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Crisis as the New Normal

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Abstract

Repeated crises are reshaping how people perceive stability and what they expect from society. Uncertainty is no longer the exception but an increasingly familiar feature of everyday life. While people are finding ways to adapt to changing circumstances, they are also grappling with psychological strain, information overload and growing doubts about institutions' ability to address pressing challenges. The key question is not simply how society will cope with the next crisis, but how it can continue to function over the long term in a world where stability can no longer be taken for granted.

Key Takeaways

- Concern and adaptation can coexist. Despite persistent uncertainty, both optimism and life satisfaction are showing a modest increase in Czechia.
- The psychological burden is unevenly distributed. Young people are more likely to report high levels of stress, while financial circumstances also play a significant role.
- People are increasingly avoiding the news. However, this does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest in public affairs.
- Distrust of politics does not necessarily mean a rejection of democracy. Institutional predictability, access to support and opportunities to influence decision-making are essential to building societal resilience.

The COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and wider geopolitical tensions, the energy crisis and the subsequent surge in inflation have all affected European society within a relatively short period. Although these crises differed in their causes and consequences, they have had an impact on people's health, security and household financial decisions.

Public concerns have not disappeared; rather, they have evolved over time. According to a September 2026 survey conducted by Ipsos, Czechs consider rising prices and the cost of living, war in Europe and an economic crisis to be the greatest threats over the next five years. The pandemic, which dominated public debate just a few years ago, has faded into the background. The survey highlights a gap between perceptions of threats and feelings of preparedness: while most respondents believe they can cope with rising prices, far fewer feel prepared for the possibility of war in Europe (Ipsos, 2026a).

However, persistent concerns do not necessarily translate into growing pessimism. Research conducted by STEM/MARK found that the proportion of Czechs who feel optimistic about the next three years increased from 42% in 2025 to 46% in 2026. At the same time, average life satisfaction rose from 5.84 to 6.11 on a ten-point scale (STEM/MARK, 2026). These findings suggest that people are capable of adapting to changing circumstances, even as significant sources of uncertainty remain.

A Society Under Strain: Who Is Coping with Uncertainty and Who Is Running Out of Resilience?

The ability to cope with prolonged uncertainty varies across different groups within society. While some people are able to carry on with their daily lives without significant difficulties, others find that psychological strain affects their ability to work, study and manage everyday activities. These differences are not merely individual; they are also linked to age, financial circumstances and living conditions.

An Ipsos survey conducted in October 2026 found that experiencing high levels of stress was far from uncommon among people aged 18–65. For some respondents, this stress also had tangible consequences for their work or studies, with young adults reporting higher levels of psychological strain (see Table 1; Ipsos, 2026b).

Table 1: Selected Indicators of Psychological Strain Among Czech Respondents (2026)

Indicator	**All respondents aged 18–65**	**Young adults aged 18–30**
High levels of stress and feeling unable to cope with everyday tasks	64%	75%
Repeated experiences of high levels of stress	40%	49%
Temporary absence from work or education due to stress or mental health difficulties	26%	35%

Note: The figures refer to the preceding 12 months. The online survey was conducted in October 2026 among respondents aged 18–65 in Czechia (n = 1,011). Young adults are included in the overall sample.

Source: Ipsos (2026b).

However, psychological resilience is not determined by age alone. Material circumstances also play a significant role. In its 2025 survey of living and working conditions, the European agency Eurofound highlighted persistent financial pressures, growing housing insecurity and disparities between income groups. Among respondents from low-income households, 61% reported difficulties making ends meet, compared with just 9% of those from high-income households. The research also draws attention to the vulnerability of renters, single-parent households and middle-aged people (Eurofound, 2026). Financial security is therefore an important factor in people's ability to cope with the pressures of everyday life.

Higher levels of stress do not, in themselves, constitute evidence of a deterioration in the mental health of the population as a whole. Nor can we determine precisely to what extent mental health difficulties are caused by wider societal crises rather than personal circumstances or working conditions. Nevertheless, research reveals the tangible impact of psychological strain on people's everyday lives. While 81% of Czech respondents consider mental health to be just as important as physical health, almost half believe that the healthcare system places greater emphasis on physical health (Ipsos, 2026b). Alongside financial circumstances and access to support, the information environment in which people learn about emerging threats also deserves attention.

Information Overload: When People No Longer Want to Know

News about security threats, economic challenges and political conflicts is available almost around the clock, through traditional broadcasting, online news outlets and social media. Yet greater access to information does not necessarily lead to a better understanding of current affairs. Some people respond by reducing their exposure to news or deliberately disengaging from it altogether. According to the Digital News Report 2026, 41% of Czech respondents actively avoid the news sometimes or often, an increase of four percentage points compared with the previous year. Overall trust in news stands at 31%, having remained within a relatively narrow range of 30–33% since 2023. Public service broadcasters have consistently maintained the highest levels of trust among the media brands surveyed (Štětka, 2026). These findings point to persistently low levels of trust and a growing tendency to limit news consumption, rather than a sudden collapse in the credibility of Czech media.

However, avoiding the news is not the same as losing interest in public affairs. For some people, it may be a way of reducing psychological strain or limiting their exposure to negative information, while for others it may reflect a general lack of interest in news. International findings from the Reuters Institute confirm a long-term decline in interest in news, alongside changes in how people consume it. In 2026, social media and video platforms overtook television and news websites and apps as sources of news for the first time, on average, across the countries surveyed (Egan, 2026).

This shift also has implications for the nature of public debate. The information people encounter on digital platforms is shaped by algorithms and business models that often prioritise content designed to attract attention and encourage user engagement. Fractured Reality, a report by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, warns that these mechanisms can contribute to the fragmentation of the information environment, the spread of misleading content and the erosion of a shared basis for public debate (Scharfbillig et al., 2026). This does not mean that social media inevitably leads to radicalisation or that its users lose the ability to think critically. Rather, the risk lies in different groups interpreting the same events through substantially different information environments.

For society to function effectively, what matters is therefore not only access to information, but also its clarity and credibility. When some people avoid the news altogether while others consume it within

distinct information environments, it can become more difficult to sustain a shared public discussion about challenges and how to address them. Changes in news consumption habits alone, however, do not tell us whether people have lost trust in politics.

From Frustration to Distrust: How People's Relationship with the State Is Changing

Dissatisfaction with politics does not necessarily amount to a rejection of democracy. People distinguish between individual political actors, institutions and the rules underpinning the democratic system. According to a spring 2026 survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CVVM), only 9% of Czech citizens trusted political parties and movements, while 73% expressed confidence in election results. The armed forces (71%) and the police (70%) also maintained high levels of public trust (Tuček, 2026a). A similar distinction can be drawn between political dissatisfaction and apathy. Only 14% of Czechs were satisfied with the current political situation, while more than half expressed dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, 56% of respondents remained interested in politics (Tuček, 2026b).

Institutional distrust should also be distinguished from societal polarisation. Research conducted by STEM and Slovakia's DEKK Institute, published in September 2026, found that Czechs perceive their society as deeply divided, even though political disagreements have less of an impact on their personal relationships than in Slovakia. In Czechia, 84% of respondents had never reduced or cut off contact with friends, family members or acquaintances because of differences of opinion, compared with 67% in Slovakia. At the same time, more than half of Czech respondents described their society as very or extremely divided (STEM, 2026).

However, perceptions of polarisation do not necessarily reflect the intensity of conflicts in everyday life. The question remains to what extent frustration may develop into a deeper sense of alienation from public institutions. International research conducted by the OECD in 2026 shows that trust in government is strongly associated with whether people feel they have a say in public decision-making. Across the countries surveyed, the gap in trust in government between those who felt they could influence public decisions and those who did not was 47 percentage points (OECD, 2026).

Frustration can manifest itself in different ways. Some people withdraw from public affairs and disengage from politics, while others express their dissatisfaction through protests or by supporting opposition parties or protest movements. Rejecting fundamental democratic principles, however, represents a fundamentally different, anti-system stance. Voting for protest parties or strongly criticising the government does not, in itself, constitute evidence of radicalisation. Moreover, the research cited does not establish whether such attitudes have become more widespread as a result of repeated crises. Distinguishing between apathy, legitimate protest and the rejection of democratic rules is nevertheless essential if public institutions are to respond appropriately to public dissatisfaction.

From Crisis Management to Long-Term Resilience

The analysis identifies three areas in which public institutions can help strengthen society's long-term resilience: crisis communication, access to support services and opportunities for citizens to influence public decision-making.

During periods of uncertainty, citizens need reliable information and a clear understanding of how institutions are responding. Ministries, regional authorities and local councils should therefore provide clear, consistent and coordinated communication during crises, explaining what has been confirmed,

what remains uncertain, what measures are being prepared and when further updates can be expected. This approach should also include a public evaluation of crisis communication once the emergency has passed. Transparency, predictability and responsiveness to public needs are among the key factors underpinning trust (OECD, 2026).

Long-term resilience cannot depend solely on individuals' ability to cope with stress. In its report on Czechia, the World Health Organization acknowledges progress in developing community mental health centres, while also highlighting challenges related to funding, staffing shortages and fragmented care provision (World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2025). Regional authorities should therefore work with health insurance providers and service providers to regularly assess the local availability of psychological and community-based support, including waiting times, and adjust service capacity to address identified gaps. Better integration of healthcare and social care is also essential.

Better communication alone will not automatically restore public trust. People must also have opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives. National and local authorities should therefore incorporate mechanisms such as public consultations into the development of major policy measures and publish concise responses to the feedback received, explaining which proposals have been accepted, which have been rejected and why. This can help transform public participation from a largely procedural exercise into a meaningful experience in which citizens feel that their voices genuinely matter.

Conclusion

The findings do not portray a society responding uniformly to prolonged uncertainty. Alongside anxiety, there is an ability to adapt, while political dissatisfaction coexists with an interest in public affairs. The differences are particularly evident in people's capacity to cope with ongoing pressures and in their experiences of public institutions.

The role of public institutions is therefore not to promise a return to a world free from crises, but to help people navigate uncertainty through predictable decision-making, accessible support and openness towards citizens. The true measure of societal resilience is not the absence of crises, but society's ability to continue functioning in a world where uncertainty is no longer the exception.

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