
Czech teachers' pay: a new hope

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Summary

- Teachers' pay has long been lower in the Czech Republic than in almost all the other most economically developed countries. That is a natural consequence of the fact that the Czech Republic spends around one third less of its gross domestic product (GDP) on regional schooling than is usual in developed countries.
- If Czech teachers' average monthly salary was, relative to the salaries of other tertiary educated employees in the Czech Republic in 2018, comparable to the equivalent ratio in EU countries on average or in Finland or Germany, it should stand at around 53,000 or 56,000 CZK rather than the current 36,000 CZK.
- Relative to the average salary in the national economy, average teachers' salaries rose year on year in 2018 by 2.9 percentage points to nearly 115%. Nevertheless, this only marked a return to the levels of 2008, i.e. ten years ago, prior to the global financial crisis. Teachers' salaries were raised substantially in 2017-2018, but at the same time salaries for all tertiary educated employees rose substantially across the whole public sector. The raise in teachers' salaries was thus hardly ahead of the game.
- In relative terms, teachers at the beginning of their careers in the under 30 age bracket are the best paid. In 2018, 'only' 69% of non-teachers in this age group received higher salaries than their teacher peers (tertiary educated, same age and gender in the same region). Next best is the situation among the oldest teachers, in the 50-59 and 60+ age brackets. Teachers in the middle age bracket, 30-49 years, receive the worst pay in relative terms: 80% of demographically equivalent employees earn more than the teachers' average salary.

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- Czech teachers' salaries are highly equalized, or even egalitarian, both in national and international comparison. In the youngest age bracket the variability in pay is comparable with that of administrative staff and other university educated public sector employees. However, whereas pay grades and variability increase with age (and experience) among non-teachers, teachers' pay rises extremely slowly with age (experience) and its variability remains low.
- In 2018 the already low share of overall teachers' pay allocated to merit-based bonuses decreased. The substantial raise to teachers' salaries in that year was achieved partially at the expense of further reducing the already very low levels of merit-based pay.
- Under Bohuslav Sobotka's government in 2014-2017, raising teachers' pay was not a priority above and beyond increasing salaries across the whole public sector more generally. A turn for the better in this respect only became apparent during the first year of the new government in 2018. Further development on this front is however still in the realm of promises, or at best rough estimates for 2019.
- The pre-election pledges made by ČSSD and ANO in this area are not mutually comparable. While ČSSD took the average salary in the national economy in 2021 as the basis for its calculations, the second took average teachers' salaries in 2017. Thus, in 2021 teachers should be paid 49,530 CZK per month according to ČSSD and 47,367 CZK according to ANO. The latter figure was adopted into the government's statement of policy. However, ANO's promise is problematic because it does not anticipate the concurrent growth of salaries in other professions, which can only be broadly predicted.
- If teachers' pay were to increase by 7.5% annually from 2020 onwards, the level of teachers' pay relative that of other tertiary educated public sector employees in the Czech Republic would match the equivalent ratio across the EU as a whole only in 2030, i.e. a decade from now. To reach the relative levels in Germany or Finland would take 13-15 years.
- Previous political promises in the more distant past regarding raises to teachers' pay were vague, short-lived and rarely fulfilled. The consequence of that has been to substantially reduce the public's belief in such pledges. In order to permanently and substantially increase the long existing low level of interest in the teaching profession among the youngest generations these pledges must be given greater credibility. It is not only essential that the current commitments be fulfilled, but also that they be extended well beyond a single term of election. Help in achieving this may come through key political parties declaring their consensus, the introduction of statutory salary indexation for teachers and a more responsible approach to compiling the mid-term state budget outlook.