

*Study 2/2024*

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# Pupils' (Dis)Interest in the Teaching Profession: An International Comparison<sup>2</sup>

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## Summary

- Many European countries, including the Czech Republic, currently face a shortage of teachers, especially quality teachers. One possible solution to this would be to support aspiring teachers at a younger age, during their studies at primary and secondary school. This study provides an empirical overview of teaching aspirations among 15-year-old school pupils in European countries based on data from the international PISA survey.
- 15-year-olds most aspire to the teaching profession in Ireland and Luxembourg, where up to 10% of pupils are would-be teachers. At the other end of the range, only 1% of fifteen-year-olds in Latvia, Portugal, and Iceland aspire to the teaching profession. At 2.7%, the level of teaching aspiration in the Czech Republic is substantially below the European average of 4.5%.
- More girls than boys aspire to be teachers across all countries; in some countries this difference is very substantial. In this respect, the Czech Republic stands out quite substantially from the rest of Europe. The lowest shares of 15-year-old boys aspiring to be teachers (around 1%) are observed in post-communist countries (Latvia, Hungary, Slovakia, Estonia, and the Czech Republic). These countries also have the lowest proportion of men currently in the teaching profession. This is probably the result of the feminization of schooling in these countries during the economic and social transformation of the 1990s. The persistent low level of teaching aspiration among boys in these countries suggests that the problem of male underrepresentation in teaching is unlikely to be resolved in the foreseeable future.

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- Among those Czech pupils who do aspire to teach, only 35% have at least one university-educated parent. This places the Czech Republic – with Italy and Slovakia – among only three countries where this percentage is lower than among pupils aspiring to other professions requiring a university education. Hence, teachers are more often recruited from families with less-educated backgrounds in these countries than in other European countries.
- With Finland and Switzerland, the Czech Republic is also part of a small group of European countries in which pupils who aspire to the teaching profession exhibit higher functional reading literacy on average than their peers who aspire to other professions requiring university education, albeit that this is only statistically significantly in Finland. The question remains whether teaching aspirations in the Czech Republic will endure until these pupils make decisions about their university studies, or indeed beyond graduation, when it comes to entering the profession and deciding whether to remain in it. The results of other recent surveys imply that the Czech Republic has the potential for a well-qualified teaching body, but this potential is not currently sufficiently harnessed.
- A series of previous IDEA studies have shed light on the fact that aspirations to teach are affected by relative pay and career prospects in the teaching profession. Relevant research nevertheless indicates that a motivation to teach is most often driven by internal and altruistic reasons. One not-insignificant factor in forming teaching aspirations is positive personal experiences and relationships with teachers while at school. Our findings show that the school environment is a substantial factor in forming teaching aspirations in the Czech Republic.
- The share of pupils aspiring to the teaching profession varies not only across European countries but also within those countries, including within the Czech Republic. According to a recent analysis by the Czech School Inspectorate, the current teacher shortage is felt more strongly in the Bohemian regions, and is much less of an issue in the Moravian regions. This correlates with the share of 15-year-old pupils who aspire to teach, which is lowest in Central and Western Bohemia and highest in Central Moravia and Silesia.
- Better pay could attract good pupils into the teaching profession and attract or retain teachers from under-represented groups, such as men and STEM subject specialists. However, this same goal could also be achieved indirectly through the approaches taken by current teachers, who can serve as good role models and positively influence their pupils' teaching aspirations. Modernisation of initial and further teacher training, in both content and form, and provision of more systematic support to newly-qualified teachers could also attract more good pupils into the teaching profession.

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