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INTRODUCTION

Entering the teaching profession is not easy, and support is usually not set up in all schools to cover all the topics and questions that novice teachers “fight with” at the beginning of their professional career. The Development of Support System for Novice Teachers (SupportTeachers) project seeks not only to map the current situation and available support provided to novice teachers, but also to help create a novice teacher support system framework based on their needs.

The third phase of the project – IO3 – was dedicated to drafting an English version of a Novice Teachers Handbook and subsequently creating its national versions for the Czech Republic, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia.

On 15-18 September 2023, a meeting of partner organizations of the **Development of Support System for Novice Teachers (SupportTeachers)** project was held in Riga, Latvia.

Over forty participants gathered in Riga. The purpose of the meeting was to train future Handbook training facilitators at national levels. The program of the meeting was divided into several panels, which included presentations and seminars. Each national team first presented the work they did on their chapter for the joint Handbook and on their national version of the Handbook. After that, the participants were divided into smaller working groups with representatives of all partner countries in each group. In these groups, a closely focused discussion took place about individual aspects of the given topic. At the end, the outputs from the group discussions were analysed and summarised in the final report.

Another important part of the third phase of the project included trainings regarding the Handbook at national levels. You can find reports from individual countries [here](#).



ABOUT THE PROJECT

The four teachers trade unions: LIZDA (Latvia), LESTU (Lithuania), ZNP (Poland), and ČMOS PŠ (the Czech Republic) have decided to jointly review and map the position of and the support system for novice teachers in their respective countries. Common activities started in 2021 within the Erasmus+ programme project **The Development of Support System for Novice Teachers**.

Educational systems in all the countries listed above face the issues of a low number of "young" teachers and a low prestige of the teaching profession.



CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech education system is struggling with a shortage of teachers. There is a shortage of teachers of particular subjects and there are even regions where there is a general lack of teachers. Although a lot of young people join the pedagogical faculties every year, not everyone is determined to enter the teaching profession after completing their studies. And even if they accept a teaching job, they often do not stay in the profession and leave. Their reasons include a lot of stress, the demanding nature of the profession, a clash with reality (it usually looks different at school than what they were prepared for in their undergraduate training), and often also a lack of support at the beginning of their career from colleagues or school management.

The Handbook, which was created as part of the project, is intended to help those novice teachers for whom the beginning of their career is not easy for some reason – e.g., because they feel that there is insufficient professional support at their school.



The Czech version of the Novice Teachers Handbook was drafted by a team of both more and less experienced teachers. This concept was based on the fact that teachers were writing the Handbook for themselves / or for their novice colleagues. Thus, it was desirable to start from how novice teachers see the issue, what topics they consider to be relevant, and, most importantly, in what way and using which language they want to address their colleagues. The Handbook is supposed to become a virtual colleague/friend who can answer a number of questions. It is therefore neither an academic text, not a set of theoretical theses, and in no way, is it an enumeration of dogmas. On the contrary, the Handbook tries to offer solutions and alternative points of view on the matter, alongside

becoming a source of further inspiration and instruction. The topics are not addressed in a confrontational way of “this is good, and this is bad,” but rather as a set of short texts intended to lead the reader to reflection, self-reflection, and further discussion in general.

The Handbook's electronic form is available free of charge on the Teachers Union website [here](#).

In December 2023, training sessions were held for novice teachers aimed at introducing the Czech version of the Handbook, its content, and structure. The training took place in four locations in the Czech Republic – in Prague, Ostrava, Šilheřovice, and Prostějov.

Below is the feedback from the trainer Michaela Sventeková, who led the training in Prague and who is also the co-author of the Czech version of the Handbook:

“I invited all colleagues who might be interested in this topic, not just novices, to the training on the electronic Handbook. One of the participants was an accompanying teacher, the others were novice teachers. Most of our novice teachers are still studying to get their bachelor's degree, so they were all the more interested in learning about the Handbook, even though we have excellent leadership support at our school.”

On the day of the training, the Handbook, including all appendices and worksheets, was published on the Teachers Union website. So, I was able to use the online Handbook and its appendices during my training session. I first explained to my colleagues why the Handbook was created, what prompted the whole project, and what were its results. Then I demonstrated how and why the Handbook was drafted in a particular way (chapters, graphics), how it should be used, what could be found in the individual chapters, and what the worksheets appended to the Handbook contained. My colleagues liked the Handbook and the idea behind it. In terms of content, they most appreciated and focused the majority of their comments on the appended worksheets (e.g., verbal assessment).”

After the training, I sent the link to the Handbook to all my colleagues. Some immediately replied thanking me for the materials. Next year, the Handbook, including all appendices and attachments, will be printed out at our school to be readily available to everyone in its physical form for everyone to flip through it more easily.”

LATVIA

LIZDA Seminar for Professionally Developed Novice Teachers Held on 1-2 December 2023 in Riga

Every organization is only as strong as its new generation: the young members in age and experience who join our education work. LIZDA thanks more than 20 young pedagogues who participated at the two-day seminar of “Professionally Supported Novice Teachers”, and who shared their experiences, talked about everyday problems at work, and looked for solutions to them together.

Young educators from Jūrmala, Southern Kurzeme, Madona, Valmiera, Balvi, Rēzekne, Preiļi, Liepāja, Limbaži, Jelgava, and many other Latvian cities gathered at the ERASMUS+ seminar. Much was said about the reasons that lower the prestige of the teaching profession, not only in Latvia and our neighbouring countries, but throughout Europe as a whole. The young people discussed a lot about the problems of remuneration, the necessary state support mechanisms, and also about the effect of burnout on the reluctance of young professionals to stay in the profession. The young educators were also introduced to the creation and content of an internationally designed handbook for the support of young educators, emphasizing both the legislative aspects and the psychological and emotional aspects of the work. Guest lecturers shared resources on the topics of mobbing and well-being with teachers. Participants shared their experience in working tree working groups – mentoring classroom management and attraction of young people to LIZDA union membership.

Main conclusions: the position of mentor has to be established at municipal educational administrations, and the requirement of a “mentor” has to be regulated by normative regulations and a paid position. Respectful relationships, a mentor as a supervisor, cooperation with colleagues and use of available resources were considered as main aspects in classroom management. Teachers also expressed that funding of non-standard hours, less bureaucracy in everyday educational work, a safe environment, and assistance personnel are important issues in classroom.



LITHUANIA

Erasmus+ Project “Support Teachers” Training in Lithuania



Attracting and retaining young teachers in the education system is a big problem in Lithuania, so it is particularly important to find out what measures would help to address it. Raising salaries alone will not bring young teachers into schools, and to retain them we need an emotionally and socially attractive working environment.

The Lithuanian Education and Science Trade Union (LESTU), as part of the Erasmus+ project “Support Teachers”, sought to find out what factors make young people want to stay in school, why they choose teaching in the first place, and what help they need to stay in teaching. This project and the national training that took place in December showed that the environment in which young professionals work and the understanding and support of their colleagues are crucial for them.



The results of the project's survey were presented during the training. Participants discussed in small working groups what they need to feel good and what they currently lack in their workplaces. It was often mentioned that it is particularly important that young professionals and their initiatives are valued, that they are welcomed into the team, that they receive support and understanding from their colleagues, and that they are not seen as a competitor but as a colleague with whom they want to share their experience and work on joint projects. The training also showed that the emotional background in the workplace is very important. There is an unfortunate tendency for young teachers to face additional pressure from colleagues, extra demands, extra work, and often being left to deal with problems alone.



This project training has shown once again that all parties need to make a major effort to make the modern school attractive to young professionals. Competitive salaries alone are no longer enough, but also a mentor network for young teachers, attractive in-service training programmes, adequate provision of working tools, an emotionally uplifting working environment rather than daily stress at work, and, of course, peer support.

POLAND

Poland, like other countries, has a shortage of teachers. Only 3 per cent of Poland's 600,000 teachers are new recruits, and the average age of a teacher is 46. This heralds a crisis that has not been seen since the post-war period. At the start of the last school year, there was a more than 22,000 teacher shortage. These problems are caused by changes in the paradigm of the teaching profession, resulting in a greater number and complexity of tasks and an increase in professional responsibility. A second reason is the very low salaries - at the minimum wage level.

In this situation, the work on the handbook for novice teachers and the principles of mentoring has become a priority for us. These are tools and forms of support that can be of real help to someone just starting out. With our team of young teachers, mentors, counsellors, and experienced authors of teacher training materials, we prepared the first versions of the materials and organised a pilot seminar for 25 novice teachers and mentors at the end of August 2023. The purpose of this was, among other things, to get feedback on the proposed e-guide



and the training programme and its scope. This allowed us to refine the concept and present revised versions in Pabianice and Toruń in October 2023. More than 70 people attended our seminars, including novice teachers, active and future mentors, educators from the in-service training system, and activists and educators from ZNP (the Polish Teachers' Union). The final conference in November 2023 in Gdansk brought together more than 50 people, and its purpose was not only to present the results of the project, but also to collect recommendations for the organisation of a support system for novice teachers and mentoring.

Our work coincided with important changes in education policy in the country, which significantly impacted our project. In 2022, the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education changed the system of professional promotion that had been in place for 20 years, including the rules for professional adaptation and mentoring of trainee teachers. These changes further worsened the salary conditions of new teachers and their social security, as the period of fixed-term employment was extended from 1 year to up to 4 years.

General elections were held in October. They resulted in a change of government, which was appointed in mid-December 2023. The new authorities in the Ministry of Education announced the revision of many regulations and declared their willingness to cooperate with the social partners. The Polish Teachers' Union ZNP made concrete proposals, including one on the period of professional adaptation and the organisation of mentoring, making full use of the materials prepared in the project.

Political changes have had a significant impact on the shape of the final outcomes of the project. In the authors' team, we recognised that the formula for the e-guide and mentoring training had to be flexible enough to respond quickly to changes that might occur in a short period of time. Therefore, our national e-guide, entitled 'The first years of school. A must for the savvy teacher.' was put on a padlet. The padlet uses the idea of a notice board, but is an enhanced version of it because it is digital. It creates an educational space for sharing knowledge and experience. Unlike a physical notice board, this space can be filled with a variety of media: images, videos, and links to related sites or materials. The board is updated instantly so anyone who shares it can immediately see new content. Everything can be kept private, made public, or shared with a specific group. Padlet is a tool for the novice teacher and mentor. As the e-guide provides suggestions for tasks that can make it easier for the novice teacher to collect and organise the necessary information or materials, the teacher is encouraged to create a personal digital portfolio where he or she can store or share material that he or she finds particularly relevant.



Lovers of the traditional - paper-based - version can also print out an e-guide and collect important documents in a separate file binder.

The participants were very enthusiastic about the tools presented. The recommendations also included a list of expectations, mainly addressed to politicians and representatives of local administrations responsible for schools. These included the need to develop and implement standards for selecting and preparing mentors and to define their working conditions and remuneration. For novice teachers, it was very important to establish clear assessment criteria and a transparent examination procedure that precedes the end of the four-year period of professional adaptation.