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Czech teachers' intellectual skills in international and generational comparison²

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Summary of key issues

- The quality of teachers' work is widely perceived as a key co-determinant of educational outcomes. This quality co-determines, among other things, the creation of human capital, future economic output and quality of life. Despite this, the quality of teachers' work remains a phenomenon that is extremely difficult to define, let alone measuring it. Recent international surveys PIAAC and ALL offered the option of looking indirectly at teacher quality through general skills of the adult population in the participating countries. Teaching staff at Czech schools were among the selected population sample for these surveys. The surveys include information about their general intellectual abilities related to daily-use life-skills in the form of scores achieved by those adult individuals in reading, mathematics and ICT literacy (i.e. use of digital technology) tests.
- This study reveals the levels achieved in and differences between general intellectual skills achieved by national populations as a whole and those achieved by teachers. Specifically it presents **(a)** an international comparison of older and younger adult populations and **(b)** a comparison of younger and older generations of teachers. Our comparison does not limit itself to presenting mean test score values, but also reveals the extent of heterogeneity in skills among the relevant populations of each country. We also offer a detailed overview of the issue of selection into the teaching profession, from both international and intergenerational perspectives.
- The study focuses on the situation in the Czech Republic. Our analysis reveals that: **(i)** on average, Czech teachers' intellectual skills remain average or slightly above-average in international comparison, both among the older and younger generations; **(ii)** the heterogeneity of skills among the Czech population, both young and old, is rather low; **(iii)** as in many other countries, there is evident intellectual selection into the teaching profession

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in the Czech Republic; **(iv)** the level of heterogeneity of skills among Czech teachers is at the international average overall, but there has been a sharp increase in the heterogeneity of reading and ICT literacy among the younger generation of teachers. That increase is very high and incomparable with that observed in other countries. The heterogeneity of intellectual skills within the Czech teaching profession as a whole remains at average level thanks to a rather high share of older teachers among whom skill heterogeneity is low. The heterogeneity of skills among Czech teachers will thus likely rise in the near future, as the share of not-so-heterogenic teachers who entered the profession prior to 1989 falls.

- The increase of heterogeneity among teachers, if it translates into heterogeneity in the quality of their teaching work, leads to growth in the heterogeneity of the education that children in various classes, schools and regions obtain. If the growth of heterogeneity in reading literacy among the younger generation of Czech teachers will be confirmed by additional research, this should lead to a reassessment of the tools of selection into the teaching profession, to changes in teacher training, and to a marked increase in their relative pay, which is currently very low.