

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 entire Moravia, the Praděd (altitude 1 491 m). The mountains 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 by the Beskydy Mountains – that are called the Moravian-Silesian Beskydy Mountains (Moravskoslezské Beskydy) at the border with Slovakia – topping out at 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 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 area of output, development of infrastructure, protection of the environment, cultural and education activity and, most of all, in tourism. For this purpose, 4 euroregions exist on 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 5 430 sq km it occupies 6.9% of the territory of the Czech Republic and thus it ranks sixth among all the Regions. More than a half of the Region's territory is agricultural land; over 35% are forest lands (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, further deposit of natural gas, a rich deposit of 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. On the territory of the city of Ostrava the Odra River receives its biggest supplies – 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 place where the Odra River and the Olše River meet, the territory of the Region reaches its minimum (altitude 195 m). The following are the main sources of drinking water: the Šance Dam and the Morávka Dam 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 the 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 1990, 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 size of 1 205 sq km including the Zlín part of the biggest protected landscape area in the CR), Jeseníky, and Poodří (an area around the Odra River) – and 163 small-size protected areas.

The Moravskoslezský Region is the 3rd most populated Region in the CR (it has 1 204 thousand inhabitants); however, with its 300 municipalities it ranks among the Regions with the lowest number of settlements. It corresponds to its population density of 222 inhabitants per square km, while the national figure is 135 inhabitants per sq km. The average cadastral area of a municipality in the Region is 18.1 sq km, which is the second largest in the CR and by 50% larger than the cadastral area of the average municipality in the CR (12.6 sq km). Only less than 2% of the Region's population live in municipalities with less than 500 inhabitants and 25% live in municipalities of 500–4 999 inhabitants, and 14% live in municipalities of 5 000–19 999 inhabitants. Most of the population (almost 59%) live in towns of 20 000 inhabitants and over – such percentage is an exception in the CR. There were more than 290 000 inhabitants living in the Region's metropolis of Ostrava, i.e. about a quarter of the Region's population. Other big towns – with the number of inhabitants over 50 000 – are Havířov, Opava, Frýdek-Místek, and Karviná.

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

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 nation-wide centre of metallurgy. Moreover, almost 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 588.7 thousand persons, who are employed in the national economy; another 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 2018 (workplace method, preliminary data) was about CZK 3 100 below the national average; compared to other Regions, it was the tenth highest average in the CR. It was CZK 28 796 per employee. The distribution of wages among industries is similar to that in other Regions of the CR; the highest wages are in information and communication, electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply, mining and quarrying, and financial and insurance activities, while 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. Good situation, relatively, is in the Frýdek-Místek District, the Opava District, and the Nový Jičín District while on the opposite side of the scale (in comparison both within the Region and the entire Czech Republic) are the Karviná District and the Bruntál District, which rank among the last of all the Districts of the CR. A burning problem of the Region is the share of the long-term unemployed (for over 12 months) in the total number of the unemployed, which is above the national average in the Moravskoslezský Region.

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 Lipník nad Bečvou and Bohumín nearly 80 km long solves transport issues and economic revival. The next fundamental routes of the current road network are the following: the international road I/11 (E 75) leading from Opava via Ostrava, Český Těšín to Mosty u Jablunkova and the international road I/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 busiest airport in the CR. Its landing runway is 3 500 m long, which enables landing of aeroplanes of all categories without limitation.

A schooling system of good quality can be found in the Moravskoslezský Region. In its 440 basic schools, more than 104 thousand pupils are fulfilling their compulsory education. There are 135 secondary schools (of which 40 are teaching programmes of grammar schools), 2 conservatoires, 13 higher professional schools, and 4 universities (VŠB – Technical University of Ostrava, University of Ostrava, Silesian University in Opava, and College of Social and Administrative Affairs, Havířov). The universities comprise 16 faculties and provide study programmes for almost 24 000 students.

There are 225 inhabitants per physician in the Region, with the number varying within the range of 156 (Ostrava-město District) to 311 (Bruntál District). The Region has 6 396 beds available in 20 hospitals and other 2 447 beds in specialised therapeutic institutions and therapeutic institutions for long-term patients.

Traditional cultural centres of the Region are Ostrava, Opava, and for the territory with important Polish minority it is Český Těšín. The Region has many theatres, museums, galleries, and cinemas. There is also a world-class symphony orchestra Janáček Philharmonic (Janáčková filharmonie) in Ostrava. Lovers of literature can visit over 410 libraries. Towns and 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 municipalities, the diverse and eye-pleasing sceneries of northern Moravia and Silesia offers also many possibilities for recreation, tourism, sightseeing, and stays with therapeutic programmes. In summer period, the Region offers (thanks to its network of cycle paths and tourist paths) conditions for hiking and cycling; in winter, mountain ranges of the Hrubý Jeseník and Beskydy are centres of cross-country and downhill skiing. The Moravskoslezský Region has many cultural monuments – there are several urban conservation areas (centres of Příbor, Nový Jičín, and Štramberk). Beautiful chateaux (mansions) are in Hradec nad Moravicí, Raduň, Kravaře near the town of Opava, and in Fulnek. Most important castles are: Sovinec near Rýmařov, Starý Jičín and Hukvaldy near Beskydy. What is specific for the Region is a rich background for industrial tourism (e.g. the Regional Museum in Kopřivnice with the Technical Museum TATRA, 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 at expanses of water, visit the Žermanice Dam and the Těrlicko Dam and fewer of them also the Slezská Harta Dam. The balneological industry is based on the curative effect of iodobromine brine in the Darkov Spa with the Rehabilitation Sanatorium. Since the 1990's there has been a new spa sanatorium in operation in Klimkovice with buildings that are interesting as for their architecture.