

# CZECH REPUBLIC 2015 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Czech Republic is a multiparty parliamentary democracy. Legislative authority is vested in a bicameral parliament, consisting of a Chamber of Deputies (Poslanecka snemovna) and the Senate (Senat). The president is head of state and appoints a prime minister from the majority party or coalition. In 2013 voters elected Milos Zeman to a five-year term as president in the country's first direct presidential election. In October 2014 the country held Senate and local elections. Elections for seats in the Chamber of Deputies took place in 2013. Observers considered the elections free and fair. Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported instances of vote buying in the October 2014 local elections in some rural areas. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces.

Societal discrimination and violence against the Romani population remained a serious problem. With the growing influx of refugees and migrants from mostly Muslim countries into Europe, including from Syria and Afghanistan, anti-Muslim sentiment increased during the year, and the treatment of detained migrants and asylum seekers met with criticism. Official corruption remained a problem, despite enforcement efforts.

Other human rights problems included inflammatory speech by politicians and public figures; violence against women; sexual and other abuse of children; anti-Semitism; trafficking in persons; and discrimination against migrant workers.

The government took steps to prosecute and punish officials who committed abuses in the security services and elsewhere in the government.

### **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:**

#### **a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life**

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

#### **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

### **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

The law prohibits such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.

#### **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Some substandard sanitary conditions and security risks in prison and detention centers persisted. Conditions in pretrial detention were generally worse than in prisons. Since the beginning of the year, authorities detained an increasing number of migrants from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia passing through the country, and NGOs described the conditions in at least one of the detention facilities as poor.

Physical Conditions: While the 2013 amnesty temporarily relieved prison overcrowding, it did not improve services to prisoners since the government cut prison staff proportionally. Facilities for prisoners serving their sentences were at 103 percent of capacity.

In October the ombudswoman criticized conditions at Bela Jezova detention facility for migrants, describing them as tantamount to a violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Convention on Human Rights. She specifically mentioned that the facility failed to meet the following requirements of the convention: that children should not be held in a facility with uniformed guards, the number of detained adults should be fewer than the number of children, and children should have adequate opportunities for education and leisure activities. Other complaints reflected in her report included lack of warm clothing and shoes for children and substandard hygiene. The report also cited complaints from detainees that they had no adequate interpretation support during medical visits, had not been informed of their right to free legal aid, and did not understand why they were being detained. In November, following a substantial decrease in the number of persons held in the detention facility, the ombudswoman acknowledged that conditions had improved.

In the first nine months of the year, there were 32 deaths in prisons and detention facilities. There was no information available on the causes of those deaths.

Prisoners had limited access to hot water, which posed a sanitation problem.

Administration: The ombudswoman investigates prisoner complaints throughout the system. Authorities permitted prisoners and detainees to submit complaints to the ombudswoman without censorship, and the ombudswoman investigated credible allegations of inhuman conditions and made routine prison visits. The Ministry of Justice, which oversees the prison system, inspected prisons throughout the year.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted independent monitoring of prison conditions by local and international human rights groups, such as the Helsinki Commission and the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), and by the media. In April 2014 the CPT conducted a periodic inspection visit. The visit targeted mainly institutions for juvenile prisoners, police custody, pretrial detention, and preventive detention. The CPT report criticized, inter alia, the presence of a police officer during medical checkups of prisoners and insufficient hygienic conditions. Authorities implemented some CPT recommendations and no longer require the presence of a police officer during medical checkups.

#### **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions.

#### **Role of the Police and Security Apparatus**

The national police, who report to the Ministry of Interior, are responsible for enforcing the law and maintaining public order, including protecting the border and enforcing the immigration law. The General Inspectorate of Security Forces (GIBS) in the Office of the Prime Minister oversees police, customs, fire fighters, and the prison service and is responsible for investigating allegations of misconduct. Inspectors investigated allegations of criminal misconduct and carried out "integrity tests," or sting operations, to catch violators in action. In 2014 inspectors opened proceedings in 269 cases nationwide. Authorities reported that police committed 112 crimes in 2014, a decrease of 27 percent from 2013, while members of the prison service committed 18, a decrease of 45 percent, and customs officers committed 11, compared with 12 cases in 2013.

Corruption remained a problem among law enforcement bodies. In 2014 police investigated 116 cases of corruption, a 102.5-percent increase from 2013. Police

also investigated 72 public figures for abuse of power. In August, GIBS detained Tomas Libal, the head of Litomerice prison, on charges of corruption and extortion. The case was pending at year's end.

The Ministry of Interior has a police ombudswoman who serves as a mediator within the ministry. All public safety personnel, including civilians, employed by the ministry can approach the ombudswoman with suspicions of possible wrongdoing or improper activities. The police ombudswoman primarily focuses on problems involving prevention, transparency, and repression. Her role is to settle internal disputes, such as complaints about improper hiring and firing practices, unfair performance evaluation and compensation, or bullying. In cases of suspected criminal misconduct within the security forces, the police ombudswoman forwards the case to GIBS. The law also requires the police ombudsman to share all information about cases with GIBS upon request, which leads to privacy and confidentiality concerns. Despite limited powers, the police ombudswoman was effective in making some police procedures more transparent and helping to settle some disputes without lengthy court procedures. In 2014 the police ombudswoman received 147 complaints, down from 306 in 2013, mostly involving bullying, overbearing behavior, and unequal treatment.

### **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

In most cases police used judicial warrants to arrest persons accused of criminal acts. Police may make arrests without a warrant when they believe a prosecutable offense has been committed, when they regard arrest as necessary to prevent further offenses or the destruction of evidence, to protect a suspect, or when a person refuses to obey police orders to move.

Police must refer persons arrested on a warrant to a court within 24 hours. A judge has an additional 24 hours to decide whether to continue to hold the individuals. For suspects arrested without a warrant, police have 48 hours to inform them of the reason for the arrest, question them, and either release them or refer them to a court, after which a judge must decide within 24 hours whether to charge them. Authorities may not hold detainees for a longer period without charge.

The law provides for bail except in cases of serious crimes or to prevent witness tampering. A defendant in a criminal case may request a lawyer immediately upon arrest. If a defendant cannot afford a lawyer, the government provides one. The court determines whether the government partially or fully covers attorneys' fees. Authorities generally respected these rights.

In September 2014 two police officers from the town of Kynperk went on trial at the district court in Sokolov for negligence in the 2012 death of a Romani man held in custody. According to witnesses, the officers beat the man after they had arrested him at the home of his estranged wife.

Pretrial Detention: By law pretrial detention may last no longer than two years except for “exceptionally grave” offenses. A suspect may petition investigating authorities at any time for release. In 2014 the average length of pretrial detention was 50 days. In the first six months of the year, the average length of pretrial detention was 103 days (84 days at the district level and 246 days at the regional level).

#### **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The law provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence. In most instances authorities respected court orders and carried out judicial decisions.

#### **Trial Procedures**

The law provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.

Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence and the right to prompt and detailed information about the charges against them. Trials are public and generally conducted without undue delay. Juries are not used. In serious cases a panel of three judges rules on the guilt or innocence of the defendant; a single judge hears less serious cases. Defendants have the right to consult an attorney, and the government provides an attorney without charge to defendants who cannot afford one. They generally have adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense. Defendants have the right to be present at trial, confront adverse witnesses, and present their own witnesses and evidence. Defendants and their attorneys are entitled to access government-held evidence relevant to their cases. Convicted persons have a right of appeal.

#### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

## **Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

The constitution provides for a separate, independent judiciary in civil matters and for lawsuits seeking damages for, or cessation of, human rights violations. Available remedies include monetary damages, equitable relief, and cessation of harmful conduct. NGOs reported increased coherence between criminal and civil procedures that simplified the process for victims. At times, however, remedies and relief still required a lengthy legal process and were difficult to obtain, particularly for members of disadvantaged groups, such as the Romani minority. Plaintiffs may appeal unfavorable rulings that involve alleged violations by the state of the European Convention on Human Rights to the European Court of Human Rights. Administrative remedies are also available.

The law recognizes children, persons with disabilities, victims of human trafficking, and victims of sexual and brutal crimes as the most vulnerable populations. It lists the rights of crime victims, such as to claim compensation and have access to an attorney. Victims of sexual crimes may choose the gender of the judge who will preside over the trials of their alleged assailants.

## **Property Restitution**

The law provides for restitution of private property confiscated under the Communist regime as well as restitution of, or compensation for, Jewish property seized during the Nazi era. Although it was still possible during the year to file claims for artwork confiscated by the Nazi regime, the claims period for other types of property had expired. Beginning in 2013, the law allows for restitution and compensation for church property confiscated under the Communist regime. Within the one-year period stipulated by the law, churches filed 7,445 claims. Churches are also to receive compensation of 59 billion korunas (\$2.5 billion) for property not returnable. The law provides that the state pay compensation over a period of 30 years while simultaneously phasing out state subsidies for registered religious groups over a 17-year period.

## **f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

The law prohibits such actions, and there were no reports that the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

In May the Prague 1 District Court acquitted Jana Necasova, the wife and then chief of staff of former prime minister Petr Necas, as well as three military

intelligence officers, of charges of corruption and unwarranted surveillance of Necas' former wife. The prosecutor appealed the decision. The case was pending at year's end.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:**

### **a. Freedom of Speech and Press**

The law provides for freedom of speech and press, and the government generally respected these rights. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of speech and press. The law provides for some limitations to this freedom, including in cases of hate speech, Holocaust denial, and denial of Communist-era crimes.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: The law mandates prison sentences of six months to three years for persons who deny Communist-era crimes or the Holocaust. The law prohibits speech that incites hatred based on race, religion, class, nationality, or other group affiliation and provides for prison sentences of up to three years for violations.

Press and Media Freedoms: Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction.

In October the High Court in Prague passed a verdict requiring the publisher of the news server Our Media to pay 150,000 koruna (\$6,250) to a Romani person because for three years it had failed to remove racist comments that called for violence against Roma. According to the judge, Our Media did not respect either the physical or the moral integrity of the plaintiff and the Romani ethnicity in general.

### **Internet Freedom**

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports that the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority. According to September data from the Czech Statistical Office, more than 70 percent of households used high-speed internet during the year.

Authorities were increasingly willing to prosecute hate speech on the internet, although extremists often stymied their efforts by placing their pages on foreign

servers out of the reach of authorities. White-Media.info, a website hosted abroad but run by Slovak white supremacists, listed the names and addresses of many Czech lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) and Romani activists and advocates. In some cases the supremacists hacked webpages, such as that of the Czech Helsinki Commission, and called for violence against individuals, such as the director of a major Romani NGO.

### **Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

### **b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

#### **Freedom of Assembly**

The law provides for freedom of assembly, and the government generally respected this right. The government may legally restrict or prohibit gatherings, including marches, demonstrations, and concerts, if they promote hatred or intolerance, advocate suppressing individual rights, or jeopardize the safety of participants. In November 2014 the Supreme Administrative Court rejected a complaint by a right-wing extremist who in 2013 attempted to organize a march in Ceske Budejovice, for which the municipality did not grant a permit. The court determined the municipality was correct to deny the permit because the march intended to threaten the well-being of Roma.

Protesters are required to have permits for demonstrations, but police generally did not interfere with spontaneous, peaceful demonstrations.

#### **Freedom of Association**

The constitution and law provide for freedom of association, and while the government generally respected this right, the law requires organizations, associations, foundations, and political parties to register with the Ministry of Interior. The courts may dissolve or ban, and the Ministry of Interior may refuse to register, groups that incite hatred based on race, religion, class, nationality, or other affiliation or that use prohibited symbols.

### **c. Freedom of Religion**

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at [www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/](http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/).

#### **d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons**

The constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

##### **Protection of Refugees**

During the year many countries in the EU and Southeast Europe experienced an unprecedented wave of migration from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, consisting of a mix of asylum seekers/potential refugees, economic migrants, and trafficking victims, among others. For simplicity, this report will refer to these populations as “migrants and asylum seekers” if more specific information is not available.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or subsidiary protection, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. According to the Ministry of Interior's statistics for the first half of the year, the length of asylum procedures corresponds to the legal requirement of 90 days.

Safe Country of Origin/Transit: The country generally adheres to the Dublin III regulations, which call for authorities to return refugees to the first EU country they entered. The Ministry of Interior accepts asylum applications from persons arriving from or through countries deemed to be safe, as defined by law. Authorities usually denied such applications but reviewed all cases individually and could approve exceptional cases.

During the year there was an increase in the number of refugees and other migrants who transited the country as well as an increase in the number of persons detained and held by police. Only a small percentage of those detained requested international protection from the government. On September 2, officials with the Ministry of Interior reported that they ceased detaining Syrian migrants who would

normally be subject to the Dublin III regulations following Germany's decision to suspend the Dublin procedures for Syrian nationals.

Refugee Abuse: There were reports of long detentions of migrants and asylum seekers facing extradition or waiting for voluntary repatriation. In October the UN high commissioner for human rights criticized the country for lengthy detention of migrants, extending for periods of 40-90 days, and alleged that detainees were strip-searched for money to pay the costs of detention. According to officials from the Ministry of Interior, detainees are searched for prohibited items according to standard security procedures and immigration law, which allows for the use of confiscated money to cover the costs of detention. According to police, 123 of more than 2,400 migrants in detention centers from January to August filed complaints. As of August 8, the courts sided with 36 of the migrants.

The Czech Bar Association began organizing legal aid to the migrants. Independent observers have access to detention facilities. In November several ambassadors to the Czech Republic and a group of journalists visited the Bela pod Bezdzem detention facility. NGOs providing legal assistance to the migrants have access to detention facilities.

Durable Solutions: A national resettlement program managed by the government in close cooperation with UNHCR continued on an ad hoc basis. Under a new State Integration Plan approved by the government in November, beneficiaries of international protection are entitled to temporary accommodation, Czech language training, and assistance finding employment and permanent housing. The country began accepting Syrian asylum seekers in October, including gravely ill children and their families. Following EU approval of a mechanism to relocate migrants and asylum seekers within the EU through mandatory quotas, the country is to receive an additional 4,306 persons through 2017.

Temporary Protection: The country provides subsidiary protection to individuals who do not satisfy the legal criteria for refugee status but who cannot return to their country of origin due to the risk of serious harm. Under EU guidelines individuals granted subsidiary protection are supposed to be eligible for temporary residence permits, travel documents, access to employment, and equal access to health care and housing. Through September authorities granted subsidiary protection in 330 cases.

### **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The constitution and law provide citizens the ability to choose their government through free and fair periodic elections based on universal and equal suffrage, and citizens exercised that ability.

### **Elections and Political Participation**

Recent Elections: In October 2014 authorities held elections for one-third of the seats in the Senate and for municipal government positions; a second round of Senate elections was held later that month. In 2013 the country held separate elections for seats in the Chamber of Deputies and for president. Local and international observers considered the elections free and fair, despite reports of localized vote buying that targeted ethnic minorities in the municipal elections.

According to testimony taken by the NGO Anticorruption Endowment, the Social Democratic Party and local SOS Cesky Tesin Party used social media to offer 500 koruna (\$21) per vote in the October 2014 municipal elections in the Moravian town of Cesky Tesin. The chair of the electoral commission in the Mojzir district of Usti nad Labem reported votes for the Civic Democratic Party were bought for 200 koruna (\$8.33). The commission reported this to the police, which closed the case during the election, citing no evidence of illegal activity. NGOs criticized the investigation as abrupt and incomplete. In November 2014 the regional court in Brno ruled the Sever district of Brno must repeat the municipal election due to evidence that Romani voters received free tickets, as well as complimentary food and drinks, to a party organized to gain votes for the Social Democratic candidate, who eventually became mayor.

Participation of Women and Minorities: Few of the country's estimated 300,000 socially excluded Roma were integrated into political life. There were no Romani members of parliament, cabinet ministers, or Supreme Court justices. There were some Romani appointees to national and regional advisory councils dealing with Romani affairs. Romani political parties and groups participated in recent national and local elections, but several factors contributed to their lack of success. Roma constituted approximately 3 percent of the national population, but a minimum of 5 percent of the vote is required for a party to enter the parliament. Any unified effort by Romani parties to enter parliament would face a statistical hurdle, but multiple Romani parties have competed in recent elections. Three Romani candidates--two who ran on a local party ticket and one who ran for re-election on the center-right Civic Democratic ticket--won seats on the city council of Trmice, a small town of 3,200 in the northwest part of the country. In Ralsko, another small town in northeast part of the country, one Romani candidate and former deputy

mayor, leader of the SNK European Democrats, was re-elected to the city council. One Romani candidate also won a city council seat in the Northern Bohemian town of Lom.

Representatives of the 14 national minority groups were included in the 31-member Government Council for National Minorities, an advisory group that includes government officials. Each minority group may nominate up to three representatives to the council.

#### **Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials. The government did not always implement the law effectively, and officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.

Corruption: In July the Prague Municipal Court sentenced David Rath, a former governor of Central Bohemia, to eight and one-half years in prison and fined him 22 million koruna (\$920,000). He was arrested in 2012 and put on trial in August 2013 on charges of accepting a seven million koruna (\$290,000) bribe. Rath appealed to the High Court. The case was pending at year's end.

In October the organized crime unit of the police raided offices of several high-level police officers and the office of the mayor of the city of Olomouc and accused the deputy regional police director, another police officer, the mayor of Olomouc, and an influential Olomouc businessperson of abuse of power and corruption. They faced up to 10 years in prison if convicted.

In January the NGO zIndex released an analysis of the financing of political parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies between 2006 and 2014. The study showed that 29.6 percent of all companies winning procurement contracts donated money directly to political parties.

Financial Disclosure: The law obliges legislators, members of the cabinet, and other selected public officials to declare their assets annually. The public can view the declarations on a website, but access remained difficult because it requires a time-sensitive password issued by the official's department. The information tended to be general and lacked detail. Persons subject to the law must report only assets gained after taking public office. NGOs criticized the fact that officials do not have to report their finances at the beginning of their term in office but rather only after they have been in office a certain time. They noted this requirement

made it difficult to determine whether an official's assets had increased during his or her term in office. The law does not require officials to disclose information about share ownership, and all forms are completed by hand, making them difficult to review.

The Supreme Audit Office is responsible for auditing executive branch disclosures but rarely verifies the declarations. The parliament had jurisdiction over asset declarations for legislators but did not verify them. If the Supreme Audit Office discovers noncompliance with the requirements, a penalty of up to 100 percent of the embezzled money may be assessed. Under the penal code, the perpetrator may also face up to 10 years' imprisonment.

Public Access to Information: The law provides for public access to government information, and in most cases the law was effectively implemented. NGOs reported inconsistent practices in releasing information, noting that authorities were reluctant to release information to the public proactively, especially information about the salaries of public officials, public tenders, and other uses of public finances.

Several cases involving access to public information reached the courts, which were generally receptive to plaintiffs' positions. Authorities, however, implemented court decisions only when specific institutions were required to provide specific information and generally did not implement nonspecific rulings.

### **Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights**

Domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without governmental restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were often cooperative and responsive to their views.

Government Human Rights Bodies: Representatives from the office of the public defender of rights (ombudswoman) made regular visits to government and private facilities where residents had limited movement, (i.e., prisons, orphanages, and senior citizens' homes), examining the treatment of individuals and monitoring respect for their fundamental rights. The office issued quarterly and annual reports on its activities in addition to reports and recommendations on topics of special concern to the government. The office operated without government or party interference, had adequate resources, and human rights observers generally

regarded it as effective, although in its October report the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance found that the ombudswoman lacked sufficient power and responsibility to combat racial discrimination effectively.

In addition to the public defender of rights, there are ombudsmen for security forces and for education.

In 2014 the government re-established the position of human rights minister to pursue a domestic human rights agenda. The Office of the Government continued to support several human rights-related councils.

## **Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons**

The law prohibits discrimination based on gender, age, disability, race, social and ethnic origin, nationality, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion, or personal belief, age, language, HIV-positive status, or other communicable disease. The government mostly enforced these provisions. Significant social discrimination against some minorities, including Roma, persisted.

### **Women**

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law prohibits rape, including spousal rape, and provides a penalty of two to 15 years in prison for violations. The government effectively enforced these provisions. Although experts still considered rape underreported, they noted an upward trend in the number of rape convictions. They attributed this trend to improved police training, public awareness campaigns, and greater interaction between police and NGOs. In the first six months of the year, authorities recorded 363 rapes and investigated 189 of them. Courts convicted 93 offenders, 45 of whom received prison sentences. The remainder received suspended sentences.

Experts believed violence against women was more widespread than suggested by the number of cases reported to authorities due to the stigma associated with such abuses. NGOs noted in particular the underreporting of violence against women in immigrant communities, where victims often feared losing their immigration status as well as being subjected to cultural stigma. In 2014 some NGOs began to offer increased social, legal, and psychological services to rape victims.

Domestic violence is punishable by up to three years in prison, with longer sentences for aggravating circumstances. Police have the authority to remove

violent abusers from their homes for 10 days. The law limits to six months the total time, including extensions, a removal order can remain in effect. NGO White Circle of Safety reported that in the first nine months of the year police removed 942 offenders (some of them women) from their homes.

In the first six months of the year, the Interior Ministry reported 392 cases of domestic violence, and police investigated 260 cases. During the same period, courts convicted 163 individuals of domestic violence, sentencing 37 persons to prison terms, suspending the sentences of 108, and deporting one.

The law also provides protection against domestic violence to other persons living in the household, especially children and seniors, and allows legal emancipation for children from the age of 16 under certain circumstances. For example, a child may request a court order to remove an aggressor from the family in case a parent (usually the mother) was not willing or able to do so.

According to research by ScioFactor, every sixth woman and every 22nd man in the country experienced domestic violence in the first half of the year. Approximately 44 percent of respondents said they had experienced domestic violence at some time during their lives. According to the report, cases of psychological, economic, and sexual abuse were on the rise. In 50 percent of cases, children were witness to domestic violence.

According to NGOs, police lacked specialized training to deal with domestic violence cases. NGOs continued training officers at the regional and local level to assist victims of domestic violence, with a special focus on senior citizens. The Ministry of Interior supported the training. Several hotlines and crisis centers offered psychological counseling to victims of rape and domestic abuse.

During the year the Ministry of Interior provided eight NGOs a total of 1.6 million korunas (\$67,000) for projects to prevent domestic violence against seniors. In 2014 the ministry provided 1.5 million korunas (\$64,000) for similar projects. NGOs noted an increase in activities and funding focused on support for children and seniors but reported that shifting the funding for social services from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to regions would create an additional administrative burden on civil society and lead to reduced services in fewer locations.

Sexual Harassment: The antidiscrimination law prohibits sexual harassment and treats it as a form of direct discrimination. A person who has been harassed may

seek justice through the courts and request compensation for possible harm. The burden of proof is on the accused party, who has to prove that he or she did not discriminate against the accuser. Penalties for conviction may include fines, dismissal from work, or imprisonment for up to eight years. Most cases of sexual harassment took place in the workplace. According to NGOs, police rarely investigated such cases because victims usually preferred to seek advice on how to stop the harassment rather than accuse colleagues or supervisors and risk losing their jobs. Police often delayed investigations until the perpetrator committed serious crimes, such as sexual coercion, rape, or other forms of physical assault.

Offenders convicted of stalking may receive sentences of up to three years in prison. In the first seven months of the year, police received 310 reports of stalking. In the first six months of the year, courts convicted 92 persons of stalking; 11 received prison sentences, 67 received suspended sentences, and the others were fined or sentenced to community service. NGOs reported that 80 percent of stalking victims were women.

NGOs reported an increase in cyberbullying or cyberstalking, not only of children but also of adults of both sexes. In response to this rise, the NGOs Gender Studies and ProFem started a campaign against cyberbullying in September 2014.

Reproductive Rights: The government recognized the basic right of couples and individuals to decide the number, spacing, and timing of their children; manage their reproductive health; and obtain the information and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, or violence.

There were reports in 2014 that hospitals refused to give women records of their sterilization performed without their full consent between 1971 and 1991. Such records were required to apply for compensation. Prior investigations showed the majority of forcibly sterilized women were Roma. In September the minister of human rights submitted a bill to the government on compensation for illegally sterilized persons, which would have provided 300,000 koruna (\$12,500) for each case. In October, however, the government rejected the bill.

Discrimination: The law grants men and women the same legal status and rights, including under family, labor, property, nationality, and inheritance laws. Women sometimes experienced discrimination in the area of employment (see section 7.d.).

## **Children**

Birth Registration: Children derive their citizenship from their parents. Any child with at least one citizen parent is automatically a citizen. Authorities register births immediately.

Child Abuse: Although illegal, child abuse remained a problem. By law any person under the age of 18 is a minor. In addition, a child is considered an endangered individual and regarded a victim in cases of domestic violence, even if the violence does not specifically target the child. NGOs reported that approximately 40,000 children experienced some form of violence every year. According to a report released by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in April, the number of abused or mistreated children rose from 7,527 in 2013 to 8,478 in 2014. Six children died due to abuse or mistreatment in 2014. The NGO Nase Dite (Our Child) reported that authorities removed 1,248 children from families and placed them in children's homes due to abuse or mistreatment in 2014. In most cases the violence was not detected early and continued through the victim's entire childhood. According to police and the Ministry of Interior, there were 821 cases of child abuse in 2014 and 518 cases of child abuse in the first six months of the year, including sexual abuse and commercial sex exploitation.

Prison sentences for persons found guilty of child abuse range from five to 12 years in the case of the death of a child. The Ministries of Interior and Justice introduced special interviewing rooms for child victims and witnesses. As of 2014, authorities had completed 57 such rooms. A child victim is not required to give additional testimony in any court proceedings when specially trained police officers follow the specific interview requirements (including the presence of psychologists and, in some cases, judges and defense attorneys).

Early and Forced Marriage: The minimum legal age for marriage is 18. Some members of the Romani community married before reaching legal age. The law allows for marriage at the age of 16 with court approval; no official marriages were reported of anyone under 16.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits commercial sexual exploitation of children and the possession, manufacture, and distribution of child pornography, which is punishable by imprisonment for up to eight years. The minimum age for consensual sex is 15. Sexual relations with a child younger than 15 is punishable by a prison term of up to eight years, or up to 18 years in the case of the death of the child. According to Ministry of Interior statistics, police investigated seven cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children in the first six months of the

year, compared with 42 cases in all of 2014. There were reports of trafficked children engaged in prostitution.

In the first six months of the year, the Ministry of Justice reported that courts convicted 59 individuals for production or handling of child pornography; all 59 received suspended sentences. Courts convicted seven individuals of misuse of a child for production of pornography, and four of them received prison sentences. NGOs criticized the sentences for producing and distributing child pornography as too light.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. For information see the Department of State's report on compliance at [travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html) and country-specific information at [travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/country/czechrepublic.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/country/czechrepublic.html).

### **Anti-Semitism**

Although estimates varied, the country's Jewish population numbered approximately 10,000. Public expressions of anti-Semitism were rare, but small, fairly well organized right-wing groups with anti-Semitic views were active around the country. The Ministry of Interior continued to monitor the activities of such groups, increase cooperation with police from neighboring countries, and shut down their unauthorized rallies.

In 2014 the Ministry of Interior recorded 45 criminal offences with anti-Semitic motives, a 200 percent increase from 2013. During the same period, the Federation of Jewish Communities reported 43 anti-Semitic incidents, including damage to property, spray painting of anti-Semitic slogans and Nazi symbols, threats, and intrusions. The federation registered one physical attack against a Jew. The number of anti-Semitic articles written by Czechs on the internet, including incitement to violence against Jews, increased from 82 in 2012 and 156 in 2013 to 191 in 2014. A well-known anti-Semitic blogger continued his anti-Semitic internet postings, including statements denying the Holocaust.

### **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at [www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/).

## Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, public transportation services, access to health care, and the provision of other government services. The government generally enforced these provisions. Nevertheless, persons with disabilities faced a shortage of public accommodations and were unemployed at disproportionately high rates. Most children with disabilities were able to attend mainstream primary and secondary schools and universities. Education officials placed a number of children with disabilities in special, or “practical,” schools, intended for children with “mild retardation.” These schools did not prepare children for university-level education. Elementary school directors had the authority to accept or reject any student, based upon the school’s ability to meet the student’s individual needs. Mainstream schools sometimes refused admittance to students with disabilities.

In April the parliament passed an education law abolishing practical schools. The law was scheduled to go into effect in September 2016. Only children with more significant disabilities would attend special schools, of which there were 10 in the country. Special schools employed specially trained teachers for teaching children with more significant disabilities. Each child had his/her own assistant, and classrooms accommodated a maximum of 10 pupils.

The law provides that persons with disabilities may exercise their full legal rights. The law requires a legal guardian to ensure that the preferences of a person with a mental or psychological disability are taken into consideration. Courts cannot deprive such individuals of their full legal capacity but limit it only in some clearly specified areas (e.g., finances, the right to vote). Courts have three years to review cases of mentally or physically disabled persons with curtailed legal rights to determine whether the treatment of such individuals complies with the law.

The ombudswoman is required to make regular visits to all governmental and private workplaces employing incarcerated or institutionalized persons, including persons with disabilities, to examine conditions, ensure respect for fundamental rights, and advocate for improved protection against mistreatment. The ombudswoman’s office conducted such visits throughout the year. The ombudswoman cooperates with the supreme public prosecutor protecting incarcerated or institutionalized persons.

According to a July report by the Ministry for Human Rights, during 2014 government ministries were not complying with the law requiring 4 percent of the staff of companies and institutions with more than 25 employees to be persons with physical disabilities. According to the report, only two of 12 national public administration bodies met the requirement. Instead of employing persons with disabilities, many companies and institutions paid fines or bought products from companies that employed persons with disabilities, a practice that the National Disability Council criticized.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs continued an EU-funded program to assist persons with disabilities in transitioning from institutional care into mainstream society.

### **National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities**

Roma, who numbered an estimated 300,000, faced varying levels of discrimination in education, employment, and housing and experienced high levels of poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy. Societal prejudice against the Romani population at times resulted in violence.

According to European Commission research data published by the NGO In Iusticia in July 2014, 32 percent of Roma had been threatened or attacked because of their ethnicity; approximately 66 percent of assault victims did not report the attack. A poll conducted in March found that 79 percent of respondents considered Roma “unlikeable” or “very unlikeable,” while only 4 percent had compassion for Roma. According to a poll conducted in July, 48 percent of firms in the country would not employ Roma. Another poll conducted by the European Commission found that only 29 percent of Czechs would feel comfortable or indifferent about working with a Rom and only 11 percent would feel comfortable or indifferent if their child fell in love with a Rom. The same poll indicated a high level of intolerance toward Asians and blacks.

The national media continued to give disproportionate coverage to crimes and acts of violence committed by Roma compared with similar behavior by members of the majority population or other minorities. White-media.info, a webpage registered outside the country, listed the names and addresses of activists and hacked the website and e-mail addresses of several high-profile individuals who either worked on Romani issues or expressed support for Roma in the past.

The new minister for human rights and the minister for labor and social affairs made public statements in support of socially disadvantaged groups, in particular Roma, and advocated policies favorable to them within the government.

Roma participated in politics and were members of mainstream as well as Roma-specific political parties. In the 2014 elections, Romani candidates had little success on the national level, but some were elected to local offices (see section 3).

According to the Ministry of Interior, extremists held 291 events in 2014, including several anti-Roma demonstrations. Police and NGOs agreed there was less anti-Roma activity during the summer, a common time for extremist groups to hold demonstrations, than in the summer of 2014. Throughout the year there were several demonstrations protesting against accepting migrants and refugees. The demonstrations, many organized by the groups Anti-Islam Bloc and We Don't Want Islam in the Czech Republic, drew several hundred to one thousand participants. In July more than 60 neo-Nazis and other extremists demonstrated against a xenophobia awareness event in Ostrava. According to media reports, police detained the extremists when they attempted to march into a district where many Romani live. NGOs focusing on migration issues reported an increase in telephone and e-mail threats over the previous year. There were also several demonstrations in support of migrants and refugees.

NGOs reported the level of hate speech increased during the year among politicians, including members of parliament, senators, and local politicians across the political spectrum, with Muslims increasingly the target. In August, at a soccer game in Jablonec nad Nisou, fans displayed a large banner showing a pig-like character in a turban being kicked by a woman. Police were investigating the case as a possible hate speech crime. At a July anti-immigration demonstration in Prague, a protester carried a mock gallows with a sign saying "for treason," for which authorities stated he would face criminal prosecution. In November the leader of the group We Don't Want Islam in the Czech Republic, Martin Konvicka, was charged by a state attorney with inciting hatred of Muslims.

According to the Ministry of Interior's 2014 *Report on Extremism*, there were 184 hate crimes reported, 139 persons prosecuted, and 129 charged, but court proceedings were pending at year's end.

Approximately one-third of Roma lived in "excluded localities," or ghettos. According to an October report by the Ministry for Labor and Social Affairs, the number of ghettos in the country doubled to 600 since 2006, and their population

grew from 80,000 to 115,000 over the same period. Ghettos usually had substandard housing and poor health conditions. In addition to housing discrimination, urban gentrification and rent increases contributed to the growth in Roma-dominated ghettos.

NGOs examined multiple housing advertisements and found that Romani applicants experienced discrimination when seeking to rent residential and business locations. While the law prohibits housing discrimination based on ethnicity, NGOs stated that some municipalities applied regulations in ways that discriminated against certain socially disadvantaged groups, primarily Roma, including basing housing decisions on the reputation of the applicant and family at previous residences. The ombudswoman identified a case of direct discrimination against a Rom by a real estate agency in Northern Bohemia. A Romani woman sued a property owner for a public apology and 100,000 korunas (\$4,200) in compensation for refusing to rent an apartment to her. The case went to a district court in Litomerice, which ruled in August that the property owner had to apologize to the woman. The court rejected the plaintiff's claim for compensation.

In the first half of 2014, the funds disbursed by the government to subsidize housing grew by 24 per cent, compared with the first half of 2013, to approximately one billion koruna total (\$42 million). According to the government's 2014 Report on the State of the Romani Minority in the Czech Republic, the government issued 64,500 individual housing payments per month in 2014, 600 fewer payments per month than in 2013.

Other problems affecting Roma included indebtedness due to lack of access to banking services, exploitation by predatory lenders, and discrimination.

A disproportionately high number of Romani children attended remedial schools known as "practical schools," which effectively segregated them into a substandard educational system. According to 2014 statistics from the Czech School Inspectorate, approximately one-third of Romani children attended such schools, which provided little opportunity for them to continue to higher levels of education. In regular schools, officials often segregated Romani children from the majority population by placing them according to the location of their residence (often in a Roma-majority neighborhood) or need for remedial instruction. The Ministry of Education issued a regulation in September 2014 that improved the method of testing for special needs, including by involving more experts in the decision process. The regulation requires increased retesting over the course of a student's education.

The Agency for Social Inclusion is responsible for implementing the government's strategy for combating social exclusion to improve education, housing, security, regional development, employment, and family/social/health services for socially excluded or disadvantaged individuals. Many such individuals were members of ethnic and other minorities. The agency implemented a national project focused on educating youth about tolerance, sharing best practices of social inclusion in local government, and conducting a national media campaign against racism and hate crimes for youths under the age of 25.

There were some reports of violence and discrimination against members of other ethnic minorities.

In June 2014 the Senate's Committee on Immunity fined Senator Vladimir Dryml 20,000 koruna (\$830) for verbally assaulting a Yemeni doctor. The committee determined the senator's comments had a racist subtext.

Results of inspections carried out by the Czech Trade Inspection Authority in the first half of the year showed that discrimination against consumers in the Czech market was rare. The authority conducted almost a thousand inspections to monitor consumer discrimination and proved only eight cases of discrimination. The cases considered discriminatory because of nationality included failure to serve food to restaurant guests, billing an extra service fee in a restaurant, or billing foreigners higher prices for drinks. Other cases of discrimination included refusal by a real estate company to rent an apartment to a Rom and refusal to serve a Romani guest in a motel.

### **Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

The country has antidiscrimination legislation that covers sexual orientation. In its October report, the European Commission against Racial Intolerance criticized the country for not having specific hate crime provisions covering sexual orientation and gender identity. Single LGBTI individuals may adopt children.

The government did not keep statistics on incidents of violence directed at individuals because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, but NGO contacts reported the number of such incidents was very low. Local LGBTI activists stated that citizens were largely tolerant of LGBTI persons. Approximately 49 percent of respondents in a May opinion poll said they approved

of domestic partnerships. The same poll found that 51 percent of the population believed that “coming out” created problems for LGBTI persons. This opinion was held mainly by individuals from small villages (less than 800 inhabitants), persons older than 60, and those having left-leaning political beliefs.

According to a survey conducted by the NGO Pro Fair Play, approximately 14 percent of LGBTI persons reported discrimination and harassment due to their sexual orientation in the first half of the year, a sharp decrease from previous years.

### **HIV and AIDS Social Stigma**

Persons with HIV/AIDS faced societal discrimination, although there were no reported cases of violence. The Czech AIDS Help Society reported a number of cases of discrimination, primarily in access to health and dental care and wrongful termination of employment or discrimination during the hiring process. The government took no action in most cases, since individuals with HIV/AIDS often preferred to keep their status confidential rather than file a complaint. In 2014 the ombudswoman’s office delivered a number of presentations at national events concerning the status of HIV infection as a disability under the antidiscrimination law. The ombudswoman also criticized an amendment to the Protection of Public Health Act over concerns that it promotes stigmatization and discrimination against individuals who are HIV positive.

### **Other Societal Violence and Discrimination**

Societal prejudice and discrimination against Muslims remained a growing concern. Although the government publicly condemned anti-Islamic rhetoric, some politicians continued to make anti-Islamic statements. In October, President Zeman stated that Muslim refugees will not respect laws and customs and will try to apply sharia law. In November, Zeman spoke at a rally held by the anti-Muslim group Bloc Against Islam and the Usvit (Dawn) political party. Several fellow politicians criticized Zeman. They included Prime Minister Sobotka, who said that Zeman’s participation in the rally was contrary to the country’s humanistic and democratic tradition.

In August an unknown perpetrator broke windows of the mosque in Brno, and in November someone poured motor oil on the mosque’s doors and walls. No organization claimed responsibility for either incident, and police continued to investigate the cases.

According to a September report by the NGO In Iustitia, the number of anti-Muslim incidents was on the rise. In 2014 the organization registered 10 such incidents. Through August it had already reported 23 cases, most occurring since the beginning of the migrant and refugee crisis in June. As of December 1, none of the incidents had resulted in criminal proceedings.

In connection with the refugee crisis, some organizations aiding migrants reported that they received threats and were targets of hate speech. For example, the Multicultural Center in Prague reported that an unknown person placed mock gallows outside the center.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The law provides for the right of workers to form and join independent unions of their choice without authorization or excessive requirements. It permits them to conduct their activities without interference. The right to freely associate covers both citizens and foreign workers, but the latter generally did not join unions due to the often short-term nature of their employment or the lack of social interaction with employees who were citizens.

The law provides for collective bargaining. It prohibits antiunion discrimination and does not recognize union activity as a valid reason for dismissal. Workers in most occupations have the legal right to strike if mediation efforts fail, and they generally exercised this right.

Strikes can be restricted or prohibited in essential service sectors, including hospitals, electricity and water supply services, air traffic control, nuclear energy, and the oil and natural gas sector. Members of the armed forces, prosecutors, and judges may not form or join trade unions or strike. The scope for collective bargaining was limited for civil servants, whose wages were regulated by law. Only trade unions may legally represent workers, including nonmembers. When planning a strike, unions are required to inform employers in writing of the number of strikers and provide a list of the members of the strike committee or contact persons for negotiation. They must announce the strike at least three days in advance. While regulations entitle union members to conduct some union activities during work hours, they do not specify how much time workers may use for this purpose, leaving room for diverse interpretations on the part of employers.

The law protects union officials from dismissal by an employer during their term of union service and for 12 months after its completion. To dismiss a union official, an employer must seek prior consent from the employee's unit within the union. If the union does not consent, a dismissal notice is invalid.

The government worked to enforce such laws effectively and permitted unions to conduct their activities without interference. Government resources for inspections and remediation were adequate, and legal penalties were sufficient to deter violations.

The Czech-Moravian Federation of Trade Unions (CMKOS) complained that, under the law, employers are not required to consult with unions on matters related to individual employees or to seek mutual agreement on some workplace problems, hurting the ability of employees of small enterprises to maintain union rights.

According to CMKOS, employer violations of the labor law and trade union rules increased during the year, following the trend of the previous several years. CMKOS reported a number of violations and cases of discrimination, including employers raising administrative obstacles to collective bargaining; making unauthorized, unilateral wage changes; and threatening to dismiss employees who asserted their union rights, refused to terminate union activities, or attempted to form unions.

According to CMKOS, some employers forced employees to work without a regular work agreement during a "trial period," paying them only a minimum wage with the remaining amount provided "under the table" or not paying wages on time in violation of the labor law. Nevertheless, proving a violation of the law was difficult. Employees, union as well as nonunion, were often unwilling to file formal complaints or testify against their employers due to fear of losing their jobs, having their wages reduced, or being moved to positions with poorer working conditions. Employees would usually file complaints only if their jobs were immediately threatened or after a job loss.

According to CMKOS, employees were making more inquiries regarding their trade union rights and ways to establish a trade union. CMKOS still reported cases of employers not allowing union members sufficient paid time off to fulfill their union responsibilities or pressuring union members to resign their employment to weaken the local union unit. There were cases of bullying of union officials, including unreasonable performance evaluation criteria, excessive monitoring of

work performance, and being targeted for disciplinary action or reduced financial compensation based solely on union participation.

During the year labor unions most frequently used strike alerts and strikes to advance their goals. Strikes and strike alerts targeted wages, premium pay for overtime, concerns about the closure of a business without a follow-on social program, including reasonable compensation for disadvantaged employees such as single (parent) employees, or intended lay-offs.

### **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, and the government effectively enforced these prohibitions.

The government implemented legislation tightening regulation of potentially abusive labor agencies by raising requirements to enter the labor agency business, levying fines for illegal employment, and establishing limits on temporary employment of foreign nationals. Resources, inspections, and remediation were adequate. Penalties for violations were sufficient to deter violations.

There were reports that men and women, including migrant workers, were subjected to forced labor, typically through debt bondage. The Ministry of Interior reported 17 victims of forced labor in the first 11 months of the year. Prosecution of those cases had not yet been completed by year's end. Private labor agencies often used deceptive practices to recruit workers from abroad as well as from inside the country.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at [www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/).

### **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

The minimum age for employment is 15. Employment of children between the ages of 15 and 18 was subject to strict safety standards, limitations on hours of work, and the requirement that work not interfere with education. Resources, inspections, and remediation were adequate. Infringement of child labor rules is subject to fines of up to two million koruna (\$83,000). The State Bureau for Labor Inspections (SBLI) effectively enforced these regulations. During the year the SBLI did not report any child labor law violations.

#### **d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment or Occupation**

Labor laws and regulations prohibit any kind of discrimination based on nationality, race or ethnic origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity, age, disability, HIV-positive status or presence of other communicable diseases, social status, political attitude and belief, or trade union membership. The law provides for equal treatment for any individual seeking employment.

In 2014 the SBLI conducted 1,213 checks for unequal treatment and discrimination. It imposed fines totaling 6.3 million koruna (\$260,000) for violations of discrimination laws, mostly noncompliance with the requirement to employ a specific number of persons with disabilities, discrimination based on gender and age, or the publication of discriminatory job advertisements. According to CMKOS, cases of labor discrimination usually involved gender pay gaps.

According to the Czech Statistical Office, 5.9 percent of women were unemployed, compared with 4.1 percent of men. In 2014 women made up 43.9 percent of the nonagricultural workforce. Women's salaries lagged behind those of men by approximately 24 percent. In the first six months of the year, the ombudswoman received 57 complaints of discrimination in employment.

Associations supporting HIV-positive individuals reported cases of discrimination. HIV-positive individuals are not legally obligated to report their diagnoses to their employer unless the diagnosis prevents them from executing their duties. Some employers dismissed HIV-positive employees due to prejudices of other employees. To avoid accusations of discrimination, employers justified such dismissals on administrative grounds, such as redundancy.

The government generally enforced the antidiscrimination laws involving employment effectively, but employees were often unwilling to file formal complaints or testify against their employers due to fear of losing their jobs, having their wages reduced, or being moved to positions with poorer working conditions.

#### **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs establishes and enforces minimum wage standards. During the year the national minimum wage increased from 8,500 to 9,200 koruna (\$350 to \$380) per month. The "minimum subsistence cost," defined as the minimum amount needed to satisfy the basic needs of a working-age adult

for a month, was 2,200 koruna (\$92). Enforcement of the minimum wage was one of the primary objectives of SBLI inspections.

The law provides for a 40-hour workweek, two days of rest per week, and a break of at least 30 minutes during the standard eight-hour workday. Employees are entitled to at least 20 days of paid annual leave. Employers may require up to eight hours per week of overtime to meet increased demand but not more than 150 hours of overtime in a calendar year. Additional overtime is subject to the consent of the employee. The labor code requires premium pay for overtime that is equal to at least 125 percent of average earnings.

The government set occupational health and safety standards. The labor code obliges an employer to provide safety and health protection in the workplace, maintain a safe and healthy work environment, and prevent health and safety risks.

SBLI inspectors conducted 5,824 checks for compliance with the labor code. The SBLI imposed fines totaling 67.96 million koruna (\$1.26 million) for substantial violations involving contracts, wages, overtime pay, working hours, and rest periods. In 2014 there were 333 labor inspectors for occupational health and safety standards in the country. SBLI's labor inspection plan focused on sectors where there were typically high-risk working conditions, such as construction, agriculture, and forestry.

The SBLI is responsible for combating illegal employment. Labor inspectors prioritized inspections for illicit employment in those sectors that were especially vulnerable to illegal employment, such as the lodging/catering, retail, agricultural, forestry, and construction industries. Inspectors conducted numerous inspections in selected, seasonal businesses, including outdoor swimming parks, ski resorts, gasoline stations, and service stations. To strengthen the effectiveness of inspections, SBLI inspectors acted in conjunction with the Labor Office, the Social Insurance Bureau, foreign police, the Customs Office, and police. In 2014 they conducted 15,081 inspections and imposed fines (total figures not yet available) for substantial violations of labor laws involving illegal employment, contracts and wages, denied salary bonus payments, working hours and rest periods, and residency and working permits.

In 2014 there were 195 labor inspectors in the country conducting checks for employment failing to meet conditions required by labor law. The SBLI conducted 394 checks in work agencies employing migrant workers. According to the SBLI, the inspections revealed inconsistencies in work agreements, denials of salary

bonus payments or on-time salary payments, as well as inconsistencies involving working hours, overtime, and breaks. For substantial infringements of the labor law, the SBLI imposed 70 fines totaling 3.2 million koruna (\$1.33 million). Although the SBLI did not find any cases of systematic discrimination based on citizenship, gender, age, or health status, violations were most frequently reported in cases where labor and wage conditions for permanent staff differed from those of temporary workers hired by agencies.

Employers sometimes ignored standard work conditions requirements in situations involving migrant workers. Relatively unskilled foreign workers from less developed countries were sometimes dependent on temporary employment agencies to find and retain work. Migrants sometimes worked in substandard conditions and were subjected to undignified treatment by these agencies. Most commonly, salaries were paid to the agencies, which then garnished them, resulting in workers receiving subminimum wages, working overtime without proper compensation, or working without compensation. Since migrant workers seldom filed formal complaints of such abuses, authorities had few opportunities to intervene.

The SBLI effectively enforced health and safety standards. Laws requiring acceptable conditions of work cover all workers equally in all sectors. During the year the SBLI conducted 9,795 checks focused on health and safety standards, primarily in the construction, manufacturing, transportation, agricultural, forestry, and heavy machine industries. The inspections occurred both proactively and in response to complaints. Authorities imposed fines totaling 25.5 million korunas (one million dollars) in cases where infringement of the law was substantial.

In 2014 the number of registered injuries in the workplace increased by 2.1 percent from 2013. Fatal accidents increased by 3.4 percent during 2014. From 2002 to 2014, the total number of registered injuries in the workplace dropped by 50.4 percent, and the total number of fatal incidents dropped by 43.2 percent. The vast majority of workplace injuries and deaths occurred in the transport, construction, warehousing, and processing industries. According to the SBLI, the most common causes of injuries or fatal incidents included underestimated risk, irresponsible application of dangerous work procedures and techniques, unauthorized conduct and/or stay in hazardous zones, and failure to observe bans. Employees of small and medium-sized companies often declined to use protective gear even though their employer provided it.

Workers may remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, and the SBLI aimed to enforce this standard consistently.