Digital education: schools lack money and MoEYS does not perform its key tasks

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The Supreme Audit Office (SAO) has examined measures and projects that were supposed to support the development of digital education in primary and secondary schools between 2011 and 2018. After five years since the adoption of the Strategy for Digital Education, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) has not set up a standard of key skills for ICT learners. The development of digital education is also a challenge for its funding, which is highly dependent on EU funds.

From 2011 to mid-2018, schools received more than CZK 22 billion from EU funds. For example, under OP Education for Competitiveness, primary and secondary schools received CZK 5.5 billion for which they acquired, in particular, ICT equipment. Given the focus of the OP, the schools, however, had to sponsor ICT purchases by creating more than 1.8 million digital learning materials. They were often of poor quality, duplicated content, and were rarely used. Such support was thus ineffective, according to the SAO.

Moreover, the EU funds do not provide a stable long-term source of funding. After the end of the programming period, schools may face a funding gap for both ICT procurement and management. Schools can only use part of the funds for the purchase of ICT from the state budget. Between 2013 and 2019, schools have had a total of between CZK 1 000 and 1 136 per pupil per year. However, most of these funds had to be used for other necessary expenditure. According to the MoEYS's analysis from 2017, schools would need a rise of CZK 500 per pupil per year to acquire ICT. However, the funding of the regional education system failed to be increased.

Projects and measures concerned with the digital education aimed at the development of digital literacy of pupils and teachers, expansion of digital services in schools, and the improvement of ICT equipment of schools. In the framework of the Strategy for Digital Education by 2020, the MoEYS planned 43 activities and the SAO examined 18 of them. The key ones have still not been met by the Ministry. It has neither identified what knowledge pupils should gain and what competences teachers should have, nor it has provided educational material for pupils or teachers or further training for teachers.

In the course of the audit, the SAO also carried out a survey at schools and an analysis of statistical data of the MoEYS to illustrate the situation. The survey and the analysis have also shown that the main obstacle to the development of digital education in primary and secondary schools is the lack of resources for the exchange, administration, and purchase of new technologies for which schools have difficulty in finding resources.

The analysis of the data has shown that while there are enough computers in secondary schools, the situation in primary schools is worse. There are 6.5 pupils per one computer at primary schools and four pupils per one computer at secondary ones, which is the optimum number of pupils per computer also according to the MoEYS. The survey has also showed that 80 % of computers at schools are more than three years old.

Visualisation of the full results of the SAO survey can be found here: https://bit.ly/2Yvu8KT