

# LOSE ENDS

*Mapping the roots of youth  
marginalization in the underclass*



**POLICY  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
HUNGARY**





# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## HUNGARY



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## Introduction

Együttható Egyesület – our association- has been operating an Afterschool<sup>1</sup> in Gyöngyös since 2014. From time to time we conduct a research program that assesses local conditions, primarily in the local segregated communities. In 2015, our LEADNFL research used a survey to assess the living situation of young people between the ages of 18 and 25 in the segregated communities of Gyöngyös.

With the research, we would like to understand these phenomena experienced in the Afterschool and, if possible, improve our services based on the results. The Loose Ends project was born out of this aspiration as mentioned.

In recent years, the composition of the students, who are attending the afterschool has changed a lot, even though the majority of the children have always been poor. Our observation is that, that the families where there is at least one earner and the parents live together are excluded from the regular child protection benefits. The number of students from segregated schools has increased, and at the same time we have lost children who are not Roma and/or live in non-segregated conditions. Essentially, only non-Roma children with Special education needs status and/or more severe disabilities remained in the provision of service.

The conversations with newcomers of the afterschool and their family members drew our attention to the fact that the majority of their parents are under 30 years old, and at least one, but in many cases both parents, and even wider adult relatives, were once students of the local special education school. Since we are a youth organization, and considering their age, parents themselves can be involved in youth programs therefore our desire was to find out , what kind of tools are possible to use to address them. Because if young parents are motivated and can be engaged in some activities that is interesting to them, their children's motivations will also improve naturally. At the same time, it is not possible to involve them without a more detailed knowledge of their living conditions.

This was the starting point of the research, the data collection of which was carried out in the summer of 2021. The Loose Ends project is implemented with the support of the Erasmus+ youth program, and with the collaboration of a Romanian and a North Macedonian partner organization. In addition to the research, one of our commitments is to jointly make a policy proposal on how to support Roma young people, who often live in segregation, with youth work - especially international youth work - and thus give them the opportunity for wider social contact.

Due to the results obtained, the thoughts of Judit Durst (2017) regarding research "otthon" ("at home") were formulated in us. In our case, home means the immediate operating environment of the afterschool and the families who are involved in the day to day life of the afterschool:

"This is about the ethnographer's fear of what can be written from all the knowledge he or she has gathered over the years - without harming the group, which is already surrounded by grave stigmas and prejudices. And without making the further research impossible by the fact that after the publication of the text, contrary to its intention of his/her writing takes on an independent life..." (Durst, 2017, p. 4)

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<sup>1</sup> Extracurricular activities for children with disadvantaged background in the afternoon, as a nongovernmental organisation



## Recommendations

We are making proposals here that obviously do not solve the structural problems arising from the economic system and the organization of the state.

Residential segregation could clearly be mitigated by expanding the stock of rental housing and other desegregation measures that support this, which is also known to local decision-makers. According to the municipal equal opportunity program, the city is committed to eradicating residential segregation, yet the number of rental housing is decreasing, and new municipal housing is not being built. The goal of the program is not to move out or demolish, but to improve the quality of life in the segregated areas by improving the accessibility of infrastructure and public services (Local Equality Programme, Gyöngyös Municipality, 2018).

In the light of our own analysis, this is certainly positive, but it does not provide adequate answers to the territorial stigmatization resulting from residential segregation and the unfavourable development of student ratios in district schools.

## Possibilities of obtaining a basic education

The Local Equality Programme document identifies low education as an obstacle to employment. The acquisition of a general education for adults and the provision of vocational educational opportunities are also emphasized and it is established that there are such options for dropouts in the settlement, but there is little interest in the vocational education on the part of those concerned. The program also identifies the presence of discrimination, which is intended to be counterbalanced by positive discrimination, positive examples appearing in local media, and appropriate, ethical behaviour expected from public services (Local Equality Programme, Gyöngyös Municipality, 2018).

*Our results suggest that residential segregation and discrimination are closely linked to school failure, so the problem should not be approached solely from the direction of schooling, but vice versa. In our opinion, mitigating residential segregation – and a stable monthly income from the state which is proportional to inflation - could do more for academic success, than the expectation from the school system to tackle poverty.*

The people living in the segregated area partly discriminated because of their Roma origin, and partly because of their place of residence. Discrimination appears in all areas of life, and based on the interviews, school is also a space for this: in the name of equal treatment, the difficult circumstances of the students are neglected.

A high degree of poverty, insufficient housing conditions and an overcrowded living environment make it impossible to successfully cope with school expectations.

The identity formed along the lines of stigmatization has a negative impact on the vision of the future, the consequence of which is school dropout. The analysis shows that life management strategies corresponding to this identity and vision are being developed; part of it is casual and informal employment, which ensures survival. And survival does not allow them to dedicate a significant amount of time to finishing school as adults.



Of course the multicultural aware and personalized inclusive support should appear in schools.

Furthermore, it would be worthwhile for the decision makers to consider the possibility of introducing a final exam to obtain certificate about basic education - exclusively - for those who, within the institutional framework, during the period of compulsory education weren't able to obtain their primary education. Obviously, this is not a local measure, but a systemic measure for which the conditions could be created.

Currently, according to Eurydice, primary education for adults is provided by various institutions, but most of them allow the completion of 7-8 classes, because there is less demand for 5-6 classes. As more and more people complete primary school in school-based training, for those who didn't finish it the only possibility is to continue in a larger or different city. In 2019 in Hungary, 453 people graduated from primary school, and in the same academic year, 3,211 people participated in adult primary school education. Another option is the so called Dobbantó program, where young people can obtain a partial vocational qualification in addition to a general education in a vocational school (Eurydice, 2022).

Each program is based on the regular and personal presence of the young person, so none of them take into account the costs and difficulties associated with travel, as well as the living conditions (child upbringing, nursing duties, and contribution to family income) that we outlined in the research report.

The „Dobbantó program” aims to provide support with the role of a mentor-teacher and tries to encourage young people to participate in the program with a scholarship providing 5% of the minimum wage (Eurydice, 2022). This scholarship is probably will prove to be insufficient in dealing with difficulties arising from the earlier mentioned life situations.

Part of our research was to find out about local education services for young people who drop out. One of our colleagues found out from the employment centre in Gyöngyös that they are starting a course to finish elementary school, which is subject to a placement test. Those who participate in the program can receive a monthly allowance of HUF 100,000. The administrator was unable to provide more precise information about this, and when we called, they were unable to give specifics about the education, for example, whether the classes will definitely start, for what duration, and how much time the applicant would need to participate per day. There is no information on the current activities of the employment centres and branches on the website of the Heves county government office.

The option of an exam not tied to regular attendance and the voluntary participation of local civic or other services in the flexible preparation of primary school dropouts would bridge the difficulties arising from living conditions, or at least give another –albeit narrow- motivated group the opportunity to obtain basic education.

### Inclusive school

Based on their own and their children's experiences, the young respondents say that they often experience marginalising and even abusive behaviour at school. The underlying structural problems in the education system are well known in literature (Fejes; Szűcs, 2018). What could be done at the local level is to create smaller class sizes in the case of the lower grades. The majority of disadvantaged children enrolled elementary school attend classes of 25-30 students, while the phenomenon of school dropout spans generations in their families, as this research report proves. They need individual, differentiated attention





provided by their school, so that they can avoid repeating classes and finish primary school on time. The risk of dropping out increases with each repetition of the year, making vocational schools off the table and putting the completion of primary school in jeopardy. While having a primary school certificate does not make a difference in living situation, as parents the respondents could support their own children in their studies more easily, as in many cases their children could be the first generation to obtain the certificate in a non-special district school. Should we want all these positive effects, schools has to have a positive image, a place worth going to where one receives support, respect and love.

Sensitization programmes focused on what the Roma contributes to the Hungarian society are necessary as opposed to ones where poverty is in the centre of the attention. Should these programmes made available to students as well, the value of Roma culture could be made more visible and increase self-esteem of Roma students.

### Youth services for young adults

Independent non-profit organizations may be necessary due to the mostly indifferent or negative experiences of the interviewees regarding the public social network. In any case, state-run public service providers often stepping up as authorities has an alarming effect and is not fostering cooperation; this can be inferred from the interviews.

Services of NGOs are not mandatory to use – unlike many of the services offered by child-protection services where cooperation is mandatory or there are legal consequences – and there would probably be a long-term demand for these services. People living in the neighbourhood not only know the community house in one of the segregated areas, but also regularly visit it. In the other segregated area, there is no similar service available, and the family support centre is also relatively far away.

Such a financially stable community centre could employ a person independent of the school, a Roma mentor, who could support the children's school attendance with personal visits in the morning. He could keep contact with the school, mediating between the families and the teachers. Our research also shows that in many cases inefficiencies in communication between families and schools also contributed to dropout, e.g. the experience of exclusion and discrimination often resulted in being absent from school, and the lack of communication related to this is also part of the repetition of class years and finally dropout.

In addition, a school bus could provide additional assistance, especially during the winter, by collecting the children and bringing them to school on time. We believe that the Roma mentor and the school bus together would improve the willingness to go to school and reduce school dropout rates.

Based on the interviews, it can be concluded that the young people do not have reliable access to relevant information about available opportunities and support provided by the education and social system, available organizations do not fully fulfil their role as information providers. Questions and problems often arise during interviews (e.g. student work, dating, community programs, adult training opportunities, internet use, need for job search advice, etc.) that could be answered by a low-threshold community and youth service within a reasonable distance.



Another important role of such a service could be the promotion of contact with other social groups in both domestic and international youth programs, in which it is possible to develop different abilities and competencies in a non-formal way, in open-ended pedagogical processes.

Such a service, on the other hand, could only survive with predictable and stable funding, which is currently not provided in Hungary; funding depends on the possibilities and decisions of the local governments.

Youth work with disadvantaged young people - and other human services - can contribute to the improvement of the quality of life, but it does not solve marginalization and its consequences, it mostly just blurs the structural problems.

