



Just enough Education to Perform

. The Labour Market Integration of Early School Leavers in a European cross-national Perspective

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PhD thesis defence on 28 May, 2010

Abstract

This thesis concerns the labour market outcomes of early school leavers in a European, cross-national perspective. More specifically, it deals with the way country level factors shape the disadvantages these early school leavers experience on the European labour market, when compared with those who have at least upper secondary education. To the extent that country level variation in the labour market integration of early school leavers can be attributed to specific institutional and macro-structural characteristics, it enriches the single cross-national definition of early school leaving, and points towards best practices that can be learned from.

The overarching research question that runs through this thesis is twofold. To what extent is the labour market integration of early school leavers in Europe obstructed by the country-specific macro-structural factors underlying a knowledge economy? And, second, can the various education and labour market policies across the European countries help to decrease the relative labour market disadvantage of early school leavers?

The concept of early school leaving, the process of ranking and rating countries on the basis of institutional and macro-structural characteristics, and the increasing availability of standardised country level indicators have all developed through a cross-fertilisation of academic research and EU policy making, which is why this thesis draws upon both the empirical literature and the Lisbon objectives when arguing the relevance of the research and formulating its conclusions.

Using the ESS, the ECHP, and the EU-SILC, this thesis addresses the cross-level influences of educational expansion, skill-biased occupational change, the type and quality of the education and training system, and labour market policies. In conclusion, attention is drawn to the three most relevant findings in this research. These are (1) the downside of an equitable educational system, (2) the benefit of a higher educational quality, and (3) the influence of durable active labour market policy.



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Stan van Alphen is a social scientist with a doctorate of Political and Social Sciences of the European University Institute. On May 28th 2010, he defended his thesis, entitled “Just Enough Education to Perform: The Labour Market Integration of Early School Leavers in a European Cross-National Perspective”. His main research interests are education, social stratification, political economy, equality of opportunity, and EU comparative research. During his PhD programme, Stan van Alphen was a visiting pre-doctoral fellow at the J.F. Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University, where he took part in a multidisciplinary program on inequality and social policy. In addition, he attended summer schools at the University of Ljubljana and the London School of Economics, in hierarchical modelling and European policy-making respectively. Before coming to the EUI, Stan van Alphen obtained an MSc in Sociology from Tilburg University, the Netherlands.