

## **“Family, education and peer group environment factors influencing early school leaving”**

The presented dissertation is an attempt to fill a gap in the Polish empirical research on the subject of early school leaving (ESL). Early school leaving is a serious problem for both the society and the individual and there are many reasons why young people leave school early. These include social problems in the family, school failure, lack of support from school, family and the social environment, changes in social conditions or difficult relationships with parents, peers and educational staff. Poland has one of the lowest ESL rates in Europe (4.8% in 2018), yet many Polish students leave school early, before completing secondary education and without obtaining qualifications necessary for further education or work, which may lead to their unemployment and social exclusion.

The study is partly based on empirical data obtained in the “Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe” (RESL.eu) research project.<sup>1</sup>

The structure of the dissertation is as follows. The first four chapters provide a theoretical discussion of the issues related to the early school leaving phenomenon. Chapter 1 presents an overview of the research on early school leaving and a review of existing literature. In addition, it discusses the definitions of the phenomenon and contains a description of the factors influencing early school leaving as well as the characteristics of early school leavers. Chapter 2 presents an overview of compulsory education in selected European countries and in Poland. The social and personal costs of early school leaving, school selections and monitoring of compulsory schooling are also described in this chapter. The third chapter deals with school failure and school success, taking into account the issue of grade retention, which is often mentioned among school failures. Chapter 4 presents selected forms of further education for youth and young adults. Chapter 5 describes the methodology of the study, including the methods of data collection and selection of the sample. The sixth chapter analyses and describes the results of the qualitative research carried out, presenting various factors influencing early school leaving. This chapter also discusses the experiences of young people who left school early, their motivations to return to education in alternative learning pathways, as well as prevention strategies applied by schools. The final, seventh chapter of the thesis contains conclusions and recommendations.

The aims of the research described in the dissertation were threefold: to identify the reasons why young people leave education early, to investigate the reasons for returning to education

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by students who left school early, as well as to explore the early school leaving prevention and intervention strategies implemented by upper secondary schools.

The research results described in the dissertation show the multiplicity and co-existence of factors that can lead to leaving school prematurely as well as the complexity of the problem, as it is never a single factor that leads to early school leaving. Any family, school or social environment risk factor may be the dominant one, but most often it is a combination of different conditions. As far as strategies to tackle this phenomenon are concerned, there is a similar situation: in schools there are no measures that would directly target the issue of early school leaving and there does not exist a single strategy to tackle ESL; most often these measures address the problem indirectly, alongside other issues related to school failure.

**Keywords:** early school leaving, school dropout, compulsory schooling, compulsory education, secondary school