

Roots and Development of Achievement Gaps

A Longitudinal Assessment in Selected European Countries

EDITORS

Giampiero Passaretta and Jan Skopek

AUTHORS

Thomas van Huizen, Piergiorgio Lovaglio, Giampiero Passaretta, Luisa Antunes Ribeiro, Jan Skopek, Stefano Verzillo, Giorgio Vittadini, Henrik Daae Zachrisson

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Online Appendix

Several chapters in this report refer to additional and supplementary analyses which are provided in a separate appendix that is available online at <http://www.isotis.org>.

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Partners and researchers involved

Partner number	Partner name	Researchers involved
5	Trinity College Dublin (Ireland)	Jan Skopek (leader ISOTIS WP 1) Giampiero Passaretta
1	University of Utrecht (The Netherlands)	Thomas van Huizen
13	University of Oslo (Norway)	Henrik Daae Zachrisson Luisa Ribeiro
7	University of Milano-Bicocca (Italy)	Piergiorgio Lovaglio Stefano Verzillo Giorgio Vittadini

Executive Summary

This report presents a comprehensive longitudinal study of social and migration gaps in educational achievement in a European-wide comparative perspective. We analyse the evolution of achievement gaps in children from infancy and preschool age up to end of compulsory schooling in five country cases: Germany, Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom, and Italy. All country-case studies make use of recent high-quality cohort data to study in-depth two key research questions: (1) When do social and migration/ethnicity gaps in children's achievement arise and how do they evolve when children are growing up and navigating from infancy to preschool, from preschool to school, and from primary to secondary school? And, (2), to which degree are social and migration-related inequalities in school-age achievement already determined by early inequalities well-established before children enter school? Taken together, we show that the early years of life (before children enter school) are formative for patterns of inequality observed in school age, and this holds for achievement inequality both by socio-economic and migration status. Socio-economic and migration-related achievement gaps in school are therefore rooted substantially in the early years.

Substantial inequality in educational achievements by the socio-economic status (SES) of children's family of origin were found across all countries. Children from high-income families and from parents with a high level of education perform consistently better than children from less affluent families and whose parents have less educational resources. Importantly, these socially-determined gaps are already visible in the very early years of life, tend to increase steadily over infancy, and are well-established even before children enter primary school. After transition to school, SES-gaps in achievement remain quite stable and increase only slightly throughout years of primary and secondary education. Notwithstanding subtle differences across countries, we found considerable similarities in the evolution of socio-economically determined achievement gaps despite clear institutional differences in national education systems and overall welfare-state arrangements. Moreover, a major part of SES inequalities in achievement accumulated over the early years is carried over into the school system even though factors related to family SES continue to shape children's achievement in school. We conclude that preschool-age interventions that facilitate a more equalized start into school life hold the promise of reducing a large part of socio-economic achievement inequality in the later school career.

Our findings reveal more country heterogeneity regarding educational inequalities related to migration and ethnic minority background of children. In general, children with a migration or ethnic minority background enter school with a substantial disadvantage in achievement. Turkish and Moroccan children are particularly disadvantaged. Socio-economic disadvantages related to migration background could only in part account for those inequalities, yet these findings varied between countries and target groups. In some countries, however, initial disadvantages of migrant children vanish almost entirely after school entry. Extreme cases represent the UK (migrant gaps close quickly after school entry) and Germany (in general, migrant gaps do not decrease over schooling). For several countries we find that although children with a migration background are lagging behind at school entry, they enjoy over-proportional achievement gains in school life. Hence, when starting into school at the same achievement level, many migrant children are outperforming children of native families. Thus, reducing migration-related inequality in preschool-age could have the potential to eradicate migrants' penalties in school-age entirely.

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