

Impact Measurement of the RISE Project

1. Introduction

This study presents the experiences and impact assessment results of the RISE programme implemented by the Autonomia Foundation and Caritas Association Alba-Iulia. The programme aimed to reduce the risk of early school leaving among disadvantaged young people, a significant proportion of whom are Roma. The project built on methods already successfully applied in previous professional programmes of the two organisations, with mentoring, skills development, and support for the social integration of young people at its core.

The programme was implemented at three locations in Hungary (Miskolc, Gyöngyös, Budapest) and three in Romania (Covasna County: Sf. Gheorghe, Harghita County: Gheorgheni, Odorheiu Secuiesc, Mures County: Târgu Mureș) and their surrounding areas, with the participation of disadvantaged Roma and non-Roma young people aged 12–18.

The main activities of the project were as follows:

- Individual and group mentoring for motivational and skills development purposes;
- Skills development sessions to develop competencies relevant to education and the labour market, as well as self-knowledge;
- Labour market preparation to impart basic knowledge of job searching and employment;
- Workplace visits and career presentations;
- Community and recreational programmes.

In addition to direct work with young people, an important element of the project was cooperation with teachers, civil professionals, and university students. During the programme, training sessions, professional workshops, and experience exchanges were held, focusing on exploring the causes of early school leaving and introducing practical methods to support prevention and intervention.

Methodology of the Impact Assessment

The examination of the programme's results was carried out using multiple data sources. A questionnaire survey was conducted among the young people involved in the project (480 people) upon entry into the programme and upon its conclusion. A questionnaire survey was also prepared among the teachers involved in the programme, with nearly 50 professionals participating.

In addition to the questionnaire surveys, the study draws on experiences formulated during professional workshops with teachers, as well as feedback from professionals involved in programme implementation – particularly mentors. These experiences were gathered during joint professional workshops and evaluation processes of the Autonomia Foundation and Caritas Alba-Iulia.

One objective of the study was to gain a more accurate picture of the social background, school experiences, future plans, and factors that may influence the academic progress and school retention of the young people participating in the programme. Among teachers, we primarily sought to understand which factors, in their experience, contribute most to early school leaving, and what measures and methods could help reduce it.

An important part of the programme evaluation was the collection of participant feedback. We examined which programme elements students and teachers found most useful, and which activities contributed most to young people's engagement, motivation, and development.

One key goal of the programme was to develop participants' skills. The questionnaires therefore included several questions aimed at measuring changes in various social, communication, and labour market

competencies. However, the results of such self-reported measurements must be interpreted with caution. Positive changes observed during the programme cannot be attributed exclusively to the project's impact, as young people's development may also be influenced by many other factors – such as age-related changes, school experiences, or family environment.

A further methodological limitation was that a portion of the participating young people had significant reading comprehension and literacy difficulties. In compiling the questionnaires, we strived for simple, accessible wording, and assistance was provided during completion when needed to interpret certain questions. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that comprehension difficulties may have affected the accuracy of responses to certain questions.

It is important to emphasise that this study does not present the results of a control-group experimental impact assessment, and therefore the effects of the programme can primarily be expressed as probable correlations and experiences. However, the various data sources – questionnaires from students and teachers, experiences from professional workshops, as well as feedback from mentors and implementers – led to similar conclusions at many points. This increases the reliability of the results and allows for the formulation of professional lessons and recommendations that go beyond the specificities of individual locations.

With all this in mind, the primary goal of this study is not the exact measurement of the programme's direct impacts, but rather to present those experiences, good practices, and directions for development that could contribute to the more effective planning of future programmes and policy interventions aimed at preventing early school leaving.

2. Targeting of the Programme and Composition of Participants

A key consideration in designing the RISE programme was reaching young people who are at heightened risk of early school leaving. According to international and domestic research, the risk of dropout results from the simultaneous presence of several interrelated factors.

The most important risk factors include:

- The unfavourable social situation of the family and the low educational attainment of parents;
- Educational inequalities affecting Roma pupils and school segregation;
- Disadvantaged or peripheral living environments;
- Accumulation of learning difficulties and school failures;
- Early school leaving due to early employment or starting a family;
- Structural factors that facilitate early exit from the education system.

During the recruitment of participants, we therefore strived to ensure that the programme reached, in as high a proportion as possible, those young people who have one or more of these risk factors present.

Girls and boys participated in the programme in equal proportions. 51 percent of participants identified themselves as Roma. The average age was 16.7 years; in Hungary this was somewhat higher, as only secondary school students participated there, while in Romania primary school students also took part.

Approximately 60 percent of programme participants attended or currently attend a primary school where at least 50 percent of pupils are Roma. At the class level, the proportion is very similar, only slightly lower (57%). Overall for the programme, slightly more than a quarter of pupils (27%) attended or currently attend a primary school class where Roma pupils are in the majority. For students involved in Hungary, this proportion is higher. Here, nearly 45% of respondents came from a class where Roma pupils were the majority or exclusively present. About 25% attended a class with an equal ratio, and only 22% of students indicated they attended a non-Roma majority primary school class. Data for the primary school as a whole show even lower values than for individual classes, suggesting that many students come from 'Roma schools', not just segregated classes. In secondary school classes, non-Roma majority is the most common response (about 60%). The proportion of 'Roma-only' classes in secondary school fell to a negligible level

(below 3%). A layer of about 15% appears in the data who, although secondary school students, remain in a Roma majority class.

Examining the residential background of participants, it can be established that the majority of young people in the programme do not live in particularly segregated or extremely disadvantaged environments; however, a significant proportion came from parts of settlements where various forms of social disadvantage and ethnic segregation are present. According to 61% of the young people surveyed, they live in an area where mainly average-status families reside, while a further 25% live in a mixed social composition environment. At the same time, one third of respondents reported a living environment where poverty is significantly present.

Responses regarding the ethnic composition of the living environment show that nearly half (45%) of participants live in an environment where the Roma population is in the majority or represents a significant proportion. This was particularly characteristic of Hungarian locations, where a significant proportion of respondents came from poor, Roma-majority parts of settlements. This suggests that the programme reached, in a considerable proportion, young people who are at heightened risk in terms of residential segregation and social disadvantage.

The educational attainment of parents of participating students also suggests that the programme reached, in a significant proportion, young people from disadvantaged families. Based on responses, 38% of mothers and 32% of fathers have eight years of primary school as their highest level of education. 15% of mothers and 19% of fathers hold a vocational qualification. Low parental educational attainment is one of the most important risk factors for early school leaving. Numerous studies point out that parental education strongly influences children's academic results, aspirations for further education, and successful progress within the education system.

The risk of early school leaving cannot be traced back to a single factor. Both the literature and the experiences gathered during the programme show that dropout is usually underpinned by several interrelated risk factors. These include the low socioeconomic status of the family, low parental educational attainment, segregated or disadvantaged living environments, educational inequalities experienced by Roma pupils, as well as learning difficulties and pressures arising from early employment.

Based on the composition of young people involved in the programme, it can be established that the project reached, in a significant proportion, students who are at heightened risk from the perspective of early school leaving. More than half of the participants identified themselves as Roma, a significant portion came from primary schools and classes with a high proportion of Roma pupils, and nearly half live in an environment where the Roma population is in the majority or has a significant presence.

Data on family background also show that the programme successfully reached disadvantaged young people. A significant proportion of parents of participating students have low educational attainment; the highest qualification of about a third of parents is eight years of primary school, while the proportion with vocational qualifications is also relatively low. Parental educational attainment is, according to international and domestic research, one of the strongest predictors of children's educational trajectories, so this data indicates that the programme engaged many young people who are also at heightened risk based on their family background.

However, the social background of participants cannot be considered homogeneous. The programme did not exclusively reach young people living in the most marginalised residential areas or segregated settlements, but also students living in mixed social composition environments. This is an important point, as dropout does not exclusively affect young people living in the most severe poverty, but also appears in broader social groups.

Overall, it can be said that compared to the programme's objectives, the outreach was particularly effective. The group of participants included in high proportion those young people who can be classified among groups at risk of early school leaving. At the same time, the programme did not concentrate on a single social group but was able to reach young people of different backgrounds, which created an opportunity to apply community-building and mentoring-based methods supporting social integration. The composition of

participants thus fits well with the project's fundamental objective: supporting young people in whom social, family, and educational risk factors contributing to dropout may simultaneously be present.

3. Causes of Dropout from the Teachers' Perspective

One objective of the survey conducted among teachers was to explore which factors, in their experience, most frequently underlie early school leaving. Based on the responses, it is clear that teachers interpret dropout primarily not as a school problem, but as a family and social problem. In their view, students' educational trajectories are most influenced by family background, economic situation, and related motivational difficulties.

The most frequently mentioned factor was family background: 71% of respondents identified family causes as one of the main triggers of dropout. The questionnaire did not elaborate on exactly what kind of family problems teachers had in mind; however, based on open-ended responses and experiences from professional workshops during the programme, this category includes shortcomings in parental support, the unfavourable social situation of families, difficulties related to child-rearing, as well as situations where education does not appear as a real value or a way out for the family.

The second most frequently mentioned factor was the need to earn money, identified by 63% of teachers. The responses suggest that for many young people, employment and supporting the family financially becomes more important in the short term than obtaining educational qualifications. The survey conducted among students participating in the programme also confirms this problem: 46% of respondents indicated that they regularly work or have previously worked alongside school.

More than half of teachers (55%) also consider learning difficulties one of the determining causes of dropout. Based on the experiences gathered during the programme, this does not necessarily mean problems related to specific subjects, but rather often refers to basic competency gaps carried over from primary school, repeated experiences of failure, and the resulting loss of motivation. Learning problems and difficulties arising from family background often mutually reinforce each other, further increasing the risk of school leaving.

Teachers also attributed a significant role to the influence of the social environment. According to 39% of respondents, the pulling-back force of the peer group or immediate environment contributes to early school leaving. This can be particularly decisive in communities where there are few examples of successful educational trajectories, while early employment or premature school leaving is widely accepted as a strategy.

The other listed factors appeared in much smaller proportions in the responses. Problems at practical training sites were mentioned by 22% of teachers, while 20% considered school conflicts a significant risk factor. Travel difficulties were identified by 16% of respondents, and inappropriate choice of school or profession by 14%. Although these appeared with less weight overall, they may play a decisive role in some students' interruption of studies.

It is notable that health or mental problems, and language difficulties, were mentioned by only 4% of teachers. This may partly indicate that these problems genuinely appear less frequently in the target group, but also that such difficulties often remain hidden from the school, or appear behind other problems.

The 'other' responses further nuance the picture. Teachers named factors such as lack of motivation, unexcused absences, lack of parental attention, early marriage, or regular absence. These responses also suggest that dropout rarely has a single cause. Rather, an interconnected set of problems is observed that simultaneously affects the family environment, academic progress, motivation, and the social relationships of young people.

Overall, based on teachers' responses, early school leaving is primarily underpinned by structural and family-originating problems. Among the most important risk factors, family difficulties, the need to earn money, and learning problems appeared, which can be further reinforced by the influences of the social environment. The responses fit well with the data collected among young people participating in the

programme and the experiences of implementing professionals. A significant proportion of participants come from family and social environments where low educational attainment, financial difficulties, limited models for further education, and employment pressures are simultaneously present. This suggests that interventions aimed at preventing early school leaving can only be effective if they simultaneously address students' academic, social, family, and motivational needs.

4. Students' School Experiences, Self-Assessment, and Vision for the Future

Assessment of School and the School Environment

Based on the responses of young people participating in the programme, an overall positive picture emerges regarding their school experiences. The majority of students perceive a supportive school environment and assess their relationships with both teachers and peers relatively favourably. However, several factors also appear that may influence long-term school success and the risk of dropout.

The class community as a protective factor – the highest value was received by the statement 'The class community is good' (3.92). Most students evaluate inter-class relationships positively and basically feel part of a supportive community. Experiences gathered during the programme and students' responses to open-ended questions also confirm that community experiences, group sessions, and jointly implemented projects played an outstandingly important role in the engagement and motivation of young people.

The role of supportive adults – students evaluated the support provided by teachers and the school favourably. The statements 'Teachers are helpful and supportive' and 'I know who to turn to if I have difficulty with studying or the practical placement' both received an average value of 3.76. Based on the responses, the majority of students feel that there is an adult within the school system to whom they can turn for help with their problems. This is a particularly important result from the perspective of preventing dropout, as both international and domestic experiences show that the presence of supportive adult relationships significantly increases school attachment and reduces the risk of early school leaving.

However, the experiences gained during the implementation of the programme partially nuance this picture. Based on mentors' reports, in many cases the involvement of external mentors became necessary precisely because the young people did not have a trusting relationship within the school system in which they could share their personal problems, family difficulties, or uncertainties about the future. In several cases, mentors fulfilled a supportive role that went beyond academic assistance, and was rather about building trust, providing emotional support, and jointly processing questions of career orientation and life management.

The two experiences do not necessarily contradict each other. Questionnaire responses show that the majority of students formally see help as available at school, while mentoring experiences draw attention to the fact that genuine, deeper trusting relationships and personalised support are often still lacking. This reinforces the importance of having mentoring provided by independent external professionals available alongside the school in programmes aimed at preventing dropout. The availability of help and the presence of supportive relationships – whether provided by the school or external actors – represent one of the most important protective factors against early school leaving.

Assessment of practical training and learning difficulties – students basically assessed the usefulness of practical training positively (3.61). The responses also suggest that the quality of practical placements and the experiences that can be gained are not equally favourable in every case. This is consistent with the proposals formulated by teachers, which emphasised the need to develop practical training sites.

The statement 'There is a lot of material and it is difficult' received an average of 2.88, showing that the quantity of material does not appear as students' most important problem in itself. The learning difficulties emphasised by teachers are more likely underpinned by deficiencies in basic skills, previous experiences of failure, and inappropriate learning strategies.

School safety – it is a particularly favourable result that the statement ‘I experience many attacks, I feel bad’ received the lowest value (1.73). This suggests that the majority of respondents do not experience regular bullying or exclusion at school. Although this does not mean that such problems do not exist at all, the results suggest that these do not represent the most important risk factor among the student group examined.

Students’ Self-Assessment and Competencies

The questionnaire also examined how young people evaluate their own skills and competencies. Based on the responses, an overall positive self-image emerges, particularly in areas related to cooperation and social relationships.

Cooperation and responsibility – the highest values were received by the statements ‘I always complete tasks assigned to me’ (3.93), ‘I can cooperate with others’ (3.92), and ‘I am a good team player’ (3.71). Based on the responses, a significant proportion of students consider themselves to possess those basic social competencies that are also crucial for learning and future employment. According to programme experiences, joint projects, teamwork, and experience-based sessions played an important role in this.

Building relationships and communication – most young people consider themselves open to forming new relationships (3.7), but self-confidence related to public communication is somewhat lower (3.24); speaking in front of a larger community or representing one’s own opinion presents a challenge for many students. This is a particularly important area for development, as communication skills play a decisive role in job interviews, workplace collaboration, and everyday administration. The drama pedagogy, project-based, and presentation elements applied during the programme are therefore considered particularly important methods.

Punctuality and self-organisation – among the lowest values was the statement related to punctuality (3.32), suggesting that some respondents, by their own assessment, struggle with time management and regularity. This is consistent with teachers’ experiences, who mentioned absences and motivational problems as one of the important factors of dropout.

Ideas Regarding the Future and Employment

Regarding young people’s workplace selection preferences, based on the responses, appropriate pay is an outstandingly important consideration for them (average ranking of 1.66), far ahead of all other factors. The second group includes workplace accessibility, predictable working hours, and interesting work. This suggests that young people think about employment primarily in terms of livelihood security and predictability. Particularly noteworthy is that factors related to workplace relationships – such as teamwork or clear employer expectations – ended up at the bottom of the list. This probably does not reflect an underestimation of their importance, but rather a lack of labour market experience. It is therefore important that career orientation and labour market programmes deal not only with the technical aspects of job searching, but also help with informed workplace selection and longer-term career planning.

Based on student responses, an overall relatively favourable picture emerges regarding the school experiences, social relationships, and future plans of young people participating in the programme. The strongest protective factors identified are attachment to the class community, supportive adult relationships, and cooperation skills. Most young people feel they have someone to turn to for help, and they also evaluate their own social competencies positively. However, the results also identify several areas where further development is warranted. These include developing communication confidence, self-organisation, time management and work discipline, as well as expanding labour market knowledge. The responses also highlight that young people’s vision of the future is strongly determined by the need for economic security, which is consistent with the problems formulated by teachers and the presence of early employment.

Based on programme experiences, methods that build on community experiences, joint projects, experiential pedagogical elements, and practical experience-gaining can be particularly effective. These not

only strengthen students' motivation and school attachment, but also support the development of competencies that are crucial in both education and the labour market.

Although general social trust and subjective wellbeing are not directly related to the question of early school leaving, they nevertheless provide important supplementary information for understanding the situation of young people participating in the programme. Based on the responses, students' social trust can be considered low: the average value of trust in people was 4.7 on a 10-point scale, indicating that most young people approach others with rather more caution. In contrast, they evaluated their own life situation and general wellbeing relatively positively, as indicated by the average happiness score of 7.4 points.

5. Possibilities for Reducing Dropout

Based on the responses of teachers collaborating in the programme, reducing early school leaving cannot be achieved with a single measure or intervention. The questionnaire results show that dropout is a complex social phenomenon with family, social, learning, institutional, and motivational factors all underlying it. Accordingly, the majority of respondents consider it necessary to establish a complex support system capable of simultaneously addressing students' academic, psychological, social, and career orientation needs.

The role of professionals and the need for complex support – among the tools needed to support at-risk students, teachers highlighted the help of specialist professionals by far the most. According to 77.6% of respondents, one of the most important conditions for supporting successful educational trajectories is the involvement of various helping professionals. This result shows that a significant proportion of teachers perceive the limits of their own possibilities and see that in many cases they encounter problems that require specialised expertise. This may include mental health problems, family conflicts, social difficulties, learning disorders, or indeed motivational problems.

Programme experiences also showed that personal attention and the presence of a trusting relationship are particularly important for young people. In student feedback, the importance of 'someone caring about them', listening to them, and providing them with support frequently appeared. It is also an important signal that those students who had already considered leaving school identified psychological support as the most important help in their responses. This confirms that in preventing dropout, alongside professional assistance, personal relationships and trust-based support also play an outstanding role.

More flexible educational environment and learning pathways – according to nearly half (44.9%) of teachers, reducing dropout would require more flexible educational organisation and more modern pedagogical methods. Based on the responses, many see that the current educational framework does not provide an appropriate learning environment for every student.

Suggestions frequently appearing in open-ended responses included:

- Strengthening differentiated education;
- Applying alternative forms of learning;
- Project-based learning;
- Use of interactive and experience-based pedagogical methods;
- Reducing the burden on students;
- Increasing time devoted to developing basic competencies;
- Establishing a system of requirements better adapted to student needs.

Based on responses, a significant proportion of teachers see that one condition for preventing student failures is greater flexibility and personalisation of the education system.

Learning support and catch-up – learning difficulties appeared as one of the most important causes of dropout in the previous questions, so it is not surprising that 40.8% of teachers also listed tutoring and learning support among the most important tools. Based on responses, reducing academic gaps, developing basic competencies, and addressing individual learning problems are indispensable conditions for at-risk

students to successfully complete their studies. Programme experiences also pointed out, however, that for disadvantaged young people it is not a realistic goal to completely eliminate the skill gaps brought from primary school. Rather, there is a need to develop competencies that directly support academic success, employment, and navigating everyday life. Practice-oriented, experience-based, and success-providing developmental methods proved particularly effective in this area.

Emotional support and mental wellbeing – nearly one-third of teachers (30.6%) emphasised the importance of emotional support. The responses show that they do not interpret dropout exclusively as an educational problem, but as a process in which self-confidence, emotional stability, motivation, and mental wellbeing also play a determining role.

Experiences gained during the programme also support this. Student feedback frequently mentioned the growth of self-confidence, the formulation of personal goals, and the recognition that they are capable of achieving results. For several young people, one of the most important benefits of the programme was being able to talk about their problems in a safe environment and receiving positive feedback.

The role of the family in preventing dropout – one of the strongest messages from open-ended responses was the emphasis on the role of families. According to a significant proportion of teachers, reducing dropout is inconceivable without the active involvement of parents and families.

Respondents frequently mentioned:

- Strengthening the relationship between family and school;
- Increasing parental responsibility;
- Supporting families;
- The need for more effective communication between parents and school.

Programme experiences also pointed out, however, that traditional school communication forms – such as parent meetings – do not primarily represent the solution in engaging families. In many cases these are families that previously had negative experiences with educational institutions or are suspicious of the school system. Therefore, the prerequisite for successful cooperation is much more the development of personal, informal relationships, communication adapted to families' life situations, and the organisation of community occasions where parents appear as partners rather than merely for problem-solving purposes.

Strengthening motivation and vision for the future – the importance of student motivation is also clearly reflected in the responses. According to teachers, the connection between school and future career pathways must be made tangible for young people.

Among the proposals:

- Support for vocational choice;
- Strengthening career guidance;
- Presenting opportunities for further education;
- Reforming the system of financial incentives.

The positive reception of the labour market training, workplace visits, and CV preparation sessions organised during the programme shows that young people particularly value activities that are directly connected to adult life and employment.

Developing vocational training and practical training – the need to develop vocational training also appeared prominently in teachers' responses. Many highlighted the development of practical training sites, providing a choice of practical placements, developing school workshops, and creating a vocational offer better aligned with labour market needs.

Community experiences and school attachment – teachers in many cases emphasised the role of community programmes, leisure activities, and community development. According to the responses, strengthening school attachment can in itself serve as a protective factor against dropout. Programme experiences also

showed that group sessions, joint projects, the application of creative and artistic tools, and community experiences can significantly contribute to the growth of young people's motivation and self-confidence.

Systemic challenges – some teachers also drew attention to the fact that the causes of dropout in many cases go beyond what the school can address. Several mentioned systemic problems, unfavourable developments in family circumstances, changes in social norms, or the effects of poverty. One respondent's formulation summarises this view particularly well: 'the school cannot do more'. Although this statement can be considered an exaggeration, it clearly illustrates that a significant proportion of teachers interpret dropout not exclusively as an educational issue, but as a social problem whose management requires the cooperation of education, the social care system, child protection, health services, and local communities.

Based on teachers' responses, reducing early school leaving can only be achieved through complex interventions built on the cooperation of multiple actors. The most prominent needs were for the involvement of helping professionals, strengthening learning support, and greater flexibility of the education system. In addition, services providing emotional support, cooperation with families, strengthening student motivation, and the development of career guidance and practical training received priority.

6. Results and Experiences of the RISE Programme

Difficulties Experienced During Programme Implementation

Based on teachers' assessment, students participating in the RISE programme faced relatively few difficulties during programme implementation overall. Average values for the individual factors on the 1–5 scale characteristically moved in the lower-middle range, suggesting that most examined areas did not present serious obstacles for participants.

The greatest challenge was independent work (3.22), which was the only factor whose value exceeded level 3. According to teachers, students primarily found independent problem-solving, organising their own work processes, and taking responsibility difficult. This was followed by meeting task deadlines (2.61) and cooperating with other students (2.58). Although these values do not indicate serious problems, they signal that the programme also served to develop skills that are equally important for future studies and labour market integration. In contrast, coordinating school tasks with the programme (1.91), cooperating with mentors (1.91), and travel (1.63) presented only minimal difficulty. Based on responses, the organisational framework of the programme worked well, and the relationship established with mentors was basically supportive and problem-free.

Most Useful Elements of the Programme According to Teachers

Based on teachers' responses, the greatest value of the programme was provided by those activities that simultaneously supported students' community integration, personal development, and labour market preparation. By far the most frequently mentioned programme element was the group development session: 61% of respondents considered this the most useful part of the programme. According to teachers' experiences, these sessions not only supported community building but also created opportunities for developing cooperation, communication, and self-knowledge skills.

The second most important area was labour market preparation. Labour market training was highlighted by 33% of teachers, and CV preparation by 31%. A particularly important experience was that these programme elements created a tangible connection between school studies and future employment. Leisure programmes were considered outstandingly useful by 27% of respondents. This suggests that joint experiences outside formal learning situations also played a significant role from the perspective of student motivation and engagement. Tutoring and portfolio preparation (22–22% each), as well as individual mentoring (20%), were mentioned in moderate proportions. Although these received lower mention rates, it is clear from open-ended questions that mentoring was one of the defining background elements of the programme, which in many cases enabled personalised support for young people.

Which Elements Can Be Integrated into School Practice?

Based on teachers' responses, the programme contained numerous elements that could be integrated into the everyday practice of schools over the longer term.

The most frequently mentioned area was the methodology of group sessions. Teachers particularly valued sessions built on cooperation, active participation, and joint problem-solving. Several highlighted the application of the project method, the role of jointly implemented tasks, and the incorporation of creative and artistic tools. These methods create opportunities for students to achieve success experiences, discover their own competencies, and become active participants in the learning process.

Labour market preparation also appeared prominently. According to teachers, labour market training, CV and portfolio preparation, and sessions supporting further education provide young people with practical knowledge directly applicable after completing school. It is also clearly visible from the responses that there is significant demand for individual mentoring. Programme experiences show, however, that mentoring works most effectively when carried out by independent, external professionals who can establish a trusting relationship with young people. Teachers also highlighted the importance of tutoring, self-knowledge sessions, drama pedagogy elements, developmental games, communication skills development, and cooperation with families.

Teachers' Most Important Experiences

Based on responses to open-ended questions, teachers' most important experiences can be captured in the positive changes in students and the development of a supportive community atmosphere.

One of the strongest themes in the responses was student satisfaction and active participation. According to teachers, young people willingly participated in sessions, eagerly joined programmes, and had a positive attitude towards the programme as a whole. The development of self-confidence and independence appeared as outstanding results. According to teachers, students became more confident, were able to formulate their own goals, and thought about their future more consciously. Numerous responses also referred to the improvement of community relationships. According to teachers, students cooperated better with each other, class communities became more cohesive, and they performed particularly well in group work. Particularly positive feedback was received about the mentors' work. Teachers highlighted the mentors' preparedness, empathy, and the fact that they provided continuous support for young people. Several also emphasised that due to the programme, students communicated more openly, talked about their problems more easily, and expressed their opinions more honestly.

Most Useful Elements of the Programme from Students' Perspective

The community and relational dimension of the programme stands out even more strongly from students' responses. The most frequently mentioned positive experiences were related to team building, cooperation, getting to know classmates better, and community experiences. A significant portion of responses emphasised the importance of trusting relationships. Several students mentioned that it was a good feeling that 'people paid attention to them', that 'someone cares about young people', and that they could talk honestly with the mentors. These feedbacks are particularly important, as they show that one of the programme's greatest strengths was the establishment of supportive human relationships.

Students also greatly appreciated the communication exercises, creative sessions, film and artistic programmes, workplace visits, job interview simulations, as well as help with CV and portfolio preparation. These responses clearly show that practical experience-gaining and experiential pedagogical elements can be particularly effective tools in motivating young people.

Satisfaction with the Programme

Both teachers and students evaluated the programme extremely positively. The average satisfaction measured among teachers was 9.27 points on the 10-point scale, an outstandingly high value. Students also

spoke positively about the programme; the average satisfaction score was 8.5 points. Based on the responses, the most important impact of the programme cannot be captured in the development of a single competency, but in the fact that young people were able to participate in a supportive environment where they received attention, built relationships, tested themselves, and achieved success experiences.

Overall, both teachers' and students' feedback show that the RISE programme's strongest impact was reflected in young people's personal development, strengthening of community relationships, and shaping of their vision for the future. The key to the programme's success is not to be found in a single activity, but in the complex approach that simultaneously built on community development, experiential pedagogical methods, labour market preparation, and personalised mentoring. Group sessions, project-based and creative methods, and the support provided by external mentors independent of the school proved particularly effective.

The results suggest that in supporting young people at risk of dropout, trusting relationships, community experiences, participatory learning situations, and practical experience-gaining play at least as important a role as direct academic assistance. The programme's high satisfaction scores and participants' feedback alike indicate that the complex support model applied by RISE may be suitable as a foundation for future interventions aimed at preventing early school leaving.

7. Summary

The impact assessment of the RISE programme shows that early school leaving is a complex social phenomenon with family, social, economic, learning, and motivational factors simultaneously underlying it. The experiences of teachers, students, and implementing professionals participating in the programme all suggest that preventing dropout cannot be treated exclusively as an educational issue, but is a problem requiring complex, multi-area interventions.

A significant proportion of young people involved in the programme came from social groups in which risk factors increasing the likelihood of dropout are cumulatively present. More than half of participants identified themselves as Roma, a significant proportion live in environments characterised by Roma majority or strong Roma presence, and many come from families where parents have low educational attainment. Data on residential and family background also show, however, that the programme did not exclusively reach the most marginalised young people, but a socially heterogeneous yet highly at-risk target group from the perspective of dropout. Compared to the project's objectives, the outreach can be considered effective.

According to teachers collaborating in the programme, the most important causes of early school leaving are family problems, the need to earn money, and learning difficulties. Based on responses, family background plays a determining role in shaping student trajectories, while economic pressures in many cases direct students towards employment even at a young age. Data measured among students participating in the programme confirm this: a significant proportion of students already work or have worked previously alongside their studies. Learning difficulties mentioned by teachers are also consistent with the literature's findings, which indicate that early academic failures are one of the strongest predictors of dropout.

Students' own opinions about their school, however, show a more nuanced picture. Based on responses, the majority of participants evaluate their school community, teachers' support, and the quality of practical training positively. The class community received the most favourable assessment, while bullying, exclusion, or a poor school atmosphere appeared relatively rarely as problems. Most students feel there is someone in the school to whom they can turn for help, which can be considered an important protective factor from the perspective of dropout. The experiences of mentors working during the programme also pointed out, however, that students' support needs in many cases exceed the possibilities of assistance available within the school's framework.

Based on students' self-assessment, participants primarily rated their cooperation skills and sense of responsibility favourably. They are less confident, however, in the areas of public communication and

independent performance. These results are consistent with the experiences gained during the programme, according to which young people particularly benefit from developmental activities that strengthen their communication, self-knowledge, and cooperation skills.

Responses related to the labour market show that for young people, appropriate pay is by far the most important consideration when selecting a future workplace. At the same time, responses also indicate that young people value interesting work, a predictable work environment, and stability. The labour market modules of the programme therefore not only fulfilled a career orientation role, but also contributed to students forming a more realistic picture of the conditions and opportunities of employment.

Results related to the programme evaluation present a clearly positive picture. Teachers rated the programme at an average of 9.27 points on the 10-point scale, and responses to open-ended questions also reflect a high degree of satisfaction. The greatest impact was exerted on participants by group sessions, community experiences, relationships formed with mentors, as well as self-knowledge and communication development. From students' responses, the significance of trust, attention, and an accepting atmosphere stands out particularly strongly. For many young people, the most important experience of the programme was being listened to, taken seriously, and being given opportunities to test themselves in situations they had not previously experienced.

Based on programme experiences, the common characteristic of the most effective interventions was that they simultaneously built on personal relationships, community experiences, and practical experience-gaining. Group sessions, project tasks, the application of creative and artistic methods, the use of experiential pedagogical tools, and the interactive forms of labour market training proved particularly effective. The programme also showed that mentoring can be truly effective when carried out by independent, external professionals who are able to establish a trusting relationship with young people and play an intermediary role between students, families, and the school.

Professional recommendations formulated based on the impact assessment results centre on the establishment of complex support systems. Reducing dropout requires the continuous presence in schools of psychologists, social workers, development specialists, and mentors, whose operation is linked not to periodic projects, but to predictable state funding. In addition, rethinking cooperation with families, strengthening learning support and skills development, expanding community programmes, and the practice-oriented development of career guidance and labour market preparation are all indispensable.

Overall, the experiences of the RISE programme show that the risk of early school leaving can be significantly reduced if young people simultaneously receive personal attention, community support, practical knowledge, and positive experiences that strengthen their self-confidence, motivation, and vision for the future. The programme's results confirm that the most effective tools for preventing dropout are not primarily administrative or sanctioning measures, but trust-based relationships, supportive communities, and complex developmental programmes that respond to young people's real needs.