

DETERMINANTS OF THE EDUCATIONAL SITUATION OF YOUNG MIGRANTS

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Due to the extraordinary influx of refugees from Syria and other crisis areas since last year, the integration of migrants is currently being debated more than ever in many member countries of the European Union. In order to draw conclusions for future policy measures to integrate migrants, the situation of today's migrant population will be analysed in greater detail. Most of the literature on this topic discusses the assimilation of migrants into the labour market. This article, however, focuses on education, which has an important impact on one's future level of employment and income. Two central questions will be answered during this elaboration: Firstly, to what extent can individual characteristics – such as the socioeconomic status and language skills – explain international differences in the educational achievement of migrants? And secondly, how large is the effect of institutional factors in this context? To answer these questions, some datasets are described and the results of empirical works are presented.

The native – migrant gap

The most common approach to assessing the educational situation of children with migration background is to compare their achievement to that of natives, the so called “native-migrant gap”. For this purpose, PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is an especially useful dataset.² 15-year-old students participate in this study (OECD 2006).

When comparing differences between natives and migrants it is important to distinguish between immigrant generations. A key difference between the first and the second generation is that the former could have received their education in their home or host country. Figure 1 provides the maximum scores reached in the PISA test for the bottom 25 percent of students by migration sta-

tus. Here, the results are illustrated for 14 countries of the European Union, as well as for Switzerland, Norway and major non-European destination countries for migrants: Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The figure presents countries in a descending order according to the score points in the sub-group of natives.

There are remarkable differences between generations: In all countries, with the exception of Austria and Germany, the performance of second generation migrants has improved relative to first generation students (for more details, see Algan et al. 2010). Since not all of the students with a migration background receive their education completely in their host country, it is difficult to compare them with native children. Thus, the following analyses only focus on the group of second generation migrants. These persons were born in the destination country and therefore should have the same educational opportunities as natives. Nevertheless, in most of the countries they still lag behind their native born counterparts. The test score discrepancies are especially large in Germany (-98 points), Austria (-92 points) and Belgium (-84 points). A successful assimilation of the second generation only takes place in Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand (the native-migrant gap lies within the small range of -15 to +8 score points).

What are the determinants relevant to the educational success of students with a migration background? This especially includes composition effects (individual characteristics like their gender, age and family background), as well as context effects such as the environment of the student (e.g. municipality, school, peers). Whereas the former is mainly determined by one's family background, context effects can be influenced by political decisions.

Composition effects

Besides the gender and age of a student, his/her socioeconomic status represents an important component of the composition effects. Several factors can be used to define socioeconomic background including the highest parental educational attainment (ISCED³), parental occupational level (ISEI⁴) or the number of books in the

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² Other useful datasets are TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) that collect information of children enrolled in fourth and eighth grade (TIMSS and PIRLS Study Center 2016).

³ International Standard Classification of Education. For more information see DICE Database (2015): <http://www.cesifo-group.de/ifoHome/facts/DICE/Education-and-Innovation/Education/Organisation/Education-levels/fileBinary/Education-levels.pdf>

⁴ International Socioeconomic Index of Occupations (Ganzeboom, De Graaf and Treiman 1992).

Figure 1

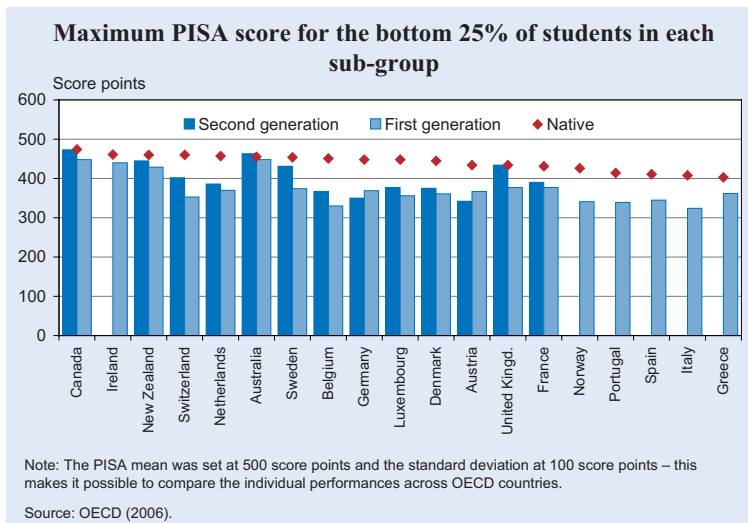
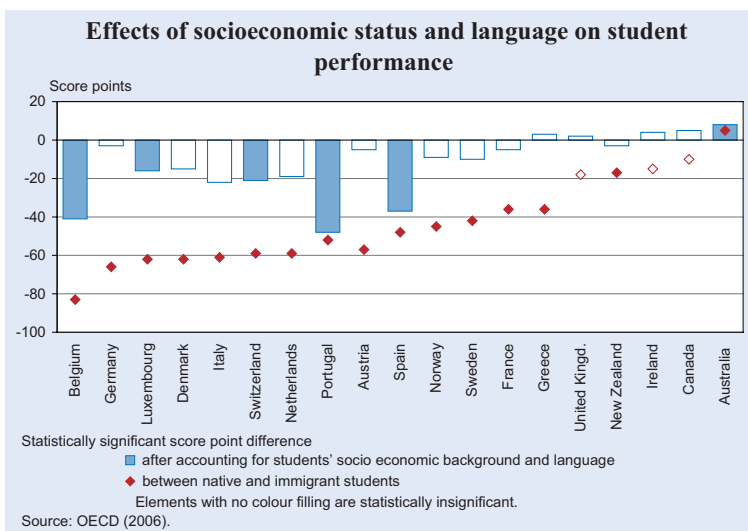


Figure 2



student's household (Schütz, Ursprung and Wößmann 2005). For students with a migration background, their proficiency in the language of their host country is particularly relevant. To that end, the PISA database provides information on which language is spoken in the student's home. Figure 2 shows the differences in mean score points (diamonds), as well as the results of a regression on the native-migrant performance gap (bars). The bars with colour filling illustrate the remaining extent of the gap when controlling for the socioeconomic status and the language spoken at home.

In Belgium, the unadjusted performance gap is by far the largest, followed by Germany and Luxembourg. As soon as the socioeconomic status and the language

spoken at home are controlled for, the performance differences decrease in all countries except for Portugal. As the extent to which the initial gap can be explained by the two variables varies significantly across countries, the order of the countries in terms of the remaining gap changes. In Portugal the differences are largest, whereas they decrease substantially and become insignificant in Germany. Immigrants only perform significantly more poorly in Portugal, Belgium, Spain, Luxembourg and Switzerland. In Australia, children with a migration background achieve even better test scores than natives with the same socioeconomic status.

For a better understanding of the previous results, it is necessary to account for differences in the parental socioeconomic status of children with and without a migration background. The PISA database provides information on the ISEI of the parents that can be used to define this variable. Descriptive statistics in Table 1 show a substantial variation in the occupational status of parents. The countries are sorted by the ISEI differences of natives and migrants. The link to Figure 2 becomes notably apparent in

Portugal and Spain: the parents of the second migrant generation have a higher ISEI than the parents of natives. This is why the socioeconomic status cannot explain the poorer performance of migrants in these two countries. By contrast, migrants have a much lower ISEI than natives in Norway (-48.6), Austria (-12.2) and Germany (-11.3). These are the countries where the performance gap of children becomes insignificant once it is controlled for socioeconomic status and the language spoken at home.

As in most countries, only a small share of the native-migrant gap remains after controlling for socioeconomic status and language, the small influence of the migration background cannot be crucial to the relatively

Table 1

Highest parental occupation index (ISEI)			
	Natives	Migrants (2.Gen.)	Gap
Norway	53.5	4.9	-48.6
Austria	50.2	38	-12.2
Germany	50.7	39.4	-11.3
Belgium	51.1	41.9	-9.2
Netherlands	52.8	44.1	-8.7
US	54.2	46.8	-7.4
Denmark	49.1	41.9	-7.2
Switzerland	50.7	44.5	-6.2
France	49.3	43.4	-5.9
Italy	46.9	42.7	-4.2
Sweden	51	48	-3
Canada	53.8	51.9	-1.9
Greece	49.4	47.6	-1.8
UK	51.4	50.4	-1
Australia	52.7	52.1	-0.6
Spain	45	47.6	2.6
Finland	49	54.4	5.4
Portugal	41.6	48	6.4

Source: OECD (2006).

poor school performance of migrants. Many empirical studies do not find evidence for ethnic discrimination. Instead, there are general inequalities in some countries in the sense that a socially deprived family background negatively affects the educational success of children (see Lüdemann and Schwerdt (2013) for Germany).

Context effects

There is a link between the extent to which cross-country differences can be explained by the socioeconomic status and the equality of opportunities in the education systems. Table 2 presents the institutional characteristics of school systems in several countries. In most cases the starting age of compulsory schooling is six years. However, even although children start going to school at the same age, there are huge international differences with regard to the age at which school tracking occurs. Whereas in the majority of OECD countries tracking takes place at the age of 15 or 16, children in Germany and Austria are only 10 years old when they are allocated to different types of schools.

Schütz, Ursprung and Wößmann (2005) as well as Bauer and Riphahn (2006) investigate the correlation between the age at which school tracking begins and school performance. Both studies show that the earlier school selection occurs, the stronger the impact of family background on the student's performance is. This might be a further reason why the performance gap becomes insignificant in Germany and Austria in Figure 2 as soon as the socioeconomic background is controlled for. Schütz

and Wößmann (2005) analyse whether the inequality of educational achievement changes from primary to secondary school. They conclude that inequality increases in countries where students are tracked (e.g. Germany) while in countries that do not track, the performance differences decrease (e.g. Canada, New Zealand). Consequently, children with poorly-educated parents are relatively disadvantaged in Germany and Austria, not only because of the tracking system per se, but also because of the early timing of tracking. Due to the fact that in general, migrants often have a less favourable socioeconomic background, they are disproportionately affected by these institutional disadvantages.

An analysis of the native-migrant gap in a country only provides limited information on the extent to which migrants are disadvantaged in the respective country. Cross-country differences in the native-migrant gap could also be attributed to a "selection bias", for example. This would be the case if there was a link between the socioeconomic status and the choice of the destination country. A recent approach to avoiding this bias is to compare migrants to the children of non-migrants in their parents' country of origin. The advantage of this kind of comparison is the implicit control for the variables *culture*, *original language* and *the quality of parental schooling*. Such comparisons reveal whether children benefit from the emigration decisions of their parents. This approach is used by Luthra (2010) for second generation immigrants in Germany. In her study she shows that every group of migrant children – except Italians – have a higher point score than the reference group in their parents' origin country. This comparison

Table 2

Institutional characteristics of school systems		
	Starting age of compulsory schooling	First age of selection
Austria	6	10
Germany	6	10
Belgium	6	12
Netherlands	5	12
Switzerland	6 (7)	12
Luxembourg	6	13
Italy	6	14
Greece	6	15
Ireland	6	15
Portugal	6	15
Australia	6	16
Canada	6	16
Denmark	6	16
New Zealand	6	16
Norway	6	16
Spain	6	16
Sweden	7	16
United Kingdom	4(5)	16
France	6	-

Source: OECD (2006, 2009).

shows that migration has a positive effect on the educational success of migrants' children. The results of the study show that migration can decrease educational inequality globally.⁵

Conclusion

Based on our descriptive analysis, the relatively lower school performance of migrants in many countries can largely be explained by their socioeconomic status. Furthermore, the language spoken at home, as well as in their country of origin, has a strong impact on the educational success of migrants. Besides these individual factors, there are also institutional ones that influence their performance. As far as school systems are concerned, the age of secondary school selection was identified as the most important factor: The earlier school tracking occurs, the larger the disadvantages are for children with a socially deprived family background – and thus for a majority of children with migration background.

⁵ An international comparison in this context is only presented for Turkish migrants since this is the only migrant group with a sufficiently large sample in several countries (see Dustmann, Frattini and Lanzara 2012).

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