

9.2 QUALITY OF HOUSING STOCK IN CZECHIA

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The quality of housing stock is one of the key indicators for evaluating the level of housing and also the quality of life of the population as a whole. Size standards (flat area and number of rooms), levels of occupancy (number of inhabitants in a flat/room) and technical quality and facilities (building materials, plumbing, heating, sanitary facilities) are among basic indicators of quality of housing stock monitored by long-term statistics. By studying changes in these indicators it is possible to evaluate not only changes in the quality of housing but also how the life-style of the population as a whole has changed over the years. The goal of the specialised map is to present changes in the quality of housing stock in Czechia since the beginning of the 20th century. Maps are composed in territorial segmentation by districts and thus regional differences within Czechia can be shown.

Data on the condition and development of housing stock could be drawn particularly from results of blanket screening of houses and flats which has been included in the census since 1950. Although data on housing conditions were first collected in the 1869 census this was restricted to areas of Praha and Brno. In 1910 a census of flats was held in 37 cities or conurbations, in 1921 in 28 cities of at least 20,000 inhabitants and in 1930 all municipalities with at least 10,000 inhabitants were included (ČSÚ 2005). Thus the 1950 census was the first to cover the whole territory of Czechia (all municipalities regardless of their size) and it offered detailed information in a format which is still used today. Partial data on housing of population on a regional basis could be also drawn from the first Czechoslovakian census in 1921. However, this provides only a highly restricted scope of information and covers only large municipalities with many inhabitants – the flat size of housing stock, size structure of flats by number of inhabitants and data on the structure of households (see SÚS 1924).

Since 1950 data about housing stock are relatively comparable between censuses and thus it is possible to track their long-term development. However, some methodological changes have occurred and these must be taken into account in processing and interpreting the data. A cardinal change of methods occurred in 2011 when the number of inhabitants of a flat ceased to be determined on the basis of permanent residents as it was between 1961 and 2001¹ but was calculated from those persons usually living in the flat. Those data thus correspond with information on inhabitants living in inhabited flats.² Another notable methodological change occurred in the definition of a “residential area”. For the first time, a kitchen was also counted as residential space if it was larger than 8m². In previous censuses a kitchen was counted as residential space only when it was the only room in the flat. This change was registered both in adding up the number

¹ In 1921 and 1950 data in the census was held for those who were present in the flat.

² In censuses from 1961 to 2001 the data related to inhabitants who had a permanent address in a given flat, although they could dwell somewhere else.

of residential rooms and in the aggregate size of residential space. There was also a change in 2011 in the terminology of evaluation of housing stock according to its categories indicating the quality of a flat based on its facilities. The original categories I and II were combined into the category of “standard flats”, and former categories III and IV are now labelled as “lower quality flats”.³ The map was processed using the following indicators: size structure of housing stock (based on the number of rooms in a flat), level of occupancy (the number of people in one residential room, or one flat in 1921)⁴, and the type of flat using a housing stock classification based on a flat’s basic facilities (bathroom and toilet) and the type of heating.

The condition of housing stock in Czechia was significantly influenced by the political, socio-economic and technological circumstances in different periods of development. Between the wars housing was one of the most pressing aspects of life in Czech society. In cities in particular the need for accommodation for people moving from the countryside grew enormously. However, the economy weakened by war was not able to produce a sufficient number of flats and many households were forced to live in overcrowded flats of poor quality (Anderle et al. 1967, Rykl 2014). Looking at the map there is an obvious concentration of less crowded flats in areas along the northern borders of Czechia. Those were areas with highly developed industry (see Semotanová 2014) and a high proportion of inhabitants employed in the secondary sector (see Map sheet section A 7.2 Structure of employment in Czechia). In the inter-war period the existence of a toilet was only of limited use as an indicator of housing quality. Few flats had an inside toilet and that was due not only to the economic status of the households but mostly to the technical infrastructure of a settlement. Lavatories could be installed in a flat only when sewerage connections were available.

“That was why some houses with stylishly complicated facades – even from the beginning of the twentieth century – had rather primitive hygienic facilities, because the infrastructure of the settlement did not permit other possibilities”

(Rykl 2014; p 121).

The unfavourable situation lingered on even after WWII. Only in the 1960s and primarily the 1970s did the rate of flat construction increase notably (see Map sheet section A 9.1 Housing Stock in Czechia). New construction did not just bring a larger number of flats but their quality began to improve as well. New flats had more rooms and better facilities (see Figures 9.2.1 and 9.2.2). The capital Prague had a quite specific status in the socialist era because it suffered (at least in the beginning) by a lower flow of investment in the building industry since the development of housing stock was concentrated into areas with more urgent housing needs (Illner 1977). Flats with a more convenient size structure (a larger number of residential rooms) were located in areas of developing industry and in the borderlands. As the border areas were being repopulated, people

³ Poor quality flats are flats without central heating and with only partial basic facilities (inside bathroom or toilet).

⁴ For 1921 data about the number of rooms in a flat are not available for all municipalities of Czechia.

mostly moved to larger flats and smaller and poorer quality flats were then gradually demolished (Anderle et al. 1967). The positive development of housing stock is also perceptible in the coal mining area in the North Czech Coal Basin where the quality of housing stock improved with the construction of new flats for the newly arriving workforce in industry and mining but also as a result of the renovation of some parts of cities with dilapidated housing stock (see for instance Anderle et al. 1967, ČSÚ 1973). These areas thus have a relatively low proportion of poor quality flats (see map). The size structure and facilities of the housing stock did not (and still do not) reflect only the economic level of a region but also the nature of any given settlement. A higher number of residential rooms is typical for instance for rural settlements where flats in family houses predominate.

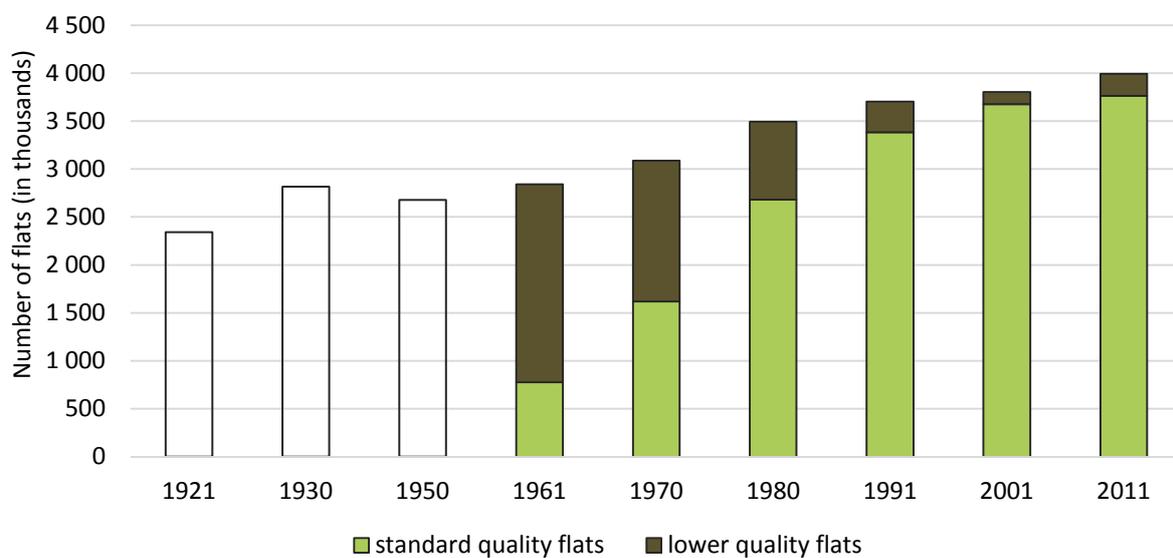


Figure 9.2.1: Changes in the quality of housing stock in Czechia between 1921 and 2011

Source: SÚS, 1921, 1938; ČSÚ, 2010a, 2011

Note: Flat type data are available only since 1961.

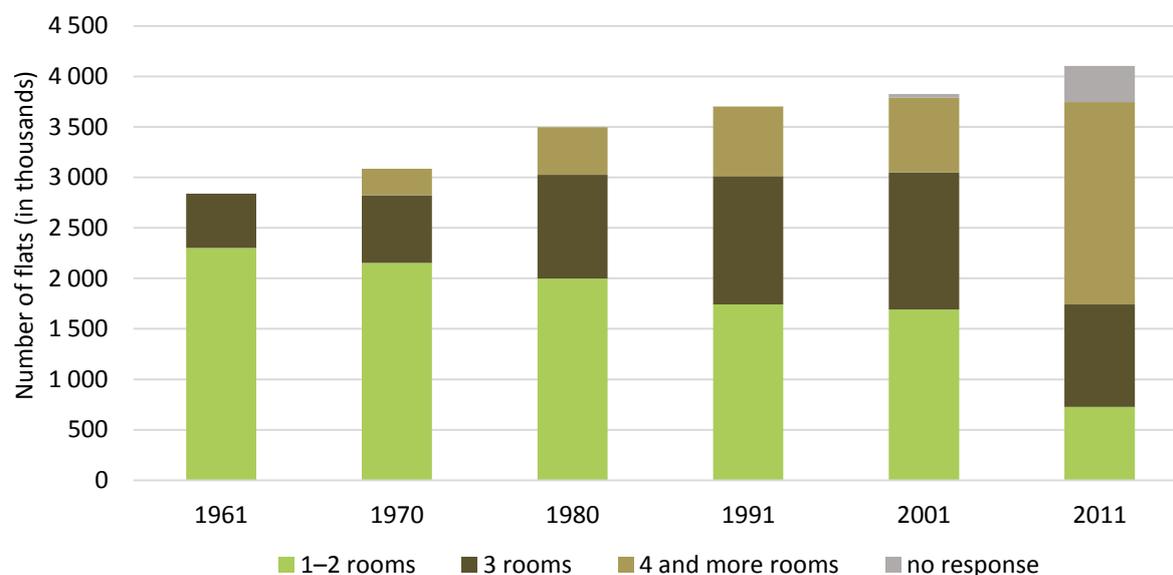


Figure 9.2.2: *Changes in the size structure of housing stock in Czechia between 1961 and 2011*

Source: ČSÚ, 2010b, 2011

Note: In 1961 3 rooms category includes also flats with more rooms.

However, the favourable housing stock situation in north Czechia did not last long and since the 1990s levels of occupancy in flats have been increasing and in comparison to the rest of the country the improvement of facilities in the housing stock is also lower. This development is a result of the unfavourable economic situation in the region (see Map sheet section A 7.1 Unemployment in Czechia). Since the 1990s the effects of new urbanization processes can be seen in the structure of housing stock and its spatial differentiation. In the hinterland of big cities (for instance Praha, Brno, Plzeň, České Budějovice) the impacts of suburbanization are becoming evident. A high percentage of flats have a large number of rooms and those flats also tend to have low occupancy (a low number of people per residential room).

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