Policy Paper

TACKLING TRANSPORT POVERTY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC:

MAPPING THE EXPERIENCES OF TRANSPORT-POOR USERS, THE IMPACT OF THE ETS2, AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE SOCIAL CLIMATE FUND

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March 2025

Co-funded by the European Union

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Introduction

Transport poverty is a pressing issue in the Czech Republic, restricting access to essential services, employment opportunities, and social participation for affected individuals. The European Pillar of Social Rights recognises transport as one of the fundamental services to which everyone should have access.[1] Given the crucial role of mobility in economic and social well-being, addressing transport poverty is essential for ensuring equitable opportunities and fostering sustainable development.

Despite its increasing relevance, transport poverty remains an underexplored issue in the Czech context. The lack of research and localised data hinders a comprehensive assessment of the problem and the development of effective interventions. Without targeted policies, vulnerable households risk further marginalisation, particularly in regions with limited public transport options or high car dependency.

Tackling this challenge requires substantial financial resources—but where will the funding come from? A key source is revenue from the European Union's Emissions Trading System 2 (ETS2),[2] which is designed in part to address transport poverty and could also support sustainable and inclusive mobility solutions.

This paper seeks to enhance the understanding of transport poverty and explores strategies for its mitigation. It examines measures that could improve mobility access while aligning with broader sustainability goals. Additionally, the paper will highlight the potential benefits of ETS2 implementation and the disbursement of the Social Climate Fund (SCF). The paper also presents the experiences of Czech citizens with transport poverty and their attitudes towards a set of proposed measures to address it, collected through a survey and focus groups in 2024.[3]

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[1] Monika Kiss, "Understanding transport poverty" (European Parliament, 2022), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/738181/EPRS_ATA(2022)738181_EN.pdf.

2 European Commission, "ET2: Buildings, Road Transport and Additional Sectors" (European Commission, n.d.), https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets/ets2-buildings-road-transport-and-additional-sectors_en.

[3] Survey: Jan Krajhanzl et al., "České Klima 2024" (Institut 2050, 2024), https://institut2050.cz/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/ceskeklima2024.pdf. Focus groups conducted by Institute 2050 in December 2024, online. See Annex for more information.

Transport poverty

Transport poverty refers to the lack of adequate transport services needed to access essential services and employment or the inability to afford such services, and it is closely linked to social vulnerabilities such as low income, disabilities, old age, or regional disadvantage.[4] Across European Union (EU) Member States, 10–25 % of households are at risk of transport poverty.[5]

Transport poverty has three core dimensions - availability, accessibility, and affordability:[6]

- **Availability** refers to the presence—or absence—of transport options, whether public or private. In the case of private transport, this also includes access to parking or charging infrastructure.

- **Accessibility** concerns the ability to reach essential services such as education, employment, childcare, and healthcare. Transport poverty in this dimension manifests as difficulty or inability to reach key destinations or excessive travel times.

- **Affordability** relates to the cost of transport relative to household income. Households affected by this aspect of transport poverty struggle to cover, or are entirely unable to afford, transport costs.

Beyond these core dimensions, other factors contribute to transport poverty. **Insufficient adequacy** refers to a lack of barrier-free travel options, low safety levels, or a lack of accessible travel information.[7]

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[4] Kiss, "Understanding transport poverty"

[5] At the time of writing, no EU-wide data is available for households already facing transport poverty. Those at risk are cited by Alexander Eden et al., "Putting the ETS2 and Social Climate Fund to Work: How to Deliver Climate and Social Goals" (EUKI, 2023), https://www.euki.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Policy-Report-Putting-the-ETS-2-and-Social-Climate-Fund-to-Work.pdf

[6] Johanna Cludius et al., "Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2024" (European Commission,2024), https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/transport-poverty-definitions-indicators-determinants-and-mitigation-strategies-final-report_en, Eden et al., "Putting the ETS2 and Social Climate Fund to Work: How to Deliver Climate and Social Goals", European Commission, "Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2022" (Publications Office of the European Union, 2022), https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0422e50e-6a35-11ed-b14f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en.

[7] Cludius et al., "Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2024"

Transport poverty often correlates with social vulnerabilities such as reduced mobility, unemployment, or household poverty. Groups particularly affected include the elderly, women, low-income households, disabled individuals, young people, and those living in rural, peripheral, or remote areas.[8]

Good practice from abroad

A widely adopted approach to tackling transport poverty is on-demand transport.[9] According to a report by Focus,[10] various initiatives have been launched across Europe. For instance, the Slovenian cities of Maribor and Ljubljana have introduced pilot programs for on-demand transport services designed for citizens with mobility impairments. Similarly, in Slovakia, the Trnava and Košice regions have implemented on-demand transport to improve access for residents in rural and less accessible areas. In Budapest and its metropolitan area, residents in smaller residential districts can request a ride online or via phone. This solution provides essential transport services while also benefiting the environment by reducing unnecessary trips.[11] Another innovative approach is social leasing of electric vehicles—a scheme introduced in France, where the state purchases and leases electric cars at subsidised rates.[12] Additionally, free public transport has been implemented in several European cities, such as Montpellier (France) and Tallinn (Estonia), making mobility more accessible for all citizens.[13]

Beyond examining on-demand transport, the Focus report[14] also refers to other strategies that aim to alleviate transport poverty and reduce financial burdens on affected households. In

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[8] Kiss, "Understanding transport poverty"

[9] On-demand transport comprises transport services that dynamically modify their routes and schedules to accommodate passenger needs. The service typically utilises smaller vehicles such as minibuses or cars and passengers can access these services through multiple booking channels, including websites, mobile applications, or telephone calls, with service options ranging from designated stops to door-to-door transportation. Katharina Krell & Simon Hunkin, "Demand-Responsive Transport: A Policy Brief from the Policy Learning Platform for a more connected Europe" (Interreg Europe, 2024), https://www.interregeurope.eu/sites/default/files/2024-07/Policy%20brief%20on%20demand-responsive%20transport.pdf

[10] Marjeta Benčina et al., "Good Practices for Tackling Transport Poverty in Central and Eastern Europe" (Focus, 2024), https://focus.si/publikacija/good-practices-for-tackling-transport-povery-in-central-and-eastern-europe/

[11] Benčina et al., "Good Practices for Tackling Transport Poverty in Central and Eastern Europe"

[12] Transport & Environment, "Inventing the €100-a-Month Electric Car" (Transport & Environment, 2023), https://www.transportenvironment.org/articles/inventing-the-e100-a-month-electric-car

[13] Guardian, "The Guardian view on fare-free public transport: good for people as well as the planet" (Guardian, 2024), https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/07/the-guardian-view-on-fare-free-public-transport-good-for-people-as-well-as-the-planet

[14] Benčina et al., "Good Practices for Tackling Transport Poverty in Central and Eastern Europe"

Slovenia, an integrated ticketing system allows passengers unlimited access to public transport across the country. This initiative simplifies travel and primarily benefits regular users who do not qualify for special subsidised fares. In some Slovenian municipalities, volunteer-based free transport services for the elderly have been introduced to prevent isolation and loneliness among senior citizens in remote towns with poor public transport connections. In Hungary, the "village and homestead guardian service" supports transport in small rural communities, where local authorities, NGOs, and churches operate transport services to compensate for inadequate public transit. Another Hungarian initiative addresses safety concerns, particularly for women and young adults traveling at night or early in the morning. This service offers a free-of-charge phone line, where an operator remains on the call to provide reassurance. Several Slovakian cities have also introduced social cab services, primarily for elderly or medically disadvantaged individuals. In Croatia, various regions offer door-to-door, free transport services for tasks such as grocery shopping, medical appointments, administrative visits, and attending social or cultural events. This initiative primarily targets citizens over 65 and those at risk of poverty, aiming to reduce social exclusion while ensuring access to basic services and healthcare.[15]

There are some examples of on-demand transport in Czechia as well. The first one is PID Haló, which allows passengers to request rides through the PID Lítačka app or a dedicated hotline. The service supplements regular bus services during evening hours. The system uses artificial intelligence to process requests and optimise routes in real-time while maintaining standard public transport fares. The PID Haló[16] was launched as a pilot project in August 2024 in the Český Brod region,[17] initially operating with two vehicles.[18] Due to high passenger demand, both the fleet and service area have been expanded.[19] Starting February 2025, the service will operate with four vehicles and extend coverage to additional towns in the Central Bohemian Region.[20]

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[15] Benčina et al., "Good Practices for Tackling Transport Poverty in Central and Eastern Europe"

[16] ROPID, "Poptávková doprava PID Haló nabídne flexibilitu i náhradu za auto v dojezdech na vlak" (ROPID, 2024), https://pid.cz/poptavkova-doprava-pid-halo-nabidne-flexibilitu-i-nahradu-za-auto/

[17] Integrovaná doprava Středočeského kraje, "Poptávková doprava PID Haló bude 3. února rozšířena o oblast Kouřimska", (IDSK, 2025), https://www.idsk.cz/halo

[18] ROPID, "Poptávková doprava PID Haló nabídne flexibilitu I náhradu za auto v dojezdech na vlak"

[19] Integrovaná doprava Středočeského kraje, "Poptávková doprava PID Haló bude 3. února rozšířena o oblast Kouřimska"

[20] Integrovaná doprava Středočeského kraje, "Halo)), kam to bude? Inovační projekt poptávkové dopravy Integrované dopravy Středočeského kraje" (Halo PID, n.d.), https://www.halopid.cz

EU policies

What are ETS2 and SCF?

As part of the 2023 revisions to the original Emissions Trading System (ETS) Directive, the European Commission[21] introduced an expanded version known as ETS2. This more ambitious system extends coverage to emissions from buildings, road transport, and select smaller industries previously excluded from the existing ETS. ETS2 is set to become operational in 2027. Under ETS2, fuel distributors will be required to purchase an emission allowance for each ton of CO_2 emitted. To prevent excessive cost burdens, the maximum price of an allowance will be capped at €45 during the first three years of operation. If the price exceeds this threshold, additional allowances will be introduced to the market to stabilise costs.[22]

To mitigate the social impact of carbon pricing in these newly covered sectors, the EU established the SCF which aims to ensure a fair and inclusive green transition[23] by supporting vulnerable citizens. It provides EU Member States with dedicated funding for initiatives such as energy efficiency improvements, building renovations, and zero- or low-emission mobility solutions. Additionally, it can serve as temporary direct income support for households most affected by the transition.[24]

What implications do EU policies have for transport poverty?

Estimates of the expected increase in consumer spending in the Czech Republic due to ETS2 vary across sources. Projections suggest an average rise of 0.6% (at an allowance price of €50 per ton

[21] European Commission, “ET2: Buildings, Road Transport and Additional Sectors”

[22] European Commission, “ET2: Buildings, Road Transport and Additional Sectors”

[23] European Commission, “About the EU ETS” (European Commission, n.d.), https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets/about-eu-ets_en#our-climate-ambition-for-2030.

[24] European Commission, “Social Climate Fund” (European Commission, n.d.), https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets/social-climate-fund_en

of CO_2)[25], 0.07% (at €70 per ton)[26], or 1.6% (at €55 per ton).[27] This increase in household spending is one of the key implications of these newly introduced European policies.

As highlighted in the introduction, transport poverty is already a pressing issue, and addressing it requires substantial financial resources. ETS2 presents one of the potential funding sources for tackling this challenge. This presents an important perspective: rather than viewing ETS2 as a cause of transport poverty, it is part of the solution through its contribution to the SCF. This funding mechanism creates new opportunities to address long-standing transport accessibility challenges while supporting the EU's green transition goals.

SCF pools revenues from the auctioning of allowances under ETS2. Additional funding sources include €50 million in allowances from the existing ETS and a mandatory 25% contribution from Member States to their Social Climate Plans (SCPs). The SCF is expected to mobilise at least €86.7 billion between 2026 and 2032.[28] The Czech Republic is eligible to receive 2.4% of the total SCF, amounting to approximately 50 billion CZK over this period.[29] While this makes the country a net-receiver in the emission trading system, the allocated sum is not sufficient for a system-wide solution of transport poverty, and a second run of the SCF would be beneficial.[30]

Zindulková and Svoboda[31] point out that each country, based on its SCP (to be submitted by June 2025), will determine how to utilise SCF funds. Member States have flexibility in implementing both short-term and long-term measures. Short-term measures include direct support for vulnerable households and temporary cost compensation, with up to 37.5% of a country's SCP allocation available for these efforts. Long-term measures focus on preventing transport poverty through

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[25] Sibylle Braungardt et al., "The Social Climate Fund – Opportunities and Challenges for the buildings sector" (Öko-Institut, 2022), https://www.oeko.de/fileadmin/oekodoc/ECF_Social_Climate_Fund.pdf

[26] Benjamin Held et al., "Assessment of the EU Commission's Proposal on an EU ETS for Buildings & Road Transport (EU ETS2): Criteria for an effective and socially just EU ETS2", (FEST, FÖS, 2022), https://etxtra.org/resources/criteria-for-an-effective-and-socially-just-eu-ets-2-assessment-of-the-eu-commissions-proposal-on-an-eu-ets-for-buildings-road-transport-eu-ets-2/

[27] Eden et al., "Putting the ETS2 and Social Climate Fund to Work: How to Deliver Climate and Social Goals"

[28] European Commission, "Social Climate Fund"

[29] Kristina Zindulková & Jan Svoboda, "ETS2 a Sociální klimatický fond v Česku: dopady a opatření" (AMO, 2024), https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/ets2_rev_final-1.pdf

[30] Rebeka Hengalová, "Will the Fund Fund Enough?" (EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, December 2024), https://www.europeum.org/en/articles-and-publications/policy-paper-will-the-fund-fund-enough/.

[31] Zindulková & Svoboda, "ETS2 a Sociální klimatický fond v Česku: dopady a opatření"

sustainable solutions. Thus, the Czech government will have access to ETS2 revenues to implement policies that balance its financial impact on households. However, since Member States have autonomy in allocating SCF funds, the actual impact of ETS2 on Czech households will depend on domestic policy choices.[32]

Experience of transport users in Czechia at risk of transport poverty

In the Czech Republic, transport poverty has not been among the frequently discussed topics. It is only in the past year or so that the topic has been carefully opened in the general discourse, largely as a side effect of the implementation of the ETS2. Despite what the limited media coverage might suggest, transport poverty has been present in certain regions of Czechia for years, typically in the inner peripheries between regions and along the country's borders.[33] Recently, partially due to the growing frequency of discussions surrounding the impact of the ETS2 and efforts to alleviate transport poverty, two studies have mapped the experience of Czech transport users.

The analytical institute STEM analysed the income and living conditions of Czech households using available data from the Czech Statistical Office.[34] Their findings suggest that 3 % of Czech households are already living in transport poverty. Among the lowest earning 20 % of the population, this figure rises to 10,6%. The metric used accounts for household income levels and housing and transport costs, thus excluding high-earning households with high transport costs that they are nonetheless able to cover.[35] Evaluating the households' entire budget in a complex

[32] Zindulková & Svoboda, "ETS2 a Sociální klimatický fond v Česku: dopady a opatření"

[33] The inner peripheries are partially created due to the fact that each region manages its public transport, which is typically centred around the region's biggest city. This leads to the effect that municipalities close to the regional borders are sufficiently serviced neither by their region's transport service, nor the service of the neighbouring region. Data for transport availability in inner peripheries is being prepared by the Ministry of Environment at the time of writing. For a map of peripheries in Czechia see for example: Milan Jeřábek et al., *Specializovaná mapa vnitřních periferií*, 2021, 2021, https://repozitar.cz/publication/49068/en/Specializovana-mapa-vnitrnich-periferii/Jerabek-Fiedor-Simacek-Dokoupil.

[34] The used datasets were European Union – Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and The Household Budget Survey (HBS). Martin Philipp and Martin Kratochvíl, "Dopravní Chudoba v České Republice - Situační Analýza" (STEM Ústav empirických výzkumů, 2024), https://www.stem.cz/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/STEM_Dopravni-chudoba-analyza-1.pdf

[35] The used indicator is the so-called VTU: The share of household expenditure on transport is more than double of the national median. At the same time, household income is lower than the national median income less housing costs. Household expenditure on public transport is higher than the national median expenditure on this type of transport.

way helps illustrate whether the current budget can absorb any spike in transport costs. The STEM study thus reveals that those 3 % of households cannot absorb a sudden increase in transport fuels or fare, forcing the household to either reduce their budget in other sections or to limit their transport needs and behaviour. Furthermore, the study indicates that individuals aged 30 to 44, and to some extent also minors and young adults, are most susceptible to transport poverty. This is likely due to their high frequency of transport needs, as they include students and young parents, combined with a lack of transport fare discounts or their limited positive impact on an already small budget.[36]

A second study mapping transport poverty was recently conducted by Institute 2050, which administered surveys to households across the country in the second and third quarters of 2024.[37] The respondents who indicated financial and transport-related difficulties were subsequently invited to participate in focus groups. The survey data shows that 43 % of respondents never struggle to fulfil their transport needs for work, studies, medical appointments, or grocery shopping. However, 15% report that they sometimes encounter difficulties, and a further 11% state that they often or almost always struggle to find suitable transport options to meet these needs. This suggests that around one-tenth of the population is frequently or consistently unable to meet their basic needs of employment, health care and food supply, while in total, one-quarter of the population experiences such difficulties at least occasionally. Regarding non-essential travel, such as travelling for hobbies or to meet friends, 9 % of respondents report that finding a suitable transport option is often or very often an issue.

Moreover, the report evaluated public responses to a sudden increase in the price of transport fuels for private vehicles by roughly 5 %, which is the expected price increase resulting from the ETS2 implementation. According to the findings, 81 % of respondents indicated they would be able to absorb such an increase within their budget, while 14% stated they would switch to public transport, a bicycle or walking. However, 5 % of respondents reported that they would neither be

[36] In the Czech Republic, there are discounts for students under the age of 26, for senior citizens from the age of 65, and for people with dissabilities. Children until the age of six ride free of charge. See for example Albert Málek, “Slevy na jízdném se mění. Připlatí si studenti i senioři,” Seznam Zprávy, April 1, 2022, https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-zivot-v-cesku-slevy-na-jizdnem-se-meni-priplati-si-studenti-i-seniori-196465.

[37] Krajhanzl et al., “České Klima 2024”

able to cover such a price increase nor switch to another mode of transport, effectively leaving them without means to travel. It is important to note that a 5% increase in the price of one litre of petrol or gas equates to 2 CZK, the cost of a single bread roll. This stark comparison highlights how stretched thin a household's budget must be if such a small price increase of a litre of petrol or gas significantly reduces the household's mobility.

Talking to transport-poor users

The Institute 2050 survey identified transport-poor respondents throughout the Czech Republic. Among those, 18 respondents participated in an additional discussion in three focus groups.[38] The findings from the focus groups further illustrate the experiences of Czech transport users who face both financial and transport-related challenges. The respondents came from a wide range of towns and cities across the entire country, with varying levels of education, background, age and gender. And yet, their experiences were often remarkably similar, frequently reflecting the same underlying issues and barriers.

As mentioned above, transport modes need to meet three criteria – availability, affordability, and accessibility. In this context, availability of public transport was discussed as an alternative to individual automobiles, which often prove too expensive for the respondents who self-reported moderate to regular financial difficulties. Some respondents have been opting for public transport to reduce their costs, others have recently lost their car, and some do not have a driver's license. The overwhelming experience was that the local public transport is not sufficient in its frequency. Buses and trains typically run during the morning rush hour, primarily servicing school commutes, but their frequency drops significantly throughout the rest of the day. Furthermore, local public transport is not often effectively integrated with connecting modes, leading to long wait times when changing between services or missed connections due to delays. This low frequency of departures not only restricts user mobility but also increases overall travel times. Several

[38] The three focus groups discussing transport poverty in the Czech Republic were commissioned by the Institute 2050 in collaboration with the EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy. They were conducted by the Res SOLUTION research company and took place on December 17th and 18th, 2024, online. Anonymised information about the respondents can be found in the Annex.

respondents highlighted the poor timing of the one or two options they have, forcing them to arrive at their destination either much too early or considerably late.[39]

"Well, I feel sad about this because instead of increasing the number of connections, the number has decreased. So, I think that the government is not trying too hard."[40]

The required time commitment seeps into other aspects of the respondents' lives. Many reported that their free time is negatively affected by the time-consuming travel, often requiring them to get up earlier or leave other commitments earlier.[41] Some respondents highlighted situations where, in order to avoid being late for an appointment in a nearby city, they were forced to arrive up to two hours in advance and make arrangements to pass the time.[42] Rather than relying on the transport system supporting their activities and needs throughout the day, they have to schedule their day around the available transport options.

"It is what it is, when the connections don't follow each other and one has to wait outside, somewhere at the bus station. We have a bus station where there is nowhere to hide, there's only a roofed area with benches, but no actual building. So, to stand there and wait in the cold, it really is not enjoyable."[43]

Moreover, respondents with disabilities, those who accompany small children with a pram, or are in any other way vulnerable, report facing additional challenges due to the limited availability of accessible options. While in larger cities it is often possible to choose a barrier-free trams or buses, in remote and smaller towns there may be only one or two viable transport options.[44] Respondents

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[39] Respondents F1.2, F3.1, F3.3, F3.5. See Annex for anonymised data about respondents.

[40] Respondent F2.5. Author's translation, original citation: „No, já z toho mám smutný pocit, protože místo, aby se ty spoje navýšily, aby byl větší počet spojů, tak se to zmenšuje, jo. Takže si myslím, že ten stát, jako, teda moc se nesnaží."

[41] Respondents F1.1, F1.3, F1.4, F1.6, F2.3, F2.6, F3.6.

[42] Respondents F1.4, F2.1.

[43] Respondent F1.4. Original citation: „Je to tak, když ty spoje prostě na sebe nenavazují a člověk má někde čekat venku prostě na tom autobusáku my třeba tady máme zrovna autobusák kde se není kde schovat tam prostě je jenom taková stříška v podstatě s lavičkama, ale není tam, není to vlastně žádná budova. Takže stát tam prostě a čekat v té zimě nebo v dešti není to fakt nic příjemného."

[44] Respondents F1.2, F1.4, F1.5, F1.6, F2.1, F2.2, F2.3, F2.5, F2.6.

also described feeling discomfort during long journeys, especially in winter and during the night, with some highlighting feeling unsafe.[45]

When it comes to questions of transport affordability, the issue is not necessarily resolved by switching to public transport. In fact, some respondents noted that the total cost of using a combination of public transport options is only slightly lower than the costs associated with driving their own car. One respondent, who previously owned a car, was able to maintain an additional part-time job to support their income. Since losing access to the vehicle, they have struggled to manage both jobs due to the time constraints of public transport.[46] Conversely, another respondent reported that their private car represents a significant portion of their household budget, as they always travel alone. However, switching to public transport would more than double their travel time while offering marginal cost savings.[47]

"... sometimes, I feel, I don't know, like a beggar. Not really, but almost like that. It is really uncomfortable." [48]

As noted above, the experiences of respondents are often similar despite geographical differences. Nevertheless, distinct groups emerge from the data. Parents of young children struggle to juggle the plethora of appointments, the harsh outside conditions in which they wait for transport, and managing the exhausting logistics of travelling with a pram.[49] Women, in general, report bearing a greater share of caring responsibilities, including caring for their elderly family members.[50] Beyond the physical strain of travel, some female respondents also report not feeling safe while using public transport or waiting at stops, constantly remaining alert. Lastly, senior citizens, who often cannot afford their own car, no longer feel fit to drive and have many doctor's visits, present

45 Respondents F1.6 and F3.6.

46 Respondent F3.3.

47 Respondent F1.4.

48 Respondent F2.4. Original citation: „...prostě připadám si někdy, já nevím, no, jako ne žebrák, ale skoro tak. Je to prostě nepříjemný pocit."

49 Respondents F1.4, F2.1, F2.2, F2.5, F3.1.

50 Respondents F1.4, F1.6, F2.1, F2.2, F2.5, F2.6, F3.2, F3.3.

another vulnerable group.[51] These vulnerabilities among transport users are well illustrated by the following quotes:

"... I have a lot of doctors, some in [a larger city], some in [a smaller city], some just like that, so it's a bit of a problem when I walk with two sticks, just like to get somewhere, because to the bus or to the train, when it is not usually wheelchair accessible and so. There are no escalators in some towns, like in [another large city] there are, but maybe in our town there are none. There is no such thing in [another smaller city] either. It's just a problem to go up the stairs to the train, to actually get on the bus. Some of them are transfers, so they just cancelled a lot of those connections."[52]

"I would say to try it for yourself, go to a really remote village to try it, I think that two to three days would be enough."[53]

Previously mentioned research suggests a range of measures that could alleviate transport poverty, depending on the local environment and suitability.[54] The focus groups respondents evaluated measures selected by this paper's authors based on a literature review of best practices.[55] The respondents often expressed a lack of trust in the institutions responsible for their implementation. Discounted fares for public transport and school/employee buses were deemed as a great suggestion, albeit with some hesitation in regards to the frequency of such services. On-

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[51] Respondents F1.2, F1.5, F2.4, F2.6.

52 Respondent F2.6. Original citation: „...mám spoustu doktorů, některé ve [větším městě A], některé v [menším městě B], některé prostě tak, tak je to trošku problém, když chodím o dvoch hůlkách, prostě jako se někam dopravit, protože do autobusu nebo do vlaku, když tam není většinou pro ty bezbariérový a tak. Nejsou eskalátory v některých městech, třeba ve [větším městě C] je, ale třeba u nás není. Takovéhle ty věci v [menším městě D] taky není. Prostě je to problém schody do toho vlaku, vyjít vlastně do autobusu. Některé jsou přestupy, tak a spoustu těch spojů prostě zrušili."

53 Respondent F2.2. Original citation: "Já bych, aby si to zkusil, jako že třeba nějaký fakt ty zapadlý vesničky, aby si zkusil, já myslím, že by mu dva, tři dny stačily."

[54] Such as on-demand transport, municipality taxi, fare-free transport, door-to-door services, active mobility, social leasing and others. See section *Good practice from abroad* for more details.

[55] See Annex for a complete list of evaluated measures.

[55] Most notable example is respondent F3.3 who had two jobs and travelled between them with a personal vehicle. Upon losing their car, they had to quit one of the jobs as the travel time became too strenuous and did not leave enough time for the actual job.

demand transport, car sharing of electric vehicles, and senior taxi services were considered too problematic, primarily due to a lack of understanding of how exactly these services would work. Respondents easily identified numerous concerns and barriers, often focusing more on potential problems than on the benefits of the proposed measures they were asked to evaluate. Many struggled to imagine how these measures could be effectively integrated into the existing transport system, doubting their feasibility in real-world conditions. Additionally, some expressed a broader scepticism, believing that the transport system as a whole requires a fundamental overhaul rather than isolated adjustments. While such concerns are valid, often based on past experiences of poorly managed transport systems, they could potentially be mitigated through the sharing of good practices and clear communication regarding implementation strategies.

Conclusions

This paper has provided up-to-date data on the situation in Czechia and shed light on the challenges faced by people affected by transport poverty. It has also outlined possible measures and best practices, as well as suitable financing options. Drawing on the findings, it offered insights into the everyday challenges faced by these individuals, demonstrating that transport poverty is not an isolated issue but one that significantly impacts access to employment, healthcare, and overall quality of life.

While transport poverty does not affect the majority of the population, available data shows that it impacts a significant and growing portion of Czech society, making it a serious issue that cannot be overlooked or expected to resolve itself over time. Furthermore, transport poverty is only one aspect of general poverty and other vulnerable situations in which individuals navigate their lives. As exemplified by the respondents of this project, transport poverty can even exacerbate other difficulties, making this a particularly complex issue.[56] Therefore, it is important to begin

[56] Most notable example is respondent F3.3 who had two jobs and travelled between them with a personal vehicle. Upon losing their car, they had to quit one of the jobs as the travel time became too strenuous and did not leave enough time for the actual job.

addressing existing transport poverty, to prevent further households from becoming transport-poor, and to design transport systems that account for the needs of vulnerable groups.

A forthcoming publication will build on these findings and present concrete steps that Czechia—together with relevant stakeholders at the local, regional, and national levels—can take to systematically address transport poverty and prevent its further spread. It is now upon policymakers across all levels (from towns, through national governments, to EU institutions) to operationalise the available know-how, funds, political will and current discourse surrounding this issue and to make a difference.

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Annex

Anonymised data of respondents

Three focus groups focusing on transport poverty in the Czech Republic were commissioned by the Institute 2050 in collaboration with EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy. They were conducted by the Res SOLUTION research company and took place on December 17th and 18th, 2024, online. Each focus group consisted of 6 respondents who were selected based on their self-reported struggles with finances and transport abilities. See the demographic data of the respondents in the table below.

Group 1: December 17th, 2024, online

respondent	gender	age	age group	region	number of inhabitants	financial struggle	frequency of travel struggle
F1.1	F	56	50+	Vysočina	up to 999	minor to moderate	almost always
F1.2	M	20	18-29	Karlovarský	1000 - 4999	minor	often
F1.3	F	60	50+	Středočeský	1000 - 4999	moderate	often
F1.4	F	46	30-49	Moravskoslezský	5000+ inhabitants	moderate	almost always
F1.5	M	39	30-49	Plzeňský	5000+ inhabitants	minor	often
F1.6	F	20	18-29	Jihomoravský	5000+ inhabitants	minor	almost always

Group 2: December 18th, 2024, online

respondent	gender	age	age group	region	number of inhabitants	financial struggle	frequency of travel struggle
F2.1	F	37	30-49	Středočeský	up to 999	moderate	often
F2.2	F	31	30-49	Ústecký	up to 1000	minor	often
F2.3	M	22	18-29	Moravskoslezský	up to 1001	moderate	often
F2.4	M	70	50+	Královehradecký	1000 - 4999	moderate	often
F2.5	F	55	50+	Moravskoslezský	1000 - 4999	moderate	often
F2.6	F	41	30-49	Pardubický	5000+ inhabitants	moderate	almost always

Group 3: December 18th, 2024, online

respondent	gender	age	age group	region	number of inhabitants	financial struggle	frequency of travel struggle
F3.1	M	42	30-49	Moravskoslezký	up to 999	minor	almost always
F3.2	F	56	50+	Ústecký	1000 - 4999	severe	almost always
F3.3	F	51	50+	Zlínský	1000 - 4999	moderate	often
F3.4	M	30	30-49	Jihomoravský	5000+ inhabitants	minor	often
F3.5	M	44	30-49	Královehradecký	5000+ inhabitants	moderate	often
F3.6	F	20	18-29	Středočeský	5000+ inhabitants	moderate	often

List of measures that were evaluated by the participants of the focus groups

- On-demand transport in the form of a (mini)bus
- Increase of available public transport connections
- Carpooling using an app
- School bus for pupils
- Company bus for employees
- Discounted municipal taxi
- Municipal car sharing with an electric car
- Long-term rental of an electric car (social leasing of EVs)
- Car sharing of a municipal or company car
- Supplemented public transport fares (per individual)
- Discount for public transport fares (across population)