

Education: A Tool for the Economic Integration of Migrants

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Labor market requirements are a main reason why education is a key factor for the integration of immigrants. European education systems can help to bridge the immigrant-native education gap in particular for second generation immigrants. An important factor is learning the host-country language. Policies that can help immigrant students include facilitating access to early education, training teachers to avoid stereotyped expectations, and preventing segregation.

International migration has accelerated during the last decades. Between 1990 and 2013 the number of international migrants worldwide rose by over 77 million (50 percent) and much of this growth occurred between 2000 and 2010. However, migration has not increased everywhere: while net immigration to Northern America declined from 1.4 million annually in 1990-2000 to 1.3 million per year in 2000-2010, in Europe it almost doubled over the same period, from one million to 1.9 million per year. Nowadays, Europe is also facing a growing refugee crisis: a large number of persons have recently reached the continent in search of safety, and according to Eurostat more than 700,000 have claimed asylum in 2015.

EDUCATION IS KEY FOR INTEGRATION

Human capital is a key factor for the integration of immigrants, because of its strong impact on the probability of employment and lifetime earnings. Although immigrants in Europe are on average slightly less educated than native individuals, there are important differences across countries (see Table). The evidence on student performance in international tests shows that in some countries (such as Denmark and France) the gap in favour of natives is almost entirely explained by differences in socio-economic background, while in other countries (such as Finland, Austria, Belgium and Portugal) the factors driving the gap are more complex.

A factor explaining the immigrant-native differences is proficiency in the host-country language. The difference in math test scores between natives and students who do not speak the host-country language at home is large in the European countries except for the UK and Ireland where it is statistically insignificant and it is even in favor of non-natives in Australia, Canada, and the US. Receiving countries with a large share of immigrants who do not speak the local language are likely to face higher integration costs. Recommended policies to address this problem include: a) providing extra funds to schools in order to help children learn the language of instruction; b) training teachers to deal with children who lack competence in the language of instruction and to work in multilingual classroom environments; c) support out-of-school activities and the engagement of parents.

Since second generation immigrants typically undertake their investments in human capital in the host country, European educational institutions have an important role to play in bridging the gap between the native and the immigrant population. Policies that facilitate access to early education and policies that foster child care for children with an immigrant background are likely to help. An example is the *Opstapje* project in the Netherlands, which enrolls 2-4 years old children with the aim of strengthening their cognitive, social and physical competences and their learning of the language of instruction.

Share with low educational attainment by immigrant status in selected countries, 2008

	Natives	First generation	Second generation	
			Mixed background	Foreign background
Austria	12	27	13	24
Belgium	23	36	32	33
Canada	24	23	19	14
Czech Republic	7	18	9	29
Denmark	21	29	–	–
Estonia	11	–	12	8
France	23	43	24	26
Germany	8	34	–	19
Greece	32	47	–	40
Hungary	18	14	–	–
Ireland	28	16	19	–
Italy	42	44	27	–
Lithuania	7	–	–	–
Netherlands	22	39	24	29
New Zealand	20	–	22	17
Poland	10	–	11	–
Portugal	70	50	53	59
Slovak Republic	8	–	–	–
Slovenia	14	34	–	–
Spain	43	40	33	55
Sweden	13	29	14	15
Switzerland	5	27	6	7
United Kingdom	25	20	20	22
United States	10	31	5	11

Percentage with education below second cycle of secondary education, including ISCED 3C. Mixed background: one parent foreign born. Foreign background: both parents foreign born. Source: Eurostat, LFS 2008 ad hoc module (online data code ifso_08cobspe).

guage at home, suggesting that addressing the language gap early on is important.

An additional factor that might affect the performance of immigrant students is the combination of teacher and student characteristics. Teachers may change their behaviour in class in reaction to the ethnicity of students. For instance, teachers might have stereotyped expectations about the skills of immigrant pupils, which might result in the self-fulfilling prophecy that these students perform worse. It is important to avoid these expectations, for instance by using targeted training programs and by recruiting teachers with an immigration background.

In principle, there may be pluses and minuses of whether immigrants mix with natives or are segregated with other immigrants. On the one hand, grouping immigrant students together might allow teachers to adopt a teaching style that fits well with their specific needs and teaching could be organized in smaller classes. On the other hand, segregation is likely to hamper social interactions with children of native parents, with negative effects on language skill acquisition and social integration. Existing empirical research suggests that immigrant students are negatively affected by other immigrant students in the class or school,

suggesting that segregation should be avoided. However, native students may be negatively affected by immigrants in class; some studies find significant negative effects, but others find no or very small effects. In this context, measures that discourage segregation may help one group but hurt another group and induce natives to move out of mixed schools. If poor language skills are the key reason why a higher share of immigrant children in the class may hurt children of native parents, pre-school language training for immigrants that reduces these negative spillover effects may help desegregation policies by reducing their negative effects on native children.

SCHOOL POLICIES TO HELP IMMIGRANT PUPILS

Early selection into vocational and academic school tracks might affect the educational attainment of immigrant children because these students not only are typically from a disadvantaged background but also face difficulties due to poor control of the hosting country language. Concern about detrimental effects of early tracking on the immigrant-native gap may suggest that postponing tracking by a year or two could improve opportunities for students with socio-economic disadvantage including migrants (e.g., DE and PL). The scant empirical evidence at hand shows, however, that early tracking affects performance only for immigrant students who do not speak the test lan-

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