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**Abstract**

This paper examines the characteristics of students admitted to Russian universities with different levels of selectivity. First, we argue that students differ not only by the results of the Unified State Exam (USE), the university entrance exam, but by family and school characteristics, and by educational strategies. Next, it is shown that the probability of being admitted to the most selective HEIs is determined not only by the USE scores, but by characteristics that are not directly related to the applicants' abilities, such as class specialisation in secondary schools, and high school location. Moreover, we have found that income has an indirect impact on the admission results: a higher level of income increases the probability of being admitted to highly selective universities through the level of investment in pre-entry coaching and the regional differences in wages. On the other hand, regional differences in costs of living decrease the opportunities of studying in selective universities. Hence, schooling and financial barriers without alternative student support can limit the participation of less affluent students in selective universities.(HRK / Abstract übernommen)