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TEN YEARS OF INFLATION

A macroeconomic study of price stability trends in selected regions

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Inflation is undoubtedly one of the key macroeconomic indicators that fundamentally influence the stability and long-term development of national economies. Over the past decade, countries in Europe, as well as the broader geopolitical area, have undergone significant economic changes that have been reflected in specific price levels, consumer confidence, and government monetary policy. In the following study, we focus on comparing inflation developments in six selected countries — Slovakia, the USA, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, and Poland — which represent different economic models, structures, and historical experiences.

Our aim is to identify the main trends of the past ten years, understand the causes of inflation waves, compare the responses of individual central banks, and assess the extent to which countries differed in their ability to cope with external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the energy crisis, or the consequences of geopolitical tensions. The study also provides an overview of the factors shaping inflation — from energy price developments and wage dynamics to fiscal policy and the openness of the economy.

Ultimately, comparing these six countries allows investors to better understand not only regional differences, but also common elements of inflation development across countries. The results can then serve as a basis for investment decision-making or, for example, for developing future strategic plans in the area of personal finance.

Slovakia

In 2015 and 2016, inflation in Slovakia was in negative territory, specifically -0.3% and -0.5%[1]. The main reason was a sharp decline in oil and energy prices, which significantly reduced fuel prices[2]. This external factor, together with weaker domestic demand and competitive pressure in the market, led to an environment where prices rose only minimally or even fell. From an international perspective, this was a similar trend experienced by several Central European economies at that time.

In 2017 to 2019, inflation in Slovakia gradually increased to between 1.4% and 2.8%, approaching the ECB's long-term target[3]. Price growth was supported mainly by higher wages and a very tight labor market, which stimulated household consumption. Prices of services, food, and housing began to rise faster, also due to stronger domestic demand. The economy grew at a relatively robust pace and companies were gradually able to maintain stable margins.

Although the pandemic in 2020 caused a significant decline in economic activity, inflation remained at approximately 2%. In 2021 it then rose to 2.8%. Inflation was supported by disruptions in global supply chains, rising prices of construction materials and goods, and the gradual increase in energy and food prices. At the same time, due to fiscal stimulus and the growth of consumer savings, the full demand reaction was delayed, which kept prices of some items relatively stable.

The years 2022 and 2023 brought an extreme surge in inflation, with average values reaching 12.1% and 11%. This sharp rise was caused by a combination of a global energy shock after the start of the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine, a dramatic rise in gas and electricity prices, and a significant increase in food and commodity prices. Food inflation was among the highest in the EU, with food prices cumulatively increasing from 2020 to 2023 by approximately 42%. Import inflation also had a strong impact because Slovakia is a highly open economy and depends on imports of energy and materials, as well as industrial goods.

[1] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG?end=2024&locations=SK&start=2015
[2] https://www.kurzy.cz/komodity/cena-elektriny-graf-vyvoje-ceny/2015
[3] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG?end=2024&locations=SK&start=2015

Inflation was also influenced by domestic factors. Companies in many sectors increased their profit margins, which strengthened secondary price pressures. Wages in some sectors grew rapidly, supporting higher growth in service prices.

In 2024, inflation fell significantly to approximately 2.8%, mainly thanks to lower energy prices on world markets and the stabilization of supply chains. However, as energy compensations were gradually phased out, household energy prices began to rise again. Together with new tax measures (an increase in VAT and the introduction of a financial transaction tax in 2025), this has currently caused inflation to accelerate again to approximately 4%.

To create a more comprehensive picture, it is necessary to focus on wage developments as well. Starting with the average nominal wage, in the period 2015 to 2025 it rose continuously. According to data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, it increased from approximately EUR 883 in 2015 to EUR 1,524 in 2024, and according to preliminary statistics for the first three quarters of 2025, growth continues — the average wage is roughly around EUR 1,580[4] [5]. As follows from the previous analysis, until 2019 wages grew in an environment of relatively low inflation, so real wages (wages adjusted for price growth) rose every year. This trend continued in 2020 and 2021, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic somewhat more slowly — in 2020 by approximately 1.9% and in 2021 by 3.6%. The expected change occurred only in 2022 and 2023, when high inflation significantly weakened the purchasing power of the population. In 2022 real wages fell by approximately 4.5%, and in 2023 by another roughly 0.7%[6]. Real wage growth returned in 2024, when it increased year-on-year by approximately 3.7%, the most since 2019[7]. Preliminary data for 2025 suggest the rising trend continues by approximately 2–3%, meaning a gradual restoration of purchasing power lost during the inflation period of 2022–2023.

[4] https://www.financnykompas.sk/grafy/vyvoj-priemernej-mzdy

[5] https://statdat.statistics.sk/cognosext/cgi-bin/cognos.cgi?b_action=cognosViewer&cv.header=false&run.outputFormat=&run.outputLocale=sk&run.prompt=true&ui.action=run&ui.backUA1%2Fclose.html&ui.name=Priemern%C3%2Fcommon%2Fportlets%2Fcps4%2Fcognosext%=RL5D&ui.object=st%5Bpr0204qs%+A1rstve+SR%mzda+v+hospod%C3+A1%8Dn%C3%mesa%C4+29%22%22i94C7052B240A492FB3BE8C7A487D337B%28%oreID

[6] https://www.employment.gov.sk/files/slovensky/ministerstvo/analyticke-centrum/2024/sprava_sossr_2023_pub.pdf

[7] https://www.employment.gov.sk/files/slovensky/ministerstvo/analyticke-centrum/2025/sprava_sossr_2024_pub.pdf

USA

Inflation in the United States of America has undergone an equally dynamic development over the past ten years, reflecting the state of the U.S. economy, cyclical labor market developments, major global shocks, and the actions of the Federal Reserve (Fed). From a long period of low inflation in the middle of the observed period, the U.S. moved into the sharpest price growth since the early 1980s. This was followed by an aggressive response by monetary policymakers, which helped return inflation back into the target range.

From 2015 to 2019, inflation in the U.S. was relatively stable and mostly ranged between 1% and 2.5%[8]. In 2015 it was approximately 0.1%, mainly due to low oil prices and a strong dollar, which made imports cheaper. In 2016 inflation rose to approximately 1.3%, and continued a mild increase in subsequent years — about 2.1% in 2017, about 2.4% in 2018, and around 1.8% in 2019. This period represented a stable macroeconomic environment with low unemployment, solid wage growth, and strong demand. During that time, the Fed gradually raised interest rates to guide the economy toward a soft landing and keep inflation close to the 2% target[9].

A turning point came in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically hit the global economy. Inflation in the U.S. fell to approximately 1.2%, reflecting the collapse of consumption during lockdowns and the drop in oil prices. The recovery, however, was very rapid. Massive fiscal stimulus from the federal government, record-low interest rates, a significant expansion of the money supply (M2), and supply chain disruptions caused inflation to surge sharply to about 4.7% already in 2021. In the second half of the year, the first signs of overheating appeared — rapid wage growth, record job openings, and rising housing prices.

[8] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG?end=2024&locations=US&start=2015

[9] https://www.investing.com/economic-calendar/interest-rate-decision-168

The year 2022 was pivotal for U.S. inflation[10]. Average annual inflation reached approximately 8%, the highest level since the early 1980s. The reason was the combined effect of the energy crisis, rising food prices, persistent logistics problems, extremely strong demand for consumer goods, and high stimulus payments to households. Gasoline prices reached historic highs and housing costs became the largest component of overall inflation. The Fed responded with the most aggressive series of rate hikes since the Paul Volcker era, with the main rate rising from 0.25% at the end of 2022 to 5.50% later[11].

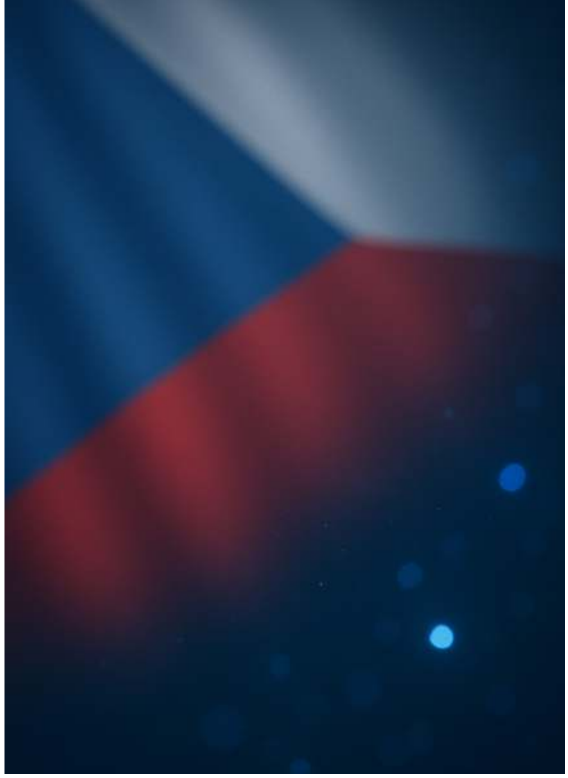
In 2023, inflation declined more noticeably for the first time, falling to approximately 4.1%. Supply chains improved, energy prices stabilized, and higher interest rates cooled demand for housing and investments. Nevertheless, inflation remained above the Fed's target levels, mainly due to continuing service-price pressures. The labor market was still exceptionally strong and unemployment remained near historic lows[12].

In 2024 inflation was around 2.9%, meaning further progress toward the Fed's inflation target. The gradual normalization of food, energy, and transportation prices, together with tight monetary policy, slowed price growth. The economy grew more slowly but remained resilient, allowing the Fed to maintain a stable monetary stance without recession risk.

In 2025, based on available monthly data, inflation continues a mild decline, ranging from 2.3% (May) to the latest 3% (October). Service-price dynamics remain stable, the labor market remains strong, but the overheating seen in 2021–2022 is no longer present. Energy prices are volatile, but compared to the peak of the energy crisis they are significantly lower and contribute to the normalization of the overall price level.

Over the observed period, nominal wages grew relatively smoothly in the U.S. The average hourly wage of private-sector employees rose from about USD 25 per hour in 2015 to USD 36.7 per hour in September 2025[13] [14]. Looking at real wages measured by median real weekly earnings, purchasing power grew steadily in 2015–2019. In 2020 there was a sharp increase in real wages, partly because low-income jobs disappeared from the labor market, statistically shifting the median upward. In 2021 and 2022 real wages stagnated or slightly declined. In 2023–2025, with inflation slowing and nominal wages continuing to rise, a gradual real recovery is taking place[15].

[10] https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/economics/2021-2022-inflation-surge
[11] https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IN12388
[12] https://www.investing.com/economic-calendar/unemployment-rate-300
[13] https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/CES0500000003
[14] https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t19.htm
[15] https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/LES1252881600Q



Czech Republic

Inflation in the Czech Republic over the past decade also showed a varied development. While the first half of the observed period was characterized by very mild price growth, after 2020 the Czech Republic entered one of the sharpest inflation cycles within the European Union. After the extreme price growth in 2022–2023, significant cooling followed, and in 2024 inflation began returning to normal[16].

In 2015–2016 inflation in the Czech Republic was extremely low. In 2015 it reached only about 0.3% and in 2016 around 0.7%. This period was marked by extremely low energy prices, weaker food price growth, and still noticeable deflationary pressure from previous years[17]. The Czech National Bank at the time weakened the koruna against the euro to prevent deflation and support price growth[18]. Despite these measures, inflation remained extremely low.

Developments shifted in 2017–2019 when inflation stayed steadily above 2%. In 2017 it reached about 2.5%, in 2018 around 2.1%, and in 2019 about 2.8%. During this period, wages grew at the fastest pace in many years, the labor market was extremely tight, and unemployment was among the lowest in Europe[19]. Strong domestic demand and rising prices of services and housing created natural inflation pressures. Even so, the environment remained stable and predictable, while energy prices stayed relatively low.

The COVID-19 pandemic also brought a significant shock to the Czech economy. In 2020 inflation did not fall as sharply as in other countries and reached about 3.2%. The reason was rising food prices, disrupted supply chains, and the rapid recovery of domestic demand after the first wave of the pandemic. The koruna also weakened in the first half of the year, making imports more

[16] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG?end=2024&locations=CZ&start=2015
[17] https://csu.gov.cz/produkty/hmu_ts
[18] https://www.kurzy.cz/kurzy-men/grafy/CZK-EUR/
[19] https://tradingeconomics.com/czech-republic/unemployment-rate

expensive and increasing price pressures. In 2021 inflation accelerated to about 3.8%, a clear signal that price pressures were building. Rising prices of construction materials, energy, fuels, and a sharp increase in real estate prices also contributed.

The strongest inflation shock came in 2022 and 2023. In 2022 the Czech Republic recorded one of the highest inflations in the EU — average annual inflation reached about 15.1%. The reason was extreme growth in energy, gas, electricity, and food prices, influenced by the war in Ukraine, rising commodity prices, and the weakening of the koruna. Prices of services, transportation, housing, and consumer goods also rose significantly. The Czech National Bank responded with the most aggressive interest rate increases in its history, but the price shock was so strong that it eased only gradually[20]. In 2023 inflation was around 10.7% — lower than 2022, but still very high. Households faced a sharp decline in real incomes and living costs increased dramatically, especially for low-income groups.

A key change came in 2024 — inflation slowed dramatically and fell to about 2.4%. Energy and food prices stabilized, production costs stopped rising, household demand weakened, and the strong rise in interest rates finally began to take full effect. The Czech economy slowed, but the price level returned toward normal. In many sectors input prices even declined, gradually feeding into consumer prices.

In 2025 the stabilization process continues. Inflation ranges from 1.8% to 2.9%, close to the long-term CNB target[21]. The koruna exchange rate improved, energy prices remain stable, and demand is gradually recovering. Most of the swings from 2022–2023 have been absorbed, although the overall price level remains significantly higher than before the crisis. This means real wages are beginning to rise, but returning to the 2021 level is gradual and slow.

In the Czech Republic, the average nominal monthly wage increased continuously in 2015–2025. From CZK 26,591 in 2015, it rose to CZK 45,899 in 2024, and in Q3 2025 it reached CZK 48,295[22]. Real wages grew by about 3–6% annually in 2015–2019. Growth continued during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 (1.4% and 1.9%). A collapse in real wages came in 2022 and 2023, when accelerating inflation caused a decline of 9.4% and then another 3.2%. In 2024, the combination of fast nominal wage growth and slowing inflation restored real wage growth by 4.7%. The latest data from 2025 indicate the return process continues, with a 4.5% increase in Q3[23].

[20] https://www.cnb.cz/en/faq/How-has-the-CNB-two-week-repo-rate-changed-over-time/

[21] https://tradingeconomics.com/czech-republic/inflation-cpi

[22] https://csu.gov.cz/docs/107508/6fde9e92-3919-c0a7-6e7e-b35614ec88cf/11002425q3p1b.pdf?version=1.0&utm

[23] https://csu.gov.cz/zamestnanci-a-mzdy?1_pocet=10&1_start=0&pocet=10&start=0&1_skupiny=11&1_vlastnostiVystupu=12&1_razeni=-datumVydani&skupiny=11&vlastnostiVystupu=15&pouzeVydane=true&razeni=-datumVydani

Hungary

Compared to the previous countries, inflation developments in Hungary show even more impulsive dynamics[24]. In 2015 and 2016, inflation in Hungary was practically negligible — according to official data, in 2015 it was around -0.1% and in 2016 about 0.4%. At that time, the country faced deflationary tendencies rather than price pressures. Weak domestic demand, relatively low wage growth, and stable or declining energy and commodity prices kept the overall price level almost unchanged.

From 2017, the situation began to change gradually. The economy grew faster, employment and domestic demand improved, which was reflected in a gradual acceleration of inflation[25]. In 2017 average annual inflation was about 2.3%, in 2018 around 2.9%, and in 2019 about 3.3%. Hungary thus moved into a moderate inflation range, reflecting a combination of faster wage growth, rising household consumption, and higher prices of food and certain services. This price growth was still considered relatively healthy at the time — inflation was higher than the EU average, but ultimately did not represent a major macroeconomic problem.

The pandemic year 2020 brought a seemingly paradoxical development. Although the pandemic caused a decline in part of consumption and even greater uncertainty, average inflation remained around 3.3%, higher than in many EU countries. The reasons were a typical mix of factors. A weakening Hungarian forint made imports more expensive, which fed into the prices of imported goods including food and consumer goods[26]. At the same time, supply chain disruptions and rising prices of some commodities increased producer costs. In 2021 inflation strengthened further to about 5.1%, signaling that the Hungarian environment was more prone to price pressures than the euro area average.

[24] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG?end=2024&locations=HU&start=2015
[25] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2024&locations=HU&start=2015
[26] https://www.investing.com/currencies/huf-usd

A real turning point came in 2022 and 2023, when Hungary was among the highest-inflation countries in the EU. In 2022 average inflation reached about 14.6%, due to the combination of sharp increases in energy, gas, and fuel prices, significant food inflation, and a noticeable weakening of the forint. Hungary is highly dependent on energy imports and any swings in oil and gas prices quickly translate into domestic prices. In addition, the government introduced and later removed various price caps and regulations (for example on fuels and basic foods), which temporarily suppressed but later strengthened price growth in shock waves. In 2023 inflation peaked — according to the Hungarian Statistical Office (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, KSH), consumer prices rose on average by 17.6% year-on-year, a 25-year maximum. This extreme price growth significantly reduced real household incomes and became one of the major social problems in the country[27].

The year 2024 brought a turning point in the form of rapid disinflation. According to KSH, consumer prices increased on average by 3.7% compared to 2023, bringing inflation back closer to the central bank's medium-term target. The slowdown was supported by stabilized energy prices on world markets, declines in certain agricultural commodities and raw materials, and the normalization of supply chains after the pandemic and energy shock. Demand for some goods and services also declined, as households became more cautious after two years of very high price increases.

In 2025 inflation is, according to current data, around 4–5%.

In Hungary, average nominal wages rose even faster in 2015–2025 than in many other countries in the region. According to KSH long-term series, the average gross monthly wage of full-time employees in the national economy rose from about HUF 248,000 in 2015 to nearly HUF 368,000 in 2019[28]. After 2020, average wages moved above HUF 400,000 and in 2023 reached HUF 571,200 according to KSH, a year-on-year nominal increase of 14.2%[29]. In 2024 the average gross wage was around HUF 640,000, and in September 2025 KSH reported an average gross monthly wage of HUF 687,100 — almost triple the 2015 level[30] [31]. Real wages developed in several clear phases. Between 2015 and 2021 real earnings grew strongly, as double-digit nominal wage growth exceeded inflation, confirmed by KSH real wage indices[32]. In 2022 and 2023, sharply accelerating inflation caused real wage declines — according to official KSH data, in 2023 real earnings fell by 2.9%[33]. In 2024 the situation reversed: inflation slowed noticeably, and real wages grew by about 9–10%. In September 2025 KSH reported the average gross earnings were higher by 9.5% year-on-year and real wages by 5.5%.

27 https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-06/ip241_en.pdf

28 https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_hosszu/h_qli001.html

29 https://trademagazin.hu/en/ksh-brutto-atlagkereset-655-600-forint-volt-2023-decembereben-164-szazalekkal-magasabb-mint-egy-evvel-korabban/

30 https://www.ksh.hu/en/first-releases/ker/eker2405.html

31 https://www.ksh.hu/gyorstajekoztatok/ker/ker2509.html

32 https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/gdp/en/gdp0035.html

33 https://www.ksh.hu/s/en/experimental-statistics/publications/distribution-of-changes-in-earnings-2023/

Italy

In the first half of the observed period, inflation in Italy remained at extremely low levels, often close to zero or even in mild deflation[34]. In 2015 and 2016 inflation ranged between 0% and -0.1%. This was a time when the Italian economy struggled with very slow growth, weak productivity, and long-term stagnant wages. Inflation was so low that it raised concerns about deflation risk rather than representing a problem of rapidly rising prices for households. Similar to Slovakia — which is also under the European Central Bank in terms of interest rates — Italy was likewise influenced by low interest rates[35]. At the same time, a massive bond-purchase program (QE) was implemented to support inflation across the euro area[36].

The year 2020 brought a sharp economic shock to the region, yet average annual inflation again ended at -0.1%. Energy prices fell, consumption was suppressed, and demand weakened. Italy recorded one of the largest GDP declines in Europe — almost -9%[37].

After the economy reopened, the situation changed quickly. In 2021 inflation rose to almost 2%, which was still within normal bounds. Problems, however, began to intensify at the end of 2021 and especially in 2022, when supply chain disruptions, rising energy prices, and then the impacts of the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine fully manifested. In hindsight, 2022 became the inflation peak — average annual inflation reached about 8.2%. The strongest pressure came from gas, electricity, and fuel prices, and the price increase then spread to food and services, making inflation one of the main macroeconomic problems in the country.

In 2023 inflation began to fall but remained well above the ECB's target range. The average for the year was 5.6%. Energy prices started to decrease, but food and services maintained relatively high

[34] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG?end=2024&locations=IT&start=2015
[35] https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy_and_exchange_rates/key_ecb_interest_rates/html/index.en.html
[36] https://www.ecb.europa.eu/mopo/implement/app/html/index.en.html
[37] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2024&locations=IT&start=2015

growth. Italian households thus felt the greatest pressure through declining real wages and rising living costs.

In 2024 a sharp turnaround occurred. Thanks to the stabilization of prices and supply chains and the effect of higher interest rates, inflation moved to approximately 1%. Currently, inflation in Italy remains stable around 1.5% to 1.9%, very close to the ECB target. Core inflation remains slightly higher, which is typical for economies with a strong services sector.

In Italy, nominal wages grew only slowly in 2015–2025, while real wages (purchasing power) declined significantly. According to OECD data, the average annual wage per employee in Italy in current prices gradually increased, and in 2023 and 2024 was around EUR 33–34 thousand per year; in purchasing power parity this is roughly USD 46–51 thousand per year[38]. However, in terms of real wages, Italy is among the weakest countries in the EU. ISTAT, in its 2025 summary, states that between 2019 and 2024 real wages lost 10.5% of purchasing power[39]. In 2025, according to ISTAT, real wages are still roughly 8–10% lower than at the beginning of 2019[40].

[38] https://www.oecd.org/en/data/indicators/average-annual-wages.html

[39] https://www.istat.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/RA-2025-volume-integrale.pdf

[40] https://www.istat.it/en/statistical-themes/education-and-labour/labour-and-wages/

Poland

In 2015 average inflation was approximately -0.9%, and in 2016 around -0.7%, as officially confirmed by the Polish statistical office GUS[41]. Negative inflation was the result of low oil prices, weak food-price growth, and overall stagnating domestic demand[42]. The Polish economy grew, but prices remained unusually low, creating an environment of high stability while also raising questions about how to support price growth toward the central bank's target[43].

In 2017 inflation returned to positive values — about 2.1%, ending the deflation period. In 2018 it slightly declined to 1.8%, but in 2019 it stabilized at 2.2%. This period was characterized by gradual wage growth, a strong labor market, and rising household incomes, leading to moderate price increases. Inflation did not exceed the stable band and Poland stayed close to the NBP inflation target. It was also a time of relative price balance — price growth was slow, predictable, and did not represent a significant burden for households.

Moving forward, 2020 was no exception for Poland. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp limitation of consumption, closure of many sectors, and increased uncertainty among the population. Inflation remained at 3.4%, which was relatively high given the pandemic conditions. Price growth was also supported by supply chain problems, increased importer costs, and uncertainty in commodity markets[44].

[41] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG?end=2024&locations=PL&start=2015

[42] https://www.tradingview.com/symbols/NYMEX-CL1!/?timeframe=ALL

[43] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2024&locations=PL&start=2015

[44] https://stat.gov.pl/en/

A true inflation turning point for Poland came between 2021 and 2023. In 2021 inflation continued rising to 5.1%. The most exponential increase occurred in 2022, when due to the energy crisis and rising prices of gas, oil, electricity, and food, inflation reached dramatic levels — on average about 14.4%, one of the highest figures in modern Polish history. Like other countries, Poland faced sharply rising food prices, rapid growth in service prices, and a significantly weakened currency, which made imports more expensive[45]. In 2023 inflation gradually eased, averaging around 11.5%. A major change came in 2024. Energy prices stabilized, pressure on global commodity prices eased, and household consumption slowed considerably after two years of price increases. Overall inflation fell to about 3.8%, returning to a single-digit range and bringing significant relief for households and businesses. In 2025 inflation in Poland continues to fall and is around 3%.

In Poland, average nominal wages in the national economy grew very dynamically — from about PLN 3,900 per month in 2015 to over PLN 7,100 in 2023 and more than PLN 8,100 in 2024, according to official GUS data. In nominal terms, the average salary more than doubled in less than a decade[46]. Real wages, according to GUS, also grew strongly before the pandemic — for example in 2018 and 2019 by around 5% per year — due to the combination of fast nominal wage growth and relatively low inflation[47]. After the pandemic, however, a sharp rise in prices caused real wages to fall by 2.1% in 2022, even though nominal wages rose again[48]. In 2023 and especially 2024, the situation improved. Wage growth again exceeded inflation and real wages returned to moderate growth; in 2024 there was a very strong real increase of 9.5%, largely compensating the temporary loss of purchasing power from 2022[49].

[45] https://tradingeconomics.com/poland/food-inflation

[46] https://stat.gov.pl/sygnalne/komunikaty-i-obwieszczenia/lista-komunikatow-i-obwieszczen/komunikat-w-sprawie-przecietnego-wynagrodzenia-w-gospodarce-narodowej-w-2024-r-,273,12.html

[47] https://stat.gov.pl/en/latest-statistical-news/communications-and-announcements/list-of-communiques-and-announcements/average-real-wage-and-salary-growth-in-2019-as-compared-to-the-2018,284,7.html

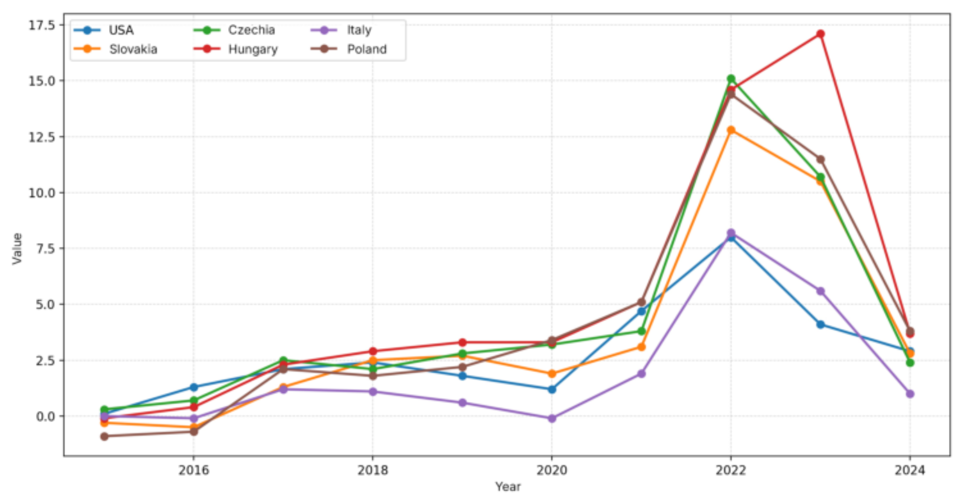
[48] https://stat.gov.pl/en/latest-statistical-news/communications-and-announcements/list-of-communiques-and-announcements/average-real-wage-and-salary-growth-in-2022-as-compared-to-the-2021,284,10.html

[49] https://stat.gov.pl/en/latest-statistical-news/communications-and-announcements/list-of-communiques-and-announcements/average-real-wage-and-salary-growth-in-2024-as-compared-to-the-2023,284,12.html

Conclusion

The result of our analytical examination of ten-year inflation developments in the Slovak Republic, the United States, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, and Poland shows that the period 2015 to 2025 was, from the perspective of price stability, highly heterogeneous and marked by several historically exceptional shocks. While the early years were characterized by low inflation — in some cases even deflationary pressures — mainly due to low energy prices and subdued demand, the second half brought the sharpest price growth in recent decades. The combination of the COVID-19 pandemic, disrupted supply chains, massive fiscal stimulus, and the subsequent energy crisis triggered by the military conflict in Ukraine led to significant inflation waves in 2022 and 2023 in virtually all observed economies.

Inflation development by country (2015–2024).

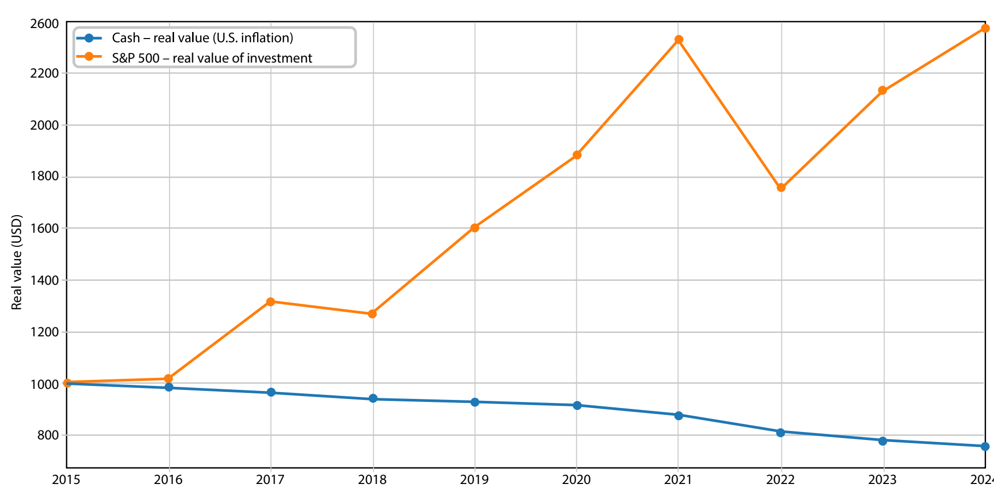


Source: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG

A comparison of the countries shows that although they were exposed to similar external shocks, their reactions and resulting inflation profiles differed significantly. Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland faced very strong price growth, especially in energy and food, while the openness of their economies and dependence on energy imports amplified external impacts. Hungary experienced even more extreme price developments, with double-digit inflation lasting longer, related also to currency weakening and specific government interventions and price regulations. Italy remained on the edge of deflation for a long time, but even there the energy shock caused a jump in inflation, although milder than in Central Europe. The United States moved rapidly from low inflation to the highest values since the 1980s, but aggressive Fed monetary policy led to a gradual return of inflation toward target levels.

A common denominator across all observed countries is that after the inflation peak in 2022–2023, price growth slowed significantly in 2024–2025. Normalization was supported by stabilized energy prices, restored supply chain functionality, and tighter central bank monetary policy. Nevertheless, over the last decade, nominal wages rose significantly in all observed countries, while real wages tell a relatively different story. Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary suffered sharp purchasing-power losses in the high-inflation years 2022 and 2023, but in 2024 and 2025 real wages again grew quickly and in some cases approach or exceed pre-shock levels. The U.S. shows stable nominal wage growth, but the real wage of a typical worker is only slightly higher than ten years ago. The clearest exception is Italy, where despite rising pay, real wages remain roughly one tenth lower than before the crisis. An Italian employee can therefore buy less in real terms today, while in the V4 countries purchasing power has largely recovered.

From an investment perspective, the study shows that inflation is not merely an abstract macroeconomic concept, but a real factor directly affecting the real value of savings, returns on financial assets, and capital allocation decisions. Periods of low inflation supported bond markets and passive cash holding, while the inflation shock of recent years highlighted the importance of real assets, portfolio diversification, and active risk management. For investors, it is important that the real value of USD 1,000 shows a significant decline: after ten years, the real value of the original amount fell to approximately USD 756. On the other hand, an investment in the S&P 500 (including reinvested dividends) produced a significantly higher nominal return. Over the period, the S&P 500 recorded positive annual returns ranging from 1.38% in 2015 to 31.49% in 2019. Based on this, after ten years an investment of USD 1,000 in the S&P 500 would reach a nominal value of approximately USD 3,426, while the real value would be about USD 2,590. This means that while the real value of USD 1,000 declined over time, an investment in the S&P 500 delivered a much higher return that not only covered inflation but also generated profit.



Data for 2025 were not available at the time of writing.

* Data referring to the past are not a guarantee of future returns.

[50] https://www.slickcharts.com/sp500/returns/details

Finally, for policymakers, the results of the study are a reminder that price stability can be disrupted by sudden external shocks, and that success in returning inflation to target depends on the speed, consistency, and credibility of monetary-policy and fiscal interventions.

In summary, the decade 2015–2025 confirmed that inflation remains one of the key variables that households, businesses, and investors must monitor. Although current values in many countries are again approaching target bands, the experience of a sharp price surge shows how important systematic financial planning, thorough diversification, and a long-term approach to wealth management are. The study therefore provides not only a historical overview of inflation trends, but also a framework for thinking about future scenarios of price stability in an environment that remains highly dynamic and sensitive to global factors.

Contact
CAPITAL MARKETS, o.c.p., a.s.,
Slávičie údolie 106,
Bratislava - Staré Mesto,
811 02 Bratislava
+421 2/222 007 70
support@investingfox.com
www.investingfox.com

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This material was prepared on 15.12.2025 by CAPITAL MARKETS, o.c.p., a.s., Company ID (IČO): 36 853 054, with registered office at Slávičie údolie 106, Bratislava – Staré Mesto, 811 02. The company is registered in the Commercial Register of the Municipal Court Bratislava III, Section: Sa, Insert No.: 4295/B.