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Teachers' salaries in 2019: A glimpse of a brighter future ?

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Summary

- As far as the relative level of pay for teachers compared to other university-educated employees is concerned, the Czech Republic has long occupied a very low position relative to other developed countries. As recently as 2018, the country ranked lowest on this front among all the OECD countries. The relative level of teachers' pay is one of the factors that determine the attractiveness of the teaching profession. The teaching profession needs to be attractive not only in order to ensure a sufficient supply of teaching staff but also to enable selectivity in teacher recruitment, with an emphasis on teacher quality. The national data for 2019, which have recently been published and on which this study is based, show that this situation has begun to improve substantially. If the pledges originally made by the current government are anything to go by, this situation ought to further improve substantially during 2020 and 2021.
- In 2019 primary school teachers' average pay reached 123.5% of the average salary in the national economy, up from 114.3% in 2018. This means that teachers' relative pay level exceeded the previous record, which was set almost fifteen years ago in 2006. The speed of increase in teachers' salaries in 2019 was far greater than the speed of increase in the salaries of other university-educated public sector employees and very substantially greater than that in the private sector. During 2018-2019 teachers' mean and median pay rose by more than 28%. The equivalent growth among university-educated employees in the public sector was 19.8% and in the private sector just 14.1%.
- The youngest teachers saw the greatest rise in their relative salaries during 2019, although their salaries had already been relatively high compared with other age groups in the profession since 2011. Teachers in the middle age category, aged between 30 and 49 years,

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continue to receive the lowest relative salaries, reflecting age. Starting salaries for Czech schoolteachers are thus relatively attractive, but that attractiveness swiftly reduces as teachers gain years of experience, whereas their university-educated peers in other professions enjoy dynamic salary increases.

- There is very low variability in teachers' salaries and it does not correspond to the existing diversity in teacher quality. Over-generalised pay in the school system leads to high quality teachers being undervalued and insufficiently motivated, which increases the risk that they may leave the profession or low interest in this profession among young generation.
- During 2019, there was also a substantial increase in the proportion of teachers' pay provided as above-tariff items, which almost doubled. As a result this proportion is now similar to that for other university-educated public sector professions. A not insignificant part of the overall increase in teachers' pay was thus manifested in the above tariff component, as previously promised. Above tariff components are one human resources management tool available at the school level and can take the form of bonuses for effort, strong work ethic or high quality work, or of an external motivator.
- It is also necessary to monitor the motivational aspect of teachers' salaries at the regional level. The main drivers behind differences in relative teachers' pay between regions are differences in the levels of pay for other university-educated employees across the regions. The worst situations in this sense are in Prague and Central Bohemia. The relative level of teachers' pay compared to other university-educated employees looks far more felicitous if we distinguish between pay levels for men and women, since most teachers are women. The relative level of teachers' pay also looks better if median pay is used rather than mean pay, since median pay is not affected by the extremely high salaries in managerial positions that are largely occupied by men. Taking age into account, however, renders teachers' pay relatively low, because the Czech teaching staff is relatively old.
- The reform efforts recently initiated by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, which aim to reduce the inter-regional differences in the level of financing for teachers' salaries at different types of schools have evidently already impacted the inter-regional differences in relative teachers' pay levels during 2019. Between 2018 and 2019 relative teachers' pay in most regions came some way closer to the national average. Nevertheless, Prague and Central Bohemia still have a long way to go to reach the national average.