

# Education for Sentenced Minors and Young Adults – Introduction to an Ongoing European Project and Results of a Questionnaire

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*The article is an introduction to an ongoing European project in which representatives of Hungary took part for a year in 2015. The project focuses on in-prison education of sentenced minors and young adults in order to them being more employable and motivated in their lives and work. The Hungarian team (researchers and academics of the National University of Public Service, Eötvös Loránd University and FORESEE Research Group) is responsible for providing the scientific background of the project, which is now in the phase of implementation of a chosen educational methodology. The authors in this article would like to provide an hors d'oeuvre to the reader with presenting the results of a questionnaire distributed among minors during the summer of 2015, based on which the methodology has been chosen.*

**Keywords:** prison, research, reintegration, re-education, educational methodology

It was in 2011 when five European partners launched a project focusing on the (in-prison) education of sentenced minors (ESM). Although that particular project ended after two years in 2013, the partners at that time agreed that a number of factors observed by them need to be re-explored in an additional research. This was the point when the Hungarian team of the National University of Public Service Faculty of Law Enforcement (together with Eötvös Loránd University and FORESEE Research Group) got to be involved in a new Erasmus+ project in 2014 (ESM-YA). In this present article the authors would like to highlight the areas where the Hungarian team contributed (and still contributes) to this international project, with main focus on a questionnaire distributed and analysed as the first step of a methodology to be formulated within the two-year-long working period.

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The Erasmus+ KA2 (2014-2-ES02-KA205-005432) project involves professionals from 8 European Union member countries: Belgium, Cyprus, Spain, France, Italy, Latvia, Romania and Hungary, Spain being the coordinating organization as project leader. All eight partners are from public institutions with a background experience of other European projects focusing on education in prison. Hand in hand with justice operators, professionals in mental health, educators, social workers and prison personnel the aim of the project is the smooth, sustainable and secure future reintegration and employability of minors.

During the two-year-long work partners have to meet four times in four different countries in order to mark the steps already taken and to highlight what needs to be done in the time ahead. In October 2015 the partners met for the second time in Hasselt (Belgium) where Hungary – as, alongside with Leuven-Limburg University College, Belgium, one representative of academic resources – had to give a presentation on the results of a questionnaire that had previously been circulated in some of the juvenile institutions of the partner countries, mainly investigating the juveniles' personal background, their schooling, their motivational basis and their future plans in order to gain insight to the nature and needs of the minors based on which the professionals could propose an individual and universal development plan and a methodology of education for them.

The Hungarian team worked on the questionnaire during the summer of 2015. We took other, previously used surveys of our partners as a basis and created a 29-question-long questionnaire divided into 4 main parts: basic information (personal background, education and employment history, etc.), life before imprisonment (income, accommodation, social network, etc.), motivation and education (help needed in prison, participation in prison activities, wishes for prison activities), factors influencing reintegration (where they return to after serving their time, what support they need after their time, etc.). The questionnaires were translated into the languages of the participating countries and were distributed during a 2 months period in August and September of 2015.

As not all partners work directly with juvenile institutions or other detention centres, not all of them had to circulate the questionnaires. Hungary, being one of the representatives of the scientific background of the project, was not obliged to ask its juveniles, however, being in close connection with Tököl Prison for Juveniles and Adult Offenders we could distribute the questionnaire among 12 juveniles in order to gain a more thorough understanding of the problem on an international scale. Thus, with an exception of Belgium and France, 6 partners worked with the questionnaires in the following institutions: Cyprus in the Cyprus Prison Department (Nicosia Central Prison), which is the only prison in Cyprus with 556 inmates; Spain with FAIM (Fundación para la Atención Integral del Menor) working with 336 minors to support and promote minors' and children's integral development; Italy's Juvenile Justice Department, which is a competent branch of the Italian Ministry of Justice for all juvenile matters, including child judicial protection; Latvia in the Latvian Probation Service – State Probation Service, established in 2003 in order to supervise persons

who have been conditionally released, to mediate in criminal matters, to organize community work service and to correct social behaviour and Romania in the Romanian Centre for Education and Human Development (C.R.E.D.) to sustain human development through the education of disadvantaged people, mainly young offenders and to facilitate the re-settlement of offenders and ex-offenders.<sup>3</sup>

We got back 89 questionnaires from the partner countries for analyzation in September, following which we could start working with the results.

## The questionnaire

In order to create a well thought of individual development plan it is essential that the characteristics and qualities of prisoners are assessed. When creating the questionnaire the main focus was to make one that concentrates on more areas to be developed.

As it has previously been stated the questionnaire was based on the ones that were sent by the partner countries as well as the ones that are used to assess prisoners in Hungary when they start their imprisonment (i.e. first assessment). It contained the following units:

- personal information: age, qualifications, employment history, family background;
- life before imprisonment: schools, housing situation, personal life, behavioural characteristics, life before prison;
- life in prison: school courses, free time activity, asking for help – support, motivational basis;
- reintegration: possibilities and motivation.

## Experiences

As none of the partner countries reflected on their experiences when filling in the questionnaires with the juveniles, in the presentation we tried to emphasize what Hungary had come across during the circulation – as a possible guideline when creating another questionnaire in any future project.

According to the psychologists who work in Tököl the questionnaire was complex, good for focusing on individual development, understandable, but when filled out at once it proved to be a bit too long, so they suggested that it should be divided into several parts or the different units should be simplified. (When Hungary mentioned their experience to the professionals in Belgium they agreed since the international team experienced similar issues while working with the questionnaire.)

The minors gathered in a room with the assistance of 4 colleagues, who were there to answer any questions arising or to provide help for those with reading difficulties. The latter was needed in the case of 4 juveniles.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.euro-cides.eu/ESM-YA/pages/pages.php?title=esm-ya](http://www.euro-cides.eu/ESM-YA/pages/pages.php?title=esm-ya) (26.10.2015).

## The results

89 questionnaires came back to Hungary. As for the age groups one can conclude that more than half of the juveniles are over 18, the least represented age group is the 21–24. In Hungary juvenile prisons only keep offenders up until the age of 21.

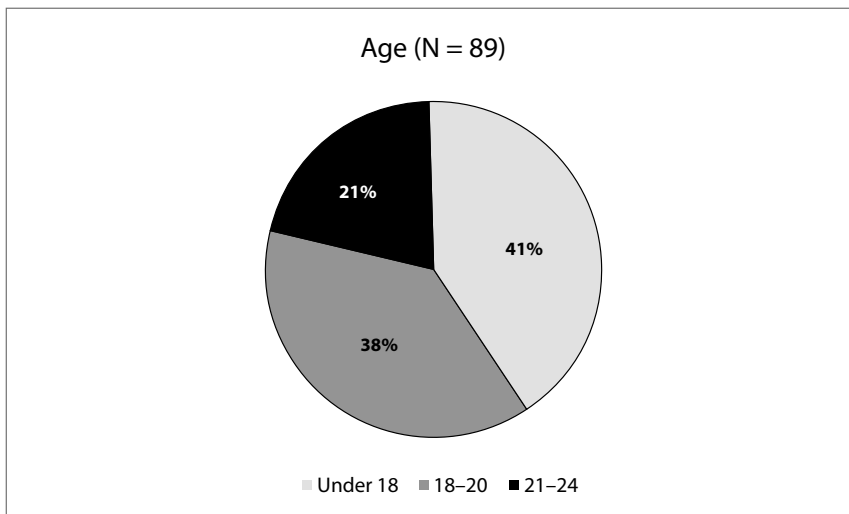


Figure 1. Age groups in juvenile prison

As for nationalities one could see the characteristics of the different countries: in Latvia and Hungary the groups are more homogenous, while in the other countries multiculturalism is the typical feature. This obviously means that the challenges faced by the different institutions are various and distinctive.

As for their marital status the participants were mostly single (probably because of their age). The authors would like to add here that the questionnaire missed a category: *have a boyfriend/girlfriend* – which is a more common feature in this age group. So this is a deficiency that one has to be more aware of the next time. Despite their young age and having unsettled marital status many of the questioned have children: number-wise, 19 out of 89 have children, mostly under one and a half years old.

As one can see in the diagram below, as highlighted by other surveys as well, the prisoners asked are unschooled. This indicates that in-school (classroom) activities should have the utmost importance within the range of reintegration programmes. There are huge differences between their having a profession: 26 prisoners have a profession and here the Cyprus inmates are over-represented (16 of them have professions like mechanic, construction worker, cabinet maker). In order to analyse these results more thoroughly we should overview the school system of the different countries (especially that of trade schooling). Take Hungary for instance: several vocational work or trade requires a finished elementary school; those who have not finished their primary education drop out of the schooling system.

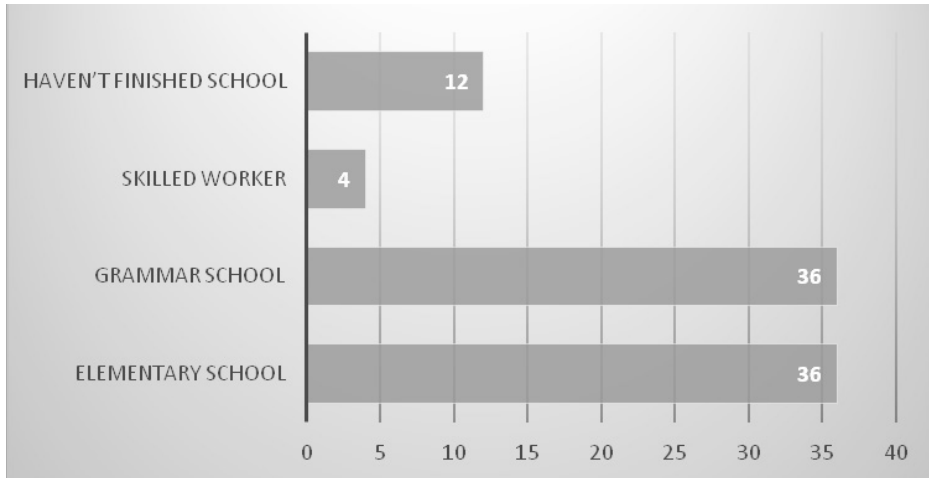


Figure 2. Educational background

If we take a closer look at the time (years) of imprisonment we can say that a sentence of 1-5 years is more represented, only 7 people got a sentence that is over 10 years. More than half of those who took part in the research (42 prisoners) were recidivists, that is, they had already been imprisoned at least once. The level of recidivism, thus, is high. However, in order to gather more precise information on the topic a future questionnaire should contain questions focusing not only on the actual imprisonment but other types of (police) measures of a pedagogical nature, such as parole (supervision) or probation.

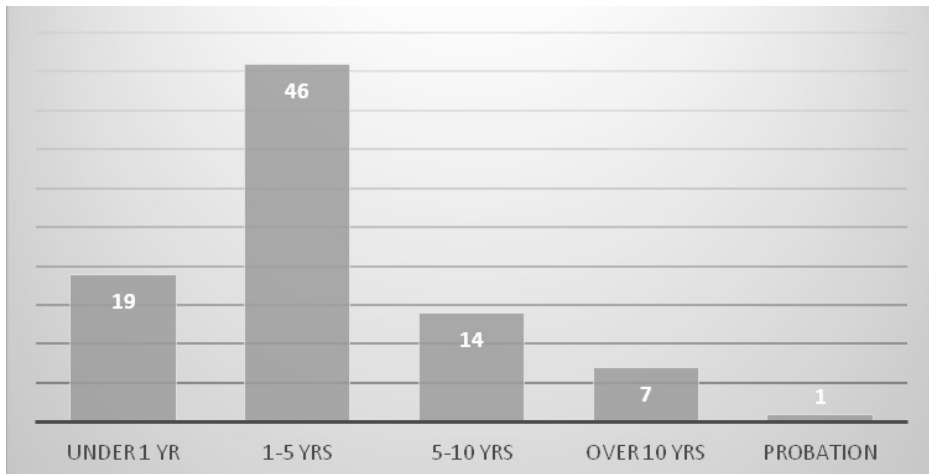


Figure 3. Duration of imprisonment

The state before imprisonment being examined, we can conclude that two main features characterize the prisoners: one is unemployment, other is being unschooled (the creators of the questionnaire did not focus on the willingness of going to school, but one can be sure that they scarcely visited schools). If the questionnaire is conducted again an additional item should be added: extracurricular work or “moonlighting”, that is, working in an unofficial fashion. Most probably this would be an often chosen category of the questioned.

Another very important question concerns the place where these juveniles lived before their imprisonment. A relatively large number (59) of them lived with their families; only 9 of them went to prison from an institution. Strikingly for us, the Hungarian results were outstanding here: 6 persons out of the nine were Hungarians. The state of being a runaway – as a common activity – was chosen by a lot of the questioned: 39 of them said that they had regularly run away before; and this data says a lot indirectly about the in-family mechanisms. The prisoners were not outstandingly dissatisfied with their housing situation, only the 1/3 of them reported their dissatisfaction (i.e.: their housing being hazardous or unsafe).

Family functions as a supportive background for almost all of them – according to the answers. 68 persons out of 89 chose family as their main supportive base proving that however dysfunctional a family could seem in the eyes of a bystander, bonds between the family members are often really strong. A criticism towards the questionnaire: it would have been beneficial to specify each family member because the juveniles may not share the same view and experience when it comes to the members of a family. It was shocking for the examiners to see that only 5 people out of interviewees see professionals as a supportive background. The percentage of them in need of after-care and support is not significant, only 34 of them said that they would need any kind of support.

With Cyprus as an exception, drug (either consumption or trade) appeared in the answers of 59% of the juveniles and the same percentage of them has a connection to a person who is either a drug user or in the business. Though we have not asked specifically about the juveniles’ own drug-using habits, it is more than obvious that these relations had influenced their socialization so far.

Only 39 people said that when committing a crime an adult’s influence had been present. However, here one can find another striking Hungarian result: 11 out of 12 said that they had been influenced this way. 12 persons reported that they have no friends, however, referring back to the previously said, the affect of these friendly ties might not be positive after all.

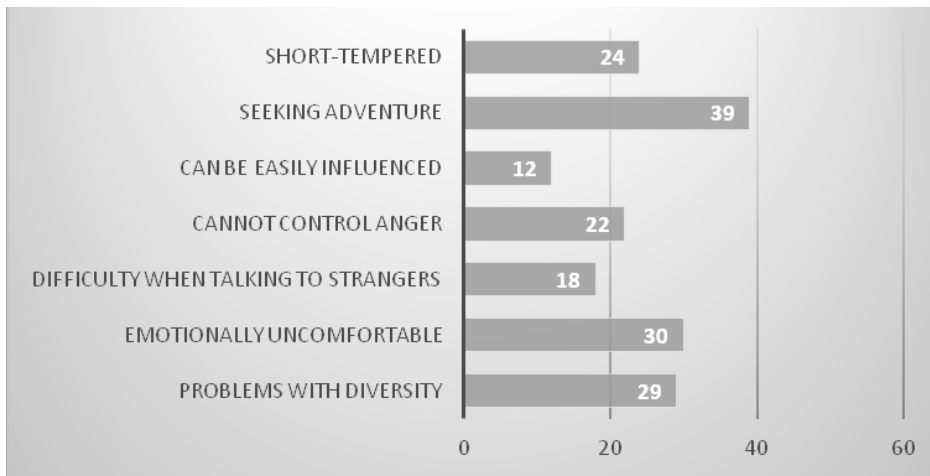
As for free time activities: 48% of the questioned declared that they could not use their free time usefully, which could be a reason for them getting involved in criminal activities. Based on this, one of the most important elements of a juvenile’s reintegration is their education to how to spend their free time in a constructive way.

Criminal behaviour is very common in the juveniles’ families, too: 42 out of the 89 said that they have an ex-convict in their families, although Hungary is over-represent-

ed in this respect, too. As for alcohol consumption: 42% confessed about an alcoholic family. No matter what the family is like, being in contact with the family is an important value for the juveniles, only 20 people confessed being neglected by their families. Although we have not examined this but it is still important to outline that keeping in touch with the families differs from country to country: for example in Hungary only a few prisons have groups supporting family attachment.

Domestic violence is always a sensitive topic to touch upon so we were excited as to whether this question would be left blank. On the contrary: in many cases it was openly reflected upon. For example in Spain, 21 people were honest about having experienced domestic violence; however, the majority of them did not specify the type of violence. In our questionnaire domestic violence primarily meant physical abuse, nobody confessed about sexual abuse.

The inmates' behavioural pattern is represented in the table below.



*Figure 4. Behavioural pattern*

One can see that minors are quite adventure seeking and often feel emotionally hurt or uncomfortable. This is a very important warning sign that reflects upon the fact that professionals should focus more thoroughly on the minors' mental health and consciously add the following contents in their education:

- tolerance training / diversity training;
- communication training;
- self-control training.

In Hungary in the past 10 years we have started to consciously introduce educational programs that focus on personal and personality development, however, in many cases it is very challenging for prison staff to get involved in such programs due to their being overworked. Thus these programs and their implementation became quite random. In the past 3 years thanks to the financial support of EU projects there have been a few such trainings organized by NGOs (non-governmental organizations).

As for in-prison help the results proved to be the expected ones: the inmates first require work and education and they would be interested in attending programs focusing on family counselling. Interestingly enough, drug prevention programs were ranked last.

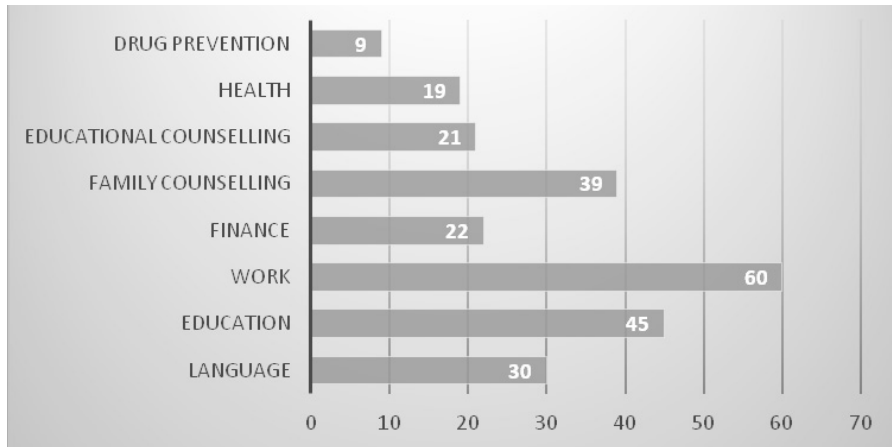


Figure 5. In-prison support

Prisons seem to try for providing an even broader set of activities for juveniles: only 14 people said that they would not participate in any offered program and at the same time they primarily need educational and work-related programs.

Amongst free time activities sport was the most popular along with cultural programs. It is in accordance with what professionals experience in Hungary: those who do not study will have to work, and it is also a task of the officers to make them practice sport, take part in theatre groups, music groups. It is not only important for them to pass the time but the developing effect of free time activities is unquestionable, too.

When it came to the inmates' wishes for prison activities/programs the questionnaire came back with the following rank:

1. sport,
2. culture,
3. work,
4. education,
5. family counselling.

As the authors have already referred to, it is surprising how unimportant a psychologist's work is for these minors: probably we should reconsider the psychology service based on this.

However, what concerns the area to be developed the creators of the questionnaire were not surprised by the results that came back: we were happy to see that the minors had stressed the importance of basic social competences, as well as ICT knowledge. The ability of reading and writing, and language in some of the participating countries proved to be essential, too.



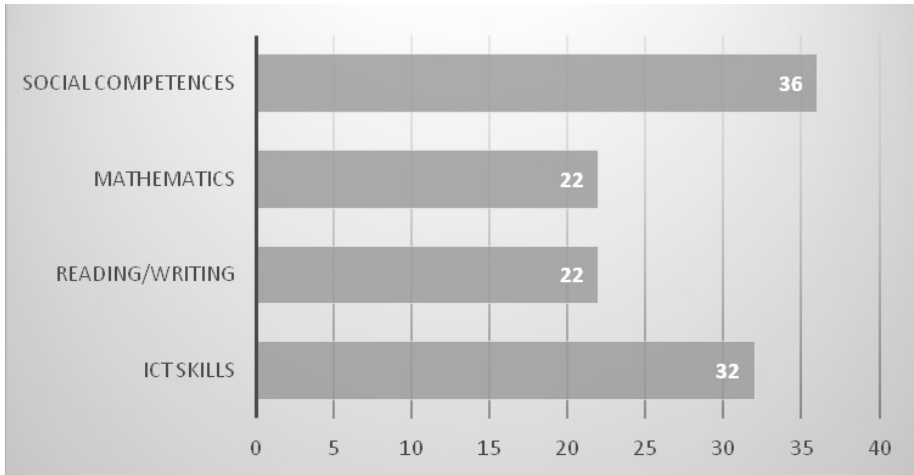


Figure 6. Field of education

64% of the interviewees attend school in prison, which is a relatively high percentage: their majority study to be skilled workers while finishing elementary school is also a target for 18 of them, which is a consequence of them being unschooled. None of them take part in higher education. Their attitude to studying is basically determined by external motivational factors. The survey asked why they liked to study to which the following answers were given:

- important for my future – that was the most common answer;
- studying is a must;
- I can learn new things;
- I have to do something useful;
- I need qualification (papers);
- I don't like to remain ignorant;
- I didn't have the opportunity and/or time to study before.

Only one out of the 89 chose that they like to study solely because of studying itself.

Less answers were produced in the case of "I don't like studying because...", some of the typical answers were like:

- it's boring;
- I don't understand it;
- useless;
- I am lazy;
- it's hard to concentrate.

It is more than obvious that these answers reflect the inmates' unfavourable experience when it comes to school. It is a characteristic of Hungary that the majority of juveniles had previously faced a lot of setbacks at school: they failed, they had to repeat a school year, they often played truant – and behind all these one will find a lack of support from the family, parents being unmotivated, learning difficulties not realized and

dealt with as well as the selective nature of the school system, its often inappropriate pedagogical methods and culture.

Prison education is often the only opportunity for these young people to try themselves again in a school setting. As their answers show they often take part in education in order to fight boredom, however, 68% of them found prison education very important, which is very different from the “outside school system”: smaller groups, in a slower pace, a more differentiated education that responds to individual needs. School education in prison tries to compensate disadvantages and to awake motivation to studying.

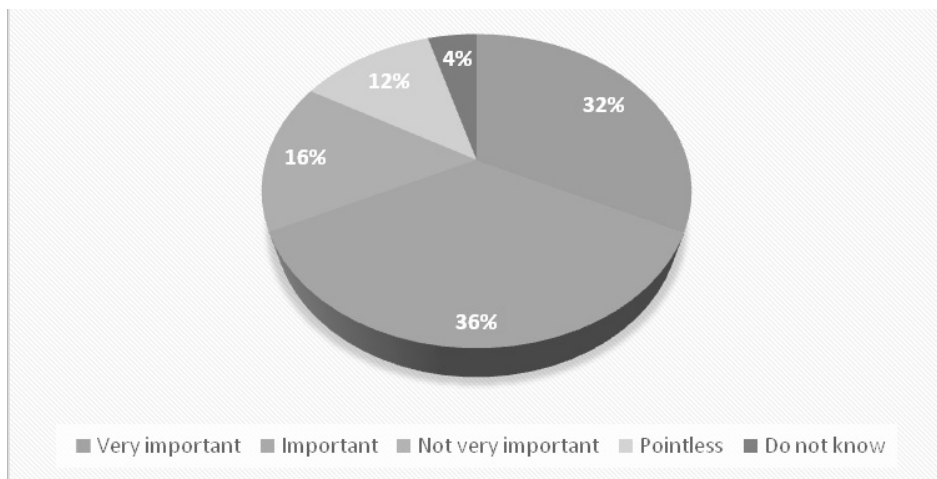


Figure 7. Education in prison

In order to make significant changes in prison education, supportive background (medium) is extremely important, that is the reason why we asked about the juveniles' motivation for studying. Again, it was shocking and disappointing to see that only 4 people chose the professional staff as a source of motivation; they were more motivated by their families and a hope for a better life. 11 people said that nothing would motivate them, which is a very high number. Being unmotivated causes great problems in closed institutions: the juveniles are hard to involve in different activities and they can be more “inspired” by external motivational tools like reward and punishment. These, however, do not bring lasting effects.

We suggested that the motivational basis needs to be reconsidered in either in-prison or other programs, following which a pedagogical concept needs to be formed. The question of follow up after serving time also arises as well as the fact that the family, where the minors go back to after their time, needs to be supervised, too. This was a shared suggestion of the international team at the meeting in Belgium. However, the already overloaded prison personnel are not capable of carrying out further supervision.

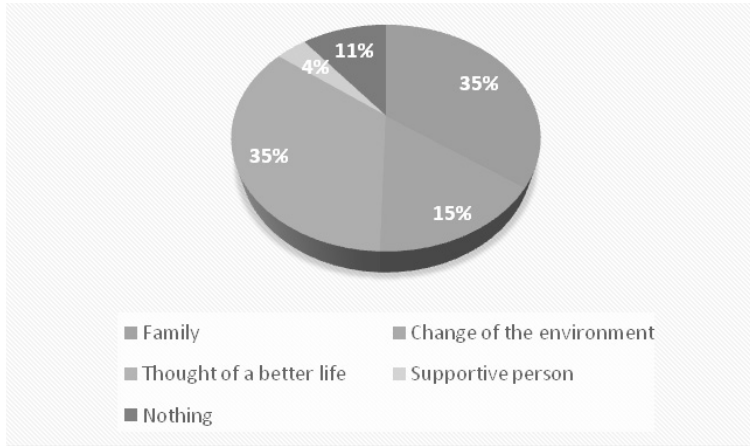


Figure 8. Motivation

As family is the primary supportive environment in the juveniles' lives it is not surprising that 58% of them wish to return to their families after their sentence. On the other hand, 23 of them said that they did not know where to go after prison. This does not mean that they were without plans but they seem to lack any safe environment where they can go back to.

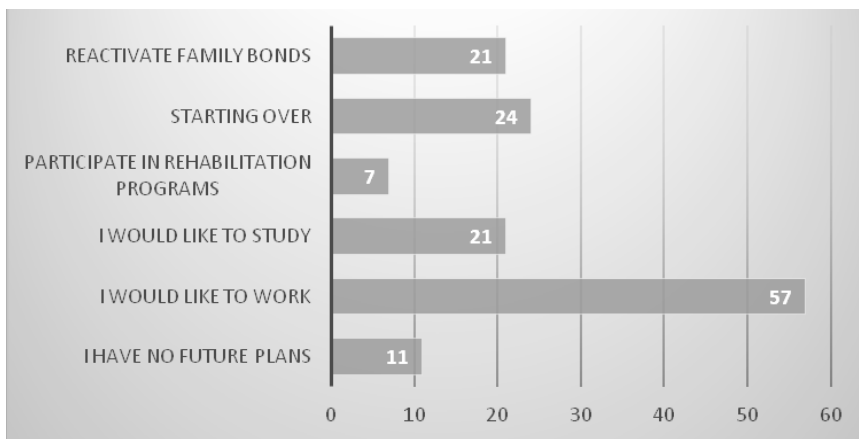


Figure 9. Plans

After finishing their sentence the juveniles would like to work, even though, as 57 of them admitted their chances were low without the appropriate schooling. 24 of them would like to start over, which is a bit of a blurry category, but we believe that they hope for a complete renaissance, which is pretty hard to achieve. Studying is amongst their future plans too: 21 of them answered that they had regained motivation for studying. 11 of them do not have plans for the future; especially the ones serving the longest sentences. As for the factors influencing reintegration the authors made the following chart.

*Table 1. The factors influencing reintegration*

<b>Personal competences</b>	<b>Support</b>
self esteem	family
the fear of getting back to prison	workplace
want to change	staying away from friends inducing bad behaviour
optimistic	money
determined	social support
able to improve	keeping in contact with educators
motivated	help with drug problems

### **Conclusion:**

Based on the results of the questionnaire we may conclude that when creating a certain pedagogical program for the juveniles one should focus on the following:

- individual development;
- support for learning;
- creation of a motivational basis;
- planting work ethic;
- developing social competences;
- guided free-time activities;
- tolerance training / diversity training;
- communication training;
- self-control training.

To sum up, the professional staff concluded that they have positive experiences with the questionnaire which gives a good, colourful and layered overview of the topic.

After the presentation in Belgium the professionals chose a methodology for education, which aims at the employability and secure reintegration of the minors. The project now, in 2016 passed the phase of implementation of the methodology. The chosen formula had to be translated in the respective languages in order to start the implementation process, which lasted for 2 months. According to the plans of the work group the test phase started in November 2015 and during the two months academic representatives of the group made follow-ups about the experience concerning the methodology: how it functions, how it is received by the minors, how effective it is on an international level and whether it needs to be re-arranged at some points. The following meeting of our project was in Rome, Italy in February 2016 where those who tested had to give a presentation about the experiences based on the follow-up questionnaire and their own observations.

## Works Cited

Erasmus+ Project: Education for Sentenced Minors and Young Adults, Source: [www.euro-cides.eu/ESM-YA/pages/pages.php?title=esm-ya](http://www.euro-cides.eu/ESM-YA/pages/pages.php?title=esm-ya) (26.10.15)

## Authors' Note:

This present study – as an own research – is solely based on the results of the questionnaires compiled and analysed by the team of the Hungarian academics participating in the project. As such, no other works or documents are cited and used than the one represented above downloaded from the project's platform (that compiles the results of the project so far and contains information about the partner organizations). The study, or parts of it, was presented in a project meeting in Hasselt (Belgium), October 2015 by one of the authors of this article.

\*Judit Hegedűs was awarded the Bolyai Prize in 2013.

## ABSZTRAKT

### **Oktatás a fiatalokú bűnelkövetők reintegrációjáért – részvétel egy Erasmus-projektben, és egy kérdőív eredményeinek bemutatása**

FEKETE Márta – HEGEDŰS Judit

*A Nemzeti Köszolgálati Egyetem, az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem és a FORESEE Kutatócsoport kutatói és oktatói több európai partnerrel 2014 januárjában kezdtek el dolgozni egy, a fiatalokú bűnelkövetők reintegrációját, munkaerőpiaci versenyképességét és alkalmazhatóságát, motivációs bázisuk megteremtését és erősítését célzó oktatási program kidolgozásán. Az Erasmus+ projekt 2015 novemberében a kiválasztott oktatási módszer implementációs fázisában van, de a megfelelő program kiválasztását megelőzte egy nemzetközi szinten, fiatalokúak között felvett kérdőív, melynek lebonyolításáért és értékeléséért a magyar kutatói csapat volt a felelős. A most olvasható cikkben az írók ízelítőt adnak az Olvasónak a nemzetközi projekt munkafolyamataiból, a kérdőívvel kapcsolatos tapasztalatokból, és a sokszor nem is túl meglepő eredményekből.*

**Kulcsszavak:** *börtön, kutatás, reintegráció, reedukáció, nevelési módszerek*