

REDUCING EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN EUROPE (RESL.eu)

Overview of the project and its main findings

The problem and its context

- Generational gap in European societies in the context of the welfare state
- Worsening indicators of youth poverty, youth unemployment and tendencies of social exclusion
- Tensions between dominant forms of schooling and labor market needs
- ESL as an indicator of the problems
- ESL as a policy focus: controversies and unmet needs

Main research questions

- By acknowledging that ESL is a widespread phenomenon that gradually evolves on the individual level: what are the major macro-, meso- and individual factors in its background?
- How far is ESL shaped by students' school engagement/disengagement?
- What are the risk factors of reducing school engagement?
- How far do important adults (teachers, parents, community members) shape school engagement and educational career?
- What are the main protective factors of prevention?

Scope of the project

- Nine countries: Austria, Belgium, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK

Quantitative and qualitative methods:

- Survey in two waves among students in the last year of upper secondary school and two years below; followed up two years later
--More than 19000 students in the first, and more than 7000 students in the second wave
- In-depth interviews with students, teachers and parents

Research focus

- Macro-level differences (class, labor market, school system) are taken for granted, and outside of the scope of the research
- The research aims to reveal the role of meso- and micro-level factors in shaping ESL
- Hence, it focuses on factors of school engagement that reflects interactions and mutual impacts between schools, families and students
- School engagement is seen as the major protective factor against ESL, while school disengagement represents a major risk

School engagement and risks

- The concept of engagement comprises school-related practices, feelings and attitudes toward school, and perception of broader associations of education
- It allows for a cross-cutting view and also for a procedural follow-up of students' relation to school
- Given its complex nature, it allows for sorting out the different factors and the risks of disturbances of engagement and/or of paths to disengagement
- Strength and limitation of the concept: it puts the individual into the focus

Overarching trends and associations

- Despite profound differences in social and educational structures, some characteristics of ESL appear independently of the national settings.

These characteristics are:

- ESL usually originates in the early phase of education
- ESL usually evolves as a gradual process
- ESL is sensitive to poverty and deprivation
- ESL is more frequent among boys than girls
- Migration background may reduce the occurrence of ESL (context)

Differences in school engagement

- Out of the components, major weight on the academic aspects that frame the behavioral and attitudinal aspects.
- Influential associations:
 - School engagement is deeply influenced by the way of instruction
 - School engagement reflects the level of support coming from teachers
 - School engagement is influenced by teacher-parent relations
 - School engagement is in association with the transparency of educational pathways

Pathways to ESL – a typology

- Interviews show great variations in causes, manifestations and consequences
- Six types were identified, implying different ways of potential support:
 - unanticipated crisis
 - downward spiral
 - parabola
 - boomerang
 - resilient route
 - shading out

Policy recommendations

- Criticism over simple indicators
- Intervention in the school system
 - integrative vocational training;
 - flexible transference across the secondary level
- Intervention on the school level
 - student-friendly ways of instruction
 - closer links between schools and parents/communities
 - more teacher support to students' choices

Policy recommendations (cont.)

- more information for students and parents about school-paths to chose
- more emphasis on practical education and skills
- country-specific arrangements for combining education and work
- diversification of alternative learning areas and their integration into the educational system.