

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGION

The Moravskoslezský Region is very diverse in terms of geography. From the west it is fringed by the massif of the Hrubý Jeseník Mountain Range with the highest peak of the Region and the whole Moravia – Praděd (altitude 1 491 m). The highlands gradually pass to the Nízký Jeseník rolling foothills and the Odra Hills (Oderské vrchy). The central part of the Region is characteristic by a densely populated lowland territory of the Opava lowlands (Opavská nížina), the Ostrava basin (Ostravská pánev), and the Moravian Gateway (Moravská brána). Towards the southeast, the landscape again gains a mountainous character and culminates in a mountain ridge of the Beskydy Mountains – that are called the Moravian-Silesian Beskydy Mountains (Moravskoslezské Beskydy) at the border with Slovakia – with the peak of Lysá hora (altitude 1 323 m) and the Silesian Beskydy Mountains (Slezské Beskydy) on the border with Poland.

The Region lies in the northeast of the Czech Republic (CR) and it is one of its most marginal parts. In the north and in the east, it borders with Polish voivodeships (the Silesian voivodeship and the Opole voivodeship), in the southeast with the Žilina Region of Slovakia. Within the regional arrangement of the CR, it is lined by the Olomoucký Region and in the south it touches the Zlínský Region. Since the Region forms the state borders, it can effectively cooperate in the productive sector, development of infrastructure, protection of the environment, cultural and education activities and, most of all, in tourism. For this purpose, 4 Euroregions exist in the territory of the Region now: Beskydy, Praděd, Silesia, and Těšínské Slezsko.

The Moravskoslezský Region is delimited by the following Districts: the Bruntál District, the Frýdek-Místek District, the Karviná District, the Nový Jičín District, the Opava District, and the Ostrava-město District; it is divided to 22 administrative districts of municipalities with extended powers, in which there are 300 municipalities in total, of which 42 are towns. With its area of 5 431 square kilometres it occupies 6.9% of the territory of the Czech Republic and thus it ranks sixth among all the Regions of the CR. More than a half of the Region's area is agricultural land; forest lands cover over 35% (especially in the mountain areas of the Jeseníky Mountains and the Beskydy Mountains). Besides the beauties of nature, there are also rich mineral resources in the Region: primarily key bituminous coal deposits of the CR, deposits of natural gas and other raw materials such as calcite, granite, marble, slate, gypsum, gravel sand, sand, and brick clays.

Surface water of the Moravskoslezský Region mostly drains into the Baltic Sea; only that of part of the Nízký Jeseník (the Rýmařov area) and small territories of the Nový Jičín District belongs to the Morava River basin and drains into the Black Sea. The Odra River that springs in the Odra Hills is the most important river of the Region. In the territory of the city of Ostrava, the Odra River receives its biggest tributaries – the Opava River that drains water from the Jeseníky Mountains and the area of the town of Opava and the Ostravice River that drains water from the Moravskoslezské Beskydy Mountains. In the north of Bohumín, the Olše River flows into the Odra River – it forms the border with Poland and drains water from the area of the town of Těšín. At the confluence of the Odra River and the Olše River, the territory of the Region reaches its minimum height (altitude 195 m). The following are the main sources of drinking water: the Šance water reservoir and the Morávka water reservoir in the Moravskoslezské Beskydy Mountains and the Kružberk dam in the Nízký Jeseník Mountains.

Since the 19th century, the Region has ranked among the most important industrial areas of Central Europe. However, the Region's structure of economy is currently causing many problems related to the restructuring as well as social issues arising from a higher level of unemployment.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, a substantial environmental improvement has been observed as a result of the reduction of manufacturing, utilisation of more environmental-friendly technologies, and significant investments in environmental measures. Despite the mentioned improvements, the Region still belongs to the areas with the biggest environmental burden in the Czech Republic, because in the past all components of the environment have been polluted. Currently, the most problematic issues are contamination of soil and subterranean waters due to industrial activity, the sinking land caused by the coal-mining activity, pollution of surface waters, and air pollution.

The character of the nature and different economic development cause differences in the quality of the environment in individual parts of the Region. The most serious impacts on the environment concentrate in the central and northeastern parts of the Region (the areas around the city of Ostrava, the town of Karviná, and the town of Třinec). On the other hand, there are also places with important and valuable beauties of nature that are protected within 3 protected landscape areas – Beskydy (with the area of 1 205 square kilometres, including the Zlín part, the biggest protected landscape area in the CR), Jeseníky, and Poodří (an area around the Odra River) – and other 167 specially protected areas.

The Moravskoslezský Region is the third most populated Region in the CR (it has 1 178 thousand population); however, with its 300 municipalities, it ranks among the Regions with the lowest number of settlements. It corresponds to its population density of 217 people per square kilometre, while the national figure is 133 people per square kilometre. The average cadastral area of a municipality in the Region is 18.1 square kilometres, which is the second largest in the CR and by 50% larger than the cadastral area of an average municipality in the CR (12.6 square kilometres). Only less than 2% of the Region's population live in municipalities with less than 500 population, about 27% live in municipalities between 500 and 4 999 population, and 13% live in municipalities between 5 000 and 19 999 population. Most of the population of the Region (about 58%) live in towns with over 20 000 population – such percentage is an exception in the CR. There were 285 000 population living in the Region's metropolis of Ostrava, i.e. about a quarter of the Region's population. Other big towns are Havířov, Opava, Frýdek-Místek, and Karviná.

Regarding the population, the basic characteristic of the current situation not only in the Moravskoslezský Region, but also in the whole CR, is a low birth rate. Therefore, the population is gradually ageing. Besides an ongoing natural population change (decrease) in the Moravskoslezský Region – unlike the rest of the Czech Republic – the population has been continually decreasing due to migration since 1993.

Already during the times of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a larger part of the Moravskoslezský Region became one of the most important industrial areas. The core of this area is the Ostrava-Karviná industrial and mining basin that was industrialised in close relation with the exploitation of its raw materials, particularly quality bituminous coking coal, and subsequent development of heavy industry and metallurgy. The Region is thus a nationwide centre of metallurgy. Moreover, the entire output of bituminous coal in the CR comes from this area, although the volume of coal mined there is diminishing. Besides these traditional branches, also generation and distribution of electricity, gas, and water, production of transport vehicles, and manufacture of chemicals and pharmaceutical products are putting through in the Region.

Despite the current slowdown of heavy industry and raw materials mining, the above-mentioned branches of industry employ over one third of the total number of 557.7 thousand persons employed in the national economy; additional 11% work in trade and repairs of goods, according to the Labour Force Sample Survey. The average gross monthly wage in the Moravskoslezský Region in 2021 (workplace method, preliminary data) was about CZK 3 500 below the national average; compared to other Regions, it was the fourth lowest average in the CR. It was CZK 34 446 per employee. The distribution of wages among industries is similar to that in other Regions of Czechia. The highest wages are in information and communication, electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply, mining and quarrying, and financial and insurance activities, whereas the lowest are in accommodation and food service activities.

The industrial structure of the Region is currently causing many problems that are related especially to the higher share of unemployed persons. A relatively good situation is in the Opava District, the Frýdek-Místek District, and the Nový Jičín District, whereas the high share of unemployed persons is reported by the Karviná District, the Bruntál District, and the Ostrava-město District, which rank among the last of all Districts of Czechia.

When Czechoslovakia split into two independent countries, the Moravskoslezský Region found itself on the periphery of the CR's northeast border with Poland and the Slovak Republic, far away from direct contacts with the Capital City of Prague and economic stimuli from advanced countries of the EU. The D1 motorway between the towns of Prague and Bohumín enables transport services and economic revival. Other trunk roads are as follows: the international road I/11 (E 75) leading from Opava via Ostrava and Český Těšín to Mosty u Jablunkova and the international road I/48, D/48 (E 462) leading from Nový Jičín via Frýdek-Místek to Český Těšín. Both roads go through the eastern part of the Region. The Moravskoslezský Region has two railway lines of European importance: electrified lines No 270 and No 320. The line No 270 is an important part of the main railway route of the CR leading from Prague to Bohumín. The air transport is ensured by the international airport in Mošnov, which is the second largest airport in the CR. Its landing runway is 3 500 m long, which enables landing of aeroplanes of all categories without limitation.

A system of schools of good quality can be found in the Moravskoslezský Region. In its 446 basic schools, 104 thousand pupils are fulfilling their compulsory education. There are 136 secondary schools (of which 39 are teaching programmes of grammar schools), 2 conservatoires, 14 higher professional schools, and 4 universities: Vysoká škola báňská – Technická univerzita Ostrava (VSB – Technical University of Ostrava), Ostravská univerzita (University of Ostrava), Slezská univerzita v Opavě (Silesian University in Opava), and Vysoká škola PRIGO (PRIGO University). The universities comprise 16 faculties and provide study programmes for over 25 000 students.

The health care system is also on a high level in the Region. There are 506 independent surgeries of general practitioners for adults, 183 independent surgeries of general practitioners for children and adolescents, 574 independent surgeries of dentists, 148 independent surgeries of gynaecologists, and 858 independent surgeries of various specialists. The Region has 6 709 beds available in 21 hospitals and other 2 389 beds in 14 specialised therapeutic institutions and therapeutic institutions for long-term patients.

Traditional cultural centres of the Region are as follows: the city of Ostrava, the town of Opava, and for the territory with an important Polish minority it is the town of Český Těšín. The Region has many theatres, museums, galleries, and cinemas. There is also a world-class symphony orchestra called Janáček Philharmonic (Janáčková filharmonie) in the city of Ostrava. Lovers of literature can use over 400 libraries. Towns and other municipalities offer a wide range of sports in sports arenas, multipurpose halls, and hundreds of playgrounds, gymnasiums, open-air pools, and swimming pools. Besides cultural and sports activities in towns and villages, the diverse and eye-pleasing sceneries of northern Moravia and Silesia offer also many possibilities for recreation, tourism, sightseeing, and stays with therapeutic programmes. In summer period, the Region offers (thanks to its network of cycle routes and tourist paths) conditions for hiking and cycling; in winter, mountain ranges of the Hrubý Jeseník Mountains and the Beskydy Mountains are centres of cross-country and downhill skiing. The Moravskoslezský Region has many cultural monuments – there are several urban conservation areas (centres of the towns of Příbor, Nový Jičín, and Štramberk). Beautiful chateaux (mansions) are in Hradec nad Moravicí, Raduň, Kravaře near the town of Opava, and in Fulnek. The most important castles are as follows: Sovinec near Rýmařov, Starý Jičín, and Hukvaldy near the Beskydy Mountains. What is specific for the Region is a rich background for industrial tourism (e.g. the TATRA Technical Museum in Kopřivnice, the Railway Coach Museum in Studénka, the Museum of Mining in Ostrava-Petřkovice, the area of Dolní Vítkovice ironworks, the Michal Mine, etc.). Water sports fans like to go down the Moravice River and the Odra River; those, who prefer recreation by expanses of water, visit the Žermanice Dam and the Těrlicko Dam and fewer of them, so far, the Slezská Harta Dam. Spa care in the Region is provided by Darkov spa in the town of Karviná established to utilise healing effects of iodine-bromine brine, further by a spa sanatorium in the town of Klimkovice with buildings of interesting architecture, and a mountain spa in the village of Karlova Studánka proud for its cleanest air in Central Europe.