

BUILDING BACK BIODIVERSITY

How EU Member States fail to spend
the recovery fund for nature

CZECH REPUBLIC

Jan Skalík

Hnutí DUHA - Friends of the Earth Czech Republic

CEE Bankwatch
Network

euRONATUR



Jan Skalík

Hnutí DUHA - Friends of the Earth Czech Republic

Editing

Emily Gray

Design

Aleksandar Saša Škorić

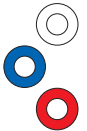


This publication has been financed by the MAVA Foundation.



This publication has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of CEE Bankwatch Network and EuroNatur and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.





CZECH REPUBLIC

1. Level of environmental ambition

The final version of the Czech national recovery and resilience plan was not submitted by the deadline of 30 April. The first draft of the plan was available in summer 2020, and the details were included in January and March 2021. **The current version of the Czech plan²⁷ (as of 10 May) shows serious shortcomings, as it does not meet the legally binding requirement of 37 per cent of expenditures for environmental objectives.** In order to address this and other issues, important changes to the final version are expected in order for it to be officially submitted. According to an analysis conducted for the Green Recovery Tracker and prepared by the Association for International Affairs (AMO), **only 22 per cent of the total budget for the Czech recovery plan contributes to environmental objectives.** Many of the 'green' measures in the most recent draft are highly questionable in this regard, and so is the methodology used to design them. Even more obvious are investments in fossil gas and the heating industry, some support for entrepreneurs affected by the pandemic, or the increase in the share capital of the Czech-Moravian Guarantee and Development Bank. The transformative potential of the plan thus remains largely untapped.

These shortcomings are concerning, as there is a unique opportunity for the Czech Republic (which will receive approximately EUR 7 billion from the RRF) to carry out major transformations with the goal of shaping a fairer, greener and more resilient future. To comply with the EU's environmental targets and make the most out of the Green Deal, all actors should have cooperated to reach a shared ambition. The RRF is a missed opportunity in that regard.

²⁷ This assessment was based on the 9 April 2021 version of Czech Republic's recovery plan.

2. Current state of biodiversity in the country

The decrease of biodiversity among bird and insect species mainly in open agricultural landscapes is well documented and continues to plummet significantly, mainly due to the renewed intensification of production after the 2000s. Although the country's strategic documents are of high quality (i.e. the Strategy on adaptation to climate change in the Czech Republic), their implementation has severe deficits.

Increased investments in biodiversity are becoming urgent given the fact that the conservation status of species and habitats in Czech Republic has been deteriorating in recent years, with some areas being in a critical state. The Nature Care Programme (Program péče o přírodu), the Programme for the Restoration of Natural Landscape Functions (Programu obnovy přírodních funkcí krajiny) and the National Programme for the Support of Biodiversity (Národní program na podporu biodiversity) are three well-working national programs which assure the protection of endangered sites, species, and landscapes. Financial allocations for these programs are not included in the recovery plan, but their absorption capacity is significantly higher than the current allocation provided under other existing financial mechanisms. The chronic lack of funding for such initiatives shows that the Czech Republic does not provide the means to match its goals.

3. Potential impact on biodiversity

The Czech recovery plan comprises both some obviously harmful measures and others that lack sufficient detail which would allow for their assessment. The following list includes some of these:

» Flood risk reduction

Starting with water management, the justification provided by the Ministry of Agriculture that presents hard anti-flood measures as a key element of flood protection is not convincing. The Czech government's Strategic Plan recognises barriers as significantly less environmentally suitable and also less effective for flood mitigation than more natural measures, such as the increase of wetlands. The whole area of adaptation-focused measures described within the National Action Plan is ignored in the recovery plan and replaced by measures with a lower counter-flood impact and higher environmental burden.

» Agricultural irrigation

The positive effect of the development of the irrigation systems on the quantity of crops does not imply positive effects for carbon storage, as the Czech Ministry of Agriculture states. The whole lifecycle related to crop production and its utilisation has to be taken into account, as the 'do no significant harm' principle states. The production of crops is also related to carbon-intensive industries (fertilisers, pesticides, management, operations, transport), and their processing leads to significant sources of greenhouse gases (discharge of the carbon absorbed during the growing period of the crops, transport, etc.).

The reference to the 'do no significant harm' principle is only vague in the Czech plan and it is doubtful that it is used properly. The 'do no significant harm' assessments consists entirely of a single Excel spreadsheet, with checked boxes or fields indicating that the assessment is 'not relevant' for most of the measures proposed, or empty boxes, even though this is not correct. Our third-party assessment shows that many of these measures could not pass the 'do no significant harm' assessment.

4. Positive measures and alternative solutions

The Czech recovery plan does not recognise Natura 2000 as an issue of intervention. To increase the protection of fish and amphibian populations, support for measures prepared and offered by the Ministry of the Environment are urgently needed. These proposals (of up to CZK 7.5 billion) are not included in the current version of the Czech plan; the proposed intervention instead focuses on reforestation efforts (CZK 8.5 billion) which may potentially harm the interests of Natura 2000 protection.

The component related to forest ecosystems is ambiguous. Fast reforestation does not have a medium-term or long-term effect on increased stored carbon compared to reforestation with the significant use of the natural processes (as stated by European Forestry Institute, 2018). Compared to natural or semi-natural forest regrowth, forest planting leads to unnecessary emissions due to manufacturing (pots, chemicals, and infrastructure), transport, operations and management. The use of reforestation with the intention of growing productive forests is nothing but harmful.



Canva

Despite serious shortcomings and concerns in terms of biodiversity conservation and restoration, the Czech plan still includes proposals that might have positive impacts. These include measures proposed by the Ministry of Environment that focus on lowering the carbon footprint of households by reducing the impact of their energy consumption (Green Light for Savings Programme). Nevertheless, the lack of detail about these measures raises questions but does not allow for proper assessment of the measures.

5. Transparency and public consultation

The comments of the public and non-governmental organisations were not taken into account during the preparation of the document. The Ministry of Agriculture and other responsible bodies did not prepare any open arena where the proposals could be submitted and discussed in detail. A series of round-tables with the presence of the Ministry of Commerce did not serve this goal, as it did not include the possibility for adopting or changing the presented drafts of the text. The government only informed participants about the process of the creation²⁸ of the recovery plan, but did not create a real opportunity for participation. For example, proposals made by Hnutí DUHA²⁹ addressing the adaptation component in chapter 2.6 of the recovery plan were discussed with the Ministry of Agriculture in December 2020, but not kept in the recovery plan.

²⁸ Government of the Czech Republic, '[Příprava Národního plánu obnovy ČR](#)', 18 February 2021.

²⁹ Hnutí DUHA, '[Na co by vláda neměla zapomenout v investičním balíčku](#)', 22 September 2020.





CEE Bankwatch
Network
euRONATUR