



Matching Practices for Secondary Schools – Hungary

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Relevant country background

Education policies in Hungary are organised at the national level. School education is compulsory and free from age 6 to age 18 (the latter is going to be reduced to 16 according to a new government proposal). Kindergarten for children aged 3 and above is also free of charge but only the last year is compulsory.

Most schools are publicly funded, under the oversight of local authorities (but according to the new proposal, the state will take over this oversight). There is an increasing number of religious schools run by different Churches, supported by state funds, and a small number of private schools.

Primary school covers age 6 to 14. Secondary school covers age 14 to 18, with a few exceptions where the starting age is 10 or 12. Secondary grammar schools provide advanced education for those interested in going to higher education, and some of them may offer study programmes starting at age 10 or 12. Vocational secondary schools are more focused on some professions, but they also award a maturity certificate, which allows entry to higher education. Vocational training schools do not award a maturity certificate. In 2011, 38.5% of the students attended secondary grammar schools, 36.8% attended vocational secondary schools and 24.7% attended vocational training schools.

Since 2000, the enrolment into secondary schools has been organised at the national level via a centralised matching scheme. Schools offer general or specialised study programmes with different quotas. As an example, suppose that a school has around 90 new students each year accommodated in three classes. This school might offer a general study programme with quota 60 and two special study programmes, say e.g. French and Math of quota 15 each. (A special French study programme can mean only a few extra hours every week, but can also mean an extra year to learn the language or even to study some subjects in French later.) Thus in this school, if all places are filled, two classes

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may be formed by students applying for general studies and a third class involving students specialised in French or Math. The detailed descriptions of the schools, the study programmes they offer and the associated quotas are available well in advance from the website of the centre responsible of the enrolment (KIR, [5]). Students may apply to any school for any kind of study, so there is complete freedom of choice. Schools also rank applicants and this ranking is, in principle, based only on the performance of the students, i.e., grades from the primary school, entrance exams and interviews. The enrolment process is very competitive and the system is completely transparent.

Summary box

Organization of education	Mostly publicly funded schools; an increasing number of religious schools run by the Church with state support, and some private schools.
Stated objectives of enrolment policy	Absolute freedom of choice, only the academic performance of the students matters for their priorities at schools.
Who's in charge?	A governmental information centre, called KIR [5], assisted by another NPO, called Educatio Kht., and overlooked by the Educational Office of the Ministry [4].
In place since	2000
Available capacity	Left to decide by the schools.
Timing of enrolment	Centralised admission process with common deadlines.
Information available to students prior to enrolment period	All the relevant information is gathered and published centrally.
Restrictions on preference expression	No restriction, students may (and are encouraged to) supply preference lists of any length.
Matching procedure	Centralised process that follows the student-proposing Gale-Shapley mechanism.
Priorities and quotas	Left to decide by each individual school under certain restrictions. When creating its ranking list, a school may consider only the grades of the students from primary school or can require participation in the centralised written tests and can also conduct interviews. The weighting of the above three scores must comply with the regulation (e.g. the weight of the interview score cannot be more than 25%).
Tie-breaking	Schools must provide strict rankings.

Description of current practices

At the beginning of the process, students submit their strict preference lists over the study programmes they apply for, with no restriction on the length of the lists. In fact, students are encouraged to submit long lists that contain also less preferred but still acceptable options. These lists are kept private, so no school can learn the preferences of their applicants.

Schools organise entrance exams that provide them with a strict ranking of the acceptable applicants. Some schools may simply use the grades of the students from primary school and the results of the centralised entrance exams, but popular schools often also organise special entrance exams or interviews for each special study programmes they offer. The weight of each score is decided by the school, under some constraints given in the regulation. After the exams, every school submits its ranking lists to KIR. These rankings are published on the central website in an anonymous way, so every applicant is informed about her current position at each study programme she applied to.

One extra option at this point of the admission process is that the applicants can modify their preference lists after the entrance exams and interviews and after having learned their rankings. This is reasonable, because the true preference of a student can change during those months, especially as a result of her personal experience at the exams (at an interview a student can actually meet with her head of class-to-be and can also have some idea about her future classmates, which can influence her decision). However, if the preference of a student remained the same during the application process then she should not change her preference list, even regarding those schools where the admission appears unlikely after the publication of the ranking lists.

When the centre receives the revised preference lists from the applicants, a software, based on the student-proposing Gale-Shapley algorithm, provides the final matching. This matching is optimal for the applicants among all possible matchings that respect the preferences of both sides (i.e., stable matching). Moreover, the procedure is strategyproof for the students, which means that they do not have incentives to provide false preference lists, as this would not increase their chances for admission. In fact, the Hungarian secondary school admission scheme works exactly as Gale and Shapley envisaged solving the college admissions problem.

After having seen the number of students admitted to each of their study programme, the schools decide how they form their classes for the new school year. A school with some unfilled programme can either advertise the remaining places in an extra matching round, which is conducted individually by each school, or just cancel these programmes. Similarly, if an applicant is not admitted to any school in the main matching round she can try to find an available place in the extra round.

Performance

The acceptance rates and detailed statistics are provided by KIR [5]. For example, according to a central summary [6] in 2011 the number of applicants was 91,580 (in 2010 it was 98,859), 96.2% of them were admitted in the main matching round, 75.6% of them to their first choice and 95.1% of them to one of their first three choices.

According to the representatives of KIR, the system is very successful and well accepted by the public. There are some complaints every year from parents who are not satisfied with the assignment of their children, but the answer (i.e. each preferred study programme on the student's application list was filled by better applicants) is usually considered fair enough.

Recent policy changes

The last change was in 2000, since then the above described process has been used.

Perceived issues

In 2003 the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) showed that early selection and segregation is very high in Hungary. Some follow-up studies (e.g. [2]) point out that this may be partly caused by the school choice system. Selection by the schools disadvantages those with a poor socio-economic background, and especially the largest ethnic minority in Hungary, the Roma (see also [3]).

The existence of secondary grammar schools which offer studies from the age of 10 or 12 (instead of 14) tends to increase early selection and leads to unravelling which further increases segregation. The introduction of 6 and 8-year programmes in the early nineties has historic reasons (which date back from before WWII) but the quick spreading of this practice and its negative consequences have led policymakers to freeze the establishment of any new 6 or 8-year programmes in secondary schools. Yet, those schools which already had these longer programmes could keep their education structure and therefore keep their advantage in attracting the best students at an early stage compared to those schools who offer only 4-year programmes. In 2011, from all those students who were admitted to secondary schools, 30.6% went to 4-year programmes, 4.6% went to 6-years programmes and 3.3% went to 8-years programmes in secondary grammar schools (the remaining students went to vocational secondary schools and vocational training schools).

Another big issue is the depopulation of remote areas due to the lack of schools. Given the demographic decline in the country, especially in rural areas, a large number of schools have been closed, or are in a difficult situation as the local authorities cannot afford to run them. The new government proposal suggests that all the schools will be taken over by the state, which might help to keep some of these schools open.

Existing data

Statistics are available at [4] and [5]. A summary on the 2011 admissions can be found in [6].

Legal texts

Summary on the admission processes is available at a governmental website:

<http://www.oh.gov.hu/kozoktatasi/aktualis-beiskolazasi/felveteli-kozepfoku-iskolakban-2011-2012-kiadvany>

The corresponding legal texts are the following (available only in Hungarian):

- 1993. évi LXXIX. törvény a közoktatásról
- 11/1994. (VI. 8.) MKM rendelet 17/A. §-a, valamint e rendelet 8. sz. melléklete
- 30/2011. (VI. 7.) NEFMI rendelet 3. sz. Melléklete

Other resources and references

[1] Péter Biró. Student Admissions in Hungary as Gale and Shapley Envisaged. Technical Report. Dept of Computing Science, University of Glasgow, TR-2008-291.

[2] Nancy Hoffman, Maria Luisa Ferreira, Ben Levin and Simon Field. Equity in Education, Thematic Review, OECD, Hungary, Country note. 2005.

[3] Gábor Kertesi and Gábor Kézdi. The Roma/non-Roma test score gap in Hungary.” *American Economic Review*, Vol. 101. No. 3. 2011. 519-525.

[4] Oktatási Hivatal (Education Office at the Ministry) website: <http://www.oh.gov.hu/>

[5] Közoktatási Információs Iroda (Information Office on Public Education) website: <http://www.kir.hu/>

[6] Felvételi a középfokú iskolákban a 2010/2011 tanévben (Admissions to secondary schools)http://www.oh.gov.hu/letolt/okev/doc/kifir2011/kifir_oh_2011_prez_nyek.pdf

MiP Country Profiles downloadable from matching-in-practice.eu

MiP Country Profile 1. Cantillon, Estelle (2011), [Matching practices for elementary schools – Belgium \(French-speaking region\)](#).

MiP Country Profile 2. Kübler, Dorothea (2011), [University admission practices – Germany](#).

MiP Country Profile 3. Irving, Rob (2011), [Matching practices for entry-labor markets – Scotland](#).

MiP Country Profile 4. Kiselgof, Sofya (2011), [Matching practices for universities – Ukraine](#).

MiP Country Profile 5. Biró, Péter (2011), [University admission practices – Hungary](#).

MiP Country Profile 6. Biró, Péter (2012), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Hungary](#).

MiP Country Profile 7. Chen, Li (2012), [University admission practices – UK](#).

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MiP Country Profile 11. Chen, Li (2012), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Ireland](#).

MiP Country Profile 12. Manlove, David (2012), [Matching practices for primary and secondary schools – Scotland](#).

MiP Country Profile 13. Merlino, Luca Paolo and Antonio Nicoló (2012), [Matching practices for elementary schools – Italy](#).

MiP Country Profile 14. Merlino, Luca Paolo and Antonio Nicoló (2012), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Italy](#).

MiP Country Profile 15. Merlino, Luca Paolo and Antonio Nicoló (2012), [University admissions practices – Italy](#).

MiP Country Profile 16 Hiller, Victor and Olivier Tercieux (2013), [Matching practices in secondary schools – France](#).

MiP Country Profile 17 Calsamiglia, Caterina (2014), [Matching Practices for elementary and secondary Schools – Spain](#).

MiP Country Profile 18 Lauri, Triin, Kaire Põder, and André Veski (2014), [Matching practices for elementary schools – Estonia](#).

MiP Country Profile 19. Salonen, Mikko A.A. (2014), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Finland](#).

MiP Country Profile 20 Terrier, Camille (2014), [Matching practices for secondary public school teachers – France](#).

MiP Country Profile 21 Basteck, Christian, Katharina Huesmann, and Heinrich Nax (2015), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Germany](#)

MiP Country Profile 22 Cantillon, Estelle (2015), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Belgium \(French-speaking region\)](#).