



EVERY STUDENT MATTERS



EVERY STUDENT MATTERS!



IMPRINT

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DEAR READER,

The publication you are holding in your hands contains the implementation results of a project titled “*Cross-sectoral cooperation focused solutions for preventing early school leaving*” (CroCooS). It lasted from the spring of 2014 to the spring of 2017, and was co-funded by the European Commission. This was a three-year-long strong cooperation among three Eastern Central-European countries – Serbia, Slovenia, and Hungary – with the support of some Danish and Dutch colleagues: our “critical friends” – as we called them during the project.

The main objective of the cooperation was to develop an early warning system (EWS) on an institutional level in 15 pilot schools, and examine its applicability with a randomized controlled trial, with the aim of enriching the common European knowledge in the field of preventing early school leaving.

Why is early school leaving (ESL) or early leaving from education and training (ELET) such a serious political issue in the EU?

ESL is a social indicator showing the percentage of young people aged 18 to 24 in a country without having completed their upper secondary education, and not being involved in further education or training. What does this indicator show, what is behind the rate? There is evidence that lower education is generally linked to unemployment rate, poverty, health problems, and social exclusion, and it has a severe impact not only on the individual, but society as a whole – less tax income, more social expenses, increasing social inequalities, inactive citizens, etc. However, ESL rate is only a statistical data. There are many heart-breaking, real-life stories about people whose lives have been derailed soon after dropping out of school as well as success stories about some getting back on track that we, responsible for improving the education system (decision makers, school leaders, teachers, educational administrators, service providers, or even parents or students) can learn from.

Early school leaving represents a complex challenge at all levels – individual, national and European. Young people leaving education and training prematurely generally have more devious pathways from childhood to adulthood, or have to face more difficulties in their lives as compared to those gaining the necessary qualifications in time. There are many reasons behind the situation: social and economic disadvantages, family problems, learning or behavior difficulties, a turbulent transitional life-stage, loss of self-esteem – as it very often happens with youngsters.

Whilst it is vital to recognise that school climate and teacher-pupil relations are affecting the cases of dropouts, it is essential to remember that education and training systems are embedded in a wider socio-political context. Even though positive changes in the quality of school systems and the improvement of teacher care are important factors, we should emphasise the level of solidarity and commitment required from politicians. It should also be noted that the reinforcement of social justice is an equal, if not more important, determining factor when combatting ESL.

I personally think that by formulating the expectation of reducing the average ESL rate in the European Union under 10% by 2020, policy makers urged member states to better focus on their social sub-systems and problems, and identify the most efficient improvement measures in their education system, social policy, youth work and health-related issues as well as cross-sectoral cooperation.

In the postmodern age, traditional communities are falling apart, even traditional families have been changing. As a result, a lot of young people grow up without a caring environment around them. Individuals mostly satisfied with their lives and well-being, being free in their choices, are evidently the engines of a healthy society. It is an indisputable fact that we must share the social responsibility of supporting every young person especially ones having temporary or permanent difficulties in managing their career. Otherwise, there is a high risk that they enter a downward spiral, and through a serial of bad decisions they get marginalized, and their reduced participation in social, cultural and political activities leads not only to the increase of poverty but also a serious democratic deficit. It is the responsibility of all governments to build adequate education system, appropriate institutions, and services around them.

Since there is no single reason for dropout, there is no simple solution, either. One of the recommendations of the European Commission to the member states, based on monitoring the well-performing youth care systems in some countries, is to establish an early warning system which helps to identify students at risk of dropping out in time and also contains elements of intervention based on the personal needs of the individuals. However, there is no exact definition, or, even less, a standardized description of an early warning system, similarly to the fact that education systems are quite different around Europe. All of the already existing EWSs are embedded strongly in the national or local culture. Nevertheless, most of the best performing countries where a comprehensive EWS has been developed (Scandinavia, the Netherlands and some of the Anglo-Saxon countries) have some similarities: inclusive education, collaborative culture of teachers and a long tradition of a system-wide cross-sectoral cooperation.

The CroCooS partnership had to face a double challenge. First, in this region of Europe, the above-mentioned characteristics of the education system are almost entirely absent. This meant that a new mindset and approach was required from both the development teams and the teachers. Second, at the first stage of the project, the partnership had to reach a common agreement on what they understand when referring to an EWS in their policy experimentation. It was a hard process to make a balanced decision between the desired institutional development process and the limited possibilities under the project framework, including the strict expectation of evaluation. The most serious dilemma of the conceptual discussion was the dimension of the core elements of the designed EWS versus the independent and autonomous improvement of schools. Finally, the responsibility to solve this challenge was placed into the mentors' hands, who – on a monthly basis – supported the schools while implementing the designed EWS, by using the developed guidelines and toolkit, and who definitely have to be called “the heroes of CroCooS”.

As a consequence, 15 pilot programmes were elaborated in 3 countries during the 1,5 years, which are similar with regard to their goals, but unique with regard to the way of the implementation. Also, there are similarities in the results, but all the pilot processes were influenced by local demands, school characteristics, organizational culture and the national education system, as the detailed evaluation report shows.

This booklet seeks to give a glimpse into the moments of the committed work of the five Hungarian schools, the eye-opening experiences of the teachers, and – in mosaics – present the professional elements of the improvement processes. Most of the stories and the described lessons learned highlight that the project activities improved the sensitivity of the teachers towards the problem, strengthened their skills in building the necessary trust with their students which can be understood as the first step of change in their school climate that could lead to an inclusive culture in the future. The partnership believes that – besides all of the scientific results of the CroCooS project – personal success stories, mindful words and grateful smiles between people are the most important outcomes of the project.

Since there are differences in the achievement and the lessons learned in the piloting countries, the structure of this booklet shows a variety: national coordinators along with the schools tried to find the most appropriate way to present their experiences. In the first chapter, we summarized the implementation methods, and this is followed by the Serbian, Hungarian and Slovenian descriptions of the schools' stories, and in the final part of the publication, there are three short writings from the evaluators, one of the critical friend's and one an academic perspective.

Acknowledging voices articulating that education is rather an art strongly rooted in practical experience, and the school-generated knowledge could equally enrich academic knowledge, we consider that it is important to note that different actors have to make a collaborative professional effort to break down the boundary between theory and practice and focus on the application of the research results.

This booklet is about *'what'* happened in practice on the school level, however, the final report of CroCooS provides a deep insight into the *'why'*, and shifts the focus from the implementation issues to the institutionalization of the new

methods. In the complex, multilevel and multiactor nature of the education systems, which imply that the results of a policy measure or an institutional innovation are theoretically not predictable, the importance of this kind of policy experimentation and the subsequent policy learning is essential.

I strongly recommend this booklet to you, dear Reader, if you are a member of any educational community – a policy maker, a teacher, any other member of a school staff, a government officer, a researcher, a parent or a student –, whether you are hesitant about or committed to changes, whether you have had either good or bad experience with dropout, regardless of your level of knowledge about the topic. After tasting some stories, I also suggest asking yourself:

“What is my responsibility in tackling early school leaving?”

Eszter SZEGEDI, project leader

CROCOOS – CROSS-SECTORAL COOPERATION FOCUSED SOLUTIONS FOR PREVENTING EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

The general aim of the CroCooS project was to contribute to the specification and to the applicability of a comprehensive institutional early warning system (EWS) for preventing early school leaving. In the framework of the CroCooS project, EWS is a tool used by educational institutions, based on **measurable data** and **observable phenomena**, facilitating the **timely identification of students at risk of dropping out** and also the **establishment and application of prevention measures** on an individual level. The operation of an EWS system is based on such institutional and teacher competencies as gathering and processing appropriate data, interpreting students' behaviour and the reasons behind them as well as establishing tailor made prevention measures and readiness to involve out-of-school resources and partners.

THE MAIN ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE CROCOOS PROJECT WERE THE FOLLOWINGS:

1. Pilot programmes on school level

The partnership identified the elements of a comprehensive institutional early warning system (EWS) and included data gathering and monitoring and the protocols of intervention on an individual level all based on cross-sectoral cooperation. **The proposed EWS was piloted in three European countries** (HU, SI, SER). Pilot activities took place between May 2015 and December 2016. The cornerstones of the pilot programmes at school level were:

- *Selecting and supporting the mentors:* two mentors were selected in each country and they were prepared for their tasks via mentor workshops. They could turn to their national coordinator and the mentor supporters for support when they experienced any kind of obstruction or difficulties in working with their teams during the whole pilot process.
- *Providing mentoring to schools:* in building the EWS in schools and using the supporting materials.
- *Preparing school teams for planning interventions at school level (EWS team):*
 - Piloting schools got the EWS-guideline and access to an online toolkit and they were mentored about finding institutional aims to enable them to build and operate an early warning system by using the materials they were given. The mentors followed the “Steps of institutional capacity building: the plan-do-check-act (PDCA) cycle” in the Guidelines when developing an EWS in their mentor schools and their primary role was to support the EWS team with the use of tools (specific educational support e.g. drama games, and supporting institutional processes e.g. organising data collection, communication among teachers, etc.).
 - The process started with the identification of the students at risk by using tools from the toolkit as well as with the help of the identified distress signals in the research phase of the CroCooS project.
 - Only a smaller group was selected from the identified at risk students who had the chance to benefit from individual intervention based on a Personal Development Plan (PDP) created by the EWS team. The effect of these interventions was followed up by the team and if it was necessary they involved external professionals from their identified cross-sectoral network.
- *National peer learning activities (PLA):* three national PLAs were organised in each country as a knowledge sharing forum for schools.

2. Development supporting materials to the pilot:

- **Guidelines for schools on how to build an EWS** on an institutional level
- **Online Toolkit** and community supporting interventions on an individual and school level
- **Online Resource Pool** containing research results and a collection of background material helping to increase knowledge in the topic.

3. Research activities

The content of products supporting the pilot is partly being developed based on the findings of a **complex research activity** involving desk research, country reports, comparative analysis of the country reports, conduction of online questionnaires in the three pilot countries, interviews and study visit reports.

4. Evaluation

The pilot was carried out by applying the methodology of randomized controlled trial. The effectiveness of the pilot activities is measured by an **input and an output evaluation**.

5. Knowledge sharing fora

Part of the pilot (and also on the occasion of dissemination) was knowledge sharing and awarenessraising **various consultations** (workshops, PLAs, on-line forum, social networks) and dissemination (conference, videos, newsletters) activities also took place and were prepared within the project. These were devoted to ensuring peer learning and both top-down and bottom-up information exchange.

6. Lessons learned

The results of the evaluation of the pilot, the research findings and the conclusions of all the consultations, events are integrated into **policy recommendations** on how to build an institutional EWS.

Publicly available information about the project – including the above mentioned guidelines, toolkit resource pool as well as the research results and policy recommendations – can be found at www.crocoos.tka.hu

The summary was written with reference to the project documentation. Original authors:

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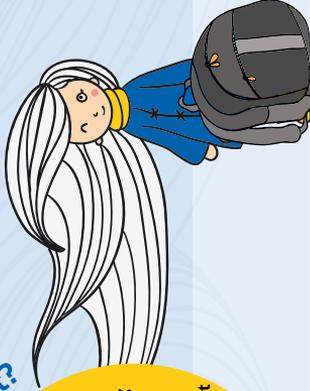
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CROSS-SECTORAL COOPERATION FOCUSED SOLUTIONS FOR PREVENTING EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING CROCOOS

WHAT
is the content of the pilot?

- Setting up an EWS team in each school
- Establishing an EWS strategy in the school
- Improving partnerships inside and outside of the school
- Improving the school's data gathering and data processing capacity
- Setting up a system to monitor distress signals
- Identifying students at risk of drop-out
- Planning adequate intervention
- Intervention based on personal development plan (PDP)



HOW
CroCoos is implemented?

- Providing support materials: Guidelines • Toolkit • Resource Pool
- Competency development in pilot schools and national teams via: Regular EWS team mentoring at site Supporting school teams to learn from each other (PLAs) Supporting mentors to learn from each other Supporting national teams to learn from each other

PILOT CONTENT AND METHODOLOGY

PRINCIPLES

NATIONAL POLICIES • EVIDENCE • RESEARCH RESULTS

**CHALLENGE/
PRESSURE** Needs of participants at different levels, in different roles, in different phase of the project

SUPPORT

TRUST

EARLY WARNING SYSTEM (EWS) – in the framework of the CroCoos project – is a systematic tool used by educational institutions at institutional level, based on measurable data and observable phenomena, facilitating the timely identification of students at risk of dropping out and also the establishment and application of tailor made prevention measures on an individual level. The operation of an EWS system is based on such institutional and teacher competencies like gathering and processing appropriate data interpreting students' behaviour and the reasons behind, establishing tailor made prevention measures and readiness to involve out-of-school resources and partners.

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www.crocoos.tka.hu



Pilot schools in Serbia

Zrenjanin

- Agricultural school

Požarevac

- Agricultural school

Požega

- Agricultural school

Ruma

- School of Agriculture and Food Sciences

Sombor

- School of Agriculture and Food Sciences

SERBIA

THE STORY ABOUT CHANGES

What happens when child drops out? Whose fault is this? Who is responsible? Who can help to change that child's world? During this project period we have worked on developing schools that know how to answer these questions and how to react in situations that are probably hardest for everyone in education! Our work in establishing a kind of school that takes care of each student was implemented on three levels: entire school level, EWS team level and level of individualized support. It was also about working on parallel changes of both school climate and culture. It was active research in which we continually worked together with school staff, listening, understanding and interpreting and only after that could practices evolve, adjusting aims and implementing interventions.

Changes in schools

Schools change on an everyday basis although such changes are more often spontaneous than planned. Introducing targeted change requires huge support from the school staff. We are happy to say that we received this kind of support in all five partner schools.

It is typical that psychologists, pedagogues and master teachers are conscious of early school leaving and the need to provide solutions. This is a great starting point but to progress from that point to *the school* that cares in our case was a full CroCooS programme. During each peer learning activity we could see how the discussions between EWS teams became more lively and fruitful. And it was the discussion about databases, procedures for intervention, local support networks, teaching/learning and extracurricular activities quality, participative establishing of students' spaces and events, school promotion in local community and many more activities that helped build up role model schools. And when we say role models we think of role models in informed and evidence-based planning, intervening and professional decision making in the complex field of school dropout.

Changes in the school staff

When you hear school leaders or teachers saying that student's problems are also their professional problem then you see the process of changes that started in EWS team but which crosslink entire school systems. This process starts with understanding dropout and ends in reacting to it. And there are millions of ways to react, but our teams became flexible systems with ideal fluid characteristics, capable of creating tailor made intervention and of mobilizing other actors/factors within the school or community every time when needed.

Changes in us, national team

We have cooperated and learned intensively, but there are gaps in our knowledge still and it is relatively easy when team shares the same values. We learned how these values are tested in the most challenging cases, in those which are hard to understand. We thank schools for reminding us how big and important job all of us do in society in which education is still not a real priority.

Jelena Joksimović, national project coordinator, Education Forum, Belgrade
Olja Jovanović and *Jovan Komlenac*, mentors

LET US NETWORK

Agricultural school, ZRENJANIN

Mentor: *Olja Jovanović*

EWS team members: *Gordana Milovanov Mutavdžin* School psychologist, EWS team Co-ordinator; *Aleksandra Rodić* teacher; *Veselinka Nikin* teacher; *Isidora Vukov* teacher; *Goran Mihajlov* teacher

Director: *Milica Damjanović Tomić*

Year after year we have increasing numbers of students leaving school. There are many reasons for this: early pregnancies, financial problems, to all sorts of violence. Despite that, dropping out was not perceived as an important problem at our school. That is exactly why we have joined this project.

What Did We Get...

...As An EWS Team?

Each of us has learned to recognize subtle signals of dropouts and how to support students at risk. We have learned to listen better and to see every problem through our students' eyes, to understand them, and offer advice when needed, to be supportive and always be with them in dealing with problems.

...As a School?

It seems that the net that we have been weaving cross-linked the entire school. Teachers are now collaborating more closely, exchanging knowledge, experiences and ideas and they also have higher motivation to meet their students' needs. We have started working on many extracurricular activities the students suggest some of those activities more freely, and then they implement these with teachers. On a school level, we have a system for preparing for the risk of students dropping out.



Students' TV station

...As a Local Community?

Local partners were introduced to the twofold nature of the problem of dropping out, as a problem for the school but also as a problem for them as future employers. The EWS team members participated in developing a local action plan for youth and the topic of preventing early school leaving took an important place in this plan.

...And What Did Our Students Get?

More smiles, initiatives and confidence to raise and implement new creative ideas; sense of belonging fewer disputes; and very visible orientation towards helping each other in everyday school or just life tasks. It seems like students have weaved their own support network as well.



Students' welcoming cards awarded to all freshmen

TRUST!

Agricultural school with a dorm “Sonja Marinkovic”, POŽAREVAC

Mentor: *Jovan Komlenac*

EWS team members: *Dragana Radovanović* pedagogue and EWS team coordinator; *Slobodan Pavlović* psychologist; *Dragan Ristić* teacher; *Velibor Janković* teacher; *Milena Jovanović* librarian

Director: *Vidoje Vukašinić*

Our experience during work on CroCooS was inspiring and stimulating for our development. It provided a chance to make our own practice in terms of preventing early school leaving. This change started from our little EWS team, included master teachers, then regular teachers too and encompassing entire school staff and other social partners.



School football tournament

What did we do?

- We have learned how to recognize, include and support students at risk of early school leaving, and we have built the database for these students.
- Preventing dropout, risk factors and detecting students at risk became regular topics/issues in classroom councils and teachers' assemblies.
- We have formed a team for peer mediation that has many activities aiming to promote assertive communication and violence prevention.
- We have connected our students with the labor market, helped them test their interests and choices to recognize benefits and the purpose of schooling and to practice setting their own goals.
- With some school trips and activities in the school dorm we have restrengthened bonds among students but between students and teachers as well.
- As parts of drama, musical and poetry activities, students participated in the event “I am a human, you are a human, let us be human together” and collected money for the medical treatment of one friend in need.
- Students created promotional videos about our school.
- Everyday teaching became more student oriented and oriented towards relevant learning activities.
- With external partners we have organized panel discussions on many different topics (violence prevention, addiction, internet safety, reproductive health, education mobility and bursaries...)
- We have focused on building trust and recognizing students' strengths.

The role of our mentor, Jovan was significant, since he helped us to adjust the project's requirements to the needs of our school and to implement all the activities.

Even though this project is now ending, our fight to prevent early school leaving has just begun.

HOW TO MAKE SCHOOL OPEN FOR EACH STUDENT.

Agricultural school with a dormitory "Ljubo Mičić", POŽEGA

Mentor: *Olja Jovanović*

EWS team members: *Vesna Vuković* special pedagogue, teacher and Team coordinator; *Miroslav Đurić* teacher; *Božina Čolović* pedagogue; *Danijela Negrojević* pedagogue; *Jelena Đerasimović* teacher

Director: *Kojo Bošković*

At the beginning of the project we recognized a new professional challenge that we have not met before, but we were willing to learn and collaborate on it. We began from what the strengths and needs of our school and the local community were and took that as a basis for planning activities at different levels of school life.

How was our journey?

A buddy on the road is always a great joy and also a great help. Our support buddy was our mentor Olja, with her, this journey was easier, more successful and more fun, and we were more confident in what we do and empowered to implement it. Our important companions were also other agricultural schools that participated in the project, because we have been exchanging experiences, and talked about difficulties and come together to ideas how to overcome them.

What are the benefits of this journey?

- The greatest benefit of all was the gradual building of an early warning system. Now, our school has comprehensive data about students that left school, and about students at risk. One additional benefit is that we have learned to plan different aspects of school life in a more systematic and evidence based way.
- We also made a huge promotion of our school in the local community, especially in secondary schools where our future students now are.
- We have put together students' short videos about dropping out, we supported the Team of Friends (a group of students that provide peer support to students at risk), created a Students' living room (space for socializing and spending free time in school) all with the aim of showing that every student is a significant part of our school.
- We covered the entire school and the dormitory with a wi-fi network which is especially important for our student with low socioeconomic status.
- In a systemic way we have tried to restrengthen the students' sense of belonging to the school, with field trips, with t-shirts and caps in the color of our school, but also by creating an open, safe and tolerant school.
- Early school leaving became an important topic to discuss in our school.
- The new image of our school was developed in the local community. The image 'says' we care about each student. Thanks to these activities we have one more class enrolled (than is usual) in our school this year.



Developing sense of belonging to the school

Our journey just begun, and our aim is to make the school fit all of our students.

THE SCHOOL WE BELONG TO

School of Agriculture and Food Sciences “Stevan Petrović Brile”, RUMA

Mentor: *Olja Jovanović*

EWS team members: *Milica Pandurčić* pedagogue, EWS team coordinator; *Bojana Gravonja* teacher; *Dragana Vulović* teacher; *Aleksandar Mišković* teacher

Director: *Milan Pupovac* director and team member

CroCooS introduced significant changes into our school. With different activities we have worked on establishing positive image of our school in the local community and moreover among our students.

We managed these:

- Considering the fact that 65% of our students come from rural areas, one special challenge was to provide the space in which they can spend free time while waiting for the school bus. This is why our main activity was establishing **Students' Corner**, a space that students use in their spare time and for socializing. This space became even more than planned, it became a crossroads of different in-school and out of school partners (training, sections etc).
- We are developing a handbook for school promotion because of our experience in putting the best aspects of our school in the spotlight.
- We created a video to promote our school in secondary education.
- The first issue of our school yearbook was published.
- Training for our entire teaching staff about quality of teaching processes was organized.
- We have organized field trips, lectures and different educational activities for our students and school staff.
- We provided individualized support to our students at risk.



Students' corner

With this project many things changed in our school, but the main thing was that this topic of early school leaving became something that we actively deal with.

Dropping out is an issue that demands cooperation, within but also out of school. This is why we sought to cooperate with local government and business partners deeper and more closely. Some companies provided internships for our students and possibilities for employment which is very important when the socio-economic status of our students is taken into consideration. The role of our mentor Olja, was rather precious to us, because she was always ready to help us and go through each challenge with us.

Comparing our experiences of that of other EWS teams, we would always suggest that school leaders should be part of the EWS team because this contributes a lot to systemic and committed dealing with dropping out.

CHANGING THE VIEWPOINT

School of Agriculture and Food Sciences, SOMBOR

Mentor: Jovan Komlenac

EWS team members: Mijatovic Arsen teacher; Kosanovic Jasna school pedagogue; Radakovic Dragana School secretary (law graduate); Njegomir Tatjana teacher, EWS team coordinator; Šolaja-Radenković Jasmina teacher

Director: Jovo Čato

CroCooS brought a twist to our everyday school practices. It was challenging for us to change the angle of seeing and dealing with early school leaving. With this joint effort we built an early warning system. This systemic point of view is exactly an agency of change and the main added value to our school practice.

Our support process started with us detecting students at risk and by creating the database. Creating this database helped us in recognizing risk factors but also in teaching master teachers to follow and monitor each student and to recognize their problems. Even though we always talked about students at risk, now we put this talk in the context of recognizing and preventing early school leaving. We became more aware of these risks.

We have created ten personal development plans. We have worked on giving each student a chance to realize that staying in school is important. We put effort into supporting each student to express their qualities, to feel safe and accepted and to make progress.

Now we have a precise database on students at risk, but also for students that already left school. Our yearly dropout rate is 0.5% (our school has 400 students). And this low dropout rate has been made possible due to individualized work with students and work on supporting environment and the school climate.

Some of our activities were:

- Communication skills workshop for students at risk, and their parents, to comprehend the importance of assertive communication in conflict solving and to understand the needs (own and others') behind the conflicts.
- Sports activities for teachers and students to contribute to the building trust and closeness between these groups. Our slogan was *"With sport against violence"*.
- Two promotional video clips about school were created by and with students at risk. This process also contributed to their sense of importance, success and a feeling of being part of the school community.
- Important support came from our partner organizations which implemented educational workshops and panel discussions about: prevention of violence, addiction, gender equality and reproductive health.



Assertive communication workshop for parents and students

We also started reconstruction of a space in the school – the future students' corner, aiming to make school another home for our students, and to provide space for students to socialize regardless of the grade or class they are attending.

Finally, the help of our mentor Jovan was very important, because this process required planning, budgeting, documenting, reporting, presentation and organization skills. We got productive advice and answers to all our questions.

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School mentors: Olja Jovanović and Jovan Komlenac

PILOT SCHOOLS:

Agricultural school with a dormitory "Ljubo Mičić", Požega

<http://www.poljoprivrednapozega.edu.rs/>

Mentor: Olja Jovanović

EWS team members: Vesna Vuković special Pedagogue, teacher and Team coordinator; Miroslav Đurić teacher;

Božina Čolović pedagogue; Danijela Negrojević pedagogue; Jelena Đerasimović teacher

Director: Kojo Bošković

School of Agriculture and Food Sciences "Stevan Petrović Brile", Ruma

<http://www.poljskolaruma.edu.rs/>

Mentor: Olja Jovanović

EWS team members: Milica Pandurčić pedagogue, EWS team coordinator; Bojana Gravonja teacher;

Dragana Vulović teacher; Aleksandar Mišković teacher; Milan Pupovac director and team member

School of Agriculture and Food Sciences Sombor

Mentor: Jovan Komlenac

EWS team members: Mijatovic Arsen teacher;

Kosanovic Jasna school pedagogue; Radakovic Dragana school secretary (law graduate); Njegomir Tatjana teacher, EWS team coordinator; Šolaja-Radenković Jasmina teacher

Director: Jovo Čato

Agricultural school Zrenjanin

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Mentor: Olja Jovanović

EWS team members: Gordana Milovanov Mutavdžić school psychologist, EWS team coordinator; Aleksandra Rodić teacher; Veselinka Nikin teacher; Isidora Vukov teacher; Goran Mihajlov teacher

Director: Milica Damjanović Tomić

Agricultural school with a dormitory „Sonja Marinkovic”, Požarevac

<http://www.poljsk.edu.rs/>

Mentor: Jovan Komlenac

EWS team members: Dragana Radovanović pedagogue and EWS team coordinator; Slobodan Pavlović psychologist; Dragan Ristić teacher; Velibor Janković teacher; Milena Jovanović librarian

Director: Vidoje Vukašinić



Pilot schools in Hungary

Budapest

- Pogány Frigyes Vocational High School of the Complex Vocational Training Center Budapest
- Csonka János Vocational Technical High School and Secondary Technical School of the Vocational Training Center of Mechanics Budapest

Barcs

- Industrial and Commercial Vocational School at Barcs of the Vocational Training Center Kaposvár

Dombóvár

- Apáczai Csere János Vocational High School and Boarding School Dombóvár of the Vocational Training Center Szekszárd

Paks

- I. István Vocational School at Paks of the Vocational Training Center Szekszárd

HUNGARY

Hungarian Vocational Training Schools have been facing a great challenge of large-scale and continuous early school leaving amongst first grader students. Therefore, the call to apply for the 'CroCooS – Prevent dropout!' project came just in time in 2014. On the other hand addressing the issue of early school leaving and elaborating the early warning system (EWS) has been a statutory requirement for schools since the autumn of 2014 and it has been regulated by detailed rules since autumn 2016.

Our two well-prepared mentors started the common work with five schools in the summer of 2015. The EWS teams formed made themselves familiar with the basic aims and with the methodology of the project, and from September onwards the work of setting up the system of dropout prevention was launched. The focus was put on freshman students.

Schools showed great variety of approach, expectations and professional backgrounds at the starting point of the work. The EWS team and the mentor jointly elaborated a realistic, feasible action plan and methodology based on the characteristics of the school. This plan was realized step-by-step and was discussed regularly in the monthly team-mentor meetings.

During this one and a half school year long project the schools' attitudes have been changed a lot and they have gained several skills and new methodologies, well usable in the course of their future work as well. To mention the most important ones: student centred approaches, more systematic working methods, experiencing the advantages of teamwork, involvement of the whole staff in the dropout prevention scheme.

Methodology was key. Shorter or longer descriptions of various methodologies proved to be good sources of ideas for tackling the various challenges related to at-risk students. In a later phase, the teams also contributed with some of their own 'tools' in making up the methodology toolkit.

Talking about some tangible results we can mention the establishment of the so called EWS rooms, which are intended to be friendly places, well usable for a discussion with students or the parents and also for various meaningful activities for smaller groups. The increased level of digitalization (laptops, educational software) is also to be remarked.

In some schools we could witness different ways of involvement of teaching colleagues into the work. We found two ways of mentoring. There was a school where one teacher followed the advancement of 5-6 students on a daily basis, another solution was that in the lesson of a certain subject another subject teacher also participated giving tailor-made help to the students in need.

The zero day in June, the questionnaire compiled for the incoming 9th graders, together with the various team building programs all served the smoother integration of freshmen. In some schools CroCooS working communities were established and CroCooS was included into the pedagogical program, ensuring that the issue stayed highlighted in the long run. Focusing on cross-sectoral cooperation, involving local partners into the prevention work was also targeted. As a result, almost all schools saw a much wider scope of cooperative partners than earlier expected.

Teams had the opportunity to meet and exchange their experiences in four workshops during the pilot period. It is important to note that the mentors were not left alone either: besides the CroCooS Guidelines and the three organized special mentor training workshops, the mentors of mentors were always there for consultation and to provide the professional background.

The most important outcome of the project is undoubtedly the fact that from among the at-risk students involved into CroCooS no one has dropped out since the programme started.

In the following pages, the schools let us have a glimpse of their work done and share some telling examples.

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IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICES FROM HUNGARIAN PILOT PROGRAMMES

The student as a source of information

“An efficient aspect of the observation of the student could be the study of his/her handwriting, any change of the handwriting. The drawings of the student, their topics, the colours, all are signs of his/her state of mind.”

“One or two months after the start of the schoolyear it is a good idea to organize a joint program for the freshman's classes, inviting the parents as well. As a result, we can witness the parent-child relationship and we can filter the information we have so far. Also we can have an idea how they can contribute to the success of the dropout prevention program.”

“Connected to the future profession of the students, some parents and some acquaintances suggested by the students can be invited for a discussion where they can talk about their work, describe the possible carrier opportunities, etc. The students are suggested to be involved into the organization of the event, so they more willingly will participate in it, and also more willingly will attend the lessons.”



Paks - Students preparing a school maquette

I. István Vocational School at PAKS of the Vocational Training Center Szekszárd

'Getting to know the student in a complex way'

On the basis of the tool from the CroCooS toolkit, we have introduced a booklet in my class where teachers can put their positive or negative remarks.

These notices might refer to the change of behaviour of the student. On the other hand students also have the possibility to put their remarks here, either in connection with themselves, with their classmates or teachers. These remarks are very useful to read in the course of a later class meeting.



Paks - Teambuilding activity

“We were having a fight with Tom, and broke the window.”

“Today the teacher has not kept her word, promised a mark 5 if we do a task and then she failed to enter it into the class register.”

“It has not been fair that he asked about the Hymn today, we agreed that we would be questioned on Tuesday – everybody failed.”

The notes in many cases provide important information to the form master, he/she receives information not only from the colleagues but there is the possibility to realize if students have problems with each other or with the teachers. It gives us the chance to help in the resolution of any conflict.

I. István Vocational School at PAKS of the Vocational Training Center Szekszárd

CroCooS has lead to several positive results at our school

Besides having our regular weekly team meetings we monitored the students of the selected class with the help of the so called CroCooS-booklet, where each teacher entered a note if he/she observed that a student produced a distress signal.

Based on these notes we selected the students, collected the necessary data, appointed a trust person and a case manager.

The Personal Development Plan was elaborated, a contract made and regular discussions took place with the student.

We kept on revising the contract and modified it if it seemed to be necessary. It was the reaction of the parents concerned that was the most surprising, because all of them expressed their thanks that we paid special attention to their child, and also the feedback was absolutely positive.

There was a parent, who asked us to conclude a contract with the student in each year, because the child put this paper on the wall of his room and always mentioned with pride that he observed the rules.

There was a case when the student came waving the booklet and the contract, asking whether she is to be commended, because she had observed all of the rules and got only positive notes. Obviously she received the praise and we gave her a pat on the back.

We have to note that the subject teacher colleagues have really played their part, since they made the effort and recorded their notes in the at-risk students' booklet after each lesson.



Csonka - New computer room

Csonka János Vocational Technical High School and Secondary Technical School of the Vocational Training Center of Mechanics BUDAPEST

CroCooS Room

CroCooS project was a great help to us in establishing a club room. We wished to set up a public space where we can hold lessons, organize events and spare time activities in a more informal way. A classroom, previously used as a workshop, was renovated and equipped with new technical devices like TV, projector, projection screen, Wi-Fi, etc. New tables and other furniture were bought. Among the very first events was the Christmas party of the colleagues working at school. It was not only a nice occasion to make the other colleagues familiar with the club room, but they could also get more familiar with each other. It was also our aim to motivate them to use the room later with their students.



Pogány - At the CroCooS room

Pogány Frigyes Vocational High School of the Complex Vocational Training Center BUDAPEST

Partners' roundtable

We organized a partners' roundtable in our new CroCooS room in November. For the discussion the sport trainers of our students and the representatives of the child protection services were invited. A constructive discussion took place in a good atmosphere. We managed to conclude agreements the lack of which we had felt for a long time ago, and we also consider as a success that at the end of the meeting the date of our next meeting was set.

Pogány Frigyes Vocational High School of the Complex Vocational Training Center BUDAPEST

CroCooS project was the initial setting up on the road

In the meantime, we have realized that this way only a few students can be focused on, and the question arose: what is with the others who are also producing one or two distress signals, or seemingly are in need of personal attention. In addition, according to the original plan only one class got involved in the project, but we felt absolutely necessary, to have some solution for the personal support of the students of our other incoming classes and that is why the mentor system was established in our school. In the framework of this system almost every colleague took up the mentoring of two or three students, paid personal attention, gave the necessary support and kept in touch with the parents.

The attitude of both the staff and the students has changed so significantly that as we feel, the mentor system might play a decisive role in our future ESL prevention work.

We definitely plan to sustain the good practices established during this scheme, to make use of our knowledge gained and keep the well working mentor system. We plan to develop it further and extend it to all classes, even trying to find the possibility that the mentors can do mentoring during the lessons as well. Mentoring reinforces the feeling of belonging to the school ...since the student knows that he/she can receive the necessary, tailor-made support whenever there is a need for it.

Csonka János Vocational Technical High School and Secondary Technical School of the Vocational Training Center of Mechanics BUDAPEST



Csonka - CroCooS room

“Thank you, CroCooS!”

The financial support we got from CroCooS was really a great help to our school, we managed to establish a much needed missing public space, well usable by all of our students. It is our library, with a devoted librarian, which was transformed into such a place. From now on it will not serve the students only with the necessary books, but there is a possibility to hold some extracurricular programs so students can spend their free time with meaningful activities. Several board games and computers were bought and also a subscription to relevant magazines taken out.

Industrial and Commercial Vocational School at BARCS of the Vocational Training Center Kaposvár



Barcs - At the library

CASE STUDIES

“My student was an 11th grader when the project started. He had to repeat 9th grade twice. We already had a lot of conversations, but no result was reached. By mid-year the student was again set to fail, this time eight subjects. It was clear to me that

the old practice of demanding, commanding and him making excuses would lead nowhere.

Our first talk did not start easily, but when he realized that it is not the usual „lecture” he started to loosen up and we could talk. I was open and interested, and he gladly talked about himself and his family. After so many long years

the mutual trust was now established.

From this time on we have regular discussions at pre-fixed times. I have an insight into his everyday life. I can realize where I can give a hand him. I am regularly consulting with the colleagues, and asked his classmates to give concrete help to him. By the end of the school year the numerous failures were over, only one remained, but at the repeated examination he got medium qualification.

Presently he is preparing for the maturity exam.”

Apáczai Csere János Vocational High School and Boarding School DOMBÓVÁR of the Vocational Training Center Szekszárd



This story is about one of my favourite students whom I have in my class. He plays competitive sports. He has collected numerous authorized and unauthorized leaves, and since he is above school age, his graduation was jeopardized. He’s got involved in CroCooS, and in the course of his common work he and also his parents have been absolutely cooperative. Even, when the date of a previously agreed discussion approached, the parent phoned me, wanted to make sure that the meeting would really take place. It was obvious that the parent wanted the school to help his son and help him graduate. He was thankful for the help we could give. As far as our experience shows, the sports trainers have a bigger reputation among the students than the parents and teachers have. In this particular case the trainer directed the student to a foreign club for trial game. From my student’s point of view it is a great possibility to start a career in sports.

If we had not managed the “emergency” he would have become a dropout.

In case he had taken a job he could not have played sport, so this possibility should have not emerged.

I do trust, that both in the field of sports and in his studies he will perform well.

Pogány Frigyes Vocational High School of the Complex Vocational Training Center BUDAPEST



“My student is graduating as a locksmith. He is going to be 22 years old in June, but has been attending our school since the age of 14. When I entered the project he became one of my mentorees, since it had been a long ago that I was curious what the reason behind the series of his failures was. There was a year when he collected a lot of unauthorized leaves, another year his school achievement was unacceptably poor. During his studies at our school he changed between the trade apprenticeships several times, but even at the locksmith profession he had several repeated school years. Because of the persistent failures he was considering leaving the school.

I strived to establish a trustful relation with the student, and as a result he slowly opened to me, and gave me an insight into the life of his family. When he was in primary school he lost his mother and has been living with his father and adult brother. The father soon found another partner, who moved to the family. They get along without any problem, the boy has his own room with a well-designed corner for learning. Since no family problems could be identified behind the failure we went on with the searching. His peer connections were mapped: not many, but he had three friends, he meets them on a regular basis. They have no bad habits, they are tuning cars and motorcycles together – so his hobby was also identified...

I also consulted with all of his teachers and each of them confirmed that he always has all the necessary equipment and pays attention in the lessons. During our next meeting I asked him to show me his exercise books, and this was the moment when I realized how his booklets look like: unreadable handwriting, unordered, often even the subjects are mixed together. Now it has become obvious to me that no matter if he gets home and sits down to learn, he is just unable to read his own handwriting.

After elaborating his PDP we reached, step by step, that now he can write more legibly. I asked the colleagues to be patient and give him help in managing his booklet and I regularly checked his writing and observed that the appearance of his handwriting had become much more ordered.

After all this it was vital to make him get back to the habit of learning. Weekly discussions were held with the subject teachers and the headmaster. We proceeded with very small steps, but his motivation was easy to keep, since he loved his profession. As his academic achievement got better, also the practical training went easier, and he has no repeated year since then, so

we have the best perspective of a successful final professional exam

On having better results, his skipping classes also ceased."

Industrial and Commercial Vocational School at BARCS of the Vocational Training Center Kaposvár



Barcs - At the library

"My student arrived at our school with an irregular family background and behavioural problems. He was interested in his chosen profession, but was a real challenge for his teachers. After getting to know each other, the mutual trust has been developed. As a result of several discussions, the student started to become adapted to the school's rules and seems to be much more balanced. He handles much better the incidental fiascos and is more motivated to learn. He now has a lot of friends, so the life he leads at the dormitory is, as much as possible, a kind of substitute for the missing family life. He voluntarily participates and happily takes part in school programs.

He freely turns to me and also to other adults who enjoy his confidence. His behaviour is more deliberate, he considers the consequences of his actions, bearing in mind his school advancement.

We can consider this as a real success story,

since finally he has integrated into the school, and plans to graduate and then to proceed with further professional education."

Apáczai Csere János Vocational High School and Boarding School DOMBÓVÁR of the Vocational Training Center Szekszárd



Dombóvár- At the classroom

One of our 9th grader students showed gradually declining academic achievements, and failed in seven subjects at mid-year. After this, together with the parents and the student we elaborated a Personal Development Plan, and as a result he is now attending the 10th grade. He failed only one subject this mid-year, which doubtlessly is the successful consequence of the

closer cooperation with the parents.

It is a great achievement that the parent let me know right away if he feels there is a trouble with the student, and we can figure out the best possible solution together. It has just turned out that student suffers from a panic disorder. This is also a cause behind the high number of absent days and the failure. We have not prepared a PDP yet, but the parents, if the need arises, require this kind of solution, having seen the success of the previous school-year

when the PDP helped.

Pogány Frigyes Vocational High School of the Complex Vocational Training Center BUDAPEST

“Our student is bilingual. Half of his school years he spent in Germany. He is visually impaired, dyslexic and dysgraphic, he is exempt from written evaluation. He shows autistic signs also. During the lessons he is sitting cross legged, disinterested, leans his head on the bench. At the same time he often comments on the curriculum, surprising everyone how well informed he is. His classmates, after the initial problems, accepted him, they like him and care about him. Most of the colleagues have also found their ways to be approachable to him by their tailor made help and patience.

All of us were also backed by the tools CroCooS provided.

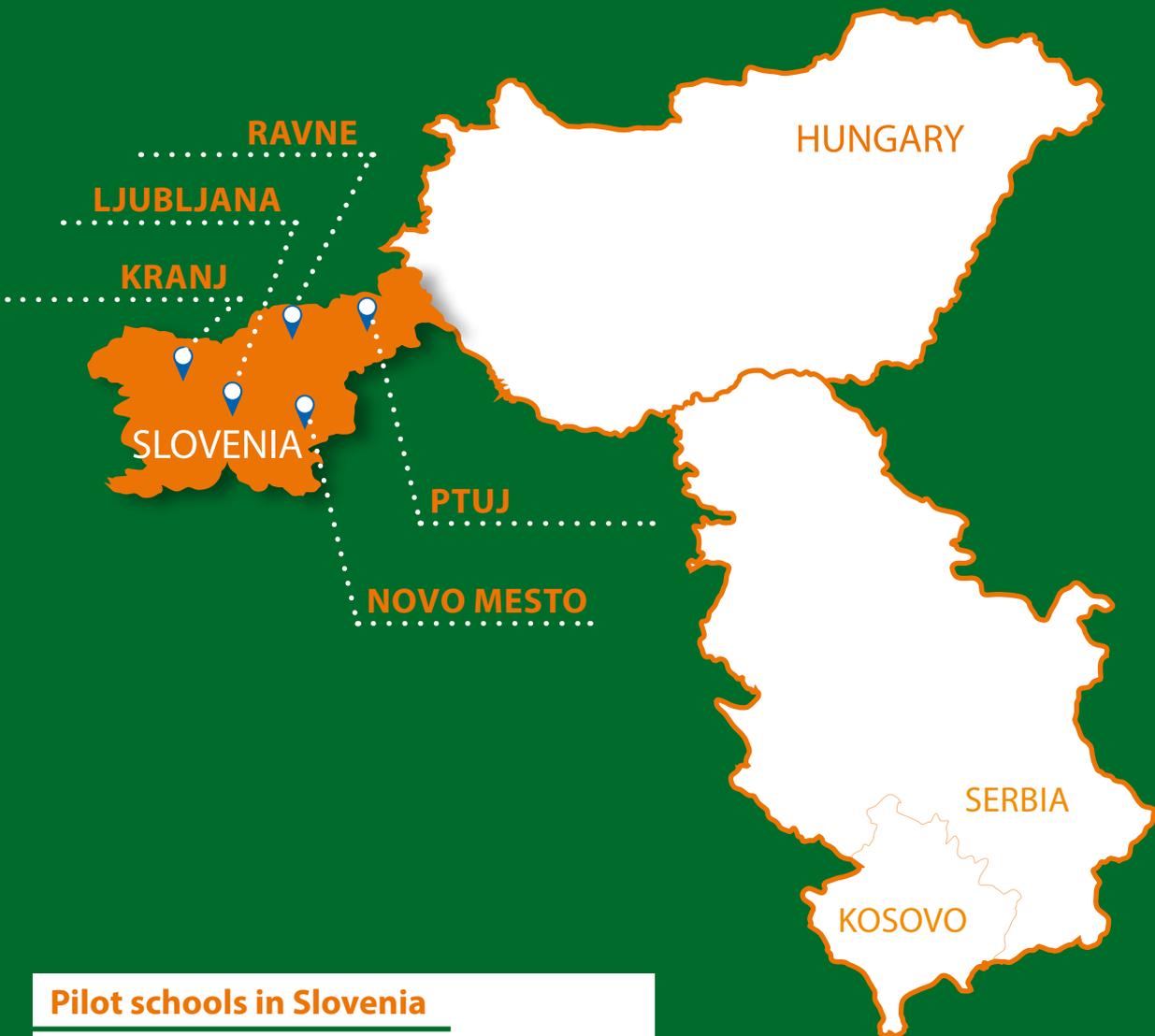
With a lot of care and attention we managed to find his strengths. He has excellent manual dexterity, he is an excellent sketch artist. He is very good in English, physics and chemistry, taking an early graduate exam in German this May. I give him support for the preparation for this exam, and during the common work he opened up to me. I have got to know much about his interests and free time activities. And also about the way he is preparing day by day for the lessons: he spends 2-3 hours each afternoon with a teacher, who reads him the material.

Our task is to deal with him so that he can perform his best, otherwise he would become a dropout, he would be lost.”

Apáczai Csere János Vocational High School and Boarding School DOMBÓVÁR of the Vocational Training Center Szekszárd



Dombóvár - Discussion with students



Pilot schools in Slovenia

Kranj

- SC Kranj

Ravne na Koroškem

- SC Ravne na Koroškem

Ptuj

- SC Ptuj

Novo Mesto

- SC Novo Mesto
- Grm Novo Mesto

SLOVENIA

SENSITIVITY TO THE DISTRESS OF STUDENTS

Five vocational and technical schools were involved in the Slovenian pilot scheme. Four schools train for professions in the field of computer science, electrical engineering including mechanical engineering and mechatronics, one school trains professions in the field of agriculture and biotechnology. Each school has formed a working group of four to eight members, who were mostly class teacher, but also counsellor, librarian, assistant principal, project manager, head of teacher council, head of the intercompany centre and a like. To different degrees, also headmistress and headmasters were involved in the development work at schools.

In the role of mentors for schools we invited Maja Klančič (psychologist) and Darja Štirn (pedagogue), both with many years of working experience in the field of education. Simona Knavs and Barbara Bauman from the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) coordinated the pilot implementation.

As in Serbia and Hungary, also in Slovenia we organized two introductory training courses and three peer learning meetings for schools; mentors visited schools for the monthly working meetings. Financial resources for pilot schools were dedicated exclusively for school development e.g. the equipment for schools, for extra training for teachers and students and other minor costs. Participating teachers cooperated at no additional charge for the work and worked in addition to their regular tasks.

The specialty of the Slovenian pilot was the extent of training for schools and mentoring sessions. The training was organized jointly for all schools and mentor meetings at schools were slightly limited. Hence, we had to adopt other methods also. Mentors more intensively communicated with schools via e-mail and by phone, they organized the joint meeting covering the use of the tools created by the project, prepared additional working materials and put in special effort in the preparation of national meetings. One of the key reasons for success of the pilot in Slovenia was also participation of all members of school's working groups in the 24-hour training program "*Peer support through coaching skills*" kindly prepared by colleagues of the National Education Institute specially for us.

The project was experimental in nature. At this level we wanted to find out if the tested approach of setting up an early warning system for preventing early school leaving would be effective at least to the extent that there are positive trends, which may not result in better performance of schools in the short term, but which have the potential efficiency in the long run. However, at the level of the pilot, we naturally wanted to achieve a direct and immediate positive effect.

Early school leaving is a phenomenon whose reasons we cannot explain only by the performance of schools and its working methods. It is conditioned by much stronger social influences to which schools cannot influence as much as may be desirable. However, early school leaving happens at schools and the school is the one who can do many things to mitigate it.

At the end of the pilot, we can recognise three positive effects at school level. All schools reported that by creating a system of early prevention they rearranged and put in a new light the many activities carried out already for many years. Via the challenge of asking themselves how they already prevent early school leaving, in many of its regular activities they again or for the first time recognized beneficial approaches. Of course, many activities were designed from the beginning and for which the staff needed to prepare the necessary appliances or equipment. All schools had an intense focus on the issues: which distress signals appear and how to track them, how they can most effectively be monitored and, of course, above all, what they can do with the given resources at the individual student level to prevent the student leaving the school too soon.

Maybe the most important effect that we perceive at all participating schools is the increased sensitivity to the distress of students. In the words of one teacher at the last national meeting: "As I did not think about this problem, I really was not aware of it. Now it is quite different. These students need the opportunity and support. I introduced quite a few new tools and approaches, with which we can help students. The phenomenon is here, so it is important that we teachers are trained and prepared to work with those students. Now we have a system that we can use to help quickly."

Simona Knavs, national project coordinator,
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Members of EWS team: Jelka Onuk, Igor Kosmač,
Marko Laznik

THE STORY OF FIVE SLOVENIAN SCHOOLS

Five Slovenian pilot schools described some of their achievements and experiences within the CroCooS project in the brochure, published in the Slovenian language. In this English version, we would like to present some of their thoughts and interconnect them in a comprehensive presentation of the results of the CroCooS project in Slovenia at school level.

*The upper secondary school of electronics and technical secondary school of the School centre Novo Mesto (hereinafter referred to as **SC Novo Mesto**) identified their experience with a statement published on the European Commission website aimed at preventing early school leaving. There is no simple solution for all they say, "Since there is not a single reason for early school leaving, there are no easy answers. Policies to reduce early school leaving must address a range of triggers and combine education and social policy, youth work and health related aspects such as drug use or mental and emotional problems."*

In their own words:

"When we look back, we realise that initially we wanted models and solutions that provide quick results, and which could be easily transferred into our practice. It turned out that not everything was suitable for us and we needed to make adjustments. We selected, introduced, and tested gradually towards our goal deliberately prepared materials (guidelines, toolkit and resource pool). We relied on our own understanding, knowledge, and previous good experience as the basis for our work. We had the opportunity to express, check and complement these with the mentor and at national meetings. The cooperation with the national coordinators, mostly with their training and advice, was all helpful."

All participating schools identified the training for the teachers as essential activity. *The upper secondary technical school at the School centre Kranj (hereinafter referred to as **SC Kranj**), for example, invested many project funds to the training to improve communication between teachers and students. Here is what they wrote:*

"Three colleagues were trained as school mediators. They presented their skills to the EWS team as well as to the colleagues of the three other schools at the School centre Kranj. Their trainer impressed all school's teachers with an eight-hour lecture on excellent communication in school situations. The mediators have already carried out some mediation in these two school years. Members of the EWS team also attended a coaching seminar and the knowledge gained is very useful in everyday communication, as well as during individual work with students."



Students tutors at SC Ptuj during the communication skill training

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/early-school-leavers_en

The electro and computer science school Ptuj from the School centre Ptuj (hereinafter referred to as **SC Ptuj**) organized a communication course for a group of students who offer peer-learning help to their classmates. The **SC Novo Mesto** and Agricultural school Grm and Biotechnological gymnasium, which operates within the school center Grm Novo Mesto – Centre of biotechnology and tourism (hereinafter referred to as **Grm Novo Mesto**) invited a speaker who, based on his life experiences, talked about drug abuse and early school leaving issues to the students and teachers.

Better communication primarily between school actors, students and teachers, does not only reduce misunderstandings and enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning. One of the fundamental prerequisites for successful schoolwork is that students feel good in the school environment and gain motivation for schoolwork that strengthens their sense of belonging to the school. All participating schools devoted a lot of attention to this area. Secondary school Ravne from the School center Ravne na Koroškem (hereinafter referred to as **SC Ravne**) equipped their hall with table football and the library with comfortable sitting bean-bags. The **SC Kranj** equipped a small room with table football and electronic darts, where informal socializing between students and teachers is strengthening their relationship.



The opening day of new room for students at SC Kranj

Teachers from **SC Ptuj** wanted to show that they are proud of their students, colleges, and their achievements with a nice display at the entrance to the building. At **Grm Novo Mesto** they were originally missing a room where students would have a comfortable, safe and supportive place for waiting for the next class or school bus. They equipped a larger library with new furniture and "... board games that require a larger number of players, their concentration, and perseverance." Later on during the evaluation, they wrote:

"Students were asked whether they are satisfied with the renovation of the library. They said that they feel 'like at home'. Students also told about the renovation at home, which was evident from the conversations at parent-teacher meetings. ... We already at the beginning of the project speculated that the wellbeing of students is a necessary condition for better relationships and thus better learning achievements. With the renovation of the library, we certainly brought improvements, especially in terms of relationships. It makes us happy to see that in the last weeks the students of 2 and 3 years, vocational upper-secondary education, who are the most vulnerable group in our school, also began to spend more and more free time in the library."



"New" library at Grm Novo Mesto for studying and free time

Most schools also renovated rooms for work with smaller groups of students and individual work with students that teachers often use for their own activities also.



SEN student with his support teacher in the new room for individual work at SC Novo Mesto

However, space and equipment alone is not enough. Students like very much to participate in activities that have no connection with regular classes, at least not a lot of connection. Under the close professional guidance of teachers, these activities are very effective for developing personal skills that also today's employers need most from their youngest employees. At **SC Ravne** the project gave a boost to the already established project week with new activities.

"For the 'project film' we invited students whom we identified as students at risk with multiple distress signals. They all accepted the invitation and were very satisfied with the activity. They were very enthusiastic, were always on time for the activities, contributed their ideas, and had no trouble staying in the school even after classes. They recorded a video that encourages students to complete school successfully. In addition, other students wanted to join this activity and we are searching now for the possibility to develop this as a regular activity.

We started a 'project garden' a year earlier and strengthened it in the scope of the CroCooS project. Under the leadership of the class teacher, work is continuous throughout the year, but the majority of the work we carry out during the project week at the end of March. ... During practical training, the students build and then put in place the fence for the garden. One student who was later in charge of mowing the grass had completely lost motivation for schoolwork and attendance of classes, and planned to leave the school in May. During his work in the garden, he again found motivation, developed a commitment to the school, and successfully completed the school year. He was looking for improvements and suggested solutions on how to protect plants against pests, improve their growth, or protect them from overgrowth. We presented the project to the parents who accepted it with enthusiasm and commented that in addition to schoolwork, other things are also important that will come in handy later in each student's life.

At school, our motivation was the realization of how important it is to enable students to be successful in the activities not directly related to the regular classes. This is especially true for students who are coming to our school with negative previous school experiences. It is good that we support them also in their personal development as much as we can."



SC Ravne student's during team work in the garden

The **Grm Novo Mesto** invited pupils of 2-year short vocational upper secondary education programmes who are trained for assistant positions and are often academically weaker, to create a play (theatre).

"Students were happy to participate. They identified themselves with the characters in the play and so they have shown the abilities that they cannot show in the classroom. This has helped raise their self-esteem, self-confidence, develop their own selves.... The visitors were impressed by the play. Such activity is usually not to be expected from the students of short vocational upper secondary education. Teachers of their elementary schools were in the audience, recognizing their former students as the performers, which impressed them even more."

Within the project, teachers were encouraged to develop activities together with students, and not just for the students. In all schools, teachers tried to invite the students to participate – in the planning and of course later in the implementation of an activity – earlier in the process. At **Grm Novo Mesto**, for example, they wrote the following about the renovation of the library:

"The proposal was presented to the school's student community and students were invited to participate in planning and implementation. They suggested a different colour for the walls, round tables, more comfortable chairs, bean-bags, shelving units for the separation of the part of the room, exhibition of the new books in the library, board games etc. Students were actively involved in the renovation. They drew the design of the room, choose the colours, and painted the walls themselves."

In the evaluation of the renovation of the **SC Ptuj** premises, the teachers described this aspect as follows:

"The students have been very satisfied with the workshop, hanging out with students from other classes has been interesting and fun. ... They expressed a desire for more activities, in which they could influence the decoration of classrooms. The students really like the change at the entrance to the school and on the staircase as the content on billboards encourages them positively. ... They showed a great deal of ingenuity and self-initiative. They enjoyed it so much that they expressed gratitude for the workshop and the invitation to join this activity. Some of the students proposed to buy a variety of board games, table football, and chess. We assume that this was because many of them are commuters who arrive early or stay after school, waiting for the school bus."

Although well-being is a prerequisite for successful schoolwork, of course this is not all that one school needs. Therefore, all schools invested a lot of effort also into other parts of their own early warning system for the prevention of early school leaving which was also the main objective of the project at school level.

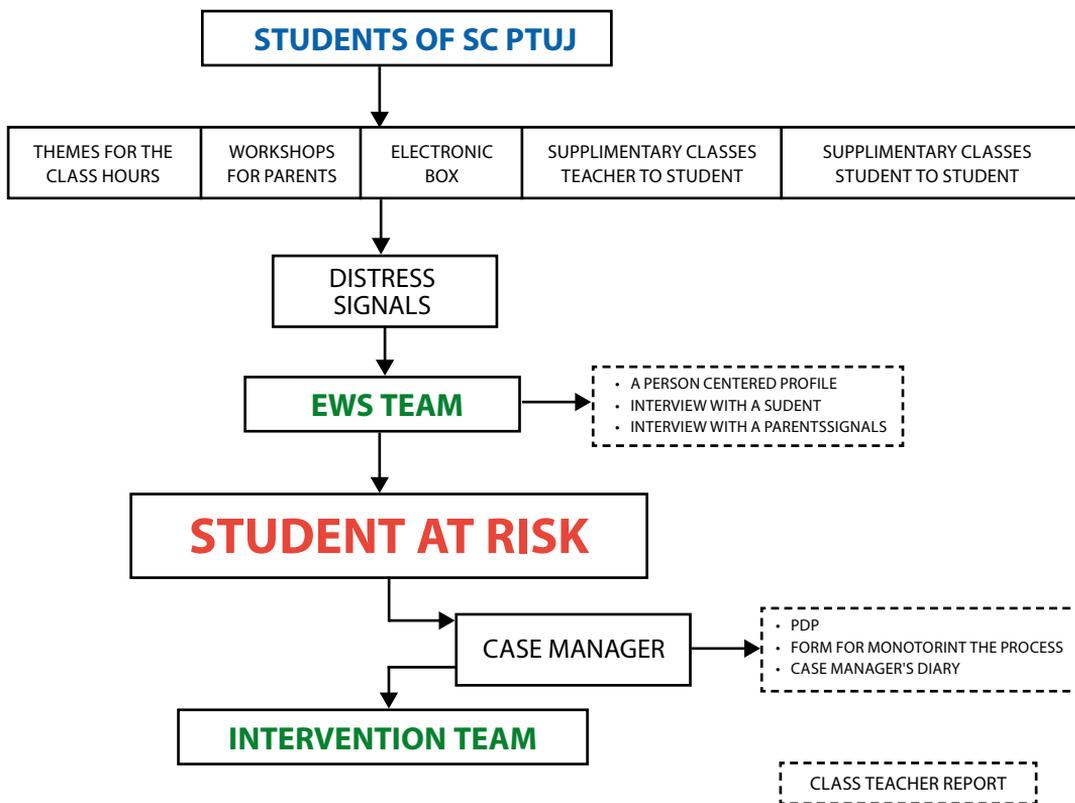
Teachers at **SC Ravne** stated:

"The preparation of the guidelines for teachers was strengthened with regular monthly meetings of the class teachers of the first year students, as the entry year is an essential year for students. They have regular discussions about the issues in classes, share experiences and agree on a standardized work where it is appropriate. For each meeting minutes are prepared. The counsellor, head of the school's support for SEN students and the counsellor for SEN students also meet once a week to review and plan the work with individual students. In this way, we enable time and space for the exchange of information, more standardized work, and continuous monitoring."

The **SC Kranj** summarized description as follows:

"We designed the process of identification and support for students at risk, its working title is Protocol. In the process of identification, all teachers should be involved, vigilant about distress signals, included in the Guidelines of the CroCooS project. We expanded the existing recording system to cover as many distress signals and causes of early school leaving as possible. We made an electronic evaluation table, which the school management, counsellors, and class teachers could access with a username and password. In the table we record (1) distress signals, as seen by the teachers, who register a student in the table; (2) possible causes detected in a conversation with a student; (3) activities carried out and by whom; (4) the impact of these activities and (5) the date of leaving the school if it occurs. We strengthened the support for students with two tools called 'Organization of Work' and 'Plan for a Successful Student'. The first tool helps the student in the phase of planning their learning and coordination with other obligations and free time. The second tool enables reflection on unconstructive behaviour and planning changes. We presented the Protocol to the teachers and invited them to use it."

The **SC Ptuj** introduced the process with this scheme:



SC Novo Mesto summarized their system with the following words:

"An effective mechanism for preventing and reducing early school leaving at school was created, which guides the students and connects all relevant partners (student, class teacher, parents, counsellor, school management et al.) in the process of helping the students. Directed systemic approaches enable more engaged cooperation, timely identification of the students at risk, as well as more continuous and regular planning. It enables the obtaining of useful information for understanding the students and for supporting them, instructions on how to act in certain circumstances, faster and regular information flow, and continuous overview of agreements made. The system has become an integral part of the annual school work plan for the 2016/17 school year. All school employees are responsible for its implementation, but school management provides the human and financial resources and above all enables in-service professional training of teachers. At the end of the school year, we will run a review of what we have done, what has been meaningful and effective. If necessary, we will improve the system."

Although cross-sectoral cooperation is well developed in the Slovenian system, all schools found that they could make progress. All schools have reviewed existing cooperation and they have all already made new contacts, primarily resulting in the development of enhanced teacher training.

Many times, we received feedback stating that, in theory, they, the schools, know how and what to do but incentives from the outside are sometimes essential to move them forward a little and direct them. For example, one class teacher from **SC Ravne**, encouraged by the presentation of the project, came up with a simple idea. She invited a football coach to have a short conversation. The coach trains one of her students with a falling success, which the student explained or excused with his commitment to the sport club. The coach has ensured her that also in his "book" the school obligation has priority over football training. This had a significant impact on teacher's further approach to the student. They agreed on a periodic information exchange about the student's obligations and progress, and of course, about the adjustments that they can make to support the student's success in both areas. The alignment of their impact on the student and their mutual support to achieve the same goal (successful student) has brought rapid and positive results.



To make a summary like this was not easy. Mainly because I did not want to highlight any single school more or to assess their work at all within this summary. The aim was just to illustrate to the readers a part of what was happening at school level during the project.

However, it is very easy to write the following: in each and every EWS team and in each and every pilot school, there have been positive shifts regarding attitudes toward students at risk. In each and every school they increased the awareness of how important the well-being of students is, enhancing their key competences, the importance of in-service teacher training, and significance of a systematic approach toward the prevention of early school leaving. All schools have considered the long-term solutions, and their efforts are reflected in the school's annual work plans and development strategies. For all those results, the EWS teams worked very hard. Moreover, at the end of this summary, allow me to say that their engagement and results make me proud and honoured to be a part of this process.

Simona Knavs, national project coordinator,
Institute of Republic of Slovenia for vocational education and training (CPI)

LESSONS LEARNED FROM A POLICY EXPERIMENTATION

Although the evaluation served to summarize the accumulation of lessons learned in the course of the implementation of the pilot programme and not the evaluation of the pilot projects themselves, understanding the circumstances of the developments in the pilot schools provides a better understanding of the latitude for change in the three participating countries. Due to the differences in the piloting countries, the same project and pilot elements took roots with varied results. The guidelines for implementing early warning systems, the tools for the teachers, the benefits from the mentors and the direct financial support all made progress in Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia but their usefulness and hence effectiveness can be summarized differently.

The pilot project evaluation describes the results and changes and their differences across the three participating countries in details, here we can only highlight the most important and/or interesting findings of the project.

However, the positive effect of the pilot project cannot be disputed (details see below), generally the list of perceived reasons for dropping out among the different target groups has not really changed from the input to the output evaluation. Lack of family support, low motivation of students, learning failures, poverty are among the top reasons, beside the bad school choice and outside peer group pressure. However, the responsibility shift to parents and students became a bit stronger, as the impact of the pilot projects the views on reasons of the different actors became more diversified.

The typical distress signals identified by teachers are behavioral changes, absenteeism, declining learning achievements, low motivation and social isolation in the class. There is a widespread optimism among directors and teachers about the capacity of teachers to recognize these distress signals. Form tutors play an interface role in all sorts of relationships that makes them the key actors of early warning and prevention systems.

Examining the ESL-problem it concluded that dropout mainly occurs at beginning of the school year: significant number of students do not even show up on the first day of school. It motivated the pilot schools to act even before the term begins and use new tools, marketing methods to make the school attractive for students and gain their commitment.

Those schools which were motivated, acknowledged ESL as a problem and were committed to reduce it, were able to use their previous knowledge and tools and/or develop new ones. This also made them more dedicated since they did not only rely on the pilot's guideline, but had something own and to be proud of which made the ground of acting even more solid.

It is clear that the timeframe dedicated for the pilot was not enough. All schools reported that the first few months (even half year) were gone due to several reasons (eg.: understanding the problem, the concept; change in the school system and its legal implications, reluctance to participate, even misunderstanding the concept).

At school and management level, we could see that the quality of leadership is a key question. So the dropout issue is highly related to leadership and their commitment and training.

The pilot projects were instrumental in intensifying the involvement of school directors in certain cases. It rather depended on the role of this person. If he/she acted as a participant, as a manifestation of the leadership's support and as a special and mutual (information) channel among the team and the management, then it served the purpose. When his/her role was rather about checking and keeping the control, then the team hardly could develop.

Important to record that defining aims was rather challenging for the schools. They tend to be lost in activities and/or set up too vague or too high expectations. That's why the first step was data collection and trends analysis to be able to make evidence-based decisions. The results of data collection served as important conclusion for the schools.

At teachers and teams' level, it was obvious from the interviews and especially from the reports that two elements are essential to start an EWS system:

- motivation from the school's side – significant drop-out problem (which might not derive from the perspective of the students but it effects the school, the school's operation and the staff)
- supportive leader, director

Working in teams was an innovative tool for the staff. Teachers usually work alone, instead of setting up teams and solving problems together. So setting up a team for a specific problem and cooperating to solve it was a learning path for the staff. The level of cooperation was different:

- remained within the EWS team;
- gradually spread in the school, involving new teachers attached by ESL
- could go beyond the school walls, inviting cross-sectoral institutions.

Forming the EWS team was a key question. It was usually the director's decision, appointment by him/her than an internal motivation of the teacher himself. Participation of head teachers of the 1st grade (which is mostly affected by ESL) was essential.

Although teachers regularly participate at conferences, trainings even at ESL related ones, this can be only the first step, not enough for change. Change can be done when there is a step-by-step methodology, ensuring external help and regular consultation. CroCooS pilot was that kind of help with the mentoring system, with the tools... etc. The systematic approach of the program was a great asset, together with the external mentors and the financial support. The conclusions for the answers are that programs, projects usually deal with only one or two aspects of a problem, but CroCooS tried to cover all relevant fields which can decrease dropout on school level.

Since this project was a policy experiment, beside the positive conclusions, negative ones should be discussed as well. The importance of supportive school leadership and the key role of form tutors are obvious. The pilot gave useful hints on how to identify key actors and how to implement systems at institutional level with reference to the particular country context. Besides that, we got information on the need to strengthen and monitor the pedagogical and methodological grounds, student case studies and the effect of incentives at institutional and individual level. All these lessons learned will be compiled in the policy recommendation of the project.

Expanzio Human Consulting Ltd.

FOCUS ON CROCOOS!

Putting the prevention of early school leaving centre stage for whole school improvement

It is easy to imagine: imagine yourself as a student entering a new school for the first time. You might be asking yourself, “Will I make friends here? Will I be popular?” Or, “Will my teachers like me? Will they care about me?” Or, “Will I be able to do the work here? Will I be smart enough?” Or, in all too many cases, “Will I be safe here? Will I be teased, bullied?” or even “Will I be ripped off or beaten up?” These questions reveal our basic psychological needs – for emotional and physical safety; for close, supportive relationships – a sense of “connectedness” or “belongingness”; for autonomy, or a say in what happens to us; and for a sense of competence – a belief that we are capable people and able to learn, and ending my education successfully with a diploma.

Understanding

The focus on these needs is exactly how our CroCooS pilot schools interpreted the challenge to prevent early school leaving. Of course there were variations in approaches between EWS teams and their mentors, depending on the schools’ contexts. First, schools wanted to build a sense of community in their schools where the individual student feels welcome, respected and engaged, where students take active part in all curriculum and extra-curriculum activities. Secondly, after creating a sense of community, the individual student at risk would come into focus. The EWS teams knew right from the start that a student at risk leaving school before graduating does not feel happy for a large number of reasons. As scientists put it: early school leaving is the result of a long term, multi-dimensional process, influenced by a wide variety of school and out-of-school experiences and the as-yet not fully understood, complex relationship between these multiple causes. This means that for schools and their students at risk, general and specified measures need to be designed and taken. A panacea against early school leaving does not exist. Tackling early school leaving is a challenge and an effort for all of us.

Complexity

Inspired by the CroCooS project guidelines and tools, the EWS teams, mentors and the national project coordinator enthusiastically started a whole range of whole school improvement activities. For more detail about these activities, see the pages earlier in this booklet, in which schools describe their own approach. During the project lead time, EWS teams and their mentors soon found out that they had to deal with and overcome all kinds of complex problematic situations requiring great effort, for example: analysis of the current school dropping out situation, any lack of dropping out data, willful myopia and resistance amongst colleagues, lack of time, priority setting, applying and developing CroCooS tools, losing momentum, frustration within the EWS team seeing little or slow results and adverse effects of education policy changes, involving parents and outside school support providers (local authorities, health care, civil society organizations, police), and when it comes down to supporting the student at risk: what will be our approach?, what kind of coaching and mentoring is required given the unique characteristics of the students at risk? In general, if the focus of preventing early school leaving is put centre stage to add to whole school improvement, EWS teams were confronted with a range of related challenges, even obstructions. Here the challenge is not only to keep the students at risk on board, but, even harder, to get all players in the community (students, parents, directors, teachers, non-teaching staff, support services, local authorities, etc.) actively involved. Preventing early school leaving is an effort for all of us!

Achievements

Having read all the reports – sometimes one can observe more from a distance – I really would like to congratulate all CroCooS project members in the pilot schools for their successful pilots. For sure, a lot has been achieved given the experimental aims of CroCooS, subjects like: becoming aware that engaging in preventing early school leaving as such, also means the need to deal swiftly with the school system as a whole (national education measures, school image and climate, school strategy and policy, student oriented learning and teaching, parents, curriculum, education schedules, education methods, involvement of school principal and staff, service providers, etc.); professional development enhancing competences in dealing with dropping out, coaching and mentoring; required facilities (registration of absenteeism, financial resources, priority setting); being creative and determined in individual approaches; improved cooperation in teams; improving project management and management of innovations skills; sharing knowledge about the 5 interconnected thematic areas in preventing early school leaving: school governance, learner support, teachers, parents and families and stakeholder involvement; and last but not least of course: keeping students at risk on board!

This all adds to the growing body of research which confirms the benefits of building a sense of community in schools. Students in schools with a strong sense of community are more likely to be motivated, to act ethically and altruistically; to develop social and emotional competencies and to resist a number of problematic behaviour patterns, including drug use and violence.

Lessons learned

After going through difficult project phases, in which all efforts sometimes seemed to lead nowhere, it was heart-warming to read Bojana's concluding comment. She is a teacher in the Stevan Petrović-Brile school, Ruma, Serbia, and says: 'Now, after hard work for two years, this school takes care of its students ... well, now, we can say that we are also professional mentors in preventing early school leaving ... we really are satisfied ... we strongly have the willingness to support and participate in the continuation of the project in every aspect!'

It is all about the students at risk, listen to them:

'Help me to stay on board! Every student matters, for me too!'

Huub Friederichs, 'critical friend' in the CroCooS project,
IJzee Management Consultant

WE CARE: PREVENT DROPOUT

Big job of small teams

During the work on the CroCooS project, many of the 'products' were formed from scratch. One of them is the booklet that you are reading now. The primary purpose of this booklet is the dissemination of the results the school projects we ran. The teams did not only apply the instruments and tools that have been developed in the project, but they also adapted them to the specific conditions of their schools. The EWS teams even created some new tools that were then shared with other schools and colleagues in the project. However, the job of EWS teams was much more than that. Each school EWS team had to seriously prepare the ground and build a foundation for establishing a system for early detection, monitoring and helping students who are at risk.

Schools, as a rule – and as it was shown by the evaluation report which called this a 'responsibility shift' –, do not deal well with dropping out and that meant that every team had a lot to do in the beginning to change their environments: to sensitize the staff at each school regarding the importance of the problem of dropping out; to try to get teachers to become actively involved in monitoring the students and working with them; in addition to school staff, they needed to engage students and colleagues from partner institutions in the local community; to create activities that would be in accordance with the specific conditions and characteristics of the school and socio-cultural milieu in which it functions; to raise the issue of quality of teaching/learning as a way to influence the dropout rate; also to start work on developing better relations between students and teachers; to gradually and patiently work to develop pupils' senses of belonging to the class and school; to develop relationships of trust, to be supportive and to ensure a safe school climate that would send the message that every student matters not only to the students but also to parents and the local community.

This booklet covers only a fraction of school activities overseen by our teams. As with an iceberg, we can see only a part of the whole picture, but the power and range of the CroCooS project are much higher. A lot has been done: highlighting the importance of this problem both for the individual and for the society, establishing of a system for monitoring and prevention of dropping out in schools; and the work of each team lead to a variety of changes in the schools. Through the project, all of the EWS team members and their supporters in different roles of the consortium tried to provide the support needed to sustain the innovation and continuance of their efforts in schools. Dropping out is a serious problem that leads to social exclusion and we must work on its prevention. John F. Kennedy said: "If not us, who? If not now, when?"

Inside and outside of schools

As we have seen, in the CroCooS project the main activities aimed at preventing dropping out were initiated at the pilot schools. This is an important point for two reasons. Firstly, to draw attention to the new understanding of the teacher's professional role, and particularly to raise awareness of the importance of the social and affective role of the teacher. Hence, coping with dropping out IS the role of the teaching profession and teachers are one of the key factors in the realization of any education policy measure aimed at the prevention of dropping out. Secondly, it highlights pedagogical autonomy of the school and teachers. The top-down operating principle is not rare in education and schools, and teachers become acquainted with a decision prepared in the Ministry (or some other instance from "above") and they have to go through with it. However, teachers are not drone-workers, but professionals. Much literature states how teachers' professionalism is a requirement for the successful improvement of the quality of education and is a necessary part of any change in schools or the curriculum, in

educational innovation or reform (school-based reform). This model is based on the concept of knowledge construction, therefore teachers are considered to be professionals who think about their work and practices and about their own continuous learning, and a sub-section of in-service teacher training and educational reforms have to be developed exactly in the school to cover this. Teachers have to be live agents for change in the school and local community².

Schools are rather conservative, perhaps harder to change than other organizations. In spite of the problem with the implementation of innovations in the system, it can be a good feature to preserve the school from hasty moves with non-convergent motivations. The EWS teams have worked hard not just on the establishing of the system for early detection of the signals of dropping out in the schools, but also on *reculturing* (Fullan, 2002, pp.18) – trying to initiate deep, lasting change in school culture. This comprises substantial agreement in terms of what the employees of the school value and how they work together to accomplish it. Commitment to work on dropout issues draw attention to the crucial aims of an educational system, such as equity, quality, relevance and efficacy. In its core, preventing dropping out is empowering *equity in education*, because the concept of equity is primarily associated with fairness in the provision of education: i.e. ensuring that personal and social circumstances are not an obstacle to achieving educational potential. Take a look at the activities of our schools and the EWS teams. In fact, they intervene in equity of resources for learning, equal learning opportunities and education results and relate to equity in access to education. The schools are owners of the project results, but *the list of beneficiaries of their work is much longer*: the education system, which has to recognize the schools as a central part (and partner) of systemic efforts in solving dropping out problems; the national economy with the decrease of social benefits for individuals from vulnerable groups and also employability effects; the state and the local communities, which are interested in increasing social cohesion, human and social capital, and the benefit of the economy; and the non-dropout individuals themselves who will be better prepared for more prosperous lives and to take care of themselves, their families, communities and a wider environment.

Since the 1960s, and the findings of the famous Coleman report³, there has been an ongoing debate among researchers about improving the educational experiences of all students, especially those from socially vulnerable groups. The bulk of findings support the statement that *school (can) makes the difference in the lives of students*. Of course, this statement supposed an aim, the measures and mechanisms related to the aim at the level of education policy, and the long, patient, devoted work of all actors in the pursuit of its realization. Every single part is relevant and the coordinated functions of all sides (educators, but also local community, national authority and public audience) alone would create a quality environment for the development and learning of all our students. But, it's worth the effort: "An empirically determined technology of capability formation reveals that capabilities are self-productive and cross-fertilizing and can be enhanced by investment."⁴ So, the obligation of an education system is to enable rich, quality, stimulating, safe and pleasant educational experiences for all students, particularly those from socially, culturally, and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, an experience that would equip them with the relevant competencies to face the struggle with the challenges of the turbulent 21st century, and any unexpected and quick changes in their private, social or professional lives. Of course, it needs a mission, objectives, and a series of tasks laid out well in advance, as well as full participation of everyone involved in the change, and a need to start with small, easy steps, rather than larger, too demanding and ambitious ones. So, let's do our best to bring worthwhile education change into the lives of our students.

Prof. Dr Ana Pešikan, Faculty of Philosophy and Education Forum, Belgrade

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² Fullan, M. G. (1993): *Why teachers must become change agents*. *Educational leadership*, 50, 12-12; Fullan, M. (2014): *Teacher development and educational change*. Routledge; Fullan, M. (2002): *The change*. *Educational leadership*, 59 (8), 16-20, pp. 18.

³ Coleman, J. S., Campbell, E., Hobson, C., McPartland, J., Mood, A., Weinfeld, F., & York, R. (1966): *The Coleman Report. Equality of Educational Opportunity*. *The first Coleman report found that family background heavily determines educational achievement and that "schools don't make a difference". But later on, much research, even the new Coleman report, dramatically reverses this pessimistic conclusion and finds instead that schools do make a difference, regardless of the family background of students (see: Ravitch, D. (1981): *The Meaning of the New Coleman Report*. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 62(10), 718-720, and many others).*

⁴ Cunha, F., & Heckman, J. J. (2009): *The economics and psychology of inequality and human development*. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 7(2-3), 320-364.



EVERY STUDENT MATTERS

CroCooS – Prevent dropout! project identified elements of a comprehensive institutional early warning system (EWS) and tested its applicability in national context. The pilot schools were supported by mentors in building EWS teams, monitoring distress signals, protocols of intervention on school level, using personal development plan and cross-sectoral cooperation.



GUIDELINES



TOOLKIT



RESOURCE POOL

