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# What the Data Says about Generations X and Y: When Our Parents Were as Young as We Are<sup>2</sup>

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## Summary

- This study presents a unique comparison of the lives of generation Y (millennials, born in 1981–1996) and those of generation X (their parents, born in 1965–1980) at the same age, based on available statistics related to education levels, relationships, and relative earnings.
- The data is taken from the 2006 and 2021 rounds of the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) carried out by the Czech Statistical Office. This survey is run on a representative sample of households and the individuals within them annually. The sample years, 2006 and 2021, enable us to compare the situations of generations X and Y at similar ages. At the time of data collection in 2006, representatives of generation X were between the ages of 25 and 40. Representatives of generation Y were between 24 and 39 years old in 2021.
- The most marked difference between generations X and Y is in their levels of education. 32% of generation Y have completed a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with just 13% in generation X. In contrast, the percentage of people with professional training has fallen, from 40% in generation X to 23% in generation Y. It is worth noting that the extent of the increase in university education is substantially different across genders: in generation X, the share of university-educated women was the same as the share of university-educated men, at 13%. Among millennials, however, 37% of women have a university education, compared with “only” 27% of men.

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<sup>2</sup> This study presents the authors' own views and not the official position of the Czech Academy of Sciences' Economics Institute nor of the Charles University Centre for Economic Research and Graduate Education (CERGE). Any remaining ambiguities or errors are the authors' own. We would like to thank Jaromír Kalmus for his advice on the data and Daniel Münich for his comments and suggestions. This study was produced with support from the Czech Academy of Sciences within its AV21 Research programme Society in Motion.

- The second most prominent intergenerational difference we observe is a reduction in the rate of marriage. Members of generation Y were married far less often in the age period we observe than their parents in generation X were at this age. While 65% of generation X women were married in 2006, in 2021 the equivalent share among generation Y had fallen to just 46%. The percentage of married Y men is even smaller. In generation Y, only 34% of men were married by the age of 40, while in generation X the percentage was 52%.
- This trend towards not marrying, or marrying later, is also related to generation Y's fewer children. In our data, every adult living in a household with at least one dependent child is considered a parent. While in generation X, 74% of women and 50% of men are categorised as parents, in generation Y, at the same age, the percentages of parents are lower: 65% of women and 43% of men.
- Lastly, we compare households' material means across the generations. We compare data that depicts a household's financial situation, such as whether households could afford a week's holiday away from home, meat every other day, a car or a computer, and how well they managed to make ends meet on their salaries. Our analysis shows that, in all of these observed budget indicators, generation Y is unequivocally better off than generation X. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that these differences in material means are not solely the result of improvements in individual household financial situations, but also reflect external improvements, including real economic growth, higher salaries, improved productivity, and the long-term low rate of unemployment in the Czech Republic.