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The support system of novice  
teachers.  
Comparative analysis.

2022

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## **1. Introduction**

Teachers are one of the key professional groups but Central and Eastern Europe countries can see an ongoing crisis in this profession - teachers as a group are aging; fewer and fewer young people are choosing this career path. Studies in Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Poland show roots of this problem comprise of uncompetitive salaries, an unstructured mentoring system, poor quality of education and more are most likely at the root of this problem. Teachers in these countries choose the profession primarily out of passion but decide to retrain after a few years. The aim of the research was to diagnose problems and to develop systemic solutions. Initial proposals, developed by four teachers' trade unions from four different countries will be summarised in this paper. This is the comparative analysis of the outcomes of surveys and current national specifics.

## **2. Selected data - summary of national surveys**

Novice teachers in all countries expressed mixed feelings about their work. A significant proportion felt overwhelmed, with Poland having the highest score on this indicator (40%). It is not the case that positive emotions are expressed by the vast majority of respondents. Some respondents from the Czech Republic feel interested, but the group of people indicating a sense of lack of support and lack of inspiration must also be noted.

55% of Latvian teachers feel that they are not paid competitively, while as many as 58% of policymakers and principals feel that the salary of entry-level teachers is competitive. It is worth noting



that no Polish respondents declared that they are paid at an adequate level.

Overwhelmingly positive sentiments were expressed towards issues such as summer professional training (which 74% of Latvian respondents support), or the provision of social housing for beginning teachers (above 50% in the Czech Republic).

The concept of mentoring received by far the most support. The majority of teachers in all countries had access to mentoring during their first years on the job, but it was this demand that enjoyed the widest support. An overwhelming majority of Czechs agreed that they needed additional knowledge in situating themselves in a teaching position, while 79% of Lithuanians complained in their responses about the lack of knowledge needed to become a real teacher. As many as 94% Latvian novice teachers believe they should have access to mentorship.

### **3. Good practices**

#### *Latvia*

“Teaching Strength” is an additional Latvian support programme initiated by the Ministry of Education and Science (MESM). Its goal is helping professionals from various fields rebrand and become teachers of general education subjects. The programme lasts two years, each year with a different target and approach. During their first year participants focus on studying, whereas second year is dedicated to strengthening skills and knowledge in practice and within the professional development curriculum. The programme runs nationwide and dozens of graduates are currently employed in educational institutions all around Latvia.



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In 2020, LIZDA, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, LLPA and LIVIA brought to life the project "Improving social dialogue in education - the experience of Norway and Latvia". Its scope was wide and included not only what the Norwegian side had to share. Multiple support solutions were mentioned, i.e. service apartment, payment of expenses for study trips, rent allowance, free visit to the swimming pool and many more. Proposed holistic approach covering several areas of professional, social and private lives was concluded as effective in making the novice teachers' position attractive.

### *The Czech Republic*

Professional Development Support System for Teachers and School Headmasters, abbr. SUSY, is a time-limited (1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 - 30<sup>th</sup> June 2030) project created in cooperation with European Union. Its sole focus is to systematically the support professional development of teachers and school managers. One of its main solutions is continuous support for novice teachers provided by mentor teachers and school management based on the cooperation of the triad (novice teacher - a mentor teacher - school management). In the SUSY's understanding, a novice teacher is a teacher with less than two years of professional experience. Although program follows generally preferred direction, it is time-limited occurring raises question of continuity. Its tried and tested solutions and arising conclusions should be dropped out of future debate.

### *Lithuania*

In 2008, private business initiative "I choose to teach" was launched. It aimed to attract the best high school graduates, with priority oriented towards schools from smaller towns, to join a 2-year program of studies and leadership training. Each year 20 to 30



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participants are taking part in the project. They are being provided with personal mentors, sequential supervisions and professional consultations. The results of "I choose to teach" are effective, as around 75% of participants remains in the field of education and chooses to continue work as a teachers, school leaders, members of the academic communities or education policies. A similar program was implemented in Vilnius ("I will be a teacher in Vilnius"). Primary education teachers took part in it and the program was certified by initiators of "I choose to teach!".

"Continue!", launched in 2018, aims to introduce innovations in the field of teacher qualifications and in the field of readiness to work as a teacher. It targets teachers entering the market and seeking employment, professionals with a higher education degree and teachers seeking to retrain their qualifications. Program's wide approach includes recreating the model of the teacher training system, increasing the quality of teachers' competence and broad studies in the field of the approach towards pedagogical studies.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of Latvia developed a program that aims not only to retrain professionals from other fields to become teachers, but also to make already teaching professionals to take up a second speciality. Scholarships for students, removing bureaucratic barriers to become a teacher and assessing additional funds are definitely a step towards resolving already existing and future problems.

#### *Poland*

"Learning Schools" is a programme initiated by the Centre for Citizenship Education (CEO) in cooperation with the Polish-American Freedom Foundation in 2000. Over the past 22 years, approximately 10,000 teachers from 3,000 schools have participated in the programme. The basic tool for working with schools is the formative assessment, meaning a set of learning strategies involving the



development of a partnership between student and teacher. The programme includes annual interactive online courses offering one-to-one mentoring, workshops for boards of education, as well as holistic school development programmes and postgraduate studies for principals. According to an evaluation carried out after 20 years of the programme, the 'Learning School' allows, amongst other things, for the improvement of teachers' working methods, contributes to the improvement of relations between students and teachers, and improves the quality of cooperation between teachers, which directly contributes to the improvement of school atmosphere. The overwhelming majority (over 86%) of teachers and principals surveyed believe that the programme is effective in improving the quality of the educational services offered by the school and the interpersonal relationships within.

#### **4. Challenges**

##### *Latvia*

Latvian education system faces several challenges and failure to address them could lead to a significant number of vacancies and deterioration in the quality of education services. Teacher's aging as well as their mass departure to other sectors is linked with the poor quality of teachers' working life. The previously mentioned indicators are significantly above the OECD average. The average age of a Latvian teacher is 48 (whereas OECD average is 44) and 38% of teachers say they would like to change profession (OECD average ranks at 25%). Only 27.5% of teachers have been on the labour market for less than 15 years. Increasing the quality of teachers' professional life, implementing solutions to support their mental wellbeing and generational exchange are the challenges Latvia is facing. An indispensable factor in overcoming abovementioned issues is to significantly increase teachers' remuneration. The currently planned



reform establishes the system of small yearly rises, therefore cannot be recognised as sufficient and thus the pay will stay uncompetitive nevertheless.

#### *The Czech Republic*

Czech teachers, like Latvian teachers, do not stay long on the labour market. Coupled with a situation where the average age of a teacher in this country is 47.2 the problem of increasing vacancies may arise. The announced salary increases to 130% of the average salary may not be actually implemented. The government's real commitment is to only secure adequate budgetary resources to implement the increases, but does not carry an obligation to make it happen. Young teachers feel overwhelmed by the amount of administrative duties they face from the start of their work and changing this situation is also on the Czech government's agenda.

#### *Lithuania*

The Lithuanian government has diagnosed the shortage of teachers as the country's urgent problem. This is the main issue the administration will face in the upcoming years. The drastic decrease in teaching graduates in recent years, as well as low pay and poor employment conditions has led to a situation where the average age of a working teacher in Lithuania is around 51. In addition, the vacancies exist in the key positions and relate to the core subjects attended by all Lithuanian students.

#### *Poland*

Polish education faces the problem of transferring the costs of obtaining a quality education onto parents. One in three Polish pupils attends tutoring sessions, and the number of pupils who are



home-schooled increased by 180% last year. The reform removing grammar schools and the issue of two year olds applying for places in secondary education institutions have converged, leading to a very dynamic increase in the number of pupils in secondary schools, technical and vocational schools. The number of pupils attending non-public establishments, and consequently the number of such establishments existing, is also increasing. Teachers' basic salary exceeds the minimum wage for only 402 PLN (around 80 EUR). Full remuneration is a combination of basic salary and over a dozen of benefits and bonuses. It causes the situation where a significant differences in teachers' remuneration throughout the country exists. Unintelligible and nonorganic system of teachers' compensation lowers the status of the profession and makes the position uncompetitive on the market.

## **5. Opportunities**

### *Latvia*

The Latvian Government recognizes the issues their internal education system is standing upon. Subsequent attempts to implement adequate and efficient solutions have already been made and even though they were not enough for the time being, it shows that the issues of unattractive remuneration, workload overwhelm and vacant positions are being treated seriously. Whilst the national education is a subject of the public debate it can be expected that relentless trade unions' efforts aimed to create an almost perfect system might overturn systematic failure into systematic victory.

### *The Czech Republic*

As stated in the Czech Republic's country report the most important opportunity is the absence of specific legislation. Rewriting laws





that are already in force is undoubtedly way more difficult and time consuming than creating new ones in order to fill in the blank. The overall situation of Czech's economics is not fatal which opens the window for implementing systematic reforms and changing the sector's position. Crucial areas has been recognized and listed out in the report: guaranteeing a salary oat 130 % of the average wage in the national economy, introducing support for teacher-training programmes and related by providing students with guidance given by experienced teachers, creating a favourable work environment with the minimisation of non-teaching obligations achieved by, most favourably, creating a non-teaching position within the scope of work dedicated to administration.

#### *Lithuania*

To make a change in a hostile, unravelled, divided or unmotivated work environment it is a rough and complicated task. Fortunately, all things considered, Lithuanian novice teachers are leaning towards positive, energetic attitude. They also recognize issues and struggles of the work they had chosen. The survey shows that teachers are well equipped and have the most necessary tools guaranteed in their workplaces. Lithuanian "Ministry of Education, Science and Sport developed a plan for teacher training and in-service training, the main goal of which is to reach as many professionals in other fields as possible to retrain and become teachers". The government has not only recognized the most crucial issues the education suffers from, but also brought specific solutions into force.

#### *Poland*

The general election that is to be held in 2023 presents an opportunity for a change of government and for the new ruling team



to open up to the prospect of a new social dialogue with teachers. The uprising issues of shadow education and numerous vacancies in schools all around Poland are downgrading the quality of services provided by schools to the effect that touches a significant part of Polish society. Therefore, it is possible that the crisis's development could be followed by the rise of support for teachers' cause amongst the people. If the events will take a proper course in the next months the change of government and the rise of education's issues in the public discourse might concur, thus leading to a systematic change.

## **6. Conclusions, recommendations**

The conclusions and resulting recommendations based on the comparative analysis of the Lithuanian, Latvian, Czech and Polish national reports can be divided into two groups. The first set of proposals consists of solutions that were identified in the national reports in unison. The second group relates to a wide range of solutions aimed at creating a system to support the creation of a welcoming and atmosphere and the gradual entry into the role of teacher for novice staff. The solutions to the problems presented in the second group appear from country to country and can be said to touch on the following areas: social and financial security, professional development and problems related to the system of functioning inside the school. The individual proposals differ because they are based on differences in situations between countries, which is why they did not appear in all the reports and are therefore described as a separate, more detailed category.

*Similar problems in each country*



The issue that was raised by the authors of the national reports in unison was substantial pay rises that will make the teaching position more attractive. The Czech trade union proposes linking salaries to the average salary, while the Polish side demands an increase in the base amount. In Latvia, the increases proposed by the government are not sufficient according to the trade union side, while the Lithuanians have diagnosed the problem of non-competitiveness as well. Given the differences between the conditions in all four countries, the fact that this topic was raised by all parties means that it is both a widespread and a crucial issue. The development of a harmonised payment system for teachers in Central and Eastern Europe requires further discussion and analysis of legislation in the area, which does not mean that work on this issue should not be carried out.

Another demand raised in similar forms is the question of systematising the position of the mentor in the legislature. The trade unions point to the need to standardise the qualification requirements necessary for the position, as well as the statutory establishment of salary supplements for performing these duties. Mentoring exists in all four countries, but it is more of a tradition than a concretised professional position. Experienced teachers play an extremely important role in acclimatising newcomers to the profession and to the specific institution, meaning that they are an extension of the educational system of pedagogues. The standardisation of responsibilities, additional payment and conditions for entering the mentoring role is a necessity that has the potential to be implemented internationally.

The third action identified as necessary to be taken is the need for a campaign in the form of a social dialogue aimed at professionals or young people to encourage them to enter the teaching profession. Elevating the professions' prestige was identified as a necessary solution to combat the decline in the number of people entering the education sector each year. Of course, such campaigns will not be



effective if they do not involve systemic change, so dialogue between groups of decision-makers and consistent communication of the demands can result in increased support for teachers. Speaking with one voice, both in terms of proposed solutions and mutual support from different social groups, combined with the targeting of young people during campaigns, creates circumstances in which, by raising the prestige of the teaching profession and creating public support for the cause, it will increase the influx of human resources into teaching and raise the overall number of teachers, while ensuring long-term improvements in the sector.

#### *Specific, non-common demands*

The recommendations made by each country vary. The Polish side explicitly pointed to the need to fund refresher courses and allow for professional development. Other trade unions also mentioned such a need, but did not specifically include it in their proposals. Limiting the limit of students per class to 20 is another specific solution presented by the Polish Teachers' Union, which follows directly from the individual characteristics of the problems faced by Polish schools. In its proposals, LIZDA mentions allocating funds for the long-distance communication technology needed for remote learning, funding psychological support and staff housing, and points to the need to provide a one-time start-up benefit, which is currently already in place in other countries. Together with the Czech trade union, the Latvians have also raised the issue of introducing an adaptation period, during which novice teachers would spend less time at work and have time for further training. Reducing the administrative burden is a proposal that came from the Czech side. The Lithuanians, on the other hand, have proposed signing a collective bargaining agreement, which their teachers are not currently covered by. Their proposed reform of the database system for staffing levels in each administrative area has appeared in other



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national reports, but only here was it included in the final recommendations.

All the unions point to the problem of the low attractiveness of teachers' terms and conditions of employment, which includes matters relating not only to raises, but also to various types of social packages. The issue of professional development and retraining, as well as learning the soft skills needed to manage teachers' relationships with the classroom and parents, also appeared in the reports. The solutions proposed in this paragraph touch the general problems but differ in relation to the specifics of each country. Systematization and development of common recommendations require further work and dialogue among the participating parties.

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