

High Educational Aspirations among Immigrant Background Youth

Children of immigrants have on average lower academic performance, but they tend to have high educational aspirations and make high-aspiring educational choices at given levels of achievement. This pattern is more consistent in countries with open comprehensive school systems, such as England, Sweden and Norway, than in countries with school systems with early tracking, such as Germany and the Netherlands.

Children of immigrants' high educational aspirations have been given various labels, including 'immigrant optimism', 'second generation advantage' or the 'immigrant drive'.

School systems differ in many aspects between countries. While some leave much room for choice, like those in Scandinavia and England, educational transitions are more heavily conditional on previous performance in others, such as in Germany and the Netherlands. This can affect educational aspirations.

Immigrant-background youth are more likely to have university aspirations than youth whose parents were born in the host country. The most consistent advantage for children of immigrants is found in England and Sweden. This suggests that the ample scope for choice in progression through these school systems allows the high ambitions of immigrant-background youth to play out. We find similar results among children of immigrants in Norway. However, an advantage for some immigrant-background origin groups is also present in the Netherlands and Germany.

The table shows majority and minority students' university aspirations in 5 countries. We can see a clear minority advantage in university aspirations in Sweden, England and Norway, as well as in the Netherlands (students who immigrated after age 7 are excluded). It should be noted that once we take account of minority

students' often disadvantaged socio-economic position, the minority advantage becomes even more pronounced. When we compare students with similar achievement and socio-economic background levels, a minority advantage can also be observed in Germany (see our publications listed below).

Table showing the % of students aged 14 who think that they will get a university degree

	Majority	Minority
Sweden	47	58
England	34	53
Norway (age 16)	66	70
Netherlands	31	46
Germany	19	16

Note: For Norway, the survey covers the Oslo region, where educational aspirations are higher than in the rest of the country.

Ongoing Research

The more ambitious educational aspirations and choices among immigrant origin youth are often seen as positive, but for many, these aspirations do not translate to higher grades or graduation. We are currently studying immigrant background differences in graduation to find out whether higher educational aspirations also result in higher educational outcomes for immigrant-background youth.

Key Research Publications

- Frida Rudolphi and Zerrin Salikutluk. 2021. Aiming high no matter what? Educational aspirations of ethnic minority and ethnic majority youth in England, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. *Comparative Sociology*.
- Jon Horgen Friberg. 2019. Does selective acculturation work? Cultural orientations, educational aspirations and school effort among children of immigrants in Norway. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.
- Jan O. Jonsson and Frida Rudolphi. 2011. Weak performance—strong determination: School achievement and educational choice among children of immigrants in Sweden. *European Sociological Review*.

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