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# KATA HAMAR

*Traditional arts and crafts  
To keep away early dropout*



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Early school leaving is rightly considered as one of the major challenges in education policy. The EU objective of reducing the share of early leavers to below 10% of young people aged 18 to 24 was first adopted as a part of the Lisbon strategy and has been retained as one of the headline targets of Europe 2020. The first chapter of the TACKED guide book aims to provide insights into the processes influencing early leaving from education or training. It also gives details about the statistical data concerning dropout rates in Hungary and a brief description of the different school types in our country. In the process of analysing the problem the EU definition of early school leaving is used henceforward: a failure to complete upper secondary education or a failure to gain qualifications or school leaving certificates.



Early school leaving is a considerable problem both for the individual and the family, as well as for the school and the whole society. Early school leavers are more likely to become unemployed, require different social supports and services, become dependent on government social programs, commit crimes, and live in poverty and are excluded from society. In addition to this, the number of jobs requiring only low qualification is continuously decreasing both in the EU and in Hungary; and due to rapid technical and technological development, labour market needs more and more highly qualified employees. Early school leaving is thus not only one of the biggest challenges facing education policy but also a highly

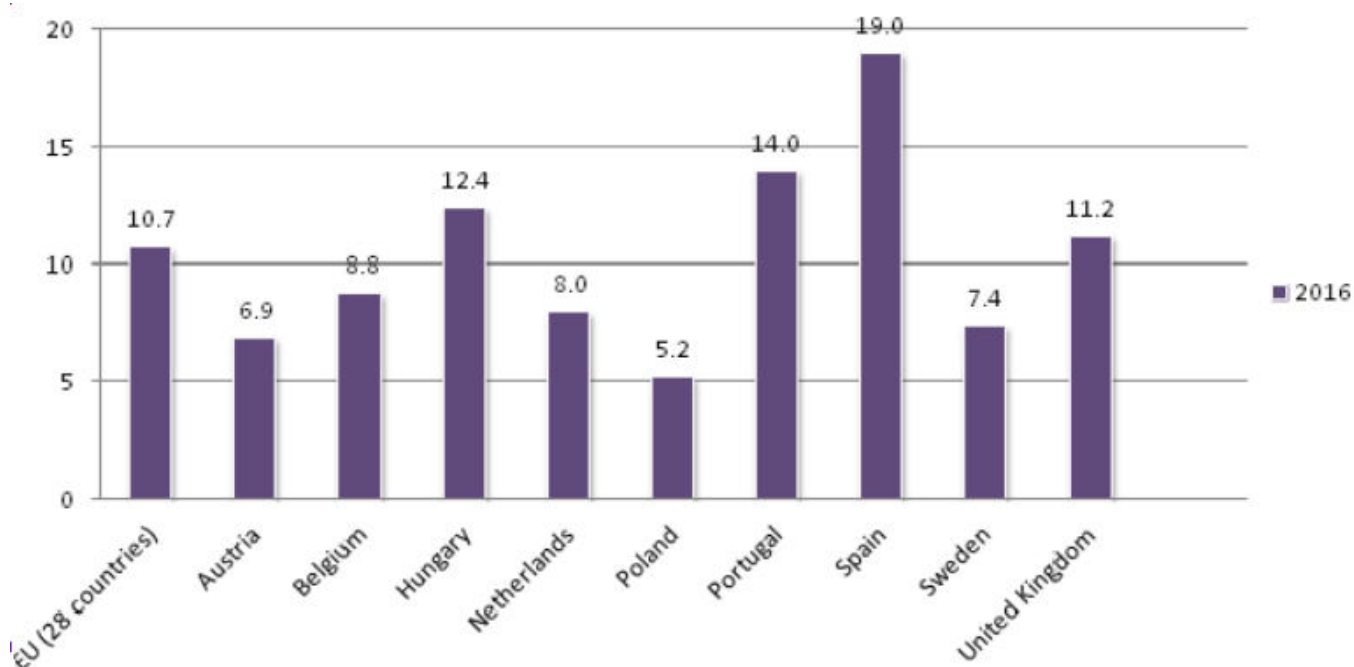
charged economic and political issue. The missing national incomes, missing taxes for state services, increased need for social services and maintenance, increasing crime ratio and deviant behaviour, decreasing political and civil participation in the life of the country, decreasing generation mobility, worse health conditions form a huge financial burden, which might lead to social tension. That is why all countries consider youngsters' successful adaptation as well as the decrease of school dropout a national issue.



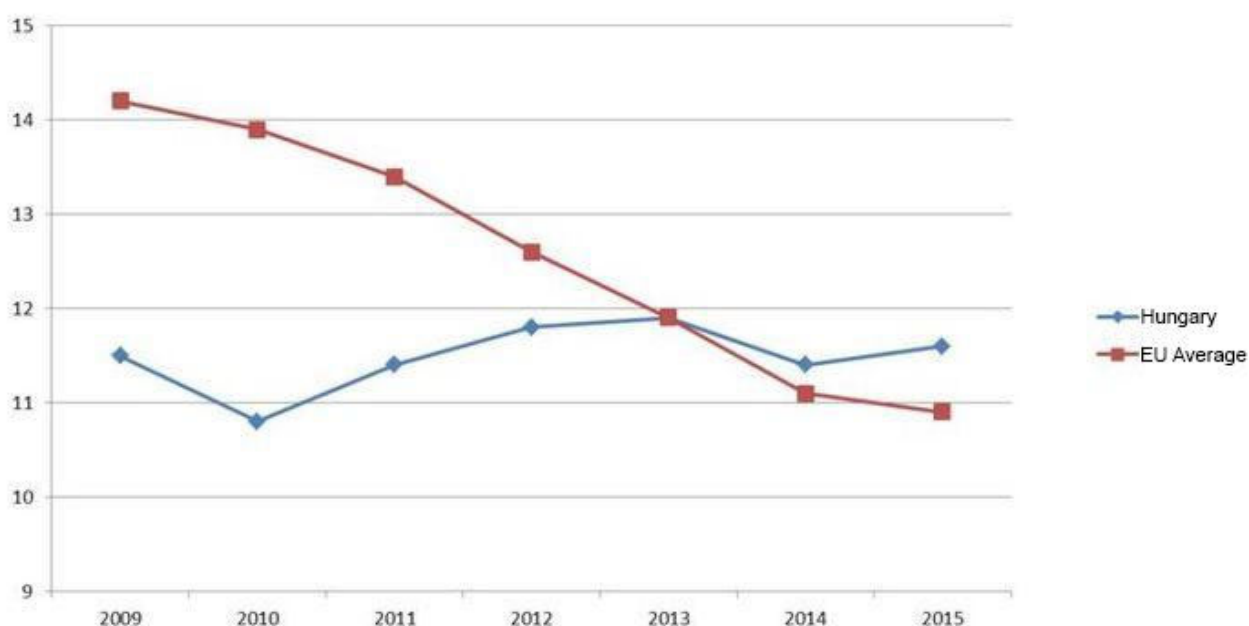
Early school leaving is a statistical measure expressing a percentage of the people aged 18 to 24 who received no education or training in the four weeks prior to the survey. The statistical indicator is then calculated by dividing the number of early leavers from education and training, as defined above, by the total population of the same age group. The primary source of calculating school drop-out statistics is the Hungarian education information database (KIR). The official estimation method of early leaving from education and training in Hungary has for many years followed the simple rule of deducting the number of students completing a certain programme from the number of students who started the same programme x years earlier. This method does not account for factors such as grade-repetition, new entrants in the programme or between-school mobility. This indicator could therefore, only be used as a very rough proxy of early school leaving statistics.

The average ESL rate for all EU member states in 2016 was 10.7 per cent which means that slightly more than 1 in 10 young people in Europe are early school leavers. EU countries differ significantly in terms of the national rates of ESL. In 2016 it was only around 3-5% for countries such as Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, and as high as approx. 20% in Spain, Iceland and Malta.

The chart below shows the rate of ESL in 2016 in nine EU countries: Austria, Belgium, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.



In Hungary, early school dropout is a current problem; however, the ratio of it must be under 10% by 2020 according to the EU strategy. While the EU's average dropout rate was 10.6 in 2017, Hungary currently ranks in 7th place with 12.6 percent. As the yearly statistics have revealed, Hungary has seen an increase of about 0.4 percent since 2012. Hungary loses 10 thousand young people annually due to their inability to complete their education. These students pose a huge burden to the social system because they won't be able to find proper jobs.



Different regions in Hungary are differently concerned in early school leaving. The most endangered region is North Hungary, where the ratio of ESL has increased up to 15 per cent in the last 10 years. This region is followed by the North Plain and South Transdanubian regions, where the rate of early school leavers is between 10-15%. The best data are from South Plain and West Transdanubian regions, where the ratio of school dropouts was lower than 10 per cent; which is better than the EU average.

In the 2017-18 school year, the most affected school districts were Ozd and Záhony—both of which showed a dropout rate of 36 percent. According to the Educational Authority (Oktatási Hivatal), 20 percent of students in the counties of Kemeecse, Nyíradony, and Mezőcsát performed below the national average as a result of poor grade performance. The risk of student dropout is the highest in the eastern part of the country in places like Nógrád, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén; meanwhile, the top performing schools are located in Pest and Győr-Moson-Sopron. In the last year alone, 18.8 thousand students needed to repeat the grade. This number—though slightly lower than the previous—still makes up 2.5 percent of all teenagers in public education.

In Hungary, secondary education is divided into three levels, which show significant correlation with students' socio-economic background. Examining the different school types it can be stated that there are powerful differences between them. Although dropout can be seen in primary education as well, the highest ratio of early school leaving can be found in vocational education, especially in the one that does not provide general final examination (the so-called Hungarian *érettségi vizsga*). Taking into consideration the dropout ratio in the 3-year vocational education, it is 46.9 percentage.

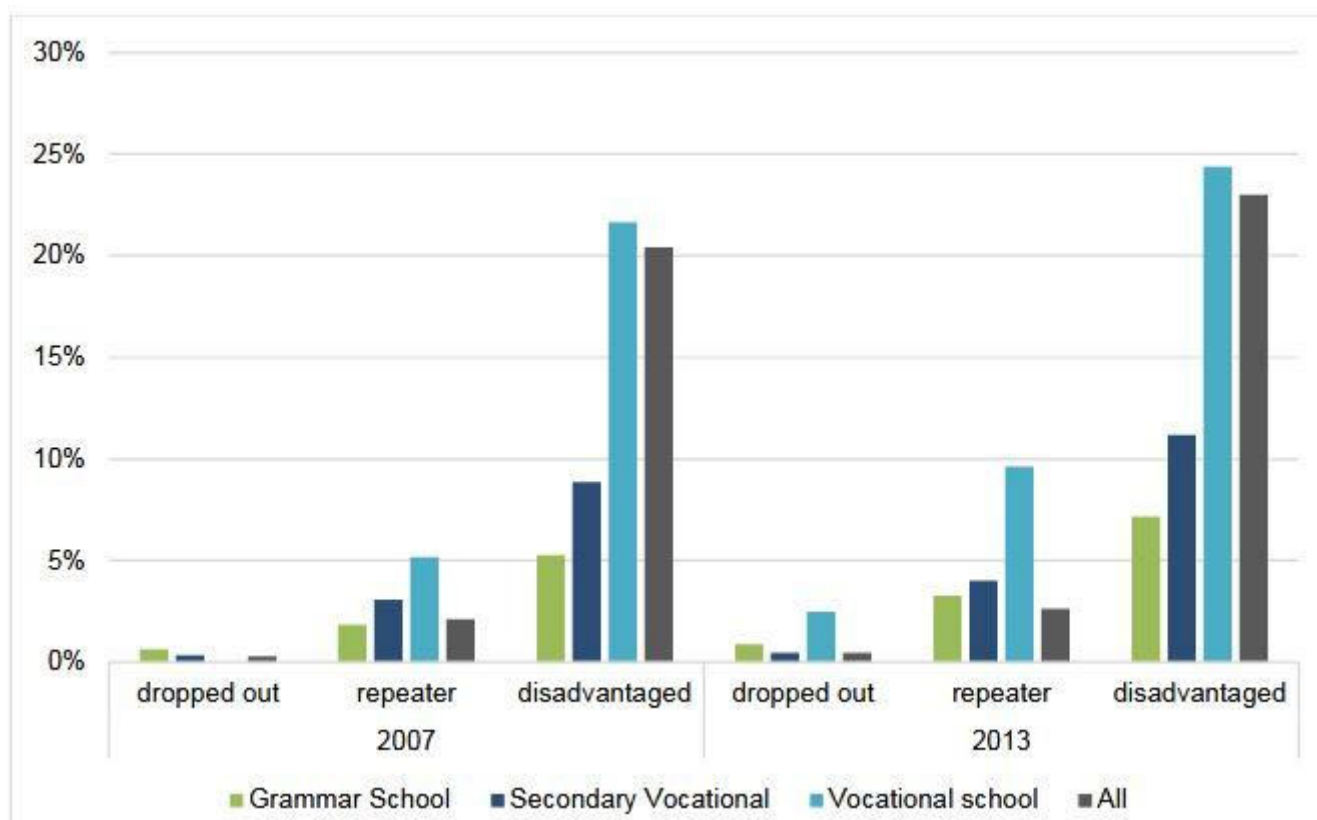
		Grammar school	Secondary vocational	Vocational school	Special vocational	All
2007	dropped out	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	grade-repeaters	1.84%	3.07%	5.16%	4.30%	2.10%
	disadvantaged	5.27%	8.86%	21.63%	27.34%	20.42%
2010	dropped out	0.64%	0.33%	0.90%	1.29%	0.29%
	grade-repeaters	2.72%	3.71%	8.60%	6.94%	2.57%
	disadvantaged	8.32%	14.00%	30.00%	33.00%	27.23%
2012	dropped out	1.21%	0.53%	1.72%	3.50%	0.41%
	grade-repeaters	3.40%	4.02%	10.87%	8.40%	2.87%
	disadvantaged	8.98%	14.26%	29.00%	29.18%	26.78%
2013	dropped out	0.88%	0.45%	2.49%	3.91%	0.46%
	grade-repeaters	3.27%	4.01%	9.61%	6.69%	2.63%
	Disadvantaged*	7.16%	11.17%	24.38%	23.98%	22.85%

Upon completion of the primary school eighth grade, pupils can choose from the following school types:

- grammar schools (gimnázium) last for eight, six or four years (elementary school pupils can transfer to grammar schools at three different grades) and their curriculum comprises only of general education content (no vocational content). Students finishing a grammar school receive a secondary school leaving certificate entitling them for entering a tertiary education institution.
- secondary vocational schools (szakközépiskola): Vocational education content is taught parallel to the general education content. Upon completion of the fourth year, students receive a so-called ‘vocational secondary school leaving certificate’ and a certificate that qualifies them for working in at least one occupation in the sector of their training. At this stage, students are free to choose between pursuing a shortened (usually one year-long) post-secondary vocational track and entering the tertiary education;
- vocational schools (szakiskola): Vocational schools offer a shorter, three-year-long programme in which students start learning the vocational content already in the first year. In addition, the share of general education content within the whole programme has been reduced to one third from one half. Upon completion of a vocational school, students attain a vocational certificate. In case of those students who wish to enter tertiary education, they can complete a two-year long programme providing them with the necessary secondary school leaving certificate.



- special vocational schools (speciális szakiskola) or special skills development vocational schools are designed for children in need of special educational needs due to mental or other disabilities. Students finishing this school type obtain a vocational examination.



For a long time, the problem of early school leaving was seen purely in psychological terms and attributed to the shortcomings of the individual. This is now an outdated view, since it ignores possible shortcomings in structural provisions (such as the lack of support in the early stages) and the responsibility of school as an institution. To anticipate who might be more at risk of leaving school early, various risk and protective factors should be analysed in order to understand what increases or decreases the probability of ESL.







Risk and protective factors of ESL can be examined at different levels, such as:

- the level related to the individual and his/her socio-demographic characteristics,
- presented behaviours, attitudes, as well as family features and their overall family situation;
- institutional level associated with school and other educational institutions, including their organisation, school climate and culture,
- education system, the educational institutions in a given country, including the existing strategies, educational policies and under-taken educational reforms, as well as the elements of the education system

such as the length of compulsory schooling; the age at which tracking between vocational and academic path-ways takes place; flexibility of education programmes.

When talking about risk factors and protective factors, it is important to keep in mind their cumulative character. What puts a youngster at risk of early school leaving is not a single factor but the accumulation or series of various risk factors. Additionally, the relationship between risk factors and the final outcome does not work on a cause-and-effect basis. This means that having one at-risk characteristic or even many risk factors does not indicate that a young person will definitely leave school early, but only increases its probability. ESL is often preceded by a longer process of gradual distancing from the school, which might be accompanied by truancy, periods of worse academic performance, and low school involvement.

The profiles of young people who do not continue in education and training vary. While some experience difficult personal situations that lead them to quitting education early, others are similar to those who eventually persist in education. The table below identifies six profiles of early leavers and learners at risk of early leaving. These profiles illustrate how different risk factors can interact and lead to early leaving.

<p>Learners escaping the system</p> 	<p>They are not radically different from other students. Their education performance is average or below average and they have low future education aspirations. Education is not major interest: they need motivation and encouragement to raise their aspirations.</p>
<p>Learners confronting the system</p> 	<p>Still in education and training but with high levels of absenteeism, low interest in education and training and gaps in basic skills, which is an obstacle for further progression. They need a combination of motivational activities and remedial training.</p>
<p>Learners disengaging due to difficulties adapting after transition</p> 	<p>They are starting to disengage during the transition period from one track to another. They have difficulties adapting to new work rhythms; they have inaccurate programme expectations and do not mix well with the group. They need support to engage fully in the programme.</p>
<p>Learners disengaging because they cannot find a placement of their choice</p> 	<p>Typically this can happen due to lack of placements in apprenticeship or a particular VET programme, lack of information and guidance or a combination of unrealistic expectations and lack of work-readiness. They need to be reoriented towards a more suitable track, possibly a bridging programme.</p>
<p>Learners who had to leave education and training because of caring, parenting or working obligations</p> 	<p>They are not interested in education but need a source of income or have other duties. Even if they see the relevance of education and training, external circumstances make it hard for them to enrol (e.g. lack of childcare). They need solutions that enable combining working and learning, possibly with support from social services.</p>
<p>Learners combining multiple disadvantage, possibly facing health and psycho-social issues</p> 	<p>They ended up leaving education and training for various reasons. They need complex support of which education and training is only a part.</p>

Family is one of the most significant indicators contributing to early school leaving. The socio-economic status of the family has a fundamental influence on school dropout: children from low-income families are 2.4 more likely to leave education than their middle class peers. Students whose families receives social maintenance are more likely to drop out of school when starting secondary education.

Large, dysfunctional and poor families have problems providing adequate clothing for all their children and sometimes require child labour (in the fields or in the household often to help with younger siblings). Most often students who drop out come from families where the parents themselves did not spend more than eight years in school. Siblings' educational example is also an influential factor in early dropout: families in which elder siblings have left school early often see the younger ones do the same. Dysfunctional families almost always lead to children dropping out of school. Tribulations like divorce, alcoholism and domestic violence can often presage school dropout. Demotivating factors like prostitution, membership of street gangs or of beggars' networks particularly apply when a child is moving from low secondary to senior high school or at the beginning of senior high school. Making money through unskilled work, bar work, prostitution or begging almost always results in early school dropout.

Early school leaving generally happens in secondary education. Adolescence is a period of time that can be described by huge behavioural, cognitive and emotional changes. At this age, a significant decrease in engagement towards school and learning can be seen, as peers become students' references: they follow them in communication, behaviour, and decisions.



At the community level the early marriage custom and having a child at an early age are influential factors of dropout especially in rural communities. In some communities teachers are afraid to interact with parents because of the high crime rate and this lack of cooperation between teachers and parents can increase dropout risks.

Besides family, the other significant factor of early school leaving is school. Failures that are experienced in the early period of school career may become the starting point of a negative spiral, which usually start in primary school and get stronger through years. Early non-success has several background causes, such as parents could not provide enough support for their children; teachers did not have suitable competencies to be able to help their students. Another important school factor is the quality of teacher-student relationship. Students who experience a bad relationship with their teachers are more likely to drop out than students who report a warm relationship.

School culture is also related to early school leaving as teachers have an important social capital for their students. Physical environment of the school has an influence on early school leaving: in schools that were clean and neat and better equipped lower ratio of dropout could be identified.

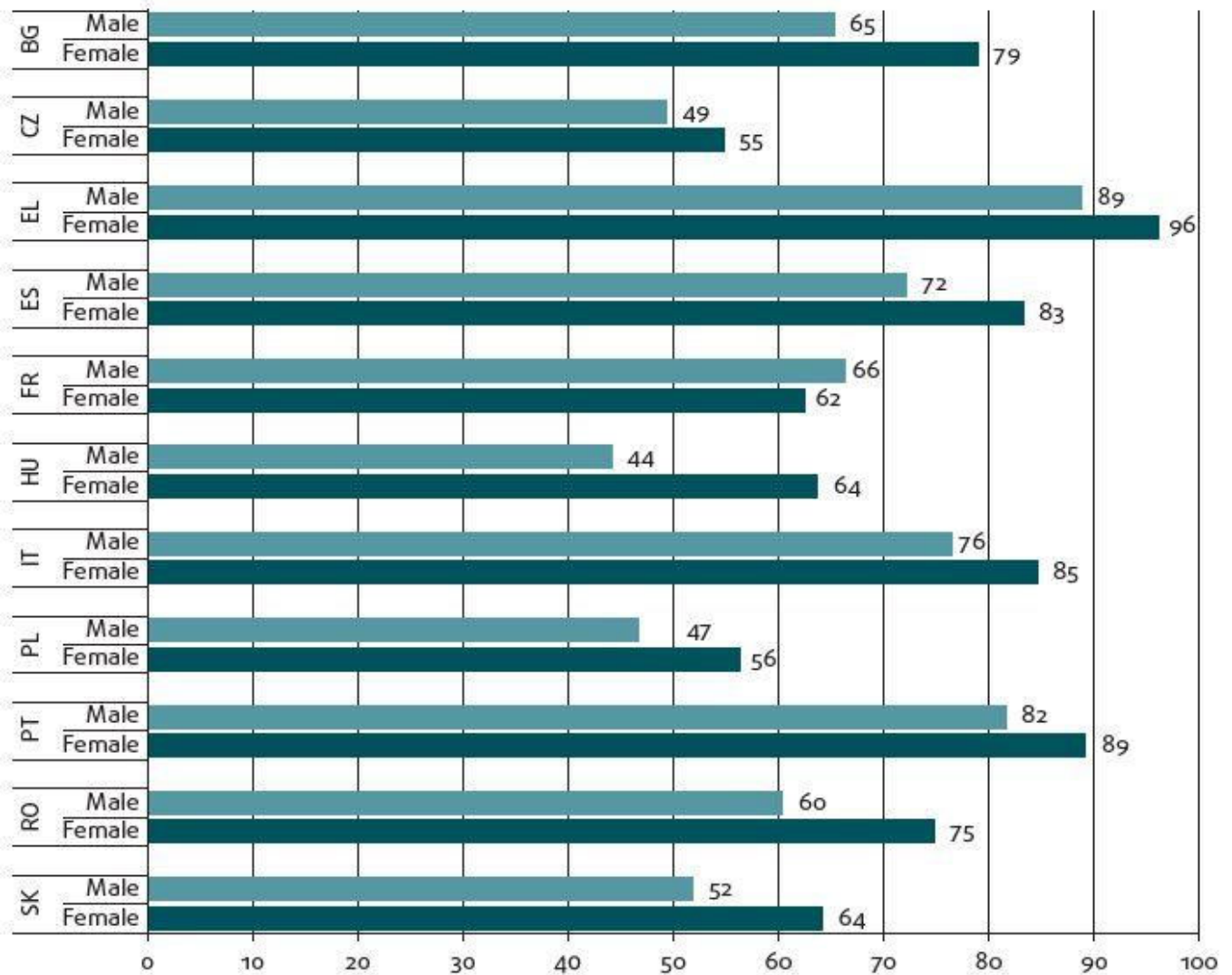


In 2013-2015, in Hungary and in two other countries, Slovenia and Serbia, a huge project, named CroCoos was running focusing on early school leaving. Participant of the project identified six fundamental factors leading to school dropout: absenteeism, grade repetition, deteriorating achievement, boredom, behavioural problems, bullying, violence and school harassment. Absenteeism was found to be the most important early distress signal. The practice of grade repetition significantly leads to dropout but seems to be problematic and contradictory. It is actually thought to be a punishment for student's under achievement; however, it is a costly way of it. These students stay longer in education with a higher possibility of not accomplishing school and not obtaining a certificate.

Sometimes big differences between primary and secondary school expectations can be detected. Skills that were not learnt during the primary school can hardly be acquired on secondary level, and have a negative effect on students' achievements. The lack of key competencies leads to school failures which turn the person to be unmotivated and eventually to drop out of school.

Students at risk often display certain behaviour, such as aggression towards teachers or peers, a too intense or a too shy temper, which is in close connection with dropping out. Frustration that can derive from a long time school failure, lack of success or negative feedbacks from teachers may lead to behaviour problems. Although bullying on a certain level is thought to be the part of normal school life, it may end in isolation and exclusion of some students. The feeling of loneliness and humiliation can quickly lead to alienation from school and then dropping out.

The figure below summarises the results of school leaving rates of Roma population in the countries of Europe. According to this Roma pilot survey 2011 the vast majority of Roma aged 18-24 leave education without obtaining a vocational or general upper secondary qualification and therefore lack an essential condition to stable participation in the labour market. The percentage of early school leavers among Roma aged 18-24 is 82% in Hungary. Roma students drop out already at the admission stage or during the vocational or upper secondary school education. This may be because of difficulties in accessing such schools, which may be far enough away from their homes to require frequent commuting.



Poor Roma families may also not have adequate financial means to support their children’s further education. Other important factors include the low quality of primary education in schools attended by Roma, low attainment in primary school, early marriage and childbirth, the need to contribute to household income, and Roma parents’ worries about the safety of their children, especially their daughters. Survey results show that two thirds of the Roma respondents who attended school stopped their education before the age of 16, the age that marks the end of compulsory schooling in Hungary. When looking at the gender differences, we can see that Roma women are more likely to leave school at an early age than Roma men as they stop education before the age of 16 by 20 percentage points more than men.

Timely interventions to prevent early leaving are crucial. Learners at risk present distress signs before they actually leave school; if these signs are detected in time, there are more chances of retaining young people with relatively simple interventions, making it possible to get better results with fewer resources. Once learners drop out, and the longer they stay outside education and training, the more difficult it is to rejoin former classmates and the higher the chances that they will be involved in other activities, such as low-wage employment.

Policies and measures to tackle early leaving from education and training are more likely to succeed if they acknowledge the different factors that can influence it and are tailored to the specific profiles of young people at risk of leaving education and training prematurely. Schools play an important role in addressing ESL but they cannot and should not work in isolation. Therefore, the establishment of 'professional communities' are crucially important in this struggle. The members of the so-called TACKED project intend to work as a cross-institutional, interdisciplinary team. It is believed that our work experience in different fields may put the question of dropout in a new light meanwhile generating ideas in the process of cooperation.



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