

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN 'SECOND CHANCE' EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA

^aSILVIA LUKÁČOVÁ, ^bMAREK LUKÁČ, ^cIVANA PIROHOVÁ, ^dEDUARD LUKÁČ, ^eDOMINIKA TEMIAKOVÁ

University of Presov in Presov, Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences, Ul. 17 novembra 1, Prešov, Slovakia
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Faculty of Education, Družovská 4, Nitra, Slovakia
email: ^asilvia.lukacova@unipo.sk, ^bmarek.lukac@unipo.sk, ^civana.pirohova@unipo.sk, ^deduard.lukac@unipo.sk, ^ed.temiakova@ukf.sk

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Abstract: The paper offers an analysis of the current situation in so-called 'second chance education' in Slovakia. It is characterised by problematic accessibility, especially for people with little or no education, while the rate of early school leaving in Slovakia has been steadily increasing in recent years. According to Švec (2008, p. 225), second chance education is understood as "an opportunity for adults to obtain, in a continuous education cycle, the kind and level of education usually acquired in childhood or youth during the initial education cycle". Education of this kind is framed by several legal norms in Slovakia, particularly focusing on the legal framework of education aimed at lower secondary education (ISCED 2) and secondary vocational education (ISCED 2C, 3A, 3C). At the same time, forms of second chance education and problems with their application in practice are dealt with. The paper also includes available statistical data on the number of people who have completed this type of education.

Keywords: increasing level of education, legal framework of second chance education, low level of education, second chance education, secondary education

1 Introduction

Education is part of human potential enabling one to navigate the progressively more complex social environment. Although, on the one hand, a positive development in the educational level of the population can be observed; on the other hand, there are still individuals and social groups whose level of education significantly falls behind and is a major hindrance in their personal development as well as work and social opportunities. Among the causes of this are (among other things) continued processes of polarisation in social stratification (where education appears to be a key stratification factor), selective mechanisms in schooling, as well as differences in individual predispositions. At the same time, the education system in Slovakia is linear in nature. Here, linear nature means a solid and tested system supported by legislation, chronologically divided into internally interconnected stages, in the process of which one gains education determined by the framework of the mainstream culture. The process is based on mutual compatibility of successful training for a profession in the education system (from preschool to university), which is key to a person entering the labour market and finding a job, which, in turn, is a key attribute in the assessment of quality of life. Schooling is followed by the system of adult education, which, however, offers *adjustment* rather than *compensation*. It seems to be better suited to those who were successful in the previous stages of education and, from this viewpoint, just like other social systems, also bears features of governmentality and contributes to strengthening positions of those successful in initial education. Clear evidence for the above statement can be found in the attendance rates of adults with little or no education in adult education. According to the Labour Force Survey (Eurostat 2017) methodology, only 1% of the adult population take part in formal adult education. In contrast, among the registered unemployed, there are 5.89% of job-seekers with unfinished lower secondary education and 25.12% with completed lower secondary education. That means that 1% of adults further their education, while, in the group of the registered unemployed, 31% only obtained a low degree of education or failed to complete education altogether (*Unemployment – monthly figures; Nezamestnanosť – mesačné štatistiky*, September 2019).

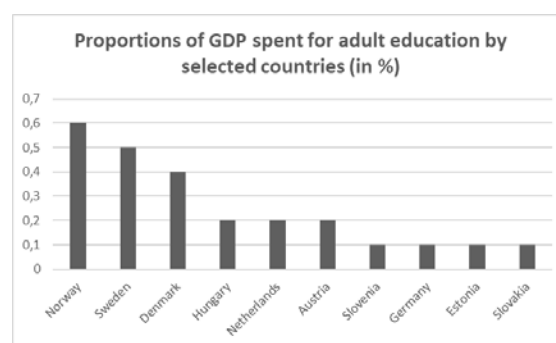
Table 1: Registered unemployment figures in Slovakia

month	total number	people with unfinished lower secondary education		people with completed lower secondary education	
		Number	share	number	share
October 2019	166,302	9,824	5.9%	42,136	25.3%
December 2018	169,802	10,687	6.3%	45,286	26.7%
December 2017	195,583	11,955	6.1%	52,428	26.8%
December 2016	276,131	14,597	5.3%	69,014	25.0%
December 2015	334,379	17,138	5.1%	80,997	24.2%
December 2014	373,754	18,209	4.9%	88,880	23.8%
December 2013	398,876	18,530	4.6%	93,766	23.5%

source: Nezamestnanosť – mesačné štatistiky. Úrad práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny.

As can be seen, by 2019, the total number of registered unemployed decreased by more than half; however, the number of people with completed lower secondary education is slightly higher. This, on the one hand, means that Slovakia seems to be unable to provide appropriate job opportunities for people with a low level of education and, on the other hand, that it is more and more difficult for people who lack education to find a job. Active labour market policies are primarily directed at further education (acquiring a professional qualification by means of courses) as part of adult education. This form of education is, however, generally attended by those who already have an education, i.e. those who completed higher levels of schooling and now deepen, extend, or acquire further qualifications, which increases social disparity (Cameron 1987). Williams (2013) describes lifelong learning in the United Kingdom as a practice of separation which produces socially excluded people, disadvantaged due to their psychological characteristics. For the successful ones, education is an enriching experience, which enhances further development of their skills and control over their own lives, even though this scheme is harshly criticised in the postmodern period (e.g. Liessmann 2008; Keller, Tvrđý 2008). Nevertheless, for those who, for various reasons, were excluded from this process or decided not take part in it, broadening the offer of lifelong learning can contribute to an increase in the gap between them and those that are well educated (*What works in innovation in education: combating exclusion through adult learning*, 1997). For illustration, Figure 1 provides a comparison of the proportions of GDP selected countries spend on adult education.

Figure 1: Proportions of GDP spent for adult education by selected countries (in %)



source: ANDRIESCU, M. et al. 2019. *Adult learning policy and provision in the Members States of the EU. A synthesis of reports by country experts*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, p. 86. ISBN 978-92-79-98393-1

2 What is second chance education

Successful schooling completed with a certificate showing the level of education is still considered key for full-value social functioning, fulfilling social roles that are culturally attributed (from the gender as well as historical viewpoint) to adult age, regardless one's ethnicity or social stratification status. This is especially true for adults with little or no education and a low

level of basic skills. The above premise also defines the responsibility of society (state) to create conditions for all its members to succeed and acquire education in order to enhance their potential and take part in the development of society. In spite of the constitutional right to education and the legal obligation of schooling, a larger group of people still fail to meet the requirements of the education system and they leave school early.

The philosophical basis supporting second chance education states that the mistakes caused by selective mechanisms of the school system or by individuals leading to the early school leaving can be rectified later on (Yogev 1997, in: Ross, Grey 2005). Second chance education provides an alternative space in the system of education in order to complete a level of education. It is an inevitable and fundamental part of the concept of lifelong learning, as it, in its very essence, meets its main idea – open and accessible education at any age. While trying to define the term ‘second chance education’, one finds out that, within the Slovak environment, it is defined by Švec (2008, p. 225) as “an opportunity for adults to obtain, in a continuous education cycle, the kind and level of education usually acquired in childhood or youth during the initial education cycle”. According to Vellos and Vadeboncoeur (2013), typical participants in second chance education are young people who had been forced out of initial education or did not finish it for various reasons. The author defines second chance education as a way to achieve higher education that is, in the present-day neoliberal atmosphere, primarily associated with individual responsibility. He also labels second chance education as ‘second chance schools’, or ‘second way education’. The term ‘second chance education’ is missing from *Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on Education* (The Education act) within which this type of education falls legislatively. It uses, as an alternative, the term ‘increasing the level of education’. Kešelová, Grandtnerová and Urdziková (2016, p. 10) state that “in legislative and transnational documents, one can come across the term ‘education aimed at achieving lower secondary education’, ‘courses aimed at achieving lower secondary education’, ‘courses aimed at completion of lower secondary education’, or ‘second chance school’”.

In Slovakia, it is school laws that provide the legislative framework for an increase in the level of education, which makes it impossible to achieve education outside the school system. That, at the same time, means that the process and organisation of second chance education fully follows the conditions defined by *Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on Education*, even though the target group of such education has different social and psychological characteristics than children and youths.

Including second chance education in the system of educational sciences follows Švec’s classification (1995, p. 38). At the micro level of the institutional system, the author proposes the following classification:

- school pedagogy and andragogy,
- edifying pedagogy and andragogy,
- employment pedagogy and andragogy,
- pedagogy and andragogy of extra-curricular groups.

Second chance education is classified within the subsystem ‘school pedagogy and andragogy’, which deals with education in the school system (Švec 1995). It is part of formal education, which takes places in the network of educational institutions (primary and secondary schools and universities). It is to be available for people who, for various reasons, left initial schooling before they achieved a certain level of education and it is to open a so-called ‘second way’ in which an individual may acquire a specific level of education. In the process, identical sources are used to those applied in the education of children and youths within formal schooling. Průcha et al. (1995) define formal schooling as “education carried out in educational institutions (schools) whose functions, aims, content, means and ways of assessment are defined and legally determined”. Formal

education is generally perceived as education carried out in schooling institutions, a school subsystem whose aim is, according to Lukáč (2013), to provide compact education of a certain level, or extend education in specific fields or academic disciplines. In accordance with the definitions of the school subsystem and formal education, the author defines the main attributes of the school subsystem as follows:

- it is carried out at primary and secondary schools and universities,
- education is systematic,
- it is carried out within a relatively closed system,
- it is provided by permanent pedagogical staff,
- the content of education is defined by key pedagogical documents,
- it primarily uses the material basis of the educational institution where it takes place.

Therefore, second chance education is considered part of the school subsystem by pedagogy as well as andragogy, as Švec (2008, p. 17) also includes second chance education within adult education. Analogically, Lukáč (2013) defines substitution as one of the functions of the adult education school subsystem, which means that the school subsystem of adult education provides an opportunity to achieve education to those who, for various reasons, could not acquire it in the past (in initial education). In an effort to legitimise andragogy, one comes across definitions pointing out differences between andragogy and pedagogy (such as Beneš 2008; Palán 2002). In the process of second chance education, however, pedagogy and andragogy overlap, as:

- it is formal education (in a school institution) for the purposes of acquiring a level of education (which is, according to effective legislation, only possible in school institutions),
- it follows pedagogical norms and documents defining the education of children and youths,
- the target group are adults rather than children and youths, which, according to Beneš (2008), means they cannot merely be defined as students (since adults are not isolated from their social roles in the work, family and private sectors of life),
- whoever teaches the course cannot be a lecturer, or an educator of adults (as in the field of andragogy), but rather a teacher, or a pedagogue (at primary or secondary school).

3 Target group of second chance education

From the viewpoint of succeeding in the labour market, people lacking in or with a low level of education are in a difficult situation on a long-term basis. Such people usually have a negative experience with schooling, in which they failed, and most of them also decided voluntarily and consciously to abandon their studies. The reasons for early school leaving are usually multidimensional and vary between individual and structural motives (based on the family and school environment). Kelly (1995, in: Blaug 2001) defines two main models of reasons and factors causing early school leaving. The ‘drop out’ model emphasises individual factors and situational reasons as the main factors causing early school leaving (personal failure, social and economic factors within the family, pregnancy, starting a family, etc.). The ‘push out’ model points to the characteristics of education or other processes of supra-individual nature which lead to early school leaving. According to Raymond (2008), participating in second chance education provides a better prospect for those who have dropped out – left initial education for individual reasons.

A lower level of education is, traditionally, associated with a higher risk of poverty due to unemployment, a higher rate of criminality, violence and addiction (as well as other pathological phenomena), higher vulnerability and a higher risk of social exclusion in general. Neither prior to nor during the process, the target group of second chance education is homogenous and nor is the group of people who lack vocational, or have only

completed lower secondary education. Should people who only completed primary education be placed in the same class as people who only dropped out in the final year of lower secondary education, it might be difficult to achieve educational standards (Kešelová, Grandtnerová and Urdziková 2016).

The publication *Strategy of lifelong learning (Stratégia celoživotného vzdelávania, 2011)* claims that barely 0.5% of the adult population try to complete their education at the level of the school-leaving (Maturita) exam within school education and less than half out of these actually manage to do so. According to available statistical data, only 1.5% of the population aged 25 to 64 (regardless their education level on entering) took part in formal education in Slovakia in 2016. Statistics for Slovakia that would provide information regarding the participation of adults with no, or a basic level of, education in formal education are unavailable, or, school statistics only observe this group according to gender, level of studies and the study programme, not age. On top of that, adults are, according to effective legislation, also allowed to study in the full-time form, even though it is generally presumed they study part-time. More is known regarding the proportion of young adults who left school early – the Slovak Republic is, on a long-term basis, below the EU average and the figure of 10%. However, after a decrease between 2004 and 2010, the number is slowly growing. In 2018, the Slovak Republic even reported a higher proportion of young women who left school early in comparison to 2008 (*Early leavers from education and training, 2019*). The percentage grew from 4.7% in 2010 to 9.3% in 2017. The government document *National programme for the development of education in the Slovak Republic for the period 2018 – 2027 (Národný program rozvoja výchovy a vzdelávania v SR 2018 – 2027, 2018)* points to the fact that those who have achieved the lowest level of education are least likely to re-enter education and the level of early school leaving in Slovakia has a rising tendency, which is associated with an insufficiently inclusive educational system in the Slovak Republic. Should this trend continue, it will be difficult to meet the EU target of 10% or less early school leavers. Moreover, in a country where the number of such young people is growing, also due to an already existing lack of qualified work force, the risk of high levels of unemployment and disruption to social cohesion is also increasing (cf. Nevala et al. 2011).

The Central Bureau of Labour, Social Affairs and Family provide statistics showing a high proportion of people with no, or lower secondary education within the total number of the unemployed. In September 2018, the proportion of registered job seekers with unfinished lower secondary education within the total number of job seekers was 6.04% and the proportion of job seekers who had completed lower secondary education was 25.67% (*Unemployment – monthly statistics; Nezamestnanosť – mesačné štatistiky, September 2018*). By September 2019, the proportion of job seekers with incomplete lower secondary education had dropped to 5.89 % and the proportion of job seekers who had completed lower secondary education within the total of job seekers remained approximately the same – 25.12% (*Unemployment – monthly statistics; Nezamestnanosť – mesačné štatistiky, September 2019*). Considering the present-day economic situation, which is characterised by a high market demand for work force, the problem of the ‘unemployability’ of people with the lowest level of education is more and more obvious, especially due to an increase in those who leave school early. Regional differences are also highly prominent, which can be seen in Table 2 below, providing data for the Prešov self-governing region.

Table 2: Job-seekers recorded by the Prešov self-governing region and their proportion (%) within Slovakia

month	unfinished lower secondary education	%	completed lower secondary education	%	lower secondary vocational education	%
09/ 2019	4,461	45.0%	12,957	30.7%	567	43.0%
12/ 2018	4,709	44.1%	13,605	30.0%	487	41.0%
12/ 2017	5,161	43.2%	15,022	28.7%	481	40.0%
12/ 2016	6,369	43.6%	18,772	27.2%	562	37.2%
12/ 2015	7,416	43.3%	19,894	24.6%	2,311	32.3%
12/ 2014	7,981	43.5%	21,056	23.7%	3,049	33.0%
12/ 2013	8,247	44.5%	22,134	23.6%	2,092	23.7%

source: Statistic data of Central Bureau of Labour, Social Affairs and Family in Bratislava

4 The legal framework for acquiring lower secondary education and lower secondary vocational education

The present study focuses on the possibilities and the current state of increasing the level of education in people with no education and those who have completed lower secondary or lower secondary vocational education. For this reason, there is no analysis of possibilities to complete a level higher than secondary vocational education, which is formally finished by obtaining a vocational certificate.

At present, second chance education at primary school is legally defined by *Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on Education, Edict No. 320/2008 Coll. on Primary School, Framework Curricula and Educational Standards for Achieving Lower Secondary Education* (part of Education Law § 30 Art. 5 and § 42 Art. 4 of Education Law), *Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on Employment Services, Act No. 417/2013 Coll. on Assistance in Material Need* (§ 12 – motivational contribution). According to *Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on Education*, education aimed at achieving lower secondary education can be provided by both primary and secondary schools. The target group are physical persons who have not completed lower secondary education according to § 16 Art. 3 Let. b), for whom a primary school can, in accordance with § 30 Art. 5 of the law, run courses aimed at achieving that level of education. A significant number of adults who have not completed primary school are registered unemployed. In spite of that fact that unemployment offices ‘have available’ the greatest target group of people with no, or a low level of, education, according to *Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on Employment Services*, achieving a level of education, with the exception of completing the final year of primary or secondary school by a job seeker for the purposes of acquiring a certificate (§ 44 Art. 3) is not considered part of the preparation for the labour market. Only the part-time form of studies is possible, in the full-time form, a person becomes a student (defined as a 100% student) and stops being a job seeker.

The Central Bureau of Labour, Social Affairs and Family can offer courses aimed at completing primary or secondary education, but only in the last year of one’s studies, by means of national or pilot studies in education and preparation for the labour market (§ 54, *Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on Employment Services*) in cooperation with a specific school. In this case, long-term job seekers (registered for a minimum of 12 months) are the only target group.

Considering the target group of educated adults who are studying and, at the same time, fulfilling other social roles, the part-time form of studies seems to be, at first sight, most convenient. This might, however, be difficult for the participants when taking their level of academic competence into consideration. The part-time study form is also more demanding in the area of self-education, time management (when studying at home), and the ability to find necessary resources and information for one’s studies. Farrington et al. (2012) point out that successful education requires academic competence in the form of academic behaviour and approach of non-cognitive character (such as perseverance, resilience, time management, ability to search for study materials, etc.).

The fact that curricula and education standards for second chance education have not been developed appears rather

problematic. They are only available for the full-time form of study (*Curriculum framework and education standards for achieving lower secondary education*, 2015). The absence of curriculum framework for the part-time study form means it is not clear what the learners are to study, to what extent and with what time allocation, nor is it clear what key competences and at what level they are supposed to achieve when completing individual courses.

The completion of primary school and acquiring secondary vocational education is, at secondary schools, run as:

1. courses aimed at the acquisition of lower secondary education (under the same conditions as primary schools) according to § 42 Art. 4 of *Education Law*, "a secondary school can run courses aimed at completing lower secondary education for physical persons who have not acquired that level of education according to § 16 Art. 3 Let. b). The participant is to be examined in front of a commission in all subjects, apart from subjects with educational focus¹. On successful completion of the final exam, the secondary school will issue the physical person a report with an insertion, stating the acquired level of education."
2. courses aimed at achieving lower secondary vocational education. This concerns completing a minimum of 2-year and a maximum of a 3-year educational programmes, labelled as F-type (formerly lower trade schools). This concerns such programmes as the production of food and textiles, clothes making, machine operating, wood work, etc. The first year of such programmes can also be enrolled in by such adults who have not yet completed the final year of lower secondary education, or their results were assessed as inadequate on its completion, or, there is no proof of completion available.
3. courses aimed at achieving secondary vocational or upper secondary education. These programmes are completed with the issuing of a vocational certificate, or a school-leaving report (Maturita), which is, naturally, the most desired by both learners as well as employers.

Alongside 2-year secondary-level educational programmes, secondary schools can also offer courses aimed at completing lower secondary education. In this way, the so-called linearity of education (when individual levels follow and function as a precondition of each other) is broken up. Certainly, this is a positive element, which increases the availability of higher education for people with a low level of completed education.

The insufficient flexibility of the school system might be one of the reasons why there is such low demand for completion of lower secondary education among people who lack it. Acquiring a vocational certificate is conditioned by completing lower secondary education. Such programmes are, however, rarely offered by primary schools, as they are financially unattractive. For this reason, a proposal by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic (*A proposal for conceptual solutions supporting the system of enhancing lower secondary education; Návrh krokov na koncepčné riešenie podpory mechanizmu doplnenia základného vzdelania*, 2017) seems prospective; it suggests as a precondition for completing secondary education by completing the first year of lower secondary vocational education (the first year of secondary vocational school in a 2-year F-type study programme). In practice, learners who have not yet completed lower secondary education would not have to do so while studying at secondary school; instead, on the successful completion of the first year of upper secondary education, they could take an exam in front of a commission in all general-education subjects (part of the curriculum for completing lower secondary education) and, in this way, also complete their lower secondary education. In essence, this combines the framework curriculum for lower secondary education with that of lower secondary vocational education in a modified way (an increased number of lessons in general-education subjects in the

framework curriculum of lower secondary vocational education). This proposal has, however, not yet been put to practice.

It is worth mentioning how the completion of lower secondary and secondary vocational education in adults is financed. Should an adult complete their lower secondary education at a secondary school, such a school then gains 10% of the average normative amount per one such student, compared to a primary school student (§ 4 Art. 13 *Regulations of Government of the Slovak Republic No. 630/2008 Coll.*). Should a learner take classes in a part-time form, the funding of such a student is 40% of the normative amount in comparison to a full-time student. The same principle applies if an adult is in the process of completing their lower secondary education. It is interesting that the normative amount for convicted prisoners who take part in full-time second chance education is 300% of the normative amount per student in the same full-time study programme (§ 4 Art. 4 *Regulations of Government of the Slovak Republic No. 630/2008 Coll.*).

5 On possibilities of acquiring lower secondary education

For those who, for various reasons, were not able to succeed in the early phases of training for their vocation, the present-day education system in Slovakia provides the following systemic opportunities to acquire the level of education/qualification:

- a) Advancing one's level of education in the school system – second chance education, in which adults study with the aim of increasing their level of education (from completing lower secondary education to acquiring a university degree);
- b) Taking and completing educational activities (accredited education) in the system of further education with the aim of acquiring a certificate of complete or partial qualification (*Act No. 568/2009 Coll. on Lifelong Learning, Zákon č. 568/2009 Z.z. o celoživotnom vzdelávaní*).
- c) Acquiring a certificate of qualification (partial or complete) on completing the process of testing specialised skills by the institution that was authorised to carry out exams testing said skills (according to § 15 *Act No. 568/2009 Coll. on Lifelong Learning, Zákon č. 568/2009 Z.z. o celoživotnom vzdelávaní*). The certificate of full qualification does not increase the level of education.

The above types of education enable one to achieve a level of education or professional qualification and, at the same time, an increased chance to succeed in the labour market. Kešelová, Grandtnerová and Urdziková (2016, p. 37) state the following three levels of second chance education in Slovakia:

- a) preparation to start education;
- b) achieving, or completing, lower secondary education (ISCED 2),
- c) achieving upper secondary vocational/full secondary (vocational or general) education (ISCED 3).

Nevertheless, Slovak education legislation does not include preparation to start education; this is carried out as preparatory education aimed at managing the basic literacy necessary to complete lower secondary education according to *Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on Employment Services* within education and preparation for the labour market. Thus, this is not a true systemic element of schooling but, rather, *ad hoc* education according to the present needs and possibilities following the ongoing project activities of employment offices.

The education system and the system of further education that follows it are always of normative character, as education is a paradigm of personal development and social advancement. In modern societies, education focused on competences, the risks of which are pointed out by Liesmann (2018), prevails. At present, education and its outcomes are strictly subjected to the requirements of the market, utilisation of the competences and anything that is not immediately applicable in the labour market is considered pointless. Even second chance education in the syllabus of which technical subjects dominate over those

¹ Subjects such as Music, Art and Physical Education.

subjects with educational focus directly proves the above claim. Supporting technical subjects at the expense of education-focused and general-education ones is a manifestation of strengthening focus on competence-oriented education for the needs of the labour market. The risks of such an approach can be seen in suppressing the general personal development of adults who should not be mere sums of competences and possibilities for their utilisation in the labour market. Education should be a way to develop one's personality as a whole towards a higher level of independence, capability of autonomous decision-making, i.e. general empowerment, as this is the only way for educated (rather than skilled) people to take their fate into their own hands. Without a more substantial philosophy of education (taking not only the economic motives of the learners but also their intellectual, social, civic, moral and aesthetic motives into consideration), those looking for a second chance will only get bare bones; merely a strictly functional education with no respect for the many other reasons why they came back to school. That is why such education is inappropriate for the development of democratic society (Rose 2012, pp. 185-186).

As was mentioned above, it is only possible to complete lower secondary education at those primary schools which offer such a course and, since 2012, this has also been possible at secondary vocational schools. Most people who attended second chance education in order to complete their lower secondary education took such courses at secondary vocational school. This is also stated by the *State school inspectorate (Štátna školská inšpekcia)* in its *Report on the state and level of the process and conditions of organising education to achieve lower secondary education (Správa o stave a úrovni procesu a podmienok organizovania vzdelávania na získanie nižšieho stredného vzdelania, 2018/2019)*, which claims that lower secondary education is predominantly completed at secondary vocational schools, even though, in comparison to primary schools, they are disadvantaged in the areas of personnel and, mainly, accessibility. In 2018, 870 people were in the process of completing their lower secondary education. Out of these, only 55 people completed a course in lower secondary education at primary schools, while 815 completed the course at secondary vocational schools. Most people completed their lower secondary education in the Košice and Prešov regions, which coincides with the highest concentration of people with unfinished lower secondary education.

Table 3: Numbers of schools and students involved in second chance education at primary and secondary schools in 2018/2019

district	primary schools		secondary schools	
	number of schools	number of students taking the course	number of schools	number of students taking the course
Bratislava	3	24	2	6
Trnava	-	-	6	115
Trenčín	2	4	2	10
Nitra	-	-	4	37
Zilina	1	7	4	40
Banská Bystrica	3	12	9	107
Prešov	1	2	10	212
Košice	2	3	9	288
Total - Slovak Republic	12	55	46	815

source: Vančíková, K., 2019. Otvorenosť a flexibilita druhošancového vzdelávania. In: Hall, R. et al., 2019. *Analýza zistení o stave školstva na Slovensku: To dá rozum*. Bratislava: MESA 10, p. 4. Available at: <https://analiza.todarozum.sk>

The authors, in the introduction of their publication *An analysis of findings regarding the state of the education system in Slovakia: Your brain should tell you (Analýza zistení o stave školstva na Slovensku: To dá rozum, 2019)*, which provides valuable findings regarding the state of second chance education in Slovakia, incorrectly, most likely for simplification reasons, labelled the course aimed at achieving lower secondary education as a 'second chance education' course. Although it is not a major issue, Slovak education legislation does not recognise such type of education and, for those well-informed,

the use of such a term causes confusion in the publication ('second chance education' is any education aimed at acquiring any level of education in adult age, not only completing lower secondary education).

According to the above quoted *Report on the state and level... (Správa o stave a úrovni..., 2018/2019)*, an interesting phenomenon occurred between 2012 and 2018. In the observed period, the Košice region (followed by the regions of Prešov and Banská Bystrica) saw the highest number of early school leavers completing their lower secondary education within second chance education. These were unsuccessful students who, after the compulsory number of years at school, had to leave before their completed lower secondary education; however, they were offered a second chance to acquire this level of education. That is why the inspection stated something that had been known for a very long time – that the education system is primarily oriented at compensating for unsuccessful education rather than prevention that would positively influence the success rate, especially, of those students coming from a socially disadvantaged environment. Courses aimed at completing lower secondary education also take place at allocated workplaces at secondary schools, which are founded in areas with the highest concentration of socially excluded communities. Hall et al. (2019) claim that the accessibility of courses aimed at lower secondary education is especially problematic in those areas where no allocated workplaces are founded at secondary schools. One can agree with the above statement based on the fact that primary schools try to avoid this agenda, mainly for financial reasons. On the other hand, it is necessary to point out that the allocated workplaces at secondary schools provide education that is closest to the excluded, however, at the same time, with a risk of even greater social exclusion, as Balážová (2015) points out. Those who completed such courses often find it hard to navigate through a greater environment, compared to their own. The authors of the present paper have encountered a young woman, a member of the marginalised Roma community, who, having completed such a course at an allocated workplace within secondary school, visited the district capital for the very first time at the age of 24. Her encounter of experiences from the 'big city' made her great fear obvious, she was worried she would get lost and never come back home.

6 On providing second chance in acquiring secondary vocational education

There were some drawbacks found in the process of education aimed at acquiring lower secondary education at secondary vocational schools. These raise doubts regarding the level achieved by those who completed it, since the same classes were provided to all the learners with varied levels. Apart from this, it became clear that secondary schools do not have sufficient personnel to provide qualified tuition across all subjects. The state school inspectorate expressed doubts regarding the quality of this type of education at secondary schools. That is why it is questionable how the proposal to offer a chance to complete lower secondary education in parallel with the first year of higher secondary education would work in practice (*A proposal for conceptual solutions.../Návrh krokov na koncepčné riešenie podpory..., 2017*). It is, therefore, necessary to add that secondary schools are also inclined to offer courses aimed at completing lower secondary education due to a chance of holding on to the learners for the courses aimed at the higher level of education. This is, undoubtedly, strong enough motivation in the competitive market, as a great number of secondary schools have to 'fight' for every single student and function in an environment defined by a strict normative framework of financing.

Currently, there is no concise information on second chance education at secondary schools aimed at acquiring vocational education (the present paper does not follow possible activities of secondary comprehensive schools). Although it is true that Hall et al. (2019) approached secondary schools by means of questionnaires, they were only interested in whether the addressed schools offer courses aimed at completing lower

secondary education. Kešelová, Grandtnerová and Urdziková (2016) only provide two examples from programmes aimed at acquiring vocational education at a secondary school. Such courses are often offered by those schools that provide full-time courses of the F-type, i.e. those that are completed in two years with a report of the final exam. These are schools and programmes that are often attended by students from a socially disadvantaged environment, especially those who left school earlier than the 9th year of study.

Table 4: Examples of secondary schools offering lower secondary vocational education (F-type study programmes)

school	study programmes
SVS* for the hearing impaired, Bratislava	machine operating, agriculture
SV Polytechnic, Dolný Kubín – Kňažia	machine operating, clothes making
Private SVS, Dolný Kubín	building trades
Secondary Technical School of Agriculture and Food Industry, Kežmarok	home economics, food industry
Ján Bocatio SVS, Košice	home economics
SVS of Agriculture and Rural Services, Košice	home economics, food industry, agriculture
SVS, Kráľovský Chlmec	building trades, clothes making
SVS of Engineering, Kysucké N. Mesto	agriculture
Majster Pavol SVS, Levoča	agriculture, car mechanics, building trades
SV Polytechnic, Liptovský Mikuláš	agriculture, food industry
Combined School, Martin	wood work, machine operating, car mechanics
SVS, Moldava n. Bodvou	building trades, home economics, clothes making
SVS, Nitra	building trades
SVS of Commerce, Nová Baňa	building trades, agriculture, clothes making
SVS, Nové Mesto n. Váhom	machine operating, agriculture, metal work
SVS Jána Antonína Baťu, Partizánske	shoe making, leather work
Secondary Technical Vocational School, Piešťany	machine operating, building trades
Combined School, Poltár	agriculture, forestry, food industry, glass production
SVS, Prakovce	home economics, forestry
SVS technická, Prešov	building trades
SVS, Pribeň	food industry, agriculture
SVS, Prievidza	building trades
SVS of Agriculture, Food Industry and Technology, Rimavská Sobota	agriculture, home economics, car mechanics
Combined school, Sečovce	machine operating, clothes making, home economics
SVS, Senica	home economics, building trades
SVS, Stará Ľubovňa	forestry, building trades, home economics
SVS, Strážske	home economics, building trades

source: own findings; *SVS – Secondary Vocational School

Self-governing regions, as founders of secondary schools, do not keep data on schools providing courses aimed at adults lacking vocational education. Such an agenda is, for instance, according to the head of the Department of School Education of a self-governing region, completely in the hands of school headmasters. Secondary vocational schools definitely have potential (technical, personnel, and material) to provide education to those adults who did not succeed in the past or never started vocational training. Some schools identified such a possibility, mainly in those regions with a high concentration of people lacking vocational education (several districts in the regions of Prešov, Košice and Banská Bystrica). In general, secondary schools are not active enough in seeking and recruiting adult students. It could be assumed that, due to demographic changes (aging population) and a negative trend in the increase of early school leavers, secondary schools will also focus on the target group of adults lacking vocational education. For the time being, this area has not been sufficiently elaborated by secondary school founders, neither is second chance education enforced as an independent agenda in the regional strategic documents on the development of education.

To find out the number of secondary school offering second chance education (ISCED 2C, 3A, 3C) and the study programmes on offer, one could follow the statistics provided by the Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information. In their statistics, the part-time form of education at secondary schools is recorded independently from other forms. The authors of the present paper were primarily interested in the data regarding people who had completed upper secondary education, secondary education, and F-type programmes with specially adjusted curricula (regardless their founder). In the academic year 2018/2019, 1,376 students completed secondary education in the part-time form, i.e. achieved upper secondary vocational, or secondary vocational, or lower secondary vocational education. Most of them completed upper secondary education (962), while the fewest completed education with adjusted curricula (60). It is interesting that the highest proportion of

women could be found in the group of those who completed an F-type programme where women made up 83.3%. Such type of education is only offered by state schools. At present (data from September 15th, 2019), the above types of education in the part-time form is attended by 3,652 students (*Statistical almanac – secondary vocational schools; Štatistická ročenka – stredné odborné školy*, 2019). It must, however, be noted that there is no way of finding out from the statistics whether the adult participants also study full-time and, also, what time elapsed since the students who enter second chance education last attended continuous education (i.e. these might, for example, be students who started attending secondary school a year after they completed lower secondary education).

7 Conclusion

In Slovakia, courses aimed at acquiring upper secondary vocational education, secondary vocational education, or lower secondary vocational education are offered in the network of secondary vocational schools which can, at the same time, offer those interested a chance to complete their lower secondary education. The process of education is fully subjected to education legislation; however, in the case of adults who aspire to a higher level of education, key roles are also played by other factors exceeding school practice (unemployment, family factors, coordinating work and study duties, individual study competences, etc.). The study strived to provide an overview of legislative and institutional background of second chance education. Based on desk research into available documents, it could be stated that the current state is not satisfactory with regard to accessibility and achievement of education standards. The authors of the paper feel it is necessary to change the approach of secondary and primary school founders towards the adult population lacking education and a low level of skills who are still the most problematic and numerous clientele of employment agencies. At the same time, they are, in the current setting of acquiring skills, primarily reliant on the offer of courses provided by private educational institutions in the system of further adult education. It is true this set-up enables one to acquire a vocational qualification (for the unemployed also provided free of charge by means of the Repas programme) but it is unable to equip socially excluded people with no, or low level of, education with such personal characteristics that would not only be connected to succeeding in the labour market, but would also allow for general personality development, also in the moral, civic, aesthetic, and social dimension. Short-term retraining, motivational courses and training are a necessary supplement to education; they, however, do not solve the existential problems of socially excluded groups in an effective way not only with regard to their succeeding in the labour market but also in their empowerment for a better future social life.

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