

Preface

At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis and episodes of lockdown, governments have focused on keeping people safe at home. The pandemic has brought longstanding housing challenges and inequalities to the fore. Never has it been more striking that affordable housing constitutes both a basic human need and a key driver of people's well-being. Housing does not only provide a shelter with fundamental services such as water and electricity, but it also determines people's access to jobs, infrastructure, and public goods. Housing is a critical component of household wealth and contributes to people's health, work-life balance and social connections. Ensuring quality and affordable housing for all helps reduce inequalities and ensure communities are socially integrated. Housing is therefore critical to build more resilient and inclusive cities.

Over the past couple of decades, housing affordability has become one of the most pressing challenges in cities, where house prices have often outpaced national averages. The Czech Republic is no exception. Despite constant efforts from the government to meet the increasing need for housing, many low- and middle-income households are getting priced out of cities.

In 2019, the Czech Republic requested support from the European Union's Structural Reform Support Programme to help reform its National Housing Strategy. The European Commission teamed up with the OECD to provide expertise and guidance. A few months after the project started, the global COVID-19 crisis broke out, revealing – and often aggravating – many of the housing challenges that the Czech Republic was already struggling with before the pandemic, such as housing insecurity, insufficient housing supply and homelessness. Urgent and decisive action was needed to protect the most vulnerable urban households, better match housing supply and demand, and upgrade the quality of existing housing.

While the full extent of the COVID-19 fallout still remains uncertain at the time of writing this report, efforts to put the world back on the path to sustainable growth are offering an unprecedented momentum to drive forward long-term policies that expand affordable and adequate housing for all. There is a window of opportunity right now for the EU Member States to make good use of the European Union's Renovation Wave and in particular of the Affordable Housing Initiative.

We encourage the national and local governments in the Czech Republic and beyond to leverage housing policy to shape a healthier, safer and brighter future for all in cities.



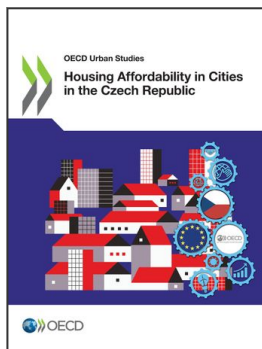
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