

# FORCED PATH

## Teachers on reopening schools

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## **Research history, frame of data collection**

The 21 Research Center concluded an online, large-sampled, cross-sectional research in cooperation with the Pedagógusok Szakszervezete – (PSZ)<sup>1</sup> again, after having concluded a similar one in January of 2021. The primary aim of the study was to gain insight on the opinion of teachers regarding the planned reopening in Spring of 2021. In addition, to unpack which possible scenarios do they find most secure?

The online questionnaire was available between April 5 (8 pm) and 11 (6 pm) through a secure link. The research design and data analysis was done by analysts of the 21 Research Center, while the dissemination was done by designated members of PSZ. The questionnaire included 10 questions, which took 3,5 minutes on average to fill out and received 9529 valid responses. The inclination to participate had been dynamic throughout the 6 days of data collection, despite of the government's decision on April 9 not to open particular educational institutions (such as high schools) on April 19. The sample bias due to online sampling has been corrected by the analysts of the 21 Research Center, by weighting the datadataset based on data of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences from 2019. The adjusted sample represents the opinion of teachers working in Hungary along three dimensions (age, region, type of

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<sup>1</sup> National Teachers Union of Hungary

institution). In the following analysis we present the most important findings of the research regarding the opinion of teachers on reopening, their cooperation and sense of security.

At the time of designing and distributing the questionnaire we were in the belief that the planned reopening on April 19 will affect all types of public educational institutions without exception.<sup>2</sup>

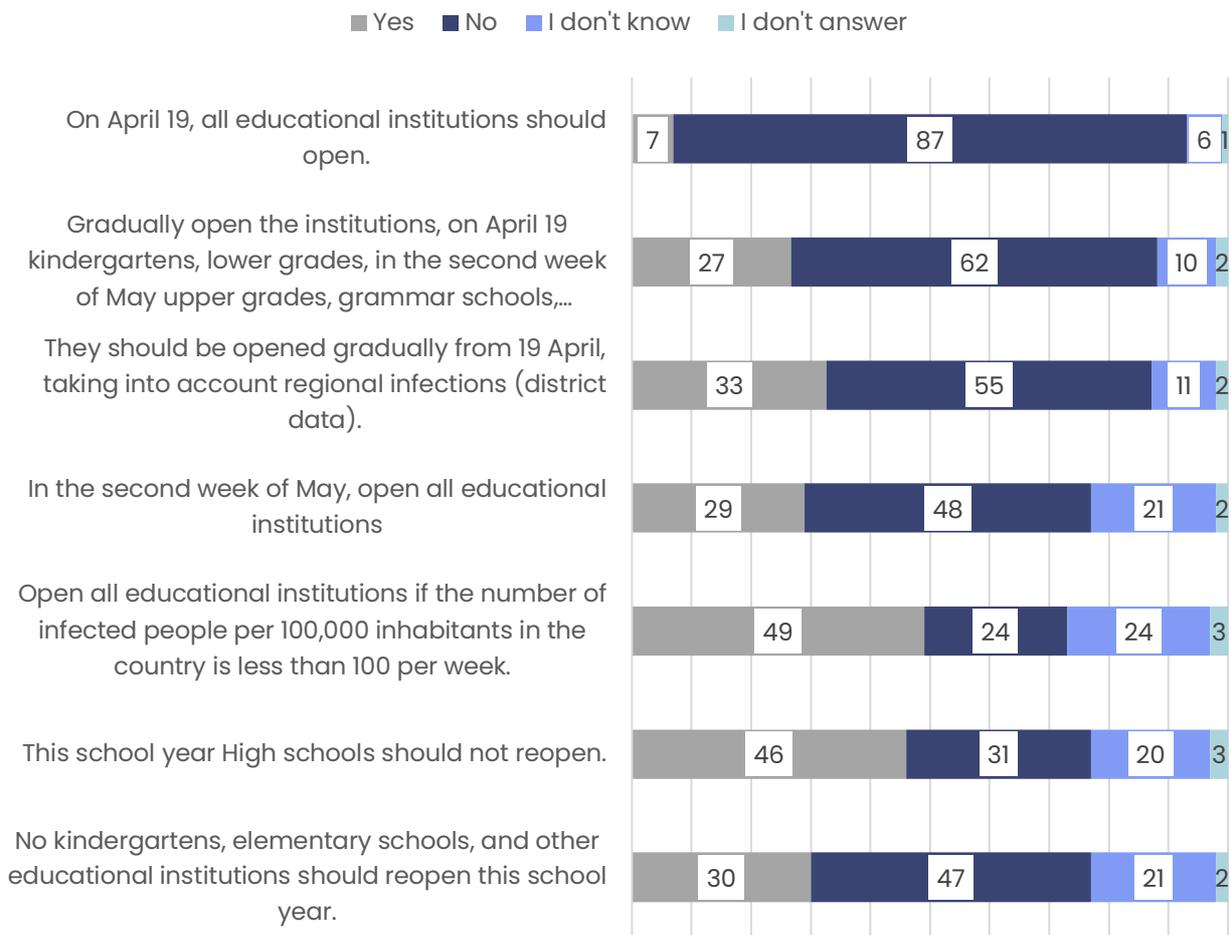
According to our findings, the overwhelming majority of teachers (87%) does not support the planned reopening of educational institutions on April 19, while 7 percent agrees with it. To have a better understanding of teachers' attitude on reopening, we presented seven possible alternatives (Figure 1.) and asked them to decide if they agree with the statements of each option. Most of the respondents (49%) agreed with the statement, that „*Educational institutions should reopen, if the number of infected people weekly is less than 100 in 100 000 residents of the country*“. We presented several options that offered the opportunity of gradual reopening with different conditions. Third of the respondents agreed with the statement „*They should open gradually from April 19, considering regional infection rates*“, while more than a quarter of respondents (27%) said, that „*Institutions should open gradually, kindergarten, primary school and EGYMI<sup>3</sup> on April 19, secondary school, high school and vocational education and training in the second week of May*“. Less than third of the respondents (29%) agree with a later reopening of all educational institutions in May. It is clear that teachers do not fully despise the thought of reopening: although 46 percent of teachers reject the idea of high schools going back to in-person education, 31 percent said that high schools should open if Hungary's coronavirus curve starts to flatten and society reaches the ideal rate of vaccination. This is underpinned by the result that less than third of the teachers think that none of the educational institutions should open in the current school year.

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<sup>2</sup> Since then the Prime Minister announced on April 9 that online education will continue to remain in high schools.

<sup>3</sup> Unified Special Education Methodology Centre.

Figure 1. Alternatives to reopening



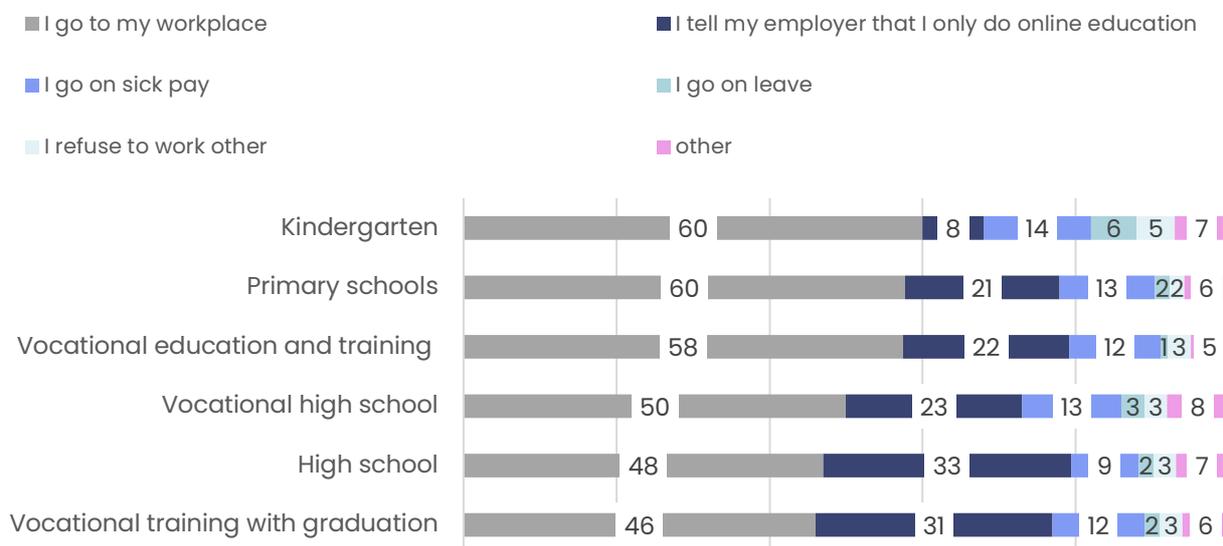
**Source:** Research on the planned reopening among Hungarian educators April 2021, n = 9529, percent, own calculation.

There is no doubt that the plan of reopening on April 19 is generally rejected among Hungarian teachers. However, they are divided on the possible time of reopening and the conditions of going back to face-to-face teaching (e. g. what kind of epidemiological and societal conditions are needed). Most of the educators could not decide between particular alternatives, such as reopening in the future, gradual reopening or full rejection of reopening. Thus, teachers does not have a collective and definite standpoint on reopening that the majority would support. Certainly, individual decisions and opinions might be influenced by a lot of effects that are in many cases hard to identify. These are for instance (i) whether they have received a vaccination, and if so, had their immunity been developed, (ii) their success in adapting to the new circumstances of digital education, the chances of themselves and their students dropping out from the system, (iii) and of course the mental health of both the educators and their students.

## Reopening on April 19

In the survey we also asked teachers what they would do in case of reopening at the end of April.<sup>4</sup> More than half of the respondents (54%) said that they would return to their workplace and would hold their classes in case of the planned in-person education. The second most popular alternative was that they would prefer to continue digital education (21%), and almost 20 percent said that they would deny face-to-face teaching to some extent and time if they had to go back to in-person education on April 19 (e. g. going on sick pay, taking leave, denying working). Almost 7 percent gave an different answer, when we asked them to write their opinion in their own words. Most of the respondents chose that they would prefer blended teaching, or repeated one alternative that was previously offered (stay at home in digital education until the pandemic declines or some kind of immunity forms between their students and their family). There are some teachers who would like to go back to in-person education following strict rules, such as everyday testing, body temperature measurement or mandatory use of masks.

Figure 2. Willingness of teachers to reopen by institutional type



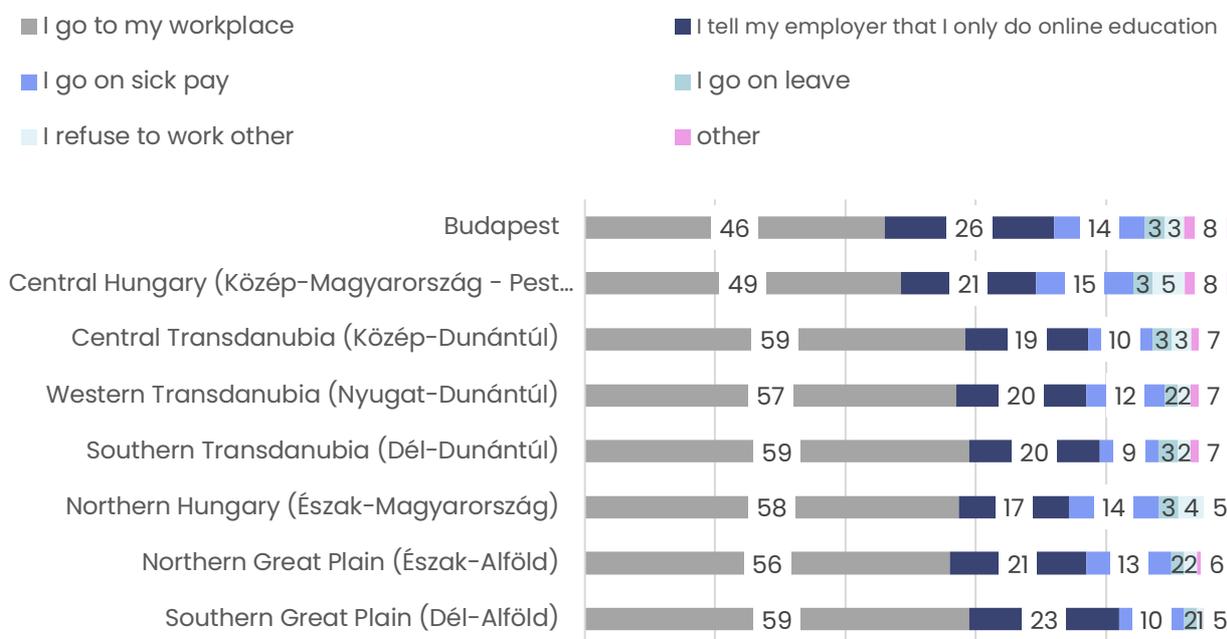
**Source:** Research on the planned reopening among Hungarian educators, n = 9529, percent, own calculation.

<sup>4</sup> Because the Hungarian government was determined to open schools and kindergartens at April the 19th. For more informations see below: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-hungary-sports-idUSKBN2BVIAS>.

The different opinions of teachers on face-to-face teaching is affected by the type of educational institution: in institutions where digital learning is harder to pursue (e. g. due to the age of students, the necessity of presence), the ratio of teachers who would like to continue to teach in-person from April 19 is higher. 60 percent of kindergarten-, primary school-, and vocational school teachers would go into their workplace on April 19. On the other hand, this ratio is less by ten percentage points (50%) in the case of vocational high school teachers, while only 48 percent in the case of high school teachers and 46 percent among teachers in vocational training with graduation.

Teachers working in all types of institutions like the idea of teaching outside the classroom, except for kindergarten teachers. Research results highlight that in those types of institutions (high school, vocational education) where digital learning has worked better in the last year, teachers would like to continue teaching online more than teachers in other institutions. This leads to the conclusion that teachers working in these types of institutions have probably got used to and become comfortable with online teaching. This research finding is supported by the result that teachers working in secondary level institutions are less likely to protest, while 25 percent of kindergarten teachers would opt for some kind of refusal to work on April 19.

Figure 3. Teachers' desire to reopen by region

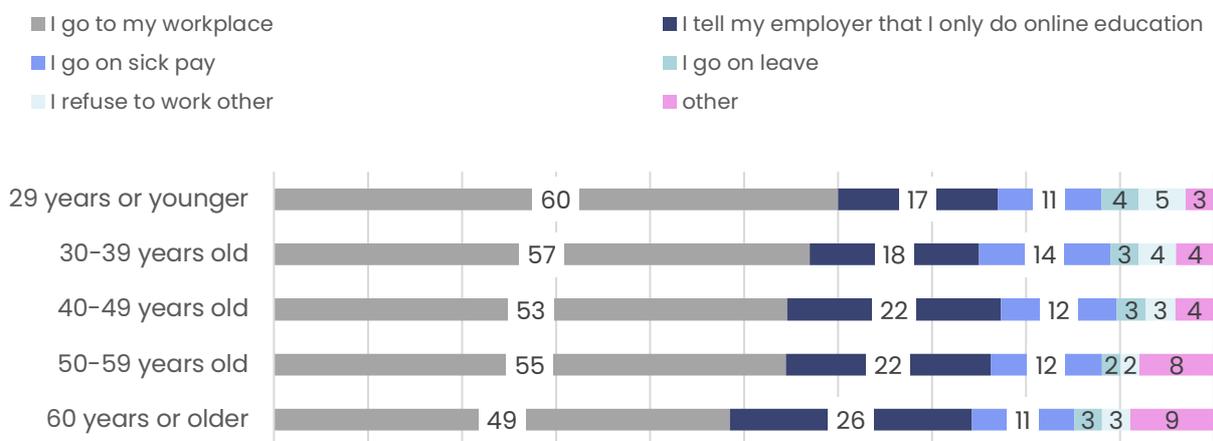


**Source:** Research on the planned reopening among Hungarian educators, n = 9529, percent, own calculation.

Regional differences offer little explanation for the opinion of teachers on how education should continue. An exceptions are teachers working in the capital and Central-Hungary: less than half of them (46-49%) said that they would go back to face-to-face teaching on April 19. Carrying on with online teaching is the most popular amongst teachers from Budapest. Whilst for teachers from Pest county the idea of denying teaching is a bit more popular, in case they had to go back to in-person education on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April. Ratios are similar in other regions of the country, roughly every sixth teacher would go back to face-to-face teaching on April 19, every fifth would tell their employer that they would like to stay in digital teaching, while the remaining 15-21 percent would take a leave, go on pay sick or deny working.

The older the teacher and therefore the more endangered they are, the less they would go back to face-to-face teaching. Less than half of respondents over 60 would go into their workplace in case of reopening, whereas 60 percent of the youngest age group (18-29 years old) would do the same. The results of the 2021 January study showed that older teachers had the least digital competency to complete their work via online learning. However, those who had little digital capital (based on self-declaration), are in fact who prefer to stay in online learning the most: more than every fifth respondent (amongst those older than 60) said that they would only teach outside of the classroom in case of reopening. All in all, older teachers would stay at digital teaching in order to protect themselves, their students and their environment, in spite of having difficulties in adopting and getting used to this educational method.

Figure 4. Teachers' willingness to reopen by age group



**Source:** Research on the planned reopening among Hungarian educators, n = 9529, percent, own calculation.

The potential denial of returning to the classroom on 19 April is not dependent on age: even the oldest bracket (60 and older) has 17% that considers it as a feasible option. The type of the educational institution has a more significant effect on the probability of denial. Teachers are the most likely to oppose the return to offline education are those who work in institutions where it is more problematic to comply with the safety regulations and keep a safe distance from the students e.g. due to small classroom space, such as special rooms for workshops common in schools offering vocational training.

In the survey we also asked whether the teachers have been vaccinated, and if so, the date of the vaccination and the type of the vaccine. The findings show that the rate of vaccination is positively correlated with the willingness of returning to in-person teaching. The survey measured the vaccination coverage: we identified 8 categories indicating the vaccination status of the teachers in Hungary. Only a narrow percentage has been vaccinated with both doses (7%) and 15 percent have received the first vaccine dose between 1 and 3 April. Most of the teachers (33%) received their first dose between 1 and 3 April, a further 20% received it a week later (between 9 and 11 April). 5 percent of the teachers have registered for the vaccine but have not been notified yet and a further 3% is considering the registration. Only 6% have not shown any willingness to register for the vaccine and a further 9% is waiting for the end of their current immunity - due to past infection - before claiming vaccination.

The teachers having received both of the vaccine doses are more likely (70%) to return to in-person education after 19 April. However, this willingness decreases as the level of vaccination lowers (e.g. vaccinated with the first dose; registered but have not been vaccinated). The rate is particularly low (36%) among those that are registered but have not been notified yet.

## **Perceived safety**

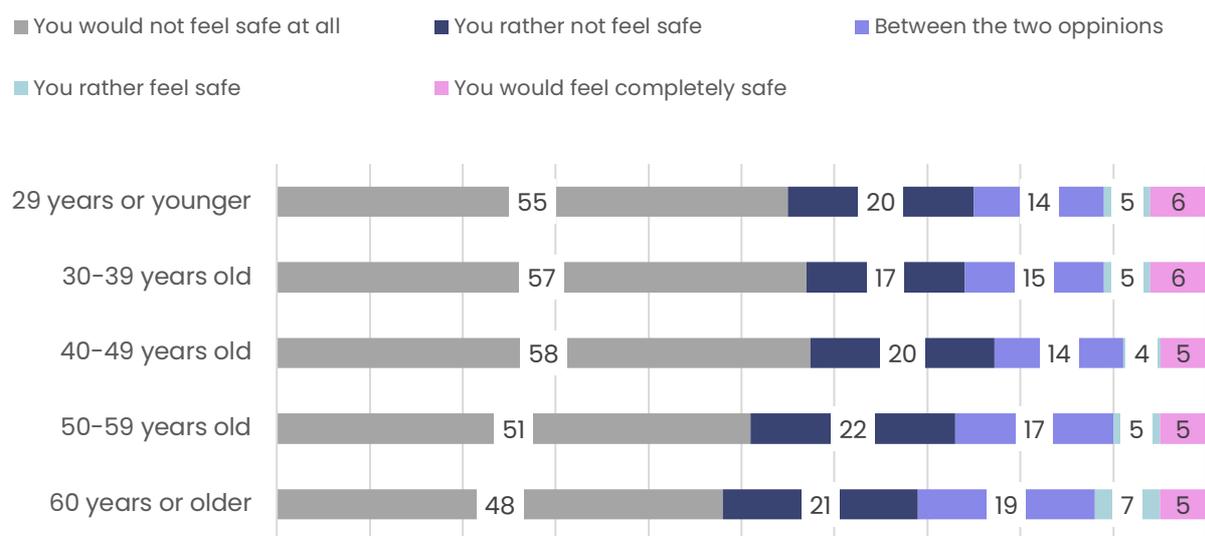
The survey measured the teachers' sense of perceived safety regarding the reopening with the following question: *"How safe would you feel at work following the planned reopening after April 19, 2021?"*. Based on the answers, the perceived safety of the teachers would be eminently low in case they were required to return to in-person education after April 19: 74% of the teachers would feel rather or very unsafe. Only 10% answered that they would feel rather or completely safe and 16%

could not make a decision and opted for the median (3) value. The results of the survey show that the perceived safety is somewhat higher among those teachers that would return to offline, in-person education after the reopening of April 19.

The teachers' sense of perceived safety varies across regions. The perceived safety of those who prefer digital education – the teachers from Budapest and Pest county – is somewhat lower (76% and 78% would not feel safe) than the teachers from other regions. This presumably contributes to their decision to continue the digital education even in the case of school reopening.

Broken down by age, the results suggest that the teachers aged 40-49 have the lowest sense of safety: 78% would feel rather or very unsafe in the case of in-person education. 69% of the teachers in the oldest age bracket (60 and older) would feel rather or very unsafe in the case of returning to in-person education and approximately one-fifth (19%) opted for the median value, which suggests that they were unable to come to a definitive decision. The rate of vaccination coverage is presumably higher in this age bracket, which is likely to increase their sense of safety. However, the overwhelming majority agreed that they would not feel safe if they had to return to in-person education, which is also indicated by the low level of answers (12%) marking the values of 4 (completely safe) and 5 (rather safe) on the scale.

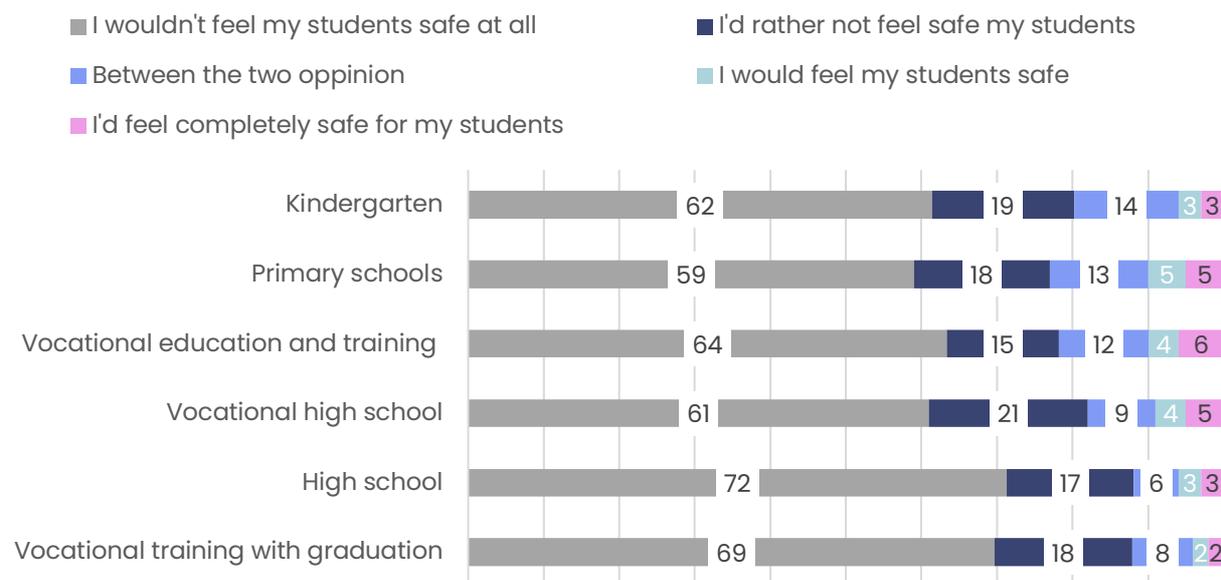
Figure 5. Teachers' sense of security by age group



**Source:** Research on the planned reopening among Hungarian educators, n = 9529, percent, own calculation.

Teachers working at institutions where it is challenging to comply with the safety regulations are the most concerned about returning to school from a safety perspective. There is no significant difference among institution types, the measured patterns are similar in the different types of educational institutions: 78% of kindergarten teachers, 77% of vocational secondary school teachers and 80% of vocational education teachers agreed that they would feel rather or very unsafe returning to in-person education after April 19.

Figure 6. Teachers' sense of security in the type of institution

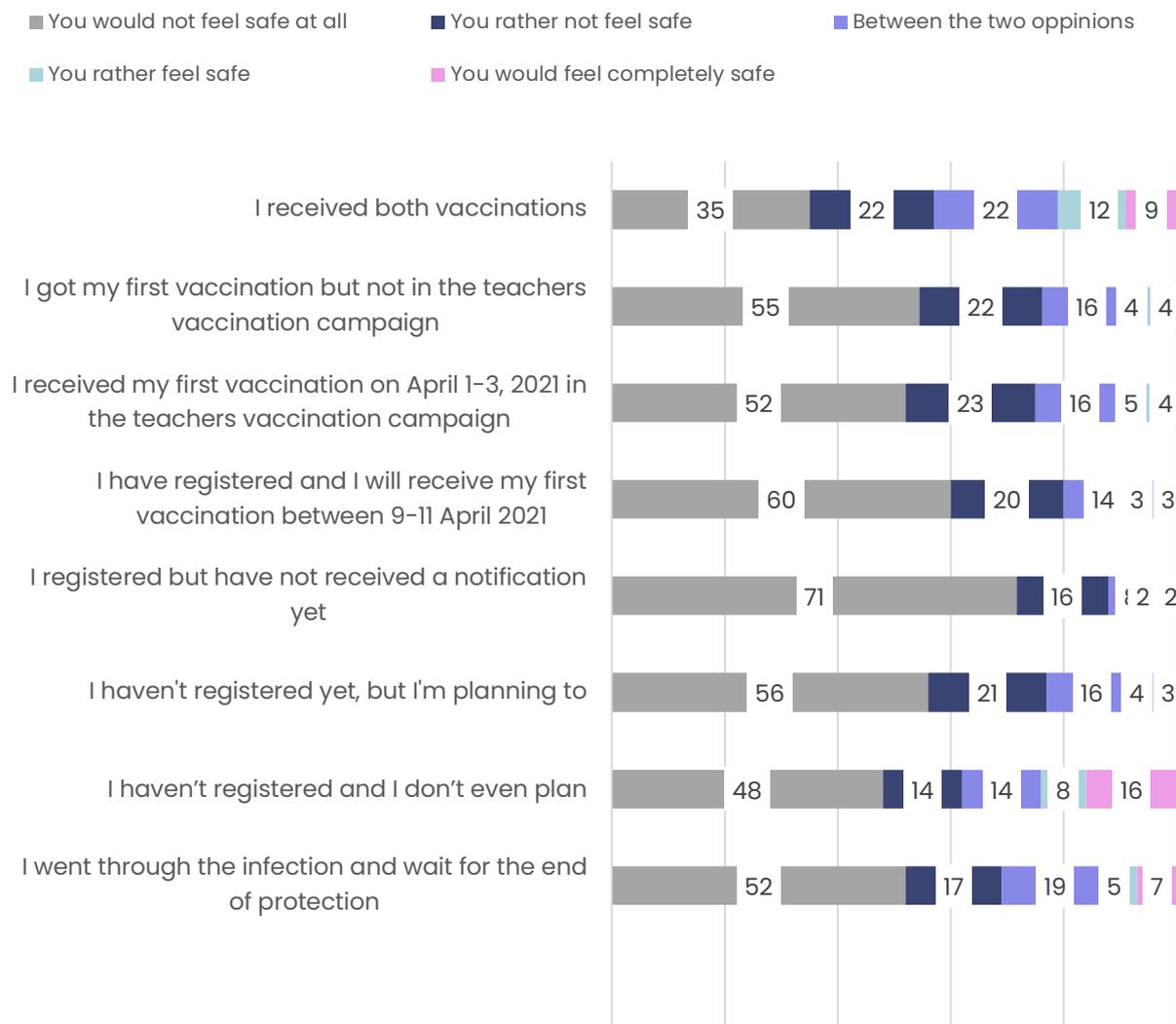


**Source:** Research on the planned reopening among Hungarian educators, n = 9529, percent, own calculation.

Based on the results, the perceived safety of educators is mainly influenced by whether they have been vaccinated, the number of received doses and the date of vaccination.

Based on the survey conducted between April 5 and 11, 2021, the sense of safety is the highest among the educators that have been vaccinated with both doses by the time of the data collection. There is a lower rate of educators among them that would feel rather or very unsafe in the offline classroom. However, even the teachers that have already got vaccinated with both doses have a 57% share that would not feel in the case of in-person education after April 19. It has strong indicative value that 22% of the educators have received both vaccine doses - and consequently enjoying immunity - couldn't manage to make a definitive decision regarding their sense of security in the case of in-person education and marked the median value.

Figure 7. Teachers' sense of security in the distribution of vaccination status



**Source:** Research on the planned reopening among Hungarian educators, n = 9529, percent, own calculation.

There is a similar pattern among the educators that received the first vaccine dose before the data collection (April 5, 2021): more than two-thirds (75% and 77%) agreed that they would feel rather or very unsafe in the classroom. Nevertheless, the rate of educators that prefer returning to face-to-face teaching is not higher among those that enjoy partial immunity after their first vaccine.

The highest rate of educators that would feel rather or very unsafe in the offline classroom is among those that are registered for the vaccine but have not received it yet. 80% and 87% of the teachers in these two categories would feel rather or very unsafe in the case of in-person education and there is only a negligible (6% and 4%) rate with a high sense of safety.

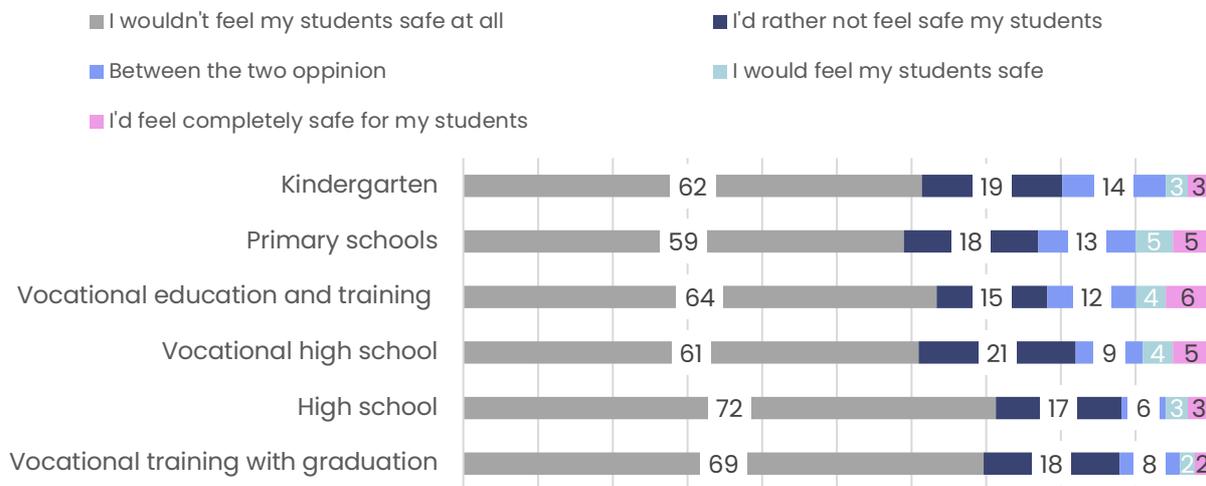
Not all the educators indicated during the data collection their willingness to be vaccinated. 77% were concerned about their own health among those that are willing to be vaccinated but haven't indicated it yet. The rate is somewhat lower (62%) among those that are not willing to be vaccinated, and they also have a higher sense of perceived safety considering in-person education.

## **Sense of Safety for Students in Case of the Planned Reopening**

In case of reopening on April 19, Hungarian teachers would fear that their students are even less safe from an epidemiological point of view than themselves. 81 percent of the educators responded that their students would not be at all, or would rather not be safe in in-person education, 8 percent said they would have their students more or completely safe, and 12 percent chose the third response considered as neutral when answering the question.

We do not experience any discrepancies according to the regional breakdown, the educators working in the South Transdanubia region expressed their concerns over their students being in danger just as much as their colleagues living and working in the Northern Great Plain. We detected the same by age groups: the youngest educators, up to 29 years old, feel their students safe similar as their elder colleagues, with 77–82% responding that their students would not be at all, or would rather not be safe in case of reopening during their work. There are slight differences in the safety status of students by type of institutions: according to the results teachers working in grammar schools perceive their students' health at risk the most, among them the proportion is 7 percentages higher (89%) of those who responded would not feel safe at all, or would rather not feel safe.

Figure 8. Educators' sense of security in relation to students by type of institution



**Source:** Research on the planned reopening among Hungarian educators, n = 9529, percent, own calculation.

Among educators who have received their first or both vaccinations before, on average, the proportion of respondents who responded “rather not feel safe” or “not feel safe at all” with regards to the safety of their students is lower. This means, the sooner someone got vaccinated, so does the sense of safety for themselves and for their students grow compared to those who are vaccinated at or after the time of data collection. On average, we experience, those educators who have already registered for the vaccine but have not yet their turn come, (1.) are more worried about their health during (in-person) teaching, and (2.) are more worried about their students’ health. The results clearly show: Hungarian teachers, regardless of where they live, how old they are, what type of institution they work for, is very much agreed upon one thing. They fear students just as much as themselves from the risk of returning to in-person education, catching and spreading the virus – and from which they want to protect their students by their own means.

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