

Paper 1/1 - Exploring risk and protective factors of ESL: methodological challenges and emerging findings from a cross-national survey.

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This paper presents an overview of the large-scale, cross-national survey undertaken in Spring 2014 within the EU-funded projects 'RESL.eu - Researching Early School Leaving in Europe'. The survey involved the administration of a structured questionnaire to over 19,000 young people in schools and colleges across fourteen different European urban sites. The paper starts by presenting the rationale underpinning the methodology and the design of the questionnaire – which was also informed by an extensive review of statistical evidence on ESL in Europe (Kaye et al. 2014). It then discusses the opportunities, but also the limitations, of collecting and analysing statistical data on young people at risk of ESL, in particular focusing on the challenges of cross-national comparison.

Some key findings emerging from the survey are then presented - using EU-wide aggregated data - suggesting ways in which statistical modelling can be used to explore the factors and characteristics leading to ESL, to estimate the trajectories of individual students and to identify those in need of additional support. The results of this analysis are compared with general hypotheses found in international literature and informing policy and practice (Dale, 2010; Ferguson et al., 2005; Lamb et al. 2011; NESSE 2010).

The paper concludes with an analysis of the extent to which profiles of young people at risk of ESL vary across different countries (Belgium, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK) and a discussion of how differences and commonalities can be used to inform further research and interventions.