

Early leaving from education in the Czech Republic

ReferNet article (2013)

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A. Early leaving from education and training in the Czech Republic: definitions and statistics

A.1 Definition

There is no special definition of the early leaving from education used in the Czech Republic. Early leavers from education, as defined by the Eurostat indicator, are monitored by the Czech Statistical Office (CZSO). Besides that, the individual drop-outs from schools are recorded, which represent students leaving their field of study or school, but there is no monitoring of the further paths of the students (who may possibly transfer to another school or finish their study later).

A.2 Statistics

Aggregated data on early leaving from education is collected on the basis of the Labour Force Survey carried out by the Czech Statistical Office. In addition, information on the number of drop-outs from schools can be obtained from the school registers – they however do not include data on whether the leaving students continued their studies somewhere else or whether they retired from education completely. Also the National Institute for Education (NÚV) is engaged in this topic. Within its activities, particular surveys have been carried out bringing, among other facts, also contextual information on drop outs from schools (especially VET schools).

Generally, the division between drop outs from VET and from general education is not made and is not seen as purposeful, as the problem at the secondary general schools (gymnasia) is only marginal (drop-outs representing here only about 1 % of students with almost all of them finishing their study at another school). Data used in this article therefore comprises VET as well as general education, with the share of the general education being rather negligible in terms of numbers as well as in terms of dealing with the problem.

B. Different aspects that influence the decision to remain in or drop out from VET

B.1 Structural characteristics of the VET system

Key features of the Czech VET system in relation to early leaving

In the Czech Republic, the period of compulsory school attendance represents nine years (from 6 to 15 years of age, ISCED level 1+2). After completing compulsory education, 96% of population (age group 15-18) continues their studies within non-mandatory upper secondary education. Secondary schools provide mostly upper secondary education (ISCED 3) – either general or vocational – studies usually take 2 to 4 years (students are usually 15-19 years old). Successful completion of relevant study programme leads to attainment of these levels of education:

- upper secondary education with Maturita examination (either vocational or general)
- upper secondary education with vocational certificate
- upper secondary education without vocational certificate or Maturita examination, only with certificate of passing the final examination

Most secondary VET schools provide study programmes with vocational certificate as well as those concluded by Maturita examination. Maturita examination at all types of schools gives right to apply for admission to tertiary level of education.

Apprenticeship training as specified in a definition used in the European Union **does not exist** in the Czech Republic. IVET at ISCED 3 level is school-based, although educational programmes at this level have a large proportion of practical training that takes place at school workshops, practical training centres or in the premises of authorised companies. Schools also organize work placements (on average 6 – 8 weeks in the course of the programme).

Over a long term, the Czech Republic has been meeting the EC goal in the area of early leaving from education. In 2012, the proportion of early leavers represented (in line with Eurostat methodology) only 5.5%. Most students who leave their study programme find another way to complete successfully upper secondary education (by means of switching school or field of study – which they find more appropriate or easier). However, this does not mean that the problem of early leaving from education does not exist in the Czech Republic. People without qualifications represent relatively small however highly problematic group, which is rather difficult to be reached by the remedial measures.

Important factor in terms of low percentage of drop-outs from education in the CR is the existing offer of less complex, shorter and practically oriented training programmes at the upper secondary level. These are programmes with vocational certificate in practical fields with lower requirements in terms of general and vocational education. Graduates acquire generally recognized vocational qualifications and are prepared to carry out simple tasks within manual occupations. Proportion of students entering these fields represented 4.8% in 2012.

Further on, there are fields of study providing upper secondary education without vocational certificate, only with certificate of passing the final examination. These programmes are attended by 1% of students, usually persons with disabilities. Training is primarily focused on practical life skills.

Recognition of prior learning

In recent years, a system of recognition of prior learning outcomes is being developed. Persons who have not completed their studies and want to acquire qualifications or who have gained knowledge and skills in another field and have no proof of that may, after meeting relevant requirements, acquire a nationally valid certificate recognized by the employers. Distinction is made between vocational and complete vocational qualifications. To obtain vocational qualification, the applicant needs to demonstrate all competencies listed in the qualification standard of the National Register of Vocational Qualifications. Verification is carried out by means of examination implemented by the so-called authorised persons (often schools). Acquiring complete vocational qualifications - equivalent to those acquired within IVET - is more demanding. It is necessary to acquire all relevant vocational qualifications and subsequently pass an examination required for the corresponding field of study within IVET (certified by the Maturita or vocational certificate). Therefore it is so far just rare to acquire complete qualifications in this manner. Nevertheless, to obtain a trade licence for the given profession, the complete set of vocational qualifications is sufficient without the necessity to pass additional exam.

The demand for the recognition of vocational qualifications in majority of fields develops rather slowly due to low awareness and maybe also costs and complexity of examinations. Policy measures are being implemented to further promote the system and enhance awareness and it is expected that the number of applicants shall increase.

Currently, it is possible to get vocational qualifications also by means of retraining courses organized (mainly for the unemployed) by labour offices¹. However, so far it is not possible to assess the impact of the measure as the courses have been gradually transformed and re-accredited only since 2010.

Vertical permeability

The education system in the CR provides relatively good permeability. The main advantage is equality between general and vocational upper secondary education, when concluded by Maturita examination (ISCED 3A): both paths provide access to tertiary education.

Completion of vocational training with vocational certificate (ISCED 3C) does not allow for direct continuation of studies at tertiary level, however, students may pursue follow-up studies (ISCED 4A), which are also concluded by Maturita examination. This educational path is widely used (by approx. one third of ISCED 3C graduates). Therefore, the training in programmes with vocational certificate is not a dead-end path. However, about one third of

¹ There is one nation-wide institution – the Labour Office – with regional and local units, referred to as the labour offices for the purpose of this article.

students in follow-up programmes do not conclude their studies and also the success rate of these graduates in terms of admission to tertiary education is relatively low.

Additional vocational qualifications can be acquired by means of the so-called shortened programmes, provided that the applicant has already completed education at the same or higher level (i.e. a person with a vocational certificate can obtain another vocational certificate and a person with Maturita certificate can obtain another Maturita or vocational certificate in a different field). The length of study is 1-2 years in full-time form.

Horizontal permeability

With regard to demographic development showing since 2006 decline in number of pupils entering the first grades of secondary schools, the schools have rather problems to fill their capacity and as a consequence the educational offer provided is very good.

This situation provides for easy mobility of students within vocational education. It is not difficult to switch the school or field of study. Most schools provide study programmes concluded by vocational certificate as well as those completed by Maturita examination; therefore it is rather easy to implement the desired change of study programme within the same school. Every such a transfer needs to be approved by the headmaster of the school to which the student wants to be admitted. In case of change of field of study, the headmaster may require that the student takes an aptitude test.

The reason for transfers is usually lack of interest in given field of study or academic failure; the most frequent are the transfers from demanding study programmes to easier ones or from general education to vocational education programmes. Also bad financial situation of the family forces sometimes the transfer to another school or programme (e.g. to the closer location with less costs for travel and accommodation or to the field of study where there is immediate link to possible earnings). The main disadvantage of transfers is the loss of time in case the student is transferred to lower grade. It is also rather risky when students remain outside education in case they cannot continue their studies immediately (e.g. due to the school year schedule, on-going practical training) and they need to wait for the beginning of the new school year.

Cooperation of vocational schools with employers and regions

The Czech Republic does not have a dual VET system; the young people keep the status of student of the school also during their practical education (the practical education comprises two main forms – practical training and work placement, their share varies in different fields of study). The practical education is implemented in companies with which the schools have established cooperation or in own training centres of the schools (e.g. school farms or restaurants). Only exceptionally the students need to find themselves a provider of work

placement. Availability of work placement is not a factor causing directly early leaving from education.

According to the results of survey carried out among pedagogical staff of secondary schools (NÚV survey, 2012), the participation of students in practical training and/or work placements fosters remaining in VET. Closer cooperation of schools with companies enables learners to become familiar with real working environment and it shows future job perspective to those who are rather practically oriented and not really interested in theory while motivating them to complete successfully their studies. According to pedagogical staff, also student competitions, field trips to potential employers, presentations of companies at schools and technology demonstrations have positive impact on students' motivation to stay in the education.

There are also financial incentives in form of scholarships offered by some companies to pupils of partner schools particularly in fields with high demand for labour. The pupils get in the course of their studies financial aid or other benefits (such as travel allowance, accommodation allowance, utilities allowance) and also perspective of getting a job adequate to their qualifications, provided they enter a contract based on which they agree to work in the given company for a certain period of time upon the completion of their studies. The most motivating is the fact that the allowance is granted under the condition that the pupils observe school regulations and successfully complete their training. Such incentives can motivate in particular socially disadvantaged students to remain in education.

Some companies motivate students by means of agreements with selected schools (they grant them financial or material help).

Early leaving from VET in terms of stage

The number of drop-outs from upper secondary education and their reasons differ importantly depending on particular grades. The school registers record drop-outs according to the following breakdown: drop-outs without passing the required examinations, drop-outs due to failing to pass to the following grade (due to insufficient study results), drop-outs based on student's own decision or expulsion. According to these data, pupils most often leave during the first and final year of their studies at the secondary school (upper secondary level). If we apply these data on the total number of pupils in each grade (in 2011), we can see that drop-outs represented 16% of the first-grade students, 9.8% of the second-grade students, 10.8% of the third-grade students and 15.3% of the fourth-grade students².

Drop-outs occurring during the first year of the studies are mostly related to the wrong choice of field or level of education. Many students are not really sure about their interests and have

² Source: NÚV research based on the data from school registers, 2011.

no clear idea about the content or requirements of the chosen field. Here we can see significant room for more effective use of career counselling. At the same time, also demographic decline might contribute to this situation and the related fact that wide number of secondary schools have difficulties filling their capacity and accept even the pupils without necessary prerequisites and motivation for the studies. On the other hand, in case the student does not meet the requirements for studies at relevant school, the timely transfer to other school or field of study is recommended by the counsellors as a suitable solution.

A higher percentage of drop-outs from the fourth grade was mainly due to the failure at the final examination. In this context, it needs to be stated that the pupil may pass the exam in the next five years.

As far as the categories of education are concerned, we can see that the less demanding the study programme is, the higher proportion of drop-outs it shows. Within the study programmes of upper secondary education without vocational certificate or Maturita examination (ISCED 2C/3C), the early leaving from education represented 28-30% of pupils. However, the number of pupils in these programmes is very low (around 1%). As regards upper secondary education with vocational certificate (ISCED 3C) with less demanding study programmes, the proportion of drop outs represents 28%. Around 5% of pupils from the relevant age group study in this category of education. The problem is that these students have limited opportunities to switch from their study programme to a less demanding one. In the category of upper secondary education with vocational certificate (ISCED 3C) with standard study programmes, 17% of pupils dropped out from education and in the category of upper secondary education with Maturita examination (ISCED 3A), the drop out level represented around 10%. Most of these pupils, however, only switch to a different study programme and do not leave from education, the resulting proportion of young people remaining without qualifications is therefore lower than these numbers.

B.2 Labour market and social policy issues

Position of early leavers from education on the labour market

Generally in the Czech Republic, the higher level of education provides better protection against the risk of unemployment. Upper secondary level of education, attained by the vast majority of population, improves importantly the position of an individual on the labour market in comparison with unskilled workers. More attractive career opportunities and higher wages prove to be an important motivational factor in terms of educational attainment, which has been shown by e.g. surveys carried out within the framework of the project PROPOS³.

³ Source: Vacek, J., Pacnerová, H., & Menclová, M.: Příčiny předčasných odchodů ze středního školního vzdělávání u žáků ze sociokulturně znevýhodněného prostředí, průzkum pro projekt PROPOS [Reasons of Early

However, in times of economic crisis, the situation is not particularly favourable even for skilled graduates. In 2009, the ability of labour market to absorb newly arriving graduates has significantly decreased and this trend still lasts. In 2012, the unemployment rate in graduates of programmes with vocational certificate within the age group of 15-24 reached 18.3%⁴ and in graduates of programmes with Maturita examination represented 14.6%. The situation of the young people with only basic education⁵ is significantly less favourable, unemployment rate in this group reached 48.9%. Nevertheless, the total number of people with only basic education is relatively low in the Czech Republic⁶.

In legal terms, there is no difference between the status of persons with or without vocational qualifications. The legislation sets slightly different employment rules for youth up to 18 years of age, which is often the case of the early-leavers. Less demanding shift schedule needs to be secured, they have the right to more breaks and also their legal liability is limited (in case of accidents, etc.). These requirements reduce the willingness of employers to recruit new employees among these young people.

The link between the labour market and VET qualifications

The vast majority of VET programmes prepare students for the performance of certain occupation or a group of occupations. In legal terms, there is no defined link between the performance of a given occupation and required qualifications (with the exception of a small group of the so-called regulated occupations). However, it is customary for the employers to fill certain positions with candidates who have completed training in adequate or related field. Nevertheless in practice, it is often the case that the formal education of an employee does not correspond to the performed occupation, as there are also other criteria playing a role, such as working experience in the field (however the employee has no respective formal qualifications) or professional references and personal contacts.

Certificates issued by the state authorities (vocational certificate, Maturita certificate) are not always seen by the employers as a guarantee of quality and there are significant differences in quality of graduates from different schools. There have been various national measures developed in recent years aimed at improving this situation. Within their framework, the uniform state guaranteed final exams and Maturita exams have been implemented and the employers can (by means of sectoral councils) define requirements for the performance of individual occupations based on the principle of learning outcomes. The data on the qualifications are recorded in the National Register of Vocational Qualifications and allow for

Drop-Outs from Secondary Education in Pupils from Socially Disadvantaged Environment, a survey carried out for the purposes of the PROPOS project]. Praha: Centrum adiktologie a IPPP, Praha 2008.

⁴ Source: Labour Force Survey, 2012.

⁵ Basic education comprises primary and lower secondary levels (ISCED 0-2).

⁶ Within the given age group of 15-24, there is only 4.5% of persons who have attained basic level of education and do not participate in education any more.

verification and recognition of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning (see also Section 1.B). Employers' awareness of vocational and complete qualifications acquired in this way is still rather low and there is often no direct link to the prospects of employment. Also the number of holders of such certificates is so far relatively low (it can be estimated⁷ as around 1 % of the labour force, with waste majority being some professions who are required by the law to have this certificate).

It is difficult to obtain objective information on availability of jobs for unskilled candidates. There is no regular monitoring of the overall structure of demand for labour in the Czech Republic. The Labour Office monitors vacancies, however, only those that are reported by the employers themselves. The more qualified the job vacancy is the less probable that it will appear among the vacancies offered by the labour offices. By the end of 2012, as much as 37% of the vacancies registered by the Labour Office were intended for unskilled workers. In this category, there were 12 job seekers per vacancy, while in the category of upper secondary education without Maturita examination, there were 19 candidates per vacancy and in the category of upper secondary vocational education with Maturita, there were 18 candidates per vacancy.

The results of the pilot project carried out in 2010⁸, which monitored all vacancies, showed that 20% of all vacancies in the market required only basic education, 28% of them required upper secondary education with vocational certificate and 38% upper secondary education with Maturita. With regard to the fact that unskilled workers represent only small proportion of the work force, it might seem that the job offer for these workers is not much worse in comparison to other groups of workers. The unemployment rate in young people without qualifications is, however, very high as there are other factors playing a role. Young unskilled workers need to compete with unskilled workers of older age groups with more working experience, or sometimes are the vacancies filled with candidates with lower qualifications (vocational certificate holders), quite often are the jobs given to foreign workers who are willing to work for lower wages.

And even if the young people at the level of basic or incomplete upper secondary education get employed, these jobs are naturally only with low wages, very often they are only short-term and offer no prospects of better employment in the future.

Wages and other possibilities of financial income

⁷ The estimation is based on the number of certificates issued till June 2013 (the number is monitored by the National Institute for Education – NÚV). This number is not equal to the number of people holding the certificate as some of them can have multiple certificates. Nevertheless, the share of people with multiple certificates is estimated to be very low.

⁸ Source: Národní vzdělávací fond, o.p.s.: Monitoring nabídky volných pracovních míst. Možnosti propojení informačních zdrojů. Dílčí studie pro projekt HC 198/10 Sledování krátkodobých trendů v poptávce po pracovní síle [National Training Fund: Job Vacancies Monitoring. Options for Information Sources Linking, Partial Study for HC Project 198/10 Following Short-Term Trends in Labour Force Demand], Praha 2010.

As regards starting salaries, there are no great differences among qualified and non-qualified young workers. The wage difference nevertheless increases with more years of employment. In general, the wages of workers without qualifications represent 65% of wages of workers with upper secondary education with Maturita; in case of workers with upper secondary education with vocational certificate it is 77%. However, there are significantly smaller differences in case of young people (see Table). Therefore, motivation to complete the studies or to get transferred to study programme with Maturita examination cannot be found in immediate difference in earnings but rather in the long-term prospects.

In each occupational group, there are only slight differences between the wages of unskilled workers and workers with vocational certificate; the difference grows bigger at the point of Maturita examination. The difference between unskilled workers and workers with vocational certificate lies rather in the fact that people without qualifications are less likely to get some of the job. This is particularly the case of young people who are not able to compensate their lack of formal qualifications by working experience.

Table: Wages in relation to upper secondary education with Maturita (in %, 2012)

	<i>Basic education</i>	<i>Upper secondary education without Maturita</i>	<i>Upper secondary education with Maturita</i>	<i>Post-secondary non-tertiary education</i>	<i>Higher education</i>
	<i>ISCED 0-2</i>	<i>ISCED 3c</i>	<i>ISCED 3a</i>	<i>ISCED 4</i>	<i>ISCED 5-6</i>
all employees	65	77	100	118	167
up to 19	89	104	100		
20-24	85	92	100	112	124
25-29	75	80	100	111	128

Source: CZSO, Structure of earning survey, 2013, available online: http://www.czso.cz/csu/2013edicniplan.nsf/engpubl/3109-13-eng_r_2013, own calculations.

Young people who have left education – whether after acquiring qualifications or prematurely – and have not get employed are entitled to get registered at the labour office and receive social benefits. In 2013, the amount of benefits represents CZK 3410 (approx. EUR 130) per month in case of individuals with no other income. The amount of benefits is determined based on the income of the whole family. Those young people living with their parents and siblings, whose income covers the subsistence of the family, are not entitled to receive any social benefits. The amount of benefits may be reduced in case the receiver does not make sufficient effort to increase their income (especially by looking for a job). Given the minimum wage (CZK 8000, approx. EUR 312) is more than twice the maximum social benefits per

individual, it is possible to conclude that, from the financial point of view, it is not advantageous for a young person to become a social benefits receiver rather than getting a job (even poorly paid).

However, the real situation in practice is much more complex. There are other factors, due to which it may be more convenient for a family of a young person that he/she becomes a social benefits receiver rather than trying to complete his/her qualifications and subsequently find a job. E.g., it is often the case of large socially excluded families (often of Roma ethnicity), whose children are at high risk of early leaving from education. Such a family may jointly receive social benefits that are several times higher than a minimum wage and this may reduce the motivational potential of paid employment for one of its members, even more if the increase in income of the family may lead to the reduction of social benefits.

Labour offices are entitled to reduce the amount of social benefits granted to the families that do not send their children to school, however this measure applies only to the compulsory school attendance (up to 15 years of age) and therefore not VET. Nevertheless, this option is in practice used on a very limited scale.

As for grants and scholarships for students, there is no systematic support of this kind on a national level, except of the programmes supporting integration of Roma students (see section C.1). Scholarship programmes are usually launched by the regions. They are designed to attract and retain students in selected fields of secondary vocational schools, that are of high demand on the labour market, and still face low spontaneous interest of potential students. Scholarships are generally subject to regular school attendance, good study achievements and discipline. The amount of allowance increases in higher grades. Although these amounts are relatively low (hundreds of CZK, i.e. tens of EUR per month), they probably help to motivate students to stay in education and successfully complete their studies.

B.3 Individual reasons that influence the decision to discontinue VET

Reasons leading to premature termination of education are typically rather complex and it is not easy to determine the cause and the consequences.

Young people dropping out from education mostly come from socially disadvantaged background, from families with low educational attainment and long-term unemployment. These pupils show low motivation to participate in education, often deal with financial problems or are at risk of socio-pathological phenomena. Generally speaking, these factors are more important than e.g. belonging to an ethnic minority (especially Roma). Unfortunately, the proportion of early leavers from socially excluded – particularly Roma – households is growing. Other risk groups are represented by students who have chosen

inappropriate field or level of education. The field or study programme may not match their expectations or may not be suitable in terms of employability on the local labour market. In addition, other risk groups are represented by students with disabilities or in difficult life situations.

As for the frequency of immediate reasons, the survey carried out among the pedagogical staff of the schools (NÚV, 2012) shows that lack of interest in learning, excessive absence and poor school achievements are the most common ones. Other reasons include insufficient parenting control of the child, lack of parents' interest in child's education or their inability to provide necessary guidance. Due to the economic crisis, financial problems arise more often (leading to increased pressure on the pupil to start contributing as soon as possible to the financial income of the family). The wrong choice of field and/or level of education constitute an important group of reasons. Less frequently is retirement from education caused by drug or other kind of addiction or teenage pregnancy.

In case of study programmes with vocational certificate, more important role is played by reasons related to interest, motivation, or adaptation of the pupil (lack of interest in learning, frequent absence at school, lack of discipline) and also family background. On the contrary, in case of study programmes with Maturita examination, relatively frequent reason to drop out from secondary school seems to be wrong choice of field or level of education and related lack of interest in the selected field or poor study achievements.

School registers record four types of early leaving from education, which brings a different perspective on the phenomenon. In 2011, prevailed the early leaving from study programme without completing the final examination (38% of secondary school students who terminated prematurely their studies in the relevant year), followed by students dropping out based on own decision (36%), dropping out due to failing to pass to the following grade (24%), and the less frequent reason was expulsion from studies (2%). Expulsion seems to be the less frequent reason because the students at risk of being expelled usually leave earlier at their own request.

Within less demanding study programmes, the predominant type of leaving from the study programme was a simple drop-out (pupil's own decision). In 2011, within the category of upper secondary education with vocational certificate dropped out 19% of students, 4% failed at the examination and 5% left school due to failing to pass to the following grade. Within the programmes with Maturita examination, relatively frequent type of leaving was termination of studies without passing the final examination. The data, however, do not reflect the fact that a number of students complete their studies at a different school, in other study programme or they take the final examination in the course of coming years.

C. Measures to reduce drop out from VET

C.1 Measures in place to prevent drop out from IVET

System of pedagogical and psychological counselling

Prevention and intervention in the area of early leaving from education is implemented as part of wide spectrum of activities within the school system of pedagogical and career counselling, career choice support, fostering pupils' interest in learning, support for families and drug prevention. Many non-profit organisations develop their activities within the area of education of students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. These organisations focus on individual tutoring of students with regard to their specific needs, including the cooperation with their families.

The main system tools of prevention include pedagogical and psychological counselling and grant schemes of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT) financing the activities of schools and other institutions within this area.

The system of pedagogical and psychological counselling (within the scope of the MŠMT) consists of pedagogical and psychological counselling centres, special education centres and school-based counselling offices. In line with the School Act, counselling must be provided at every basic and secondary school. Counselling at schools is provided by **pedagogical counsellors** and **prevention counsellors**. The counsellors are recruited from the pedagogical staff. They must have their qualification enhanced in relevant training courses. Alternatively, counselling may be provided by school psychologist or special education teacher, in case the school has one. The drawbacks include low work time assigned to these tasks and insufficient wages.

Pedagogical counsellors focus primarily on career counselling and the process of integration of pupils with special educational needs (including the integration of gifted pupils) in schools. Prevention counsellors (consultants) work primarily within the area of undesirable social phenomena prevention, they cooperate closely with pedagogical and psychological counselling centres, educational care centres, police and social services departments. The school-based psychologist or special education teacher creates a system of timely identification of pupils with learning difficulties and develops strategies used in schools to prevent learning difficulties related to re-education. In addition, they also provide methodological support to teachers and secure crisis intervention.

Pedagogical and psychological counselling centres step in particularly in cases of impediments to the educational process. In the area of early leaving from education, they provide counselling services to pupils at higher risk of academic failure or with difficulties in their personal and social development, to their parents or other legal representatives and

pedagogical staff educating these pupils. In addition, they implement preventive measures and coordinate school methodology of prevention.

Special education centres provide counselling services in the area of education of pupils with disabilities and methodological support to schools. Counselling is also provided by **educational care centres** which constitute a part of facilities for institutional or protective care.

Grant schemes developed by the MŠMT, under which the schools and other institution may apply for support of activities within the area of prevention of early leaving from education, include particularly:

- ✓ ROMA SŠ and VOŠ Programme – secondary schools and tertiary professional schools may apply for the financial support of socially disadvantaged Roma students who otherwise could not afford to pay the costs related to their studies; good behaviour and regular school attendance are prerequisites for getting a grant;
- ✓ Programme of Roma community integration – is financing projects of non-profit organisations; one of the main goals of this programme is to support Roma pupils at basic and secondary schools and training of pedagogical staff in the area of high-risk pupils' integration;
- ✓ Programme supporting the schools implementing inclusive education and education of disadvantaged children and pupils – subsidies for schools that have higher proportion of socially or physically disadvantaged pupils and implement measures to support these pupils;
- ✓ Programme supporting pedagogical assistants for socially disadvantaged students – subsidies for schools that employ pedagogical assistant(s) (i.e. pedagogical staff with relevant qualifications, who help in classes with disadvantaged pupil(s));
- ✓ Programme of primary prevention of risk behaviour – is financing projects of schools or non-profit organisations focused on prevention of socio-pathological phenomena.

School-level approach to preventing drop-outs

The most frequently used preventive measure in broader sense is availability of a school psychologist or pedagogical counsellor and giving a pupil opportunity to seek their help if needed. Around 86% of surveyed schools use the school psychologist or educational counsellor in order to help pupils who are currently at risk of dropping out from school. Counselling is often initiated based on a fact that a teacher reports pupil's failing to fulfil school duties or increased number of absences at school. Subsequently, interviews with the parents and meetings of educational committees are initiated. Sometimes, consultations or tutoring are offered as a part of the solution, further on it may be also a transfer to different study programme in the same school or a transfer to different school, cooperation with pedagogical and psychological centres or with social welfare authorities and so on. In case of pupils with health issues who happen to be at risk of drop out from education, the schools are entitled to provide individual study plan.

In addition, preventive measures may also include student adaptation courses held at the beginning of the study, questionnaires or interviews aimed at identifying potentially vulnerable students, drug prevention.

In case of serious social or health problems, there is an option for the secondary school students to interrupt their studies for the period of up to 2 years. Interruption of studies needs to be approved by the headmaster of the school and when returning to school, the students go back to the grade in which they had interrupted their studies or to the following grade provided they prove adequate knowledge. Interruption of studies is being used by the students particularly in cases of health issues, pregnancy or child care.

In addition to counselling, the schools encourage students' interest in learning and successful completion of their studies by means of various other activities, such as student competitions, field trips to companies, meetings with successful graduates and so on.

There is still room for improvement in the area of systemic support for the targeted work with vulnerable students in terms of prevention. At the moment, methods of work with these students depend to a large extent on possibilities and attitude of individual schools or non-profit organisations.

Growing importance of career counselling

So far, in terms of counselling, emphasis has been put on pedagogical and psychological aspects. But the importance of career counselling and guidance that should prevent wrong choice of field or study programme is becoming more evident. Career counselling is within the education sector provided by the above mentioned network of counsellors at schools. An important role is played also by the teachers who prepare and teach the cross-subject topic

“Man and the World of Work”, which is being followed by the students at the basic as well as upper secondary level of education. Part of activities of counsellors in the education sector is represented by cooperation with the consultants from the Labour Office Information and Counselling Centres, who are involved in the process of educational path selection and in case of pupil’s failure also in the re-engagement and pupil’s return to education or their inclusion in retraining programmes.

National project VIP Kariéra II is an example of increased attention paid to the development of career counselling. A comprehensive information system www.infoabsovent.cz is being developed within the framework of this project. Its aim is to create a link between educational offer and comprehensive information on the content of education. In addition to other features, it also includes short video trailers aiming to introduce particular professions and occupations to the students. The portal also contains sections specifically dedicated to the prevention of early leaving from education. It shows examples of good practice in the area of prevention and intervention while also including descriptions of the most common problems of the students accompanied by suggestions and advice on how to proceed and whom to contact in that particular situation, etc.

Growing importance of career counselling is expressed also in the new governmental strategy entitled “New measures fostering vocational education and training” (adopted in 2013) that places further development of career counselling among its main priorities.

Training of pedagogical and counselling staff

The topic of prevention of early retirement from education is discussed in the broader context of pedagogical and psychological work with the pupils and prevention of pathological phenomena. Within the training provided at pedagogical faculties, there is also a study programme of educational counselling entailing wide spectrum of topics covering partly also the field of career counselling. Teachers may enhance their qualifications in this area also within the framework of continuing education (e.g. courses provided by the National Institute for Further Education). E-learning courses for counsellors are organised within the framework of VIP Kariéra project.

The schools may employ also the so-called pedagogical assistants, whose task is to improve working environment in the class including a physically or socially disadvantaged pupil. Pedagogical assistants must successfully complete relevant accredited course.

C.2 Remedial measures in place related to VET

Generally, the main actors responsible for remedial measures are the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

Given that the majority of students dropping out of schools complete eventually their studies and acquire qualifications, the core of remedial activities lies rather on the part of schools and education sector in general. Also the options provided by permeability of the system are being used. The students may interrupt their studies and return again to formal education or they may switch the school or study programme. Possibility of returning to education at particular point of the school year is sorted on individual basis, depending on the capabilities and capacity of particular school and study programme, organisation of practical training, etc.

However, in case a young person prematurely leaves the education completely, there is no specialized programme or institution that would be in charge of addressing the situation. In the position of job seekers and social benefits applicants, these young people come into contact with the **labour office** counsellors. Labour offices are obliged to pay special attention to this group of job seekers; they are regarded as vulnerable group in terms of labour market. Labour offices use the so-called Individual Action Plan as the main tool for working with the vulnerable groups. It is a document specifying particular measures and the time schedule of their use according to individual capabilities and needs of a client. The situation of the client is assessed by the counsellor focusing on possibilities of finding a job. Enhancing their qualifications in an appropriate form (in particular retraining courses provided within the framework of employment services or return to formal education) might be one of the suggested solutions. Success rate of these activities is, however, rather low as many clients show negative attitude towards school environment and lack of motivation to learn.

Diverse types of assistance to families in difficult social situations are secured within the framework of the **social services system**. The assistance is provided by the Social Services Departments in municipalities and regions or by non-profit organisations. There are no targeted system programmes fostering re-engagement in education, however, as the main goal is to achieve full participation of a person in the society, it is also possible to provide support to young people and their families to help them to acquire their qualifications. That might be done as part of social advisory services, low-threshold facilities for children and youth or other social activation services intended for families with children.

As already mentioned, the Czech Republic has a **system for verification and recognition of knowledge and skills** acquired outside formal learning. Candidates without formal qualifications, who have in any way acquired certain skills and competences, may upon completion of relevant examination(s) obtain formally recognized certificate. However, awareness of this option has been rather low by now (for further information see section B.1). Especially for the target group of early leavers from education there is no direct linkage to the opportunities (or necessity) to get a job or start another activity (e.g. social entrepreneurship).

D. Conclusions

The Czech Republic has always ranked among the EU countries with the lowest indicator of early-leavers from education and by far exceeds the 10% target set in the Europe 2020 strategy. The related national target has been set at maximum 5.5% of young people leaving prematurely from education, which means maintaining the current situation. The Government will, therefore, pay close attention to current developments and will promptly respond to any sign of deterioration of the situation.

The objectives of the CR Government aimed to increase attractiveness of VET include setting up support for cooperation between companies and vocational schools, adjustment of VET framework educational programmes in cooperation with experts from practice, etc. In order to encourage corporate investments in VET, motivate companies to provide practical training at their premises and foster provision of corporate scholarships, the Government is preparing reform measures that should facilitate tax deductions to companies.

The further steps will among other things build on the sectoral cooperation (e.g. Sector Skill Councils) that has been successfully established and developed in recent years.

Reduction of structural unemployment in new graduates and fostering of faultless decision-making while choosing field and study programme is a task for growing field of career counselling importance of which will keep on being emphasized.

The recent launch of uniform Maturita examination (since 2011) contributed to the increased number of students who failed at final examination and have not acquired qualifications at the level of upper secondary education. This is probably the cause of the slight year-to-year increase of the early-leavers indicator (from 4.9% in 2011 to 5.5% in 2012). At present, it is not possible to determine whether this tendency will last or whether it has been only a temporary swing over which the Czech education system can easily get in the course of next few years. Students, in fact, may attempt to pass Maturita examination once again during the following five years; another option is to switch to less demanding study programme and complete their studies there. Currently, testing is being carried out of study programmes enabling the students to acquire also vocational certificate in addition to Maturita examination. In case of failure at Maturita examination, they would at least acquire vocational certificate and would not be left without any qualifications. On the other hand, the launch of uniform Maturita examination may result in the change of study preferences of the pupils as well as their parents in terms of more careful decision-making while selecting the school and field of study corresponding to the abilities of the students.

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