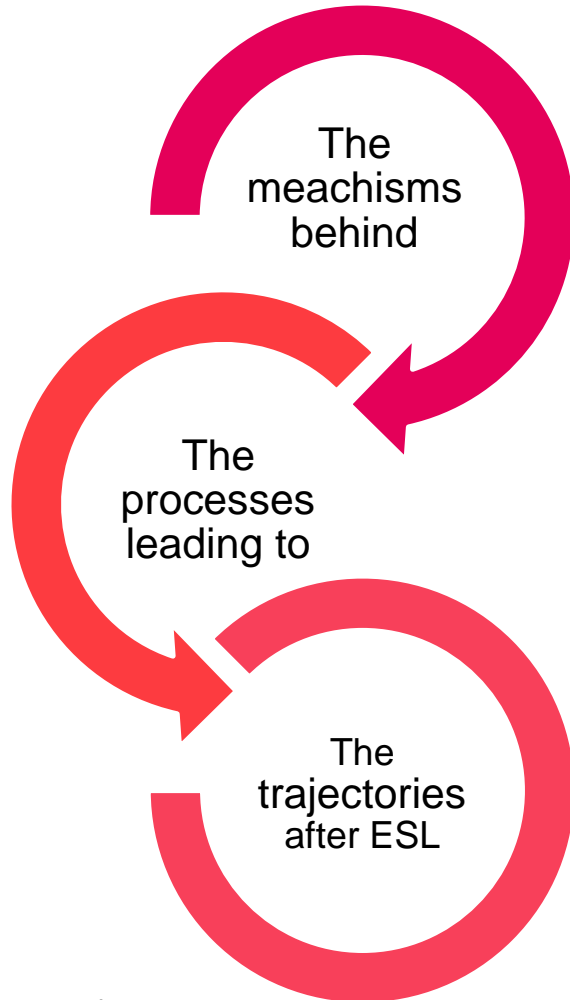# RESL.eu
Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe

Young adults who left secondary school speak about their educational pathways: in between failure and hope

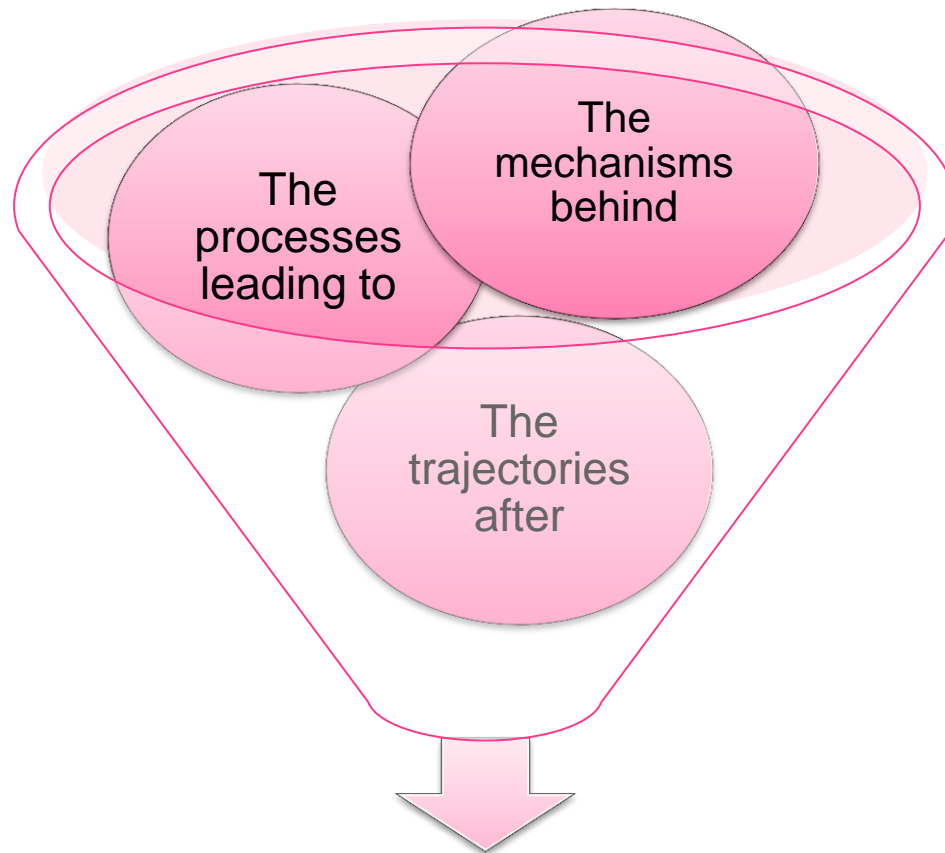Sofia A. Santos, Helena C. Araújo & Eunice Macedo
U Porto / CIIE & FPCE

ABJOVES 2016 Barcelona

EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

The meachisms behind

The processes leading to

The trajectories after ESL

Analysis of the paths and subjectivities of young adults involved in cycles of school disaffection and early school leaving (ESL) in Portugal

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The processes leading to

The mechanisms behind

The trajectories after

Early School Leaving

(both at institutional and individual level)

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➢ Why some young people do not identify themselves with current school?

➢ How do they find hope for their futures by reinvesting in their education?

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The wider project   RESL.eu

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- ➢ "Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe"
- ➢ Lasting from 2013 up until 2018
- ➢ Funded by the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme
- ➢ Involves 9 partner countries
  - ▪ with different power positions in the EU

AND

  - ▪ different rates of ESL

- ➢ Belgium, United Kingdom, Sweden, Portugal, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Hungary and Austria

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Key goals

- To **advance the state of the art** in the academic field with the contribution of **various disciplines and methodological** perspectives

- To enhance **cooperation on ESL** between researchers in the partner countries and regions, and in Europe in general

- To help decision-makers in the scholarly community and policy makers on different levels **design efficient education policies and innovate educational systems** by developing comparative indicators for ESL

- To contribute to the **formulation, development and implementation of ESL policy** at national and European level

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RESL.eu aims to provide insights into the mechanisms and processes influencing

➢ a pupil's decision to leave school/training early;

➢ ESLers' decision to enroll in alternative learning arenas unrelated to a regular school - but wherein specific creative or innovative methods of knowledge and skill transfer are used.

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Types of measures in tackling ESL
(EU Commission)

Preventive Measures
- strategies that seek to tackle the problem even before the first symptoms. - remove systematic obstacles.

Interventive Measures
- improving the quality of education and training and providing targeted support to pupils – student or school wide focused strategies

Compensation measures (extramuros)
- creating opportunities for those who left education and training prematurely, but want to gain the qualifications they missed. - reintegrate young adults in danger of social exclusion by offering a range of tailor-made education and training opportunities

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ESL definition

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➢ European Union
  ▪ ESL has been identified as a major social problem
  ▪ Its characteristics differ across Europe

AND

➢ ESL as *statistic make up* disguises the problems of social inequality and educational duality underlying it
    Tarabini & Monte 2015

➢ Portugal
  ▪ ESL is not fully recognised as a problem in need of tackling
  ▪ There are dissimilar – sometimes conflicting - views about it
  ▪ ESL has decreased in the last decade

BUT

  ▪ there are still high percentages of ESL when compared to other European countries and the EU average
    Araújo, Magalhães, Costa & Macedo, 2014

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➢ "leaving education un(der)qualified (unqualified or under qualified)", this means all young people who have left school without attaining a degree or certificate of upper secondary education or similar to an ISCED level 3 (2011 ISCED scale).

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ESL statistics data

GEO/TIME	2000 (%)	2005 (%)	2010 (%)	2015 (p) (%)
European Union (27 countries)	17,6 (e)	15,8	14,0	11,0
Belgium	13,8	12,9	11,9	10,0
Spain	29,1	31,0	28,2	20,3
Italy	25,1	22,1	18,6	14,6
Hungary	13,9	12,5	10,8	11,6
Netherlands	15,4	13,5	10,0	8,3
Austria	10,2	9,3	8,3	7,3
Poland	:	5,3	5,4	5,3
Portugal	43,6	38,3	28,3	14,4
Sweden	7,3	10,8	6,5	6,6
United Kingdom	18,2	11,6	14,8	11,0

Early leavers from education and training (total)
Source: Eurostat, 2016 (retrieved 01-04-2016)
(e) - estimated
(p) - provisional

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35 youngsters (aged 18 - 23) who are studying in Alternative Learning Arenas (ALA)

4 Focus Group Discussion

8 Interviews

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Who are these young adults?

- Young women and men (aged 18 - 23) who left school before the 9th or 12th grade because of personal, educational or financial reasons;

- Some of them are from former colonies;

- Most of them got a job after dropping out;

- Two of them stay at home for 2 or 3 years: "Extra time to be able to think. Three years of thinking."

- All of them are enrolled in ALA for 2 or 3 years.

- Three of them already have children;

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Reasons to school dropout	Reasons to come back to school
• Emigrate in search for better life conditions *"It's better to study abroad than in your country, because if we study in Africa we may practice, go to university, but when you conclude there's no work. That's bad."* • Health problems • Bad grades – Problems with teachers and teaching methods • No relation between school knowldege and the labour market or future plans • Lack of study behaviours *"I don't study at home. Only what I understand from the classes. For me, it's enough. I don't see myself studying."* • Family problems - The need to find a job to help at home	• Reinvest in education as an **option** to learn more *"I like studying, to learn more. Every day you learn something new. I don't miss school. It's very important. People who have an education have everything. People who don't have an education have a hard time finding a job. People who have an education get a job, go to other countries... I don't know how to explain it but I know it's good."* *I accepted because I could learn a little more about the labour world. In regular school it's not possible, they don't talk much about that, they're more focused on the contents than in the labour world. And I chose to come to the courses."* *"Not everybody has the same ability to learn. But if people make an effort everybody can do it, at least the minimum. No paper or diploma will say that you are more intelligent or know how to do things better. That's not what's at stake. But I think that in the country and the world we live in, if you don't have an education, you won't succeed."*

Reasons to school dropout	Reasons to come back to school
• Do not feel included in school - bullying • Do not like the classes/environment • Truancy • Lack of interest in the syllabus *"I wasn't already much committed. I wasn't interested. I don't know. I lost interest. It was the lack of interest. I have no particular reason, I dropped out spontaneously."* • Find a job to be independent	• As a **requirement** of the Labour Market *"Today, 12th grade is a priority for almost all jobs. So, it's really necessary. Nowadays, you need to have 12th grade even to clean the floor."* *"I started working but as I saw that I didn't find anything that I liked to do, I came here. a cleaner isn't really what I... I do it but I don't like it much."* *My working experience turned out to be useful because it made me grow a bit more in life. See the difficulties, see that I really had to get 12th grade or I wouldn't be anyone. It made me realise that I needed studies to be able to have another area besides the one I had."* • The financial support (the Scholarship - food, transport, accommodation)

Reasons to school dropout	Reasons to come back to school
	• As a second opportunity to follow other paths *"Some interest, some fascination in learning. I've also met new people here, it was very important to me. People with whom I identify because of this life path. I feel more comfortable with them. My goal here is only to conclude 9th grade."* *"Meanwhile I got a job, it didn't go well and my mother said: "That's enough! You have to study, conclude 9th grade because this is no life for you". And I said: "You're right, but if I go to a regular school there's only kids there. I don't want that". She said: "But this one is different." We ended up here."*

Pedagogical Practices

Regular upper secondary school	Alternative learning Arenas
- More theoretical - Access to wider syllabus *"In terms of knowledge I think that secondary school is better. The regular one. Because here we have specific subjects and there you learn everything, from Philosophy to French. Here we have Mathematics, English, Physical Chemistry and Portuguese. I think that there, regarding learning, one learns more, more contents of everything. Here it's more specific to the course."* - They have to study more - It is more complex and difficult	- More practical *The current school is "a school that trains a person to go into the labour market. It gives more opportunities because here I feel ready to go into the labour market."* *"I like the practical part better. That's where you get to learn more things. The theory is a little boring, but the practice demands more from you. The internship is also good. In classes, it's also good to have the practice. Always be handling the materials, doing things, learning a bit more."* *"In a classroom we're sitting at a table in front of the blackboard, the teacher explains. In here that doesn't happen. You choose where you want to sit."* - Easier *"I like the classes, the syllabus. I think it's easier than regular education."* - Greater diversity of activities

Pedagogical Practices

Regular upper secondary school	Alternative learning Arenas
• More strict *"They're stricter, they take everything too seriously. Here we talk about everything."*	• More useful (Internship) *"Here we get the technical part, right? The relationship with work itself."* • More flexible – respect students' timings *"Here in this school we're not. If you want to study, you study, if you don't..."* *"It's like the school name, it's a second chance, because here they work differently from other schools. They let us follow more according to our will. If we're working well in a day and we do everything, that's fine. In the next day, if we don't feel much like it and we don't work, that's fine as well."* • Teacher- students relationship is warmer *"In here teachers are often more cooperative, they help and facilitate things more."* *"The environment is different; here it is like a family. We're always very comfortable. People interact much with each other."*

Obstacles

Regular upper secondary school	Alternative learning Arenas
• Lack of teachers' support • Have to study more • Many hours and many contents *"Schools have to change a lot, the level of education because the study programs are very large. Those who have difficulties can't keep up. In school they're always tiptoeing. Longer study programs require more time to learn. If they'd put theory into practice, people would be more motivated. If teachers were closer, if they knew the student better."*	• Reducing of schoolarships • Less resources • Smaller

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- Better school achievement due to greater teachers' support

"In that school I didn't manage to conclude English. Here I've had good grades due to teachers' support. There I didn't understand the words, I didn't understand many of them. Here that doesn't happen."

"I'd say that it's much better here because teachers help a lot more so that you may move to the next grade. In regular education I don't think they care much. They see mainly students who are more intelligent, and the others who have difficulties, most don't want to talk with them. I think that's where this school is good. The teachers try to pass all students. They'll only fail if they want to. That's it."

"Here teachers fight for us more. It's different. They help a lot, even if we have a negative grade they allow us taking another test to improve the grade, they're always concerned with us."

"We feel more motivated if people encourage us, if they believe that we have abilities and that we'll succeed. But if people are always telling us: "You won't make it", "do as you please", we lose heart."

- The possibility of study a specific area of knowledge increases their motivation

"It gives more opportunities because I'm on a course that I actually like, never in my life did I think I'd take this course, but I'm enjoying it and when I was on the internship I really loved being there. It gives me more opportunities to get a job when I conclude my studies than regular education."

- More opportunities in the labour market

"I have the professional experience and the students from regular courses have no professional experience in anything. They know other contents."

"Studying in regular school is good, we learn a lot but we conclude 12th grade, and if we have the misfortune of not enrolling in university, we have no training in work, we don't have any know-how. Whereas here we learn a profession. If we want to conclude our course and go work, we can do that. If we want to enrol in university, we can do that. We have more paths if we come to these courses."

- Finding other skills

"I've seen that I can do other things besides that. I can learn other vocations. Arts, music.. I'd never thought about it before coming here. But since I've been here, I got interested in Music. Maybe that's what interests me most. To learn an instrument."

In the previous school I was more of a rebel. I misbehaved, and here I don't. It changed my mind. My way of thinking. Because I told myself I couldn't be like that. I had to change, I had to do something, otherwise I wouldn't be anyone in life and that's not what I want for myself.

- All of them, but one, would like to pursue studies to the University, however, none are able to afford it.

- Find jobs to earn money to go to the university; to help families at home;

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Final remarks

- Commonly educational disafecction leading to early leaving from education and training can be associated with students' disengagement and/or difficulties to identify with school practices;

- Young adults' pathways show their struggle to conciliate family and personal challenges;

- There is a clear failure of the regular school and teachers to respond to individual differences and needs;

- The economic deprivation still putting at educational risk the social vulnerable groups

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➢Thank you

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