National report on the pilot tracking of secondary vocational school graduates in Slovakia

2024

Published: January 2025

Cooperation on the document: Ľuba Habodászová, Ľubica Gállová, Tatiana Pončáková, David Martinák, Juraj Vantuch, Barbora Halásová

The report was produced as an output of the national project Introduction of quality management in VET and adult education co-financed by the European Union under the Slovakia Programme.

Introduction

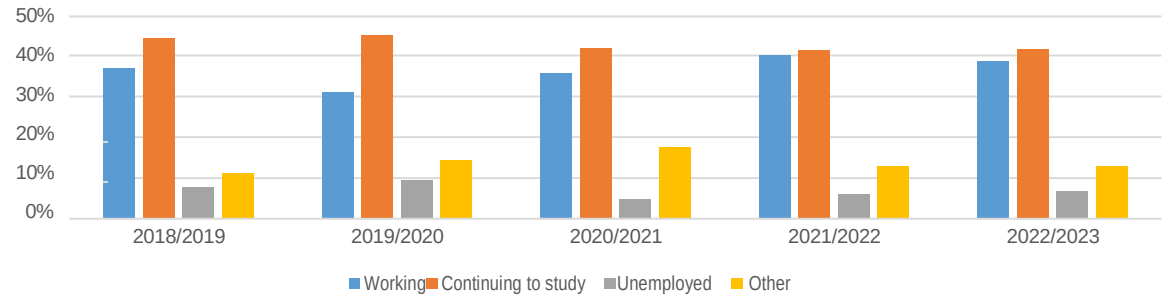
Different graduate tracking tools are used to obtain information on the further career and educational paths of graduates of each level of education. The National Survey of Secondary School Graduates serves to supplement the information currently obtained from administrative data available through state information systems. Although the survey data are not representative, they are a first probe into the views of graduates on the skills they have acquired and their experience of studying in vocational secondary schools. The national survey is also an important intermediate step towards motivating secondary vocational schools to obtain their own feedback from graduates to improve the educational processes in their schools. Respondents to the pilot national survey generally report a positive experience of their studies, but the scope for improvement appears to be in the enhancement of skills for their future employment. Conducting pilot activities during the national project and evaluating them will allow decisions to be made regarding the future operation and shape of the graduate trajectory.

Background

Slovakia has an unusually high proportion of secondary school students in vocational secondary education. With a share of pupils in secondary vocational schools (SVS) of 68%, Slovakia is well above the EU average of 49%[1]. The main feature of this educational stream is the emphasis on specific skills and the share of practical learning, which depends on further differentiation of the different streams of this type of education. A separate category is lower secondary vocational education (F courses), which until recently did not allow progression to higher education[2]. Post-secondary education, higher vocational education and conservatories have a special status.

More than a third of the graduates of secondary schools continue their studies similarly to their peers from grammar schools. According to the available data for the period under review, an average of 37% of graduates enter the labour market after graduating from secondary school each year and 43% continue their studies *(Figure 1)*[3]. Secondary vocational education has historically been expected to lead to graduates entering the labour market after completing this level of education, but this function of secondary education is currently only partially fulfilled due to the high proportion of graduates continuing their studies. At the same time, the high share of secondary vocational education with specific skills highlights the problem of trade mismatches in a dynamic labour market.

Chart 1: Labour market position of secondary vocational school graduates 12 months after graduation[4]



Source.

[1] Eurostat, (educ_uoe_enra13)

[2] Technically, even before the reform measure in the Recovery and Resilience Plan was legislated (Reform 4 in the Access, Development and Quality of Inclusive Education Component), these graduates were able to apply to secondary vocational school if they had completed the equivalent of primary school in the form of secondary education during their lower secondary vocational education. The reform in this area has also opened up other opportunities to complement lower secondary education. In practice, these are disadvantaged groups who face barriers to education and entry into the labour market.

[3] Data from the Graduate Placement portal, which was created by linking administrative data by the analytical units of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth.

[4] The category "other" represents persons who are not in the monitored categories. This includes, for example, the voluntarily unemployed, but also, for example, members of the armed who cannot be identified in the available data.

The question of what specific role secondary vocational education should play is not answered. The above context is important for reviving the debate on the specific societal order to be fulfilled by VET in secondary education. This is not only to clarify the role of VET in relation to current and future labour market requirements, but also as one of the building blocks of lifelong learning and skills building in the context of ongoing challenges (e.g. an ageing population or growing labour shortages). Curriculum reform in primary schools is currently under way, reflecting to a large extent the societal call for a change in the content and form of teaching. In secondary education, the debate focuses mainly on the lack of capacity in the general education stream (grammar schools) compared to demand. A reform that would reflect the high share of secondary school graduates in further studies and the often discussed (and also difficult to measure) disciplinary mismatch is not the subject of a wider professional debate[5]. The new law on adult education[6] partially reflects the role of SVS in this field of education.

Even without systemic changes, there is room for action to improve the quality of the vocational education provided. The State Institute of Vocational Education is currently piloting the introduction of quality assurance measures in selected VET schools7 as part of a national project. Specific objectives of the project include in particular the systematic introduction of peer review and the use of alumni tracking to improve the quality of secondary vocational schools. Thematically, the project thus fits in with the general trend of emphasising self-evaluation and internal reflection for quality assurance of institutions, similar to the introduction of internal quality assurance systems in the context of university accreditation. This is thus an of 'bottom-up' reform, where measures are defined and implemented by the education providers themselves. Successful implementation can thus increase the attractiveness of vocational education as an equivalent educational pathway and partially reduce the pressure on the general education stream. However, it is still the case that despite the potentially positive impact of the project activities on the quality of vocational provision, these activities cannot be considered as necessary systemic changes that need to be set up centrally and coordinated at system level. For example, optimization of the school network, simplification of the branch system and adjustment of the national curricula by assessing the share of general skills.

The handling of information on graduate employability, including feedback on educational attainment, is part of education systems in different countries. In various forms, the tracking of graduates takes place at the level of systems, but often mainly at the level of educational institutions, especially higher education institutions. Taking into account the views of former pupils and students when setting educational policies or programmes is considered to be one element of quality assurance. In the Slovak context, graduate tracking is part of the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning and Guidance 2030 (hereinafter referred to as the National Strategy)[8] in section *"Establishing a comprehensive graduate tracking system"*, which includes a number of measures, including the implementation of a questionnaire survey of secondary school graduates.

Graduate tracking is useful for multiple stakeholders. The state is able to incorporate the results of the feedback into planning and adjustments of education policy based on real data[9]; school founders get a picture of the effectiveness of the performance of schools in their jurisdiction. Furthermore, there is scope for employers to receive information on the implementation of the practical part of work-based learning and the use of skills acquired during studies in the labour market. Last but not least, the involvement and participation of students and graduates in influencing the quality of the vocational education provided will increase.

---

[5] Possible future policy developments in secondary vocational education are indicated by the interim report of the Review of Primary Expenditure and Secondary School by the OHP and the IVP. In particular, the issue of the share of general education subjects that strengthen the transferability of skills acquired for graduates' future employment and the simplification of the vocational system, together with the potential optimisation of the network of secondary vocational schools. Concrete proposals for measures will be formulated in the final report, which is expected in the first half of 2025.

[6] 292/2024 Z.z.

[7] National project "Introduction of quality management in vocational education and training and adult education"

[8] National Strategy for Lifelong Learning and Guidance 2021-2030, Area 1.9 Establishing a comprehensive graduate tracking system.

[9] Of course, this is only possible if the data collected is representative.

Building expertise for graduate tracking requires multiple pilots, or project iterations, and continuous troubleshooting of implementation pitfalls. In Slovakia, we have experience with graduate tracking in European pilot project Eurograduate, which ran between February 2022 and January 2024 in 18 countries10, including Slovakia. As in other countries, the biggest pitfall for further use of the collected data is the extremely low return rate of questionnaires, which will have to be addressed in the future. In addition to this project, similar tools to those used in the tracking are being used for the purpose of collecting and evaluating data for performance contracts in the context of public HE funding[11]. These include central data collection for key indicators following the same methodology (e.g. drop-out rates) and satisfaction questionnaire surveys. Although the focus is of course not on graduates but on current students, the experience with these tools encourages further use of existing databases and the development of methodologies for questionnaire surveys[12], the elimination of gaps and the sharing of good practice between different parts of government.

In the future, it would be advisable to consider legislative adjustments to further support and scale up project activities in the event of successful piloting. Existing school legislation supports self-evaluation processes, implementation in practice is lame. For example, the report on educational activities does not fulfil the function of internal reflection of the organisation to ensure continuous improvement. Internal evaluation of schools is also referred to in the methodological materials of the State School Inspectorate[13]. However, in order to systematically build a quality culture in the schools themselves, new elements will need to be explicitly introduced in the legislation, in particular the introduction of an obligation for secondary schools to implement an internal quality assurance system, the creation of a position for a quality coordinator at the level of the self-governing region as the founder, and also the linking internal self-assessment with the existing external quality assessment and control by the State School Inspectorate. Clarification of the necessary legislative adjustments will be possible after the evaluation of the activities of the ongoing project.

Box: Recommendations of the Graduate Tracing Council

The basic principles of graduate tracking within European Union were formulated in the Council Recommendation of 20 November 2017[14]. EU Member States are recommended to: *'improve the availability and quality of data on the activities of graduates and, where appropriate, non-completers of higher education and vocational education and training, including making progress by 2020 on the establishment of graduate tracking systems, which may include:*

*a) Collection of relevant **anonymised administrative statistics** from education, tax, population and social databases;*
*b) the development of **longitudinal surveys on graduates at the level of the education system** and, where appropriate, at the institutional level, taking into account the importance of qualitative data on people's transition into the labour market or into further education and training and on their subsequent careers; and*
*c) the possibility of public institutions **to link anonymised data from different sources** to create a comprehensive picture of graduate outcomes".*

It is further recommended to collect data in the following areas:

1. Socio-demographic and socio-economic information
2. Information on education and training
3. Information about employment or further education and training
4. Relevance of education and training for employment or lifelong learning
5. Career progression.

The setup of a tracking system depends on the specific interest and priorities of policy makers. However, the implementation must have a clearly defined goal and purpose for the use of the data. The Council's recommendation includes the following headings for the use of the information obtained from tracking:

[10] Eurograduate in Slovakia was implemented by CVTI SR. Information about the survey is published on the CVTI SR website (Application of university graduates on the labour market).
[11] University performance
[12] Methodology of collection for the survey of satisfaction of students in HEIs (Prof. Mgr. Martin Kanovský, PhD).
[13] https://www.ssi.sk/metodicke-materialy-pre-skoly/
[14] Recommendation of the 2017 Graduate Tracing Council

1. "Strengthening **career guidance** for prospective students, current students and graduates"
2. 'Support for the **design and updating of curricula** to improve the acquisition of relevant skills and employability"
3. "Improving **skills matching** to foster competitiveness and innovation at local, regional and national level and to address skills shortages"
4. "Contributing to **policy-making at national and Union level**"

Tracking graduates in Slovakia

The implementation of graduate tracking in Slovakia is framed in three pillars, which complement each other. The measure in the National Strategy defined the three pillars of tracking:

- Data collection through administrative data linkage, (i.e. analysis of data from different information systems of public authorities),
- centralised data collection using a standardised national questionnaire for graduates,
- individualised school questionnaires carried out by the schools themselves.

Although these levels of tracking can be implemented independently, the usefulness lies in the complementarity of the information obtained. Thus, they do not represent a list from which the most preferred tool can be selected.

The first pillar of the route has already been successfully implemented for several years. Utilizing administrative data from the 2018/2019 school year, the implementation of the first pillar of tracing for high school and college graduates is already underway. The linked administrative data obtained from the information systems of the state administration bodies provide information regarding the labour market employment of graduates after the year of graduation and wages for workers at the level of educational levels, fields of study, schools, regions and municipalities. They also provide information on the form of work (employment, self-employment, contract work and work abroad), average and median wages for the employed in Slovakia. The current version of the first pillar is developed in cooperation between the Institute of Educational Policy of the Ministry of Education and the Institute of Social Policy (ISP) of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, on whose website it is also accessible[15].

Administrative data is objectively the most appropriate data source, but it also has limitations. Administrative data processing has several advantages. It is population data that can be clearly interpreted on the of clear criteria of the registers concerned. Furthermore, the cooperation of respondents is not required, no additional data collection takes place and sensitive data processed in this way are protected by current legislation. However, the absence of 'soft' data, such as opinions on the education provided, factors influencing decision-making and graduates' overall satisfaction with their career and educational paths, remains a drawback. The first pillar is mainly used to complement information on school choice for pupils and parents, providing information for head teachers on the employability of graduates from their schools, as well as for the schools themselves. Its usefulness for the purpose of improving the education provided in schools is less clear. For this reason, the Ministry of Education, on the basis of the measures of the National Strategy, has proceeded to complement the first pillar of tracking with two additional pillars through the above-mentioned national project "*Introduction of quality management in VET and adult education "*[16].

The second pillar of graduate tracking is the collection of qualitative data through national surveys. This is a standardised questionnaire collection targeting all graduates. The aim is to obtain information on graduates' views on the training provided and employability over a period of about 15 months after graduation

[15] The Graduate destination portal from analytical units of the IVP and ISP is a newer version of the previous portal Uplatnenie.sk, also implemented under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Slovak Republic. The new version of the portal is based on the following administrative registers (information from the portal): the basic source of data is the Departmental Information System of the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic, which has been supplemented with data on insurance relations registered by the Social Insurance Institution, data on job seekers registered by the Labour, Social Affairs and Family Office, data on health insurance registered by the Health Care Supervision Office and data from the Register of Legal Entities, Entrepreneurs and Public Authorities administered by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

[16] Ongoing project activities are published on okvalite.sk

The purpose of the information gathered is to help inform the ability of the system as a whole to produce graduates with sufficient relevant skills not only for the current labour market, but also for ongoing and future changes, be they technological, digital, green, and societal. However, the focus remains on the matching of skills to current labour market needs, which is difficult to quantify from administrative data. This thematic focus is also due to the fact that the second pillar implemented the national project is exclusively related to SVS.

The third pillar of tracking is done through individualized school questionnaires. The reason for adding an additional level of tracking is to allow schools to tailor the questionnaires to their own needs, such as feedback on, for example, specific skills in the school curriculum and their evaluation, as well as a higher level of detail for the areas examined in the second pillar. School-based questionnaires have the advantage of specification of questions that is not possible at national level (e.g. feedback on specific disciplines or even individual subjects). Again, as we are piloting the third pillar in Slovakia in a national project designed for secondary schools, the emphasis is on identifying the employability of graduates in the field, which will potentially allow schools to optimise their vocational education offer. The support from ŠIOV consists of popularising the usefulness of the feedback for schools, assisting in the development of school questionnaires, processing, but also in promoting the building of relationships between schools and their former pupils as wider and stable communities in the form of so-called alumni clubs.

Survey results

In the autumn of the school year 2024/2025, ŠIOV conducted the first pilot survey of SVS graduates, i.e. the second pillar of graduate tracking. The results of this survey serve as a starting point for further discussion - it is not representative data which would allow to formulate measures at this stage. The survey collection carried out was significantly affected by incomplete or unsystematically maintained databases of alumni contacts at the schools (see more in the Box on survey methodology), which affected the final number of questionnaires after the collection was completed, namely 1,767 questionnaires. The largest cohort included graduates from the school year 2022/2023, followed by the cohort of the most recent graduates from 2023/2024 (Figure 2). The vast majority of respondents live in the country; a positive feature of the collection is the capture of graduates living abroad (Figure 3).

Chart 2: Graduate cohorts by year of graduation

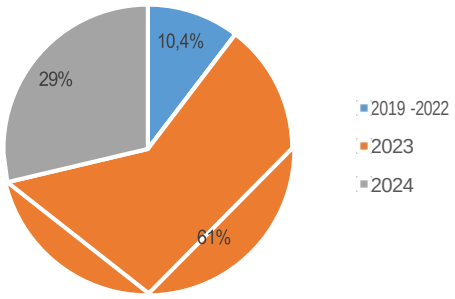
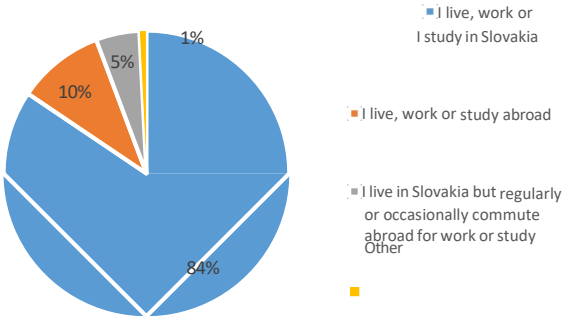


Chart 3: Graduates by place of residence



The questionnaire survey covered all regions, with the most represented category of respondents being graduates with a high school diploma without a certificate of education *(Figure 4)*. 98% of respondents were full-time students. The proportion of respondents in state secondary schools was 90%. Most respondents were from the Žilina region, which we attribute to the Žilina self-government region's own activities preceding the national data collection *(Figure 5).*[17] Respondents were asked to state their field of study; if they did not know the exact wording, they could give an approximate name. Subsequent aggregation of responses into fields of study or groups of field of study showed the largest representation of respondents from business academies, medical fields, electrical and mechanical engineering *(Figure 6).* In the chart, we report only the majors or groups of majors that were represented by at least 50 respondents.

[17] Compared to CVTI data on graduates for the school year 2022/2023, the Košice and Prešov regions can be considered underestimated. Up to 94% of respondents in the survey have a full secondary vocational education (with a high school diploma), while according to CVTI data this group represents 66% of SVS graduates. Note that the data presented do not represent a single cohort. Thus, comparison with the population is only indicative.

Chart 4: Graduates by level of education

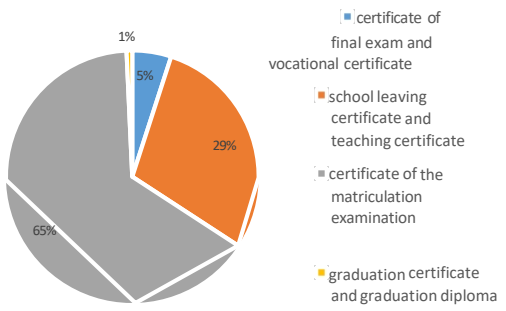


Chart 5: Percentage of graduates by region

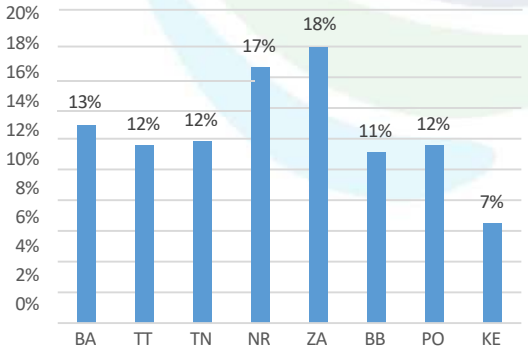
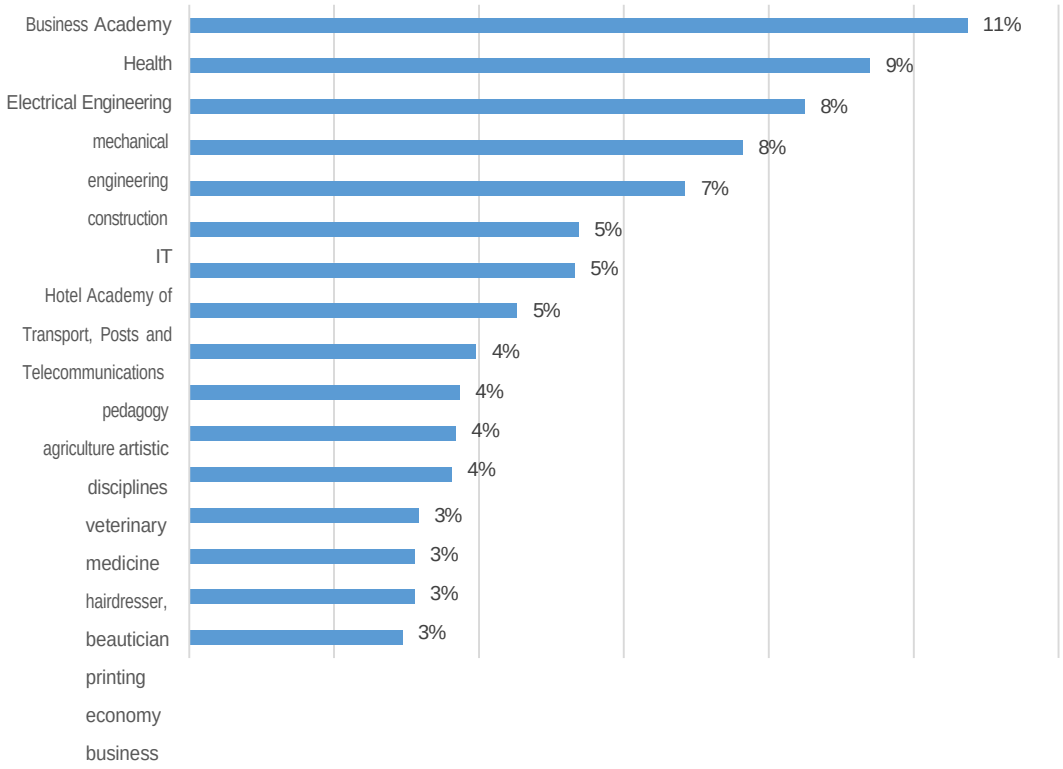


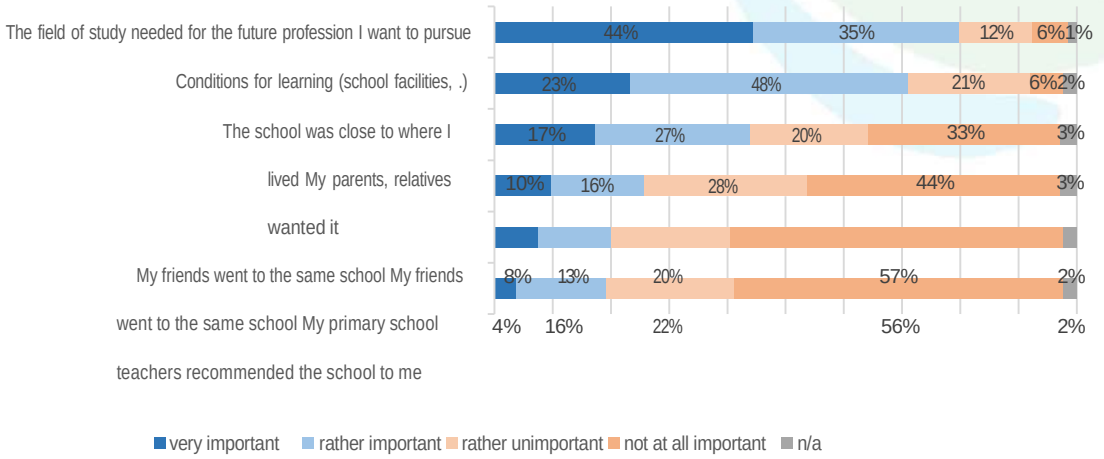
Chart 6: Representation of unions or groups of unions



Note: only fields or groups of fields with at least 50 respondents are listed

According to the respondents, the two most important factors for choosing a secondary school are the field of study and the conditions for learning, and the third factor is the proximity of the school to their place of residence *(Figure 7)*. The first group of questions focused on the secondary school attended. In the case of transfers or continuation at another secondary school for a higher level of education, respondents were instructed to refer to the last school attended. A relatively underrepresented factor is the influence of teachers at the primary school. Reasons unrelated to intrinsic motivation for a particular study were captured by the response options "my friends went to the same school" and "my parents/relatives wished to do so", the proportion of respondents for whom these were significant factors was relatively low.

Chart 7: Importance of factors for the choice of secondary school



In general, respondents declare relatively high levels of satisfaction with secondary school *(Figure 8)*. Respondents rated their high school experience on three questions. The first one was oriented towards the assessment of particular aspects, the other two questions were directed towards the opinion for repeated choice of the same field or school. The answers to the repeated choice question correspond to this. About 70% of the respondents would choose the same field or the same school *(Figure 9)*.

Chart 8: Satisfaction with the experience at SVS

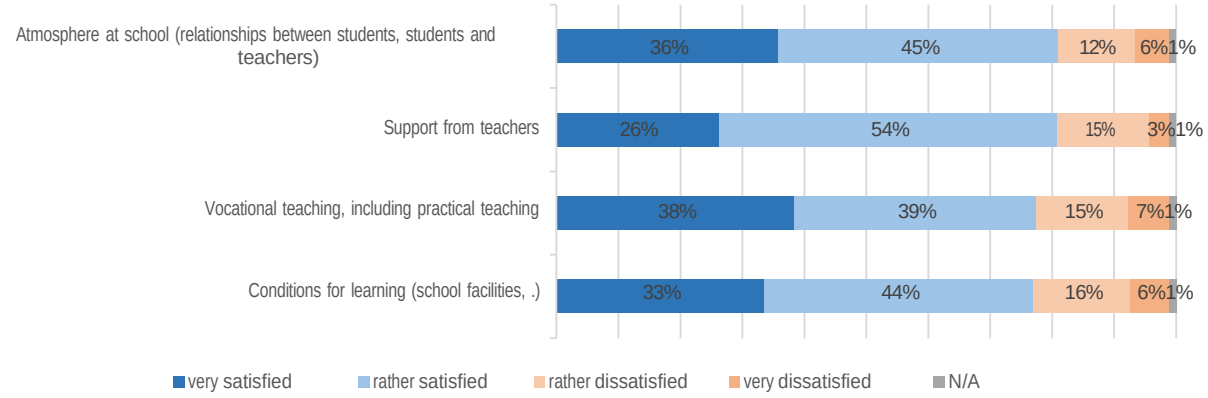
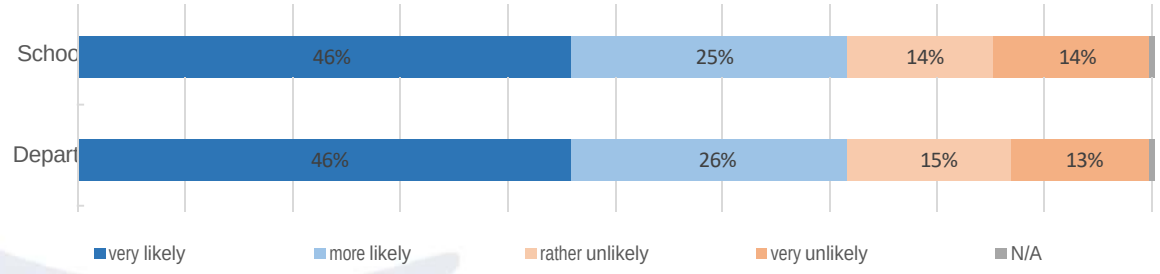


Chart 9: If you can choose , how likely is it that you would choose the same school or major?



Ratings of the level of knowledge and skills acquired were largely positive, with up to 80% of respondents being very or somewhat satisfied *(Figure 10)*. The most significant reasons for dissatisfaction were unsatisfactory teaching methods and poor motivation on the part of teachers *(Figure 11)*. In open-ended question about giving other reasons for dissatisfaction, reservations related to the lack or relevance of practical training, poor motivation of the teachers themselves, the impact of the pandemic, and also poor preparedness for study were frequently raised.

Chart 10: Satisfaction Satisfaction with Achievement Satisfaction with the level of knowledge and skills acquired at the secondary school

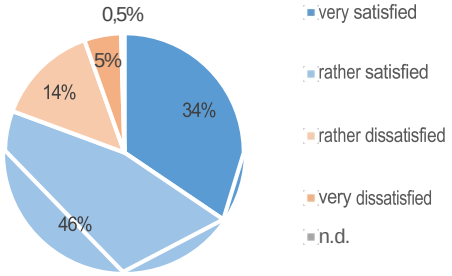
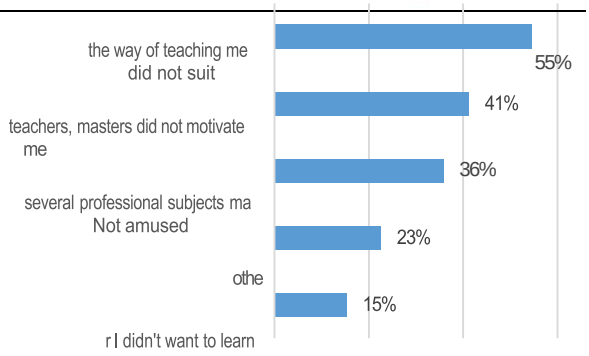


Chart 11: Reasons for dissatisfaction



From respondents' answers - reasons for dissatisfaction (other):

"Curricula and syllabuses are not in line with practice, many are outdated and have not been used in practice for a long time."

"A number of subjects were not related to the union and the ones that were there I didn't learn much."

"It absolutely did not prepare me for my future profession, almost every position required a college degree or an advantage would was practice."

"The curriculum that was covered was not at all necessary for me in practice, and it was insufficient for college."

"Some teachers were not interested in teaching us the subject at all".

"We hardly cooked anything in the cookery department, so I didn't get any experience."

"Instead of teaching practical lessons, they used us as cheap ."

"Vocational training in terms of practice, in which I should be taught to move and work, has failed miserably in its craft, the masters outdated and bitter, unwilling to teach and teach the pupils new things, the tools unusable. (yes we had one classroom at the school where everything was new and where you could teach and learn something, but it was forbidden to enter, it only used when there was an inspection at the school :D)."

Roughly half of working respondents said they felt sufficiently well prepared for the labour market. Respondents answered questions about their views on the applicability of acquired knowledge and skills in the market. All cohorts of respondents were retained in the analysis, also because the questions included in the questionnaire are not time sensitive (e.g., length of time spent looking for a job). We consider as working graduates those respondents who indicated that they work in different forms, employment, entrepreneurship, work, working and studying at the same time, and working in a family business. The proportion of working respondents was 51% *(Figure 12)*. Of these, 52% said that their school had adequately prepared them for their current role in the labour market *(Figure 13)*. Of the respondents who selected the "other" option, almost all reported that they were not working in the field they had graduated from.

Chart 12: Labour market status

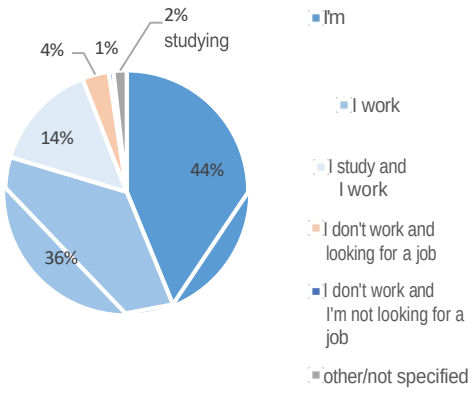
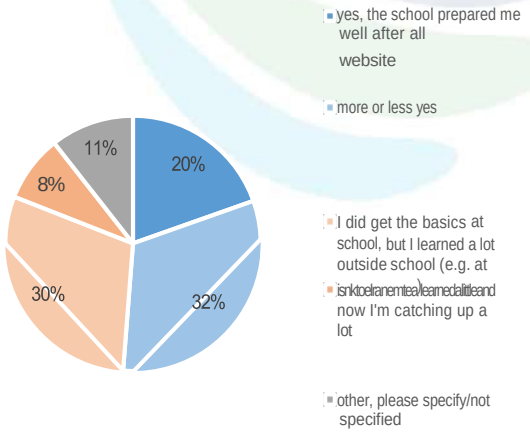


Chart 13: "Do you think school prepared you well for current job?"



The field of study was important in finding a job or starting a business for 47% of working respondents and a further 27% said that the field was important to a lesser extent *(Figure 14)*. A question that sought to identify union mismatch by assessing the importance of the field to the respondent's current job indicated 58% of working respondents were working in the field or a related field *(Figure 15)*.

Chart 14: "To what extent did your degree help you find a job or start a business?"

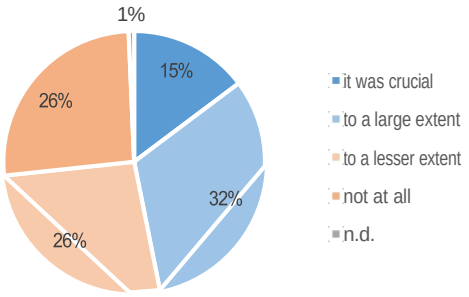
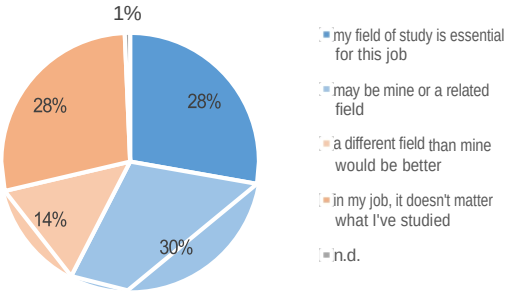
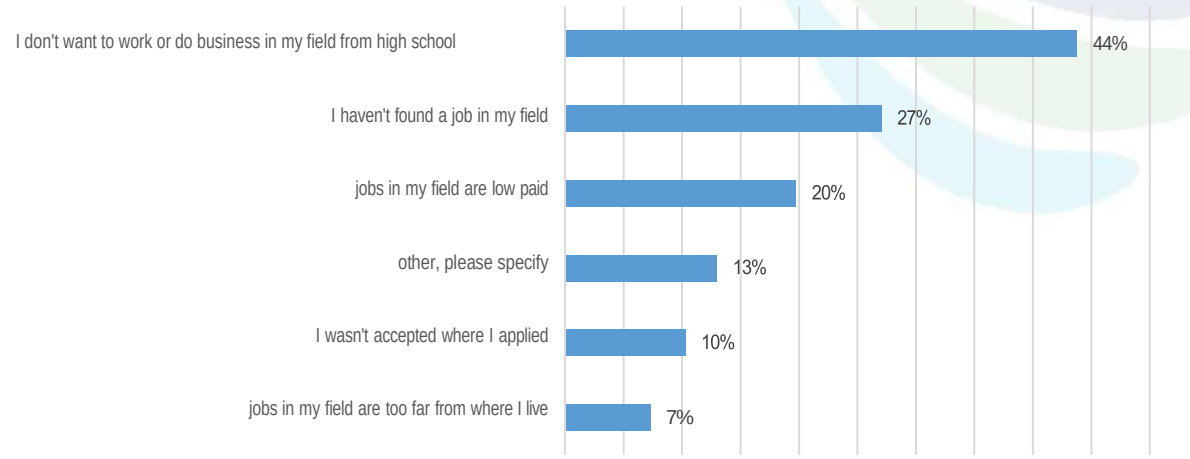


Chart 15: "How important is the field you studied to your current job?"



The trade union mismatch of the working respondents was mainly due to lack of interest in working in the union. Respondents who report that another field would be better for their current job or that it is not important for their job what field they majored in are considered to be working outside of their graduate field. The most common reason for working outside their field was a reluctance to work or do business in their graduate field, with 43% of respondents working outside their field not wanting to work in their field *(Figure 16).* Linking this to responses about the importance of the major in choosing a high school, it was found that nearly half of these respondents (46%) cited the major as a very or somewhat important factor in choosing a high school. Other frequently cited reasons for working outside the field were not finding a job in their field and low-paying jobs in the field they majored in. Among the responses in the category
'Other' respondents more or less emphasised the reasons already given, or reflected on their flexibility to work in another
in the field or in addition to studies.

Chart 16: "Why aren't you doing work in your field?" (only those who work outside the field)



From the respondents' answers - reasons for working outside the union:

"I wasn't looking for anything to do with the field I was majoring in. A job offer came to me, regardless of my education, and I took it."

"My job is more time-manageable."

"I was expecting something different from the school and found out it wasn't for me, then Covid came along and I couldn't change schools, so I just finished it."

"I went abroad to try something new and different."

"I started my business in high school and it fulfills me more than working in the field."

"Even though I'm partly doing a job where some of the skills from the field are while I'm studying, I've found myself doing other ."

"At the moment I don't have the knowledge to work in the construction , but I would like to change that later."

Those working in the field consider the skills acquired during their studies to be useful but insufficient. The issue of skills matching is not only related to union matching but also to the matching of specific skills of graduates in union matching. From the responses of respondents working in their field (based on the question in Chart 15), 40% of respondents report that their job requires more than what they learned during their studies *(Chart 17).* On the other hand, the knowledge and skills during school appear to be useful for almost 80% of respondents working in their field *(Chart 18).* In other words, it does appear to be a mismatch the content of education and the requirements of the labour market, but rather an insufficient amount of vocational provided. Again, school questionnaires with questions for specific skills in particular fields can provide more information. On the other hand, the education system cannot be expected to fully prepare graduates for all the skills currently needed, especially in sectors with dynamic technological change. Employers' co-responsibility for the development of specific vocational skills be reflected in particular in dual education and practical training in companies, and school questionnaires will allow these aspects to be explored more.

Chart 17: "Compare the requirements of your job with what you learned in school in your field" (only for those working in the field)

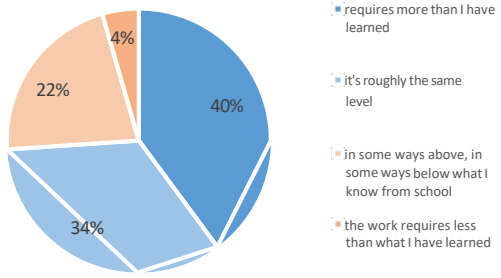
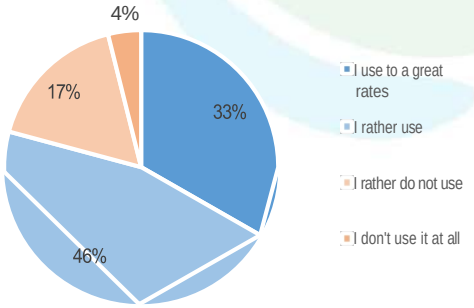
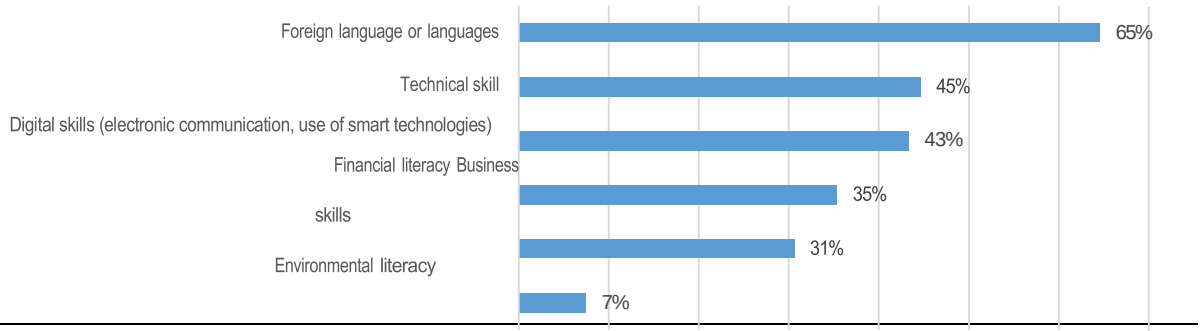


Chart 18: "To what extent do you use what you learned in school in your field of study at work?"



Of the transferable skills, foreign languages appear to be the most covered, according to respondents. The first question was about hard transferable skills[18]. Almost two thirds of respondents said that they had learned a foreign language or languages during their studies *(Figure 19).* The next most commonly reported skills were technical skills, digital skills, and financial literacy. Environmental literacy was the least represented skill.

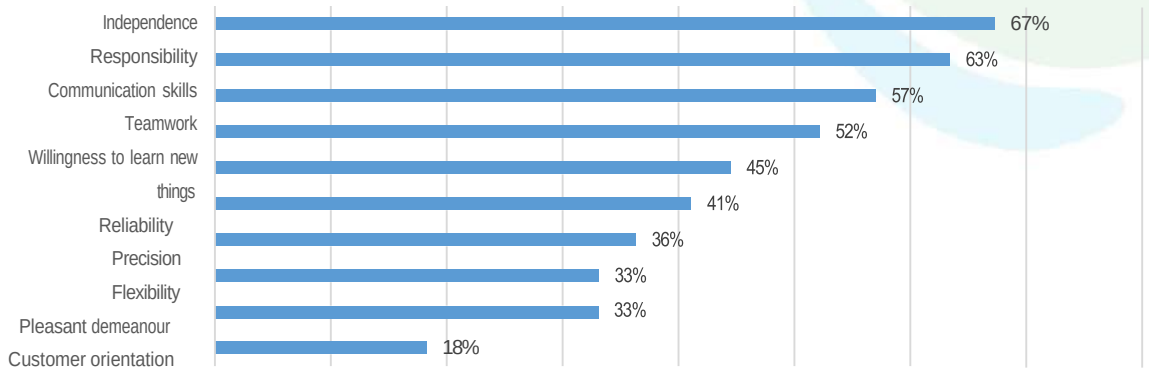
Figure 19: Percentage of respondents who felt that the hard skills listed above were part of the school curriculum



Soft skills are dominated by independence, responsibility and communication skills *(Figure 20).* The list of soft skills was created based on the most frequently occurring employer requirements in advertisements listed on Profesia.sk for positions requiring secondary education and suitable for graduates[19] Respondents gave their subjective assessment of the opportunity to learn or develop these skills during their studies. The most frequently mentioned soft skills were independence, responsibility and communication skills.

[18] For the selection of hard skills options we were motivated by the study "Skills for the future of a competitive labour market in Slovakia" of 2023, implemented by the Republic Union of Employers.
[19] Information provided by the operator of the portal Alma Career Slovakia.

Figure 20: Percentage of respondents who felt that the soft skills listed were part of their studies or were possible to develop during your studies



Graduates demand more financial literacy and practice. Finally, all respondents were asked to self-report a skill or skills that they felt the school should teach or promote more. 47% of respondents answered this option. Although the question was directed at naming specific skills, respondents interpreted this option to express broader feedback in relation to their experience. To summarise the responses received, we report the occurrence of the words in the verbal formulations, supplemented by selected responses (Figure 21). Respondents most frequently requested financial literacy and more practice and practical skills. Also resonating is a greater need for soft skills such as communication and 'life' skills.

Figure 21: Occurrence of words in statements to the question: "Now that you're out of school, what skills do you think school should teach or support more?"

From the respondents' answers:

"To be more interested in the students, in their aspirations, more workshops, more interest in the individuals." "How to solve problems and how to ask for help without the teacher making you feel stupid."

"More focus on entrepreneurship and improving the individual to create their own business (Not teaching to do for 'someone') Teaching: doing over someone, leadership."

"The school should pay more attention to practice and link it with theory. Teachers in vocational subjects should not be changed so often."

"Something to make us familiar with how the institutions work, so we know how to use them, ."

"Conflict resolution, working with emotions." "Relationships with other people and especially with myself."

"It should bring its teaching system more in line with the interests of young people and develop their talents." "Support students in what they are good at rather than what they need to know."

"Bring something modern into the study, not just outdated forms."

"How it works in life, what are real obstacles." "Difficult situations that can happen to anyone."

Almost a third of the respondents who completed dual training were employed in the enterprise where they did their practical training. Thematic modules can be added to the national survey and may vary depending on the areas of interest of public policy makers or other stakeholders. In the pilot survey, we have added a section for graduates of dual training in this way. Out of a total of 1,767 respondents, 243 reported that they had a contract in the dual training system (SDV). Of these, 238 responses could be used for a graph showing the relationship between SDV, a future contract and subsequent employment in the enterprise or employer where the respondent did his/her practical training. The data shows that 31% of respondents were employed by the business or employer where they did their apprenticeship, while 25% had a future contract agreement (percentages are out of the total numbers) *(Figure 22)*. The predominant reason for not being employed by a business was to continue their studies *(Chart 23)*.

Chart 22: Respondents in the dual training system

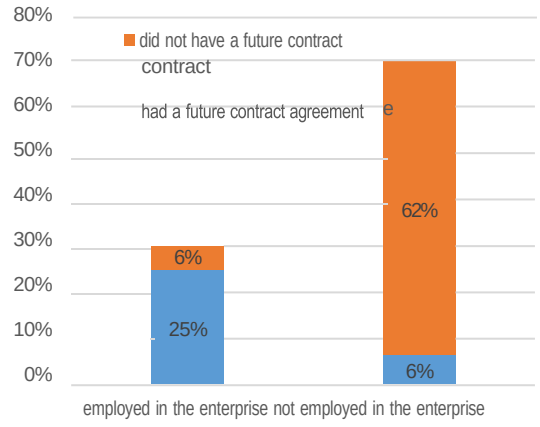
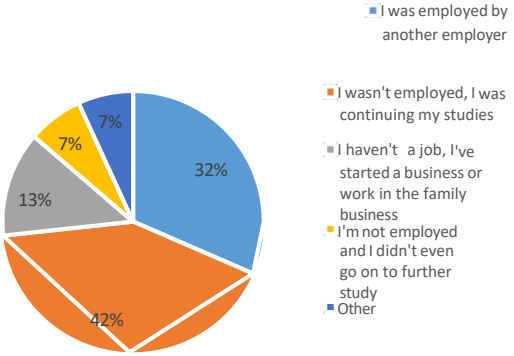


Chart 23: Reasons for being unemployed in a company or with the employer (without a future)



How next?

The focus of project activities will now be on motivating schools to join the third pillar. Given the non-representativeness of the pilot survey carried out, its role should be seen more as a procedural intermediate step towards tracing graduates at school level. Almost a third of the SVS (132 schools) expressed interest in the pilot national survey. From this point of view, the form of collection can be considered appropriate for the next planned rounds of tracking of SNE graduates. At the same time, it can be assumed that presenting the results in this national report will motivate schools to carry out their own collections to obtain more detailed information. Popularising the usefulness of collecting feedback from graduates highlights the move away from the hitherto main form of feedback through external audits by state authorities.

In the future, a sample survey should be strongly considered instead of a full-scale survey. Prospectively, we expect that after the successful implementation of tracking by schools through their own school questionnaires, the status and form of the national questionnaire will be modified, particularly in the introduction of stratified random sampling to ensure the representativeness of the data collected. At the same time, although the survey results presented are not representative, they represent a probe into the experiences of secondary school leavers and allow for further discussion on the thematic scope of this form of feedback gathering at national level.

Experience in subsequent rounds of data collection will be important for further building the tracking system. We are also working prospectively with the concept of linking the first and second pillar of the tracking by linking administrative data and the national questionnaire survey. This step will already require a sample survey and the resolution of privacy issues. However, the more technically demanding data collection will substantially increase the usefulness of the data for public policy making by allowing the transfer of observed phenomena to the whole population (e.g. the relationship between employability in a field and satisfaction with school choice). This is not possible with the current survey design - the findings are limited the respondents. Linking Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 also brings benefits in the form of higher response rates, as sensitive questions such as wages, employer, etc., are not important to include in the questionnaire. Last but not least, questionnaires can be better targeted, as in a sample survey the administrator has more control over the characteristics of the respondents.

Box: On the methodology and implementation of the pilot national survey

When designing a questionnaire, it is generally necessary to consider the level of detail that affects the length of the questionnaire and the extent to which sensitive socio-demographic characteristics of respondents or questions that allow their identification are captured. Neglecting these aspects may reduce the return rate. It is also true that the return rate is also influenced by the user-friendliness of the questionnaire. In the pilot phase of the second pillar of the tracking, the evaluation of these aspects translated into the decision to create a short questionnaire and implement it through Jotform, an open platform that allows the questionnaire to be completed via mobile devices. The risk of this open approach remains the inability to control the exact return rate, the lack of assurance of non-repeated responses and the control of the target group of respondents.

The pilot survey was not carried out as a sample survey; the link to the electronic questionnaire was sent by the schools themselves to their graduates. Until now, most vocational secondary schools did not keep a database of their alumni contacts. In the framework of the national project, schools in participating in the project collected the contact email addresses of their alumni and sent them the link to the electronic questionnaire within an agreed time period. This meant that not all schools had contact addresses for 2022/2023 graduates in the autumn of 2024/25. This allowed schools to use all the contacts they had available at the time of the survey, mainly to popularise the project amongst graduates on the one hand, but also to allow schools to test the technical side of the data collection.

The data collection using the open application Jotform was carried out from 15 to 31 October 2024 and was accompanied by an information campaign on social networks with the help of the Student Council of Secondary Schools and information support from the founders of secondary schools, especially the education departments of the VUC. The collected data itself is not made available to the schools; the analysis of the results is carried out by the SIC. The questionnaire does not contain an identifier for the school, so sharing the collected data with schools is not possible. This decision stemmed from the concern of possible comparisons between schools, which would not only jeopardise the participation of schools in the project, but also potentially lead to an unwanted departure from the original intention of using tracing to generate rankings etc.

Out of total of 1784 questionnaires received, 17 questionnaires from high school graduates were excluded. From the remaining 1767 questionnaires, we retained the responses of all respondents in further data analysis. Where relevant, we report the proportion of unlisted responses for each question. Data from all respondents are retained in further data analysis even if they did not provide answers all questions (all mandatory questions were answered). Although it is good practice to exclude questionnaires that do not meet predefined quality criteria (such as the proportion of questions answered), we have retained all questionnaires. This is because this is not a representative survey and part of the pilot was to determine the relevance, appropriateness and wording of the individual questions, which is also reflected in the proportion of unanswered optional questions.

The limitations of the collection also include the inability to calculate the return. Of the total 32,519 high school graduates in 2022/2023, 1,077 respondents participated in the survey. This represents a capture of 3% of the target population. The return rate cannot be determined: we do not know the number of contact addresses to which the link was sent and it appears that the link was also shared between graduates from different schools. The next round of the survey will consider the importance of popularising the tool to all graduates on the one , and narrowing the collection to a target group of graduates 15 months after graduation on the other. A separate challenge is the tracing of vulnerable groups who dropped out of formal education before completing at least secondary education. These groups are difficult to reach with conventional surveys. In the future, information gathering through interviews can be considered; the challenge remains to contact this group of respondents.

This project is co-funded by the European Union under the Slovakia Programme.