



**center
for education
policy**

***School dropouts -
reasons and consequences***

Monitoring of the OSI related Centers for Education Policy

**National Report
2005**

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Introduction

Education is in the life of every person the key factor determining future opportunities for a successful and fulfilling life. Insufficient education on the other hand takes such chances away. Education plays a key role also on the life of a society since it is the basic prerequisite of developing an open democratic society. Increasing number of people with low education very likely contributes to general instability of a country which is less able to compete with skilled labor force on global markets. School failure and social inequality harm stability of any country or region.

The phenomenon of school dropouts is considered to be a serious societal problem in most European countries. It is the reason of growing gap in education level of citizens in many postcommunist countries in which the number of people with low education and limited skills required by the labor market increases. Not only the increasing number of people with low education, but also increasing requirements of today's society make the issue of school dropouts a growing social problem. Quality and life-long education are key words for successful life in today's society. Therefore young people leaving school with low or no qualification stand little chances at finding a good job in today's increasingly technological, scientific and information age.

The issue of school dropouts seems to be an important topic also in Slovakia, although it has been rather underserved so far. Therefore the Center for Education Policy at the Orava Association for Democratic Education decided to participate in the international monitoring of school dropouts that was part of the initiative and cooperation of a number of partner organizations from various countries. Apart from Slovakia, further six countries were involved. These were Albania, Latvia, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Tajikistan. The Initiative was supported by the Open Society Institute in Budapest.

The first question of cooperating centers was the level on which the issue of school dropouts should be predominantly studied. Based on the discussions and agreements, the monitoring focuses on the level of primary education as the key prerequisite for continuing to study and reach qualification enabling success on the labor market and life in general.

The goal of the monitoring was to identify the depth of the problem on the level of basic education, to evaluate the content and implementation of the existing legislation, real impact of various factors, develop recommendations for education policy and increase awareness of the issue in Slovakia. As part of the monitoring, definitions and understandings of this phenomenon in Slovakia and abroad were studied, existing preventive measures analysed and questionnaires administered on a sample of 253 children aged 12 to 16, their parents and teachers in five locations around in Slovakia, these being Bratislava and area, Rimavska Sobota and area, Presov and area, Martin and area and the Dolny Kubin area. This research focused mainly on studying various factors contributing to young people leaving school system too early and factors helping to prevent it.

The national report offers summary of findings and results of research and analysis. It is to serve as the basis for further discussions about this important topic and about possible ways to help the problem.

Legislation, regulations and structures

1. Society and undereducated people

In most cases it is a combination of school and personal factors that lead to dropping out of school of a child. It seems to be an especially serious problem among youth with learning disabilities, behavioral and emotional instability. It is often related to various social, geographical, ethnic, economic, school, family or personal circumstances.

Educators around the world have been working on developing programs supporting young people to achieve primary education and continue to study. For the development of effective programs it is however important to have information and studies about the school dropout phenomenon. Although it is difficult to know the exact percentage of children leaving the school system early, it is possible to study trends in society and over time. According to the World Bank data, approximately 20 per cent of sources assigned to education is used to children repeating a grade or those who left school. The society will have to invest in these individuals also in the future. At the moment, the percentage of early school leavers is not monitored regularly in many countries of central and eastern Europe. Early school leavers index is however one of the sixteen qualitative indices in the report on quality of education system in European Union documents.

Education influences greatly the access and position of an individual on the labor market as well as the possibilities of the society to fight poverty. In 2004 as many as 51.1% of Slovakia's unemployed had only finished primary education, 20.5% of unemployed had vocational education and 19.6% graduated from secondary school with a narrow professional specialization¹. This is reflected also on the high number of unemployed among young people up to 25 years of age when the youth unemployment ratio in Slovakia is much higher than on most EU countries.

Table: Unemployment rate²

	2002			2003		
	EU 25	EU 15	SR	EU 25	EU 15	SR
Total unemployment rate	8.8	7.7	18.7	9,1	8.1	17.4
Unemployment rate among youth up to 25 years of age	17.9	15.1	37.6	18.3	15.8	32.9

Connection between education and successful realization on the labor market can be documented on further data coming from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. The data indicates that the highest annual increase in average unemployment in 2004 according to education level was recorded in the group of people with primary education and vocational education.

¹ Statistical Office of SR, www.statistics.sk

² Structural indicators Eurostat in: Joint Memorandum on Inclusion, www.employment.sk

Table: Unemployment rate according to education in percentage³

	2002	2003	2004
Primary	45.6	47.6	51.1
Vocational	20.7	19.5	20.5
Secondary without diploma	19.3	19.1	19.6
Vocational with diploma	17.5	14.4	16.8
Completed general secondary	17.7	16.8	14.2
Completed specialized secondary	13.9	12.4	12.5
Higher specialized	7.6	8.9	11.1
University 1st degree	19.4	13	5.4
University 2nd degree	4.1	4.6	5.6
University 3rd degree	3.1	-	-

Slovakia continues to be defined by regional differences including the level of education. Regions with traditionally high unemployment are at the same time regions with neative education structure of people seeking employment. This can be documented by further data provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic according to which a high percentage of unemployed in 2004 were in Presov region (38.2%), in Kosice region (38.0%) and Banska Bystrica region (37.2%).

Table: Unemployment level according to regions in 2004⁴

Region	Total in thousands of people	Ration in Slovakia in %	Unemployment level in %
Bratislava	27,0	5,6	8,2
Trnava	36,0	7,5	12,5
Trenčín	25,4	5,3	8,6
Nitra	71	14,8	20,3
Žilina	57,9	12,0	17,5
Banska Bystrica	86,8	18,1	26,6
Prešov	85,4	17,8	22,9
Košice	91,3	19,0	25,2
Total	480,7	100	18,1

According to the information of the Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, in 2004 most inmates (36%) had secondary education degree, 33% primary education and 19.4% have not completed primary education. More than 8% of inmates had full secondary education, 2% of all were illeterate and 1% had a university degree.⁵

The ability of the Slovak education system to prepare young people for labor marker, what is one of its most important roles, does not seem to be adequate. As many as 4/5 of students attend secondary vocational schools and vocational schools that prepare for working in industry, despite the fact that the role of industry is diminishing. On the other hand only 17% of secondary school students attend general grammar schools (gymnazia) offering general education and preparing for university.⁶ Continuing challenge of the education system in Slovakia is the

³ Statistical Office of SR, www.statistics.sk

⁴ Statistical Office of SR, www.statistics.sk

⁵ Slovak Ministry of Justice, www.justice.gov.sk

⁶ Joint Memorandum on Inclusion, www.employment.gov.sk

transition from stressing theory to focusing on its practical use in everyday life, especially on the labor market. Labor market and today's society require that school graduates be flexible, speak foreign languages and skilled in information technologies. It is important that the education system support flexibility of schools and educational institutions to react to these needs.

Another big challenge of Slovakia is the status of Roma minority that belong to the marginalized groups because of various reasons. Poverty is higher in rural areas than in the cities, since there is a lack of functioning social networks there. The areas with the highest percentage of Roma population equal those regions with highest level of unemployment.⁷ According to the UNDP study (Avoiding the Dependency Trap, 2002) the situation of Roma minority is especially difficult because it represents a social group with the highest risk of poverty and their socio-economic status is often „inherited” from one generation to another. Approximately 18% of Slovakia's unemployed are of Roma nationality and at the same time social benefits and other forms of state support are the main source of income for almost 70% of Roma households.⁸ Despite the fact that this support reacts to the socio-economic needs of the Roma families, it does not provide sufficient motivation for finishing primary education and for continuing to study.

According to official data as many as 76.7 per cent of economically active citizens of Roma nationality have finished only primary education and 3.7% has no school degree. According to the data of UNDP the ratio of incomplete primary education among Roma children increased in Slovakia from 46% in 1976 to 63% in 1999.⁹ A large part of Roma children go to special schools for mentally handicapped and many reports and analysis indicate that they are enrolled there unjustly. This proves to be a certain way of „pushing out“ of Roma children from the standard education system influencing their educational path and opportunities for the rest of their lives.

Roma children are 30 times more likely to drop out of primary school and 14 times more likely to repeat a grade at least once than the rest of the school children.¹⁰ Roma children face in real life unequal access to education which hurts their position on the labor market. Save the Children report from 2001 indicates that the level of school dropout among Roma children is so high that the percentage of secondary school graduates from among the Roma minority is only around 1%.¹¹

When asked if Slovakia had a problem with school dropouts or early school leaving, approached representatives of institutions and organizations dealing with related issues, reacted followingly:

Yes, people with incomplete primary education can not later when they are older complete or increase their qualification (vocational education diploma, secondary school leaving exam). Because of this they are practically unemployable and that disadvantages them in society in general.

PhDr. Nora Lepejová, director of School Psychology Center in Martin

It exists, especially among the Roma and students from socially disadvantaged environment. In general however, this problem is not so serious.

Mgr. Miriam Trupková, coordinator of crime prevention – Regional Municipal Office in Nitra

⁷ Šranková, Higo, Lafuente, 2004.

⁸ UNDP, 2002

⁹ Joint Memorandum on Inclusion, www.employment.gov.sk

¹⁰ Lacko, Koptová, 1991.

¹¹ Save the Children, 2001.

Mgr. František Šinka, CSc., Secretary of the Slovak Government's Office for crime prevention

Yes, this fact however is not sufficiently medialized from our point of view by professional or general public. It is needed to seriously study the issue and find practical solutions – legislative supported by active participation of the whole social net – state as well as public institutions.

Mgr. Mariana Revúsová, Director of Labor, Social Affairs and Family Office in Martin

We asked also about their opinions on the factors leading to dropping out of school.

We consider for the main reasons to be

- a) Insufficient upbringing in the family,*
- b) Lengthy problem solution because of administrative difficulties at the departments of social and legal protection and prevention of the Labor, Social Affairs and Family offices,*
- c) High unemployment in many regions of Slovakia. Because of lack of jobs many parents (especially fathers) leave for work to distant parts of the country or abroad and they have almost no time for their children from the position of their authority. In worse case parents see no outcome, they turn to alcohol even theft, children are getting used to this environment and take these negative elements for „standard“.*

Mgr. Miriam Trupková, coordinator of crime prevention – Regional Municipal Office in Nitra
Mgr. František Šinka, CSc., Secretary of the Slovak Government's Office for crime prevention

Little supportive social environment of a great part of notsucceeding students, negative impact of the society including the media (friends, TV, aggressive behavior of students in school, people on the streets, in the shops, mass transportation etc.), weak differentiation of education process, preferring frontal teaching to working in pairs, groups and individual work, neglecting individual approach to students, overloading students by knowledge, weakly developed skills of students in the area of assertive behavior, facing one's own weaknesses, focus of the Slovak school system on knowledge outcomes instead of supporting the ability to apply knowledge in practice and balances development of students' personality, absence of research and experiments in this area, the school is not a place where students feel good, students don't like to go to school.

Alžbeta Bernátová, State Pedagogical Institute, Bratislava

One of the main reasons of children's failure in school is especially social environment of the student (dysfunctional family, work overloading of parents, low educational and qualificational level of parents, disinterest in child ...). Another reason is insufficient cooperation between school and family, consequently problems of students are not dealt with in the beginning when solution is possible, but often the problem is discovered only when it is too late to solve it. Classrooms are too full, it is not possible to use individual approach to students. The teacher is often unable to manage student discipline in class and turns to bad grades or bad grade for behavior often leading to grade repetition. It happens then that a 14 – 15 year old student sits in class with co-students younger by 2 or 3 years, terrorizes students as well as the teachers and makes no efforts to learn anything in school, improve grades or achieve higher education.

PhDr. Nora Lepejová, Director of the School Psychology Center in Martin

Social factors (student's environment) is not considered, cooperation and coordination between school psychology center – councillor – teacher – parent – student is insufficient, curricula overloaded, emphasis is on encyclopaedic knowledge, school gives little space for individual approach, teachers often redirect their responsibility (in case of grade repetition),

rules for children with learning difficulties are not followed, issue of grade repetition is being dealt with formally.

Ing. Dana Weichselgärtner, PhD., State School Inspectorate, Žilina

Incomplete family, neglected upbringing, financial situation, abuse in family...

A. Tomčániová – Primary School M.C. Sklodowskej, Bratislava

I explain early school leaving as a result of insufficient family support and influence of parents on their children.

Ing. Ivan Dolinský, Vice Principal, Engineering Vocational School, Martin

One of the main reasons leading to students leaving primary education or failing to complete compulsory education is the family, economic situation of the family, personality predispositions of student. Family environment is from our point of view one of the most important factors able to positively or negatively influence personality, intellectual and professional orientation of each individual. In accordance with the family it is important to think about the environment and the way how free time of child is spent – influence of peers, various ethnical groups as well as various social pathological elements that often accompany this problem.

Mgr. Mariana Revúsová, Director of Labor, Social Affairs and Family Office in Martin

Despite the fact that the Slovak public in general does not perceive the problem of early school leaving as one of the „hot” issues, several measures have been recently taken in an attempt to limit the number of young people leaving schools early with low or no qualification. Since 2003 one of them is the measure introduced by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family according to which child benefits are ceased if child neglects school attendance. An amendment to the School Law in 2002 enabled introduction of zero or „preparatory“ grade in primary schools and of the position of teacher assistant as part of pedagogic staff.

Decree of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic enables as of May 1, 2004 that establishers of pre-school facilities and primary schools provide subsidies for food and school aids for children coming from families receiving financial aid. This is another measure aimed at protecting children from families with lowest incomes against insufficient nourishment in their decisive developmental stage and to create advantageous conditions for education. Motivational effect is incorporated in the system of paying stipends for primary school students while the amount depends on the school results of children.

Based on the Slovak Ministry of Education Decree on providing stipends to secondary school and special school students effective as of June 1, 2004, national project of providing secondary school stipends for students from families in which parents depend on financial aid has been started to be implemented. The goal of the national project cofinanced by the European Social Fund is to provide secondary school stipends as a mean to make access to education for students whose parents are financially dependent easier. Instrument to facilitate their access and increase their chances for future employment are the stipends. Stipends awarded can be used for financing costs related with school attendance – food, accommodation, travel expenses from home to school. A special goal of the project is motivate students whose parents receive financial aid to achieve better school results. The amount of the stipend is leveled in accordance with school results of students which motivates students to make efforts to achieve as good results as possible.

Slovakia’s joining to EU influence education strategy which was increasingly focused on new political and economic needs. One of the eminent areas needing support has been education

of the Roma minority. Efforts to improve the situation were focusing mainly on early childhood education, curriculum modification and introduction of the position of Roma teacher assistant.

With the aim to improve situation of the Roma minority, Office of Slovak Governmental Plenipotentiary for Roma community was established. Apart from other it began in 2003-2004 based on the Governmental Decree NO. 278/2003 to Basic Thesis of policy concept of the Slovak Government on Roma community integration to provide funds for the *Program of supporting Roma students of secondary schools and universities*. These funds are aimed at secondary schools, individuals and university students to facilitate the studies of talented Roma students from socially disadvantaged families. Aid relates to all schools that are part of the network of secondary schools including those offering state school leaving exam or not (vocational and practical schools), including higher specialized schools as well as universities.

Unequal access to education opportunities and a combination of political, institutional, socio-economic and personal factors lead to school failure of Roma children and their dropping out. The factors can be categorized as following¹²:

- *Socioeconomic Dimension*: The UNDP (2002) indicates that poverty is a major impediment to education. Parents cannot afford to provide their children with the basic items necessary for school—e.g. clothes or books. Roma children often go to school hungry: this makes learning for them very difficult. Miserable living conditions prevent children from preparing homework assignments. Their parents—often poorly educated themselves—are unable to help them in this regard. Roma children are frequently involved in income generating activities or care for younger siblings, or work in agricultural activities. Some marginalized areas in Slovakia show 100% unemployment, often referred to as famine valleys (SGI, 2002). For children living in these areas, school is a strange and formal institution distant from their home culture. The gap between Roma children and their peers becomes so wide that Roma children stay out of school just to avoid being permanently confronted with their own failures.

- *Socio-cultural and Discriminatory Dimensions*: Roma children's weak command of official languages—and the inability of the state to address this situation effectively— makes it hard for them to understand what they are being taught in school. Cultural differences with the majority of the population—once more, not appropriately addressed by schools— lead to a lack of self-confidence, lack of trust in the system on the part of Roma families, and a consequent alienation from the educational system. School dropouts are even a more serious problem among youth with learning disabilities or behavioral problems. Discrimination against the Roma has a dual nature: it is both a consequence of exclusion; as well as its primary cause. As suggested by UNDP (2002), early marriages and a high fertility rate at a young age; the fragmentation of the centralized educational system; the social fragmentation that occurred in the 1990s and the geographic segregation of Roma communities limit the access of Roma children to education. For instance, it is an institutionalized practice in many schools to place Roma children in separate classes from their non-Roma counterparts.

- *Regional inequality in the provision of education*: the Roma students also experience lack of schools and adequate infrastructure in areas where they live. They often live in very isolated communities with inadequate roads and almost no means of transportation. The need to commute to school becomes a financial burden, therefore limiting school attendance. Regions with a higher percentage of Roma population are also those regions with the lowest level of economic development. Socially and culturally excluded, Roma children are therefore less likely to stay in school. As well, teachers often lack adequate training in treating Roma pupils appropriately; therefore cannot help them to succeed in school.

¹² Šranková, Higo, Lafuente, 2004.

2. Compulsory education. Legislation and regulations related to compulsory education.

When it comes to the education system in Slovakia and changes that have taken place in the past decade, it is possible to characterize it by several trends. One of them is also the decrease in expenditures for education: Slovakia invests approximately only 4 % of its GDP in education. Since this fact is a subject of much criticism and generally school funding is considered to be inadequate, efforts to improve this situation have been often declared however so far not realized. In 2003 new School Financing Law was approved that apart from other introduced per capita funding as well as multisource school financing in an effort to increase funds available for schools. Insufficient funding of schools is connected also with awarding teachers for their work. Slovakia is in this area at the end of the list of 29 OECD countries.

Table: Public expenditures for education as a percentage of GDP¹³

Year	Percentage of GDP
1996	4.60
1997	4.30
1998	4.10
1999	4.00
2000	3.9
2001	4.1

The Slovak Constitution guarantees the right to education in stating that access to education is generally open for all citizens of the Slovak Republic. School attendance is compulsory for children between 6 to 16 and nobody can not be freed from this responsibility. It means that also a physically or other handicapped child must have ensured adequate education upon school enrollment, either in school or individually. The Slovak Constitution also guarantees national and ethnical minorities the right to education in mother tongue. Access to basic education is general. Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) in years from 1990 to 2002 gradually increased indicating improvement in access to education at almost all levels.

Table: Gross enrollment Rate (%)¹⁴

	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002
Preschool education	82	82	81	83
Primary education	103	103	103	101
Secondary education	85	87	87	89
Terciary education	26	29	30	32

Compulsory education is defined by Act No. 29/1984 on the system of primary and secondary schools (School Law) as amended by Act No. 188/1988 Coll, Act No. 171/1990 Coll., Act No. 522/1990 Coll., Act No. 230/1994 Coll., Act No. 231/1994 Coll., Act No. 6/1998 Coll., Act No. 5/1999 Coll., Act No. 229/2000 Coll, Act No. 216/2001 Coll, Act No. 416/2001 Coll.,

¹³ World Bank

¹⁴ UNESCO Institute of Statistics

Act No. 506/2001 Col., Act No. 334/2002 Col., Act No. 408/2002 Col., Act No. 553/2003 Coll., Act No. 596/2003 Coll., Act No. 207/2004 Coll. and Act No. 365/2004 Coll. At the moment a lot of discussions focus on the need to adopt a new school law and several drafts have been recently prepared however not approved. This currently valid several times amended law in its fifth part, article 34, defines the beginning, duration and fulfillment of compulsory education as follows:

(1) Compulsory education begins as a rule at the beginning of the school year following the day when child reaches sixth year of age. If child did not achieve school readiness upon reaching sixth year, state school administration body decides about their enrollment into the zero grade of primary school or about the deferral of school enrollment (article 5 paragraph 1 of the Act No. 279/1993 Coll. On school facilities as amended) by one school year based on a request of legal representative or based on recommendation of general practitioner for children and youth, counselling body (Article 21 and 23 of the Act No. 279/1993 Coll. as amended) or at the suggestion of pre-school principal if child attends it and always based on approval of the legal representative of child.

(2) If during the first school year of primary school child shows insufficient physical or mental maturity for school attendance, state school administration body may upon request of school principal and after having discussed it with legal representatives of child retroactively defer school enrollment by one year.

(3) Compulsory education lasts ten years and no longer that till the end of year in which child reaches 16 years of age, if this Act does not specify otherwise (Article 61a paragraph 1). Attending zero grade of primary school is considered as the first year of fulfillment compulsory education.

(4) For children education in special primary school, the start of compulsory education depends on assessment of school preparedness and the end of compulsory education by fulfillment of conditions of compulsory education. Conditions for assessing school preparedness will be set by a Decree of Ministry of Education.

Article 36 defines the duty to enroll in school and the responsibility for school attendance:

Legal representative of child, caretaker or citizen, or institution, responsible based on court decision for child's upbringing is obliged to enrolled school-aged child into school and see that child comes to school regularly and on time; their are further obliged to express opinion to child's secondary school application. If they register child for school club, they are obliged to see that child attends it regularly and comes in time.

As mentioned earlier since 2003 measure was introduced to stop child benefits in case child neglects school attendance. Measure initiated by the Slovak Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family was incorporated in the new Act No. 596/2003 Coll. on state school administration and school governance and on amending and adding some Acts in accordance to Act No. 365/2004 Coll. And Act No. 564/2004 Coll. According to Article 5, paragraph 10 and 11 of this Act:

In case legal representative neglects thorough fulfillment of compulsory education of their child (Article 36 of Act No. 29/1984 Col. As amended), school principal reports this fact to the corresponding state administration body and municipality that is the home of legal representative of child. Legal representative neglects thorough fulfillment of compulsory education especially if they do not enroll child into school or if child has more than 15 lessons of

unexcused absences in a month. (Article 18 paragraph 2 of the Act No. 281/2002 Coll. On child benefits and on support to child benefits in accordance with the Act. No. 658/2002 Coll.).

Act on child benefits and on amending and adding the Act No. 461/2003 Coll. On social insurance in Article 1 defines child benefits (further referred to as „benefit“) as state social support with which the government contributes to authorized individual for upbringing and nourishing of minor child. According to Article 3 of this Act a minor child is considered to be a child until the end of compulsory education and no longer than 25 years of age if the child

a) continually prepares for profession by studying or

b) can not continually prepare for profession by studying or can not carry out profit activity because of sickness or injury.

On the side of rights of parents in the area of compulsory education, parents have the right to choose school in which they enroll their child. However the law sets the principle of district school and so each principal has the right to decide about accepting or rejecting a student coming from another school district. On the other hand, the principal can not refuse to accept a child residing within the corresponding school district. In this way, each child is guaranteed a place in school closest to its home.

Parents have also the right to excuse absence of their child for five following days any number of times. It is possible to repeat all grades, the first grade however only once. A child repeats a grade if he or she failed at least one subject. It is possible to hold a committee exam for a child who failed only one subject. If a child failed more than one subject, such committee exam is not possible and the child automatically repeats the grade.

The school law deals with the issue of individuals who failed to complete basic education (ISCED 2) only in one place and that is the Article 60 which states:

For those citizens who have not completed basic education, primary or secondary school can organize courses to complete it.

Citizens who during their compulsory education years have not completed basic education (ISCED 2), can complete it through participation in courses organized by primary or secondary schools. As we will explain in further chapters, the current system requires clarification and facilitation so that it truly provides a „second chance“ to people without completed basic education and interested to complete it and increase their qualification. Labor offices offer also educational activities for people seeking employment. These courses provide new knowledge and skills and often increase chances for success on the labor market. However, they do not replace classical education in school and do not enable completion of primary school.

Internationally used English term for people who do not attend school until its completion as defined by local standards is „dropouts“ or „early school leavers“. Translation of this term into Slovak itself presents problems and requires thorough explanation and clarification of the definition. Perhaps also this in clarity of terms documents the fact that this topic in Slovakia requires further studies and more attention. Based on discussions so far, the term „dropout“ on the level of achieving basic education and qualification (level ISCED 2) is closest to Slovak term „citizens with incomplete basic education“.

Local standards for designating dropouts may differ in terms of the period of absence required before classifying a student as a dropout, the standards for school completion, the nature of other educational institutions deemed as acceptable for continuing one's education, and the procedures by which the institution the student leaves may be informed about subsequent

enrolment in another acceptable institution. Thus, the seemingly clear-cut notion of a dropout is anything but clear and consistent in practice.

The definition of dropping out is even more complicated than the definition of truancy, as suggested by this definition proposed by Morrow: A dropout is any student, previously enrolled in a school, who is no longer actively enrolled as indicated by fifteen days of consecutive unexcused absence, who has not satisfied local standards for graduation, and for whom no formal request has been received signifying enrolment in another state-licensed educational institution. A student death is not tallied as a dropout. The designation of dropout can be removed by proof of enrolment in a state-licensed educational institution or by presentation of an approved high school graduation certificate.¹⁵

OECD defines „dropout” as a student who leaves a specific level of education system without achieving first qualification. According to the UNESCO definition „dropping out” or „early school leaving“ is understood as leaving school education without completing the started cycle or program.

Those absent in school without a good excuse despite being enrolled in school are as a rule titled as „truants”. There are no universally agreed upon definitions of truancy and dropping out. Truancy is generally understood to mean absence from school without an acceptable reason, while criteria used for determining what is an acceptable reason and who decides what is an acceptable reason are not always clear. Parents and students vary widely in their views on attendance and reasons for being absent. School personnel also differ in their attitudes toward attendance and absenteeism, particularly as one moves from school to school and system to system.

In general we can thus state that students not attending school until its completion as defined by local norms are as a rule labeled as „dropouts“ or „early school leavers“. Those absent in school without a good excuse despite being enrolled in school are usually labeled as „truants“. For the purposes of our study we use more often the term „people without completed basic education“ or we use the English term „dropout“.

3. Organisation and cooperation in fulfilling conditions of compulsory education on state and institutional level

We asked the approached representatives of institutions dealing with the issue of compulsory education and its fulfillment about their opinion to who is responsible for solving problems with early school leaving of children. Their answers were following:

First of all parents, or legal representative. Educating by positive role models is most important. In a wider context however school, or youth organizations and leisure time institution can not refuse responsibility.

Mgr. Miriam Trupková, coordinator of crime prevention – Regional Municipal Office in Nitra
Mgr. František Šinka, CSc., Secretary of the Slovak Government’s Office for crime prevention

The whole society: parents, education documents, educators, school leaders including the Education Ministry, inability (unwillingness?) to start to realize the Millenium Project, absence of researc and experiments in the area, research education institutions, universities, inadequate preparedness of teachers to develop student skills and their positive motivation, school is not for all students a place where they feel well and which they like to attend.

Alžbeta Bernátová, State Pedagogical Institute, Bratislava

¹⁵ Center for Democratic Education, Tirana, 2003.

This problem should be first of all addressed in legislation, by law amendment, because the current legislation is not sufficient and appropriate anymore. For solving this, first of all the Ministry of Education and the Slovak government is responsible. Last but not least, teachers, school principals and parents are responsible to dealing with the problem.

PhDr. Nora Lepejová, Director of School Psychology Center in Martin

Slovak Ministry of Education, school principals, teachers.

Ing. Dana Weichselgärtner, PhD., State School Inspectorate, Žilina

With regards to the real situation, the highest level of responsibility lies with the social policy and interest of the government to deal with this issue, insufficient funding for these purposes, incompatible and unthought through legislative amendments in the area of primary education.

Mgr. Mariana Revúsová, Director of Office of Labor, Social Affairs and Family, Martin

According to the law the ultimate responsibility for fulfillment of compulsory education is with the parent or legal representative of child. The rights and responsibilities of the **legal representative** of child is defined by the school law which in Article 37 clarifies the responsibilities and at the same time the violation legal representative is committing if education of a minor is endangered and compulsory education neglected, especially in case when child misses without excuse more than 60 lessons per school year.

Moving out to another country does not impact the duty to fulfil compulsory education. Article 27 states that children of Slovak citizens can fulfill compulsory education and be schooled outside of Slovakia in a so called "special way of school attendance." This is understood by law as following:

- a) Attending school with Slovak teaching language established by the Slovak Embassy,
- b) Attending school established by Embassy of other country abroad and in Slovakia,
- c) Attending school in another country,
- d) Individual teaching abroad.

Special way of school attendance is approved based on a request of legal representative by principal of school in which child fulfills or should fulfill compulsory education, so called „district school“. Legal representative has the duty to enrol student to school within 15 days from coming into the country and within 30 days to announce the way of fulfillment of school attendance of student to the principal of district school. District school provides student whom special school attendance was approved textbooks based on request of legal representative; student fulfilling compulsory education in accordance to Section 2 a) receives textbooks from school established by the Slovak Embassy. Student who passed exam from subjects not taught in school abroad or who fulfilled compulsory education individually and passed exams from all compulsory subjects of teaching plan for the corresponding year of district school, school awards certificate.

The duty of school principal is to report to the corresponding body on municipal level, specifically to the social office, cases of school attendance negligence and that as soon as after 15 missed lessons in a month. According to Article 5 of the Act on State administration and school governance the primary **school principal** carries out first grade state administration and decides about

- a) accepting student to school,
- b) school enrollment deferral of a child,

- c) post deferral of compulsory education fulfillment of a child,
- d) freeing student from the duty to attend school,
- e) freeing student from education in individual subjects or their parts or approval about fulfilling compulsory education outside of Slovakia,
- f) deciding about educational measures,
- g) approving of committee exam,
- h) approving committee exam from individual subjects also to individual who is not student of the school,
- i) setting the amount of contribution of legal representative of student to partially cover the costs of care provided to student in school and school facility.

The state transferred in 2003 by the Act on State Administration and School Governance some important competence regarding schools on to municipal level. School boards were strengthened and can initiate and support principal in school management, protect interests of parents, children and teachers and help improve teaching process. School boards elect school principals and their decision are for the school establisher hiring school principal binding, unlike in the past.

Municipalities became the establishers of schools and school facilities ensuring compulsory education, keeping records about children and students in the compulsory education age and their school absences. Problem with fulfilling compulsory education are first dealt with on local level requiring effective cooperation and communication between school, family and various institution on municipal level.

Article 6 of the Act on state administration in school and school governance sets duties of **municipality** from the point of view of ensuring compulsory education as the responsibility to create conditions for

- a) education of children and students especially by establishing schools and school facilities,
- b) fulfilling compulsory education in primary school that it establishes,
- c) ensuring education of children and students with special learning needs in schools and school facilities that it establishes,
- d) ensuring education of children and students with exceptional talents and gifts in schools and school facilities that it establishes.

Municipality carries out state administration of first degree when it comes to issues of endangered education of a minor and neglecting care to fulfil compulsory education of student. It keeps records on children and students residing in the municipality in the age of compulsory education and keeps track of in which school they fulfill compulsory education.

According to Article 8, section 2, if municipality does not establish primary school, it can agree with neighbouring municipalities on establishing common school district for primary schools. If such agreement is not reached and fulfillment of compulsory education is endangered, regional school office decides about establishing such common school district. Student fulfills compulsory education in primary school in school district in which he or she resides permanently. (Section 3) Student can fulfil compulsory education in primary school outside of the school district where he or she permanently resides, if school principal of this primary school approves of it. Principal of the primary school in which student was accepted reports this fact to the principal of primary school in school district where students is permanently residing as well as to the establisher of the primary school to which the student was accepted. Municipality that is

the establisher of this school reports to the municipality where student permanently resides that this student was accepted to primary school in their school district. (Section 4)

In case a primary school is excluded from the network of schools and consequently closed down, municipality identifies school district of primary school where students of closed down primary school will continue to fulfil compulsory education according to section 3 and 4. If this does not happen, regional school office decides about in which primary school district will be the one where students of the closed down school will fulfil their compulsory education. (Section 5) If municipality does not establish a primary school, primary school with kindergarten, for the purposes of ensuring fulfillment of compulsory education, then school in municipality sharing school district that student attends is required to cover the travel costs to legal representative of child from state budget funds if transportation is not ensured in other way. (section 6). School in which student fulfills compulsory education ensures according to section 6 also costs of transportation when returning to the place of permanent residence. (section 8)

Article 9 of the same Act defines duties of municipal region. **Municipal region** creates conditions for education and fulfillment of compulsory education in secondary schools, conditions of ensuring education of children and students with special learning needs, children and students with exceptional talents and gifts in schools and school facilities that it establishes. (Section 4)

The new Act on state administration and school governance introduced a new link of state administration in the form of **regional school office**. Its duties in the area of fulfillment of compulsory education are defined in article 10 which says:

Special condition according to section 5 letter a) is that municipality does not ensure fulfillment of compulsory education according to this act and common school district can not be identified. (article 8). In such case student attends primary school established by the regional school office. (part 6)

According to section 9 of the same part, regional school office decides in second degree in issues of endangered education of a minor and neglecting of care to fulfill compulsory education in which municipality decided previously in first degree.

The responsibility of the ministry of education and further institutions on state level is to provide network and create a clear legal framework for securing compulsory education, define rights and responsibilities on individual level and provide support and safety net in case system on lower level is failing.

Following 1989 civil society in Slovakia was greatly developing and many organizations and initiatives were established focusing on improving education in general or specifically dealing with education of Roma children and youth. Many projects and activities have been realized since with good results and practical outcomes, unfortunately only a couple of them led toward institutionalization and systemic changes.

National and international non-governmental organizations attempted to react to the needs to improve education as a prevention of early school leaving. Among such activities are for example community and educational project in the area of early childhood education and supporting of school – family cooperation. One of such project was the Step by Step project that recorded great improvements in the area of Roma education. It involved direct work with teachers working with Roma students. Further such projects involved establishment of community center and supporting Roma leaders. Several NGOs, such as the Orava Association,

Susan Kovalik Asociacion etc. focused on developing skills of teachers to provide high quality education and creating positive social atmosphere in classroom that supports thinking, motivation, active learning and the opportunity for students to experience success.

Individuals interviewed talked about further initiatives taking place on local level:

As part of education of prevention coordinators that took place in 2003, also the topic of truancy was dealt with. Apart from that the regional committee for crime prevention has realized since 2001 LUMIPER project, focusing on control of game and internet cafes, garden pubs near schools and it monitors cases of truancy. It informs about the results school leadership as well as parents.

Mgr. Miriam Trupková, coordinator of crime prevention – Regional Municipal Office in Nitra
Mgr. František Šinka, CSc., Secretary of the Slovak Government's Office for crime prevention

We initiated among vocational schools in our region opening of two year study programs, so called B alternative, for students who finished compulsory education without completing primary school. We realize however that this only possibility for education of these students does not solve this problem. Finishing such two year program leads to awarding a certificate enabling work only as aid worker for certain jobs, graduates do not receive a certificate of profession.

In cooperation with the Office of Labor, Social Affairs and Family participated in project „Youth – real change for entering social life and job market“ aim of which was to motivate participants of the project to complete education and continue to increase their qualification.

PhDr. Nora Lepejová, Director, School Psychology Center, Martin

Our school is doing a lot of work in the region by accepting students with completed 6th grade of primary school. In this way students receive after two years of studying at the vocational school in engineering specializations a certificate of profession for assistant jobs. In further years we plan to increase the offer for these students also in the area of services, specifically for the assistant jobs in care services. We encourage students who are interested and have completed 8th grade, to complete primary education by completing 9th grade of primary school (through course in our school) so that they can continue to study in a three year program in our school and achieve professional qualification in one of 14 offered vocations.

Ing. Ivan Dolinský, Vice-principal, engineering vocational school, Martin

In 2000-2001 we carried out in cooperation with the association – Social work, Bratislava the project „Second chance – ARKS“ (second chance for education). This project focused on young job applicants without completed primary education. As part of this project, intensive group activities took place aim of which was activating and motivating towards further learning, requalification and cancelling courses, or to guide participants to be interested and make efforts to complete primary education and to clarify personal professional orientation.

In the course of 2001-2002 we carried out a project „Youth – real chance to entering social life and job market“, realized as part of the Program of individualized labor services. All young job applicants were enrolled in this project (those without completed primary education, those with completed primary but incomplete secondary education). The goal of the project was to motivate them to complete their education and increase their qualification.

Mgr. Mariana Revúsová, Director, Office of Labor, Social Affairs and Family, Martin

4. Alternative education pathways

At the beginning of this chapter we are offering a couple of interesting and positive examples from the lives of young people who completed their primary education and continued to study despite their failures during the compulsory education years:

Michal (23 years): finished vocational school 7 years ago, during his studies externally attended a course to complete his primary education, right away transferred to a three year program, after its completion he attended 2 year program and completed secondary education with secondary school leaving exam. Applied to university, was not accepted, therefore he started a two year post secondary program focusing on state administration. He is now in its second year and is planning to take a second state secondary school leaving exam and wants to reapply to university.

Peter (29 years): completed a two year vocational program, graduated from primary school completion course with honors, after having finished a two year additional program he passed the state secondary school leaving exam and received secondary school diploma, was accepted to university and successfully graduated from it.

Lucia (18 years): she finished last school year a two year vocational program, during her studies she attended an external course to complete primary education, is doing very well, she could also pass secondary school exam. Starting September she was supposed to be transferred to a three year program, but did not start it because of family reasons – social problems, 13 siblings at home, father in jail, she is helping her mother to take care of the family.

Róbert (18 years): finished a two year vocational program, passed course to complete primary education with honors, was supposed to transfer to a three year program, but could not because his mother got seriously ill and he must help her, also financially. He got an assistant job by TESCO in Martin.

The problem of dropouts, or citizen without completed primary education, is dealt with in Slovakia in the school law dated back in 1984, according to which “primary or secondary school can organize courses to complete primary education for citizens without completed primary education” (Article 60 of the Act No. 29/1984 Col. on the network of primary and secondary schools (school law) as amended).

According to the Ministry of Education regulations such course can be organized if at least 12 participants register. When more than 24 register, a second course is to be organized. The course is to be cancelled if the number of participants reduces to less than 6. The course lasts one year and is organized in the form of evening classes. Instruction follows a modified lesson plan and curriculum. Organization of the school year in course corresponds to school year organization. The course can be organized externally, in such case the school enables to take the prescribed exams. The exam by an external course consists of a written and oral part in front of a committee. The date of exam is set by school principal. Exam can be divided into several parts and can be taken gradually individually each subject. The school issues a certificate of participation in course if participant passed in all subjects. Certificate states that participant „reached education provided by primary school“.

In reality such courses are most often organized **externally, 72 hours per year**. The course ends with a committee exam for each subject according to individual grade levels. (**Slovak Ministry of Education Regulation from July 5, 1985 No. 7496/1985-20 on primary school** as amended by Slovak Ministry of Education Regulation from August 28, 1989 No. 8119/1989-20 and from July 13, 2000 No. 1074/2000-41 - **Article 14**)

Organization to ensure fulfillment of compulsory education on national and institutional level follows **Teaching plans for grades 1-9 primary school** (approved by the Slovak Ministry of Education on May 14, 2003 under No. 520/2003-41 valid from September 1, 2003). Teaching plans are developed individually for schools with Slovak as instruction language and for schools with Hungarian as instruction language.

Teaching plans for courses to complete primary education (Slovak as instruction language:)

Alternative 1

Teaching plan for group instruction in accordance with Article 14 par. 1 of Slovak Ministry of Education Regulation No. 7496/1985-20 on primary school and Regulation No. 5275/1986-20, by which teaching plans for primary schools and for courses to complete primary education are issued:

Number of lessons per week

	1st term	2nd term
Slovak language and literature	3	3
Foreign language	2	2
History	1	2
Geography	1	1
Math	3	3
Physics	↑	↑
Chemistry	5	4
Natural science	↓	↓
Total	15	15

Alternative 2

Teaching plan for external form in accordance with Article 14 par. 3 of the Slovak Ministry of Education Regulation No. 7496/1985-20 on primary school for year:

Slovak language and literature*	16
Foreign language	12
History	6
Geography	6
Math*	16
Physics	↑
Chemistry	16
Natural science	↓
Total	72

Note:

* Written exam

Apart from school such courses are at the moment also organized by **Labor Offices** that have funds for such purposes and can also purchase school aids for participants. The problem of motivation is however present also here. Once a person drops out of the education system, it is very difficult to come back. Therefore labor offices have great difficulties to motivate their clients with incomplete primary education to return back to school and complete their education. Such clients are practically unemployable. From time to time motivational courses are organized for them but these do not have the wished effect. Requalifying courses as well (if they participate at all) enable participants to only take assistant jobs, they do not replace classical school education. Despite this fact 8.9% registered unemployed participated in requalification programs in 2002, which is an increase when compared to year 2001. More than a third of total number of

requalified found a job on the labor market which slightly increased the success rate of employment of requalified clients when compare to year 2001.¹⁶

The State Pedagogical Institute has carried out since September 2004 project „Experimental verification of organization, content and process of realizing education – course to complete primary education“, which is a specification of the pilot project of the Slovak Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family titled: Pilot project of education and preparation for labor market of employment seekers „Finishing primary school“. Project focuses if curriculum and its content is appropriate and if participants receive education preparing them for the labor market or further studies comparably as completing primary school. The goal of experimental verification is to verify the organization, appropriateness of selection of content of education and process of its realization as part of education of employment seekers. Project verifies:

- appropriateness of course organization in the form of daily classes lasting 10 months,
- appropriateness of content – teaching plan, curriculum and corresponding teaching texts for individual subjects,
- methods and forms of instructions in such type of course,
- way of evaluation and assesment and issuing certificates,
- effectiveness of instruction as seen on results.

The target group of the project is selected participants that are unemployed due to low or no education, while age is open. The number of participants is approximately 140, the project takes place on 5 schools and in 7 classes. The control group includes approximately 280 students from the same experimental schools with low results in the 9th grade and students finishing primary school in lower than 9th grade.

How was this problem handled last school year in the district of Martin?

In this district approximately 1,500 students finish compulsory education per year, including around 50 - 60 studemzs finishing in lower than 9th grade. Two year program with specially modified curriculum (so called B alternative), that is designed for these students, is offered by two vocational schools in the district. Last school year one of them organized for its students in two year program a two week intensive course (72 lessons) to complete primary education. A month later participants took an exam in each of the prescribed subjects in front of a three member committee. 13 students participated and 11 of them also succeeded ti finish it. 8 of them enrolled into the first grade of a three year program at the same school and one participant enrolled into another vicational school. Two graduates got assistant jobs.

Source: Interview with Mgr. Jozef Zanolita, principal of vocational engineering school in
Martin,
June 2004

Primary education completed yesterday by adults

LUČENEC – In Primary School on Kubínyho street in Lučenec 12 unemployed aged 18 to 23 received certificates si vysvedčenie. They participated in first course oriented at completing primary education started last year in September. "Originally twenty unemplomped enrolled in the course, mainly Roma with incomplete primary education. Some of them passed only 6 grades previously. Four of them however managed to stay in school just one day, others a little longer.

¹⁶ Joing Memorandum on Inclusion, SR, www.employment.gov.sk

From among those who receive certificates today, seven want to continue to study at a secondary school and on vocational schools," school principal Jaroslav Zachar said.

The course lasted ten month. Its participants from the districts of Lučenec and Poltár daily participated in four lessons. Additional two lessons were voluntary and focused on consultations and tutoring. Among compulsory subjects were Slovak language, math, natural sciences, geography, physics, chemistry, ethics and civic education.

The government contributed 500 Skk per participant for school aids. It also funded a monthly salary of 22,000 SKK for teacher salaries. Apart from that the school received approximately 80,000 SKK for purchasing a xerox machine and computer and to cover the operational costs.

In the following school year, the same course will be opened for approximately 20 unemployed at this school. In the region of Banská Bystrica similar courses are supposed to be opened in Poltár, Rimavska Sobota and Brezno. (tasr)

Source: Daily SME, 7/1/2005, www.sme.sk

Reality therefore shows that solutions on the local level are found, it however depends on the capabilities and willingness of those responsible to agree and create a functioning system providing a second chance to people without basic qualifications in spite of unclarity and incompleteness of legal standards and regulations. Although there are positive examples from the reality, the data about education level and unemployment from many regions of Slovakia indicate that situation is not sufficiently handled and the system requires clarification and increased effectiveness.

We asked individuals what do they thought could be done to improve the situation in the area of young people leaving the schools system without completed primary education. They responded as follows:

The Slovak Ministry of Education should (since children spend fourth of the day in school):

- a) increase the funds in school budget per capita to employ a leisure time educator, school psychologist and special educator.*
- b) introduce cumulated position of coordinator of drug prevention and educator full time.*
- c) regularly check through school inspection fulfillment of curriculum of the subject – „Educating toward marriage and parenting“, since these roles are taught in school only formally and shallowly.*

Mgr. Miriam Trupková, coordinator of crime prevention – Regional Municipal Office in Nitra
Mgr. František Šinka, CSc., Secretary of the Slovak Government's Office for crime prevention

It is necessary to start realization of the project Millennium, by analysis, research and evaluation of pedagogical documents, to reevaluate the content of teacher preparation: devote more time to developing skills of the graduates, their assertive behavior, empathy, non-authoritarian style of instruction, developmental psychology, humanization of instruction, conceptual improvement of post-graduate studies of educators, realization of innovative studies for teachers focusing on differentiating content and process of instruction, developing student ability to practically apply knowledge and differentiating teaching process in accordance with individual abilities of students – seminars and courses connected with practical activities, realizing research, experimentally verify new methods, strategies and organizational forms of work, teaching process including measuring of student results, focusing on abilities and

mediating values instead of overloading students with knowledge – inspection should focus on following this issue instead of measuring results by tests.

Alžbeta Bernátová, State Pedagogical Institute

Legislation needs to be changed so that it enables opening programs in vocational schools with modified curricula where in the first grade students would complete the content of primary school – from grades that they have not finished. These programs should end with profession certification that would be equal to certificate in profession from a regular vocational program (for students with completed 9th grade). It would be needed to do away with theoretical content, and to prepare students for real practical life more, to change the attitude of teachers – individual attitude and pace, greater interest in student. It is necessary to improve following of valid legislation, not to punish children for their behavior with bad grades, to create special classes for children with behavioral problems. „Healing“ of family would help – social and work situation, relationships..., improving cooperation between school and family, school psychologists, social offices.

PhDr. Nora Lepejová, Director of School Psychology Center, Martin

It is necessary to adapt curricula and teaching standards, to innocate methodological guidelines for assessment of students in primary schools, to unify criteria for evaluation and assessment (benevolence-strictness), respecting of guidelines for assessment of students with learning difficulties, to take into consideration social environment of student with their abilities to develop skills and practical experience.

Ing. Dana Weichselgärtner, PhD., State School Inspectorate, Žilina

Social worker in family, leisure time centers could help.

Tatiana Košinárová, Primary School, Holíčska 50, Bratislava

Solving of this problem is in more thorough and responsible upbringing of children – guiding, life goals and regular habits. Relationship between child - parent. Last but not least, school psychologists should lead focused interviews and practice various model situations.

Ing. Ivan Dolinský, Vice-principal, vocational engineering school, Martin

Actively engage in nationwide and professional discussion, communication, to hear and search together most effective first steps, solutions, procedures and project leading to preventing children from dropping out of school and leaving the school system too early. Ensure connection and intensive communication of all involved (parents, school – educator, social office, students, school psychologist...), legislative changes

Mgr. Mariana Revúsová, director of Office of Labor, Social Affairs and Family, Martin

Information base

5. Availability of information (statistical data) related with fulfillment of compulsory education

Statistical data and information regarding schools and school attendance are in Slovakia collected and processed by the Institute of Information and Prognosis in Education (ÚIPŠ). According to its statute ÚIPŠ is a department of regional schools: it is a research, conceptual and analytical institute in the area of analysis of the state and development, financing, prognosis and development of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools. In this area it processes proposals, conceptual materials, analysis and prognosis of education development. It manages departmental information system of regional school data, its central databases based on which it processes and provides information for governmental bodies, and other central institutions and state administration, media and other interested parties. The mission of the institute is to create an information center for education, and its responsibility is to provide information for the purposes of educational management as well as for the purposes of primary, secondary school and other school organizations.

Several departments of the institute deal with the area of regional schools including issues of school attendance and compulsory education fulfillment. The department of regional school information systems analysis and deals with the issue of developing basic and systemic program instruments for information system, ensures methodological and coordinational work in the area of informatics and use of computers in the department, it cooperates on solving problems with other departments by ensuring automatization and data processing, creating databases for the use of superior bodies, coordinating the development of individual program products to ensure data collection, it realizes basic data collection and updating and makes research of information needs.

Content is processed in application programs distributed into the education network. Information available for management in education are part of the departmental information system producing statistical information and data for purposes of state information system.

The Department of analysis and prognosis of regional schools focuses on global and strategic problems of regional school development in Slovakia, its current state and perspectives of development in the whole society, integration in Europe and the world. It processes and provides Ministry of Education, regional state administration bodies, municipalities and individual schools analysis, suggestions, proposals and projects to increase the quality of regional schools. The department

- Processes quantitative and qualitative analysis of the development of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools,
- Processes quantitative prognosis of development of kindergartens, primary, secondary schools and universities,
- Follows and analyses development of society when it comes to factors influencing optimal functioning of schools and education,
- Participates in development of educational concepts and school reforms,
- Researches relevant dimensions of education and based on this submits proposals for change and innovation,
- Analysis, generalizes and encourages top innovation tendencies in the area of education in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools,
- Analyzes trends of development of regional schools in Slovakia and the world in the perspective of gradual improvement,

- Collects and processes information about education of national minorities in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools,
- Processes proposals of conceptual ways of financing regional schools from budget and other sources with the aim to make the regional schools more efficient,
- Proposes ways of operating educational and service facilities in a multi-source system of funding of education including cooperation of education institutions and institutions on the labor market,
- Participates in preparation of law drafts and other legal regulations,
- Develops analysis, recommendations, comments based on requests of the Slovak Ministry of Education.

The Department of Statistics and Services processes statistical information for all schools and school facilities in Slovakia. At the moment data from 39 statistical overviews are available including approximately 8,000 various indexes or their various divisions up to the level of individual schools. Basic standard outputs are summary and analytical overviews and publications. Apart from standard overviews the department creates also nonstandard overviews from nationwide databases (selection of individual data, various divisions according to region, type of school, language of instruction, establisher etc.) according to the requests.

The main data receiver is the Slovak Ministry of Education and the Slovak Statistical Office, other departmental ministries, National Labor Office, various organizations dealing with education. Data are also provided to international organizations (OECD, UNESCO, EUROSTAT) that use these data for international comparisons and publish them in their publications such as Education at a Glance (OECD), Education across Europe (EUROSTAT) and iné.

The following overviews are regularly prepared, published and made available at the internet page of the institute www.uips.sk:

Overview on primary schools includes data about students leaving primary schools, finishing in a certain grade, number of students in class, number of students repeating a class divided according to nationality, gender, region, data on extended instruction, foreign language instruction, data on the number of teachers, clubs, classrooms, organization of instruction, number of preparatory grades, schools in nature, age structure, individual integration etc.

Overview of primary and special primary school student school results including information about the number of students according to grade and results, repair exams, handicapped, excused and unexcused absences.

Overview of special kindergarten and special primary school includes data on completion of compulsory education of students, about schools in nature, classrooms, students repeating a grade, newly enrolled, nationality, staff, foreign languages, clubs, classes, age etc.

Another source of statistical data is the **Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic** (www.statistics.sk) providing statistical data on inhabitants according to nationality, level of reached education, economic activity, social group, sectoral level, gender. The office processes information on inhabitants, i.e. 15 year old and older according to five year age groups, highest completed education and gender. It collects and processes information on employment, unemployment, salary, educational structure and demographics when it comes to gender on a regular basis and provides statistical data long-term. The office collects also information on gender differentiation at time of elections.

Much information divided based on gender is provided also by governmental offices such as Ministry of Justice of SR – on crime and violence, or institutes (Institute of health information

and statistics, State faculty health institute – on illnesses and health care), detailed information on educational structure is provided by the above mentioned Institute of Information and Prognosis in Education.

According to the Slovak Statistical Office early school leavers represented in 2002 only 5.6% of total population of aged 18 – 24 when compared with 19.4% in EU. As mentioned however earlier, understanding of the term in Slovakia and abroad is often different. Since in Slovakia a typically used definition of young people leaving school system early is rather benevolent, data on students falling under the stricter international definitions are not available or available too late. Data on students finishing compulsory education without completed primary education are available however come at a time when these young people finish compulsory education and those not continuing to study on a vocational school offering two year program, appear later only in statistics of Labor Offices. Unavailability of earlier data leads at the same time to lack of preventive measures and delaying of solving of the problem for later, too late for many of these young people.

Table: Early school leavers¹⁷

	2002			2003		
	EU 25	EU 15	SR	EU 25	EU 15	SR
Early school leavers	16.5	18.5	5.6	15.9	18.0	4.9

Table: Number of students finishing compulsory education (state schools as of 9/15/2004)¹⁸

Region	In grades 1-4	Transferring to secondary school	In grades 5-9	Transferring to secondary school	In 9th grade
Bratislavský	688	682	187	127	5977
Trnavský	334	308	291	135	6392
Trenčiansky	297	282	242	159	7690
Nitriansky	472	435	346	102	7904
Žilinský	428	421	430	326	8772
Banskobystrický	409	376	607	228	7175
Prešovský	491	407	868	348	10004
Košický	539	479	1036	382	8253
Spolu za SR	3658	3390	4007	1807	62167

Table: Number of students who finished compulsory education (private schools as of 9/15/2004)¹⁹

Region	In grades 1-4	Transferring to secondary schools	In grades 5-9	Transferring to secondary school	In 9th grade
Bratislava	17	17	13	13	18
Trenčín	0	0	0	0	0
Žilina	0	0	0	0	0
Banska Bystrica	0	0	0	0	0
Košice	2	2	0	0	64
Total for Slovakia	19	19	13	13	82

¹⁷ Structural indicators Eurostat in: Joint Memorandum on Inclusion, www.employment.sk

¹⁸ Institute of Information and Prognosis in Education, www.uips.sk

¹⁹ Institute of Information and Prognosis in Education, www.uips.sk

Table: Number of students who finished compulsory education (church schools as of 9/15/2004)²⁰

Region	In grades 1-4	Transferring to secondary school	In grades 5-9	Transferring to secondary school	In 9th grade
Bratislava	151	151	36	36	276
Trnava	33	33	2	2	165
Trenčín	50	50	6	5	272
Nitra	61	61	11	11	386
Žilina	76	76	28	26	617
Banska Bystrica	4	2	4	0	181
Prešov	90	80	29	8	585
Košice	9	8	20	8	363
Total for Slovakia	474	461	136	96	2845

The accurateness of data provided by school can be in some cases problematic. Since schools are funded per capita, they have the tendency to „cover“ real leaving of the student from school, since together with student they loose funds. When asked about differences between legislation, official data and reality, the answers were as follows:

Yes. Valid laws, regulations and guidelines are not followed.

PhDr. Nora Lepejová, Director of School Psychology Center, Martin

Yes – getting rid of 16 year old students, the law does not enable completing of primary education, methodical guidelines for assessment are not followed, integration of students with behavioral problems is insufficient or not happening (no methodology for working with these students exists), students repeat grades more due to behavioral problems.

Ing. Dana Weichselgärtner, PhD., State School Inspectorate, Žilina

Yes, as not all schools send accurate data.

A. Tomčániová, Primary School, M.C. Sklodowskej, Bratislava

²⁰ Ibid.

Table: Number of students who repeated primary school grade in school year 2004-5 (state schools)

Region	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		Total	
	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%
Bratislava	54	1.20	35	0.78	18	0.37	31	0.62	46	1.00	72	1.41	77	1.47	72	1.23	5	0.08	410	0.91
Trnava	144	2.74	45	0.87	30	0.56	71	1.22	129	2.19	155	2.46	91	1.47	124	1.84	8	0.12	797	1.51
Trenčín	69	1.27	32	0.58	21	0.36	33	0.54	84	1.24	93	1.31	110	1.50	69	0.88	14	0.19	525	0.89
Nitra	269	4.12	79	1.21	73	1.07	101	1.49	161	2.27	107	1.43	113	1.46	104	1.27	31	0.40	1038	1.60
Žilina	91	1.23	44	0.58	26	0.34	45	0.55	123	1.47	105	1.18	124	1.40	88	0.95	6	0.06	625	0.87
Banska Bystrica	419	6.25	156	2.39	166	2.51	181	2.64	350	4.91	294	3.94	210	2.85	145	1.96	29	0.40	1950	3.09
Prešov	729	7.14	311	3.22	224	2.29	210	2.06	450	4.25	364	3.34	205	1.94	166	1.58	14	0.14	2673	2.90
Košice	913	9.78	456	5.37	293	3.50	309	3.63	545	6.25	358	3.97	240	2.70	208	2.34	29	0.36	3351	4.28
Total for SR	2688	4.86	1158	2.15	851	1.54	981	1.71	1888	3.19	1548	2.49	1170	1.88	976	1.51	136	0.22	11396	2.15

Table: Number of students who repeated primary school grade in school year 2004-5 (private schools)

Region	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		Total	
	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%
Bratislava	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trenčín	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Žilina	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Banska Bystrica	0	0	1	4.34	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.66
Košice	0	0	1	1.58	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.43	0	0	2	0.38
Total for SR	0	0	2	1.06	0	1	1.36	0	0	3	0.26									

Table: Number of students who repeated primary school grade in the school year 2004-5 (church schools)

Region	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		Total	
	Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%														
Bratislava	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.63	4	1.42	0	0	1	0.30	0	0	7	0.22
Trnava	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.50	0	0	1	0.51	0	0	2	0.13
Trenčín	4	1.87	2	0.82	2	0.84	2	0.66	3	1.13	4	1.38	2	0.80	6	2.23	1	0.37	26	1.11
Nitra	4	1.20	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.60	1	0.28	3	0.75	0	0	1	0.24	11	0.32
Žilina	4	0.68	1	0.19	0	0	1	0.17	0	0	1	0.16	3	0.49	2	0.31	0	0	12	0.23
Banska Bystrica	1	0.64	1	0.59	1	0.58	0	0	2	1.14	2	1.16	1	0.53	1	0.49	1	0.53	10	0.61
Prešov	21	4.59	25	5.41	3	0.62	4	0.74	10	1.95	2	0.35	11	1.81	10	1.61	0	0	86	1.76
Košice	3	0.84	6	1.80	6	1.82	6	1.71	3	0.77	15	3.54	2	0.45	6	1.43	0	0	47	1.37
Total for SR	37	1.42	35	1.35	12	0.45	13	0.43	22	0.82	30	1.03	22	0.74	27	0.87	3	0.10	201	0.79

6. Descriptive analysis of results of questionnaires

Research using questionnaires was conducted in five regions of Slovakia. The main aim of the research was to assess the impact of various factors on school leaving or staying in school of a child. 253 children aged 12-16, their parents and their teacher were approached with the questionnaire in five locations of Slovakia. Questionnaires were conducted by regional coordinators who approached schools for cooperation to contact parents of children to be interviewed. The sample of interviewed children was randomly chosen. Questionnaire was administered in Slovakia, similar one was administered in the other cooperating countries. Questionnaire used was prepared by psychologists and educators from the Center for democracy Education in Albania. The original questionnaire however went through a process of reviewing based on which several questions were omitted, several added or changed so that the questionnaire corresponds to the needs and context of Slovakia. Questionnaires were administered in the form of direct interview with childre, paren and teacher and the answers recorded in the form by the administrator. Parent, or legal representative of child was always contacted and interviewed as first since only based on his or her approval child could be interviewed as well. The Center for Education Policy has also decided to follow the principle of anonymity when carrying out the questionnaire.

Sample characteristics

The survey was conducted on a sample of 253 children, their parents and teachers. Children interviewed were between 12-16 years of age. The sample was randomly chosen in five regions of Slovakia. Regions involved were Bratislava, the capital city, Dolny Kubin area in northern part of Slovakia, Martin and area in the central Slovakia, Presov and area in the eastern Slovakia with substantial Roma population and Rimavska Sobota and its area, in southern Slovakia with substantial Hungarian and Roma population. In each of the five selected regions, schools were approached for cooperation to provide information about children considered as dropouts (DO), children at risk of dropping out (RS) and children with no problems with school attendance for the purposes of control group (CG). With the assistance of schools parents were contacted and met by the regional survey administrators.

Children considered as dropouts for the purposes of our research were those who corresponded to the agreed difinition. According to this, child who fails to finish basic education requirements and is absent from school for more than 15 consecutive days is considered a dropout. Schools cooperating in the research provided information and contacts for students with more than 200 unexcused absences and/or being in the final year of their compulsory education they had previously repeated more than one class. As children at risk of dropping out were considered children with problematic school attendance and poor school results, often leading to class repetition in the past. Control group consisted of children with no problems with school attendance and school succeeding. More detailed characteristic of the sample can be seen in the following tables:

Explanation of abbreviations used in analysis

DO	Dropout group
RS	Children at Risk group
KS	Control group
D1	Question No. 1 in the children's questionnaire
R1	Question No. 1 in the parents' questionnaire
U1	Question No. 1 in the teachers's questionnaire

Children

253 questionnaires

Gender

	DO		RS		KS		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Girls	45	48	37	30	21	60	103	40.7
Boys	49	52	87	70	14	40	150	59.3
Total	94	100	124	100	35	100	253	100

Region

	DO	RS	KS	Total
Rimavská Sobota	25	20	5	50
Bratislava	15	36	5	56
Prešov	34	26	20	80
Martin	19	18	4	41
Dolný Kubín	1	24	1	26
Total	94	124	35	253

Average age, grade and year of compulsory education

	DO	RS	KS
Average age	14.5	13.5	13.6
Average grade	6.2	7.5	7.6
Average year of compulsory education	8.4	8.3	7.6

Parent, grandparent or sibling of child

253 questionnaires

Teacher of child

253 questionnaires

Family and social background of child

U9 Did the child repeat a grade in the past?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	96	70	0
No	4	30	100

R5 Number of children in family

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
1	5,3	14	8,6
2	14	42	60
3	17	18	31
4	23	15	0
More than 4	40	10	0

R10 Has the child both parents?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Both	78	84	97
Father	20	12	3
Mother	1.1	3.2	0
None	1.1	0.8	0

R12 Are parents of the child divorced?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	22	31	3
No	72	65	97

R13 Does one of the parents live abroad?

Odpovede v %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	5.3	3	6
No	93	97	94

R11 Does the child live with grandparents?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	36	22	31.4
No	64	78	68.6

R14 Years of education of father

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
0	6.4	4.8	0
8	62	34.7	0
12	22	50	51
16	1.1	7.3	17
More than 16	0	2.4	29

R15 Years of education of mother

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
0	9.6	4	0
8	60.6	35	0
12	28.7	48	60
16	1.1	8.9	17
More than 16	0	1.6	23

R18 Have parents of child finish primary education?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Both	58.5	88	97
Father	7.5	1.6	0
Mother	6.4	3.2	3
None	25.5	7.3	0

R7 What is the average monthly income of the family (in SKK)?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Up to 12 000	57	50	2.9
12 – 20 000	40	38	31
20 – 30 000	2.1	8.9	49
Over 30 000	0	0	14

Group of dropout children (DO)

In this group of children 96 % repeated a primary school grade at least once. They come from families with a higher number of children – 63 % of them come from a family with 4 and more children. 1.1 % of children do not have any parent. 22% of them live in incomplete families (divorced marriages), 36% share their household with the grandparents. Fathers of the dropouts have typically 8 years of education, 6 % less than that and only 1% attended school for 16 years. Mothers of dropouts have typically 8 years of schooling, 10% less than that and 1% 16 years. Moreover, there is only 58% of children whose both parents completed elementary education and one quarter come from the families where none of the parents completed primary education. The net income of these families is in 97% up to 20 thousand SKK (500 EUR).

Group of At Risk Children (RS)

70% of these children repeated a grade. 42% of this group come from a family with 2 children. 0.8% of children do not have any parent. 31% of them live in incomplete families (divorced marriages), 22% share their household with the grandparents. Education of parents – the majority is in the category of 12 years of schooling, 10% completed 16 and more years of schooling. Both parents completed primary education in 88% and 7% of these children come from families where none of the parents completed primary education. The net monthly income of 9% of these families is in the range of 20 - 30 thousand Slovak crowns (500 – 650 EUR), income of the others is lower.

Control Group (KS)

All the children are successful at school. Majority of them comes from families with two children. There is no one from a family with 4 and more children. 97% of children have both parents. Only 3% of these children live in incomplete families (divorced marriages), 31% share their household with the grandparents. The education of parents – 51% of fathers stayed in the system for 12 years, 46% 16 and more years. Education of mothers is similar. Almost all (97%) parents completed primary education. The net monthly income of 14 % of these families exceeded 30 thousand SKK (750 EUR).

PREDICTORS OF CHILD'S DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL

Child's personality, negative behavior, signals of worsened psychological state, emotional problems

D8 Do you feel sometimes angry?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	39	33	14
Sometimes	51	62	86
Never	6.4	2.4	0
No response	2.1	2.4	0

D9 Do you have nightmares?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	12	8.87	5.7
Sometimes	53	52.4	69
Never	30	32.3	26
No response	4.3	6.45	0

D10 Do you have headaches?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	13.8	17.7	3
Sometimes	50	52.4	60
Never	31.9	25.8	37
No response	2.1	4	0

D14 Do you smoke?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	19	24	3
Sometimes	36	31	3
Never	39	35	94
No response	5.3	8.9	0

D18 Do you break school rules?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	21.3	27.4	0
Sometimes	42.6	54.8	51
Never	33	16.9	49
No response	2.1	0.8	0

D19 Do you fight with your schoolmates?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	13.8	13.7	3
Sometimes	34	44.4	20
Never	46.8	41.1	77
No response	2.1	0.8	0

All the groups of students indicate that there are situations when they feel angry – this is so to a greater extent in the group of DO and RS, in this group (DO and RS) only 30% has never got nightmares, in the group of CG even less (26%) children has never got nightmares and almost 70% sometimes. Headaches were also reported more often in the group of DO and RS, however, in the category of sometimes is 60% of CG. Smoking – a very apparent difference, in the CG 94% never smokes, in the DO and RS more than 50 % smokes sometimes or often. Frequent breaking of the school rules in the CG was not reported, half of them never broke the school rules. In the DO third never and in RS only 17 % never broke the rules. In this question the RS was reported as the worst. DO and RS equally report frequent beating with the classmates (around 14%), CG reports only occasional fights (20%) and as many as 77% of CG never beat with classmates. Comparing the DO and RS in their reporting of never getting into fights: 47% compared to 41%.

U11 Does child show aggressive behavior?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	19	17.7	0
Sometimes	39	44.4	34
Never	41	37.9	66

U12 Does the child have problems with discipline?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	28.7	31	3
Sometimes	50	48	40
Never	21.3	22	57

U13 Is the child quiet?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	31	20	20
Sometimes	44	53	77
Never	26	27	3

U21 Is the child psychologically sensitive?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	18	24	11.4
Sometimes	55	60	85.7
Never	26	15	2.9

U14 According to your knowledge, does the child take drugs or other addictive substances?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	7.5	2.4	0
Sometimes	17	19	0
Never	64.9	73	100

U15 According to your knowledge, does the child smoke?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	24.5	27	0
Sometimes	33	28	11
Never	41.5	44	89

U16 Does the child carry gund or other dangerous subjects such as knife, sticks and metal objects etc.?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	0	2.4	0
Sometimes	9.6	18	5.7
Never	88.3	79	94.3

From the point of view of the teacher the personality and behavior of child is described as follows:

Aggressive behavior is not observed at all in the CG. Children from DO, RS 19% express often aggressive behavior – which is higher percentage than indicated by children themselves. Slight difference is in the answer – never shows aggressive behavior – approximately 5% difference (teachers report a smaller percentage). Discipline is perceived by teachers as sometimes or often problematic with 80% among DO and RS. On the other hand, almost 60% among CG has never a problem with discipline. Psychological sensitivity is perceived by teachers in an interesting way: almost all of the CG is in the middle of the range, in the group of DO and RS more than half is in the middle of the range but as many as 26% (DO) and 15% (RS) is according to the teachers never psychologically sensitive. Drug abuse was observed in quarter of DO and in one fifth of the RS, CG is all in the category never. When it comes to smoking – the view of teachers is very much the same as the expressions of students. When it comes to arm carrying, it is not as alarming. Relatively worst is the situation among students in RS – one fifth sometimes carries dangerous objects to school.

Child's personality, self-assessment, level of assessing one's own abilities

D11 Do you think you have positive characteristics?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	66	59	77.1
Not sure	29.8	35	22.9
No	2.1	2.4	0
No response	2.1	4	0

D12 Do you think you can succeed in life?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	56.4	60	71
Not sure	31.9	33	29
No	1.1	1.6	0
No response	10.6	4.8	0

D13 Are you satisfied with yourself?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	53	48.4	60
Not sure	20	23.4	34.3
No	15	19.4	2.9
No response	12	8.9	2.9

Children of DO and RS show lower self-esteem than children of CG, they are less satisfied with themselves, unsure about their future lives. They often were not able to respond to the questions regarding their positive personal qualities. They preferred not to respond. Almost no child of CG (only 1) evaluated himself/herself in a negative way and one child did not respond.

Health

Administrators carrying out interviews with children assessed their health.

D36 Based on your opinion, how is the health of the child?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Good	79.8	77	93
Partially good	17	18	6.7
Bad	1.1	4.8	0

Parents answered the same question.

R22 Is child's health good?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	83	79.8	93
No	11	18.5	6.7
No response	6.4	1.6	0

Social relationships – relationships with peers, with teachers

D2 Are your friends of your age?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	35	42	77.1
Almost	53	45	22.9
No	11	13	0

D3 Do your close friends go to school?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
All	47	52	80
Some	48	41	17
None	3	4,8	3

D16 Are you in touch with your peers in school?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	53	61.3	94
Sometimes	43	35.5	6
Never	3.2	2.4	0
No response	1.1	0.8	0

There is a slight difference in the age of peers of the respondents – children in control group don't indicate to have friends that would not be of their age. Children in dropouts and risk group have such friends. Most of such friends of these children are almost in their age while as many as 77 % of the control group report to have friends of their own age. Contacts with peers at school are also less frequent in the group of dropouts and risk group than in the control group.

U20 Does the child have friends among school peers?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Many	8.5	8.1	34
Several	79.8	83.9	60
None	10.6	8.1	5.7

U19 Does the child have disagreements with school peers?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	21.3	28	11
Sometimes	59.6	54	31
Never	18.1	18	57

U34 Did the child get involved in suspicious groups?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	31	20	0
I am not sure	35	55	17.1
No	33	25	80

From the teachers' point of view of the number of friends of all observed children we can see the difference in the social net of the children in the individual groups. Among dropouts and children in the risk group only about 8% have friends, majority has several and a relatively high percentage (11% and 8%) has no friends while among children in the control group as many as 34% have got a lot of friends and 60% has several friends.

The difference is also in the disagreements among peers as perceived by the teachers. In the control group most children is in category never. Frequent disagreements occur only in 11%. In

the DO and RS the highest percentage is in the category of sometimes (60%, 54%), then often (21%, 28%) and only 18% of children do not have disagreements with their peers in school.

As a problem in the DO and RS groups participation into strange groups (as assessed by the teacher) appears – 31% and 20%. Teacher can only in about 33% and 25% certainly say that the child does not meet peers with negative influence. In the control group teachers said about almost all the children that they do not engage in strange groups.

U18 Does the child have conflicts with you or other teachers?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	18	16	11
Sometimes	50	55	31
Never	31	29	57

Disagreements with teachers are according to teachers also a problem in the group of DO and RS, to a lesser extent so as disagreements with peers. 70% has sometimes or often disagreements with some of the teachers.

D20 Are you satisfied with the behavior of your teacher?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	39.4	36.3	31
Sometimes	48.9	52.4	69
Never	5.3	4	0
No response	6.4	7.3	0

D21 Are you nice to teachers?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	39	37.9	80
Sometimes	51	46	20
Never	4.3	6.5	0
No response	4.3	9.7	0

Perception of the relationship I – teachers is somewhat more negative in groups DO, RS, fewer children are satisfied with the behavior of their teacher, there are also cases when they are never satisfied. In CG there is no such case. Almost 70% is often satisfied.

Behavior of children to teachers is perceived by children in DO and RS in similar way than behavior of teachers to children. Children in CG according to their own reporting behave to teachers nicer than teachers behave to them.

School motivation, school results

D17 Are you satisfied with your school results?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	19.1	14.5	57.1
Somewhat	29.8	30.6	34.3
No	47.9	54	2.9
No response	3.2	0.8	5.7

D29 Do you believe that education (school) guarantees a better future?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	46.8	55.6	65.7
Don't know	44.7	37.9	34.3
Not at all	5.3	5.7	0
No response	2.1	0.8	0

D33 Do you want to continue to study?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	39.4	65.3	88.6
I am not sure	19.1	17.7	8.6
No	36.2	15.3	2.9
No response	4.3	1.6	0

D34 Do you know what you would like to become in the future?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	40	54	48.6
I am not sure	21	28.2	45.7
No	27	12.1	5.7
No response	4.3	2.4	0

Satisfaction with school results, with school grades – big negative difference in the group DO and RS when compared with the CG. Half of the children in these groups is not satisfied with grades in school, what is as we suppose the real image (they are not succeeding) and thus we can assess it positively in the sense that they feel a problem with their bad results, that they are not satisfied with the situation. However, of course, not for everybody is dissatisfaction a motivation factor. Long-term dissatisfaction, lack of success can be strongly de-motivating. It is a matter of discussion if dissatisfaction with grades does not mean dissatisfaction with teachers.

A motivation factor is the belief that education guarantees a better future and this is shown as relevant for the risk of early school leaving. Half of the children in DO, RS indicate that they understand the relationship between education and the future, but further approximately 40 % are not convinced about that and more than 5 % do not believe in it at all.

Goals for the future – in CG majority wants to continue in studies, in fact they know what they want to become, they have an idea about their future. In RS – in this regard there seems to be the opportunity for the future, possibility of positive influence, because as many as 65% wants to continue to study, 18% is not sure. In DO – in fact the expected outcome – almost 40% does not want to continue to study, approximately equal percentage however wants to.

U17 Is the child motivated to learn?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	1.1	3.2	68,6
Sometimes	55.3	73.4	31.4
Never	42.6	23.4	0

U23 Is the child active in class?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	2.1	4.8	60
Sometimes	52	54	40
Never	45	41.1	0

U24 Does the child fulfill its classroom duties?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	4.3	13	77.1
Sometimes	60	68	22.9
Never	35	19	0

U25 Does the child bring to school school aids?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	11	19.4	86
Sometimes	43	60.4	14
Never	46	20.2	0

U26 Does the child make his/her homework?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	1.1	8.9	88.6
Sometimes	33	63.7	11.4
Never	66	27.4	0

U27 Does the child succeed in school?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	6.4	14.5	97
Sometimes	67	77.4	3
Never	25.5	8.1	0

U28 Is the child angry about his/her school results?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	3.2	12	17
Sometimes	35.1	38	71
Never	60.6	50	11

U35 Does she/he like school?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	12	22.6	74
I am not sure	43	57.2	23
No	45	20.2	3

The perception of teachers focused on the perception of the child's motivation towards learning, its activity in school, fulfilling its duties, succeeding and reactions of child to its results and how it feels in school. It was confirmed that motivation is decisive. Frequent, systematic motivation was observed by teachers only by 1% of DO and 3% of RS. Sometimes motivated are 55% of DO and 73% in the RS. 42% and 23% are never motivated. In CG majority is often motivated.

Frequent activity of children in classroom among DO and RS is at minimum level, rare is among half of them. As much as 45% and 41% of children are reportedly never active. Here it is important to point out the irreplaceable role of teacher in activating children. Among CG activity is frequent to rare in a ratio 2:1. Systemic fulfillment of duties, bringing classroom aids, making homework is also problematic among the DO and RS children. As many as 66 % DO never make their homework, rarely makes homework 64% of CG. Teachers can eliminate this negative factor. Children in CG have no significant problems in this area.

DO children have problems with their school results, they rarely succeed and 25% never succeeds. RS is more successful, failures are not alarming and through stressing of successful moments more frequent and longer success can be achieved in this group. CG reports only minimum of children failing sometimes. Teachers do not perceive dramatic dissatisfaction among DO and RS with their school results. And according to teachers also in the CG prevail those children who are sometimes angry about their grades. By as many as 45% of children from among DO have the teachers the feeling that they do not like school. Among RS it is 20%. Among CG – the majority likes school.

School attendance

Average number of absent hours per school year	DO	RS	KS
Excused	181	130	55
Unexcused	131	20	0.5

We monitored a real situation of children school attendance. Undoubtedly, irregular school attendance has big impact on bad marks at school and at the same time it indicates also other problems for which a child attends school irregularly as well as it affects continuity of the process of education which increases a danger of the child's early leaving school system.

U10 What was the school attendance of the child like?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Systematic	15	36	91
Problematic, but usually excused	48	54	9
Problematic and usually unexcused	36	8.1	0

Teachers reported school attendance of DO children as systemic only in 15%, as problematic for a number of justified reasons in 48% and as a problematic, unjustified (which is most significant for the danger of dropping out) in 36% of children. In RS we can assume that through effective control of children school attendance they will stay in school system and so will have more chances to achieve education according to their abilities. 36% attends school systematically, 54% with problems for objective reasons and 8% is often absent at school. Absolute majority of CG children attends school regularly, there are not problematic absences.

Extracurricular activities

D15 Do you participate in extracurricular activities?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	8.5	11.3	49
Sometimes	30.9	42.7	46
Never	58.5	43.5	2.9
No response	1.1	2.4	2.9

The view of children in the DO group – almost 60% never participate, in RS – 44% never participate, among CG – only 3% do not participate. This means that activities outside of school, the effort to engage in extracurricular activities rises in accordance with the hypothesis that the phenomenon of „staying in“ school system is influenced by motivational, relaxation, and fun extracurricular activities.

U22 Does the child get involved in extracurricular activities?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	11	10.5	66
Sometimes	22	34.7	34
Never	66	54.8	0

The view of teachers is the same, they also indicate even higher percentage of disengaged children. 66% among DO, 55% among RS, in CG to the contrary situation looks better than situation presented by children – teachers report higher number of children involved in extracurricular activities and they do not report any child that would never engage.

Family influence – view of education, school – family communication

R20 Do you agree with your child's leaving school

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	12	4	2.9
No	82.7	95	97.1
No response	5.3	0.8	0

R23 Do you believe that education (school) guarantees a better future?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	54	80.6	97
I am not sure	43.9	18.5	3
No	2.1	0.8	0

The opinion of the family about the education of their children, the importance of education on school attendance, results and staying in the school system: 12% of parents of children among DO and 4% among RS agree with their child's dropping out of school. Only half of the DO parents believe that education guarantees a better future, 44% are not sure and 2% do not believe in it. There are more (80%) parents realizing the importance of education in the RS group, in the CG majority of parents is convinced of the importance of education.

D22 Do your parents care about your education?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	45.7	62.1	86
Partially	18.1	21	14
No	28.7	12.1	0
No response	7.45	4.8	0

D23 Do your parents help you with learning?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	10.6	12.1	31
Sometimes	25.5	44.4	57
Never	57.4	40.3	5.7
No response	4.3	3.2	5.7

D24 Do your parents meet with your teacher?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	12.8	18.5	31.4
Sometimes	56.4	61.3	68.6
Never	27.7	17.7	0
No response	2.1	2.4	0

D25 Do your parents agree with your leaving school?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	6.4	4.8	0
No	83	86.3	100
No response	9.6	8.9	0

The view of children of supporting education in family – there are no problems in the CG, family background and support is clear, all parents care about the education of their children, they do not agree with child's dropping out and they all sometimes or often help their child with learning and meet with teacher. Although frequent help with learning is quite rare in this group, it is not a negative indicator, because these children can do their school duties without parents' help. Meetings of parents with teachers are also quite rare which may indicate no problems with child's marks and behavior at school, but at the same time parents' lack of time.

In the DO group almost 30% parents don't care about the education of their child, in RS the percentage is smaller, a higher percentage definitely care, almost 60% from among the DO group never help their child with homework, in RS the situation is somewhat better, approximately 60 % of children mention that parents sometimes meet with teachers. Children mostly feel that their parents would not agree with their dropping out of school. These results generally are not positive, it is evident that family's weak support of children's education contributes to the phenomenon of students' early leaving of school system and at the same time does not help to solve this problem.

U29 Do parents communicate with you?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	12.8	19	69
Sometimes	62.8	61	31
Never	23.4	19	0

U30 Do you communicate with child's parents effectively?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	4.3	15	71
Sometimes	60.6	56	29
Never	34	30	0

U31 Do you communicate with child's parents informally?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	5.3	14	60
Sometimes	59	52	40
Never	31	35	0

U32 Is there a link to support cooperation between school and child's family? (association, teacher assistant etc.)

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	49	37.1	5.7
No	27.7	39.5	71.4

Teachers see communication with parents similarly to the students – approximately 60% of parents in the DO and RS sometimes communicate effectively with teacher. With the same percentage of parents, the teachers communicate on an informal level as well. Among CG formal as well as informal communication between teacher and parents is more frequent and more effective.

Better communication with family can be achieved through supportive services (units). It is a pity that only as little as 49% of DO and 37% of RS teachers indicated that there is a unit supporting co-operation with child's family. Contacts with family, its involvement in solving of child's problems should be better used in such cases when it is just the family that is causing child's failure. School co-operates with teacher assistants, school counseling centers, special pedagogy professionals, school psychologists, special psychologists, community workers, social curators, regional social departments, etc. Besides this, in the group of RS are mentioned good experiences with teacher-parent-student meetings, activities of homeroom teachers, active participation of the child's mother in school council, co-operation with the crisis center, doctor, non-governmental organization. CG almost does not use any supporting units, according to the teachers it is not needed. They do not have problems to communicate with families directly.

Outside conditions, family conditions, social-economic situation of family

R4 Did your family move in the last five years?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	24	19	14
No	76	81	86

R9 Do you have adequate housing?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	60	76	100
No	39	24	0

R8 Does your family receive social benefits?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	67	40	3
No	33	60	97

R16 Is the fathehr employed?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	19	57	94
No	76	40	3

R17 Is the monther employed?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	23.4	56	91.4
No	76.6	40	8.6

R21 Does anyone in family drink alcohol?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Not at all	26	22.6	17
Occasionally	70	66.1	83
Daily	3.2	9.7	0

Migration of the family (and consequent change of child's school, change of environment, social relationships, etc.) in the last five years can also be one of the reasons of worsened school achievements. Largest number of children whose family moved in last five years is in DO group – 24%, this is followed by RS – 19%. In the CG 14 % changed the address. Dwelling conditions are characterized as satisfactory by 60% of DO, 76% of RS and 100% of CG.

Financial income of most DO families (67%) is affected by social benefits, in RS it is in 40%, while in CG there are no social benefits. Income from employment is minimal in DO families – only 19% of fathers and 23% of mothers are employed. In RS the situation is somewhat better – almost 60% of parents are employed. In CG there is only 9% of unemployed mothers. In all groups is a big percentage of families with occasional consumption of alcohol.

D27 Did you have family problems in time when you started to have problems in school?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	23.4	34.7	2.9
No	36.2	48.4	46
No response	39.4	16.1	46

D28 Do you speak with your parents about your problems?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Usually yes	16	17.7	20
Sometimes	29.	38.7	71
Never	50	37.1	5.7
No response	2.1	6.5	2.9

We are observing perception of a causal relation between the problems at school and family in quite a big number of DO children (23%) and RS children (35%). In all three groups, however, we are observing that children little talk with parents about their problems. It may be caused by low trust of this age children to their parents, bad family relationships, or lack of parents' time.

U33 Do you think there are problems in the child's family?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Often	37	34.7	14
Sometimes	56	54.8	46
Never	5.3	8.9	37

U36 Do you have knowledge that the child ever ran away from home?

Answers in %	DO	RS	KS
Yes	13.8	7.3	0
I don;t know	26.6	40	0
No	58.5	52	100

Teachers view of existence of family problems indicates that in half of the families of all groups there are sometimes problems. 37% of DO and 35% of RS live in families with frequent problems, which influences child's school achievements and behavior. On the contrary, 37% of CG families have never problems.

Different reasons may lead to child's running away from home. Such a way of solving frustrating situation is close to truancy. 14% of teachers of DO children know that their students sometime ran away from home. Almost 60% never ran away. In RS 7% sometime ran away, while in CG teachers know that children never ran away.

Causes of child's problems at school

U37 According to you what are the reasons leading to child's problems in school? Please describe.

Teachers of children in all groups see their students complexely, they observe and can assess personal problems of children, their fitting in in social structures, family background, they try to get to know the parents, grandparents, siblings, their relationships, economic situation of the family, housing conditions. In individual cases teachers could not answer this question.

Children of DO and RS groups are endangered by a number of negative factors and they are affected by a variety of unfavorable, dramatic and even tragic circumstances. Children of CG are mostly affected by the only problem – parents’ indulgence and lack of time caused by their business at work.

According to teachers, problems of DO and RS children are mostly caused by family influence in a wider understanding – socially disadvantageous environment, bad economic situation, neglect of parents’ care, problems between parents, quarrels, missing parent, lack of communication between family and school, ignorance of teacher’s requirements, lack of parents’ interest in child’s education. Among the other negative factors in family life teachers mentioned the following: bad dwelling conditions, food, hygiene, insufficient conditions for child’s relaxation and sleep, lack of privacy, weak motivation, family’s support to learn and attend the school, parents’ divorce, death of a parent, new partner of a parent, too big age difference between a child and a parent, upbringing by grandparents, bad model of older brothers and sisters, alcoholism, parents’ diseases, refusing of teacher’s authority in the family, low intellectual and educational level of parents, frequent change of address and change of the school.

The personality of the student seems to be also a serious cause of difficulties, as reported by teachers. According to their responses, it is mostly low level of mental abilities, learning and behavior disorders, unconcern in learning, lack of motivation, passivity at school, neglect of homework, irregular attending of the school, bad health, bad relationship with parents, refusing of parent’s authority. Moreover, there are some more phenomena, as being an outsider of a group, runaways from home, mental unstableness, emotional problems, home duties (which cause other problems, like absence from school, tiredness, lack of time for school duties), drinking of alcohol, smoking, doping, partner relationship, sexual maturity, walking to school from other village, language problems.

The third category as seen by the teachers is an influence of bad mates, older friends out of school, and street upbringing.

R19 What are according to you the reasons of your child’s problems in school?

Parents of DO and RS children see the problem in themselves, in a difficult life situation, in the child, outside conditions, mates, and friends. In a smaller extent they also blame the school and teachers. Some of them are not able to name the cause or they do not see any problem.

List of negative factors as seen by parents:

<i>Group of Dropouts</i>	<i>Group of At risk of dropping out</i>
Bad company, friends, older friends, early interest in sexual life, fun, smoking, doping, truancy	Learning difficulties, too much to learn, learning and behavior disorders
Unconcern in learning and school, child is not learning, doesn’t want to attend the school	Unconcern in learning and school, child is not learning, doesn’t want to attend the school
Family problems – quarrels, divorce, death, maltreat, alcohol, financial problems, dwelling problems, social situation	Parents – lack of interest, weak control, lack of time, absence caused by busyness, weak support, not able to help with homework

Healthy problems	Family problems – quarrels, divorce, death, maltreat, alcohol, financial problems, dwelling problems, social situation
Disobedience, hard to educate	Bad company, friends, older friends, early interest in sexual life, fun, smoking, doping, truancy
Bad relationships with classmates, bullying, Roma child among non-Roma children	Health problems
Learning difficulties, too much to learn, learning and behavior disorders	Bad relationships with classmates, bullying, Roma child among non-Roma children
Insufficient preparation for school (doing homework)	Disobedience, hard to educate
Parents – lack of interest, weak control, lack of time, absence caused by busyness, weak support, not able to help with homework	Moving, change of school
Adolescence age	Problems with teachers, school is guilty
Problems with teachers, school is guilty	Insufficient preparation for school (doing homework)
Moving, change of school	Complicated commuting to school
Complicated commuting to school	Adolescence age

In the CG only some of these causes were indicated, such as – adolescence age, disagreements with mates or teachers, lack of independence, lack of interest in learning, health problems, parents' heterogeneous education and upbringing, weak discipline in the class, teacher.

D32 Why do you started to have problems in school?

The third, most interesting and relevant point of view of the complex network of objective and subjective reasons of school problems, assuming the highest level of sincerity, is the children's perception of their own lack of school success. Children described problems hindering their school succeeding and demotivating them. Often there is not one, it is not easy to give one reason, or one are, several are interconnected, linked and cumulated.

List of negative factors as seen by the children:

<i>Dropouts</i>	<i>At risk of dropping out</i>
I don't learn, I don't like school, I am not interested in learning, I do not see any sense in learning, laziness	I don't learn, I don't like school, I am not interested in learning, I do not see any sense in learning, laziness
Absences, truancy	Learning difficulties, too much learning, nobody can help me at home
Influence of the friends, smoking, doping	Influence of the friends, smoking, doping
Learning difficulties, too much learning, nobody can help me at home	Family problems - quarrels, divorce, death, lack of parents' interest, lack of privacy, dwelling problems, moving
Family problems - quarrels, divorce, death, lack of parents' interest, lack of privacy, dwelling problems, moving	Absences, truancy
I don't know	I don't know
Disobedience	Healthy problems
Bad relationships with other children, being outsider of a group, Roma child among non-Romas, age difference	Neglect of homework, insufficient preparation for school

Healthy problems	Disobedience
I do not have any problems	Bad relationships with other children, being outsider of a group, Roma child among non-Romas, age difference
Neglect of homework, insufficient preparation for school	Teacher – bad relationships, changing of teachers
Feeling of being misunderstood, uncertainty, disappointment	I do not have any problems
Complicated commuting to school	Complicated commuting to school
	Feeling of being misunderstood, uncertainty, disappointment

Positive factors supporting children's staying in school system

Apart from factors discouraging children from staying in school and feeling well in school, it is equally important to know what the children like, under which conditions they are able to successfully learn.

D30 What do you like about school?

It is interesting to observe different preferences in the different groups of children.

DO	RS	KS
Lessons	Friends, schoolmates	Lessons
Nothing	Teachers, relationships, attitude of adults	Extracurricular activities, trips
Friends, schoolmates	Lessons	Teachers, relationships, attitude of adults
Teachers, relationship, attitude of adults	School facility, environment, material equipment, hygiene	Friends, schoolmates
School facility, environment, material equipment, hygiene	Extracurricular activities, trips	School facility, environment, material equipment, hygiene
Extracurricular activities, trips	Nothing	Everything, school is good
Everything, school is good	Informal breaks	Nothing
Informal breaks	Need to learn	Need to learn
I don;t know	Everything, school is good	I don;t know
The need to learn	I don't know	
Practice	Practice	

Potential for improvement

U38 What do you think, what approach and type of methodology and strategies are most effective when working with this student?

For improvement of the given situation, according to the teachers most effective are the following approached, strategies, methods or securing certain conditions. Of course it is always important to see the specific case, its specificities and search for appropriate ways.

- Individual approach to educating child – rote, tutoring, repeating, reduction, simple explanation, regular control, various learning activities, experiential learning, art, practical and manual activities, possibility to present knowledge and skills.
- Teacher – humane, kind, sensitive, partnership, close relationships, frequent communication about life, problems, school, communication, tolerance as well as authoritative approach.
- Motivation – praising, experiencing success, sensitive pointing out of weaknesses.
- Family – greater interest, care of child, of his/her making homeworks, cooperation with school, fulfilling of compulsory education requirements.
- Help and cooperation – psychologist, special educator, police, social worker.
- Change of environment – low motivational family environment, use of dormitories.
- Changing to special school.
- Material aid, lunches, stipends, transportation.
- Organizing extracurricular activities, filling out free time of children.
- Treatment.

In some cases teachers were not able to find or identify appropriate approaches, all their attempts failed.

Summary of findings and recommendations

Summary of findings

Current relevant legislation

Slovak Constitution guarantees all citizens the right to free education. Compulsory education in Slovakia is defined by the Act on General Education Act No. 29/1984 (further referred to as School Law) to last 10 years, typically going from age 6-16 and including 9 classes of primary school and 1 year of secondary school. In year 2003 a new regulation was introduced with the aim to reduce absenteeism of children. According to this regulation, monthly child benefits are redirected from parents to local government offices in case their child misses out more than 15 hours per month without excuse. Amendment to the School Law passed in 2002 introduced “zero” or preparatory grades for children not ready for enrolling into the first grade. Furthermore, the position of teacher assistant was also introduced into the school system in 2002. Both measures have been reported to be effective in reducing absenteeism and increasing school succeeding of children at risk, but they are in reality also often accompanied by organizational or funding problem.

Defining school dropouts in Slovakia

The border between considering a student as dropout or absentee is very unclear: Slovak school system considers as a dropout a person who having fulfilled the compulsory education requirements has not completed primary education level (ISCED 2). Compulsory-education-aged children who miss out of school are considered in terms of school statistics to be absentees regardless of the number of missed days or weeks in school. Definitions of school dropouts applied abroad are however often much stricter than definition applied in Slovakia and used in the Slovak school system.

Data available

Official school statistics in Slovakia are collected and processed by the Institute of Education Information and Prognosis, a state institution working under the Slovak Ministry of Education. The institute collects detailed data regarding enrolment numbers per year and type of school as well as regions. It also collects and processes information about the number of absent hours, repetition as well as provides information about the number of students finishing compulsory education without completing primary education, i.e. not reaching grade 9 of primary school. Parents are required by law to enroll their child into the first grade at the age of 6, there is however no system of registering children every school year. Therefore valid data about students falling under the stricter international definition of school dropouts are not available. Data about students finishing compulsory education without completing primary education are collected and known, come however late to encourage taking preventive measures. Therefore, a lack of earlier data and information about school dropouts leads into underestimation of the problem and of the need to introduce preventive measures. Furthermore, as schools are financed per capita, they more likely tend to “hide” absenteeism not to lose students as well as finances.

Continuing challenges

Although it is generally acknowledged that children from socially disadvantaged environments, such as Roma children, are at higher risk of dropping out of school, there are no data collected on ethnical background of school dropouts due to human rights issues. According to the Save the Children report from 2001, only 1 per cent of Roma complete secondary school. Other studies

(Koptova, Lacko, 1993) indicate that Roma children are 30 times more likely to drop out of school and 14 times more likely to repeat a grade.

Insufficient and confusing system of second chance courses

The problem of citizens without completed primary education is dealt with in the Slovak School Law according to which “primary or secondary schools can organize courses to additionally obtain primary education certificate for citizens without completed primary education” (Article 60 of School Law and its further amendments). According to Ministry of Education regulations, course to complete primary education can be opened by a primary or secondary school if more than 12 participants apply, the course will be closed if the number of participants reduces to 6. The course lasts one year and takes the form of evening classes, or as a part-time course. The course leads into an exam passing of which is the condition for receiving certificate from primary school.

Problems lie in financing of such courses, as municipalities do not provide funds for schools offering such courses. Additionally, it is difficult to find information about schools offering second chance courses. Consequently, those interested approach schools individually, usually their former elementary schools, these are however often unable to open such course due to insufficient number of participants and funding problems. In the past, one school in the region was appointed to provide courses for completing primary education and received funds to do so. Another problem is the curricula used in these courses as they do not sufficiently reflect individual needs of students. All courses last one year and follow the same curriculum regardless of whether participants missed one or more years of primary school.

Findings based on the questionnaires

Questionnaires conducted with 253 children, their teachers and parents showed several interesting results. The analysis shows that social background of dropout children is a relevant factor when compared to results of all questionnaires. 63 % of dropout children in the sample come from a larger family with 4 and more children, while the net income of 97 % of these families is low, up to 20,000 SKK (500 EUR). Education background of parents has also proven to be a relevant characteristic. Parents of dropouts have typically spent 8 years in school, 6 % of fathers and 10 % of mothers less than that and only 1 % attended school for 16 years. Family support of education is also an important predictor. 12 % of parents of dropout children agree with their child dropping out, only half of parents of dropouts believe that education guarantees a better future for their child and 30 % does not care about the education of their child.

When it comes to negative predictors, dropout children tend to have more behavioral problems and problems with discipline while in school according to the questionnaires. A relevant difference is shown in the area of peer contact. Among dropout children a relatively high percentage reported to have no friends or to have friends that are not of their own age. Many teachers also report involvement of dropout children in suspicious groups of friends. It is also more typical in the group of dropout children that they are not satisfied with school and teachers and relationships in school. Half of the dropout children is not satisfied with their results in school which can suggest on one side realistic assessment of situation, but on the other long-term demotivating frustration. Belief in the value of education showed to be important factor. 40 % of dropouts are not convinced that education means better future and more than 5 % does not believe in it at all. 40 % of the interviewed dropouts does not want to continue to study, however positively, 40 % would like to continue studying. Results of questionnaire also confirm that motivation is a decisive factor. According to teachers 42 % of dropouts were never motivated in school, 45 % is reported as never to have been active in classroom, 60 % never to make their

homework or participate in extracurricular activities. In this regard, the role of teachers in increasing motivation and creating environment supporting active learning needs to be emphasized.

Recommendations

New legislation

The problem of dropouts in Slovakia needs more attention on all levels. The currently valid School Law dates back to 1984, a new one is being planned. It should then clearly define the term of school dropouts, strengthen preventive measures, support and clarify the system of second chance schools and courses. Further legislation and regulation should focus on supporting family as such and education and see it in direct relationship with unemployment and successful life of an individual. New legislation should clearly set the limits of state responsibility and support local safety networks.

Improving cooperation

Schools lack a coordinating body that would help them deal with the issue of school dropouts. It should be agreed on local level where second chance courses would be organized and this information should be easily accessible to those interested in continuing to study. Real life shows that secondary schools, especially vocational, are often a more appropriate and motivated institution for organizing such courses, as participants of these courses are potentially their future students. In line with per capita funding of Slovak schools, a working system of funding of such courses needs to be agreed. Cooperation of community and social workers needs to be supported in regions, the principle of local self-governance encouraged and communication between school, family and local government bodies improved.

Improving the system of teacher pre and in-service training

In the system of teacher preparation and life-long education of teachers, the issue of school dropouts needs to be taken into consideration. Teachers play a key role in preventing children from dropping out of school if able to support motivation and active learning by providing individual approach to children in their classroom, especially those at risk of dropping out. For those already dropped out of school, teachers play a vital role in coming back to the school system. Many participants who start never finish second chance courses due to lack of motivation, interest and support from family. Teachers need to be better prepared to deal and approach students in these courses.

Data collection

It is important to improve the system of data collection regarding school dropouts, while making the definition of school dropouts applied in Slovakia stricter. The system of reporting of absent students needs to be improved and registering of students in school every new school year recommended. In this way, information regarding children practically out of school and at risk of not completing primary school would be available earlier, encouraging preventive actions to be taken before these young people reach the age of 16 and leave the compulsory education system without primary education and basic qualification very often leading them directly to register at the Labor office as unemployed.

Create an effective system of second chance courses

The current system of courses for completing primary education is rather limiting than supportive. It is important to develop a system offering choices for young people who wish to

complete primary education and continue to study. It has proven to be better to organize courses in the form of evening classes and to open them each year at the beginning of school year due to securing funding for each such students. In this way, teachers as well as schools would be paid for their work and able to provide courses of higher quality. Course curriculum should include apart from the curriculum covering the missed years also practical topics from the area of psychology and other social sciences such as communication, conflict resolution, self-presenting, labor market orientation, applying for a job etc. When organizing second chance courses, schools should cooperate also with other professionals, such as psychologists, labor office staff workers, social and community workers etc.

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Addenda:

Addendum No. 1: Key findings of selected countries

Addendum No. 2: Questionnaires

Addendum No. 3: Questions of structures interviews

KEY FINDINGS OF SELECTED COUNTRIES

ALBANIA

Based on the discussion of the results of this study, several conclusions could be drawn in relation to the predictors and consequences of dropping out of school. It is important to note that a considerable part of the conclusion section is not only valid for actual dropouts, but additionally for at-risk children. The later, in some aspects have demonstrated a higher probability towards predicting factors such as: disagreements with school peers, violation of school rules, smoking and dissatisfaction with academic achievements.

WHAT IS MORE LIKELY TO CAUSE A CHILD TO DROP OUT FROM SCHOOL

The results of this study discovered that a child who has decided to leave school is more likely to:

- Reveal disordered attitudes and character problems during schooling;
- Have frequent disagreements with teachers and school peers;
- Violate school rules;
- Smoke;
- Show lack of interest in school, poor motivation in learning and lack of involvement in school life;
- Dissatisfaction with school achievements;
- Lack of involvement in school activities and do not feel incorporated into the school environment;
- Repeat grade levels;
- Have frequent attendance problems;
- Have parents with basic education and/or who have dropped out;
- Have unemployed parents;
- Have parents who show poor interest in school progress, who do not assist him/her in studying and who do not meet with his/her teachers.

The family of the child who has decided to drop out is likely to:

- Be large and have many children;
- Suffer from unemployment and low monthly income;
- Possess poor or ineffective living conditions;
- Have communication problems among members;
- Encourage and often enforce the child to leave school.

The school that generates dropouts is more likely to have:

- Poor organization;
- Poor community participation;
- A non functioning school board or student government;
- Inappropriate conditions and infrastructure;

- ❑ Unavailable health programs;
- ❑ Lack of incorporation in the learning/teaching process and recreation activities;
- ❑ Difficulties in teaching techniques and methodologies;
- ❑ Poor teacher development;
- ❑ Poorly motivated teachers.

WHAT IS NOT LIKELY TO CAUSE A CHILD TO DROP OUT:

The child who drops out is not inclined to:

- ❑ Show aggressive behavior during schooling;
- ❑ Have poor health;
- ❑ Have a family which has migrated;
- ❑ Have divorced parents or parents who are emigrants;
- ❑ Have alcoholism in the family;
- ❑ Engage in gangs or deviant groups.

WHAT IS LIKELY TO HAPPEN TO A DROPOUT CHILD

A child who has dropped out from school is more likely to:

- ❑ believe that school does not guarantee a better future;
- ❑ be employed in order to help the family;
- ❑ be more upset than children who attend school;
- ❑ have a lower self-esteem than children who attend school;
- ❑ have fewer peers than do his/her coevals who attend school;
- ❑ hang out with older friends, who have dropped out from school and who are employed;
- ❑ have disconnected relationships with school peers;
- ❑ be less self-confident and less confident about his/her future than a non-dropout.

LATVIA

National level education policy and practice

The legislation of the Republic of Latvia and other politically significant documents are modern, they clearly define the problems and goals of the education system, however, these are not fully implemented on a practical level.

Population groups, whose access to education is limited, do not receive sufficient support from the state; the responsibility for their involvement in education rests with local governments, where available resources and priorities differ greatly across the country.

The reform of education content requires the movement towards skill development and the mastering of knowledge which will be useful in one's life; however curricula of various study subjects are still very complicated and not always linked with direct applicability, thus children with less ability and motivation find them quite difficult.

The data gathering on the schooling age children is incomplete – there are discrepancies between the data of the Register of Population and the register of schooling-age children, which is conducted by schools and local governments as the requirement of the Ministry of Education

and Science. It is not clear how many children do not participate in the education process, and what the reasons of this condition are.

The criteria developed by the Ministry of Education and Science, which should be identifying the reasons of non-attendance of school, are unclear and open to various interpretation, thus the information is of no practical use.

No studies are carried out in Latvia to obtain qualitative information, for example, on the reasons of lack of learning motivation, as well as the impact of staying in the same grade for a second and a third year on the process of completing basic education. Thus it is difficult to assess the extent to which the practical work is in concert with the policy goals.

Pedagogical and social adjustment work has been started with children who have learning and behavior challenges, however this is not accessible to all children who might need it, and the outcome of the work have not been researched to a satisfactory extent.

Local level education policy and practice

The contribution of local level government to ensuring the education process depends on the funding and human resources that are at its disposal. In particular in the eastern part of Latvia (Latgale), as well as in rural areas, local governments are not affluent and less funding goes to education. For the most part, only city governments can staff their schools with social teachers, who provide assistance in working with social problems of families, truancy, etc.

Because of the restricted resources, as well as the lack of sufficiently educated professionals, local governments do not develop strategies and action programs which are oriented towards identifying the needs of vulnerable groups, responding to these needs and systematic work with families, who need support in bringing up the children.

The information exchange among institutions and professionals is quite limited; therefore the roles of various players in addressing the problems of children and families are unclear.

The work of schools

School teachers admit their insufficient skills in working with children who have learning and behaviors challenges, as well as insufficient work with the families of these children. However the schools lack resources to make progress in this situation.

In some schools the cooperation between specialists and teachers is promoted, and team work in providing support to children is encouraged; however state-wide school teachers lack time and experience, knowledge and skills to organize, manage and carry out this kind of work. Teachers lack the knowledge on where help and support can be obtained when facing complicated and novel problem situations.

Participation of the society

There are several successful examples of the participation of parents' groups and NGOs in addressing problems that are topical for schools: promoting learning, family and school cooperation; however the participation of the society as a resource in improving the work of schools is underused across the territory of Latvia.

Addendum No. 2:

NOTE:

Numbers in brackets indicate the number of question as taken from the Albanian questionnaire

INTERVIEW WITH THE PARENT

ID no of the student: _____

1. **(1)** Person interviewed:
a) mother b) father c) grandparent d) other: _____
2. **(2)** Child birthplace: _____
3. **(3)** Family location: _____
4. **(4)** Family has moved in the course of past five years?: a. yes b. no
5. **(5)** Number of children in the family: 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 4+ _____
6. **(6)** How many persons work in your family? _____ persons
7. **(7)** What is your monthly family income (in SKK):
a) up to 12 000 SKK b) 12 000 – 20 000 SKK
c) 20 000 – 30 000 SKK c) 30 000 SKK and more
8. **(8)** Your family receives social assistance: a. yes b. no
9. **(9)** Is your housing appropriate? a. yes b. no
10. **(10)** Does the child have both parents?
a) both b) only mother c) only father d) none
11. **(11)** Do you live with your parents?
a. yes b. no
12. **(12)** Are the parents divorced?
a. yes b. no
13. **(13)** Does one of the parents live abroad?
a. yes b. no
14. **(14)** The fathers years of education:
a) 0 _____ b) 8 _____ c) 12 _____ d) 16 _____ e) 16+ _____
15. **(15)** The mothers years of education:
a) 0 _____ b) 8 _____ c) 12 _____ d) 16 _____ e) 16+ _____
16. **(16)** The father is employed:
a. yes b. no
- 16 a. **(16a)** If yes, what is his profession: _____

- 16 b. If yes, does the father commute to work?
a) daily b) weekly c) monthly d) other: _____
17. **(17)** Mother is employed:
a. yes b. no
- 17 a. **(17a)** If yes, what is his profession: _____
- 17 b. If yes, does the mother commute to work?
a) daily b) weekly c) monthly d) other: _____
18. Have the parents completed basic education?
a) both b) father c) mother d) none e) no response
19. **(19)** What were the reasons that he/she left school?
20. **(20)** Did you agree with his/her dropout?
a) yes b) no c) no response
21. **(21)** Does any member of the family use alcohol?
a) no b) occasionally c) daily
22. **(22)** Has the child been in good health?
a) yes b) no c) no response
- 22 a. **(22a)** If not, please explain why: _____
23. **(23)** Do you believe that school guarantees a better future?
a) yes b) not sure c) no
24. How would you imagine an ideal school for your child? Please describe.

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

ID NO OF THE PUPIL: _____

1. **(2)** Municipality: _____
2. **(3)** City/village: _____
3. **(4)** School (name): _____
4. **(5)** Gender: a) F b) M
5. **(6)** Age: _____ years old
6. Nationality: a) Slovak b) Hungarian c) Roma d) other: _____
7. **(7)** Grade of child _____
8. Year of compulsory education _____
9. **(9)** Was a repetitive: a) yes b) no
- 9a) If yes, what grade, or what grades did the child repeat? _____
10. **(10)** His/her attendance was
a) systematic b) disordered, but usually excused c) disordered and usually not excused
- 10a) Number of excused absences of child since September 2003: _____
- 10b) Number of unexcused absences of child since September 2003: _____
11. **(11)** Did the pupil show aggressive behavior?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
12. **(12)** Did the pupil have a disordered attitude?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
13. **(13)** Did she/he have a quiet character
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
14. **(14)** Did she/he use drugs as far as you know?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
15. **(15)** Did she/he smoke as far as you know?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
16. **(16)** Was she/he in possession of an arm or other potentially harmful objects such as knife?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
17. **(17)** Was she/he motivated to learning?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never

18. **(18)** Did she/he have disagreements with you or other teachers?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
19. **(19)** Did she/he have disagreements with school peers?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
20. **(20)** Did she/he have fun with school peers?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
21. **(21)** Was she/he psychologically sensitive?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
22. Was she/he involved in after-school or extracurricular activities?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
23. **(23)** Did she/he participate in class?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
24. **(24)** Did she/he fulfill the classroom tasks?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
25. Did the child bring classroom necessities to school?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
26. Did the child do his/her homework?
27. **(25)** Were his/her results high?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
28. **(26)** Did she/he get upset because of results?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
29. **(27)** Did the parents communicate with you?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
30. **(28)** Did you have effective communication with them?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
31. Did you communicate with his/her parents informally?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never
32. Is there any link to support school/family cooperation? (e.g. teacher assistant, local association, social worker etc.)
-
-
33. **(29)** Do you think there were problems in the family?
a) yes b) not sure c) no
34. **(30)** Did the child engage in deviant groups?
a) yes b) not sure c) no

35. **(31)** Did she/he like school?

a) yes

b) not sure

c) no

36. Do you know if the child had previously run away from home?

a) yes

b) I don't know

c) no

37. **(32)** According to you, which were the reasons that influenced in the dropout of this child? Please, describe:

38. In your opinion, what approaches and methodologies would be most effective when working with this child? Please describe:

INTERVIEW WITH THE DROPOUT CHILD

ID NO of the student: _____

1. **(1)** How many close friends do you hang out with? _____ friends
2. **(2)** Are your close friends of your same age?
a) yes b) almost c) no
3. **(3)** Do your close friends attend school?
a) all of them b) some of them c) none of them
4. **(4)** Are your close friends employed?
a) all of them b) some of them c) none of them
5. **(5)** How long have you hung out with these friends? _____ months
6. **(6)** Do you always listen to your friends opinion?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never d) no response
7. **(7)** Do you work?
a) yes b) no c) no response
8. **(8)** Do you sometimes feel upset?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never d) no response
9. **(9)** Do you have nightmares?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never d) no response
10. **(10)** Do you have headaches?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never d) no response
11. **(11)** Do you think you have good qualities?
a) yes b) unsure c) no d) no response
12. **(12)** Do you think you can succeed in life?
a) yes b) unsure c) no d) no response
13. **(13)** Are you satisfied with yourself?
a) yes b) unsure c) no d) no response
14. **(14)** Do you smoke?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never d) no response
15. **(15)** Did you participate in extracurricular activities?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never d) no response
16. **(16)** Do you have contacts with your school peers?
a) usually b) sometimes c) never d) no response
17. **(17)** Were you satisfied with your school grades?
a) yes b) somewhat c) no d) no response

18. **(18)** Have you violated school rules?
 a) usually b) sometimes c) never d) no response
19. **(19)** Did you fight with your school peers?
 a) usually b) sometimes c) never d) no response
20. **(20)** Were you satisfied with teacher's behavior?
 a) usually b) sometimes c) never d) no response
21. **(21)** Were you nice at teachers?
 a) usually b) sometimes c) never d) no response
22. **(22)** Did your parents care about your study?
 a) usually b) sometimes c) never d) no response
23. **(23)** Did your parents help you out with studies?
 a) usually b) sometimes c) never d) no response
24. **(24)** Did your parents meet your teacher?
 a) usually b) sometimes c) never d) no response
25. **(25)** Did your parents agree with your dropout?
 a) yes b) no c) no response
26. **(26)** Who in the family did not agree with your leaving? _____
27. **(27)** Did you have problems in the family during your school leaving?
 a) yes b) no c) no response
28. **(28)** Do you talk with your parents for your problems?
 a) usually b) sometimes c) never d) no response
29. **(29)** Do you believe school guarantees a better future?
 a) yes b) don't know c) not at all d) no response
30. What did you like about school?

31. If there was a teacher you liked, can you tell me why you liked this teacher?

32. **(30)** Why did you leave school? (describe)

33. **(31)** Would you like to continue to attend school?
 a) yes b) not sure c) no d) no response
- 33a. **(32)** If yes, what could be done about this according to you? (describe)

33b. If not, what do you plan to do?

- a) be unemployed b) find a job c) go abroad
d) I don't know e) other: _____ f) no response

34. **(33)** Do you know what would you like to become in the future?

- a) yes b) not sure c) no d) no response

34a. **(33a)** If yes, what? _____

Interview duration: _____ min

35. **(37)** Did the child resist answering?

- a) usually b) sometimes c) never

36. **(38)** According to you the physical health of the child was:

- a) good b) somewhat good c) not good at all

Addendum No. 3:

Questions of structured interviews

- 1. Do you think Slovakia has a problem with school dropouts and school non-attendance?*
- 2. Have you or your institution got involved in discussions or activities related with this issue?*
- 3. In your opinion, what are the main factors leading to this phenomenon?*
- 4. Who do you think is responsible for this problem?*
- 5. What do you think can be done to improve the situation?*
- 6. Do you think there is a difference between law, regulations and the real situation?*