

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION POLICY OF THE CZECH STATISTICAL OFFICE

INTRODUCTION

International cooperation in the context of the Czech Statistical Office (hereinafter only referred to as the "CZSO") includes a wide range of activities related to participation in the international statistical community, whether it is participation and representation of interests of the CZSO or the Czech Republic in international negotiations, participation in the EU legislative process, exchange of experience with other EU Member States (and not only with them), or provision of technical assistance to other countries (hereinafter also referred to as "TA").

The legislation adopted by the EU in the domain of statistics has a direct impact on activities of the CZSO and the whole State Statistical Service of the Czech Republic, similar to that of national legislation. The adoption of each piece of EU legislation is preceded by a process involving the Member States, in particular through written and oral opinions on proposals submitted by the European Commission (hereinafter also referred to as the "EC"). These opinions, and the negotiations that follow them, contribute significantly to the final form of the legislation.

Within the CZSO, an increasing number of employees are involved in the preparation, coordination, discussion, and approval of opinions on draft EU legislation. It is mainly due to an increase in the European Commission's legislative activity in the domain of statistics in recent years. At national level, representatives of ministries and other central administrative authorities, the Czech National Bank, or other partners who are significantly involved in the activities of the State Statistical Service as representatives of primary data providers or users of statistical data and information are also involved in this activity through the Inter-institutional Coordination Group for Statistics.

Another way of engaging with the international statistical community is by providing technical assistance in order to contribute to the development and harmonisation of statistics in other countries. It is also a way of strengthening the prestige of the CZSO in this community. A significant comparative advantage of the CZSO is its own experience of completing the transition to a market economy and democratic society, as well as preparation for the membership in the EU, including the experience gained during the 2009 and 2022 EU Council Presidencies in terms of the statistical service. It gives the CZSO an opportunity to pass on practical experience to other countries in similar situations. This experience not only relates to the target state of official statistics, but also to the process itself, to the options for dealing with various situations, or to lessons learnt from own practice.

This document sets out the basic principles, main objectives, and forms of support for the International Cooperation Policy of the CZSO, which will help to actively promote the interests of the Czech Republic, contribute to the development of statistics internationally, and lead to greater involvement in international structures and thus to the growth and strengthening of the CZSO's prestige in the international statistical community.

SOURCE REGULATIONS AND DOCUMENTS

This policy is implemented by internal regulations in the area of drafting opinions and accepting responsibilities regarding legal acts and other documents of the European Union¹, in the area of provision of technical assistance², and in the area of business trips abroad (foreign travels) and foreign visits (to the CZSO)³.

¹ Directive (in-house regulation) No 4/2024 on the drafting opinions and accepting responsibilities regarding legal acts and other documents of the European Union, Statutes and rules of procedure of the Inter-institutional Coordination Group for Statistics

² Directive (in-house regulation) No 8/2023, laying down basic rules on the provision of technical assistance by the CZSO to other countries in the area of statistics financed from external sources

³ Directive (in-house regulation) No 9/2018, laying down a procedure for making business trips abroad (foreign travels) and receiving foreign visits (to the CZSO)

The policy also fulfils the strategic objective 3: Increasing the prestige and respect of the CZSO, which is defined in the Strategic Plan of the Czech Statistical Office for 2022–2026 and aims to build a strong international position by strengthening the CZSO’s position within the European Statistical System (hereinafter only referred to as the “ESS”) and other international structures, actively participating in the European legislative process in the area of statistics, partnership with Eurostat and other ESS members, and offering development assistance.

THE EU LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Basic principles

The International Cooperation Policy of the CZSO is based on the following principles in the preparation, coordination, discussion, and approval of opinions on draft EU legislation in the area of statistics:

Coordination

The preparation, discussion, and approval of draft opinions must be coordinated with all relevant units of the CZSO and, where appropriate, with other departments outside the CZSO which, in particular, perform tasks of the State Statistical Service and activities of which may be affected by the legislation under discussion.

Transparency

Within the preparation, discussion, and approval of opinions it is necessary that all participants have the relevant documentation and a sufficient overview of the development of the negotiations as well as of the previous opinions of the Czech Republic. After meetings, it is also necessary to ensure that the relevant employees are always informed about the outcomes of the discussions and can make further use of it.

Flexibility

When preparing opinions, it is necessary – in the context of promoting the interests of the Czech Republic – to respond flexibly to the development of negotiations or to a change in behaviour of other participants.

Competency

Employees of the CZSO who are involved in the preparation, coordination, discussion, and approval of opinions must be well acquainted with both the subject-matter content of the proposals under discussion and the procedural aspects of the legislative process.

Communication

Opinions must be presented to key people (representatives of Member States, the European Commission, etc.) in order to gain the widest possible support for them and to actively seek out and form like-minded groups of countries.

Consistency

Opinions should be consistent while they are discussed at all levels – from discussions within the European Commission (Eurostat working groups, directors’ groups, the European Statistical System Committee) to negotiations within the Council of the EU or the European Parliament.

Main objectives

To respect and contribute to the improvement of the legal framework for the preparation, coordination, discussion, and approval of opinions on draft EU legislation in the field of statistics

Within the CZSO, the Directive governing the drafting opinions and accepting responsibilities regarding legal acts and other documents of the European Union is the basic legal regulation for the above-mentioned objective. This Directive lays down the procedure for the preparation and approval of opinions depending

on the stage of negotiations of the legal proposals and defines the rights and obligations of the participants involved in these processes. In order to ensure the basic principles of this policy, the provisions of the Directive and other internal regulations of the CZSO aimed at preparing, coordinating the discussion, and approval of opinions on draft EU legislation in the field of statistics must be fully respected.

In addition to the internal regulations and strategic documents of the CZSO, it is also necessary to comply with all legal regulations and methodological documents governing the procedure for preparing opinions at the national level. It is very important for the responsible employees of the CZSO to follow the preparation of such regulations and to contribute with their suggestions to its possible improvement.

Since the process of approving EU legislation undergoes frequent changes, attention has to be paid to updating or enhancement of the CZSO's internal regulations where necessary, so that the best practices, knowledge, and tools are always used.

In drafting all internal regulations of the CZSO aimed at preparing, coordinating, discussing, and approving opinions on draft EU legislation, care must also be taken to ensure that they are comprehensible and illustrative for all addressees.

To ensure the quality of the Czech Republic's opinions in the field of statistics

Another important objective of this policy is to ensure that opinions are of the highest possible quality, i.e. that they meet the following requirements:

- they are based on an expert assessment of the potential financial, administrative, and legal impacts of the legal proposal for the Czech Republic and they are based on the consensus of all stakeholders in the Czech Republic,
- they respect the objectives to be achieved by the legal proposal,
- they promote solutions leading to efficient use of human and financial resources, overall reduction of the administrative burden while pursuing to optimise the burden on respondents and maintaining sufficient quality of the required outputs,
- they are factual, comprehensible, and realistic so that they can gain support of other Member States, of the European Parliament, and of the European Commission (Eurostat).

INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Basic principles

The International Cooperation Policy of the CZSO in the provision of international technical assistance in the field of statistics is based on the following principles:

Involvement

Involvement in international technical assistance activities takes the form of participation of CZSO experts in projects led by other statistical offices, private entities, or direct provision of TA to the partner statistical office in the beneficiary country. When negotiating cooperation, the CZSO takes into account its capacity and previous experience with the partners and their competence in the field.

Private involvement of CZSO experts in TA projects (i.e. without assistance of the CZSO) during their leave of absence is only possible with the prior written consent of the President of the CZSO.

Financing

The limited budget of the CZSO does not allow to finance the assistance entirely from its own sources. Therefore, the CZSO, when engaging in TA projects, requires adequate financial coverage of these activities in accordance with the contracts concluded between the TA project initiators and implementers.

Transparency

Negotiations with foreign partners or national coordinating institutions (e.g. the National Contact Point for Twinning and TALEX) concerning the preparation and involvement of the CZSO in TA are conducted by the Legislation and International Cooperation Department (hereinafter only referred to as the “OLMS”).

Competency

The provision of TA abroad depends primarily on the availability of suitable experts who have the appropriate professional and linguistic knowledge, interest, and ability to carry out this activity. At the same time, the capacity of the CZSO must be taken into account to ensure that the tasks are carried out by the relevant units and that TA does not have a negative impact on the activities of the CZSO.

Balance

The CZSO gets involved in TA according to capabilities of both individual departments and their experts. When planning TA activities, the balance between the provision of activities of the respective units and TA activities is monitored and taken into account by the relevant managerial employees (superiors). The administrative burden of engaging in different phases of TA project implementation is also considered.

Main objectives

To contribute to the development of statistics and to production of internationally comparable data

Statistics makes it possible to monitor and better understand the state and development of a country's economy, population, and the environment. A statistical office usually ensures the collection and processing of data for statistical purposes and provides statistical information to state authorities, local and regional authorities, the public, and abroad. It also ensures the comparability of statistical information nationally and internationally.

The CZSO was itself a beneficiary of assistance during the transformation of statistics (especially before EU accession). Hence, it is aware of its obligations to the international statistical community in building and developing official statistics in candidate or less developed and transition countries, but also of the need to ensure internationally comparable statistical data on as wide a scale as possible; therefore, it is willing and ready to share knowledge gained. The objective of the CZSO's active participation in TA activities is to contribute to the development and harmonisation of statistics and standards applied in particular by the UN and the EU and thus to contribute to the production of internationally comparable statistical outputs.

To strengthen the prestige of the CZSO in the international statistical community

Based on its experience in the transformation of statistics and its willingness to share knowledge gained from this process, the CZSO became a sought-after partner for providing technical assistance shortly after EU accession.

Assistance funded by international organisations and national institutions is directed to selected countries in accordance with their priorities in terms of territorial focus and in relation to relevant political decisions. For example, the EU mainly focuses its assistance activities in the framework of the accession process of other countries to the EU (EU Enlargement Policy) and its European Neighbourhood Policy on the nearest neighbouring countries (East and South). The Czech Republic also has agreed territorial priorities for foreign development cooperation, which are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Georgia, Cambodia, Moldova (the Republic of), Zambia, including assistance to Ukraine and Afghanistan (see “Strategy for Foreign Development Cooperation of the Czech Republic 2018–2030”). These foreign policy priorities of the Czech Republic should be respected when considering the CZSO's involvement in assistance.

Taking into account the specificity of individual national statistical systems, limited funding opportunities (especially from funds of international organisations), and previous involvement in assistance, it is appropriate to direct the CZSO's assistance activities towards countries preparing to join the EU and thus to use its transformation experience. Therefore, the priority of the CZSO is to provide assistance to Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Türkiye.

To gain and deepen the experience of experts

Active involvement in TA projects requires considerable professional, language, and, last but not least, presentation skills. Sharing national experience, discussing possible approaches with foreign colleagues, and being open to possible solutions are part of the work of experts in international cooperation. These activities also contribute to maintaining or developing the skills of the participating employees of the CZSO.

PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS

Basic principles

The International Cooperation Policy of the CZSO is based on the following principles within the framework of its involvement in international structures in the field of statistics:

Cost-effectiveness and prioritisation of business trips abroad (foreign travels)

Business trips abroad (foreign travels) are carried out at the CZSO in accordance with cost-saving measures within the state budget, and therefore also the budget of the CZSO, especially in terms of the number of participants on individual trips (in principle, one participant per meeting, with certain exceptions duly justified in advance, e.g. due to historical links and proximity of statistical cooperation systems with the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, in order to accompany the President of the CZSO, etc.) and in accordance with the economical use of allocated funds.

Similar principles, i.e. maintaining economy, efficiency, and effectiveness, are also applied in the case of grant-funded trips, within technical assistance, while sending CZSO employees as trainers of ESTP courses, etc.

Given the obligations arising from the EU membership, the CZSO considers it particularly important to ensure participation in the meetings of EU bodies. Similarly, it considers it important to participate in the meetings of the high-level statistical bodies of the United Nations (UN), the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as part of its involvement in activities of international organisations.

Approving of trips therefore takes place according to the following priorities (sorted by main type of meetings and organisers):

Priority No 1

<i>Organiser</i>	<i>Type of meeting</i>	<i>Note</i>
European Commission / Eurostat, Council of the European Union	working groups, directors' groups, committees of the Commission, task forces	partial reimbursement by the Commission or the Council (transport)
	working groups, directors' groups, committees of the Commission, task forces	no reimbursement
UN, UNECE, OECD	high-level meetings	
Bilateral, multilateral cooperation	high-level meetings	

Priority No 2

<i>Organiser</i>	<i>Type of meeting</i>	<i>Note</i>
European Commission / Eurostat, Council of the European Union	conferences, seminars, workshops	partial reimbursement by the Commission or by the Council (transport)
UN, UNECE, OECD	working group meetings	
Euroregions, cross-border associations	expert meetings, seminars, workshops, conferences	
Bilateral, multilateral cooperation	expert meetings	

Priority No 3

<i>Organiser</i>	<i>Type of meeting</i>	<i>Note</i>
European Commission / Eurostat, Council of the European Union	conferences, seminars, workshops	no reimbursement
UN, UNECE, OECD, ISI (IAOS)	conferences	
ESTP, or other	training activities	participant of a training activity
Other	other	

Effective planning of foreign visits (to the CZSO)

Receiving of foreign visits in the CZSO takes place on the basis of monthly visit plans, which may be flexibly supplemented by unscheduled visits in the month in question. The plans are prepared by the OLMS; they are published and updated on the intranet of the CZSO. In order to plan foreign visits (to the CZSO) efficiently, it is necessary for the CZSO employees to hand over information on the planned foreign visits (to the CZSO) to the OLMS in time.

Communication

A participant in a meeting (in the case of a business trip abroad (foreign travel), an online meeting, or a foreign visit (to the CZSO) whether he/she participates online or in person) informs the interested CZSO employees and his/her superiors about the progress and conclusions of the meeting (e.g. if the meeting concerned EU legislation, he/she also informs the OLMS and shares the background materials). After the meeting is finished, he/she writes a report and sends it to the OLMS so that it is published on the intranet of the CZSO.

Main objectives

To strengthen the prestige of the CZSO in the international statistical community by actively engaging

An employee of the CZSO who participates in an international meeting should actively represent the CZSO by, among other things, speaking or sharing the knowledge and experience of the CZSO, promoting the interests of the CZSO or the interests of the Czech Republic, and actively spreading the good name and awareness of the CZSO and the Czech Republic. Employees who are professionally and linguistically equipped and are well versed in the international environment should represent the CZSO at international meetings.

To use information obtained in meetings

Equally important is also the effective implementation of the acquired knowledge inside the CZSO in order to improve working procedures, methods, technological solutions, etc. In particular, adherence to the communication principle described above, i.e. timely handing over of important information to all interested departments of the CZSO, should contribute to this objective.

POLICY SUPPORT

Given the direct impact of EU legislation on activities of the CZSO, the preparation, coordination, discussion, and approval of opinions on draft legislation can be considered one of the CZSO's priorities. The CZSO wants to be a trusted partner in the international statistical community and thus strengthen the CZSO's prestige in this area.

Therefore, the CZSO will support the following activities and measures to achieve the above-mentioned objectives and principles:

- promoting formal and informal international contacts and active involvement in the international community in order to spread the good reputation of the CZSO and its representatives abroad;

- drafting internal regulations – directives (in-house regulations), guidelines, and other methodological materials – to specify the role of individual participants in the process of preparing, coordinating, discussing, and approving opinions;
- managing and developing the CZSO’s internal database on draft EU legislation, which contains information and documents related to legislation being negotiated, including approved opinions;
- active involvement of CZSO experts in international negotiations;
- operational cooperation and coordination with representatives and experts from other EU Member States in order to obtain their support for positions presented in opinions of the Czech Republic;
- involvement of experts in bilateral and multilateral cooperation in areas, in which the CZSO has superior expertise;
- involvement of CZSO experts in technical assistance activities.