

## PREVENTING AND COMBATING SCHOOL DROPOUT

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**Abstract:** *In these past two decades, school dropout has become a widespread phenomenon in the current school environment, illiteracy being an acute problem of the Romanian education system as well as a problem of the whole society, besides marginalization and social exclusion. School dropout is in fact the result of a combination of personal, social, economic, educational and family factors, strongly intertwined that generate many disadvantages. Without investing in education and without adopting optimal educational policies that reduce school dropout and that fold on the education system in our country, we cannot expect positive results but lead to lower education standards, which obviously limits in the future, the possibility for young people to train and develop professionally in order to integrate them into the labour market. The study has as object of research the phenomenon of school dropout. The research aims to develop a study in order to highlight the consequences of school dropout and the efficiency of the school system in urban and rural areas. The investigation focuses on establishing a diagnosis by conducting an analysis of risk situations and the effects of school dropout in order to prevent dropout and identify and establish methods and strategies for school reintegration of pupils and students in rural and urban areas who dropped out of school or find themselves in abandonment risk situations. The research is quantitative in nature, the necessary data being collected following a rigorous sociological survey by applying the questionnaire research tool and technique to 100 respondents in Caraș-Severin county. The aim of the research was to identify the main consequences of domestic violence on children and to observe how adults suffer. School dropout is a controversial phenomenon with a markedly visible impact on children's personal lives, showing effects in the future when they become adults and with multiple effects on society.*

**Key words:** *school dropout; broken family; child; community; prevention actions.*

### 1. Introduction

School dropout is the conduct of permanent evasion which consists in the cessation of school attendance, leaving the educational system regardless of the level reached, before obtaining a qualification or complete professional training or before concluding the study programme started (<https://edict.ro/abandonul-scolar-cauze-si-modalitati-de-prevenire/>).

School dropout and early school abandonment are two distinct phenomena given that school dropout refers to pupils who drop out of school, and early school leaving refers to young people aged 18-24 who have dropped out of school before completing compulsory education, not attending any other vocational training or qualification program. Children who are out of the system are excluded from education, while children who are at risk of dropping out of school are deprived of equal learning opportunities (Bonea, 2019: 387; Ekstrand, 2015).

School dropout is perceived as the conduct of permanent evasion which consists in the cessation of school attendance, leaving the educational system, regardless of the level reached, before obtaining a complete qualification or professional training or before the end of the study cycle. (<http://dar.episcopiadevei.ro/index.php/2015/10/20/ce-este-abandonul-scolar-cauze-si-modalitati-de-prevenire/>). Early school leaving is the situation of a pupil or student who has not completed the compulsory education cycle and has not actually

attended school in the last 4 weeks prior to the assessment of the situation. Thus, a student who appears in the catalogue, but who has not attended school in the last 4 weeks, becomes a case of school dropout. The intervention of the authorities has great chances to stop the phenomenon, but if this intervention takes place after 2 years from not attending school, the effectiveness of the intervention is low, as it is too late (Ivan and Rostaş, 2015:12-13).

School absenteeism can be defined as a socio-cultural characteristic of the environment from which the pupil or student comes, which reflects the structured attitude of lack of interest, motivation, and confidence in school education. Skipping classes is a predominantly emotional problem (evasionist behavior, a form of physical and psychological escape from the situation perceived as traumatic). Absenteeism can be a form of manifestation of school deviance (late alert of the existence of problems), signaled by the reduction of attachment and integration as well as low identification with the objectives and aspirations of the group of pupils or students. Absenteeism is used by students as a form of passive aggression against school, without being afraid of possible punishments that would occur from both the management of the institution and parents, is the first factor directly associated with dropping out of school and more often encountered in urban areas among poor families (<https://www.stasalba.ro/rolul-familiei-in-combaterea-absenteismului-scolar-o-problema-mereu-actuala/>)

## 2. Causes of school dropout

In the social plane, school dropout is associated with juvenile delinquency, broken family life, or drug use. Abandonment can be characterized by total or partial absenteeism. The partial one has different causes depending on the area, rural or urban. In the urban area, abandonment can be caused by the influence of the circle of friends on children, by the attractions that the city exerts on them. The rural one is determined by the conditions of the village, by the help that the children have to give to the parents in the agricultural works. Jigău states that the notion of school failure can vary from one country to another, from one school to another, from one education system to another. The most common meanings he uses are the following: early school leaving; the gap between personal potential and results; leaving school without a qualification; individual learning difficulties; grade failure and repetition; illiteracy; inability to achieve pedagogical objectives; failure in the final exams (Jigău, 1998:35).

Specialised studies have highlighted the following types of absenteeism: selective absenteeism (skipping classes is common in a single subject or only in a few subjects); generalized absenteeism (running away from school is frequent and generalized, foreshadows school dropout); the search for loneliness (reaction to strong intra- or interpersonal tension); the desire to be with the partner (in adolescents); desire to belong to the group („initiation rituals”) defensive attitude towards the authority of a system (<https://www.proform.snsr.ro/baza-de-date-online-cu-bune-practici-pentru-educatie-incluziva-de-calitate/plan-de-masuri-model-pentru-combaterea-absenteismului-si-abandonului-scolar-in-anul-scolar-2019-2020>).

In order to be able to implement the optimal measures to prevent school dropout, it is necessary to know the causes that can generate this phenomenon:

1. *Causes related to the personality and health of the pupil or student:* low school motivation, lack of interest, low confidence in school education, fatigue, anxiety, low self-efficacy, impaired self-image, feelings of inferiority, low social skills, passivity; refusal to adhere to a choice made by others (reaction to the pressure exerted by the desires of adults)

2. *Family-related causes, socio-economic conditions of the family:* poverty, indifferent parenting style, careless, broken families, very busy parents or working abroad

3. *Causes related to the specific school context (including the teacher-student relationship):* group pressure, school overload, poor student-teacher communication (ironizing, humiliating the student) subjective evaluation, fear of evaluation, conflict with colleagues, educational practices perceived by students as unfair, frustrating, incompatibility between aspirations, learning needs and educational offer of school; form of defence - against the excessively rigid and severe discipline, pro-absenteeism policies of the school for the students from the final classes, the variable age is also very important (<https://www.proform.snsr.ro/baza-de-date-online-cu-bune-practici-pentru-educatie-incluziva-de-calitate/plan-de-masuri-model-pentru-combaterea-absenteismului-si-abandonului-scolar-in-anul-scolar-2019-2020>)

From the literature and from studies and analyses conducted on the national level in previous years, we could identify a number of causes of school dropout, such as poverty, tradition, parental beliefs, broken family, insufficient involvement of parents, parents leaving abroad, offer non-stimulating schooling, teacher fluctuation, entourage, the monopolizing fascination of electronic communication (Voicu, 2010:10-11).

According to the 2012 report (prepared by the team coordinated by Bogdan Voicu, at the request of UNICEF and the Education 2000+Centre), the following factors were identified that determined the early school leaving by students at different levels:

*A. on the level of the pupil/student and the family:* material difficulties; the educational model offered by parents; the educational model offered by the brothers; family disorganization; involvement in activities at the limit of the law; entering the labour market.

*B. at the community level:* early marriage; the appearance of a child; lack of security in the area; non-continuation of education beyond 8 classes, as a community norm.

*C. on school level:* repeated and frequent repetitions; insufficient integration in the class of students; the quality of relationships with teachers and colleagues.

Other causes of school dropout identified in the Romanian literature following studies (2011 and 2013) are:

- ***The precarious economic conditions of the family from which the pupil/student comes***

The precarious condition of the family of the pupil / student influences the parents' ability to cover the hidden costs of education - supplies, contributions to extracurricular activities, food - but sometimes even the conditions necessary for individual study at home - lack of electricity, space, individual meals, it also influences the student's comfort level in relation to his / her classmates, it influences the student's health degree and, therefore, the school absenteeism. All these factors favour school dropout and the placement of the child on the labour market at a very young age (Ivan & Rostaş, 2015:10). Children living in poor families are less likely to have a full school education. The economic status correlated with school dropout is evaluated by variables such as: a) the degree of education and education of parents; b) the father's profession; c) the income of the family and its standard of living (Popescu, 1991, in Neamţu, 2001:185).

- ***The structure and cultural capital of the family***

The family structure in turn has an influence on the dropout rate. Families with many children are very often exposed to poverty; inter-sibling relations are often meant to compensate for the lack of parents engaged in productive activities that ensure the subsistence of the family. This situation increases the risk of dropping out of school.

The cultural capital of the family represented by the level of education of parents, their ability to help their children, enhancing the usefulness of education and reduced ability to guide the child in a complex bureaucratic system, the influence of the educational model of siblings, early marriages in some communities of traditional Roma or the habit of leaving the educational system after completing secondary education, as part determined by the lack of school units in the locality of residence, influences school dropout but also the school performance of children (Ivan and Rostaş, 2015:10).

- ***Socio-cultural causes***

Children are actually the product of their own family and the socio-cultural context in which they are formed. Visible effects appear in the child's personality and behavior when we encounter dysfunctions at these levels. A child with problems is often an unhappy child among people who are themselves unhappy, constituting a false note that, in a concert, shows that the instruments were not given, without the public knowing too well which of them to blame. In this category we can also include the indicators of power and social status that refer mainly to ethnicity, social class or belonging to rural and urban communities. That is why a special place belongs to the family, through the major role it plays in the life of each child and through its influences (Neamţu, 2001:185).

- ***Individual factors***

They target the pupil's or student's ability and personal resources to react, due to the richness and quality of the "adaptation schemes", some pupils or students having a greater potential for adaptation than others who are more rigid and less permissive in their relationships with others. An important role is also represented by the presence of the mother in the child's life. The child's development proceeds normally if he or she lived in a family environment where the mother's presence was daily. Otherwise, he or she may have certain mental disorders, such as hyper emotivity, phobias or anxiety, excessive nervousness or apathy, indifference, or even mental retardation, if the student lives in a state of prolonged isolation. Children's mental characteristics can negatively or positively influence their school performance. Labelling as a "weak pupil/student," a "bad pupil/student," leads to a decrease in self-esteem, a decrease in self-confidence, and in those around him. When the child does not have the necessary resources to overcome the difficulties, he seeks to stand out, often through deviant behaviours. Lack of will (or reduced availability), low level of aspirations, interests, motivation, insufficient development of the ability to operate cognitively and others can have an acute negative effect on the student's school activity, on the results of his work. Also, the student's state of health can influence his / her success or failure / school failure (Popescu, 1991, in Neamţu, 2001:185).

- ***The school environment***

An important factor in dropout is the unfriendly school environment. The attitude of the school towards the pupils or students and the community, the appropriate teaching methods, the proactive role in ensuring the school participation of the students and the mechanisms of early intervention in cases of school non-participation, cooperation with social services are factors related to the school environment (Ivan and Rostaş, 2015:10). Thus we can mention among the factors in the educational space, which can influence the school dropout: the insufficient knowledge of the pupils or students, due to the large number in a class or due to the disinterest shown by the teachers; non-compliance with the age and individual peculiarities of students, lack of concern of some teachers to stimulate interest in learning, especially in rural areas where teachers do not show interest in the learning process due to the fact that salaries are not up to expectations, insufficient training professional and psycho-

pedagogical teaching of some teachers, lack of professionalism, manifested either by the severity of the teacher (can induce fear, anxiety of the student), or by the teacher's permissiveness; lack of material endowments in educational institutions, lack of schools in the villages, which forces most of the students to travel a long way to school every day; lack of qualified teachers in rural areas (Popescu, 1991, in Neamțu, 2001:185).

- ***Community influence and social context***

Another risk factor for pupils and students dropping out of school is the influence of the community considering the way the relationship between the school and the community. In a community where the dropout rate is high, it is not necessarily correlated and does not always illustrate the extent to which the community values education but may be the result of other factors. Insecurity in school or on the way to school, how the school facilitates community participation in decisions, the distance to the school and the accessibility of the school by means of transport are other causes that influence school dropout, given the lack of state investment in education. A negative influence on the perception of education is the media, by promoting more and more the poorly educated who have succeeded in life through luck or other endowments in nature, representing role models for children. Often, those from rural areas are stigmatized about their background. At the national level, programs are developed to support education in rural areas, but few are implemented.

- ***Psychological factors / causes***

Deprivation of status and labelling as "weak pupil or student" reduces their self-esteem and undermines their attempt to build a positive social identity. Thus, the students who do not have the necessary resources to mobilize, in order to overcome the difficulties, will seek to satisfy their need for personal valorisation outside the school, possibly by dropping out. Labelling as "failure" or "deviant" causes students to adopt deviant roles precisely in response to deprivation of status. In schools where there are classes to keep underperforming students in school, membership in such a class may lead to dropping out of school. (discussion / analysis can continue on a parallel based on the concept of hypercorrectness) (Ivan and Rostaș, 2015:10).

### **3. Effects and prevention of school dropout**

The effect of dropping out of school has serious consequences, because the young person who has no professional qualification indispensable for his or her socio-economic integration, nor the moral and civic training necessary to exercise the role of citizen of a community, practically fails to adapt properly to social life. Having no qualifications, those who drop out of school are the future unemployed and represent in the medium and long term, a source of difficulties for society but also for themselves (Cîmpean, 2018:2).

It has direct consequences on the extent of social inequalities manifested on the level of a country. Thus, those who leave school early have difficulty finding a job that provides them with decent living conditions, most often being among people who have been unemployed for a very long time. The material condition of these people influences the school success of their children, thus reproducing social inequalities. From this point of view, educational policies must reduce as much as possible the influence of factors that do not depend directly on those in the education system. An efficient and inclusive education system would be one in which factors such as parents' education, family income, place of residence, student's ethnicity, etc. it would have as little influence as possible on the dropout and school performance of students (Ivan and Rostaș, 2015:10).

School dropout is a dangerous phenomenon, because it causes negative effects both individually and psychologically, respectively an alteration of the self-image of the pupils or students in question, who will lose more and more confidence in their own possibilities and abilities, developing a fear of failure, as well as socially, because permanent school failure "stigmatizes", "labels" and leads to social marginalization with an increased level of deviant and criminal behavior. Dropping out of school is based on several factors that may be different, but most often associated. The student faces a series of school difficulties that have as main causes: their own person, parents and family, school, local community, etc. There are several concepts that are correlated and whose meaning intertwines, giving us an image of the phenomenon of school deviance. These are: deviant behavior, juvenile delinquency, deviance in school and school deviance, and the relationship between them can be reproduced (Neamțu, 2003:27).

In Romania, the issue of school dropout has become an important topic of analysis and debate in recent years. In this context, the state proposes a series of educational policies and concrete strategies to address the problem, in order to improve the education system, thus supporting young people who drop out of school prematurely face unemployment, poverty and marginalization (Bonea, 2019:387-403, Mc. Grath and Van Bergen, 2015:2-5).

The framework and guiding principles of the Europe 2020 TPP Reduction Strategy are aimed at both the goals of "smart growth", improving the level of education and training, and those of "inclusive growth". It must combine a series of prevention, intervention and compensation measures, with a special focus on school and student interventions.

Complete strategies should include a mix of prevention, intervention and compensation measures, as follows:

1. Prevention measures aim to reduce the risk of early school leaving before the onset of problems, optimize the supply of education and training, to support the student in achieving better school results and remove obstacles to educational success. They aim to establish a solid, early foundation that allows students to develop their own potential and creates opportunities for better school integration.
2. The intervention measures aim at eliminating the incidence of PTȘ phenomenon, by improving the quality of education and vocational training, at the level of educational institutions, by providing specific support to students or groups of students at risk of early school leaving. Considering all levels of education, from early education and care to upper secondary education, with an emphasis on school-level policies, which should be integrated into general unit development policies, and those at the individual level, to develop students' resistance to the risk of PTȘ and to recovering from concrete difficulties, which may be of a social, cognitive or emotional nature.
3. The compensation measures intend to support the reintegration into the education system and the training of people who have left school prematurely and the acquisition of the necessary qualifications for access to the labour market. Currently, the policy mix combines a number of measures in all these areas, with a main focus on providing interventions on school and pupil or student level. Improving the quality and expanding the scope of prevention measures is a key element of the strategy, especially in the early stages of the education process (preschool and early primary school). The strategy also focuses on the gradual expansion of already tested and successful

compensatory measures (such as Second Chance education, evening secondary and part-time secondary education) and the development of new measures. based on the opportunities offered by the National Education Law no.1 / 2011, with subsequent amendments and completions, not yet explored (reintegration paths in mainstream education, recognition and validation of previous learning, among others). The strategy focuses mainly on the implementation of successful prevention and intervention measures and on actions to prevent school dropout among students, and for young adults ([https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fi%C8%99iere/Invatamant\\_Preuniversitar/2015/Strategie-PTS/Strategia-PTS-2015.pdf](https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fi%C8%99iere/Invatamant_Preuniversitar/2015/Strategie-PTS/Strategia-PTS-2015.pdf)).

#### **4. Methodology. Data analysis and interpretation**

In order to conduct the research investigating the phenomenon of school dropout as well as the problems and factors that generate it, the sociological survey was used as a research method, the technique used being the opinion poll, and to obtain the data necessary for the study, the questionnaire was applied to 100 persons from the urban area (the town of Reșița) and from the rural area (Fîrlug, Dezești, Dulău, Remetea), in Caraș-Severin county.

The aim of the research is to identify the main consequences of the phenomenon of school dropout on children's lives and to analyse how the lack of education influences the lives of future adults.

The objective of the research is to evaluate the opinions and attitudes of the subjects participating in the study regarding the increase of school dropout, the number of pupils / students who have not completed their studies. Also, this research aims at identifying the causes that generate school dropout, the status and socio-economic situation of families from which those who drop out of school and the role and importance of parental involvement in the education and school life of children. The research also intends to highlight the fact that some people who do not complete a form of schooling become adults who in the future encounter difficulties in finding a job without access to the labour market and a fact that determines a life that does not ensure normal living conditions. living in poverty. Many of them end up receiving certain forms of social assistance to the detriment of a job. It also aims to test the hypotheses underlying this research:

1. If parents were better informed about the child's school activities then they could intervene to improve schooling conditions and increase the quality of education.

2. If the parents' education level were higher, then they would be more involved in the child's school activities, providing support in homework preparation, ensuring access to training and education, and solving problems encountered in the school environment.

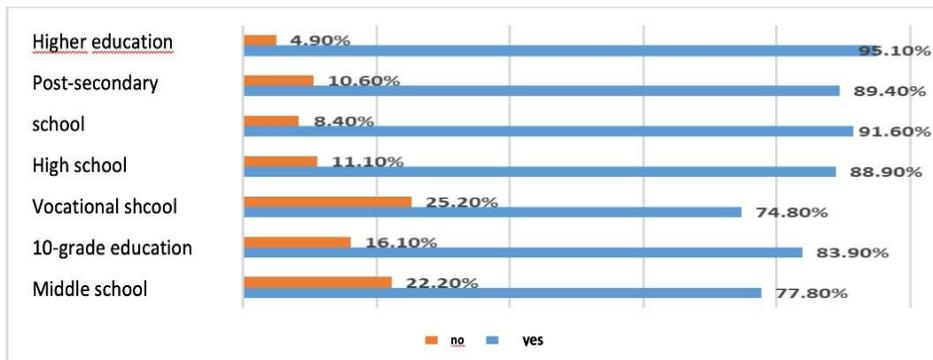
3. If parents get in touch more often and work with teachers, this could make it easier to monitor the child's progress or regression.

**Table 1: The activity of the pupil's preparation the in the family is controlled**

Do you control the pupil's / student's preparation activity in the family? * School									
		School level							Total
		Elementary	Middle	10-grade	Vocational	High school	Post secondary	Higher education	
Do you control the pupil's preparation activity in the family?	Yes	77.8%	83.9%	74.8%	88.9%	91.6%	89.4%	95.1%	88.9%
	No	22.2%	16.1%	25.2%	11.1%	8.4%	10.6%	4.9%	11.1%
Total		100,0%	100,0%	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0%	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %

Source: Own applied research, 2019-2020, Caraş-Severin

**Figure 1: The activity of the pupil's preparation the in the family is controlled**

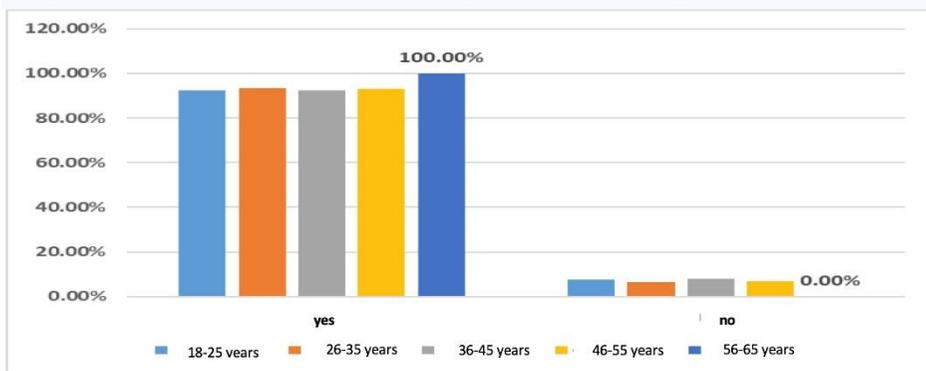


**Table 2. Children's access to training and education spaces in the school**

Does your child have access to all the training and education spaces in the school? * Age							
		Age categories					Total
		18-25 years	26-35 years	36-45 years	46-55 years	56-65 years	
Does your child have access to all the training, education spaces in the school?	Yes	92.3%	93.4%	92.2%	93.2%	100.0%	93.0%
	No	7.7%	6.6%	7.8%	6.8%	0.0%	7.0%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Own applied research, 2020, Caraş-Severin

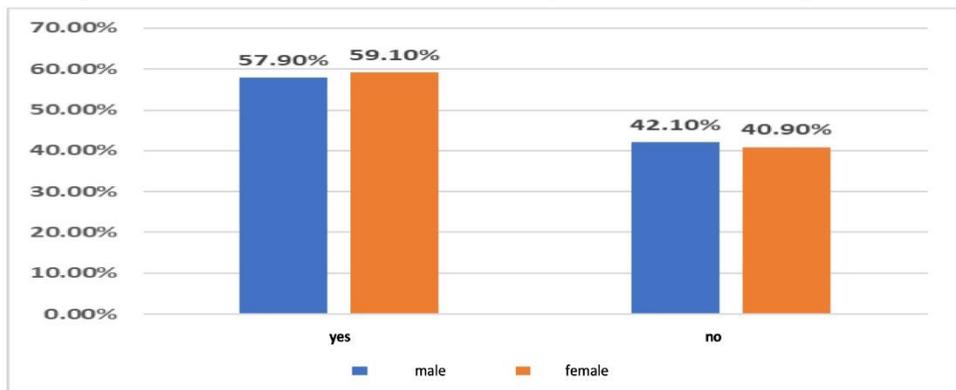
**Figure 2: Children's access to training and education spaces in the school**



**Table 3: Consultation in order to develop school rules and regulations**

Have you been consulted in the elaboration of the internal regulations or the rules of the school? * gender				
		Sex		Total
		male	female	
Have you been consulted in the elaboration of the internal regulations or the rules of the school?	Yes	57.9%	59.1%	58.6%
	No	42.1%	40.9%	41.4%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Figure 3. Consultation in order to develop school rules and regulations**

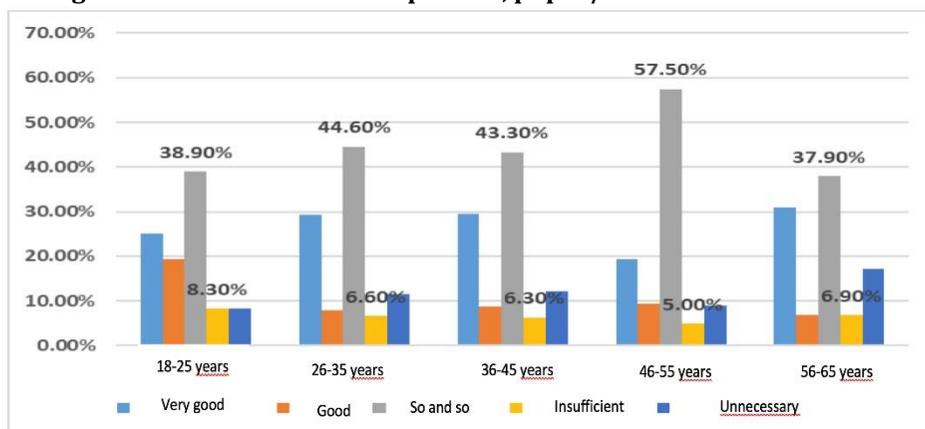


**Table no. 4. Collaboration of parents, pupils/students with teachers**

How do you appreciate the collaboration with the teachers? * Environment				
		Environment		Total
		urban	rural	
How do you appreciate the collaboration with the teachers?	Very good	24.0%	28.1%	26.0%
	Good	7.5%	10.1%	8.8%
	So and so	51.2%	45.0%	48.2%
	Insufficient	5.1%	7.1%	6.0%
	Unnecessary	12.2%	9.9%	11.1%
Total		100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Source: Own applied research, 2019-2020, Caraş-Severin

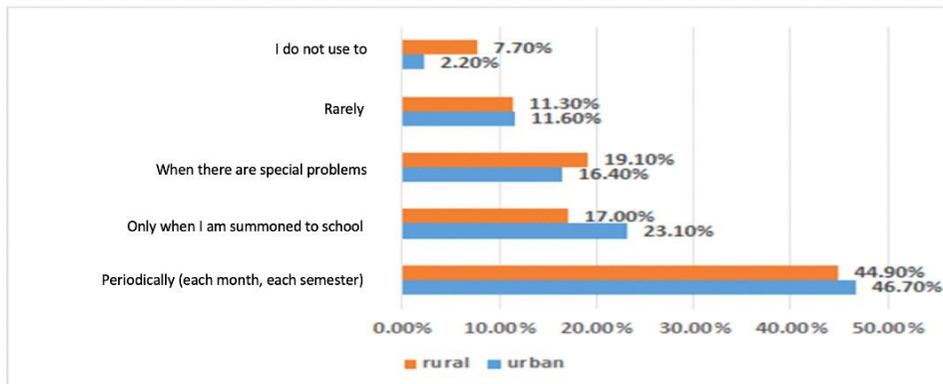
**Figure no. 4. Collaboration of parents, pupils/students with teachers**



**Table: 5. Maintaining the contact with the teachers**

Do you use to contact the teachers? * Environment				
		Environment		Total
		urban	rural	
Do you use to contact the teachers?	Periodically (each month, each semester)	46.7%	44.9%	45.8%
	Only when you are summoned to school	23.1%	17.0%	20.1%
	When there are special problems	16.4%	19.1%	17.8%
	Rarely	11.6%	11.3%	11.4%
	I do not use to	2.2%	7.7%	4.9%
Total		100 %	100 %	100 %

Source: Own applied research, 2019-2020, Caraş-Severin

**Figure 5: Maintaining the contact with the teachers**

### Conclusions

The data and results presented in this study are not representative of the entire education system, but this research provides data and some conclusions that can be drawn from them. Based on the answers provided by the respondents participating in the study we can say that the overall picture of the profile of the respondents highlighted some possible problems in the education system. According to the survey results, we can conclude that students who drop out of school or have dropped out of school come largely from rural areas, from families where parents have a low level of education (elementary school, high school). We can also say that they come from family backgrounds with a poor socio-economic status, or from families with parents disinterested in their children's schooling, because they do not collaborate and do not keep in touch with teachers, and go to school only if called by the teachers.

The opportunity of the children living in poor families to receive a full school education are minimal. Not only do they not have a chance to achieve in the future and live decently by managing to integrate into the labour market through employment, but they become more dependent on maintenance and social assistance programs than the rest of the population. Given that in recent years the number of pupils and students dropping out of school has increased visibly, the state tries and shows a constant concern regarding the adoption of measures to prevent and combat school dropout, obviously with adaptation to the specific local, social and economic context. The existence and effectiveness of these institutional measures can increase student confidence in school and reduce the risk of dropping out of school. Family support is a factor that matters in the education of students.

The answers of the interviewees indicate that students who benefit from the support of the family, and in case of need can turn to the family for educational support, when completing homework are much more likely to complete their studies. This support is closely correlated with the level of education of the parents, in order to be able to support their children in doing homework. Education is an important and decisive factor in the formation and development of children.

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