

*Ensuring equal opportunities and promoting upward social mobility for all are crucial policy objectives for inclusive societies. A group that deserves specific attention in this context is immigrants and their children, as they face multiple disadvantages and constitute an important and growing part of the population virtually everywhere. In the European Union, the native-born children of migrants account for 9% of all youth aged 15-34 and 11% of all children below the age of 15. At the same time, these children and youth tend to have lower educational attainment and labour market outcomes than do their peers with native-born parents, especially those in those EU countries that experienced large-scale immigration of low-educated immigrants.*

*This edition of **Migration Policy Debates** assesses the intergenerational transmission of the disadvantages encountered by migrants, in absolute and relative terms, and the conditions under which the native-born children of immigrants may be resilient in the face of the challenges of their parents' generation. It summarises a recent OECD report (OECD, 2017) on this issue, funded by the European Commission.*

## How does having immigrant parents affect the outcomes of children in Europe?

- In the EU, 15% of native-born with non-EU parents have a mother with at most primary education or no formal education at all, which is five times the share among the native-born. This indicates that these people have a more challenging “starting point” in life, which could partly explain their weaker performance in the education system and on the labour market. Additionally, whether immigrant mothers have a job seems to have an important impact on the outcomes of their children, more than for their peers with native-born parents. While this is observed for both boys and girls, the association is particularly strong for girls.
- In many European countries, the native-born with low-educated immigrant parents have a lower probability of completing secondary school and higher education, compared to the native-born whose parents have an equally low level of education but are native born.
- There is a convergence of educational attainment across generations. On average across European OECD countries, the native-born with immigrant parents have 1.3 years more schooling than their parents, while their peers with native-born parents have 0.7 years. Among parents, the difference in educational attainment between the native-born and immigrants is roughly 1.2 years of schooling, while among their offspring this difference is reduced to roughly 0.7 years of schooling.
- Intergenerational upward mobility among children of EU-born parents is exceptionally high. Across all levels of parental education, adult children with EU-born parents have higher employment rates than both adult children of native parents and of parents born outside the EU.
- Higher levels of parental education do not improve the labour market chances for the children of non-EU immigrants as much as they do for the children of natives. The native born with low-educated parents of non-EU origin have roughly the same employment chances as their peers with low-educated native-born parents. However, having parents educated at upper secondary level increases the employment rate for natives with native-born parents by 10 percentage points, while increase is only 5 percentage points for peers with non-EU parents. The picture is broadly the same for those with highly-educated parents.
- In Europe, the employment gap between native-born children of non-EU immigrants and children of the native-born decreases with the level of the children's educational attainment, suggesting that education is a stronger driver for labour market integration among children of non-EU immigrants than among children of natives. Low-educated natives with low-educated parents born outside the EU have an employment rate almost 8 percentage points lower than their peers with native parents, while the gap is only about half that for upper secondary or tertiary levels of education.

## What is the issue?

The degree to which parents transmit their human capital is a key factor affecting people's education and labour market outcomes later in life. A key group of interest in this context are immigrants and their children, who constitute a large and growing group in most OECD and EU countries. While parental human capital is generally correlated with their children's success (usually defined as educational attainment, income, or occupational status), immigrant parents are often at disadvantage compared to the native-born because of lack of host-country language skills and social networks, among others. What is more, in most EU and OECD countries, immigrants are overrepresented at lower educational and occupational levels, with most at the very lowest levels, especially in European OECD countries. In the EU, a full 15% of those native-born with non-EU parents have a mother who did not complete formal education, which is five times the share among native-born mothers.

That particular overrepresentation indicates that natives with non-EU parents have a more challenging "starting point", which could partly explain their weaker performance on the labour market. Indeed, previous OECD and EU work has shown that children of immigrants, and of non-EU immigrants in particular, face lower education and labour market outcomes nearly everywhere (OECD 2010; OECD and EU 2015). The differences are particularly pronounced in EU-countries which experienced large-scale labour migration of the low-educated in the past.

Not only are migrant parents overrepresented in the lowest education levels, but also they are more likely to be without a job and, when employed, to find themselves more often in lower-skilled occupations (OECD and EU, 2015). At the same time, intergenerational mobility is more likely for those whose parents are at the bottom end with respect to these characteristics. It would thus not be surprising if children of immigrants were, on average, likely to seem more mobile at first, given that the threshold they have to surpass is much lower.

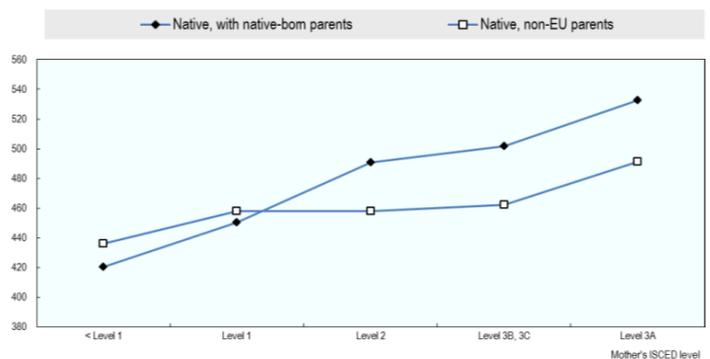
Indeed, there is a convergence of educational attainment across generations. Progress is clearly visible when comparing differences across generations for children with immigrant and native-born parents. On average across European OECD

countries, natives with immigrant parents have on average 1.3 years' more schooling than their parents, while their peers with native-born parents have 0.7 years. Among parents, the difference in educational attainment between native-born and immigrants is roughly 1.2 years of schooling, while among their offspring this difference is reduced to roughly 0.7 years of schooling. The gap has thus almost halved within one generation.

## Are the natives with immigrant parents more or less socially mobile than the native-born with native-born parents?

To shed more light on the intergenerational mobility patterns of the native-born with immigrant parents compared to that of their peers with native-born parents, it is crucial to compare individuals with the same starting point, i.e. with the same parental educational level. Figure 1 shows that higher parental education is associated with better outcomes for all children, but that the increase is less pronounced for the children of immigrants from non-EU countries.

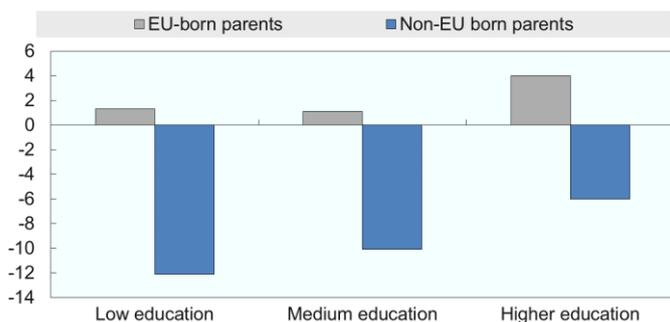
**Figure 1: PISA 2015 mathematics scores by migration background and mother's ISCED level, European OECD countries**



Note: ISCED refers to the 1997 International Standard Classification of Education. Level 1 refers to primary, level 2 to lower secondary and level 3 to upper secondary educational attainment.

Figure 2 shows that for children of immigrants, their own education matters more for their labour market outcomes than does that of their peers with native-born parents (Figure 2). What is more, children of EU-born immigrant parents have better labour market outcomes than their peers with native-born parents, after considering parental education, age, gender, country of residence, and their own education. In contrast, the children of migrants born outside the EU fare less well.

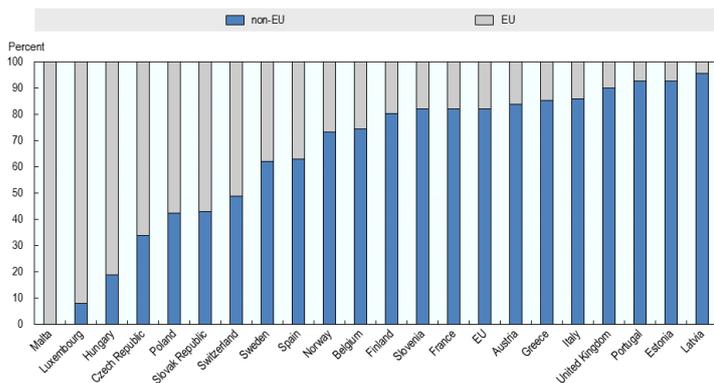
**Figure 2. Employment rate of the children of immigrants, by education and parental origin, 2014**



Note: Reference group: Individuals with native-born parents. Population aged 25-54; Regression controlling for parental educational attainment, age, country, and gender. Source: EU LFS AHM 2014

This stark difference between different groups of parental origin has important implications. First of all, it shows that in intergenerational terms, the integration of immigrants from other EU countries has been highly successful. At the same time, the share of this group among the children of immigrants in Europe differs widely between countries and this is important to take into account in comparisons of outcomes across countries (Figure 3). Second, as this also holds when their parents were low-educated, it shows that some groups of children of immigrants are resilient – poor outcomes of children of low-educated immigrants are not inevitable. Third, some groups are falling behind and do not profit as much from upward mobility as natives. This holds also within the group of children with immigrant parents from non-EU countries (OECD, forthcoming), suggesting that for a considerable part of the children of non-EU immigrants the situation is even worse than the average suggests. This is a worrisome finding and poses a threat to social cohesion.

**Figure 3. Native-born youth with immigrant parents, by parental origin, 15-34, European OECD countries, 2014**



Source: EU LFS AHM 2014.

There are also important gender aspects. Female native-born children of non-EU immigrants outperform their male peers in education, whereas the inverse is the case in the labour market. An important influence with respect to the latter comes from immigrant mothers' labour market participation. This seems to have an important impact on the outcomes of their children, more than for the latter's peers with native-born parents. One may only speculate about the reasons, but role modelling certainly seems to be an important channel. While this is observed for both girls and boys, the association is particularly strong for girls whose parents came from non-EU countries. Having had a working mother at age 14 (as opposed to a mother staying at home) increases the likelihood of being in employment for natives with non-EU parents by 9 percentage points, more than twice the number for their peers with native parents at 4 percentage points.

### Policy considerations

While policy measures aimed at improving the situation of youth in general also reach and support natives with immigrant parents, targeted policy measures may be necessary to address some of their specific challenges. For example, the native-born with immigrant parents have often grown up in an environment where parents have less information about how the labour market functions in the host country or access to networks that may help in finding a first job. Few countries have specifically targeted policies for native-born youth with immigrant parents. However, some indirect targeting – for example, for disadvantaged youth in general – can disproportionately benefit native-born youth with immigrant parents, because they are often overrepresented among this group. Enhancing transparency with respect to the offers available and making sure that all children have the relevant information about these offers are important prerequisites for such programmes to work.

### Early intervention

Increasing access to early childhood education with a specific focus on disfavoured children with language obstacles – as is often the case for children of low-educated non-EU immigrants - not only would allow the mothers to enter the labour market, but also would likely provide high returns for the children themselves – as demonstrated by evidence from a number of OECD countries such as

France and (OECD 2012). Many OECD countries have specific policies in place to help children of immigrants with language obstacles, often based on systematic language screening in pre-school coupled with follow-up remedial.

### ***Promoting excellence and the possibility for upward mobility***

Fostering intergenerational mobility for children of immigrants also means providing opportunities for kids who are among the “best and brightest” but lack family guidance and support regarding post-school options. Higher education is a key point for ensuring equal opportunities across one’s career. Improving disadvantaged youths’ access to top schools remains important for breaking the “glass ceiling” that they often face. The system tends to be structurally biased against low-income students, mostly because of costs in some countries, but also because such schools often require specific preparation for their entry processes. With little information and few resources, some youth prefer to attend shorter post-secondary courses or go to less demanding schools because of the quicker path to entry-level jobs, even if such schools offer lower labour market prospects. Policies aimed at addressing this include so-called “contextual admission” by universities, which takes into account the socio-economic context of the students, to avoid situations where high-potential candidates with a disfavoured background do not pass the initial screening. Students who are flagged through contextual admissions are given additional consideration and will not be rejected solely on the basis of their predicted or actual grades, or will be guaranteed an interview or similar additional opportunity, depending on the discipline. While such initiatives do not target children of immigrants specifically, they do target children from disadvantaged backgrounds, among which children of immigrants are often overrepresented.

Since children of immigrants often end up in the lower streams of the education system and have less parental guidance and fewer role models, it is particularly important to have sufficient possibility for upward mobility in the educational system that allows students to move into more prestigious streams of secondary education or to access higher education.

### ***Combating discrimination and promoting diversity in the labour market***

Most OECD countries have taken measures to combat discriminatory hiring practices, although the scale and scope of the measures vary widely. The most common measure to combat discrimination is legal remedy. Many OECD countries have, for example, implemented non-discrimination legislation and established agencies responsible for monitoring its application. In the OECD countries that were settled by migration, such as Australia, Canada and the United States, such legislation dates back several decades. In the European Union, an important impetus has come from Racial Equality Directive 2000/43/EC.

Several OECD countries have also tested equal employment and affirmative action policies. Such policies go beyond imposing penalties on discriminatory acts and have attempted to “level the playing field” by removing barriers that hamper access to the labour market and professional upward mobility. Often these are based on targets, although hard quotas are rare. A growing number of OECD countries have adopted diversity policy instruments. France, for example, provides companies with the possibility of passing an audit as to whether or not they use fair hiring and promotion practices, and, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden have experimented with anonymous CVs as a tool to tackle discrimination and enhance diversity in the hiring process.

In general, a considerable part of the effect of policy measures with respect to combatting discrimination and increasing diversity stems from raising awareness about the issue rather than through the direct influence of a particular policy on reducing discrimination or promoting equal opportunities. The promotion of diversity also implies tackling the issue of segregation in neighbourhoods and schools. There does not seem to be a one single solution to this problem; a mix of policy interventions – including both housing and education policy instruments that aim at avoiding concentration of disadvantage – is certainly needed.

## ***Counselling and mentorship***

Individuals with immigrant parents tend to have fewer social networks and less knowledge about how the labour market functions. Policies can help to overcome this, for example through programmes for better career counselling or mentorship programmes. Such programmes for immigrants have been highly effective in a number of countries, increasingly so for recent arrivals, but they could also be used to overcome such obstacles for the children of immigrants, even for those who are native born. Such measures could also promote social cohesion at large.

## ***The public sector as a role model***

The public sector, and in particular the public administration, can play an important role in integrating immigrants and in supporting intergenerational mobility for their children. Offering public sector jobs to immigrants not only widens their career options, but also generates a range of additional social benefits for countries. First, the presence of public servants with migration background enhances diversity within public institutions and contributes to a better understanding of the needs of immigrants and their children. Second, the ways in which the wider public perceives children of immigrants depend on their ‘visibility’ in public life and the contexts in which they become ‘visible’. When civil servants with a migrant background act as teachers, police officers, or public administrators, they demonstrate

## **References and further reading**

OECD (forthcoming a), *Catching Up? Country Studies on Intergenerational Mobility and Children of Immigrants*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

OECD (forthcoming b), *All Different, All Equal: Levelling the Playfields and Addressing Social Mobility*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264086395-en>.

that immigrants are an integral part of society, and act as role models to other native-born youth with immigrant parents. Finally, by pro-actively employing children of immigrants, the public sector serves as a role model to private sector employers.

This is an area where countries have been increasingly active : about a dozen OECD countries have policies in place to promote the employment of children of immigrants in the public sector. There is a wide range of tools targeted at children of immigrants, ranging from information and advertisement campaigns such as in Germany, to broad-based policies in the Scandinavian policies which oblige public employers to make particular recruitment efforts with respect to this group. Other countries, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, have long-standing affirmative action policies which target disadvantaged youth in general.

## ***Supporting the integration of immigrant parents***

Finally, integrating immigrant parents, by providing education and training where appropriate and, more generally, by supporting labour market integration, will have an important spill over effect on the outcomes of their children. Involving and supporting immigrant parents – especially mothers, who are often a blind spot in the integration offers of OECD and EU countries – is thus a necessary precondition towards achieving upward mobility for their children.

## **Contacts**

Jean-Christophe Dumont  
International Migration Division, OECD  
Email: [jean-christophe.dumont@oecd.org](mailto:jean-christophe.dumont@oecd.org)  
Tel: +33 1 45 24 92 43

Thomas Liebig  
International Migration Division, OECD  
Email: [thomas.liebig@oecd.org](mailto:thomas.liebig@oecd.org)  
Tel: +33 1 45 24 90 68

## **Useful links: [www.oecd.org/migration](http://www.oecd.org/migration)**

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