



## **Romani Students in Vocational Education and Training<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

The study reviews the changes in opportunity within Romani's schooling since the Transition. The expansion of secondary education has meant that an increasingly widening strata of society can be integrated into education - though access to educational programmes is not the same between the different social groups. Romani students enter vocational schools at the highest ratio but, even here, some of them are still not capable of graduating. According to studies, only 40% of Romani students reach a point of graduation. Several empirical researches focusing on Romani vocational school students have been conducted in the past few years with the support of high priority programs from the Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development. The paper analyses – on the basis of two databases – the path, scholastic record, plans and chances on the labour market of Romani vocational school students. Several events cause discomfiture to Romani students at school and failure and grade repetition are overrepresented among them. Many students' careers are a result of pressure, not free choice. Their plans for the future are unsure and they rate their labour market opportunities as worse when comparing with non-Romani students.

**Keywords:** educational mobility, access to education, educationally disadvantaged, Romani

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## Introduction

After the second world war, owing to the adoption of 8-grade education the educational level of the population increased at a great rate. Because of this, the educational levels of Romani students also increased rapidly in the 1950s and '60s, even while differences between Romani and the non-Romani population were also becoming more pronounced (Kemény, 1996). Kemény also stated that this process continued into the '70s and '80s. At the beginning of the '90s, due to the expansion of secondary education almost all students finishing elementary school went on to secondary education. Therefore the expansion had a positive effect on the educational levels of all groups of society, including Romani students. At the same time, though, Romani students are still underrepresented in training programs and courses giving at their end a school maturity certificate, so the educational gap between Romani and non-Romani population is still wide – even though education is indispensable as regards helping their integration into society (Forray, 1999, 2011).

During the expansion of secondary education, different schools participated in receiving an increasing numbers of students with different capacities<sup>2</sup>. Due to the expansion, the ratio of students advancing to vocational school increased in the main. According to estimations, while at the beginning of the '90s nearly half of Romani elementary school-leavers left education and less than a third of them advanced to vocational school, in 2002 the education leavers' ratio went down to below 10% while more than 60% of them advanced to vocational school (Havas, Kemény & Liskó, 2002; Liskó, 2005). Owing to the expansion, the number of students in special vocational schools also increased alongside the number going to ordinary vocational schools (Fehérvári, 1996). A higher ratio of Romani students is also notable here. So we can state that due to the expansion of secondary education, chiefly low-prestige vocational education and training (VET) absorbed Romani youngsters. Neither the last 20 years situation was the same. The results of research show that the ratio of Romani students in high-prestige education is still low, especially in grammar schools. According to a study done in 2006, from 1,000 8th grade Romani students 503 advanced to vocational school, 332 went to technical college and 87 to grammar schools (while the rest left education). (Kertesi & Kézdi, 2010).

Yet entering secondary education does not necessarily mean that the student will graduate. Due to the expansion, the drop-out rate also increased, especially in low-prestige educational programmes, where the highest rate of Romani youngsters can be found.

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<sup>2</sup> In Hungary, elementary education lasts 8 years. Secondary education is a general grammar school (4 or 5 years) or vocational school (3 to 5 years) education. The forms of VET are special vocational school, vocational school and technical school.

A consequence of the career study launched in 2006 was that 40% of Romani youngsters stay in secondary schools without any grade repetition. Compared to non-Romani youngsters, the rate of students who are unable to graduate is 9–10 times higher amongst Romani students; so the Romani population's educational disadvantages compared to those of the non-Romani population still exists (Kertesi & Kézdi, 2010).

According to a study conducted in 2008 (Fehérvári, 2008) focusing on two school years, the drop-out rate is approximately 25% in vocational schools. The most endangered groups are students with low-educated parents and Romani students. The study also noted that eliminated students do not form a homogeneous group – they can be divided into at least two big groups by persons' learning motivations. The so-called "errants" – that is, students who don't have any learning motivation as yet – see their choice of career and school becoming derailed, even though with proper support they might be reintegrated into education. The second group contains students who don't have any learning motivation. They are kept in school only by the law (studying commitments) and need more support to be reintegrated into education.

Several studies focusing on Romani vocational school students have been conducted in the past few years by the Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development.

The study focusing on school-leaver students in VET was done in the spring of 2010; and it is unique because its data includes vocational school and technical college students, so we can compare these two groups. Schools in the sample well represent the type of settlement, region and educated vocation group. In 68 technical schools and 62 vocational schools, a total of 2,533 (1,174+1,359) questionnaires were filled in<sup>3</sup> (Tomasz, 2012).

The next database is based on a survey done in 2011 among students studying in early vocational education and training (early VET)<sup>4</sup> and traditional VET (in 9th or 10th grade). Data was collected in 30 vocational schools, from 9th and 10th grade students. Nearly 2,000 students filled in the questionnaire. The sample represents vocational schools with early VET. Data was also collected from a control group in all schools where it was available. Control groups contained students from the same grade, but from traditional vocational programs (Fehérvári, 2012).<sup>5</sup>

According to the first study, while among vocational school-leaver students the rate of Romani students was 9%, the same rate in technical colleges was only 1% (N.B. In the

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<sup>3</sup> Career tracking of skilled young people 2010. Data XXX

<sup>4</sup> Early vocational education and training (VET) – schools have had a chance, since 2010, to launch 3-year vocational training programs. From 2013, this VET will become general in Hungary.

<sup>5</sup> The studies were supported by TÁMOP-3.1.1-11/1-2012-0001, in a project called "21st Century School - development, coordination".

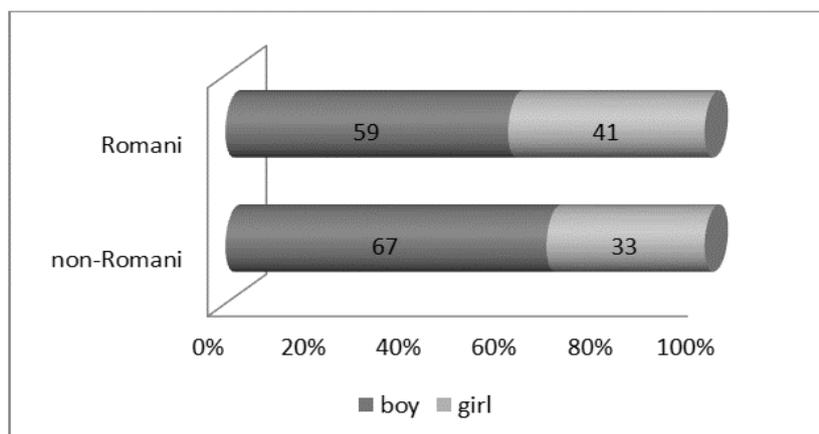
studies we measured Romani ethnicity by own admission, seeing as Romani every student whose parents are both Romani). Romani students are represented at a much higher rate in the second study, where the rate of Romani students was 16% in the 9th and 10th grades. This difference can be explained in different ways. The first possible explanation is a difference in samples. While the first study's sample is nationwide and representative, the second includes only schools with early VET. The second obvious explanation is in grade differences. Amongst last-grade students the Romani's rate is lower because such persons had left education in the meantime. This means that nearly half of Romani students are eliminated from school before graduation.

This paper introduces, via the results of these two databases, the possible careers of Romani VET students, their routes through education, failures and ambitions, as compared to non-Romani students.

### Family background

Last-grade Romani VET students are significantly different from others by gender and hometown. If we take a look at the distribution of genders, we can see that the difference between girls and boys is lower among Romani students (Figure 1). This can be explained by the different typical school careers: while most non-Romani girls choose training giving them a high-school graduation, mostly via a grammar school, amongst Romani youngsters this rate is extremely low (as mentioned in the introduction). So among Romani students there are no typical 'gender routes' in education – only vocational schools open gates for them. Kertesi and Kézdi (2009) say the same thing, namely that grammar-school matriculation has the highest denial rate.

Figure 1. Last grade VET students' distribution by gender, %

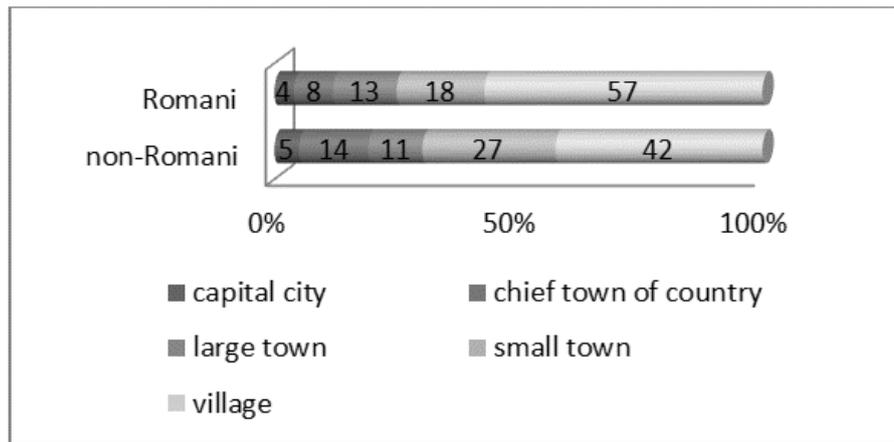


Source: Career tracking of skilled young people 2010. Database

Differences by hometown (Figure 2) illustrate well-known data as related to the Romani population – though the rate of students living in a village is higher among VET students

when compared to other educational training formats (Fehérvári, 2008)<sup>6</sup>. When we look at figures for non-Romani students inside training, the difference is much greater. According to census data, the rate of Romani students in the population is highest in the small villages of South Transdanubia, Northern Hungary and Northern Alföld (Habicsek, 2009). The rate of the Romani urbanised population is extremely low compared with that of non-Romani students. While 62% of non-Romani students live in cities, this rate is only 40% among Romani students (Cserti Csapó, 2012).

Figure 2. Hometown of last-grade VET students, %



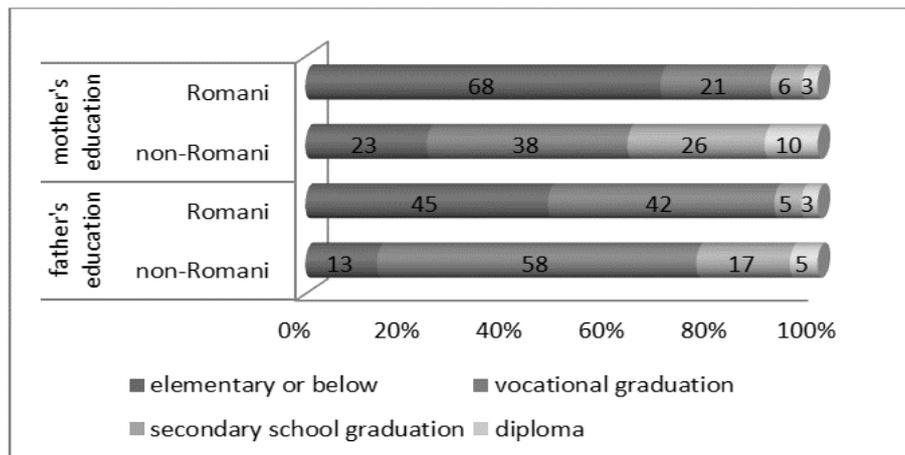
Source: Career tracking of skilled young people 2010. Database

In secondary education mostly deprived students can be found, principally in vocational and special vocational schools. At the same time, if we divide data into Romani and non-Romani students, we discover that among students with a ‘worse’ family background Romani students have more socio-economic disadvantages; that is, employment, and a non-beneficial financial and income status show multiple disadvantages.

When we look at parents’ educational data among Romani students, we can see that the rate of low-educated mothers is triple – and the rate of low-educated fathers is five times more – that of non-Romani students (Figure 3). Among every hundred Romani parents only three have a diploma and only five have a high-school graduation certificate.

<sup>6</sup> The mean of the rate of students living in villages is 45% in vocational schools, 35% in technical colleges and 28% in grammar schools.

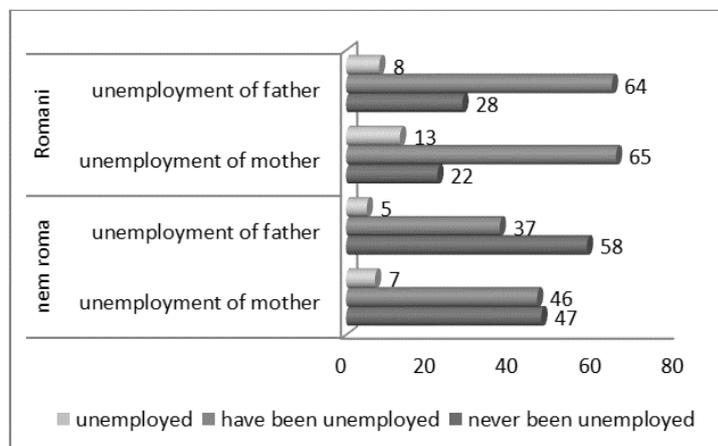
Figure 3. Educational levels of last-grade students' parents, %.



Source: Career tracking of skilled young people 2010. Database

The same dramatic difference can be observed in the parents' employment status (Figure 4). In Romani families three quarters of the parents have been unemployed or are unemployed at the moment comparing to non-Romani students' parents, the rate being 42%-53%. According to the data, we can also see that in Romani families the males' situation is as bad as females', while in non-Romani families the females' situation is significantly worse.

Figure 4. Employment status of last-grade students' parents, %



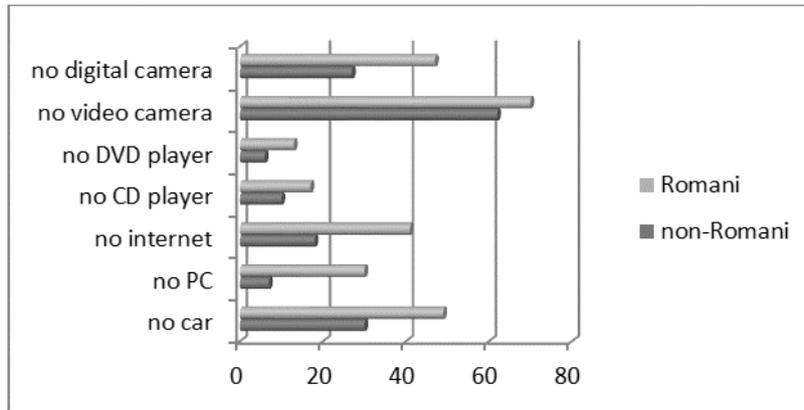
Source: Career tracking of skilled young people 2010. Database

This employment data causes people financial problems. More than a tenth of VET students live in a family with permanent financial problems; though this rate is double among Romani students, where every fourth family has financial problems. According to the students' report, one family in ten cannot even afford food; and this rate is more than double among Romani students compared to others.

The situation is the same in the field of durable goods. Romani families are less well-endowed according to figures for all the seven goods that were asked about in comparison with the situation of others. The figure below (Figure 5) shows that the

difference is biggest between the two groups when we look at cultural capital-related goods (computer and internet).

Figure 5. Lack of durable goods of last-grade students' families, %

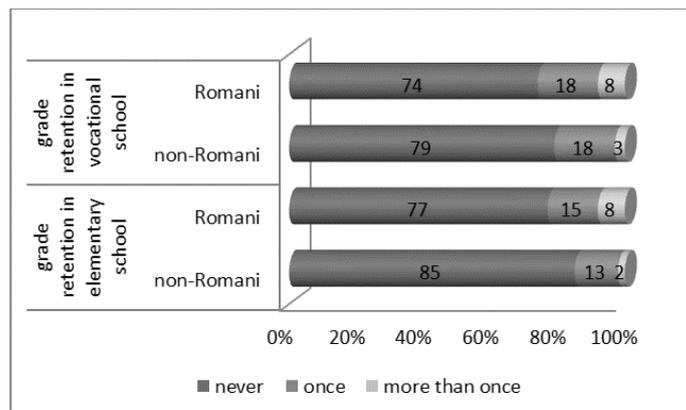


Source: Career tracking of skilled young people 2010. Database

### School career

One quarter of Romani students face failure in elementary school - and this phenomenon does not change in VET (Figure 6). According to the questionnaires, the gap between Romani and non-Romani students was very wide in elementary school. In vocational schools the differences decreased, however. A repetition of failure shows the biggest difference between the groups as the rate of students with more than one failure is higher among Romani students. For a comparison, according to the technical college students' database used also for this study, in elementary school the rate of students with at least one grade repetition is only 2.1%; so vocational school students usually have to face more educational failures than other secondary education students. At the same time there is no difference between vocational and technical students in secondary education – the two groups have a 21% rate of students who have to take an exam at the end of the school year because of failure (17% once, 4% more than once).

Figure 6. Educational failure for last-grade VET students, %



Source: Career tracking of skilled young people 2010. Database

Data related to last-grade students' failures show more differences in elementary education between the groups. While 16% of Romani students repeat a grade in elementary school, amongst non-Romani students this rate is only 9%. In addition, this rate has equalled out by the end of secondary education (9%), and the difference between the two groups lies only in the frequency of grade repetition – which is higher among Romani students. Amongst 9th and 10th grade students in early VET, the rate of elementary failure is much worse. 27% of Romani students repeat a grade (5% more than once), while this rate is only 19% among non-Romani students. In vocational schools the rate of grade repeaters doubles in early VET compared to the situation with last-grade students. So our statement that half of students with elementary school failures leave education before graduation is presumably true.

In secondary educational programs, vocational school is where the most unsuccessful students go – according not only to failure rates but also to results for mathematic and reading comprehension competence tests<sup>7</sup>. (Education Office, 2011). We do not have available longitudinal data about results for Romani students, but the survey part of the study did connect with 8th grade students' competence test results from the starting year of the already mentioned career study (2006). Given this, we can compare competence test results for Romani students with non-Romani students' within a single grade, and a single class. Unfortunately, the results are overwhelming, as one fifth of Romani students' reading comprehension tests couldn't be evaluated (because they had too few points). Their mathematics results are more worse, however – and half of them couldn't be evaluated. (Kertesi & Kézdi, 2009)

The authors were also curious to know about the causes of these very bad results. What is behind the differences? The issue was: if there is not so much difference in the financial and income situation of Romani families compared to non-Romani ones, would there not have been such a difference in the performances of the two groups?

It was seen that the differences in test results are mainly caused not by ethnicity but by permanently bad living conditions, for which the school cannot compensate. (Kertesi & Kézdi, 2012)

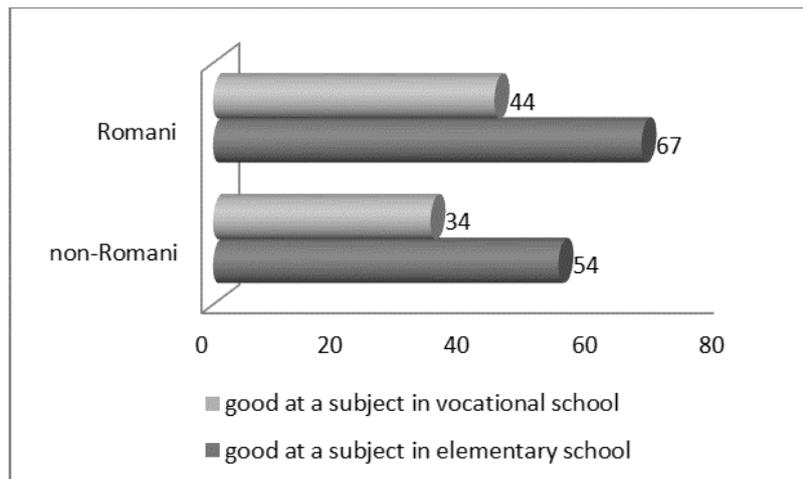
Returning to our study's data, despite educational failure most students think there is a field or subject where s/he can perform above the average; furthermore, Romani youngsters do rate themselves as being better at things/subjects than do others. According to opinions about themselves, two-thirds of Romani students were good at a subject – while only half of non-Romani students thought the same. As shown in the figure below (Figure 7), in vocational schools both groups' rates showed a decrease, yet

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<sup>7</sup> The Hungarian Education Agency organises competence tests in mathematics and reading comprehension with the participation of all 6th, 8th and 10th grade students. The tests are supplemented by questionnaires relating to the students' socio-economic background.

Romani students still kept their advantage. The rate of students who think there is a subject they are good at is 10% more amongst them.

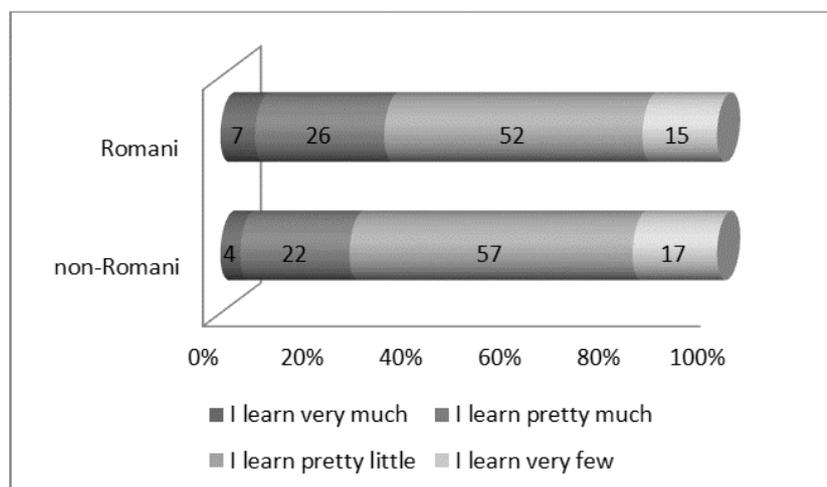
Figure 7. Self-esteem of last-grade VET students, %



Source: Career tracking of skilled young people 2010. Database

The self-esteem data of students (Figure 8) shows that Romani students put more effort into learning to gain a result compared to non-Romani students. Whilst a third of Romani youngsters learn quite a lot or very much, among non-Romani students only one out of four students answered the same.

Figure 8. Self-esteem of last-grade VET students 2., %

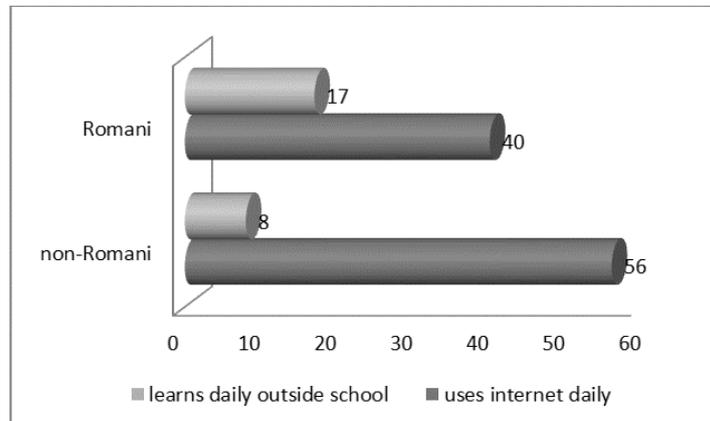


Source: Career tracking of skilled young people 2010. Database

The role of learning among everyday activities confirms this statement. 17% of Romani youngsters study every day, while this rate is only 8% among non-Romani students (Figure 9). Yet there is a big difference in another area between the two groups. While among half of non-Romani students using the internet has an important role in everyday activities, amongst Romani students this rate is only 40%. Of course, differences in availability might be observed behind this result, for a lower rate of Romani families

have a computer or an internet connection compared to others. While 30% of Romani families don't have a computer and 41% don't have an internet connection, amongst other families these rates are only 7% and 18% respectively (Figure 5).

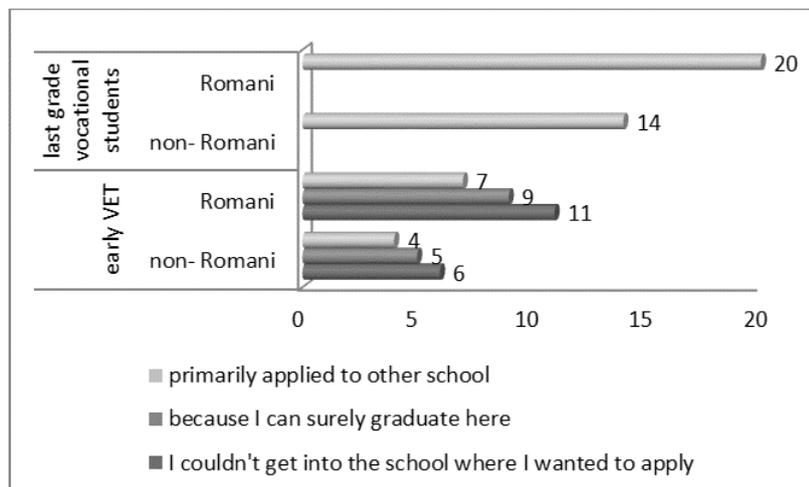
Figure 9. Everyday activities of last-grade VET students, %



Source: Career tracking of skilled young people 2010. Database

A successful choice of career has a correlation with successful graduation (Figure 10). For the majority of Romani students, VET is the only alternative. However, regarding vocational schools, among Romani students there is a higher rate of students who do not study in the school they wanted to. Comparing with non-Romani students, more Romani students did not apply to their school, or they didn't dare to apply where they wanted to because they were doubtful about the result.

Figure 10. Choice of school application among vocational school students, %



Source: Career tracking of skilled young people 2010. Database

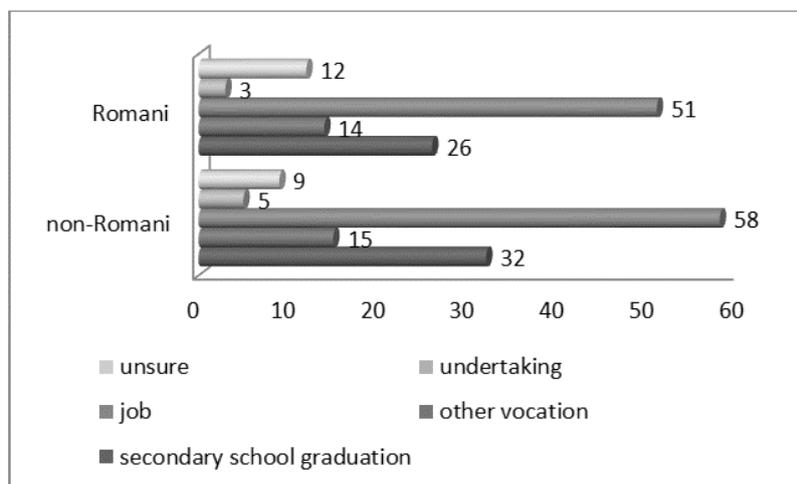
An unsuccessful choice of career may raise the chance of leaving education. Some students try to solve this problem by changing school or vocation when it is underway. One out of every five first or second grade students participating in the early VET study changed or wanted to change vocation – while this rate is nearly 33% among Romani students.

## Plans and opportunities

The figure below introduces future plans for vocational school students (Figure 11). The same rate of students in both groups (Romani + non-Romani) want to go into business or learn another profession. Yet working and studying don't appear in the same relation because fewer Romani students have plans to graduate compared with others; they also have a few percent disadvantage in the field of finding a job, and we can also see a higher rate of 'unsures' amongst Romani youngsters. The survey was conducted in the few weeks before the vocational examination, i.e. being very close to graduation. The fact that more than 10% of Romani youngsters do not know anything at all about what to do after graduation is very significant here. The non-Romani students' situation is much the same, though a little better.

At the same time, the attitudes of students wanting to get a job are not the same, i.e. Romani students and non-Romani students have different reasons for wishing to find work. While 30% of non-Romani students have had enough of studying, among Romani students this rate is only 11%; however, three out of four Romani students do not want to study because they want to make money. Only 55% of non-Romani students answered the same here.

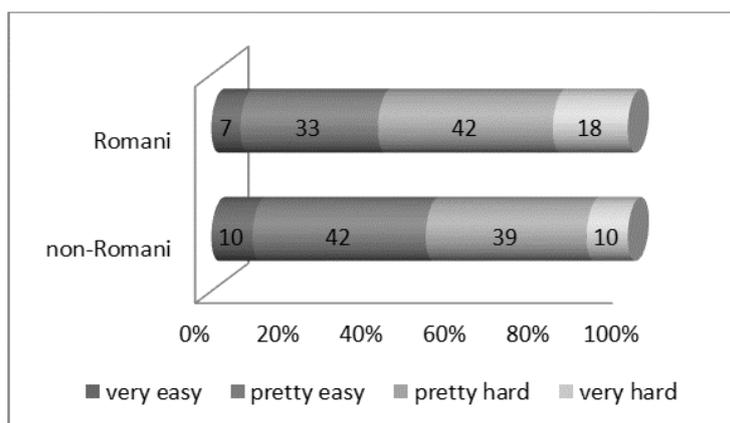
Figure 11. Plans of graduated VET students, %



Source: Career tracking of skilled young people 2010 Database

There is also a difference between the two groups' future plans. Non-Romani students are more positive about the future compared to Romani students. 60% of Romani students think that finding a job will be hard. Non-Romani students' opinions are more balanced: half of them think they will find a job easily.

Figure 12. Last-grade VET students' chance to find a job, %



Source: Career tracking of skilled young people 2010. Database

Several studies gave accounts of discrimination against Romani students which lessens their chances on the labour market (Forray, 2011). Our study cannot implicitly confirm this statement as its focus group is not the same. At the same time, early VET and last-grade VET students' data shows us that schools sign significantly fewer student's contracts (which contract is available to students for professional practice with a company) for Romani students compared to the case of non-Romani ones. 70% of first and second-grade students on early VET have a student's contract, while this rate is 60% among Romani students. Amongst last-grade VET students, 30% of Romani students did not have a student's contract throughout their secondary education – while this rate is only 20% among other students. We do know from other studies that students' contracts increase the chance of someone's finding a job later on (Fehérvári & Tomasz, 2011).

We examined which factors increase somebody's likelihood of getting a student's contract with a linear regression analysis. (Table 1) The regression model includes the following independent dummy variables: hometown, low-educated father, inactive father, one of the parents is Romani, sector of studied profession, year repetition in vocational school. We ran the analysis and chose the best model with the stepwise method. The model's  $R^2$  (coefficient of determination) is not too high (so there may be more aspects determining the likelihood of someone's getting a student's contract that we didn't include); and only four of the variables have a significant effect on the likelihood of a student's contract being obtained. The studied profession has the strongest effect: professions belonging to the economic-services sector have a positive – while agrarian sector professions have a negative – effect on the someone's chance of getting a student's contract. Hometown has the second strongest effect, while living in a small town has a negative effect on the likelihood of obtaining a student's contract. The fourth included variable was Romani nationality (or ethnicity), which has a significantly negative effect on such a likelihood.

Table 1. Linear regression model – which factors have an effect on the likelihood of someone's getting a student's contract

Modell	B	STD. Error	Beta	Sig.
(Constant)	.78	.017		.000
ag2 economic-services sector	.186	.025	.219	.000
ag3 agrarian sector	-.185	.035	-.155	.000
l3 hometown – small town	-.071	.022	-.094	.000
k4x Romani nationality	-.094	.042	-.064	.000
R ,315	R Square .099			

Source: Career tracking of skilled young people, 2010. Database

As we have seen before, 50%–50% of last-grade students think finding a job will be easy or will be hard, and Romani students are more pessimistic here. Yet such youngsters have a great willingness to show geographic mobility to reach their goal. Most of them would commute to another town (85%) or county for a job. Moreover, the rate of students who would go to a foreign country for a job is also very high (70%). There is no significant difference between the groups as regards mobility willingness, so the attitudes of Romani and non-Romani students are the same here.

## Summary

In the last 20 years, several efforts have been made to help integrate the Romani population, primarily through education. However, data shows that despite educational expansion Romani youngsters' educational levels have not improved significantly. Within secondary education, vocational schools receive Romani students at the highest rate; though at the same time this is the place where leaving education is the biggest problem, affecting principally children of low-educated and Romani families.

Educational performance of Romani VET students is below that of non-Romani students'; in addition, vocational school students' grades are worse when compared with others' secondary education results. VET students have had to face several types of failure in elementary school – especially Romani students. This situation does not change in secondary school, either – despite Romani students making more of an effort to gain better grades compared to others.

Romani students' plans for the future are insecure. The rate of students wishing to gain a high-school graduation is lower among them, though the rate of students wanting to learn another profession is equal when compared with others. In Romani students' opinions, they have less chance on labour market than non-Romani students. Both groups have a great willingness to make themselves geographically mobile, and a majority of both Romani and non-Romani students would move away from home to get a job, even if this means going to a foreign country.

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