

# ASSISTANT TEACHERS FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC – PRESENTATION OF SELECTED PARTICULAR RESEARCH RESULTS

*Jan Michalík, Jan Chrastina, Jaromír Maštaliř, Pavlína Baslerová*  
Palacky University Olomouc, Czech Republic

## Abstract

The profession of an assistant teacher (AT) deserves due attention in terms of methodological, personnel, legislative and professional discourse. The position of AT was established in the Czech Republic already in 2005; however, research and scientific findings providing relevant practical data (in the form of general research studies) are still missing. The paper presents a concept of a national research study performed in February – March 2015 and particular results focusing on the description of sociodemographic distributions and selected aspects of labour-law relationships (and their attributes) in terms of the function of AT. The paper also includes an interpretative view of the results by means of suggested practical measures in the area of operation, competences and especially legislation.

The research study used a quantity-based approach to investigate the research phenomena. The data collection method was a questionnaire of an own design, which was – regarding the number of ATs in the Czech Republic – administered in an electronic form. The data were then classified, analysed and statistically tested. This is the first communication of an extensive research report. It describes the initial domain of sociodemographic characteristics and the first research – labour-law aspects: employment contract, type of employment, length of employment, amount of remuneration and related aspects.

**Key words:** *Assistant teacher – special educational need – health disability/impairment – social disadvantage – support – assistance*

## Introduction

In 2015 in the Czech Republic (referred to as CR) there is a discussion about the functioning of assistant teachers (referred to as ATs) in the educational system. This public discussion covers personnel, organizational, legal, financial but also didactic and methodological aspects of this profession. The reason involves both quantity aspects of the profession and quality issues, which have arisen after about ten years of its *de jure* existence. In Czech schools there are currently more than 8 thousand ATs. Formally, this position was stipulated in 2005 by the Education Act (Act No. 561/2005 Coll.) Until 2005, ATs were in schools but under a non-systematic status, mostly in a ‘hidden’ position (educator, civilian service employee – substitute for military service, etc.) During the ten years of the official function of ATs, their significance was demonstrated in educating children, pupils and students with special educational needs (referred to as “pupils with SEN”). On the other hand, our experience shows a number of issues that this profession faces. Some of them have a common ground and implications in the whole CR (e.g. non-existence of unified rules for the position of AT, non-existence of a system of methodological guidance and generally acknowledged standards of AT activities. Others relate to specific regions or schools (financing and availability of ATs). A number of them also appear in other countries (compare Ross & Dunphy, 2007). The inconsistency in AT activities and the differences in their preparation (and acquired competences) largely affect the primary consumers of the services – i.e. pupils in classes with assistant teachers (Uzlová, 2010).

In March 2015 the Parliament of the CR passed an amendment to the Education Act (Act No. 82/2015 Coll.), which stipulates that from September 2016 ATs will represent a legal support measure provided to pupils: “*A child, pupil or student with special educational*

*needs shall be any individual who requires the provision of support measures to fulfil own educational possibilities or to exercise own rights on an equal basis. Support measures shall mean any necessary adjustments in education and school services corresponding with the medical condition, cultural environment and/or other life conditions of a child, pupil or student. Children, pupils and students with special educational needs have the right to free provision of support measures by the school or school facility”.*

Undoubtedly, this legal framework will cause a substantial transformation and a sort of a problem for the educational system. We might also expect increased pressure of the professional community and parents to increase the number of ATs. This demand will be substantially above the current number of ATs as specified in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Distribution of the number of ATs in kindergartens, basic school and secondary schools across the CR

Year	Persons		Full-time equivalent total	
2005	1588		1156.4	
2006	2132		1559.9	
2007	2923		2098.9	
2008	3450		2415.4	
2009	4044		2772.3	
2010	4751		3145.6	
2011	5386		3483.1	
	<b>6576</b>		<b>4276.5</b>	
2012	ATs for children/ pupils with HD	ATs for children/ pupils with SD	HD – Full-time equivalent total	SD – Full-time equivalent total
	5966	610	3797.1	479.4
	<b>7445</b>		<b>4770.4</b>	
2013	6863	582	4325.6	444.8
	<b>8873</b>		<b>5744.8</b>	
2014	8155	718	5201.2	543.6

Therefore, it is necessary to perform a research study to investigate the key issues of organization, competences, methodology and relationships concerning this profession in schools in the CR. The first and initial part of an extensive research survey is presented in this paper.

### Objectives

The objective of the research study was to identify, analyse and describe selected aspects of AT activities in relation to pupils with SEN in the Czech Republic. The present paper is a part of an extensive survey focusing on the description and the basic factors influencing the position of ATs. The main areas investigated, analysed and described by the research were the following:

- 1) Labour-law relationships and aspects of the position of AT in the sociocultural context of the CR;
- 2) Distribution of the content/structure of activities commonly performed by ATs in the CR;
- 3) Relationship aspects of the position of AT – coordination of activities, cooperation with other subjects, schools and professionals.

The present research focused in the following objectives:

- 1) To identify and describe the main sociodemographic indicators of the researched sample of ATs, who currently assist pupils with health disability or impairment (referred to as “pupils with HD”) and pupils with social disadvantage (referred to as “pupils with SD”);

- 2) To analyse and describe selected attributes of labour-law relationships in ATs included in the research, who currently assist pupils with HD and pupils with SD.

#### **Sample and methods**

To obtain research data we used the ex post facto design with a quantity-based approach. The data collection method was a questionnaire of an own design, which was – regarding the anticipated number of respondent in the CR – administered in an electronic form. Regarding the fact that there were no domestic publications (studies, empirical surveys, research reports, review studies, etc.), individual sets of items of the questionnaire were developed according to an analysis of the content of legislation relating to the position and competences of ATs, and according to a group critical discussion with relevant professionals (special educators, school psychologists, prevention methodologists, etc.), who are already in a methodological, coordination or labour-law relationship with ATs in the process of coordination and cooperation. The questionnaire consisted of closed, semi-closed and open-ended items. Opinion and frequency items were identified by means of a Likert scale (where 1 = strongly disagree/very bad; 10 = strongly agree/very good). Items focusing on the frequency of performing work-related activities were recorded by means of operationalized choices “always – often – sometimes – never”, and the respondents were provided with guidance with precise specification of the time periods/repetitions of specific areas defined by work-related activities.

The preparation of the questionnaire was performed in several stages, the questionnaire was amended according to material, content, formal and methodological comments raised at group meetings of the research team and consultations with professionals and a methodologist. The questionnaire was distributed by means of cooperating employees of Regional authorities in the CR (offices of education) during 01–02/2015. The questionnaire also included sociodemographic data (sex; age; education; filter item – length of experience in the position of AT; family relationship with the pupil with SEN; type of disadvantage of the pupil with SEN; size of the school; completion of an AT qualification course; place of work; wage conditions and wage category, etc.) Individual domains of the questionnaire were as follows:

- a) Identification items – target group of pupils with SEN, where an AT position is required;
- b) Labour-law relationships (and their attributes);
- c) AT job description (content of performed activities): “assistance with self-attendance activities”; “assistance with movement”; “nursing activities”; “working with pupils with SD and their families”; distribution of the working time – identification of direct and indirect educational work with a pupil with SEN;
- d) Professional education of ATs and methodological support provided to ATs.

The questionnaire comprised a total of 32 items. In the final part the questionnaire, the respondents (ATs) had an opportunity to assess the current situation by means of opinions and comments. The respondents also had an opportunity to have the results of the survey sent to a predefined email address. The research sample consisted of respondents who returned completed electronic questionnaires. The total number of respondents was  $n = 1732$  (primary research sample). The selection of respondents was performed by means of an intentional exhaustive selection – we addressed all schools who have the position of AT established. In the process of data collection and analysis, anonymity was guaranteed at the time of publishing the partial results of the research. The research (secondary, selective) sample included questionnaires that were duly completed and sent for archiving and systematic work; these questionnaires were classified into three independent groups (see below). The inclusion criterion was the current position of AT and willingness to participate in the research. The respondents’ age or region of the school were not predefined.

After data collection was completed (and an active link was made available to complete the questionnaire) the data were checked for the first time and prepared for subsequent statistical processing. During the first classification stage we sorted and checked the completeness of the data, which were then used to perform calculations of absolute and relative frequencies, including mean values and the basic measure of variability. The second classification stage was performed by means of the SPSS and Statistica programmes and included comparison approaches. We used

the Chi square test for independence in contingency tables, Mann-Whitney U test, Student's test and Kruskal-Wallis test of analysis of variance. Statistical testing was performed at a level of statistical significance of 5% (in selected phenomena – regarding the number of respondents – and also at a level of statistical significance of 1%). In an analysis of items/testing we only used the real number of respondents' answers, which always represented an independent exhaustive set (100% in specific areas/items). The average age of all respondents was 38.52 years (standard deviation = 11.3), variation span (19–78 years). Regarding the different characteristics of the AT position the research sample was compared according to particular sets of “ATs working with pupils with HD”; “ATs working with pupils with SD”; “ATs working with pupils with multiple criterion parameters”.

The basic document for the development of items in several domains was Decree No. 73/2005 Coll., on Education of children, pupils and students with special educational needs and the exceptionally gifted, as last amended. In this document the assistant teacher position is defined in Section 7 (main AT activities, new AT position request form). The other legislative document was Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on pre-school, basic, secondary, tertiary professional and other education (Education Act), as last amended. In this document the assistant function is defined in Section 16 (preconditions for establishing an AT function).

As mentioned above, this paper presents basic data of a descriptive-interpretative nature – distribution of monitored features/variables included in the area of “labour-law relationships (and their attributes)” (see above). The study respects the requirement for a comparative criterion of ATs working with pupils with HD and those working with pupils with SD. The comparative stage thus excludes ATs who indicated multiple or ambiguous responses.

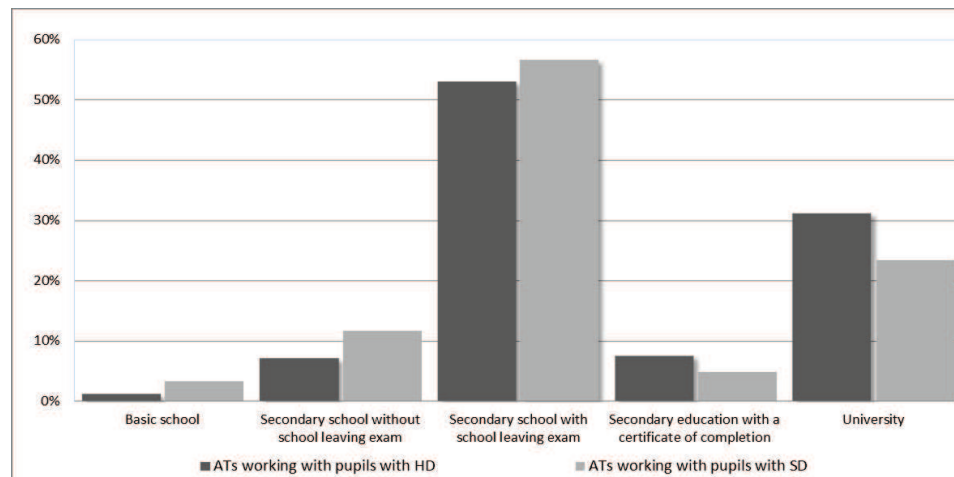
## Results

### *Description of sociodemographic characteristics of the research sample*

The research sample of ATs working with pupils with SEN consisted of 1732 respondents. Regarding the place of work of the respondents, the survey included ATs evenly from all 14 regions of the CR (respective to the total number of inhabitants/number of educators). ATs involved in the research worked with pupils with HD (n = 1367), and pupils with SD (n = 205).

The research involved a predominant proportion of female ATs (1299 of women work with pupils with SEN due to HD; 190 of women work with pupils with SEN due to SD; 68 of men work with pupils with SEN due to HD; 15 of men work with pupils with SEN due to SD). The age span of the responding ATs was 19–78 years (variation span). The most frequent age was 26 years (n = 82), the average age was 38.52 years (standard deviation = 11.3).

The values for the age parameter in the group of ATs for pupils with HD (n = 1366) were as follows: average age 38.39 years, mod. = 26, med. = 38, variation span 19–78 years, standard deviation = 11.35. The values for the age parameter in the group of ATs for pupils with SD (n = 204) were as follows: average age 39.26 years, mod. = 35, med. = 39, variation span 20–69 years, standard deviation = 11.04. In terms of the type of school the predominant type was basic school (n = 1340): 83.13% of ATs for pupils with HD and 84.17% of ATs for pupils with SD, followed by kindergarten (12.99% of ATs for HD and 7.5% of ATs for SD). Only a small number of ATs work in secondary schools (3.8% of ATs for HD and 1.5% of ATs for SD). The category of education was dominated by a group of ATs with completed secondary education with a school-leaving exam (n = 842; 53.6%), followed by respondents with a university degree (n = 474; 30.1%) and respondents with secondary education with a certificate of completion (n = 121; 7.7%). The degrees achieved by ATs are shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Degrees achieved by ATs by target groups of pupils

In the category of frequency of ATs according to the type of health disability of their pupils, the largest proportion included autism spectrum disorders ( $n = 365$ ; 30.6%). This category was followed by ATs who work with pupils with mental disability ( $n = 274$ ; 23%), almost one fifth of responses was represented by ATs working with pupils with multiple disability ( $n = 235$ ; 19.7%). The smallest group of ATs were those who work with pupils with disrupted communication ability. An overview of proportions of ATs according to the type of HD in pupils who currently have an AT is summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Overview of proportions of ATs by type of HD in their pupils

Cause of pupil's health disability	n	%
<i>Autism spectrum disorders</i>	365	30.6
<i>Mental disability</i>	274	23
<i>Physical disability</i>	120	10
<i>Disrupted communication ability</i>	31	2.6
<i>Hearing impairment</i>	50	4.2
<i>Visual impairment</i>	42	3.5
<i>Multiple disability</i>	235	19.7
<i>Specific developmental behaviour disorders</i>	77	6.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1194</b>	<b>100</b>

#### Description of labour-law aspects of the assistant teacher function

In terms of length of experience of the position of AT, the most numerous category was "less than one year" in both groups of ATs (ATs working with pupils with HD:  $n = 440$ ; 32.2%; ATs working with pupils with SD:  $n = 65$ ; 31.7%). An interesting finding is the length of experience "between one and two years" in both groups of ATs (i.e. 18.1% and 13.2%). An overview of ATs by length of experience is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Distribution of ATs by length of experience

Length of experience	AT for pupil with HD		AT for pupil with SD		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<i>Less than one year</i>	440	32.2	65	31.7	505	32.1
<i>Between one and 2 years</i>	248	18.1	27	13.2	275	17.5
<i>Between 3 and 5 years</i>	401	29.3	55	26.8	456	29
<i>6 years and more</i>	278	20.3	58	28.3	336	21.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1367</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1572</b>	<b>100</b>



Further analysed and described categories were the type of employment and possibility of free selection of part-time employment. A total of 1120 ATs (81.9%) working with pupils with HD indicated part-time employment. The group of ATs working with pupils with SD was also dominated by part-time employment (n = 124; 60.5%). A statistical data analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between both groups – it might be concluded that ATs working with pupils with HD have more full-time employments (p = 0.05; p = 0.01). The distribution of ATs in various groups by type of employment is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Type of AT employment

Type of employment	AT for pupil with HD		AT for pupil with SD		Total	
	N	%	N	%	n	%
<i>Full-time</i>	247	18.1	81	39.5	328	20.9
<i>Part time</i>	1120	81.9	124	60.5	1244	79.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1367</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1572</b>	<b>100</b>

ATs who indicated part-time employment were also asked about the choice of this type of employment. The aim was to find out whether the part-time employment was selected by ATs themselves or whether they had no such choice (offered by the employer). The table below (Table 5) indicates that in both groups of ATs most assistant teachers did not have an opportunity to select part-time employment (81% of ATs working with pupils with HD; 70.8% of ATs working with pupils with SD).

**Table 5.** Own choice of part-time employment by ATs

Own choice of part-time employment	AT for pupil with HD		AT for pupil with SD		Total	
	n	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Yes</i>	204	19	35	29.2	239	20
<i>No</i>	871	81	85	70.8	956	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>1075</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1195</b>	<b>100</b>

In terms of security of employment and stability of their position, ATs were also asked about the length of their current employment contract. Of the total number of ATs who answered this item (n = 1551), most respondents in both groups indicated a fixed-term employment contract. In total, almost 83% of ATs working with pupils with HD and 70% of ATs working with pupils with SD have a fixed-term employment contract. The distribution of ATs in both groups by type of employment contract (fixed period, indefinite period) is summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Distribution of ATs by duration of employment contract

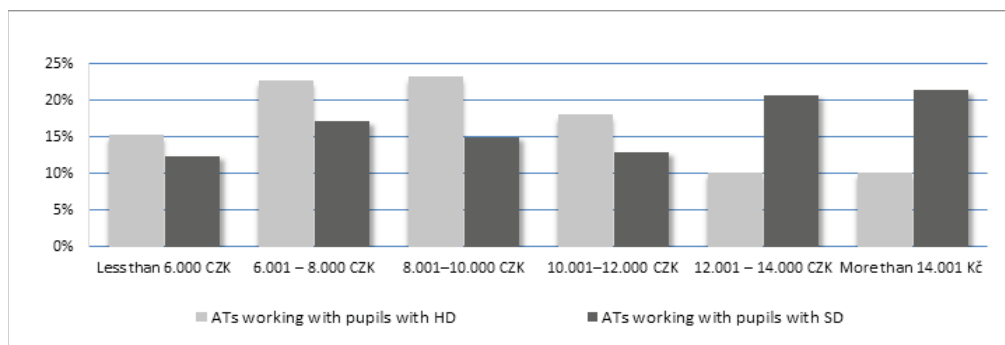
Duration of employment contract	AT for pupil with HD		AT for pupil with SD		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N	%
<i>Indefinite period</i>	231	17.1	60	29.7	291	18.8
<i>Fixed period</i>	1118	82.9	142	70.3	1260	81.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1349</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1551</b>	<b>100</b>

In terms of effectiveness of AT activities and their intensity towards pupils with SEN, ATs were asked about the division of their employment to direct and indirect educational activity. As mentioned in Table 7, it might be concluded that a majority of ATs who answered this item (n = 1572) do not have their employment divided into direct and indirect educational activities. This involves 1028 ATs providing assistance to pupils with HD (75.2%) and 141 ATs (68.8%) working with pupils with SD.

**Table 7.** AT employment and distribution by direct/indirect educational activity

Employment distribution: direct/indirect educational activity	AT for pupil with HD		AT for pupil with SD		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	339	24.8	64	31.2	403	25.6
No	1028	75.2	141	68.8	1169	74.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1367</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1572</b>	<b>100</b>

The last category concerning AT labour-law relationships and their aspects was the amount of monthly salary. To ensure uniformity of answers, ATs were asked to indicate a range of their gross monthly salary. The respondents were offered gross monthly salary ranges with 2,000 CZK increments (less than 6,000 CZK; 6,000 CZK to 14,000 CZK; more than 14,000 CZK). An interesting finding is the fact that most ATs who provide assistance to pupils with SD reported gross monthly salary of 12,000 CZK – 14,000 CZK ( $n = 40$ ; 20.8%), or even more than 14,000 CZK ( $n = 41$ ; 21.4%). The highest proportion of ATs providing assistance to pupils with HD were in the 6,000 – 10,000 CZK range ( $n = 287$  and  $n = 293$ ; 22.8% and 23.3%). The distribution of ATs in both groups by amount of gross monthly salary is shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Amount of AT gross monthly salary

### Discussion

The mentioned descriptive results of this extensive survey present, for the first time in the CR, an overview of labour-law aspects concerning a relatively new educational profession. It was confirmed that the proportion of ATs in the CR for pupils with SD is considerably lower than ATs for pupils with HD. This is caused by a number of factors. The category of a pupil with SD has a very weak position in legal regulations. Moreover, a diagnostic manual for assessing the degree of SD is missing. Finally – in the conditions of the CR the so-called sociocultural disadvantage has been socially acknowledged for only a few years; therefore, its legal status in educational standards is at the very beginning. As a result, the number of pupils in the CR with a declared status of individuals with special educational needs because of SD is de jure 5584 (Klusáček & Hrstka, 2015) as opposed to approximately 90000 pupils with HD. Without doubt, the amendment to the Education Act (Act No. 82/2015 Coll.) and its Section 16 effective from 1 September 2016 will cause a significant increase in the number of pupils with SEN as a result of SD.

The group of ATs for pupils with HD includes a large proportion of ATs for pupils with specifics in the area of cognitive performance. The most numerous group is represented by ATs for pupils with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) – 30.6% ( $n = 365$ ), followed by ATs for pupils with mental disability (23%,  $n = 274$ ) and ATs for pupils with multiple disability (19.7%,  $n = 235$ ). The last group also includes a majority of pupils with mental disability. This result predicts a significant “budgetary” issue that the educational section will face after 1 September 2016, when ATs become legal support measures. As of 1 September 2014, Czech basic schools (which have 85% of all ATs) had the following numbers of pupils with disability (see Table 8).

**Table 8.** Numbers of pupils by health disability in basic schools in the CR as of 1 September 2014

Mental disability			Physical disability		Visual impairment		
Mild	Moderate	Severe	Moderate	Severe	Moderate	Severe	Blind
13961	2027	538	783	376	670	173	41
Hearing impairment			Speech disorders		ASD	Developmental learning disorders	Developmental behaviour disorders
Moderate	Severe	Deaf	Moderate	Severe	2677	35471	6237
661	427	103	3459	1202			

Source: statistics of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the CR

A significant finding of the research study is also the fact that a majority of ATs have very limited experience or are just beginning in this profession. Again, this logically results from the “novelty” of the profession (de jure from 2005). Another reason includes labour-law aspects of this position (short-term employment, fixed-term employment contracts – see below). The fact that a half (50.3%) of ATs for pupils with HD and nearly a half of ATs for pupils with SD (44.4%) have experience shorter than two years is a significant factor illustrating the real readiness for this profession. Here, we can speak about a certain type of “learning through practice”, which is confirmed by the high number of ATs at the beginning of their professional career. This can cause problems in terms of the abilities and skills to fulfil SEN in pupils who have ATs.

A significant finding was brought by the research study on labour-law aspects of the position of AT in the system of Czech education. Only 18.1% of ATs for pupils with HD ( $n = 1367$ ) and 39.5% of ATs for pupils with SD ( $n = 205$ ) are on full-time employment. The statistically significant difference between these groups is caused by a different way of financing (different grant sources) of ATs for pupils with SD. Another finding of the research study, according to which part-time employment was selected by only 19% of ATs with HD and 29.2% of ATs for pupils with SD, predicts significant problems with permanent identification of persons with their working positions. This conclusion is also confirmed by another finding of a labour-law nature: 82.9% of ATs for pupils with HD ( $n = 1349$ ) have a fixed-term employment contract, i.e. until a specific date (see below), and 29.7% of ATs for pupils with SD ( $n = 202$ ). This leads to a conclusion that a model AT for a pupil with both HD and SD is on involuntary part-time employment and has a fixed-term employment contract, also decided by the employer.

In terms of monthly salaries of ATs, we observed statistically significantly higher salary of ATs for pupils with SD. A monthly salary exceeding 12,000 CZK was indicated by a total of 42.2% of these ATs ( $n = 81$ ). In the group of ATs for pupils with HD this salary range includes only 20.5% of them ( $n = 257$ ) (NB: average salary in the CR in 2014 = 25,686 CZK) (Czech Statistical Office, 2015).

All mentioned characteristics undoubtedly influence the motivation of ATs, their identification with the profession, and the quality of their work (not covered by the research). However, there are reasons to predict a lower degree of motivation for permanent delivery of this profession.

### Conclusion

The research study accounted for the yearly permanent increase in the number of AT positions in the Czech system of education (increase from 1588 in 2005 to 8873 in 2014). The results of the present study show that the position of AT is taken by employees with limited work experience, the position of AT is mostly performed in the form of part-time employment. Regarding the short period of employment contracts (usually until the end of the respective school year),



the income does not achieve even 70–80% of average salary in the CR. It might be concluded that there are significant risks concerning the degree identification of ATs with their positions. We observed (in terms of job content) unjustifiable differences in the salaries of ATs for pupils with HD and SD.

Further potential risks emphasised by the research study are associated with identifying the group of pupils (with impaired cognitive performance) with whom ATs usually work. With respect to the amendment to the Education Act, which identifies ATs as legal measures (upon recommendation of a school counselling facility), we might predict a significant increase in the number of requests for this position after 1 September 2016, which is the date of effect of the amended Education Act. The educational budgetary section will face higher funding demands. In case of general insufficiency of funding we might also expect legal disputes between pupils' representatives and public authority in the CR provided that an AT is not assigned to a specific pupil.

A number of measured results will be analysed in further scientific communications.

### Acknowledgement

The paper is dedicated to the following project of the Student Grant Competition at Palacky University, Olomouc, Faculty of Education: *Unconventional views of the quality of life of persons with special needs (IGA\_PdF\_2015\_020)* and the following ESF project in the CR: *System support of inclusive education in the Czech Republic (CZ.1.07/1.2.00/43.0003)*.

### References

1. Klusáček, J., & Hrstka, D. (2015). *Počty dětí se SVP v základním školství v ČR: výzkumná zpráva*. Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci – in print.
2. Ross, C., & Dunphy, J. (2007). *Strategies for teaching assistants development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
3. Uzlová, I. (2010). *Asistence lidem s postižením a znevýhodněním*. Praha: Portál.
4. Education Act No. 82/2015 Coll. as of 19 March 2015 (2015). Retrieved from: <http://www.sbirka.cz/POSLATYD/NOVE/15-082.htm>.

## ASSISTANT TEACHERS FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC – PRESENTATION OF SELECTED PARTICULAR RESEARCH RESULTS

### Summary

*Jan Michalík, Jan Chrastina, Jaromír Maštališ, Pavlína Baslerová,  
Palacky University Olomouc, Czech Republic*

Paper includes an interpretative view of the results by means of suggested practical measures in the area of operation, competences and especially legislation. The research study used a quantity-based approach to investigate the research phenomena. The data collection method was a questionnaire of an own design, which was – regarding the number of ATs in the Czech Republic – administered in an electronic form. The data were then classified, analyzed and statistically tested.

The objective of the research study was to identify, analyze and describe selected aspects of AT activities in relation to pupils with SEN in the Czech Republic. The main areas investigated, analyzed and described by the research were the following: 1) Labour-law relationships and aspects of the position of AT in the sociocultural context of the CR; 2) Distribution of the content/structure of activities commonly performed by ATs in the CR; 3) Relationship aspects of the position of AT – coordination of activities, cooperation with other subjects, schools and professionals.

The present research focused in the following objectives:

- 1) To identify and describe the main sociodemographic indicators of the researched sample of ATs, who currently assist pupils with health disability or impairment (referred to as “pupils with HD”) and pupils with social disadvantage (referred to as “pupils with SD”);
- 2) To analyze and describe selected attributes of labour-law relationships and there in ATs included in the research, who currently assist pupils with HD and pupils with SD.

The questionnaire comprised a total of 32 items. In the final part the questionnaire, the respondents (ATs) had an opportunity to assess the current situation by means of opinions and comments. The respondents also had an opportunity to have the results of the survey sent to a predefined email address. The research sample consisted of respondents who returned completed electronic questionnaires. The total number of respondents was  $n = 1732$  (primary research sample). The selection of respondents was performed by means of an intentional exhaustive selection – we addressed all schools who have the position of AT established.

The results of the present study show that the position of AT is taken by employees with limited work experience, the position of AT is mostly performed in the form of part-time employment. Regarding the short period of employment contracts (usually until the end of the respective school year), the income does not achieve even 70–80% of average salary in the CR. It might be concluded that there are significant risks concerning the degree identification of ATs with their positions. We observed (in terms of job content) unjustifiable differences in the salaries of ATs for pupils with HD and SD.

Further potential risks emphasised by the research study are associated with identifying the group of pupils (with impaired cognitive performance) with whom ATs usually work. With respect to the amendment to the Education Act, which identifies ATs as legal measures (upon recommendation of a school counselling facility), we might predict a significant increase in the number of requests for this position after 1 September 2016, which is the date of effect of the amended Education Act. The educational budgetary section will face higher funding demands. In case of general insufficiency of funding we might also expect legal disputes between pupils’ representatives and public authority in the CR provided that an AT is not assigned to a specific pupil.