



# **APPLE- eArly warning Platform to Prevent youth from dropping out of school Education**

National report: Key findings of desk research and interviews with educators and stakeholders in North Macedonia

IO1 – Capacity Building Seminars for Educators



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## Abstract

In the Republic of North Macedonia, the phenomenon of early dropout among vulnerable categories of students, especially students from the Roma community and students with disabilities (students with special education needs) has been the subject of analysis for the last 10 years. This phenomenon is confirmed by analysis and researches that deeply investigate the reasons why students leave the education process.

Regarding the prevention of dropout and early abandonment of education among students from vulnerable categories, significant measures, policies and projects have been undertaken by the Government, domestic and international organizations, unfortunately the problem of early school leaving among Roma and students with disabilities, it is still largely present in the country, hence most of them remain without a completed education, which in the long run makes it difficult for them to integrate into society.

The purpose of this report is to explore more the problem and the reasons why students from vulnerable groups often leave school before they complete the education, as well as identify the needs of teachers/educators and schools to prevent the emerge of dropout among students. The report provides qualitative and quantitative data on the problem through conducting desk and empirical research that will be the stepping stone for creating capacity building seminars for teachers that will enable them to apply innovative pedagogical methods and to easier identify youth at risk of dropping out.

The key findings mostly bring the attention on the need for strengthening the capacities of teachers for identifying students at risk of dropping out of school and timely intervention to prevent dropout among students, promoting inclusive education as a concept of education for each child and the creation of new measures and policies to improve the system in prevention of dropout among students from marginalized and vulnerable groups.

All the findings and result of this report will provide APPLE – *"eArly warning Platform to Prevent youth from dropping out of school Education"* project in achieving the goal of tackling the issue of early school leaving by developing an innovating guide for educators as well as an early warning platform, which will enable educators to identify youth at risk of dropping out and take preventive action against early school leaving.

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## 1 Introduction

In recent years, North Macedonia has taken significant steps towards the improving of the education and providing access to education for all children, especially for the children from most vulnerable communities in alignment with the EU, international instruments, international and national policies and the national legislative for education.

International assessments such as PISA (*Program for International Students Assessment*), PIRLS (*Progress in International Reading Literacy Study*) and TIMSS (*International assessments for monitoring of the student's achievement in mathematics and science*) for assessment of the education systems, have shown that the country has not meet its obligation to provide quality education for all children, especially for vulnerable categories such as Roma and children with disabilities. In fact, the results of the latest assessments are not only weak, but also show that the quality of education is declining.

There are several reasons behind the poor results of the country's education system as well as the significant dropout of students from the educational process. The education policies do not rely on the relevant data and facts and to great extent influence the overall outcomes. The teaching programmes are not up to date with the latest researches and achievements and often are not implemented properly.

In terms of education and prevention of dropout among students who come from vulnerable categories such as Roma and people with disabilities, the level of implementation of the concept of inclusive education plays a key role. Inclusive education as a model envisages adaptation to the society, the system and the institutions to the needs of the vulnerable groups of citizens. While the integration as a concept envisages adaptation of the citizens to the society, the system and the institutions. According to the experiences, it can be concluded that N. Macedonia still practices the second model, i.e. integration, in great extent. This in turn generates problems in access to education and retaining students in the education process.

Unfortunately, depending on place of residence, the socio-economic situation of their families, the ethnicity, the disability, or simply because they are different, some children are unable to fulfill their right to education. The children with disabilities and from the Roma ethnic background are particularly at risk of losing their right of education. Almost three out of four children with

disabilities do not go to school at all, mainly due to stigma, physical barriers, lack of support services and low expectations of parents.

According to the analysis and researches available, it has been confirmed that the largest number of students' dropout as a phenomenon occurs in primary education, especially in the period from 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, i.e. students aged 11 to 14 and in the transition from primary to secondary education or students aged 14 and 15 years. This phenomenon indirectly affects the reduction of the number of enrolled students in secondary education.

At national level, according to the State Statistical Office, in primary schools, at the beginning of the school year 2019/2020, the number of students in regular primary schools was 187,240, which is a decrease of 0.5% compared to the previous school year. Meanwhile, the number of students in regular secondary schools, at the beginning of the school year 2019/2020, was 69,980, which is a decrease of 2.3% compared to the previous school year<sup>1</sup>. According to the report conducted by the Ombudsman in 2016, out of the total number of students with disabilities in primary education on local level in the city of Skopje from the total number of 2333, 175 students dropped out of the educational process<sup>2</sup>.

The critical moments with the phenomenon of dropout among vulnerable groups, especially Roma and children with disabilities, appears in the transition from 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade (aged 10 and 11), ie in the transition from lower primary education (1<sup>st</sup> -5<sup>th</sup> grade) to higher primary education (5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade). Regarding the dropout among students with special needs, according to the report of the Ombudsman from June 2016 for assessment of the level of inclusion of people with disabilities in regular education, out of the total number of dropouts, more than about 18% are in the transition from 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade (ages 10 and 11). Among the Roma students, a higher rate of dropout has been identified in the transition from primary to secondary education, where total of 70 to 75% finishing primary education continue in secondary school. The remaining 25

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<sup>1</sup> State Statistical Office, News release for Education, 2020, Skopje

<sup>2</sup> Toward inclusive education, Report of the conducted research regarding inclusion of the children with disabilities in regular primary education, Ombudsman of the Republic of North Macedonia, June 2016, Skopje



to 30% drop-out and do not complete secondary education. Meanwhile, in secondary education, the data show that in 2013/2014 the percentage of drop-outs is 16% which continues to increase until the school year 2015/2016 where the percentage is 23%<sup>3</sup>. According to the analysis the largest numbers of dropouts' occurs among Roma population.

Regarding the dropout among the students with disabilities, it should be noted that the analysis and the researches available are more focused on the level of involvement and inclusion of people with disabilities in regular secondary education, than on the dropout of school hence at the moment, there are limited data related to this phenomenon.

The most common reasons of dropout and early school leaving are the poor socio-economic situation of the families, discrimination and stigmatization of Roma children and children with disabilities by their peers and even by the parents of their peers. Significant influence for the emergence of this phenomenon is the incomplete implementation of the concept of inclusive education by the schools, which should provide adequate education for every child and provide full support to all children regardless of their ethnicity and disabilities.

The specific reasons for the dropout of students with disabilities from secondary education can be the inadequate approach by teachers in regular education, the incompetence of teachers to work with students with special learning needs, the unadjusted infrastructure of schools to students' needs, lack of professional staff such as special educators, personal assistants and pedagogues, the lack of appropriate didactic aids for students with disabilities, etc.

Whereas, among the students of the Roma community for this problem additionally contributes the insufficient knowledge of the Macedonian language which leads to decreasing the interest of the students to attend classes as well the low level of education of their parents contributes to low awareness for the importance of the education. An additional reason for school dropouts among vulnerable groups, especially the Roma population, is the emigration of a large number of families in European countries.

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<sup>3</sup> Ombudsman of Republic of North Macedonia, Report for Inclusion of the Roma after the Decade for inclusion of Roma – Actual situation and challenges, 2018, Skopje

For better understanding of early school leaving, the research aims to give comprehensive overview of the phenomenon of early dropouts in N. Macedonia, gather relevant information through literature review and field research. The results will be essential for development of capacity building seminars and innovative guide for in order to enhance the knowledge and develop skills on innovative pedagogical skills of the educators. With this the educators will be able to give support to the students who are at risk of dropping out. The ultimate goal is identifying ways of preventing early school leaving as well as the necessary reforms at political and institutional level.

## 2 Methodology

This report provides an overview of the current state and the level of educational inclusion/exclusion of students from vulnerable families, especially Roma population and people with disabilities. In order to have a clear overview and get into the reasons for early school leaving, relevant information through literature review and field research will be gathered. Apart from the information and data received on field, the national and local context, as well as national and local policies and legislation in the country are taken into account.

The research was conducted on local level within the municipality of Skopje and targeted two secondary school, Secondary School of the City of Skopje "Shaip Jusuf" with 90% of students coming from Roma community and Secondary School "St. Naum Ohridski" for students with special education needs.

With this research were used methods that provide qualitative and quantitative data, such as: analysis (content, structural) synthesis, description, induction and generalization. The following techniques and instruments are used in the process of conducting the research on order collecting relevant data:

### a. Research techniques

1. Analysis of relevant documentation (legal regulations, strategies, policies, reports);
2. Interviews with relevant stakeholders

### b. Research instruments

1. Questionnaire for interview with educators;
2. Questionnaire for interview with education stakeholders;
3. Pre-identified questionnaires

Relevant and available data on practices and tools implemented at national level for prevent and combat early school leaving were subject to analysis. In order to map the needs regarding prevention of early school leaving, potential methods/practices and skills that considered necessary, interviews were conducted with the education stakeholders and with the educators/teachers. Last all professionals included in the research completed pre-identified questionnaires about the characteristics of students at risk of dropout.

The targeted professionals with this research are coming from the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), and the above mentioned schools. The education stakeholders included in the research are in total five, and educators/teachers included in the research are in total five. From the total number of professional five are females and five are males.

The detailed structure of the interviewees and the summary of the results analyzing the needs of education professionals and educational stakeholders, are going to be presented and elaborated within this report in the sections for key findings of empirical research.

## **3 Key findings of the desk research**

### **3.1 Existing practices and tools for the prevention of early school leaving**

In recent years, N. Macedonia has taken measures to systematically solve the problem of education of vulnerable categories of citizens, especially for Roma and people with disabilities as the most marginalized groups.

Secondary education is regulated by the Law on Secondary Education and the Law on Student Standard. With these laws is regulated the organisation, functioning and management of secondary education and facilities for student standards, as part of the system of upbringing and education. According to these two laws, "Secondary education is compulsory for every citizen,



under equal conditions determined by this law”<sup>4</sup> also “Every regularly enrolled student, under equal conditions determined by this law, has the right to stay in a student dormitory”.<sup>5</sup> This determinates the right to education for all students, as well as policies, the rights and obligations of citizens, and measures for implementation of secondary education in the country.

The practices and tools used can be divided in three categories: legislative, policies and projects on local, national regional and international level.

### *Law on Student Standard*

In order to increase the level of enrollment of Roma students in secondary education, increase the retention rate from one year to another and reduce the level of drop-out, the MoES in the Law on Student Standard in Article 54 provides and grants scholarships for secondary Roma students in five categories according to students grade success. The fourth category targets Roma students involved in special secondary schools, which provides them with financial support to prevent school drop-outs for a variety of reasons, as well as support to complete their education on time.

Each year, the MoES awards 800 to 900 scholarships to secondary Roma students and student with special education needs. According to data from the MoES, this measure significantly reduced the dropout in secondary education among Roma. From the total number of scholarship holders, Roma are affected by 1-3% annually<sup>6</sup>.

### *Law on Secondary education*

Given that students from smaller ethnic communities use and speak their mother tongue, they face problems in attending classes in Macedonian language. In order to prevent student dropout and facilitate education for students, the Law on Secondary Education enables the realization of

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<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Law on Secondary Education, Official Gazette No. 64, 2018

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Law on Student Standard, Official Gazette No. 20, 2019

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Law on Student Standard, Official Gazette No. 20, 2019

the right to mother tongue education in Article 4 paragraph 2 and regulates the following: For students, members of the ethnic minorities that attend classes in a different language from the Macedonian language and its Cyrillic alphabet, the educational work is performed in the language and script of the respective community<sup>7</sup>.

Having in mind that students come from different areas sometimes distant and deprived it is a risk for attending the classes' therefore according article 41-a paragraph 2 each student is entitled to a free transportation if the place of living is on a distance at least 2.5 km from the high school where the student is enrolled and attends classes<sup>8</sup>. When it comes to students with disabilities this article ensures that: The student with special education needs and the person accompanying him / her have the right to free transportation regardless of the distance of their place of residence to the state high school in which the student is enrolled and attends classes<sup>9</sup>. Moreover to overcome the difficulties of people with disabilities with their every day school activities an inclusive team is envisioned to be formed in the secondary school consisting of the pedagogue, i.e. the psychologist in the school, the student's teacher, the parent, i.e. the student's guardian, a special educator if there is one in the school and if necessary the student's doctor can be included. The inclusive team prepares an individual educational plan for each student with disabilities. For any other measures to be undertaken for the students with disabilities are it can be prescribed by the Minister itself.

### *Law on Primary and Secondary education Textbooks*

The Law on Primary and Secondary Education Textbooks represents the legal basis for providing free textbooks to the students. In accordance to its provisions "at the beginning of the school year, every student shall receive a set of free textbooks."(Article 53) "Teachers are obliged to instruct both, the students and parents that textbooks must not be damaged and that certain textbook passages must not be underlined or otherwise highlighted."(Article 54) "At the end of the school year, the students are obliged to return the set of textbooks undamaged, with the

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<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Law on Secondary Education, Official Gazette No. 64, 2018

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Law on Secondary Education, Official Gazette No. 64, 2018

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Law on Secondary Education, Official Gazette No. 64, 2018

exception of school aids (workbooks, exercise books and etc)"(Article 55). These measures have considerable positive effect, especially for the students from vulnerable groups including Roma families and the students enrolled in special education living in poor socio-economic conditions unable to provide their children the necessary resources for studying<sup>10</sup>.

### *Comprehensive Strategy for Education 2018 – 2025*

During 2017, the MoES adopted a Comprehensive National Education Strategy (2018-2025). In order to provide increased access and improve the conditions of education in special schools and reduce the dropout of students with special needs, the strategy envisages: Preparation of individual educational plans; Forming an inclusive team in secondary schools; Equipping the professional service with pedagogues, psychologists and special educators; Use of assistive technology aids and building access ramps in schools<sup>11</sup>.

### *National Roma Strategy*

As for the fight against the reduction of the dropout of Roma students from primary and secondary education, within the Strategy for Roma in N. Macedonia 2014-2020, it is developed Action Plan for Education 2016-2020. The Action Plan for Education elaborates the objectives and expected results in each of the sub-areas of operation in the field of education: pre-school; primary education; secondary education; tertiary education; adult education and education for children with disabilities. It also sets out specific activities, indicators, time frame, budget for implementation of activities for decreasing of the dropout of school. Based on this Action Plan, the MoES developed the existing measures for supporting of the education of Roma especially the measures for decreasing of the dropout rate of the Roma students<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Roma Resource Center, Policy and Legislative framework and recommendation paper, 2017

<sup>11</sup> Ministry for Education and Science, Comprehensive Strategy for Education 2018 – 2025, 2018

<sup>12</sup> Ministry for Labor and Social Policy, National Roma Strategy, June 2014

### *Project Scholarship, Mentoring and Tutoring*

For support of the secondary education of Roma students as well as taking measures to reduce the dropout of Roma students in secondary education, the Directorate for Development and Promotion of the Education in the Languages of the Ethnic Minorities is continuously implementing the project "Scholarship, Mentoring and Tutoring of Secondary Roma Students." The aim of this project is to prevent early dropout of Roma students in the first, second, third and fourth grade in secondary education. This project also includes students with special education needs enrolled in regular secondary schools and special schools. Every year, more than 800 secondary Roma students receive financial support as well as mentoring/tutoring assistance in around 84 schools in 28 municipalities by providing mentors and tutors to help them during the education and work with students and families to prevent secondary school students from dropping out. Within this number 30 to 50 are Roma students with special education needs/disabilities.

### *Other projects*

According to the analysis, it has been confirmed that the schools do not have adequate capacities and resources to encourage social inclusion and social cohesion between different categories of students. As a good practice to prevent the dropout of students from vulnerable categories of citizens is the project implemented at a regional level "Regional Support for Inclusive Education" implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia and Kosovo. This action promotes the concept of inclusive education as a reform principle that respects and nurtures diversity among all students, with a special focus on those at higher risk of marginalization and exclusion. Within the project, a tool for improving the practices for education of teachers for inclusive education has been prepared. The tool is a positive practice for the adoption and implementation of inclusive education by teachers as a prerequisite for improving education and retention of students in the educational process, especially students from marginalized groups<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup>Judit Halevenger, A tool for further improvement of the practices for education of teachers for inclusive education

### 3.2 Needs of educators

In accordance with the analysis and recommendations of several reports, few significant recommendations have been emphasized and will be elaborated as needs of teachers in order to prevent and reduce the level of dropout of secondary school students.

It is important having regular trainings and capacity building programmes for new methods and different educational approaches in order to follow the rapid intellectual and cognitive development of the students. Development and progress of the teachers/educators is a continuous effort and should go hand in hand with a budget and policies that will ensure that they implement what they have learned and to be in accordance with the national education policies and strategies;<sup>14</sup>

Opposite to this/but then, teachers need appropriate equipment, tools and didactic material in order to be able to conduct practical training for the conducting of the education curricula. It is especially important teachers who have classes with students with special education needs to be provided with technical and material conditions (architectural interventions) with whom students with special educational needs will have the opportunity to use assistive technology according to their needs, which will significantly contribute to students attending classes regularly, to stay in the education process, and to reduce the possibility of dropping out of school<sup>15</sup>.

The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education has developed a profile of inclusive teachers based on four core values and a set of competencies related to each core value. It has been proven that inclusive values and attitudes in teachers training are essential to prevent early school leaving. Regarding this it is necessary to provide capacity building of the teaching staff for understanding and practicing of inclusive education as a philosophy for providing appropriate education for each students in order to contribute for decreasing of the

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<sup>14</sup> UNICEF, Teachers, Inclusive, Child centered Teaching and Pedagogy, 2014

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF, Teachers, Inclusive, Child centered Teaching and Pedagogy, 2014

dropping out of students from vulnerable groups (social vulnerable families, Roma students, students with special education needs) <sup>16</sup>;

According to the rapid technological development, the teachers, especially the elderly have a great necessity of strengthening the capacity and knowledge of IT technology, computers and manipulate various online platforms and tools that will help facilitate teaching and communication with students, especially students with disabilities with reduced mobility and problems accessing the school.

Initial teacher education does not equip new teachers with minimum teaching competencies. Initial teacher education is provided by universities, and suffers many of the issues associated with lack of selection and low quality as higher education in general. While teacher candidates have a teaching practicum in a school, this is not always well-integrated in the rest of their initial education and teacher candidates are frequently not coached by experienced teacher mentors during their practicum. The absence of strong mechanisms for initial certification at the end of teacher education means that new teachers enter the profession without any assurance that they have met minimum teaching competencies. <sup>17</sup> As a result, teachers practice just few new teaching methods and techniques, and can not keep students' attention during classes also in a significant extent cannot transfer the knowledge to the students. This has a serious impact on the quality of children's education as well as the termination of students' education due to insufficient motivation. Building the capacity and knowledge of teachers for new methods and use of different approaches in education in order to increase students' motivation for education and their retention in the educational process is curtail.

Moreover an important need is the strengthening of schools that apply and practice the concept for inclusion of students with special education needs and schools with Roma students. Strengthen the capacities of educators, the professional service, as well as counseling work with other students to accept students who are different from them (reducing stereotypes, prejudices,

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<sup>16</sup> European Agency for Development in Special needs Education, Teacher Education for Inclusion – Profile of inclusive teachers, 2012

<sup>17</sup> OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, North Macedonia, 2019



discrimination and stigma), is important in order to achieve a positive climate, school atmosphere, which significantly will contribute to reducing early school leaving of the students.

### 3.3 Needs of education stakeholders

The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) is responsible for developing strategic and legal documents and defining and implementing policies for all levels of education. The MoES lacks technical capacity for evidence-based policy making or monitoring policy implementation. This undermines the development of coherent and consistent policies for preventing of the early leaving of the education. The MoES has adopted a comprehensive education strategy that does not give appropriate and sufficient measures to prevent students from dropping out of education process, especially students from vulnerable categories, Roma and students with special education needs. The MoES, as a responsible institution, should develop special policies and measures that will target the phenomenon of early dropout, especially for the most risky groups. According to the Strategy for Roma Inclusion, a National Action Plan for Education was adopted, that proposes measures to improve the education of Roma, as well as to prevent dropout in secondary schools. But those measures are not enough, and there is a lack of a monitoring system of the dropout rate. Based on that experience, the MoES should develop a National Action Plan to support the education of persons with disabilities, which will provide appropriate measures to reduce early dropout of secondary school students.

The schools struggle to respond to student demand. Nearly half of primary and three-quarters of secondary schools offer double-shift instruction and 5% of institutions offer triple-shifts. The large student numbers in big cities in particular in Skopje and the related lack of sufficient capital investment are one of the main factors behind the high prevalence of multiple-shift schools. The high prevalence of multiple-shift schools is an obstacle to increasing instructional time or after-school study, which are both low. This problem represents a serious threat to the quality of education and retention of students in the education process. Due to the limited capacity of schools and inadequate management, there is a high percentage of student dropouts, especially in primary education.

Raising educational outcomes and decreasing of the dropping out of the students from the education in significantly depends on strengthening schools' capacity to design and lead instructional improvement. This review recommends how schools can be better supported

centrally, through the school evaluation framework and data, to critically reflect on their performance and set their own objectives for teaching and learning and providing of inclusive environment. It also suggest how schools can become supportive communities for teachers' professional development, by reinforcing existing promising practices like the teacher groups (the "Teacher Actives"), regular appraisal and the multi-professional support teams. Teacher development will also be encouraged by the recognition and incentives provided by a new performance-based teacher career path<sup>18</sup>.

The latest experiences have confirmed that schools are not ready to conduct distance learning. Moreover, schools do not have the appropriate facilities and knowledge for modern ways of online education, on the other hand, they do not have the necessary tools and resources for conducting digital education. Accordingly, schools need support to strengthen their capacity to conduct online education and distance learning in order to follow the new trends in teaching digitalization, as well as to provide maximum support to students during the educational process. The implementation of online teaching is a new model in N.Macedonia and appropriate infrastructure will need to be developed in order to be able to implement it successfully. An important element is the knowledge and skills of educators to manage this type of teaching. Therefore, schools must conduct a series of trainings to strengthen the capacities, skills and knowledge of teachers for different types of online platforms for distance learning.

## 4 Key findings of the empirical Research

### 4.1 Findings of the interviews with educators

#### Structure of interviewees

For the purposes of this part of the analysis, a total of 5 professionals were interviewed, three females and two males. Targeted professionals are teachers in secondary education of which

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<sup>18</sup>OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, North Macedonia, 2019

two are teachers in the secondary school “St. Naum Ohridski” - Skopje and three participants are teachers in the secondary school “Saip Jusuf” - Skopje.

#### i. Difficulties faced by the educators

Analyzing the question *“Do you face any difficulties in your work with youth at risk of early school leaving? Would you like to give us some examples?”* 60% of the interviewed teachers answered that they face difficulties in their work because of the poor socio-economic situation that causes students not attend classes’ regularly and generates high level of dropout among the students. Whereas, two of them answered that the difficulties for them is low cooperation with the parents and the students coming from dysfunctional and antisocial families. Not less important yet significant to be mentioned that influence the work of teacher are low educational achievements by the students, unawareness of the parents for the importance of education as well the migration of families to the EU countries to seek better socio-economic life.

#### ii. Methods used to prevent early school leaving

From the analysis of the interviews on the question *“Do you use any methodologies that can/could contribute to the prevention of early school leaving?”* 100% from the interviewed teachers answered that they use individual conversations with the students, four participants or 80% from the total number of the professionals answered that practice consultative meetings with the parents. Three teachers answered that have also practiced the method “motivational conversations” with students by presenting successful examples in order to contribute to the prevention of early school leaving. The following methods from two participants are also mentioned: Implementation of mentoring and tutoring assistance, awarding scholarships through the Ministry of Education and Science, Informing families about social benefits of education and financial support for who regularly attend classes.

#### iii. Existing practices and tools that contribute to the prevention of the phenomenon

To the question *“Are you aware of any existing practices or tools for the prevention of early school leaving?”* according to the analysis of the interviews, the following answers were

given: Law on (Compulsory) Secondary Education (60% from the participants), Mentoring and tutoring support for students with poor knowledge and students with special needs (60% from the participants). While the conditional money transfer for socially disadvantaged families and projects by NGOs for support of Roma students are mentioned by two participants or 40% from the total number. Moreover were mentioned social benefits and financial supporting (MLSP), free transport, and text books for students, opportunity for accommodation in students' dormitory for regularly enrolled students and scholarships for Roma students and students with disabilities.

Almost each of them stated that these practices have given results, yet it is necessary existing practices to be improved and new ones to be developed. Else was stated that the most common results achieved by these practices are the following: increasing the number of enrolled students, reducing of the dropout of students from school and raising awareness of parents about the importance of education.

#### iv. Training needs and necessary skills

According to the information provided from the interviews on the question *"Do you feel sufficiently trained for working with young people who are at risk of early school leaving?"* just two teachers (40%) said they attended training and are trained to work with youth who are at risk of early dropout out, while the other three participants (60%) stated that they do not feel trained and are not ready to work with that category of students and noted that they need appropriate training for new methods and techniques on how to manage reducing the early dropout and young people who are at risk of dropping out.

To the question *"What skills do you find necessary for an educator to possess in order to identify young people who are at risk of early school leaving?"* during the interview, it was noted that a teacher/educator should possess the following skills to identify people at risk of dropping out early: ability to build empathy and trust with students and parents (80% from the participants/4 persons), ability individual teaching approach tailed to the needs and capacity of each student (60% from the participants/3 persons) and dispose of quality communication skills (60% from the participants/3 persons). Also few more skills were mentioned as significant by 40% from the participants: regular observation of students during the educational process, keeping an individual student portfolio; to be

observative, good motivator and to give students support; and to cooperate and communicate with all institutions in order to prevent early school leaving.

#### v. Training recommendations

From the analysis of the question *“Would you be willing to participate in relevant trainings, in order to acquire new skills on innovate pedagogical methodologies, that could contribute to the prevention of such phenomena? If yes, what would you like this training to include?”* All interviewed teachers stated that they are interested in participating in trainings and exercises to gain additional skills and knowledge to successfully deal with the phenomenon of school dropout. According to the analysis, the teachers emphasized the following proposals and recommendations for training and exercises:

- Methods, tools and techniques for working with students from vulnerable categories and mixed groups;
- Innovative methods and techniques for working with students who are at risk of leaving school;
- Exchange of positive practices with other countries;
- Communication and motivation skills in order to prevent early dropout;
- Models of cooperation and involvement of parents in the process of education of their children;
- Trainings for inclusive concept of education of vulnerable categories of students.

## 4.2 Findings of the interviews with education stakeholders

### Structure of interviewees

For the purposes of this part of the analysis, a total of 5 professionals were interviewed, three males and two females. Two of them are school principals; of Secondary School “Saip Jusuf” and of Primary School “Braka Ramis Hamid”, and three are representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science; the Head of department for Secondary Educations, and two professionals from the Directorate for Development and Promotion of the Education in the Languages of the Ethnic Minorities.

## Findings

From the analysis of the interviews on the question *“Do you work with educators who are in contact with young people who are at risk of early school leaving? Would you like to give us some examples?”* Out of five professionals, four answered that they are cooperating or have had cooperated with teachers/educators who were in direct contact with young people who were at risk of early dropout. Two of them are school principals and are directly involved in cooperating and managing the process of preventing early dropout. While two representatives of the MoES have cooperation with teachers and educators indirectly through the implementation of the programs of the MoES for Roma students. The other representative of the MoES stated that has no cooperation with teachers/educators, but that is part of the team that creates the policies of the MoES in the country.

The analysis of the question *“Are you aware of any existing practices or tools for the prevention of the phenomenon?”* shows that all professionals listed practices or tools that they know in order to prevent the phenomenon. The following answers were underlined as the most important: Establishment of Roma Education Mediators (60% from the professionals/3 persons), Providing mentoring and tutoring support to secondary Roma students (60%/3 persons), including Roma students studying in schools for special needs (60% from the participants/3 persons), Scholarship for secondary Roma students including Roma students with special needs (60%/3 persons). Two participants mentioned the practice for separate program of the MoES for scholarships for students studying in schools for special needs and sanction undertaken by the education inspectorate.

In regard to the question *“Are you aware of any practices used by the educators to prevent and combat early school leaving?”* the professionals listed the following practices that are known and used by teachers/educators for the prevention of early drop-out: Conducting additional classes with students with poor education achievements (60% from the participants/3 persons), Individual work with each student and pedagogical counseling and motivation activities for students (40% from the participants/2 persons). The following practices are also mentioned by 3 of the professionals: Meetings and workshops with students to increase their awareness and identifying discrimination and stereotyping, especially towards students from vulnerable categories; Implementing mentoring and tutoring for Roma students in regular secondary schools and special schools, tips, counselling, motivation; activities for raising awareness of the



parents for the importance of education and increasing the support for their children's education; and tutoring for Roma students in primary education.

From the analysis of the question *"Are there any results of the practices used?"* it can be said that all professionals confirmed that the practices had given results yet there is still possibility for improvement of the existing practices as well as developing and introducing new tools and practices to prevent the phenomenon of early dropout. As significant results achieved, were brought to attention the following:

- Increased number of enrolled students in primary and secondary education;
- Increased number of students completing primary and secondary education;
- Decreased number of students who dropped out compared to previous years.

According to the interviews of the participants on the question *"Does your organisation provide any training(s) to educators who work with youth at risk of early school leaving?"* the answers of the respondents are different. The two school principals said training was being provided at their schools to prevent student's drop-out and monitor of their progress. While the representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science stated that the Bureau for Development of Education organizes trainings for teachers, but those trainings are not specified for the prevention of early drop-out. All participants said that this type of training and coaching is needed for teachers to be able to identify timely the students who are at risk of dropping out of education as well as skills to work with students and families to prevent student's drop-out.

Regarding to the question *"Would you be willing to support educators for the prevention and tackling of early school leaving?"* all professionals stated that they were ready to support teachers in the process of preventing early school leaving. Below are mentioned some suggestions on how teachers can be supported in early school abandonment:

- Providing trainings for teachers/educators within the schools and their participation in more trainings organized by other organizations;
- Establishing working groups for prevention of early school leaving and monitoring of students at risk of leaving;
- Improving the inter-sectoral work with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy;

- The MoES in cooperation with the Bureau for Development of Education can plan a special training programme for teachers in order prevention of dropping out and decreasing the risk of early school leaving;
- Improving the cooperation of the parents with the teachers and their active involvement in the school life of their children.

### 4.3 Characteristics of young people at risk of early school leaving

Additionally to the conducted interviews the educators and education stakeholders filled in a pre-identified questionnaire i.e. total number of filled in questionnaires is 10.

#### STATISTICAL DATA OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

To the question "*What is the average number of school drop-outs in North Macedonia?*" the respondents have different information and data, of which six (6) respondents or 60% stated that they do not have information. One respondent answered that there is no official information at national level, but for Roma students that average is around 19% (source from the MoES) from the total number of Roma students enrolled. Another respondent included data on the average dropout of Roma in the secondary education of 20%, which is approximately equal to the data of the previous respondent. One participant stated that for the school year 2019/20 the average dropout of students at the national level is 2.3% (official source from the State Statistical Office) and another participant states official data from 2016 from the State Statistical Office of 2% at the national level. From the data it can be concluded that the largest dropout occurs among students from the Roma ethnic community of around 20%.

In regard to the question "*What is the average number of young people at risk of early school leaving in North Macedonia?*" seven respondents (70%) answered that they had no information. While one (1) respondent answered that there is no information on national level about the average number of students at risk to leave education yet according information that came across for Roma students in secondary education the risk ranges is from 20 - 30% of the number of enrolled students in secondary education, which is an indicator that should be not overlooked. One (1) respondent gave the answer that the average number of students at risk of dropping out is in range from 5-8% during school year. While one (1) respondent answered that the average risk is about 300 students during school year at the national level.

Analyzing the question *"What is their average age?"* more than 70% answered that the average age of students at risk of dropping out of school is in range from age 14 to 16. While to the question *"What is their gender?"* three have answered that females are at higher risk of dropping out of school, while the remaining seven (7) respondents said that both male and female, are equally at risk of dropping out of school.

About the question *"Based on your knowledge, do you think that certain students belonging in minorities are more prone to drop out of school?"* all respondents agreed that students from smaller ethnic communities were more likely to dropout. Further to the question *"If yes, please mention three (3) groups that you think might be associated with higher drop-outs?"* 50% or five of the total number of respondents listed students coming from the Roma community, 40% or four respondents listed students coming from the Roma and Albanian communities, while only one participant mentioned students with combined disabilities, that are not independent and dependent from third person, as a risk group.

## CHARACTERISTICS AND DRIVERS OF SCHOOL DROP-OUTS

Concerning the question *"In your opinion, could one or more of the following aspects have an impact on early school leaving?"* 90% of the respondents gave the answer that economic factor and family qualities have a significant impact on the dropout of students. While 60% answered that cultural/ethnic background also affects early school leaving.

To the question *"In your opinion, could one or more of the following factors, related to academic qualities, have an impact on early school leaving?"* even 90% of respondents stated that irregular/low attendance has an impact on students' early dropout. The low interest of school was selected by 70% of the respondents; while low academic achievement, age (being older than other in the same grade) and being retained in one or more grades, were selected by 40% of the respondents and stated that have an impact on the students' drop-out from the educational process.

To the question *"In your opinion, could one or more of the following factors, related to school qualities, have an impact on early school leaving?"* 70% of the total number of respondents emphasized that teacher performance significantly affects the early school leaving, while 30% of

respondents said that administrative/instructional leadership and standards of conduct also have an impact on the dropout of students.

According to the question **“In your opinion, could one or more of the following factors, related to personal background, have an impact on early school leaving?”** as a significant factor affecting early retirement 80% reported the ethnic background being a factor. Also, as an important factor that affects the phenomenon with the drop-out among students, 70% of the respondents answered that a significant factor is also the social class.

The analysis of the question **“In your opinion, could one or more of the following factors, related to the family context, have an impact on early school leaving?”** shows that all respondents are compliant that all factors as have approximate effect. As most significant factors are distinguished the less individual attention towards children which 70% of the respondents have selected, the lack of family encouragement for which 60% have selected and Intergenerational dropout patterns which was noted by 50% of the total number of respondents. While 30% of the respondents answered that traumatic experiences and lack of family encouragement also have an impact on the students' dropout.

According to the respondents' answers to the question **“In your experience, do any of the following groups face higher risk of early school leaving?”** as most group at-risk for early dropout are children and youth from Roma communities, which even 90% of respondents have selected. Then second in line are students from low income families which 70% of respondents have selected. While students with learning disabilities and emotional or behavioral disorders as a risk group is noted by 50% of the respondents. Also, 40% of the respondents answered that children and youth from ethnic, racial minorities and students from and deprived rural areas and students with physical disabilities are also a risk group for leaving education prematurely.

## 5 Conclusions

According to the findings of the analysis, schools and institutions lack an appropriate and unified system for monitoring of students' early school leaving. As well schools do not have an appropriate system for recording and monitoring students at risk, therefore schools are not ready for proper prevention of the early dropout. All this contributes to the number of dropouts being much higher. It is necessary for schools together and under the supervision of the MoES to develop a system for monitoring students at risk of dropping out of school and reducing the percentage of students leaving the education process.

Most policies and programs place more emphasis on educational inclusion, and there are no specific measures to prevent students' dropout and early school leaving, especially when it comes for students with disabilities.

Schools still in great extent apply the concept of integration while it is essential to start applying and practicing the concept of inclusive education as well as adapt the education programmes according to the needs of the students. The inclusive education approach will enable each student to use their potential, to feel valuable and useful for themselves and for the school environment, which will greatly reduce the probability of students, especially Roma and students with special needs, to leave school. In order to provide suitable environment for keeping students from vulnerable categories of students in the education system, it is necessary to systematically and fully implement the concept of inclusive education that will enable substantial and overall involvement of Roma students and students with special educational needs in schools, as well as reducing the risk of early school dropout.

The findings of this analysis confirm the fact that the largest dropout in secondary education occurs among Roma students. Accordingly, it is necessary to create measures and mechanisms that will be adapted to the needs of students and their families in order to prevent the high percentage of dropout in this category of students;

Although many activities and measures have been implemented in order to raise awareness of Roma parents about the importance of education, the analysis has shown that parents are not much or not at all involved in the education of their children, and they do not provide sufficient support to their children as well as the teachers/educators. It is required and mostly significant

that the triangle parent – child – school be strengthened and be an inseparable link in the education process of the students.

The performance of the teachers/educators was detected as one of the reason of early school leaving. Schools in cooperation with the MoES and the Bureau for Development of Education should develop a program to strengthen the capacities and increase the skills of teachers/educators. It has been confirmed that the teachers/educators have necessity of trainings on a new methods and techniques for working with vulnerable categories of students and appropriate implementation of them curricula and classes in heterogeneous groups in order to prevent dropout of students.

Equally important is the continuous education and capacity building of teachers' knowledge, capacities and skills to implement inclusive approaches to education, especially in promoting equality for all students in school, reducing and completely eliminating discrimination, stereotyping and stigma towards children with disabilities such as towards Roma population as a marginalized ethnic community.

The analysis has shown that teachers and schools do not have special activities and measures to prevent dropout and early school leaving. They still use standard measures that do not give significant results. It is important and necessary to support teachers and schools with innovative methods, techniques and platforms to combat the phenomenon of students' dropout and prevention of early school leaving.

Lastly the schools do not have proper experience with using online tools and conducting online teaching and distance learning. Very few of the teachers have the skills and knowledge to use online platforms for distance learning. In order to follow the new trends and the development of technology, schools and teachers need trainings to strengthen their capacities for conducting of online teaching and use of different types of online platforms that will significantly contribute to improving the quality of education, reducing the cost of education, as well as enabling the education of persons who do not have the opportunity to attend regular classes at the schools, in particular this applies to persons with physical disabilities.



In this matter can be concluded that there is a great opportunity and potential for improving and enhancing of the education system in the country as well of the tools and methods used in education when it comes to early school leaving.

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