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THE EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE OF SECOND-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS IN EUROPE: HOW TO ENSURE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION?

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Abstract

In Europe, second-generation immigrant children often face educational disadvantages compared to the native population. The CILS4EU project examines the underlying reasons for these disparities in four EU countries with different educational systems: England, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Germany. Addressing this issue, the European Union has outlined measures in the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 to ensure the educational inclusion of children with migrant backgrounds. Special attention is given to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), for which the EU Commission has drafted guidelines for Member States, recognizing its pivotal role in narrowing this gap. With this in mind, the aim of this research is to identify effective strategies and policies to address the educational disadvantages faced by second-generation immigrant children in the EU.

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INTRODUCTION

Education represents one of the fundamental pillars of individual and social development. However, even if it is a universal right recognized by the international community in several treaties, not all people can fully enjoy this right, due to some difficulties that they may face in accessing the educational systems. Reasons behind these difficulties are the lack of adequate educational policies for most vulnerable groups, such as people with a socio-economic disadvantage background, people with disabilities, immigrants, and people with a migrant background. The present research presents the analysis of a specific category of immigrants, or second-generation immigrants. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data, nowadays, it is observed that young adults with immigrant parents are less likely than their peers of native-born parentage to be highly educated (32 % vs 40 % respectively) and more likely to be educated to a low level (21 % vs 14 % respectively). Therefore, it is evident the significant educational disadvantage faced by second-generation immigrants compared to the native population in Europe. This phenomenon raises important questions about the concept of equality of opportunity in education and the social integration of groups with a migrant background. Even if, compared to last decades, educational outcomes and employment rates of second-generation immigrants are higher nowadays, there are still a lot of steps to be taken to ensure equal opportunity and full integration of people with a migrant background. In recent years, scholars have highlighted the importance of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) systems in ensuring the inclusion of children with migratory backgrounds. This is also reflected in the more effective integration of families into society. The significance of these systems becomes evident in reducing the gap in educational outcomes in subsequent years of schooling, both in primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Therefore, promoting and supporting these systems is essential to foster a fair and inclusive educational path for all children, regardless of their family and cultural background.

The European Union is actively tackling this issue by raising awareness about this phenomenon. EU policies and political objectives focus on migrants and individuals with a migrant background by providing guidelines to Member States on effective measures to ensure inclusive and quality education. In pursuit of this objective, the EU acknowledges the significance of Early Childhood Education and Care, recognizing its pivotal role in integrating children with a migrant background into the school environment.

The research aims is to shed light on EU policies ensuring inclusion for children with migrant backgrounds within the school context. The study aims to conduct a thorough analysis of this complex issue, examining the underlying causes, impacts, and possible solutions to achieve inclusion and integration within the educational context for children with a migrant background, specifically second-generation immigrants. Thus, the research aims to provide valid and concrete solutions to address the issue of inclusion and quality education for children with a migrant background, offering a comprehensive and unique overview of ECEC policies for EU member states and promoting effective improvements. Through this multidisciplinary and comparative analysis, the aim is to provide an in-depth understanding of the educational disadvantages faced by second-generation immigrant children in the EU and to identify effective strategies and policies to promote equality of opportunity and social integration through education. The research methodology will employ a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses. By utilizing both types of data, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the phenomenon.

Given the long-standing commitment of the European Union to achieving inclusive education and the persisting disparities in outcomes between second-generation immigrants and native populations despite EU directives, this topic becomes particularly compelling within the context of the right to education in the EU. Therefore, the main research question addressed in this thesis is: *How can EU tools be effectively utilized to ensure inclusive education for second-generation immigrants?*

The research design of this thesis has been carefully crafted to address the research question in the most accurate way possible. Therefore, a set of sub-questions have been

identified based on the EU's commitment to achieving inclusive education. These inquiries include examining the adequacy of the tools provided by the EU for this purpose and deliberating on whether the EU should implement a follow-up process to ensure the inclusion and provision of quality education for second-generation immigrants.

This research carries significant societal importance, since it raises awareness about the importance of ensuring equitable and inclusive education for all, regardless of their origin or cultural background. In a time marked by persistent educational inequalities, especially for vulnerable groups like second-generation immigrants, this research serves as an important tool for promoting social justice and equal opportunities in education. By identifying concrete and valid solutions to address this challenge, this research makes a significant contribution to public discourse and policy formulation aimed at securing a better future for all children in the EU. The academic significance of this research lies in its contribution to the existing literature on educational disadvantages faced by socio-economically disadvantaged groups, a category that encompasses second-generation immigrants. While much attention has been devoted to understanding the educational challenges of socio-economic disadvantage, there has been a relative dearth of research focusing specifically on second-generation immigrants within this context. Thus, this study seeks to fill this gap by integrating the existing literature with specific research on second-generation immigrants, thereby enriching our understanding of the educational obstacles they encounter.

The findings of the thesis show that despite the EU guidelines regarding the functioning of ECEC systems, there are still some EU Member States that have difficulties in ensuring access to ECEC for everyone and record low enrolment rates. Therefore, The EU should accompany member states in guiding their education policies to ensure access to Early Childhood Education and Care systems, underscoring the importance not only of setting objectives at the EU level but also of providing adequate support and guidance to member states for the effective implementation of inclusive education policies.

With this in mind, the thesis is structured as follows. In the first chapter, a detailed overview will be provided of the theoretical framework that has guided the study of equality of opportunity in education, with particular attention to the migration context.

The concept of the right to education will be explored not only as a tool for the full and effective realization of other socio-economic human rights but especially as a means to promote social and cultural integration of groups with a migrant background. Additionally, the chapter examines key theories of educational inequality, emphasizing the influence of social and ethnic origin on access to education and academic outcomes. The intersectionality of social origins and ethnicity factors raises important questions regarding the exasperation of challenges faced by second-generation immigrants in accessing the educational system compared to natives.

The second chapter will focus on a comprehensive analysis of the educational disadvantages encountered by second-generation immigrant children in Europe. Through the use of data from the "Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries" (CILS4EU), educational disparities among different European countries (Germany, Netherlands, England, and Sweden) will be explored, highlighting the factors within the educational context that contribute to increasing immigrants' disadvantages. Specifically, aspects such as social capital, segregation, ethnic homophily, the role of peers and teachers in schools, and the degree of tracking within schools will be examined. These aspects of the educational system are closely related to students' educational outcomes and therefore contribute to providing a comprehensive understanding of the disadvantages affecting immigrants. They will be examined in the context of CILS4EU data to fully understand their impact on the educational disadvantages of second-generation immigrant children. Furthermore, the characteristics of educational systems itself that may or may not be favorable to students with a migration background will be analyzed, i.e. the stratification, selectivity, and tracking. The four countries chosen by the project present different levels of these characteristics and help to have a comprehensive understating of the issue.

The third chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of the EU's tools for inclusive education, with a particular focus on students with migrant backgrounds. It will examine the objectives outlined in the Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, which aims to tackle school segregation and promote early childhood education and care (ECEC) as hubs for integration. Key topics to be discussed include the toolkit for inclusive ECEC, emphasizing the importance of ensuring the availability of nurseries,

staff training, and inclusive curricula. Furthermore, the structure and regulations of ECEC systems in Europe will be explored using data from the European Commission's report "Structural Indicators for Monitoring Education and Training Systems in Europe 2023", providing insights into the current landscape of ECEC systems in Europe.

CHAPTER 1

EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES OF SECOND-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS: SOCIAL ORIGINS AND ETNHICITY -LITERATURE REVIEW-

1. Right to education

"Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market."[1]

The right to education is enshrined and protected in several international conventions and instruments. The above quotation reports what is stated in the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which is consistent with the purpose of the research, or precisely demonstrates the importance of education as a means of integration in a society, particularly for people with an immigrant background.

The right to education was sanctioned and recognized for the first time in 1948 through the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations. Article 26 of the UDHR[2] expresses the idea of free and compulsory education. Later, in 1976 the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reaffirmed the right to education as a legally binding commitment. The latter Convention highlights, in article

[1]European Pillar of Social Rights, first principle.

[2]"Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." – UDHR, article 26.

13 (par.2), four characteristics of education: availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. Starting with the concept of availability, it is understood that *"Functioning educational institutions and programmes have to be available in sufficient quantity within the jurisdiction of the State party. What they require to function depends upon numerous factors, including the developmental context within which they operate; for example, all institutions and programmes are likely to require buildings or other protection from the elements, sanitation facilities for both sexes, safe drinking water, trained teachers receiving domestically competitive salaries, teaching materials, and so on; while some will also require facilities such as a library, computer facilities and information technology."*

Moving forward with accessibility, *"Educational institutions and programmes have to be accessible to everyone, without discrimination, within the jurisdiction of the State party."* Accessibility refers to the non-discrimination, physical, and economic dimension. Particularly important for the purpose of the research is the dimension related to non-discrimination, as states that education must be available to everyone, particularly those in vulnerable groups, without any form of discrimination.

Regarding acceptability, "*The form and substance of education, including curricula and teaching methods, have to be acceptable (e.g. relevant, culturally appropriate and of good quality) to students and, in appropriate cases, parents…"*. The last dimension of education is adaptability, according to which *"education has to be flexible so it can adapt to the needs of changing societies and communities and respond to the needs of students within their diverse social and cultural settings."*

These different characteristics of the right to education have meant that governments must support the right to education by ensuring that it is available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable.

As said before, the right to education is affirmed in numerous other human rights treaties, including the European Charter of the Fundamental Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Covenant against Discrimination in Education, and in various regional treaties, such as the European Social Charter and the African Charter on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights. This right is also upheld in some conventions focused on particular groups of people, for

example, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, particularly relevant to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. The latter ensures that migrant workers, their children, and family members are entitled to fair and equal treatment compared to the nationals of the state where they are employed.

It is evident how employment also is considered a crucial aspect for fully integration into a society. The possibility of good employment in the host society for individuals with a migrant background can be guaranteed by the enjoyment of the right to education. In fact, the same Convention, regarding the education of children of migrants, in article 30 affirmed that "Each child of a migrant worker shall have the basic right of access to education on the basis of equality of treatment with nationals of the State concerned. Access to public pre-school educational institutions or schools shall not be refused or limited by reason of the irregular situation with respect to stay or employment of either parent or by reason of the irregularity of the child's stay in the State of employment." It is clear how the right to education should be conceived as being able to overcome all situations of irregularity[3] precisely because it is a fundamental right.

Education, in fact, is considered the primary means[4] by which both economically and socially marginalized adults and children can emerge from poverty and obtain the means to play a fully active role in their communities. Furthermore, education plays an important role for the integration of people with an immigrant background, and for this reason is necessary to ensure that this category of people can enjoy fully this right, equally compared to natives.

Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means for the realization of other socio-economic human rights, such as the right to work[5] or the right to dignity of

[3]There are different categories of immigrants: legal immigrants, legal nonimmigrants (those with visas that authorize stays for some period of time), and unauthorized or illegal immigrants. Enjoyment of the right to education could be different for each of these categories.

[4] General Comment No. 13 of the UN Committee Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

[5]"Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests."- UDHR, article 23.

the human person[6]. The right to work is often dependent on the education and training one receives; an adequate education can provide individuals with the necessary skills and means to access significant job opportunities. Education is linked to the right to human dignity, since through learning and education, individuals can gain awareness of their rights and responsibilities within a given society.

The right to education is strongly linked to the right to non-discrimination, as many human rights instruments with binding force prescribe the right of all to education without discrimination. In fact, the principle of non-discrimination in education covers several aspects. Firstly, it emphasizes that education, regardless of the level, must be accessible and available. Regarding accessibility, as seen above there are three overlapping dimensions of it. The first dimension is non-discrimination, in meaning that admission into schools or universities should not be affected by ethnicity, gender, or religion. The second dimension is physical accessibility, or that access to education must be either through attendance at a conveniently located physical institution, such as a local school, or via contemporary technological means, such as participation in a distance learning program. The third dimension is economic accessibility, i.e. the commitment of governments to make schooling accessible according to their economic resources.
Instead, availability refers to the adequate infrastructure and trained teachers able to support the delivery of education, without any discriminatory behavior towards students due to their ethnicity.
Furthermore, it asserts that quality and content of education should uphold principles of non-discrimination. Lastly, education itself should foster the development of respect and tolerance among individuals.

Unfortunately, in reality, not everyone can enjoy this right to the same extent. In fact, the Council of Europe has identified three groups of young people within the education system who are particularly vulnerable: those from economically disadvantaged families, those whose parents have a low level of education, and finally ethnic minorities, immigrants and the homeless. These categories should not only be understood separately,

[6]"Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected." - EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, article 1.

since, as we shall see later, a single person may belong to more than one of the categories described above.

As can be seen, immigrants fall into one of the vulnerable categories, i.e. subject to discrimination about the right to education. As has already been mentioned, the right to education serves as a means for the integration of individuals into society, including immigrants. The latter, more than natives, need to integrate into host societies. This is why it is important that they have access to all the integration tools that society offers, particularly education, without any kind of discrimination.

2. Integration of immigrants and the key role played by education

2.1 Definition of Integration

The definition of integration in the specific field of inter-ethnic relations is proposed for research purposes. “Integration must be a mutual exchange of human experience on a psychological level, it must be a cultural exchange from which a broader and more mature perspective emerges, and it must be an integration of the immigrant into the new social structure as a vital and functional part that enriches the whole” (Alberoni e Baglioni, 1965).

According to this definition, the integration process is described as unilaterally, as adaptation, and bilaterally, as cultural exchange.

It is interesting to observe how over time the concept of interaction has evolved from the idea of it being a process of adaptation of immigrants to the host society to the more recent idea of considering it as a process of interaction between immigrants and natives. In this regard the European Union, in the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy, defines integration as a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by immigrants and residents of Member States. This implies respect for the fundamental values of the EU and at the same time safeguarding the practice of different cultures and religions so that immigrants do not lose their identity. However, some argue that

integration is a process of asymmetrical adaptation. They posit that because immigrants must undergo greater adaptation, the receiving society holds a heightened responsibility to take proactive measures in fostering equality between immigrants and natives (Carens, 2005).

John W. Berry (2006) in this regard proposes the acculturation[7] model, according to which there are four ways of acculturating for individuals with a migration background, which differentiation is based on the level of participation and the type of contact the subjects have with the natives. Acculturation, in fact, is defined by the same author as "the process of cultural and psychological change that follows intercultural contact" (Berry, 2003). Acculturation leads to changes that occur due to contact with culturally dissimilar people, groups, and social influences (Gibson, 2001). This process involves cultural and psychological adaptations resulting from interaction with different cultures, influencing how individuals integrate and adapt to a new cultural context.

Starting with the process of assimilation[8], or when immigrants decide to completely conform to the culture of the host country, rejecting contact with the ethnic group of reference and distancing themselves from the culture of origin. Alba and Nee (2003) give a negative meaning to the concept of assimilation, defining it as a "decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences". In fact, from the perspective

[7] Acculturation is most often studied in individuals living in countries or regions other than where they were born—that is, among immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and sojourners (e.g., international students, seasonal farm workers (Berry, 2006).

[8]The concept of assimilation goes back to the model of straight-line assimilation, according to which assimilation is the *telos* - as desirable as it is - towards which to strive, and that the transition from "foreigner" to "not-foreigner" is only a matter of time. Subsequently, new theories emerged concerning not so much whether or not assimilation occurred, but to which segment of society individuals assimilated. Portes and Zhou's (1993) theory of segmented assimilation, in addition to contemplating the possibility of an assimilative path in the classical sense, envisages two further outcomes downward assimilation, which expresses itself in the adherence of young foreigners to the values of an 'oppositional culture', made up of loyalty to marginal groups and rejection of the values of the dominant society, and thus in the refusal to identify with both the group of origin and destination; selective acculturation, which combines the ability to maintain a strong link with the culture and community of origin with forms of economic and social ascendancy and which, therefore, favors the development of multiple, hyphenated identities. The new assimilation theory - purged of the original ethnocentric values - asserts that the assimilation of the foreigner into the host society remains the most likely outcome in the long run, as evidence would show that the passage of time would lead to a progressive and ineluctable blurring of differences between different minority groups (Alba and Nee, 1997; Brubaker, 2001). – Legami e origini, Debora Mantovani

of the ethnic minority group, the ethnic origins of its members become increasingly less relevant compared to those of the ethnic majority group.

Continuation with the process of separation, is understood as the rejection of any contact with the host society, leading to social isolation and ethnocentric closure. Then, the process of marginalization, is characterized by the lack of contact with both the group of origin and the host group and the rejection of the culture of the country of arrival.

Lastly, the integration process, i.e. the tendency to maintain the culture of the country of origin but, at the same time, to come into contact with the culture and members of the host country. It is therefore evident how integration is the desirable way of acculturation for individuals with a migration background to integrate into the host society without losing their identity.

The concept of integration is multidimensional in that it extends to different spheres of social life that can be distinguished into social, economic, cultural, and political. These spheres do not always move synergistically, as there are cases of immigrants who have achieved economic prosperity while remaining socially isolated.

The European Union adopted a system of indicators to measure the integration of immigrants in the various EU member states by using Eurostat. This system comes from the Zaragoza Declaration[9], adopted in 2010.

European countries recognized four[10] key areas as fundamental to measuring integration of immigrants into societies. These are employment (measured by activity, employment, and unemployment rates), education (both in terms of learning skills and participation in education), social inclusion (determined by studying the distribution of income and

[9] https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/library-document/declaration-european-ministerial-conference-integration-zaragoza-15-16-april-2010_en

[10]More precisely, the fourteen key integration indicators, according to the European Commission are:
-Employment area: employment rate, unemployment rate and activity rate.
-Education area: highest educational attainment, share of low achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science, share of 30–34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment, share of early leavers from education and training.
-Social inclusion area: median net income, share of population at risk of poverty, share of population perceiving their health status as good or poor ratio of property owners to non-property owners among immigrants and the total population.
-Citizenship area: share of immigrants that have obtained citizenship, share of immigrants holding permanent or long-term residence permits, share of immigrants among elected representatives.
See Indicators of Immigrant Integration (Eurostat, 2011).

capital, and the risk of falling into poverty) and active citizenship (of which the acquisition of citizenship, residency, and the exercise of the right to vote are indicators).

With particular reference to the integration of children of immigrants, according to Dustmann and Frattini (2011), integration occurs when, under similar conditions, children of migrants exhibit a distribution similar to that of native-born children concerning their educational choices and labor market outcomes. In reality, integration can be measured along both economic and non-economic dimensions (cultural and social aspects).
To assess this integration, various analytical perspectives have been proposed. The static perspective offers a snapshot comparison of performances at a specific moment. While useful for understanding existing differences, it doesn't consider the evolution over time or ongoing dynamics within migrant populations.
On the other hand, the conditional perspective considers demographic and socioeconomic diversities among groups, exploring how these factors influence the educational and employment performances of migrants and their descendants compared to natives. The dynamic perspective provides insight into the evolution of performances over time, observing how initial skills adapt to the host country's labor market and how new skills are acquired throughout life.
Lastly, the dynastic perspective evaluates integration across multiple generations, acknowledging how differences in the performances of migrant parents may influence those of their children and subsequent generations (Dustmann and Frattini, 2011).

2.2 Education: the key to integration for immigrants of second-generation

Before we begin to explain the crucial role that education plays in the integration of immigrants into the host society, it is important to be more specific and clarify the subcategories of the term immigrant; because, as anticipated, the subject of our study will be the children of immigrants, i.e., second-generation immigrants. It should also be recalled that the term "second generations" was coined in the early 20th century in research by the Chicago School of Sociology on the migration phenomenon that originated on the European continent (De Fusco, 2018).

A first distinction can be made between the first and second generation of immigrants. Usually, "first generation" refers to individuals who migrated at an adult age, while their children, born in the destination country are considered as "second-generation". The demarcation lines between those two categories are not clear-cut, since even if because even if second-generation immigrants are considered, strictly speaking, as individuals born of immigrant parents and raised in the host country, and first generations as immigrants who arrived after the age of majority; it is possible to identify a continuum between them. It is proposed in this regard, the classification of Rumbaut (2004).
According to him, immigrants can be subdivided into specific categories depending on their age of arrival at the receiving society. The author identifies the second-generation as the children born in the host country from foreign- born parents; "generation 1.75" as individuals who entered the host country with 0-5 years; "generation 1.5" as those who migrated at age 6-12; "generation 1.25" who migrated at age 13-17; and the first generation who migrated at 18 or later.

At the level of international institutions, however, different definitions of the category of second-generation immigrants have been accepted.
According to the European Commission, a second-generation immigrant is "a person who was born in and is residing in a country that at least one of their parents previously entered as a migrant". Instead, according to OECD, second-generation immigrants are individuals born and raised in the country of assessment, whose parents (both of them) are foreign-born.

It is interesting to notice that the term second-generation immigrants highlights the reality that this group is often not considered as part of the nation. Individuals within this group, in fact, are frequently viewed as outsiders, despite their birth and upbringing in that country. Consequently, they may encounter discrimination based on this perception (Wihtol de Wenden, 2005).
From this conception, the idea was born of analyzing the process of integration of this category to better understand on which aspects it is important to concentrate to better guarantee the integration and eliminate substantial differences between children of

immigrants and natives; these differences are visible and start within the educational system and are inevitably also reflected in the labor market.

Education, in fact, is widely regarded as one of the most influential factors determining an individual's socioeconomic status (SES)[11]. It is believed to significantly impact occupational achievement and various economic outcomes such as employment likelihood, job status, career advancements, and earnings (Becker, 1967). For children of immigrants, education holds even greater importance as it might be their primary resource to overcome the typical challenges faced by immigrant families. For this reason, the research proposes to consider education as a pathway to socioeconomic progress and serves as a safeguard against inadequate integration into the host society (Portes, et al. 2009).

Since in contemporary societies, the level of education attained is an important predictor of future employment status, it is important to engage in the identification of educational disadvantages related to nationality, as these are revealing barriers and obstacles in the integration process.
Thus, the labor market participation of immigrant children is particularly informative on the development of the integration process (Brubaker, 2001).

The disparities between immigrant and native workers are evident and not surprising, given that immigrants, unlike natives, typically arrive in the host country as adults. They encounter the adverse effects of migration, including a loss of social connections and potential non-recognition of qualifications obtained in their home country. Additionally, they shoulder the substantial costs of integrating into the new society, such as learning a new language and unfamiliar societal norms.
However, this doesn't necessarily apply to immigrant children. They haven't directly experienced the challenges of migration and, having grown up in the host society, have

[11]The term "socio-economic status (SES)" refers to an individual's position in a society which is determined by wealth, occupation, and social class and is a measure of an individual's or group's standing in the community. It usually relates to the income, occupation, educational attainment, and wealth of either an individual or a group (M.R. Sarsani).

assimilated its behavioral norms during their upbringing. Simultaneously, they've acquired crucial knowledge for making informed decisions in this new society. Furthermore, having attended schools in the host country, they possess qualifications readily acknowledged by employers and benefit from established social connections within the destination country. As they enter the job market, the formidable obstacles faced by their immigrant parents should, therefore, not pose the same level of challenge for them. For this reason, upon entering the labor market, children of immigrants should not face the same obstacles as their parents; unfortunately, obstacles and distinctions between immigrants of second generation and natives are present in the labor market, and the reason lies in the inequalities this category finds in the educational system.

Education plays a crucial role as it holds a central role in shaping ambitions and life trajectories. Policymakers have frequently emphasized its significance as a powerful tool for assimilation, integration, multiculturalism, and fostering cohesive, inclusive societies (Bloch and Hirsch, 2017). Furthermore, education is considered a fundamental tool that can adequately equip immigrants, but especially their descendants, for greater success and more active engagement in society, including labor market participation (EU Council).

Also, school represents one of the main channels of social mobility, i.e. the change in a person's socio-economic situation, both concerning their parents (intergenerational mobility) and during their lifetime (intragenerational mobility).
More precisely, social mobility is conceived as the movement in time of individuals, families, or other social units between positions of varying advantage in the system of social stratification of society (Müller and Pollak, 2015).
It is to schools that societies assign the task of social selection, i.e. that of graduating the new generations in both vertical terms (of highest educational level achieved) and horizontal terms (of course of study with the same educational level achieved). At the end of the educational pathway, the educational qualification attained by students will be extremely relevant for the possibility of attaining the best positions within the social and occupational stratification.

The importance of education, through schools, in facilitating social mobility is particularly relevant for youngsters from migrant backgrounds. Hence, underscoring the role of schools as a pivotal nexus in the integration journey of ethnic minorities within the host nation becomes crucial.
It is evident that education is considered as a key, both in the form of human capital, with its valuable payoffs in the labor market, and as a crucial mechanism of social integration (Heath and Brinbaum 2007, Rivas and Portes 2011).

Notwithstanding all the previous statements about the importance of school as a pole of integration and at the same time as the main instrument of social uplift for able students from less advantaged social groups, it is important to report what various sociologists have stated the contradictory role it plays. Schools, in fact, reflect institutions and polity, in a way, and are intended to be places that reproduce inequalities, such as race, gender and, class divisions in society (Foster et. al, 1997).

The following section will analyze in detail the factors that tend to create or reproduce educational inequalities within the educational system, taking into account that the integration of second-generation immigrants into any social structure takes place mainly in the school environment (De Fusco, 2018). The issue arises from the unequal distribution of educational opportunities among the population, influenced by various factors that extend beyond individual effort and talent. The problem is represented by the fact that educational opportunities are not equally distributed in the population, due to several ascriptive factors that influence individuals' educational outcomes over and beyond individual effort and talent. As we will see in greater detail throughout this chapter, social background plays an important role in affecting children's educational outcomes, and migration background adds to—and possibly interacts with—this "traditional" form of inequality of educational opportunity.

3. Educational disadvantage

Until now, the concept of educational disadvantage has been mentioned without specifying its meaning. It is important to be clear about this to better understand the analysis that this work proposes.

Kellaghan (2001) proposes a definition of this term, stating that "educational disadvantage is defined in terms of discontinuities between the competencies and dispositions which children bring to school, and the competencies and dispositions valued in schools, and factors, conceptualized in terms of three forms of capital (economic, cultural, social), which influence the development of the competencies and dispositions." However, it is possible to outline two distinct approaches in the definition: one "ex-ante," focusing on factors that presumably reduce the expected outcome of education, and one "ex-post," which examines the distribution of educational outcomes among different social groups. The latter can be analyzed by considering both the concentration of groups in the lower part of the distribution and the lower performance of specific percentile groups.

Moreover, the Education Act of 1998 defined educational disadvantage as "the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools."

3.1 Social origins

In the latter part of the 20th century, initial sociological explanations emerged to address academic disadvantages experienced by specific social groups, offering a counter perspective to earlier notions about educational inequalities. The prior viewpoint attributed some students' educational underperformance to perceived lower cognitive abilities. Furthermore, also non-cognitive skills were considered by scholars as an explanation of academic performance (Bowels and Gintis, 1976). Basically, cognitive[12]

[12]"Cognitive ability refers to the human brain's ability to store memory, process and extraction of information, includes attention, memory and logical reasoning, and thinking transformation". - The effect of cognitive ability on academic achievement: The mediating role of self-discipline and the moderating role of planning by Yuegi Shi and Shaowei Qu, 2022.

and non-cognitive[13] skills, have always been regarded as the explanation lower academic performances.

However, early sociological theories on educational disadvantage shifted the focus away from inherent individual abilities (considered unchangeable) towards examining family environment characteristics, particularly emphasizing social backgrounds (Tomlinson, 1997). Thereby, the intertwining of individual factors and those associated with the social context demonstrates that academic achievement is significantly influenced by what are commonly termed individual factors, like language proficiency or the educational and socioeconomic background of parents (Bilgili, Huddleston, & Joki, 2015; Dustmann et al., 2012; Feliciano, 2005). This illustrates that while individual determinants play a role, they can also be counterbalanced by structural and social factors.

Regarding social capital, it has been discussed in doctrine for years and it is now well known that there is a strong relationship between the level of education attained by an individual and his or her social status (Boudon, 1974). The author proposes a distinction between primary and secondary effects of social origins. According to him, the influence of social origins on learning and educational achievement was defined as primary effects, and the influence of social origins on the individual's educational career, given the same demonstrated abilities, as secondary effects.

Interesting in this regard is the theory of Sorokin (1927), who affirmed that society tends to reproduce, it has mechanisms of selection and reproduction whose effect is to preserve social structures regardless of the continuous passing of individuals. This theory also applies to social subsystems, including the family. The latter has a controlling power over social mobility; to ensure continuity over time, the family would tend to curb the mobility of individuals, both upwards and downwards, as excessive mobility tends to weaken

According to Pierre et al. (2014), cognitive skills involve the "ability to understand complex ideas, to adapt effectively to the environment, to learn from experience, to engage in various forms of reasoning, to overcome obstacles by taking thought."

"Cognitive abilities include mental abilities that are used in thinking activities including reading, writing, and numeracy" - Non-cognitive skills: definition, measurement and malleability, Global Education Monitoring Report by UNESCO (2016).

[13]Non-cognitive skills are defined as the "patterns of thought, feelings and behaviours" (Borghans et al., 2008) that are socially determined and can be developed throughout the lifetime to produce value. Non-cognitive skills comprise personal traits, attitudes and motivations – UNESCO.

family continuity. This mechanism would then explain how the family tends to influence the child's level of educational ambitions in line with the family's status.
This theory is also taken up and reconfirmed by Parsons (1940), who states that the family subsystem is a generator of inequalities in the face of education. The social status of the family is the same for all family members, so even if an individual has aspirations that differ from his or her family members, he or she must in some sense conform to aspirations that are in line with family status. For this reason, as affirmed by Roger L. Geiger "the educational system merely serves to reproduce existing class relations."[14]
Furthermore, according to Kahl (1953) and Hyman (1953), inequalities in the educational level attained by an individual are linked to the value system, which differs according to social class. Within the social scale, the shift from the highest to the lowest level corresponds to value systems associated with increasingly decreasing probabilities of survival and success in the school system.

In line with these arguments, Lucas hypothesized that individuals 'choices in education—specifically, the breadth of their educational pursuits—actively contribute to maintaining the existing social hierarchy within a society, the so known "*hypothesis of effectively perpetuating social inequalities"*. Lucas suggests that more privileged families, in their pursuit to uphold their relative advantage over other social groups through their children's education, will make decisions geared towards favoring their offspring. To put it more concretely, Lucas proposes that if the participation rate in a certain level of education is notably high due to an expansion in educational opportunities, families with greater economic and cultural resources will leverage these to ensure their children occupy the most advantageous positions within that educational tier, typically opting for fields of study that offer comparatively higher financial rewards (Lucas, 2001).

So far, therefore, it is clear how social status is a generator of inequalities in education.
As mentioned above, these inequalities also reflect negatively on social mobility, as these phenomena are closely related. Individuals would thus see their ability to move between social strata diminished and thus also the possibility of improving their status. Unlike

[14] Origins and Destinations: Family, Class and Education in Modern Britain by A. H. Halsey, A. H. Heath and J. M. Ridge – Review by Roger L. Geiger.

educational positions, social positions are largely determined and independent of individual will. Social origin creates a system of relative privileges in the competitive process: all things being equal, an individual with a higher social origin is more likely to obtain a relatively desirable social position than an individual with a lower social origin. These considerations clearly reflect what happens when obtaining an educational qualification or simply the progression through the education system. In fact, more recent studies have shown how students from advantaged backgrounds were still more likely to progress through the education system than peers with the same achievement (grade point average, GPA; Jackson, 2013) but disadvantaged backgrounds.

Having reached this point, it is important to introduce the concept of intergenerational persistence, as social origins play an important role in maintaining this particular persistence within the educational system. Scholars defined intergenerational persistence as the correlation between the socio-economic positions of parents and their adult children (Björklund, Jäntti, & Solon, 2007).

The term "socio-economic status (SES)" refers to an individual's position in a society which is determined by wealth, occupation, and social class and is a measure of an individual's or group's standing in the community. It usually relates to the income, occupation, educational attainment, and wealth of either an individual or a group (Sarsani, 2011).

Daniele Checchi (2006) underscores various channels through which intergenerational persistence manifests. The first pertains to parental education, as children of educated parents are more likely to acquire education. The second relates to parental income, which mirrors financial constraints, as limited family resources often restrict access to education. When education leads to better-paying jobs, a poverty trap can ensue impoverished families are unable to invest in their children's education due to insufficient resources and lack of access to financial support, resulting in their children remaining uneducated and in poverty. A third aspect is territorial segregation, often associated with family wealth, which is also considered a contributor to intergenerational persistence.

If residential decisions are influenced by the evaluation of local school quality, and such quality impacts housing prices, wealthier families can access superior schools by residing in closer proximity. Enhanced school quality, coupled with a more culturally

homogeneous community, can generate greater social capital, providing a distinct advantage to children raised in such an environment.

According to what has been said so far, it is widely recognized that, on average, children from poorer/disadvantaged backgrounds have worse educational outcomes than their better off peers. The next paragraphs will be presented in detail different aspects of social origins; the analysis will concentrate particularly on parental education, employment, income, and family size.

3.1.1 Parental education

The literature on achievement consistently has shown that parent education is important in predicting children's achievement since parents' educational levels positively influence their children's immediate educational outcomes, educational and vocational achievements into middle adulthood (Dubow et al., 2009). Dustmann et.al (2012) conducted a study precisely on the correlation of the educational achievement of second-generation immigrants with the educational achievement of their parents, to demonstrate that the transmission of educational outcomes from parents to children depends on the correlation between generations.

Children of educated parents are more likely to acquire an education; this may be partly due to parent imitation (if they see their parent reading a book, they get the idea that reading is a rewarding activity), but in most cases, it works through induced educational choices. In fact, an educated parent is better aware of the psychological and economic value of education and therefore puts more pressure on his/her child's choice toward better opportunities (Checchi, 2006). Also, better educated parents can provide more qualified help with the learning of cognitive and other types of skills that improve performance in schools in terms of test results or teacher-assigned grades (Erikson and Jonsson, 1996). In addition, such parents have better strategic knowledge about the educational system, which puts them in a favorable position at the main educational transitions (Kristen, 2005). Therefore, for families with more favorable resources, it is much easier to continuously support and secure their offspring's educational career,

whereas for those in a less beneficial position, it is more difficult to pursue similarly promising and efficient educational strategies.

Generally, highly educated parents, those with more than 4 years of college experience, tend to invest more time with their children compared to parents with less educational background (Guryan et al., 2008). This inclination arises from the perception among more educated parents that the time spent with their children serves as an investment to cultivate human capital (Guryan et al., 2008). Consequently, they actively dedicate this time to assisting their children in honing their talents and abilities. On the other hand, less educated parents may allow their children's skills to develop with little or no guidance or stimulation (Lareau, 2002). Moreover, parents with higher levels of education harbor greater expectations for their children's success. They play an active role in encouraging their children to cultivate their own high aspirations for achievement (Davis-Kean, 2005). Additionally, these parents demonstrate a better aptitude in aligning these expectations with their children's abilities, a skill comparatively less common among low-income or less educated parents (Alexander, Entwisle, & Bedinger, 1994).

Leaving aside the well-known direct influence that parents' education has on their children's educational outcomes, some of the literature suggests that it also influences parents' beliefs and behavior, leading to positive educational outcomes for their children. Some authors noticed that "parents of moderate to high-income and educational background held beliefs and expectations that were closer than those of low-income families to the actual performance of their children, low-income families instead had high expectations and performance beliefs that did not correlate well with their children's actual school performance."[15] Alexander et al. suggested that the parents' abilities to form accurate beliefs and expectations regarding their children's performance are essential in structuring the home and educational environment so that they can excel in post schooling

[15] Alexander, Entwisle, and Bedinger (1994) - The Influence of Parent Education and Family Income on Child Achievement: The Indirect Role of Parental Expectations and the Home Environment by Pamela E. Davis-Kean.

endeavors. In summary, the study showed that parents with a higher income and education level tend to have more realistic expectations that are closer to their children's real abilities, while low-income families often show high expectations that do not correspond to their children's actual school performance. This is important because realistic parental expectations can help create a more suitable home and educational environment, enabling children to succeed in areas beyond school.

Other research on parenting also has shown that parent education is related to a warm, social climate in the home. In fact, mothers with a higher education tend to create a more stimulating learning environment for their children and this influences the academic success of children. Maternal education is therefore crucial for children's academic learning and would even appear to have a more significant impact than family income.
In essence, children's educational outcomes are correlated with a long list of specific behaviors at home, that are typical of more educated parents (e.g., using a rich vocabulary, providing assistance with schoolwork, or encouraging the pursuit of advanced education, reading).

Ultimately, some studies have endeavored to show how the educational level of parents does not only have an impact on biological children but also on that of adopted children. Clearly, genes play a significant role in passing on traits from parents to children, but it's important to recognize that they are not the sole determining factor. The family environment can have an equally significant influence on the development and characteristics of children.

3.1.2 Parental employment

Child educational achievements depend on, as seen before, the time that parents dedicate to their child and also on inputs that they receive from their parents. Both time and good inputs are influenced by parents' employment decisions.
While working, parents tend to allocate less time to engage with their children, leading to a negative "time effect" regarding interaction and educational activities. However, there is a positive "input effect", since as parents work more, family income typically rises.

This increase in income often translates to improved resources such as high-quality food, a greater number of books and toys at home, or the provision of additional educational activities.

To explain the impact of parent employment on the educational achievements of the children is interesting the theory of "family behavior"[16], according to which parents make decisions considering their well-being over time and the impact these decisions will have on their children. It is assumed that parents invest part of their earnings to improve their children's future since this contributes to the overall well-being of the family. These investments can be financial, such as purchasing higher quality books or toys, or they can be investments of time spent with the children, like helping them with their studies. For instance, buying better-quality educational materials represents a financial investment, while dedicating time to assist children with their studies is a time-based investment.
Therefore, the employment decisions of parents are influenced by considerations of the long-term well-being of the family, which translates into different choices regarding time investment, both within the family and at work.

Some research demonstrates how the effect that parent's employment may have on children's well-being. In fact, the commencement of a mother's employment within the first year of a child's life has shown a negative impact on the child's educational success, whereas employment after the first year appears to have more varied effects. Actually, further studies find that the negative effect on cognitive outcomes can be associated with maternal employment over the first five years of the child, whereas the effect of the father's employment is negligible. On this matter Ruhm (2004) found an overall negative impact of working mothers' conditions on the cognitive abilities of children measured at the age of five and, even, six. It must be specified that the crucial role of mothers in achieving education for their children does not necessarily imply that increasing female

[16] Becker & Tomes, 1979. From "Does parental employment affect children's educational attainment?" By Hannah Schildberg-Hoerisch

participation in the labor market[17] should contribute to a lowering of educational attainment in the children's generation.

3.1.3 Parent's Income

There exist numerous pathways through which children from low-income families tend to underperform in school. Among these, some connections are causal, while others are not.

Non-causal relationships refer to circumstances associated with, but not directly caused by, low family income that contribute to lower academic achievement. In low-income families, adults often possess traits that may predispose their children to academic challenges. These traits include lower levels of parental education or other less observable variations among adults, resulting in diminished educational support within the home environment. For instance, this might encompass inherent cognitive abilities, a reduced emphasis on educational success in parenting styles, or limitations in converting parenting time into educational development. Another example within this category involves sudden events, like family breakdowns, which affect both academic performance and income, yet income itself isn't the root cause of diminished achievement. Additionally, the literature on child development underscores that financial strain heightens family conflicts and parental stress, consequently hindering effective parenting practices that positively influence educational outcomes.

The economic literature examining the causal link between income and educational achievement predominantly focuses on direct financial investments in children's human capital (Becker and Tomes, 1986). This theory revolves around optimizing utility by allocating resources among investments in education, consumption, and other avenues, where these options are considered substitutes. While there are explicit investments

[17]Increased female participation in the labor market exerts an ambiguous effect, since on the one hand it reduces the attention paid to children, but at the same time it increases the available income (De Checchi, 2006).

parents can make in their children's education, such as funding higher education expenses, these seem less pertinent during early childhood. In the developmental stages of childhood, a significant portion of how income affects academic success likely occurs through the simultaneous production of education alongside consumption or other investments. For example, providing a conducive home environment through access to books, toys, and outings (as shown by Burgess et al, 2004 in a study conducted in Avon) is essential. Here, books and toys are acquired for immediate use as well as for educational benefits. Similarly, decisions related to housing, while influenced by school quality, yield other advantages.

The discussion surrounding the correlation between family income and educational success brings forward various approaches by different researchers. Mayer (1997), for instance, suggests a different perspective by proposing the use of alternative metrics to gauge family income, such as family assets and child support payments. These metrics are believed to have a weaker correlation with parental characteristics. Mayer's findings highlight a positive and noteworthy impact of income on both educational achievements and earnings.

However, when exploring this relationship, authors like Shea (2000) have adopted a different approach by using the father's union and occupational status as evaluative tools for income effects. Surprisingly, Shea's observations reveal a relatively neutral influence on children's outcomes. Conversely, Chevalier et al. (2005) emphasize the lasting significance of permanent income on the educational success of children. Additionally, Maurin (2002) takes an innovative approach, utilizing grandparents' socioeconomic status to predict parental incomes and thereby understand children's educational performance.

Extending beyond the varied methodologies used, a collective understanding emerges from numerous studies indicating the enduring impact of a sustained increase in family income on children's outcomes. This influence extends into their young adult years, translating into tangible improvements in educational achievements and a decrease in instances of criminal behavior. Moreover, the positive effect of increased income

resonates within family dynamics, fostering enhanced relationships between parents and children, resulting in a reduction of familial issues over time.

3.1.4 Family Size

Another factor that could affect the educational outcome of children is the family size, due to the existing strong relationship between family size and educational attainment. In fact, as the size of the family increases, parental resources become more diluted, leading to diminished educational opportunities for each child (Baranowska-Rataj et al.; 2014). Therefore, parents encounter a trade-off between the number of children and the educational prospects of each child when making decisions about their family size (Becker and Lewis; 1973). Moreover, if the mechanism of diluting parental resources is indeed in effect, it significantly contributes to the perpetuation of social inequalities. This results in children from larger families encountering diminished prospects for acquiring a quality education.

3.2 Ethnicity as a factor of educational disadvantage

The previous paragraph highlighted the reasons for educational disadvantage and low social mobility in relation to social origins. This paragraph instead proposes the analysis of ethnicity to explain the educational disadvantage and its negative reflection on the labor market. There will be presented some articles that propose the analysis of the educational disadvantage that affects ethnic minority groups, from the perspective of the second-generation immigrants.

It's crucial to acknowledge that nationality significantly contributes to explaining variations in educational attainment among different ethnic minority groups. For instance, the research conducted by Kao and Thompson (2003) illustrates varying degrees of explanatory power concerning educational disparities derived from social backgrounds among these specific groups. In this analysis, the aim is not to delve into specific

educational disadvantages based on different ethnic affiliations but to offer a general overview of the educational disadvantage experienced by any ethnic minority group compared to the ethnic majority group.

Before starting with the analysis, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by ethnicity. Terminology recalls the idea of human grouping based on cultural and linguistic characteristics; this term is often referred to national minority or, minority ethnic group (Treccani).
In literature Lamont and Molna´r (2002) defined ethnicity[18] as a boundary with both symbolic and social aspects. Therefore, it's a differentiation individuals establish in their daily lives, influencing their behaviors and perspectives toward others. This distinction usually arises from diverse social and cultural disparities among groups, imparting tangible importance to an ethnic divide.

Gerald Berreman (1972, 1981) delineates ethnicity as a tier within social stratification or social inequality, encompassing race, class, kinship, age, estate, caste, and gender. Berreman underscores distinct differences between ethnicity, race, and class. Ethnicity is intricately linked but contrasts with race and class. While racial stratification pertains to innate status attributed at birth based on physical and cultural attributes delineated by external groups, ethnicity, also bestowed at birth, is defined by the ethnic group itself regarding its cultural traits.

Even though migrant and minority group parents have consistently shown their belief that securing good educational qualifications is crucial for their children to attain equal citizenship status, rights, and opportunities on par with children from the majority group; globally, it appears that choice policies in education lead to increased social segregation[19]

[18]The deliberate framing of the ethnicity definition aims to encompass the concept of race. Within the academic discourse on ethnicity and race, there exists a divergence of opinions regarding whether ethnicity and race should be considered interrelated or separate concepts (Cornell and Hartmann 2002). However, for the investigation of immigrant-group integration, it proves highly beneficial to view the recognition of racial disparities as a component of a more extensive ethnic differentiation.
[19]"The higher the segregation in a region, neighborhood, or school, the less migrants are surrounded by natives but the more they are surrounded by other migrants.
The different contact opportunity structures that result from different levels of segregation are particularly important as they influence personal tendencies to form ingroup relationships relative to intergroup contact." - The 'mixed bag' of segregation, on positive and negative associations with migrants' acculturation by L.A. Boileau, Bless, E. Gebauer.

in schools. Roland Benabou's territorial segregation model (1996) underscores its effects on class segregation. According to this model, social integration or segregation hinges on how individuals optimize their actions influenced by social capital in shaping human capital. Consequently, school choice affects the distribution of human capital in society and is closely tied to income inequality. School attendance forms newly acquired human capital, contingent on family background and the quality of the attended school. Thus, social factors exacerbating educational disadvantages might intersect with circumstances impacting academic success, such as varied learning environments due to social and ethnic segregation within schools. Studies by Portes and Hao (2004), Dronkers and Levels (2006), and Stanat (2006) highlight how such contextual conditions may exacerbate unequal educational opportunities, potentially widening disparities in academic achievement.

There are several explanations behind the educational disadvantage of ethnic minority groups.

Starting with a distinction, as anticipated before, between the "primary" and the "secondary" effect of stratification (Boudon, 1974) that may affect the ethnic minority group. This differentiation corresponds to a division between the factors influencing achievement (such as measured by test scores) within the compulsory schooling period, and the factors affecting the rates of progression into higher secondary and tertiary education once the compulsory education phase ends and students have the choice to pursue further education or enter the workforce.

Regarding the primary effects, was noted that privileged groups are more active in choosing the desired schools, and that these schools being located in wealthier neighborhoods, are only accessible to residents of these neighborhoods, i.e. those with a privileged social status. In addition, ethnic and racial segregation in schools is also exacerbated by the choice of parents, who prefer to avoid schools with high numbers of ethnic minority students, as they argue that the presence of these types of students can lower school standards. Not by chance indeed parents of natives are considered

"privileged parents"[20], as they have the cultural capital and educational knowledge necessary to emerge as winners in local school markets.
Conversely, immigrant parents who were raised and educated in a different setting might lack experiences gained through their own schooling. The specific resources they bring from their home country might not be as applicable in a distinct school system (Chiswick, 1978; Chiswick and DebBurman, 2004). Consequently, the limited transferability of educational resources originating from their place of origin could impact immigrant families capacity to invest in education. Additionally, understanding the inner workings of a different school system is a crucial attribute that isn't easily transferred between contexts. Thus, even if immigrants possess similar levels of education as native individuals but obtained elsewhere, they might face a disadvantage.

Regarding the secondary effects, some authors affirmed that discrimination in the labor market as it happens in the form of discrimination for the minority, it could happen in the form of discrimination for the majority; therefore, in the latter case, minorities could take advantage of the discrimination since the minorities itself have been positively selected in the labor market.

Another reason for the educational disadvantage among ethnic minority groups is the presence of "ethnic discrimination"[21] in schools, which may encompass teachers' perceptions, expectations, assessments, or other forms of behavior.
Essentially, this discrimination could impact educational transitions (e.g., through teacher recommendations) or, in more nuanced ways, the development of students skills (Ferguson, 1998; Schofield, 2006).
In fact, discrimination based on ethnicity imposes hurdles and difficulties that extend beyond an individual's control. When adolescents feel incapable of achieving their academic or broader life goals, they tend to develop a sense of futility[22] (Agirdag et al.

[20]Ball et al., 1996 - Diversity, Choice and Ethnicity: The Effects of Educational Markets on Ethnic Minorities by Sally Tomlinson.
[21]Ethnic discrimination refers to the unequal treatment based on ethnicity, which results in placing individuals or a specific ethnic group at a disadvantage (Quillian, 1995).
[22] It is crucial to overcome the sense of futility, particularly due to the fact that students from ethnic minority backgrounds tend to achieve lower performance levels compared to their peers from the ethnic majority (Stevens & Dworkin, 2014).

2012; Rosenbaum 2001; Ross and Broh 2000; Ross and Mirowsky 1989; Van Houtte and Stevens 2010). This feeling of futility strongly impacts their motivation to succeed in school; consequently, they invest less effort, ultimately resulting in lower academic achievement scores (Agirdag et al. 2013; Agirdag et al. 2012; Van Houtte and Stevens 2010). The ethnic discrimination could also stem from the exaggerated "parental ethnic socialization"[23](e.g., cultural socialization and preparation for bias). Cultural socialization fosters a favorable perception of adolescents' ethnic heritage. Nevertheless, encountering ethnic inequality or discrimination may cause psychological distress when others devalue the ethnic background that one takes pride in (McCoy and Major 2003; Tajfel 1974). Preparation for bias, despite good intentions, may contribute adversely by fostering anxious expectations of rejection among adolescents (Branscombe et al. 1999; Mendoza-Denton et al. 2002). Consequently, rather than aiding adolescents in coping with ethnic inequality and discrimination, this approach might heighten sensitivity and instill a belief that there is no respite from negative experiences, potentially leading to stronger reactions to ethnic discrimination.

Another possible explanation of educational disadvantage is the different capital owned by the ethnic minority compared to the ethnic majority, and vice versa.
Ethnic minority capital has been defined by scholars as "ethnic capital" (Borjas, 1992; Lee and Zhou, 2014; Modood, 2004). According to the "ethnic capital" theory, people belonging to an ethnic minority group are aware of their position of relative disadvantage, educationally speaking, in the host society and especially in relation to the natives. For this reason, they use ethnicity to their advantage as a resource for constructing and sustaining a rigid "success frame" (Lee and Zhou, 2014) as a strategy to counterbalance potential and actual disadvantages in access to educational resources in the host society.
It's intriguing to observe that ethnic capital is on one side the cause of educational disadvantages, stemming from varying cultural capital among different ethnic groups, and on the other side as a tool employed by these ethnic groups to counter their own disadvantage. This occurs because they recognize that ethnic capital represents a disadvantage while also using it to navigate and overcome these challenges. These

[23]Parents' ethnic socialization involves the conveyance of parental perspectives on ethnicity through various means, whether subtle, explicit, intentional, or unintentional, aiming primarily to shield children from the adverse impacts of ethnic discrimination and disparities (Hughes 2003; Hughes et al. 2006).

communities leverage their ethnic and communal resources by providing a variety of support, including concrete offerings like after-school tutoring or supplemental educational programs. Links to this latter concept is thesis of "reinvigorated ambition for second-generation education" by Li (2018), according to which these young individuals, despite being aware of the challenges, are driven to excel in education and employment despite the perceived hurdles due to ethnic inequality and discrimination.

3.3 Intersectional analysis of social origins and ethnicity

Studies have shown that the socio-economic status of parents seems to stratify ethnic minorities very similarly to majority groups and appears to have very similar consequences on educational attainment. Thus, differences in socio-economic background, i.e. in employment, education, and parental income, although they are highly indicative factors in predicting the future educational attainment of young people, cannot fully explain ethnic educational disadvantage, for both primary and secondary effects. In fact, these predictors carry significant weight within different racial, ethnic, and immigrant groups. It's evident that social origin, by itself, isn't adequate to fully explain the disadvantages experienced by the second-generation, given that the reasoning linking social origins to educational outcomes[24] applies equally to families with and without a migration background.

For this reason, when trying to explain the educational disadvantage of people belonging to an ethnic minority, it is necessary to take ethnic origin into account, so an intersectional analysis of social and ethnic background factors can better explain the real disadvantage of this category.

[24]Educational outcomes are viewed as an ongoing process of developing and accumulating school-related competencies from birth throughout various stages of preschool and one's academic journey. The specific circumstances linked to an individual's social and ethnic background not only influence this process but may also impact the educational choices individuals make during different transitional phases in their educational paths.

With a similar socio-economic background, what emerges as an answer to the ethnic educational disadvantage is "cultural dissonance"[25], understood as the lack of the necessary cultural capital and the parents' lack of command of the language of the majority population (Heath and Brinbaum, 2007).

Fundamentally, cultural dissonance derives from the idea that different groups have different cultural capitals, understood as different linguistic skills, values, habits, and behaviors. This theory was conceptualized by Bourdieu about to social strata to explain the exclusive cultivation by the upper class of skills, knowledge, and dispositions (i.e. cultural capital) that produce institutional advantages. According to this theory, therefore, education is viewed as a tool for perpetuating cultural norms that uphold the current social hierarchy, while the school system is seen as a mechanism of societal control that benefits the privileged classes.

Thus, the aspect of cultural dissonance and the advantaged position in the context of school choice held by native families, are the reasons of the difficulty for the children of certain immigrant groups to succeed in school or in the labor market, leading them to achieve lower educational attainment or qualification than natives ones but particularly than would be expected given their parents' socio-economic position

This cultural dissonance serves as a potential explanation for the educational disadvantage observed among ethnic minorities, even after controlling for their parental socio-economic background.

[25]The authors opted for this definition rather than "cultural disadvantage", with the intention of not favoring one particular cultural conception over another.

CHAPTER 2

ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE AMONG SECOND-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS: UNDERSTANDING CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN FOUR EUROPEAN CONUTRIES

1. The CILS4EU project

The CILS4EU project, inspired by a previous longitudinal study on the integration of second-generation immigrants in the United States[26], focuses on the intergenerational integration of children of immigrants in four selected European countries: Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

Currently, it stands as the inaugural, all-encompassing, and meticulously standardized longitudinal investigation in Europe concerning this topic. It presents an exclusive chance for researchers globally to delve into the internal mechanisms guiding intergenerational integration. This is a longitudinal, international, and comparative survey, which started in the 2010/11[27] school year and continued in the 2011/12 and 2012/13 year, since it follows the same individuals over time.

It is important to highlight that although CILS4EU data collection ended at the end of the 3 waves, starting in 2014, national teams conducted country-specific follow-up studies, independent of each other. In fact, the Dutch team proceeded to gather three additional sets of data until 2016. Following a two-year hiatus, the Swedish team accumulated one more wave of data in 2016. Subsequently, the English team commenced collecting two

[26]This study was conducted by the Center for Migration and Development of the Princeton University. The aim of the project, started in the 1992, was to study the adaptation process of the second-generation immigrants by conducting a sample of this category that was attending the 8th and 9th grades in public and private schools in the metropolitan areas of Miami/Ft. Lauderdale in Florida and San Diego, California.

[27]The CILS4EU survey was made possible thanks to funding from the "NORFACE ERA NET Plus Migration in Europe programme".

further waves of data beginning in 2018. Regarding the German case, it is possible to refer to a sort of extension of the CILS4EU project, the so-called CILS4EU-DE[28], since it comprises six more waves of data collection-collected annually from 2014-2016, and bi-annually after that.

During the academic year 2010/2011, interviews were conducted with both children of immigrants and their peers from the ethnic majority group at the age of 14. Additionally, their parents and teachers were also interviewed. Subsequently, these adolescents were followed up over the next two years, encompassing a pivotal and influential phase of their lives. These collected data enable an exploration of the intricate and interconnected relationships between structural, social, and cultural integration processes. The project commences with the premise that only through this approach can significant variations between countries, ethnic groups, and life domains be comprehensively understood.
Children of immigrants and their peers were reached in the classroom during school hours in order to obtain the highest possible response rate. Due to the school-based sampling approach, the target population of CILS4EU consists of students attending the school grade in Dutch, English, German and, Swedish schools in which most of the students already are (or will become) 14- years old. These are the 3rd grade of secondary schools in the Netherlands, the 8th grade in Sweden, the 9th grade in Germany, and the 10th grade in the United Kingdom.

Regarding the sample, in order to provide valid measures of children's structural, social, and cultural integration in the participating countries, it should have been selected in a way that ensures the representation of the full target population of each respective country. In reality, despite the aimed full coverage strategy, deviations from this strategy have to be reported. Initially, certain countries had to omit broader clusters of schools located in specific regions (*resulting in reduced population coverage*). Secondly, there were occasions where complete schools had to be omitted from the sampling frame (*school*

[28]For the sixth wave of CILS4EU-DE in 2016, an update sample was added to the existing panel sample to counter panel attrition. The face-to-face interview for the update sample included a life history calendar (LHC) covering the partnership and employment trajectories of the respondents so that they could be reconstructed retrospectively.
https://www.cils4.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=99&Itemid=83

exclusion). Lastly, within participating schools, the exclusion of specific students became necessary (*exclusion of students within participating schools*).

It is important to point out that for the United Kingdom case, the sample was restricted to the geographical area of England, with the exclusion of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, due to the consistent differences in educational systems in those different countries.

Starting with the case of reduced population coverage, for Germany, the initial intent was to cover all Federal States in the sample. However, Bavaria refused to participate in the study. Therefore, only 15 Federal States are included in the German sample.

Furthermore, although the probability proportional to size (PPS)[29] sampling technique was used, which guarantees a low probability of inclusion for small schools, it was necessary to eliminate from the sample, for cost reasons, the extremely small schools, i.e. schools with a number of students in the target grade level of less than a quarter of the average class size of all schools containing two or more classes in the grade in question.

Other reductions in the sample occurred at the level of individual students within eligible and sampled schools, allowing for the exclusion of specific individuals.

In the school year 2010/2011, 4,000 students in each country were interviewed, at least 1,500 students of whom had an immigrant background. To achieve this, a minimum of 100 schools in each country were sampled; to have an adequate balance between a sufficient number of schools (thus reducing sampling error at that level and, consequently, allowing meaningful comparisons between countries) and a sufficient number of students within each school (thus allowing us to calculate reliable context measures for multilevel analyses).

In all countries, the sampling methodology employed for CILS4EU consisted of a three-stage stratified sample design. The initial sampling units *(first stage sampling units)* comprised individual schools that enrolled the pertinent target grades, primarily those hosting 14-year-old students.

After the exclusion process was applied at the school level, schools were selected from a comprehensive national roster of eligible schools (referred to as the school sampling

[29]Probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling is a method of sampling from a finite population in which a size measure is available for each population unit before sampling and where the probability of selecting a unit is proportional to its size - Chris J. Skinner

frame) using probabilities proportional to the school's size (PPS). Before the actual sampling, schools within the sampling frame were categorized into distinct and non-overlapping groups (explicit strata) based on the percentage of students with an immigrant background in each school. The objective of this stratification approach was to intentionally oversample schools with higher proportions of students from immigrant backgrounds to achieve the desired number of cases representing children with an immigrant background.

The next stage *(second stage sampling units)* involved the selection of classes within the sampled schools, targeting the specified grades. In order to mitigate cluster effects, such as those stemming from very large schools, a random selection of two school classes was made in cases where more than two classes were available. However, in instances where the school had only one or two classes within the relevant age group, that/those class/classes were chosen for inclusion.

Lastly *(third stage sampling units)*, the primary sampling units in the third stage were the students within the selected classes. In this final phase, all students within the selected grade were included in the sample, except those specifically excluded according to the guidelines regarding "exclusions within schools".

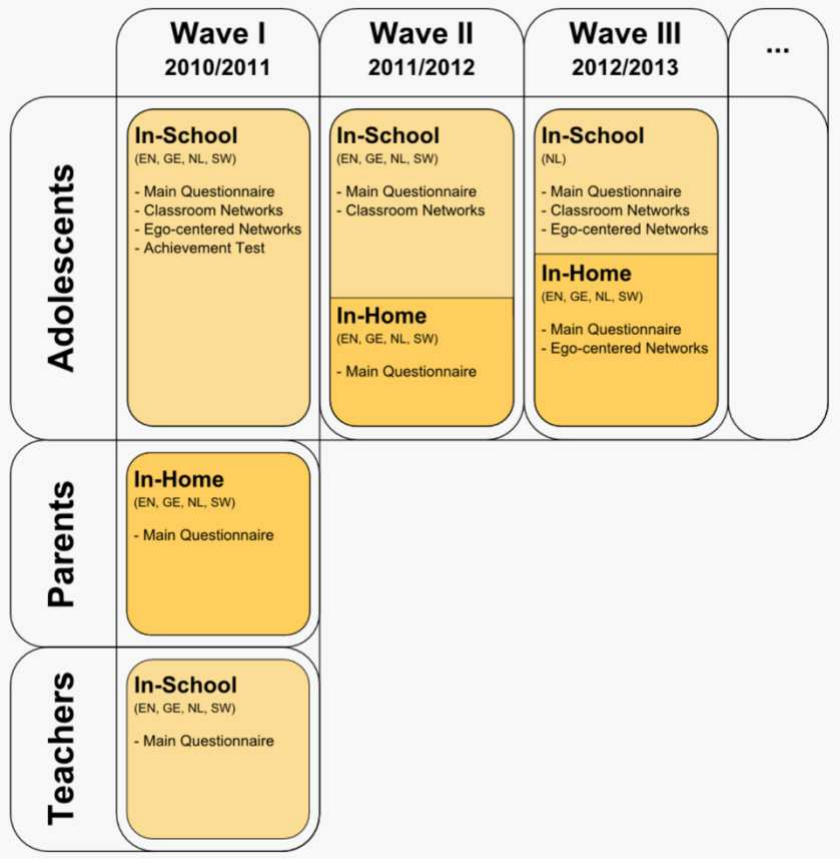

Figure 1 – CILS4EU

https://www.cils4.eu/

In the initial phase of the study, school interviews were conducted comprising a 20 to 30-minute written assessment focusing on fundamental cognitive and language skills. Additionally, a 45-minute self-administered questionnaire was provided, encompassing queries related to students' ego-centric networks and their networks within the classroom. Moreover, teachers were requested to complete an additional questionnaire aimed at capturing pertinent characteristics at both the classroom and school levels. Furthermore, 30-minute telephone interviews were carried out with one parent of each student.

During the subsequent phase, most participants were approached again via their respective schools. Similar to the first phase, a 45-minute self-administered questionnaire

was employed. For those respondents interviewed at school, data on their classroom networks were once again collected.
A small subset of students who had left or changed schools were individually contacted via telephone and email. They answered only the youth's main questionnaire.

Between the second and third waves of the study, a significant number of respondents either exited school or progressed to a higher educational level. Except the Dutch segment of the study, interviews in the third phase were primarily conducted via telephone, while some were also conducted online or through postal means.
Students responded to a condensed version of the main questionnaire. During this phase, information about the respondents' ego-centric networks was also collected anew.

The project delved into various facets of integration, encompassing structural, cultural, social, and identification aspects. For explanatory purposes, some of the most significant questions for each category of integration will be shown. Concerning structural integration, the questionnaire covered elements such as educational and occupational aspirations, both from the perspective of children and parents. It also delved into the social and ethnic background of the family, including the country of origin of the parents and their occupational status.
For cultural integration, the questions addressed gender roles, languages spoken at home, the parent-child relationship, and the amount of time parents dedicate to their children. Social integration questions focused on sociometric measures of classroom ties and ego-centered networks of best friends. Classmates of immigrants were asked about the types of relationships they formed with them.
Identification integration encompassed aspects like identification with one's ethnic group and the level of perception of belonging to the host country. Notably, questions administered to teachers, gauging their perception of the difficulties immigrant children may encounter at school, such as access to free books and meals, are crucial for understanding the overall integration level.

Integration studied from different points of view, with related questions, is extremely relevant for the purpose of the project since it contributes to explaining the educational disadvantaged of children of immigrants.

2. Educational disadvantage within 4 EU countries: Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, and England.

The next paragraph will discuss the factors that can play a positive or negative role within the educational context for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially students with a migrant background. As mentioned above, focusing on these factors is crucial since they impact the educational route of students, and consequently also the educational outcome, allowing to understand the underlying reason for educational disadvantage.

Analysis will be conducted based on some studies that used data from the first three waves of CILS4EU.

Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, and England differ in education systems. The choice of these countries, therefore, can be helpful to understand the different impact that aspects that contribute to increasing or decreasing the educational disadvantage of immigrants, can have according to the education system considered.

2.1 Different access to "social capital"

The study on the different access to social capital and the benefits derived from it was conducted by Sven Lenkewitz and Mark Wittek in 2022 by using data of the CILS4EU project and the CILS4EU-DE extension conducted as a follow-up study in Germany[30]. Thanks to the questionnaire[31] administered during the first two waves, with its

[30]The networks and educational decisions of over 2700 students were examined using network models and regression techniques to investigate the formation of social capital and its link with academically ambitious educational choices.

[31]Students were inquired about their social connections through the following questions: "Who are your best friends in class?" and "Whose parents do your parents get together with once in a while or call each other on the phone?" (see Kruse and Jacob 2014).

sociometric items, it was possible to detect social networks at the class level, such as friendships or contacts with parents. The analysis included students from lower-track schools *(Hauptschule)*, intermediate-track schools *(Realschule),* comprehensive schools and schools with multiple *tracks (Gesamtschule* and *Schule mit mehreren Bildungsgängen),* and upper- track schools *(Gymnasium).*

Four hypotheses were formulated for the analysis of this issue:
1) Students and parents from similar socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to form relationships with one another.
2) Parents show a stronger tendency to form a relationship with others from a similar socio-economic background than students.
3) Access to social capital increases the chances of making an academically ambitious decision.
4) Social capital is especially beneficial for children from a household without academically educated parents.

Before going on with the analysis, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by "social capital"[32] and to outline some premises. According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital consists of information and resources embedded in personal networks. Social scientists, in fact, widely acknowledge that the outcomes of individuals, organizations, and societies are influenced by social networks (Bourdieu, 1986).
Therefore, individuals can benefit from their social environment in various spheres, such as the labor market or educational contexts. But it is interesting to note that individuals, by having different access to social capital, can benefit differently their social environments; this then highlights the existing inequalities between individuals.
The analysis that is about to be conducted on social capital in the school context has to be understood from the perspective of how the information and resources embedded in social relationships can be harnessed by students and parents to achieve specific goals,

[32]"Social capital consists of the people an individual knows; the resources they possess; and their willingness and opportunities to employ these resources for said individual (Pedulla & Pager, 2019)." From "Social Networks and Educational Decisions: Who has Access to Social Capital and for Whom is it Beneficial?" By Sven Lenkewitz and Mark Wittek, 2022.

such as the transition from school to work, university completion or improved academic performance (Verhaeghe et al., 2015; Behtoui, 2007).

It is important to point out that, according to Flap e Völker (2001), social capital is not an "all- purpose good", but a goal specific. The type of social capital that the analysis proposes is contact with highly educated adults via friendship and parental networks, which is related to the specific outcome of academically ambitious educational choices at the end of secondary education[33](Helbig and Marczuk 2021).
However, what has just been said is only true if network partners are willing and able to share their resources and information, even if one is in a segregated situation, since this might not always be the case, e.g. when societal groups erect physical or symbolic boundaries to exclude others from their accumulated assets (Bourdieu 1984; Lamont and Molnár 2002). However, it is also true that schools, being environments that foster social interaction between students and parents, should allow students to have access to social capital embedded in their network environments.

It is well known that individuals in high social positions tend to benefit from social capital (Verhaeghe et al. 2015), but more interesting is to analyze the access to social capital by socio-economically disadvantaged families. Since the socio-economic composition of schools is shaped by neighborhood segregation (Denessen et al. 2005), school tracking (Jenkins et al. 2008), and school choices (Jheng et al. 2022), opportunities to form social relationships with others from different socio-economic backgrounds to be restricted owing to the distribution of households between schools. Furthermore, the choices

[33]In Germany, upon completion of secondary education, adolescents confront the decision of whether to pursue further schooling for a higher educational degree, commence vocational training, or enter the labor market. This decision is contingent on the type of school attended by students. Graduates from upper secondary school have the option to enter tertiary education, while students from lower-track, intermediate-track, and comprehensive schools are initially tasked with deciding whether to pursue upper secondary education. Following completion, students from these schools can also choose to enroll in a university. Consequently, enrollment in upper secondary education (Gymnasium) is conceptualized as an academically ambitious educational decision for students from lower-track, intermediate-track, and comprehensive schools. In contrast, the pursuit of tertiary education is defined as an academically ambitious educational decision for students who attended upper-track schools (Dollmann 2017). From "Social Networks and Educational Decisions: Who has Access to Social Capital and for Whom is it Beneficial?" By Sven Lenkewitz and Mark Wittek, 2022.

individuals make in forming relationships within schools have the potential to contribute to increased segregation. The principle of homophily, which will be discussed afterward, suggests that individuals with similarities are more likely to associate with each other, and children and parents from advantaged backgrounds tend to build connections with others who share similar advantages (Malacarne, 2017). Having a common socio-economic background often becomes a conducive factor for building relationships, as individuals with similar socio-economic statuses typically share similar tastes, cultural preferences, and attitudes (Bourdieu, 1986).

The researchers employed specific tools to conduct their analysis, such as network models[34] and regression techniques, which contributed to highlighting the importance of social capital in the academic setting.

All four hypotheses have been affirmed by the study, but some clarifications are necessary. The findings indicated that both students and parents tend to establish connections with individuals who have similar educational backgrounds. Nonetheless, parents appear to engage in relationships influenced by socio-economic differences more frequently compared to their children. This variation could be attributed to the increased opportunities for adolescents to connect with their peers during school life (Feld, 1981). Alternatively, it might be explained by parents exhibiting greater selectivity when choosing relationship partners (Windzio and Bicer 2013).

Furthermore, the findings indicate that social capital embedded in students' friendships and parental networks fosters academically ambitious choices, but in different ways; in fact, parents' social capital is beneficial for all educational decisions, meanwhile the social capital accessed through students' friendship networks only shows a clear link to the decision to visit university. This highlights the relevance of parents in their children's educational careers (Roth and Weißmann 2022).

In addition, it is highlighted that social capital is particularly beneficial for adolescents from less privileged households, but, despite adolescents from less privileged families

[34]For example, the exponential random graph models (ERGMs), which treat the overall structure of an observed network as a result of various factors and aim to identify the specific local behaviors that contribute to shaping the overall structure of the network, has been used to test the first hypothesis, that individuals tend to form relationships with others who have the same educational background.

potentially benefiting from the social capital of others, there are challenges related to segregation that make accessing it fully difficult. School choices and opportunities to interact with peers from highly educated families are influenced by parental socio-economic characteristics and segregation within school relationships. Therefore, even though social capital may offer a pathway to advanced education, social circumstances often limit the full realization of this potential advantage.

Another aspect, pointed out by the current study, is that the interaction within families, characterized by high levels of education, is expected to encourage the making of academically ambitious educational choices for various reasons. Individuals with advantages in education possess the necessary resources for success within the educational system, and they can also assist others by directly aiding with homework or assignments (Flashman, 2012). In terms of concrete educational decisions, parents with higher levels of education can offer insights into various educational options (Forster and van de Werfhorst, 2019) and the potential advantages associated with obtaining a better degree (Barone et al., 2018). Additionally, they can provide guidance on the viability of a particular educational decision and offer information regarding the associated costs (Grodsky and Jones, 2007).

Indirectly, parents with higher levels of education and their children can function as role models due to their typically elevated educational ambitions and aspirations (Lenkewitz and Wittek, 2022). This influence may extend to other students, particularly in discussions about academic plans. Highly educated parents not only positively shape the educational decisions of their own children but can also have a positive impact on the educational choices of other students; therefore, it can be affirmed that adolescents with less educated parents stand to gain from social capital.

This assertion is rooted in the close connection between educational decisions and the resources and information already present in highly educated households. According to Helbig and Marczuk (2021), this connection may result in a reduced impact of social connections on academic choices. In households with a high level of education, academic expectations are already elevated, and making ambitious choices might be considered the norm. Consequently, there may be limited room for improvement through the additional influence of social capital, potentially creating a ceiling effect for this group.

On the contrary, households with fewer privileges lack the essential resources, information, and role models that could foster academically ambitious choices. In this context, social capital becomes particularly valuable for students from non-academic backgrounds, offering them a means to compensate for the absence of necessary resources (Sokatch, 2006).

2.1.1 The returns to social capital and labor market outcomes

According to Lin (2000), social capital[35] has a positive impact on the labor market, both for majorities and minorities, in four different ways. In the first instance, connections within one's social network may serve as a gateway to information about job opportunities, potentially leading to a broader range of prospects in the labor market (Granovetter, 1973). Secondly, social contacts can wield influence over others in decision-making processes; for instance, a contact may endorse an individual during a hiring process (Marsden, 1994). Thirdly, an individual's social capital can be viewed as a valuable resource for an organization, making individuals with more social capital more attractive as employees (Baalbergen and Jaspers, 2023). Lastly, social contacts may offer emotional support, aiding individuals in job searches and providing a buffer against the stress of unemployment (Caspi et al., 1998).

Partly due to poor social capital, as claimed by Baalbergen and Jaspers (2023), in Europe second-generation immigrants from the Global South often face a disadvantaged position upon entering the labor market[36]. In fact, according to Eurostat's 2016 report, young ethnic minorities are more likely to be associated with temporary contracts or part-time

[35]Social capital has three dimensions, encompassing upper reachability, extensity, and range. Upper reachability gauges an individual's access to prestigious occupations. Extensity measures the quantity of one's social capital, while range denotes the diversity within one's social capital (Behtoui, 2007; Song and Lin, 2009). From "Social Capital and Its Returns as an Explanation for Early Labor Market Success of Majority and Minority Members in the Netherlands" by Baalbergen and Jaspers, 2023.

[36]It is more comprehensive to speak of inequalities of labor market performance, which consists of two parts. The first part relates to the probability of having a job, referred to here as a threshold effect. The second part relates to differences in income, given that a person is in the market, and is referred to as an income from work effect (Behrenz, Hammarstedt and Månsson, 2007). From "Social Capital and Its Returns as an Explanation for Early Labor Market Success of Majority and Minority Members in the Netherlands" by Baalbergen and Jaspers, 2023.

employment. Furthermore, across various European countries, these individuals are less frequently observed in professional and managerial roles, as highlighted by Heath et al. in 2008. Investigating the underlying causes of these labor market inequalities is crucial. A noteworthy avenue for exploration is the study of social capital, as it helps elucidate differences in labor market success between members of the ethnic majority and minority. This differentiation stems from varying returns in the labor market, influenced by the distinctive social capital possessed by these two groups.

On this point, Baalbergen and Jaspers (2023) conducted a study to understand reasons of inequalities in labor market outcomes faced by minority groups by using data from both CILS4EU and CILSNL, which were then matched with registered data from Statistics Netherlands[37].

	Majority members (N = 2076)		Minority members (N = 498)	
	Mean (%)	SD	Mean (%)	SD
Dependent variables				
Unemployed within 3 months	2.8%		6.8%	
Unemployed within 12 months	5.0%		11.5%	
Full time permanent contract	35.8%		25.3%	
Independent variables				
Social capital				
Upper reachability[a]	.0		.0	(.0)
Range[a]	.0		.1	(.0)
Extensity	1.8	(1.0)	2.3	(1.2)
Control variables				
Education				
Lower secondary	5.9%		12.1%	
Higher secondary	8.9%		8.8%	
Lower vocational	21.2%		25.9%	
Higher vocational	30.7%		27.8%	
Applied university	26.4%		20.7%	
University	6.9%		4.6%	
Parental ISEI	51.0	19.2	43.5	19.9
Age	23.6	.7	23.8	.8
Gender				
Male	41.7%		39.0%	
Female	58.3%		61.0%	

Table 1 - Bivariate descriptive statistics (N = 2574) (Baalbergen and Jaspers, 2023)

[37]The participants were around 14 years old during the initial wave of the study. The CILSNL project spanned four additional waves and was conducted from 2013 to 2017. In the most recent wave of data collection, the respondents were around 21 years old. Following the amalgamation of all the waves of panel data, the information was connected to the register data provided by Statistics Netherlands.

The table above shows a bivariate analysis of some descriptive statistics highlighting several significant aspects. Members of minority groups more frequently experience unemployment (11.5%) compared to majority members (5.0%), and they are also less likely to have secure employment (25.3% for minorities, 35.8% for majorities). Furthermore, disparities in socioeconomic backgrounds are observed between the two groups. On average, majority members have a higher level of education than minority members. The International Socio-Economic Index (ISEI) of the parents of majority members is higher than that of the parents of minority members (Baalbergen and Jaspers, 2023).

It is interesting to note how small percentage differences in educational attainment between the majority and minority groups translate into much larger differences in unemployment, disadvantaging the minority.

The theory of "capital deficit" (Lin, 2000) and the theory of "return deficit" (Lin, 2000) are useful in understanding the inequalities in labor market outcomes that minorities face.

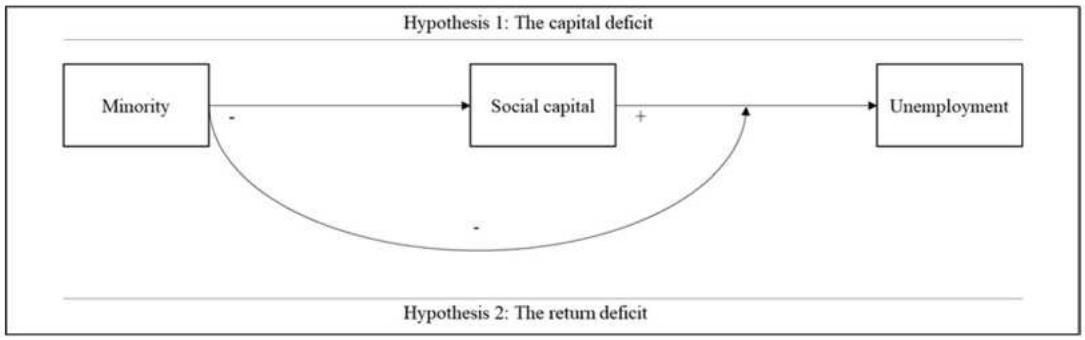

Figure 2 - Schematic overview of the capital and return deficit (Baalbergen and Jaspers, 2023)

The theory of “capital deficit” (Lin, 2000), is the explanation for what reasons minority members might possess a lower quantity and/or quality of social capital compared to majority members.

Behind this theory there is the idea that social capital is differentially distributed across different social groups; distribution may depend on gender, race, and ethnicity. The main focus of this analysis is on how social capital is distributed and embedded among and by

individuals according to their ethnicity. The main reason for the deficit in social capital among minorities seems to be homophily, as anticipated by the previous study on different access to social capital.

Homophily, or the tendency to form connections with individuals similar in key demographic characteristics, may hinder contact between majority and minority members. This phenomenon could make it more challenging for minorities to establish broad, diverse, and prestigious social networks, as they might have fewer opportunities to interact with individuals of higher socioeconomic status and diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, segregation in stigmatized neighborhoods or lower segments of the labor market could further limit opportunities to meet diverse people, influencing the size and diversity of social networks.

More interesting is to notice that, even if members of different social groups possess the same social capital, they may receive different returns on it. In this case, it is discussed as "return deficit" (Lin, 2000). In the context of minorities, this implies that, despite having a network of similar size to that of the majority, the benefits they derive from their social network may be lower (Van Tubergen & Völker, 2015). This could stem from the fact that minority contacts might be less willing to provide assistance than majority contacts, influenced by negative perceptions, stereotypes, or discrimination. Additionally, there might be a lack of opportunity among minority contacts to successfully provide help, for instance, due to discrimination by employers after referrals (Heath et al., 2008).

The conclusions reached by the study show that young adults from minority groups in Europe may face a "return deficit" on their social capital in the labor market, which does not depend on a "social capital deficit". In fact, as was found by the analysis, members of minority groups have higher levels of social capital compared to members of the majority. Therefore, the reason behind the "return deficit" can be explained by the fact that differences in access to social capital develop later in life, potentially due to minorities' lower career success and segregated personal lives and, are less apparent in young people's social capital.

It is well evident how social capital affects the success in the labor market, thus a possible solution to overcome the problem concerning minorities could be the extension of the

social network of minorities through, for example, social mixing (Bolt et al., 2010), since it appears that social network of majorities is stronger.

2.2 Role played by peers and teachers.

Another important aspect to consider concerning overcoming the educational disadvantage of individuals coming from socio-economically disadvantaged families, such as second-generation immigrants, is the role played by teachers during student's school period and the role played by peers.
Through their support, teachers can promote educational equality by mitigating disparities in problematic behavior at school. On the other hand, peers can contribute to the educational outcomes.
A separate analysis of these two factors will be conducted.

2.2.1 Teachers

Teacher support is frequently considered a protective factor for students facing disadvantages, helping shield them from problematic behavior[38] and negative educational outcomes (Berkowitz et al., 2017). Several studies report that disadvantaged socioeconomic background can affect the outcomes of children, and put them at risk of poor outcomes[39]. Negative effects don't concern only the school environment, but also the health and well-being of individuals in their adult period.
Therefore, in addition to the family, school can also be seen as a main place for children and adolescents to learn and have a positive development (Sabol and Pianta, 2012), especially if the family's role in doing so is absent.

[38]Problematic behavior within the educational context must be understood as a crucial element generating educational inequalities. From "Teacher Support as a Protective Factor? The Role of Teacher Support for Reducing Disproportionality in Problematic Behavior at School" by Carlijn Bussemakers and Eddie Denessen, 2023.
[39]Several research studies have indicated that students hailing from poor backgrounds or minority families, as well as those facing specific challenges such as parental divorce, tend to exhibit higher rates of misbehavior in school. Additionally, these students are more prone to frequent class absences and have an increased likelihood of dropping out, as evidenced by studies conducted by Geven, Kaiser et al. in 2019.

Teachers possess the ability to prevent and alleviate problematic behavior among students through an instructional approach that fosters a sense of competence, connection, and autonomy (Sabol and Pianta, 2012). Both academic and social support from teachers play vital roles in achieving this. Academic support entails teachers encouraging students and ensuring that learning activities align with their abilities by providing the necessary information, guidance, or assistance for effective learning (Song et al., 2015)[40]. Social support instead means that teachers demonstrate to students a genuine concern for their emotional needs and well-being, fostering a sense of connection and relatedness at school (Hallinan, 2008).

An interesting study on whether teacher support reduced disproportionality in problematic behavior was conducted by Carlijn Bussemakers and Eddie Denessen in 2023, using the CILS4EU data of the first wave, which was consistent with the purpose of the research.

It is necessary to specify that the study conducted a separate analysis for the two types of support by teachers.

Three dependent variables were identified by the authors to measure the problematic behavior of students: getting angry, acting impulsively, and skipping classes.

Furthermore, five factors in students' social background that can place students at risk of problematic behavior have been identified as independent variables: low parental education and parental unemployment, migrant background[41], and household composition and parental rejection.

Results given by the analysis arise from the utilized of OLS regression method[42]; regression analyses have been divided into three steps. In the first one, an assessment was

[40]Self-determination theory posits that for students to develop intrinsic motivation for learning or internalize educational values, they must experience a sense of competency, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Van Petegem et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2020). From "Teacher Support as a Protective Factor? The Role of Teacher Support for Reducing Disproportionality in Problematic Behavior at School" by Carlijn Bussemakers and Eddie Denessen, 2023.

[41]Families from a migrant background may encounter increased cultural differences with the school environment, potentially leading to diminished parental engagement and a decreased sense of belonging for students at school (Mazzoni et al., 2020; Nakhaie, 2021). From "Teacher Support as a Protective Factor? The Role of Teacher Support for Reducing Disproportionality in Problematic Behavior at School" by Carlijn Bussemakers and Eddie Denessen, 2023.

[42]Ordinary Least Squares regression (OLS) is a common technique for estimating coefficients of linear regression equations which describe the relationship between one or more independent quantitative variables and a dependent variable (simple or multiple linear regression).

conducted to measure the impact of social background on problematic behavior, aiming to determine the degree of disproportionality. Following this, teacher support was introduced into the models in the second step to examine whether discrepancies in problematic behavior could be attributed to differential access to teacher support. In the third step, interaction terms between social background and teacher support were included to investigate variations in the impact of teacher support based on social background.

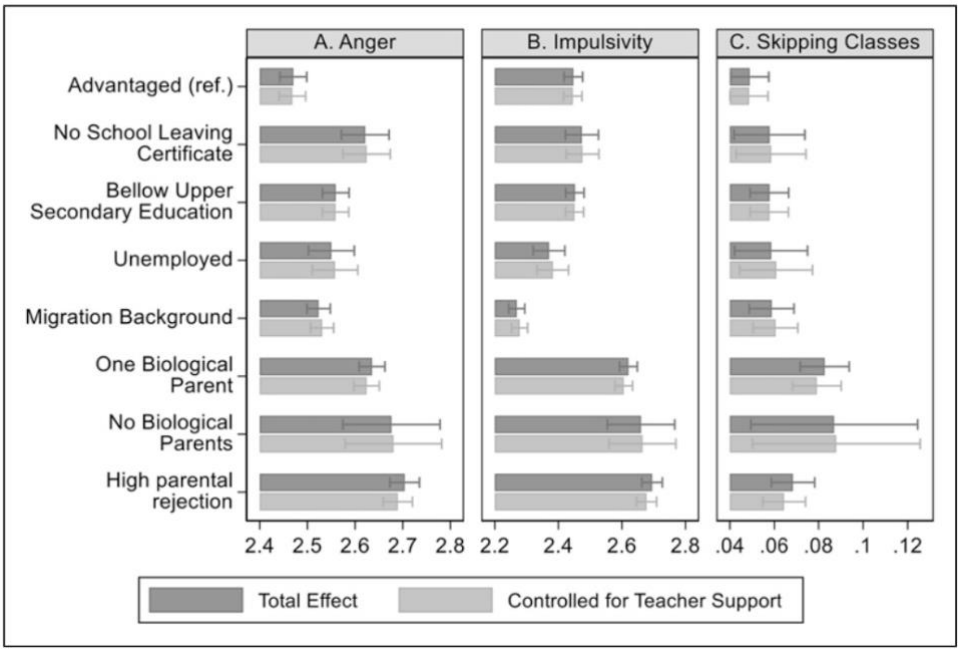

Figure 3 - Adjusted Mean Levels of Problem Behavior by Student Background (Bussemakers and Denessen, 2023)

What emerges from Figure 3 is that students from advantaged backgrounds tended to have relatively low levels of problematic behavior, rather than students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In particular, students from migrant backgrounds seems to skip classes more often comparing with students from advantaged backgrounds; but they did not report more anger and seem to be less impulsive.

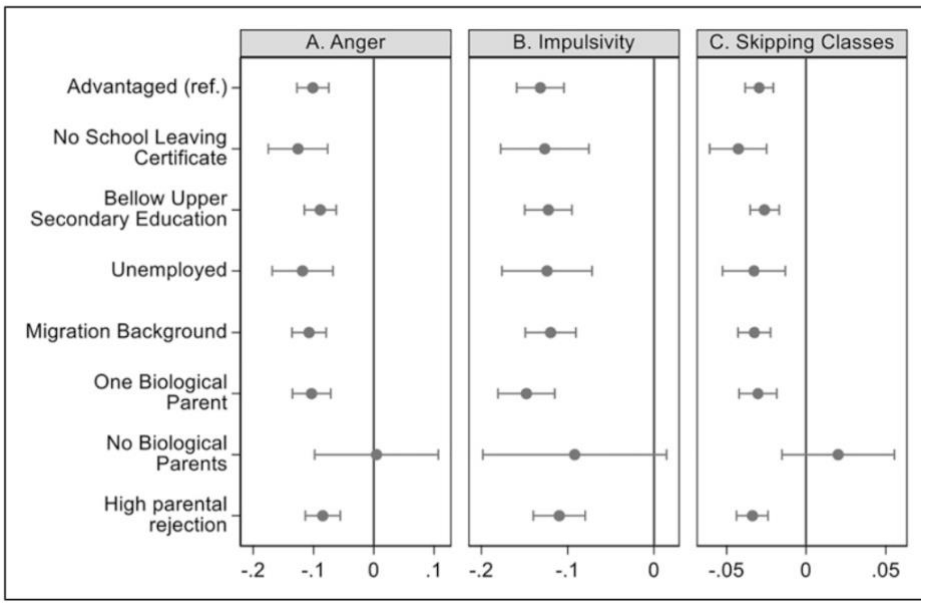

Figure 4 - Estimated Effects of Teacher Academic Support by Student Background (Bussemakers and Denessen, 2023)

Figure 4 presents the estimated effects of academic support from teachers for students from disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds, showing that academic support is associated with lower levels of all three forms of problematic behavior for students from advantaged backgrounds as well as students from most disadvantaged groups. Instead, there has been no significant correlation found between academic support from teachers and any form of problematic behavior among students who do not live with either of their biological parents.

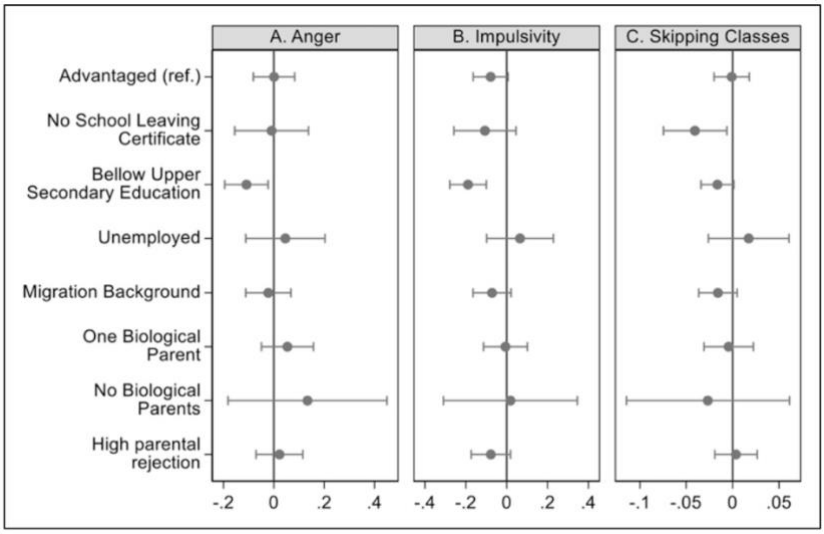

Figure 5 - Estimated Effects of Teacher Social Support by Student Background (Bussemakers and Denessen, 2023)

Figure 5, instead, presents the estimated effect of social support from teachers according to student background. It is noted that social support from teachers is not associated with lower levels of problematic behavior for most groups. In fact, students from advantaged backgrounds did not observe any positive effects on problematic behavior from the social support provided by their teachers.

This trend was consistent among most students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with an exception noted for students whose parents had lower educational attainment. Specifically, students whose parents had not completed upper secondary education reported lower levels of anger and impulsivity if they received social support from their teachers.

The conclusion of this study highlights that, while academic support is associated with less problematic behavior among almost all groups of young adolescent students, both from disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds, social support from teachers is not associated with less problematic behavior among almost all groups[43]. Therefore, due to the similar associations between advantaged students and most students from

[43]Only for students with lower educated parents, social support from teachers was found to be associated with less anger, which translated into smaller differences in anger between this group and advantaged students.

disadvantaged backgrounds, academic support cannot be seen as a factor of absolute reduction for differences in problematic behavior, but for sure it plays a crucial role as a protective factor since it can improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged students.
Regarding the social support, it can be crucial in reducing problematic behavior among individuals whose parents are less familiar with the norms of education, resulting in a larger cultural difference between the home and school environment which can make children feel less comfortable at school.

2.2.2 Peers

A different study concentrates on the effects that interactions among students who may not share the same cultural background, such as the case of immigrants and natives, could have on educational outcomes. The focus of the study is benefits that immigrants can draw from interactions with peers within the educational context since it is well known the importance of pupils' social environment for academic outcomes.
The analysis was conducted by Andreas Diemer, in 2022. The educational experiences of adolescent children with diverse cultural backgrounds were examined by integrating administrative data from Sweden with information from the Swedish segment of the CILS4EU.

This study examined how the presence of peers from diverse backgrounds can impact educational performance in varied ways.
The analysis confirmed the heterogeneity[44] of endogenous peer effects[45], indicating that these effects seem to arise predominantly from interactions with native students. Both native students and children of migrants experience such spillover effects, which are roughly of similar magnitude. However, notably, children of foreign origin exhibit larger

[44]For there to be heterogeneity between native and migrant children, two prerequisites must be met. Firstly, the underlying mechanisms influencing the situation must differ between these groups. In other words, if there is a friendship connection, it should have distinct implications for various types of students within each group. Secondly, this mechanism must have an impact on academic grades, either by encouraging greater effort or by enhancing effectiveness at the same level of effort. From "Endogenous peer effects in diverse friendship networks: Evidence from Swedish classrooms" by Andreas Diemer, 2022.
[45]These effects are primarily determined by internal factors or interactions within the group.

peer effects when interacting with native peers compared to native children interacting with foreign-origin peers. In fact, for the latter group, these effects are largely absent.
This highlights a potentially crucial factor contributing to non-linearity in endogenous peer effects, where it appears to amplify the achievements of the majority group in society. This dynamic necessitates the minority group's interaction with the majority to experience similar benefits. A growing segregation in Swedish classrooms might worsen educational disparities between native and migrant children, especially if it discourages friendships across different groups.
High-achieving children of migrants seem to be particularly susceptible to friendship segregation.
The diversity in endogenous peer effects suggests that increasing opportunities for interaction between migrant and native students can be advantageous for the former without negatively affecting the latter. Therefore, policies promoting social integration in schools, and encouraging heightened interaction among students from diverse backgrounds, could contribute to establishing a more equitable and inclusive educational system in Sweden.

3. Ethnic Homophily and Segregation

A possible explanation regarding how social networks are created by individuals of majorities and minorities, and how they establish relations with each other, is the ethnic homophily, which leads to segregation for individuals belonging to minority groups. Ethnic homophily, in fact, is understood as a force against social capital, since as will be explored in this section, it represents a barrier for the minority to establish social connections with the majority. Instead, ethnic homophily can be considered as a force in favor of ethnic capital, because, as anticipated in the previous chapter, ethnic minorities, being aware of their own disadvantaged position, use their ethnicity as their advantage factor to achieve their success.
The term "ethnic homophily" refers to individual's inclination to build social connections within their own ethnic group rather than outside of it. This prevails due to the fact that

attitudes, customs, preferences, and values, which foster the formation of friendships, are frequently associated with, or deeply connected to, ethnicity (Zhao,2023).

Several notable studies observe that the inclination to associate with similar individuals becomes more pronounced in groups with higher exposure to members from different backgrounds (Currarini et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2016). For example, research by Smith et al. (2016) suggests that homophily often increases with exposure to the outgroup, and these levels are particularly associated with the proportion of individuals belonging to the minority. Typically, these findings are interpreted to support the "group threat theory" (Smith et al., 2016), where the presence of a relatively large outgroup intensifies a sense of threat (Hewstone and Brown, 1986), thereby increasing homophily. These results also run counter to "contact theory," which posits that interactions with outgroup members foster positive attitudes toward the outgroup (Allport, 1954), consequently reducing homophily. As noted, studies on ethnic homophily have been focused on homophily as the cause of network segregation; but it is interesting to look at this causal relationship in the opposite direction, i.e., how network segregation may impact homophily. The study being presented, focuses on whether initial network segregation predicts homophily in subsequent changes to initial networks.

The author of this current study, Linda Zhao (2023), analyzed the dynamic friendship networks among 3255 Swedish adolescents in 160 classes using data from CILS4EU, as the latter reports on contexts where many minorities are present in the study, thus optimal for the study on ethnic homophily.

The reasons why Sweden was chosen as the country to conduct the study on homophily lie in the fact that, the education system of this country does not track students, increases the likelihood of their exposure to consistent school environments, ensuring that networks remain relatively stable over time.

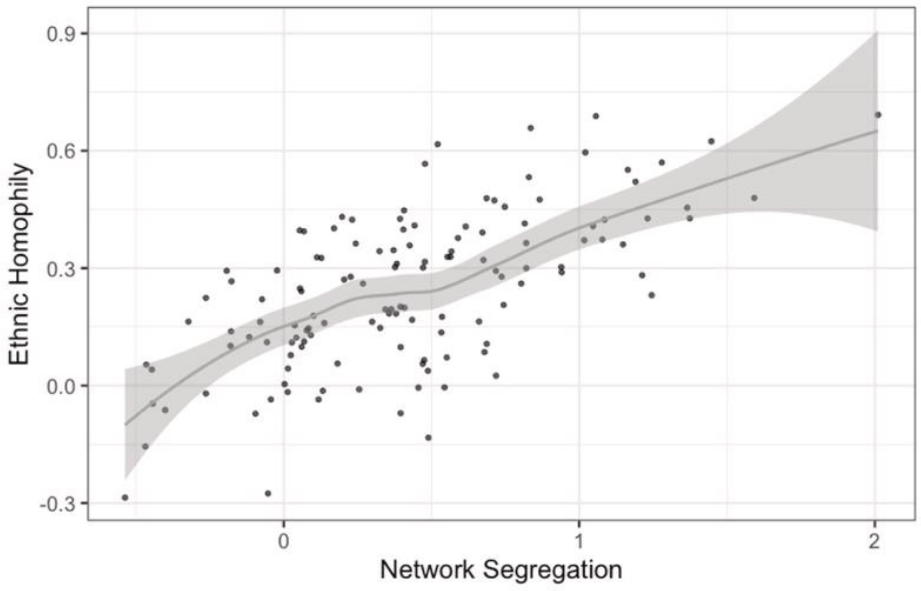

Figure 6 - Initial Network Segregation and Ethnic Homophily in the Evolution of Classroom Friendships (Linda Zhao, 2023)

Figure 6 depicts the projected values of ethnic homophily on the y-axis relative to levels of network segregation on the x-axis. At the upper limit of network segregation, ethnic homophily reaches levels comparable to the average gender homophily observed in a classroom. Conversely, when network segregation is at the lower end of the spectrum, ethnic homophily is minimal. In general, classrooms exhibiting some degree of initial network segregation (values of network segregation greater than 0) are also likely to be environments where connections tend to form in ways that are more ethnically homophilous.

This highlights how crucial it is to prevent initial network segregation, ensuring that high levels of ethnic homophily do not occur.

The study revealed that a heightened level of initial ethnic segregation in an individual's friendships correlates with an increased tendency for ethnic homophily in their evolving social connections over time. Consequently, individuals entrenched in more integrated social networks, featuring connections among individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds, tend to exhibit decreasing levels of ethnic homophily as time progresses.

This finding serves to bridge the gap between the recognition that high-quality contact is a more effective catalyst for fostering positive attitudes toward outgroups and reducing homophily behaviors.

What the study suggests is that care should be taken not to confuse simplistic forms of exposure (e.g. enrolment in the same class) with high-quality forms of social relations (e.g. initial friendships between groups), as the latter can facilitate the overcoming of prejudices, the promotion of positive attitudes and the reduction of barriers between different groups. Since only high-quality forms of social relations have an influence on ethnic homophily, effective action must be taken on this type to ensure the creation of environments free of ethnic homophily. Exposure to high-quality contact is the turning point to improve the educational performance of minorities, since allows them to establish relations with native peers, strengthening their social network.

4. Education systems of CILS4EU countries

This section will be devoted to an in-depth study of the main differences in education systems in Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, and England, since different educational systems can aggravate or alleviate family-related background disadvantages. Thus, it is important to understand from the cross-country comparison which characteristics of the school system come into play. Two educational systems at opposite poles will be analyzed, namely choice education system and performance-driven education system, in order to understand which kind of education system can benefit most students from socio-economically disadvantaged background, particularly immigrants. It will be noted how those countries are arranged differently along the line joining the two poles.

Furthermore, a specific section will be devoted to the analysis of the influence that tracking in performance-driven education system may have on educational expectations of immigrant students. Since a considerable gap in educational expectations between second-generation immigrants and ethnic majority students has been reported, it is necessary to analyze the type of education system that may be able to reduce this gap.

4.1 Choice education system VS performance-driven education system: does a better system exist?

Jackson & Jonsson (2013), identified two characteristics of education systems, considered as the main causes of both social and ethnic differences in educational decisions, namely stratification and selectivity; they uncovered important findings about which type of education system could be most beneficial for immigrants.

Despite the statement of these authors, the research conducted by Dollmann (2021), will show how selectivity and stratification, in reality, should not be considered the main cause of ethnic differences in educational decisions, thanks to the high aspirations of students. The study focused on addressing whether immigrants and their offspring tend to make more ambitious decisions in education systems driven by choice, as opposed to selective systems, by using stratification and selectivity characteristics as a yardstick for evaluating differences in ambitious decisions in the education context.

By utilizing representative samples of students with and without an immigrant background in England, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden, the research centered on the move to upper secondary education following lower secondary or compulsory education. The educational systems of these countries vary in terms of their degree of stratification and the significance of students' decisions in educational transitions, indicating their level of selectivity.

	Selectivity		
Stratification	**High**	**Intermediate**	**Low**
High	Germany The Netherlands		
Intermediate		Sweden	
Low			England

Figure 7 - The relationship between stratification and selectivity at the secondary or upper secondary level (Jackson & Jonsson, 2013, p. 310). Ethnic inequality in choice- and performance-driven education systems: A longitudinal study of educational choices in England, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden; by Jörg Dollmann (2021)

Figure 7 outlines how countries within the CILS4EU dataset can be categorized based on the two dimensions of stratification and selectivity, according to the framework proposed by Jackson and Jonsson (2013). The English educational system exhibits very low levels of both stratification and selectivity, while both the German and Dutch education systems are highly stratified and feature high selectivity. The Swedish education system falls somewhere in between these two extremes.

Germany and the Netherlands have highly stratified educational systems. Students are grouped into different paths at an early age, typically between 10 and 12 years old. These paths significantly vary in the taught curricula. Consequently, in highly stratified systems, making the "right" choice of path at this young age is crucial for future life opportunities (Jackson and Jonsson, 2013). On the contrary, in comprehensive systems, there are virtually no educational choices to make at an early age, as later transitions in the educational journey are planned to occur at a relatively advanced stage, leading to higher levels of tertiary education.

Another substantial difference between these two educational systems, which are positioned at opposite poles, lies in the role that parents play in influencing their children's educational choices. In highly stratified and selective school systems, parents exert a greater influence on decisions precisely because children are required to make choices at a young age. In contrast, in comprehensive educational systems, parental influence is less pronounced because transition opportunities are limited and occur at a higher level in the educational paths.

Educational systems with high stratification foresees are very selective in educational transitions since transitions of students are based on previous performances in their educational careers. Conversely, comprehensive systems, with later educational transitions, provide students with more freedom to choose their path, with less emphasis on prior performances.

When an educational system is highly stratified, it means that there are various options and paths available for students. This could be positive for immigrants as they would have more opportunities to choose the path that best suits their needs and aspirations. On the

other hand, the educational system highly stratified also includes a high level of selectivity; it means that decisions about the educational path are based on students' performance. This could be a concern for immigrants if they are subject to discrimination or have lower performance. Thus, selectivity could limit opportunities, especially for those who may already be in disadvantaged positions, such as immigrants who came from a disadvantaged family background. Stratification provides more choices, which could be advantageous for immigrants, but selectivity, based on performance, could limit their possibilities. That's the reason why the combination of stratification and selectivity can have opposite effects on immigrants' ability to make educational choices and achieve their goals.

Results of the analysis conducted by Jörg Dollmann (2021), show that, despite the countries took in consideration differ for level of selectivity and stratification, ethnic choice effects do not differ significantly between Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Indeed, what leads students to make ambitious educational choices is to possess high aspirations; this has proven to be true regardless of the ethnic or immigrant background of the students.

It is interesting to note that even if German educational system is highly selective, immigrants do not face disadvantages. The reason lies in the fact that stratification and selectivity would seem to decrease as transitions into the school system continue. As a result, immigrant students, although initially placed into lower and intermediate educational tracks after the first transition following primary school, might compensate for these less advantageous transitions at a later stage. They could achieve similar participation patterns in academic upper secondary education as students in Sweden, where this transition marks the beginning of their educational journey.

Additionally, it is necessary to point out that vocational education and training (VET) is of similar importance as academic education in Germany, Netherlands, and Sweden (Busemeyer & Jensen, 2012), helping to reduce the positive impact of ethnic choices in the context of higher education. On the contrary, in a context where vocational education is less important, as in England, immigrant students may be more likely to make more ambitious educational choices.

4.2 Tracking and Educational Expectation Gaps in Immigrant Students

An important study by Katja Pomianowicz (2023), suggests focusing on educational tracking in order to understand the educational expectations gaps between second-generation immigrants and ethnic majority students. Once again, the study focuses on countries of the CILS4EU project.

The idea of this study lies in the fact that immigrant children in many European countries are more likely than comparable children from the ethnic majority to continue in higher academic tracks (Heath and Brinbaum 2014). Some authors define it as an "ethnic premia" since it is assumed to be linked to higher ambitions among immigrant children, potentially functioning to compensate for their disadvantaged starting positions (Heath and Brinbaum 2014).

Educational expectations[46] are crucial considerations when assessing students' educational attainment, as they mirror the anticipations individuals form in response to the external conditions embedded in the opportunity structure they encounter (Kerckhoff 1976; Morgan 2007). These expectations also function as a practical evaluation of future prospects, making them significant in shaping behavior (Kerckhoff 1976). Within this framework, such expectations play a pivotal role in influencing an individual's educational attainment (Beal and Crockett 2010) and achievement (D'hondt et al. 2016).

According to Wisconsin model of status attainment (Sewell, Haller, and Portes 1969), predicting educational achievement relies heavily on individuals' educational expectations. These expectations and aspirations typically develop through two primary mechanisms. The first mechanism involves the influence of interpersonal relationships, while the second mechanism revolves around students forming educational expectations based on their perceived abilities.

[46]Educational expectations do not be confused with educational aspirations since the latter refer to the desired educational level an individual ideally aims to achieve and are considered to have less significance in shaping subsequent behavior (Haller 1968; Reynolds and Pemberton 2001). From "Educational Expectation Gaps Between Second- Generation Immigrant and Ethnic Majority Students in a Comparative Perspective: The Moderating Role of Educational Tracking" by Katja Pomianowicz, 2023.

Interpersonal influences play a significant role in shaping these expectations. Additionally, students gauge their educational expectations by estimating their abilities, often drawing from past academic successes as a reference point. These achievements serve as a basis for self-reflection and contribute to the assessment of future goals and the likelihood of attaining them (Sewell, Haller, and Portes 1969).
It's noteworthy that educational expectations tend to shift towards a more realistic outlook when students encounter structural constraints, such as limited home resources or perceived barriers within the school environment. Consequently, ideal preferences may be compromised in such situations.

A structural barrier that students could encounter within the educational context is educational tracking[47]. In fact, it is having an effect on students' expectations and on educational outcomes, particularly on immigrants students.
Pomianowicz (2023), by using data from CILS4EU, conducted research on educational expectations of students around the age of 15 in England, Germany, Netherlands, and Sweden with the aim of showing how different types of tracking systems can affect differently educational expectations of students. Specifically, the data for this study was gathered during the academic years 2010/11 (wave 1) and 2011/12 (wave 2). Across the four countries, 76.6 percent of students who participated in Wave 1 also took part in Wave 2, amounting to 14,939 students in 425 schools.

Higher tracking, which is present in educational systems with high stratification and selectivity, implies an early implementation of tracking systems, where students are sorted into distinct programs with separate curricula, such as academic or vocational programs, offered either between schools or within schools. In contrast, lower-tracked

[47]This term is used to describe the division of students into different instructional groups according to their ability level (Hallinan 2000). From "Educational Expectation Gaps Between Second- Generation Immigrant and Ethnic Majority Students in a Comparative Perspective: The Moderating Role of Educational Tracking" by Katja Pomianowicz, 2023.

countries adopt a more flexible approach, utilizing methods like "ability grouping" or "course-by-course tracking," where students are grouped into courses with varying ability levels within or between classes (Chmielewski, Dumont, and Trautwein 2013).
In countries with high tracking in schools, students' educational advancement is constrained by the type of tracking program they are enrolled in. Thus, for a student in a lower-level track, it might be more challenging to access certain educational or university opportunities. On the contrary, in countries with less tracking, participation in a specific track is not closely tied to university access. This means that even if a student is in a track considered less advanced, there could still be the possibility of accessing a higher level of education or university opportunities.

The key features of the school tracking system can influence the formation of students' educational expectations in two distinct ways. The first suggests that in countries with a more rigid tracking system, students tend to have more realistic expectations due to the clear message sent by the educational paths regarding future educational and career opportunities, as well as their academic potential. Thus, the type of track a student is in indicates the future opportunities they might have.
The second point concerns the impact of this stronger tracking on how students form their expectations. Students in countries with more pronounced tracking may rely less on the influence of people around them, such as parents or peers, as the feedback on their academic abilities and opportunities for university access is strongly tied to the track they are following.

In fact, an important aspect to consider in the formation of children's educational expectations is the influence of parental aspirations. In the case of immigrants, according to Feliciano and Lanuza (2016), higher expectations are often observed due to parents' ambitions to enhance their social status through their children's education. This is especially true when immigrant parents have not achieved their own educational goals (Teney et al., 2013). Parental aspirations have a lesser influence on children's expectations when students consistently receive feedback on their future educational

opportunities based on the tracking level, they have been selected[48]. Additionally, immigrant parents themselves might be less optimistic and form their aspirations based on their child's tracking level. In this way, the overall differences in expectations between second-generation children and those from the ethnic majority decrease (Cheng and Starks 2002). Therefore, it is clear how tracking moderates the influence of parental aspirations on the expectations of immigrant children, so that the typically higher aspirations among immigrant parents transfer to a lesser extent to their children in countries with more tracking. Conversely, in countries with less tracking, the influence of parental aspirations might have a greater impact, resulting in higher educational expectations for second-generation immigrants compared to students from the ethnic majority.

Another aspect that contributes to shaping children's educational expectations is the educational selectivity of parents, according to their ethnic origins (Feliciano and Lanuza, 2017). Educational selectivity refers to the parent's level of education compared to the average in their country of origin. For instance, if parents have an education level higher than the average in their home country, they bring with them a "relatively high" level of education and a set of cultural resources that can positively impact the educational success of their children (Feliciano and Lanuza 2017). At the same time, the positive effect of educational selectivity could be lower within high tracking educational system, since children receive clearer signals from the educational system itself, reducing the influence of parents to a lesser extent (Feliciano and Lanuza 2016).

A last aspect that plays an important role in forming is the "responsiveness to school ability", or how students consider their academic performance when forming their educational expectations. For immigrant students, academic ability seems to have a lesser impact on shaping expectations compared to students from the ethnic majority (D'hondt et al. 2016). This could be attributed to the lower familiarity of immigrant parents with

[48]This phenomenon is expected to be more pronounced within immigrant families due to the marginalized status of immigrants in their host societies. Immigrant children may lean more heavily on the social resources within their families as a result (Cheng and Starks 2002). From "Educational Expectation Gaps Between Second- Generation Immigrant and Ethnic Majority Students in a Comparative Perspective: The Moderating Role of Educational Tracking" by Katja Pomianowicz, 2023.

the educational system in the new country and potential language barriers (Antony-Newman 2019), making it challenging to understand the school system and accurately assess their children's performance.

In countries with higher tracking, where students receive more information about their abilities through the educational track, immigrant students may be less likely to overestimate their abilities when forming expectations. Conversely, in countries with lower tracking, the lack of detailed feedback might lead immigrant students to be less aware of the consequences of their performance and develop expectations independently of their actual abilities.

Country	Time point first selection	Type of tracking in lower secondary education	Main route to university	Overall degree of tracking	H1: Influence of parental aspiration on overall immigrant expectation gap	H2: Influence of parental aspiration on expectation gap by parents' educational selectivity	H3: Differences in influence of school ability on immigrant vs. ethnic majority students' expectations
Germany	Age 10	Academic and vocational program division, mostly between schools	Academic track	+++	+	+	+
The Netherlands	Age 12	Academic and vocational program division, mostly within schools	Academic track	++	++	++	++
England	Age 16	Widespread ability grouping between classes	All tracks	+	+++	+++	+++
Sweden	Age 16	Some ability grouping between/ within classes	All tracks	+	+++	+++	+++

Table 2 - The Degree of Tracking and Country-Specific Hypotheses, from "Educational Expectation Gaps Between Second- Generation Immigrant and Ethnic Majority Students in a Comparative Perspective: The Moderating Role of Educational Tracking" by Katja Pomianowicz, 2023.

Table 2 illustrates that the impact of parental aspirations on the educational expectation gaps for immigrants is expected to be least pronounced in Germany and most significant in Sweden and England.

The four countries under study represent distinct types of tracking implementation. Germany can be regarded as the country with the highest degree of tracking, as the age of selection is the lowest (age 10 in most federal states), and sorting into distinct programs takes place mostly between schools rather than within schools. The Dutch education system can be considered more integrative due to a higher prevalence of within-school tracking, which facilitates track mobility (Büchner and van der Velden 2013). In principle, track mobility and alternative pathways to enter university exist in Germany as well. Nevertheless, in both systems, access to university is formally provided mainly in the academic tracks (Henninges, Traini, and Kleinert 2019).

In Sweden and England, tracking in lower secondary education is less rigid, as it is applied between or within classes within each school and the age of selection occurs at a higher age. In England, tracking within comprehensive schools is more widespread, since students are grouped for almost all subjects (Chmielewski 2014). In Swedish schools, ability grouping is less extensive as it is applied only for some subjects or in a more informal way within classes (Rudolphi and Erikson 2016). Additionally, the initial choice of vocational versus academic subject seems to play a greater role in subsequent educational decisions in England compared to Sweden (McMullin and Kulic 2016).

For the study, the dependent variable "educational expectations" was derived from students' self-reports regarding the highest level of education they anticipate completing. This variable is binary, with a code of 1 indicating an expectation for a university degree, while any qualification below university serves as the reference category, coded as 0.

Regarding parental aspirations, the independent variable is coded as 1 when students report that their parents desire them to pursue a university education. In cases where students perceive their parents' preference for a lower qualification, the variable is coded as 0.

The analyses incorporate controls for age, gender (where 1 represents female), and the highest level of parental education (coded as 1 for university level and 0 for below

university level). These controls serve to mitigate potential influences, allowing for a more precise examination of the relationships between variables in the study.

	Sweden				England				Netherlands				Germany			
	Non-immig.	*2nd-gen. immig.*	*Neg. selected*	*Pos. selected*	*Non-immig.*	*2nd-gen. immig.*	*Neg. selected*	*Pos. selected*	*Non-immig.*	*2nd-gen. immig.*	*Neg. selected*	*Pos. selected*	*Non-immig.*	*2nd-gen. immig.*	*Neg. selected*	*Pos. selected*
Students' educational expectations (wave 2)	0.73	0.84	0.78	0.85	0.53	0.71	0.69	0.72	0.42	0.63	0.67	0.62	0.26	0.21	0.18	0.23
Parental aspirations (wave 1)	0.76	0.95	0.91	0.95	0.64	0.82	0.74	0.85	0.32	0.81	0.78	0.82	0.19	0.31	0.26	0.33
Cognitive ability (wave 1)	0.69	0.62	0.63	0.62	0.71	0.70	0.68	0.70	0.74	0.67	0.63	0.68	0.75	0.70	0.69	0.70
Language ability (wave 1)	0.68	0.59	0.56	0.59	0.69	0.68	0.62	0.70	0.58	0.48	0.47	0.49	0.55	0.43	0.43	0.44
Track level (wave 1)																
High track	0.23	0.18	0.24	0.16	0.80	0.78	0.87	0.76	0.13	0.25	0.16	0.27	0.33	0.22	0.22	0.22
Middle/low track	0.21	0.21	0.19	0.21	0.14	0.17	0.09	0.20	0.87	0.74	0.84	0.73	0.50	0.66	0.73	0.64
No tracking	0.55	0.62	0.57	0.63	0.06	0.04	0.04	0.05	-	-	-	-	0.17	0.11	0.06	0.14
Parental education	0.57	0.51	0.00	0.61	0.35	0.41	0.02	0.53	0.18	0.15	0.00	0.18	0.25	0.12	0.01	0.17
Female student	0.46	0.58	0.55	0.58	0.51	0.56	0.51	0.57	0.50	0.71	0.61	0.73	0.47	0.51	0.44	0.54
Age	14.74	14.68	14.77	14.66	15.18	15.18	15.10	15.20	14.89	15.00	15.09	14.97	14.87	14.97	15.13	14.92
N (students)	869	452	84	368	1010	352	72	280	1225	234	58	176	1459	990	271	719
N (schools)	125				97				98				144			

Table 3 - Weighted Mean Statistics by Immigrant Background and by Parents' Educational Selectivity, from "Educational Expectation Gaps Between Second- Generation Immigrant and Ethnic Majority Students in a Comparative Perspective: The Moderating Role of Educational Tracking" by Katja Pomianowicz, 2023.

The distribution of variables outlined in Table 3 reveals distinct patterns across all countries (except Germany). Notably, second-generation immigrants consistently express higher expectations of attaining a university degree compared to their peers from the ethnic majority (as evident in the initial two columns of each country's panel). Parental aspirations for their child's educational attainment also tend to be higher among second-generation immigrant students in all four nations, with Germany showing the smallest disparity and the Netherlands displaying a particularly significant gap between the parents of second-generation immigrants and those of ethnic majority students.

Additionally, the cognitive and language ability test scores indicate that second-generation immigrant students generally score lower, with minimal differences observed in England. Furthermore, in terms of educational tracks, second-generation immigrant students are less likely to be placed in higher tracks compared to their ethnic majority counterparts across all countries, excluding the Netherlands, where second-generation students demonstrate a higher likelihood of attending academic tracks. A first impression from these descriptive results points to a less favorable context in Germany for developing high educational expectations among second-generation immigrant students.

Divergences based on parental educational selectivity, as presented in Table 2 (refer to the last two columns in each country's panel), highlight that students with positively selected immigrant parents generally harbor higher educational expectations. The exception is observed in the Netherlands, where these students demonstrate lower educational expectations compared to their counterparts with negatively selected parents. Across all four countries, aspirations are consistently higher among parents who are positively selected. This suggests a correlation between elevated student expectations and heightened parental aspirations, particularly in the context of parental educational selectivity, except for the Netherlands.

Furthermore, in the Netherlands, students with positively selected parents are slightly overrepresented in higher educational tracks, whereas the trend is reversed in England and Sweden. In Germany, there is no discernible variation in academic track attendance based on parental educational selectivity.

The results indicate that in countries with more pronounced tracking, which separates students into ability-based tracks, immigrant students have more realistic educational expectations relative to their academic abilities. However, this may also limit opportunities for immigrant students, as they may adjust toward lower expectations due to perceived limited future prospects.

CHAPTER 3

EU TOOLS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENSURE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH A MIGRANT BACKGROUND – FOCUS ON ECEC SYSTEM

1. EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027

The Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion of 2021-2027[49], adopted by the European Commission in 2020, underlines the European Union's commitment in realizing an inclusive and cohesive society for all. Under this category, fall European citizens as well as people who arrived in one of the EU countries with the right to stay.

To foster an inclusive and cohesive society, it is crucial to ensure respect for the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. This entails upholding the right to non-discrimination[50]; cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity[51]; as well as equality before the law[52]. Additionally, it is necessary the respect of the European Pillar of Social Rights, particularly regarding equal opportunities[53].

This achievement not only benefits the citizens within that society but also ensures the long-term well-being of the society itself and the stability of the economy.

The Action Plan dedicate particular attention to guaranteeing inclusion within European societies for migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background, or "nationals of EU

[49] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0758

[50]"1. Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.
2. Within the scope of application of the Treaty establishing the European Community and of the Treaty on European Union, and without prejudice to the special provisions of those Treaties, any discrimination on grounds of nationality shall be prohibited." –Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, article 21.

[51] "The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity." –Charter of Fundamental Rights of EU, article 22.

[52]"Everyone is equal before the law." –Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, article 20.

[53]"Regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, everyone has the right to equal treatment and opportunities regarding employment, social protection, education, and access to goods and services available to the public. Equal opportunities of under-represented groups shall be fostered." European Pillar of Social Rights, third principle.

Member States who had a third-country nationality and became EU citizens through naturalization in one of the EU Member States as well as EU citizens who have a third country migrant background through their foreign-born parents"[54].

The Action Plan predicts several actions in different sectoral areas: education and training, employment and skills, health, and housing. A specific section will be devoted to the sectoral areas of education and training, and housing, as they are extremely relevant from the perspective of strategies adopted by the European Union to mitigate the educational disadvantage of immigrant children, which has been extensively discussed in previous sections. Instead, this section merely briefly introduces the strategies outlined in the 2021-2027 Action Plan in other policy areas.

Regarding the employment and skills area, migrants often bring highly sought-after skills to the labor markets of European Union member countries. However, they frequently encounter challenges in the recognition of these skills and in securing employment commensurate with their level of expertise. Furthermore, immigrants encounter other difficulties such as a lack of networks, difficulties in accessing credit, and insufficient knowledge of the regulatory and financial framework, which are essential elements for fully participating in a country's economy and building a stable life for themselves.
What the European Union aims to focus on to overcome these issues is, first, to enhance skills assessments[55] for migrants during the pre-departure phase, as these assessments can assist them in integrating more quickly into the labor market. Secondly, it is essential to ensure that immigrants have access to high-quality Vocational Education and Training (VET), as a work-based learning approach has proven to be a particularly effective tool in facilitating their integration into the labor market. Lastly, it required also engaging the collective efforts of a diverse array of participants[56], including local, regional, national, and European public authorities, civil society organizations, economic and social

[54]Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 – European Commission, 2020.
[55]By sharing and scaling up practices on skills assessment through the European Integration Network, the European Network of Public Employment Service and by enhancing the EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals and advocating for its utilization by public authorities and various organizations, especially prior to arrival, particularly in resettlement and complementary pathways scenarios.
[56]The European Partnership for Integration is a useful tool to promote a multi-stakeholder approach to labor market integration.

partners, and employers to ensure the inclusion of this category of people within the labor market.

Another challenge that migrants and EU citizens with a migration background face is the health care system, as they may face obstacles in accessing health services due to a lack of information and familiarity with the health care system, and also due to language or intercultural barriers. The EU is committed to making immigrants and European citizens with a migration background aware of their rights in the field of health so that they have equal access to regular healthcare services[57].

1.1 Education and Training

In the education and training areas, the EU Commission is committed to ensuring quality and inclusive education, from early childhood education and care (ECEC) to tertiary and adult education and non-formal education. Special attention is paid to increasing the participation of immigrant children and those children with a migrant background in ECEC. To guarantee effective integration, ECEC programs should be equipped in such a way as to serve culturally and linguistically diverse children, should provide the learning of the host country's language, and should aim to enhance the participation of families within ECEC itself.

Learning the language of the host country is a crucial aspect of full integration. For immigrant children, it is important to ensure a sustained learning path rather than to stop learning the language only a few months after their arrival. As far as children with a migration background are concerned, ensuring this aspect is extremely important, since even if they were born in the "host" country, often the language spoken at home is that of the country of origin of the family, thus leading to gaps in the official language of the country in which they reside.

In order to obtain integration within the educational context, it is important to achieve a school environment that involves communities. Teachers play a crucial role in this respect

[57]To promote access to health care services for migrants, the EU Commission will use funding from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund as well as funding from the European Social Fund Plus and the European Regional development Fund.

since they can ensure a multicultural environment only if they are equipped with the necessary skills and resources to teach in multicultural and multilingual classrooms and to support children with a migrant background throughout their education.
The EU, to gain these specific goals, suggests to EU States Members to make use of the practical guidance on inclusion in ECEC, published in 2021, in which a separate section of the chapter will be devoted to its analysis.
Additionally, the EU offers specific assistance to teachers in enhancing their skills to address cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity within classrooms through the Erasmus Teacher Academies[58].

A category of migrant children or children with a migrant background in need of protection is children with disabilities, in line with the EU Strategy on the Right of the Child[59], which seeks to ensure that all children, regardless of origin, ability, socio-economic background, legal and residence status have equal access to the same set of rights and protection. For this category, in addition to working on increasing enrolment in ECEC, one must also focus on the non-formal learning through which they can gain skills and competencies.

Furthermore, it is important to streamline the acknowledgment of qualifications obtained in non-European countries, enhancing their visibility, and improving their comparability with European qualifications is essential for expediting and ensuring equitable integration of migrants into the labor market. Providing bridging courses to assist migrants in supplementing their education from abroad is crucial. This approach enables migrants to fully leverage their competencies and skills. Moreover, it opens avenues for migrants to pursue further education in the host country, fostering increased participation in higher education and lifelong learning opportunities. To ensure that the European Commission promotes cooperation between national authorities responsible for integration and

[58]"Erasmus+ Teacher Academies create European partnerships and promote cooperation between teacher education institutions and training providers. Their objective is to offer support for teachers at the beginning of their career and strengthen their professional development. They encourage multilingualism, language awareness, cultural diversity, and deep transnational cooperation between teacher training institutions." – European Commission.
[59]"Enrolment rates in ECEC for children with disabilities and children from disadvantaged groups, children with a migrant background and Roma children, are much lower, even though they are among the children who would benefit the most from participation." – EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

national centers for the recognition of qualifications (ENIC-NARIC networks)[60], it is necessary to facilitate exchanges between Member States regarding the provision of complementary courses for migrants, as well as provide information on recognition practices, skills, and qualifications for migrants, utilizing the full potential of the Europass portal[61].

1.2 Fighting Segregation

European Commission declares the importance of fighting segregation in schools, as well as house segregation to achieve a more inclusive society, especially a more inclusive education system.

By fighting segregation in schools, the EU Commission intends to ensure interactions between migrant children or children with a migrant background, with native children. In order to guarantee a more inclusive education system it is important to fight, at the same time, house segregation, since it can exacerbate division within the society, which reflects also as a consequence within the school context.

1.2.1 School Segregation

School segregation is at variance with European human rights standards since its clauses establish an affirmative responsibility for states to ensure that every child has access to quality education without discrimination. As a result, the Commissioner for Human Rights urged member states of the Council of Europe to address this ongoing issue within their education systems by advancing towards the implementation of truly inclusive education. Therefore, the Commissioner identified several strategies and actions, which

[60]The ENIC-NARIC Networks have evolved through continuous collaboration among the national information centers responsible for the academic recognition of qualifications in a total of 55 countries. These national information centers operate in accordance with the principles outlined in the Lisbon Recognition Convention of 1997.

[61] https://europa.eu/europass/en/recognition-skills-and-qualifications

member states should adopt in their school systems to ensure truly inclusive education. As can be seen, these actions require strong leadership and political commitment.

First, to ensure an inclusive education system it is necessary to start by analyzing the domestic legislation regarding the prohibition of discrimination adopted by states, since, despite the existence of firmly entrenched international standards prohibiting discrimination, laws in some countries still leave room for ambiguity regarding the prohibition of school segregation based on ethnicity or other grounds. Therefore, it is necessary to reinforce the legislation in such states by ensuring that segregation is explicitly considered as a form of discrimination[62]. Furthermore, the entitlement to inclusive education should be explicitly embedded in national laws and it should be accompanied by a framework of specific penalties for actions and measures that violate this right. Only in this way is it possible to apply effectively sanctions to states that make school segregation possible and guarantee a reduction of school segregation in such states.

Once the legislation has been reinforced, the second step to take regards the adoption of a "school desegregation strategy". On this point, what the Commissioner suggests to states is to consider the desegregation process as a long-term project, to carry it out in a sustainable manner.
Strategies for desegregation should encompass campaigns aimed at raising awareness, initiatives to overcome interests held by various stakeholders in education, and efforts to guarantee elevated expectations and high-quality education for all children. Additionally, once strategic plans for desegregation have been adopted, states should also include effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. It is often the case that due to a lack of comprehensive data and information on school desegregation, authorities cannot adequately evaluate school desegregation in the country under consideration. By ensuring that strategies are evaluated, it is possible to assess not only school segregation itself but

[62]"The law should provide that the following acts, inter alia, are considered as forms of discrimination: segregation; discrimination by association; announced intention to discriminate; instructing another to discriminate; inciting another to discriminate; aiding another to discriminate." - ECRI, General Policy Recommendation No. 7 on national policies to combat racism and racial discrimination, paragraph 6.

also the impact of implemented policies and actions, so that suggestions for improvement can be offered.

In addition, as will be discussed in more detail later, the inclusion of a framework for free and compulsory pre-school education should be considered by states as an integral component of desegregation strategies, as it can contribute to the improvement of the promotion of equal opportunities for all children from the beginning of their education and to the reduction of the influence of factors often cited to justify school segregation.

Another important aspect that national authorities should take into consideration is to raise awareness in society about the importance of inclusive education for social cohesion. For this reason, conducting campaigns to increase awareness about the perils of school segregation while highlighting the numerous advantages of inclusive education, such as enhanced academic performance, reduced dropout rates, improved integration into the labor market, and strengthened social cohesion, can positively influence the attitudes and expectations of society. This approach can also bring about changes in the educational strategies of minority groups that may inadvertently perpetuate segregation through emulation and practices of social closure.

Moreover, embracing inclusive education necessitates a shift in societal mindset – moving from viewing certain children as problems to recognizing their existing needs and enhancing the education systems themselves. It is imperative that society, decision-makers, and all stakeholders in the education sector fully grasp the necessity for this paradigm shift. This is extremely important as it happens that schools with a high concentration of disadvantaged students are often regarded as "bad" schools. In fact, elevated levels of poverty and academic challenges often diminish the expectations that teachers and families hold for the learning potential of children. Teachers may lack motivation to stay in such schools, leading to high staff turnover and complicating the development of high-quality educational initiatives. The absence of measures to ensure educational quality perpetuates a detrimental cycle of lower educational standards and a heightened concentration of students from disadvantaged groups.

Recognizing this, the Council of Europe has undertaken significant efforts in advancing quality education. The Committee of Ministers Recommendation on ensuring quality education offers valuable guidance in addressing this issue[63].

[63]Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13.

Concerning the methods employed by schools to select students, it's crucial to highlight that these tools are utilized in a manner where schools leverage test results to claim inadequacy in meeting the specific needs of certain children. This, in turn, results in their exclusion from enrollment. Clearly, students more affected by this practice are students from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds and students with migrant backgrounds.

To guarantee inclusiveness, it is necessary for states to commit to eliminating the use of these tools to prevent children from accessing specific schools.

It's crucial to emphasize that the prohibition of enrollment tests does not compromise the individual assessment of educational needs. Assessing the needs of each child remains a necessary prerequisite for allocating additional support where necessary and ensuring a more equitable distribution of students with specific needs across schools. Individual educational needs can be caught by using some objective indicators, which can show language difficulties, notably in terms of the language of schooling, any learning difficulties or disabilities and individual circumstances which can hinder a child's possibilities of learning in adequate conditions and on an equal footing with others[64].

The only aspect that needs attention is to avoid that the ethnic origin, nationality, or socio-economic background of children serve as substitutes for these objective indicators, as assigning children to specific schools based on these criteria violates anti-discrimination standards.

1.2.2 House Segregation

To realize a more inclusive and integrated society, the EU Commission recognizes the importance of guaranteeing access to adequate and affordable housing, since housing conditions have a strong impact on employment and education opportunities and on the

[64]See in particular Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)4 on strengthening the integration of children of migrants and of immigrant background and Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)5 on the importance of competences in the language(s) of schooling for equity and quality in education and for educational success.

interactions between migrants and host communities.[65] It is well known how substandard housing and segregation can worsen societal divisions as well as erode social cohesion. Rising housing costs, a lack of affordable and social housing, and discriminatory practices in the housing market pose challenges, particularly for migrants, which securing suitable and sustainable long-term housing solutions. Even if the main responsibility for house policies is in charge of the national competence, the EU Commission commits itself to supporting Member States in achieving this goal. Already in past years, the European Commission has played a pivotal role in fostering innovative housing solutions across various EU member states. This was achieved through the financial support of initiatives such as Urban Innovative Actions[66] and the strategic utilization of the Cohesion Policy Funds[67]. These funds are recognized as crucial instruments, particularly in the 2021-2027 period, aimed at bolstering non-segregated housing initiatives. The overarching goal is to facilitate access to inclusive and high-quality general services, thereby contributing to the promotion of integrated and sustainable communities.

Through the current Action Plan, the European Union aims to ensure that migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background have access to suitable and affordable housing, including social housing. In addition, Member States, along with local and regional authorities, are equipped with a diverse set of tools and best practices to combat discrimination within the housing market. Establishing a stable working relationship with member states is crucial to promoting the development of non-segregated, adequate, and affordable housing, including social housing. This involves utilizing EU funds, particularly those under the European Regional Development Fund[68], European Social Fund Plus, Asylum and Migration Fund, and InvestEU[69], to provide essential integration

[65]"Discrimination on the housing market reinforces segregation, with a knock-on effect in terms of education or employment opportunities and, in the case of families with children, significant detrimental impact on children's development." EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025

[66]"Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) is an Initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges."https://uia-initiative.eu/en/about-us/what-urban-innovative-actions

[67]European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Cohesion Fund and European Social Fund + (ESF+).

[68]"The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is designed to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion in the European Union. It aims to do this by correcting imbalances between regions enablinge investments in a smarter, greener, more connected and more social Europe that is closer to its citizens." – European Commission https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funding/erdf_en

[69]"The InvestEU programme provides the European Union with crucial long-term funding by leveraging private and public funds in support of Europe's sustainable recovery. It helps to mobilize private

services. Furtemrore, is necessary to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices among Member States, cities, villages, and regions in order to combat discrimination in the housing market and diminish residential segregation. This will be achieved through initiatives such as the European Integration Network[70] and specific funding provided under the Asylum and Migration Fund.

2. ECEC: Early Childhood Education and Care

The European Commission launched the development of a toolkit for inclusive early childhood education and care in 2020 in response to the worrying 2019 statistics that revealed 31 million children under the age of 6 living in the European Union did not all have access to such services. Unfortunately, only 34% of children, roughly 5 million, under the age of three had participated in ECEC programs[71]. Whereas the rate of access to ECEC has been highest for older children, age group 3 to 6 years.

According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)[72], early childhood education (ISCED level 0) is composed of early childhood educational development (category 010) and pre-primary education (category 020). Early childhood educational development is aimed at the youngest children (typically aged 0–3 years) while pre-primary education is designed for children aged 3 years until the starting age for primary education[73].

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investments for the EU's top policy priorities, such as the green, and digital transition, innovation and social investments and skills." https://investeu.europa.eu/investeu-programme_en

[70]"The European Integration Network (EIN) brings together representatives of national public authorities, mainly from the ministries responsible for migrant integration, from all the 27 EU Member States as well as two EEA countries, Iceland and Norway. Many of them have a role in the planning and implementation of dedicated EU funding opportunities such as the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) in their respective countries. The EIN members also participate in targeted study visits, peer reviews, workshops and mutual assistance actions on specific integration aspects to exchange knowledge." – European Commission.
https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/eu-grid/european-integration-network_en

[71] https://eurydice.indire.it/chi-ben-comincia/ - :~:text=L%27educazione e cura della,i 6 anni di età.

[72] International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) – Eurostat.
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=International_Standard_Classification_of_Education_(ISCED)_-_Implementation_of_ISCED_2011_.28levels_of_education.29

[73]Early childhood education statistics – Eurostat.
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early_childhood_education_statistics

Although access to ECEC is more prevalent among children aged 3-6 years old, it is imperative to work towards ensuring access for children in the 0-3 age range, given the pivotal role that education plays during these formative years in guaranteeing inclusion and a solid basis for quality education during the next years. The toolkit for inclusive early childhood education and care is of utmost relevance today for the realization of such goals, as highlighted in the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027.
According to Eurostat (2023), in fact, in 2021 around 15.4 million children were enrolled in early childhood education in the EU, but still only 1.8 million in early childhood educational development, against instead 13.6 million in pre-primary education.
From these data, it is possible to understand the importance of action by Member States to ensure access to ECEC from the earliest years of life, as this type of investment in education will have positive implications, both for the children themselves, i.e. providing them with quality education, and for society itself, ensuring inclusion and integration of all.

The following paragraphs examine the families that may face significant barriers to accessing the ECEC system. This analysis is prompted by the observation made in the Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee[74], which highlights a paradox regarding ECEC for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Despite its effectiveness in providing opportunities, it is utilized less by families experiencing low income or economic fragility. Furthermore, some suggestions for improving and making the ECEC system inclusive will be presented, through the presentation of some projects of ECEC system in EU countries.

[74] file:///Fresno, J-M, Meyer S. and Bain, S., Target Group Discussion Paper on Children living in Precarious Family Situations, Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG), Brussels/ European Commission, 2019.

2.1 Access to ECEC for families with a migrant background

The category that is most in need to receive support when trying to engage with the ECEC system is families with a disadvantaged socio-economic background, particularly families with a migrant background. In fact, the toolkit highlights some barriers that both children itself and families with a migrant background may encounter in accessing the ECEC system, such as lack of information about legal rights and available financial support; language barriers, causing communication problems between ECEC staff and parents; a lack of culture-sensitive provision (e.g. religious prescriptions relating to food); lack of intercultural skills of ECEC staff; immigrants' own cultural values preventing them from bringing their children to ECEC; provision of home care allowance, which may deter families, and in particular migrant women from sending their children to an ECEC center.

Given the significant role that ECEC systems play as community hubs and in enhancing children's language skills, it is essential to emphasize their function as spaces for families to connect while also fostering proficiency in both the service language and the child's first language, the Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC systems encourage Member States in achieving specific goals.

Firstly, it is important to analyze and address the obstacles families might face when accessing and utilizing ECEC services involves recognizing and mitigating cultural and linguistic barriers, addressing discrimination, as well as providing adequate information. Parents who don't speak country's language could represent an obstacle to the integration of their children into society as well as a barrier to access to ECEC and establishing relations with ECEC staff.

In this respect, Finland had adopted in Vantaa, the "Vantaan osaava vanhempi" project[75], which aims to offer immigrant parents caring for their children at home the possibility of studying Finnish once a week (for two hours). While the parent is studying, safe and professional childcare/early integration activities are provided for the child by ECEC staff by Finnish teaching for immigrant parents who are caring for their children at home is

[75]This initiative began during the national trial project Participative Integration in Finland (2011-2013) and was later integrated into Vantaa's services.

organized in Kotva groups ('Kotva' is an abbreviation of the word kotivanhemmat, or stay-at-home parents).

Secondly, it is highly recommended the support to all children in learning the language of education while also respecting and acknowledging their first language is crucial. For example, Denmark actively encourages inclusive ECEC for families from minority ethnic backgrounds and families with lower social and economic status by ensuring, through National policies, support for language learning and (if required) the assessment of language competencies for children between the ages of two and three both in and outside of ECEC; a compulsory program providing 25 hours of ECEC for one-year-olds in vulnerable housing areas who are not already enrolled. This initiative also includes specific activities aimed at assisting pedagogic staff in engaging with parents; and by ensuring additional training available for pedagogic staff to effectively support disadvantaged children and their parents[76].

Furthermore, the Council recommends considering tailored multilingual early childhood programs, which cater to the specific needs of bi/multilingual children, can be beneficial where feasible; to ensure that staff receive comprehensive initial and ongoing training to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively engage with linguistically and culturally diverse groups, and implement a curriculum that actively fosters diversity, equality, and linguistic awareness. Such a curriculum can play a vital role in fostering the development of both the mother tongue and the language of education for children with migrant backgrounds. Slovenia for example, thanks to some initiatives[77] have fostered intercultural development and enhanced the professional capabilities of educational staff to effectively integrate children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds into the Slovenian educational system. The current program, introduced in 2018, aims to enhance the social and civic skills of professionals working with migrant children across preschool, primary, and secondary education. It targets three key areas of

[76]This specialized training focuses on enhancing skills in communication and language, understanding diverse cultures and democratic principles, and building trust and cooperation with parents.
[77]The inclusion of migrant children in education (2008-2011); the development of interculturalism as a new form of coexistence (2013-2015); the development of teaching materials in Slovene as a foreign language (2014- 2015); and strengthening the social and civic competences of professionals (2016-2021).

integration: promoting social inclusion and fostering a sense of belonging, facilitating the learning of the Slovenian language, and establishing supportive networks within ECEC settings and local communities.
Preliminary evaluations indicate that the majority of teachers exhibit a positive outlook toward inclusive practices and interculturalism. Those who have participated in program activities feel more confident and possess fewer negative attitudes towards inclusive ECEC practices and interculturalism, even if 25% of teachers express a lack of confidence in providing more personalized and individualized instruction.

Extremely relevant is the suggestion to organize provision that encourages participation, strengthen social inclusion, and embraces diversity, with concrete examples, or reaching out to families with targeted initiatives that allow them to express their needs and enable services to take these into account when tailoring provision to the demands of local communities; the recruitment of staff from marginalized, migrant or minority groups can be encouraged as it has proven to be of advantage if the composition of staff in ECEC settings reflects diversity in the community; and creating a welcoming environment for children that values their languages, culture and home backgrounds, hence contributing to the development of their sense of belonging.
Belgium is a good example of realizing the participation of parents into the ECEC systems. In fact, to improve the enrolment and attendance rates in preschool education by toddlers of third-country nationals (a group that does not participate, or participates irregularly, in pre-school education), the Flemish government launched a pilot program (2017-2018)[78]. The program specifically targeted parental involvement as a key factor in boosting the enrollment and attendance of this group of children. It operated on the principle that investing in high-quality preschool services and facilitating smooth transitions can alleviate potential challenges in the children's future educational transitions. Seven "living labs" were established in cities with significant populations of non-EU citizens and relatively high rates of child poverty. These labs devised and put into action experimental initiatives tailored to local needs, utilizing network-based collaboration among preschool services, organizations serving similar demographics, and

[78]The realization of this programme was possible thanks to the support of the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

local authorities. A learning network was formed to oversee the living labs, providing theoretical and methodological assistance in a participatory manner throughout the planning, implementation, and assessment phases of the program. Each living lab devised a customized action plan addressing local needs, implementing innovative experiments primarily within school settings.

They introduced new tools and creative methods to enhance the professional skills of school teams. Examples include guiding parents to their preferred preschool services, creating a welcoming atmosphere, and fostering daily meetings and communications among school staff, teachers, parents, and children.

The primary impact of the program was observed in the quality of relationships among stakeholders. Parents and school staff developed stronger, more collaborative bonds, while parents also strengthened their support networks. Schools learned to collaborate with other organizations to enhance guidance for parents and children in the target group, making themselves more accessible in the process.

2.2 Improving the availability, accessibility, and affordability of ECEC

The European directive on work-life balance[79] highlights the challenges faced by parents and caregivers, particularly the negative impact of long working hours on women. Difficulty in balancing work and family contributes to the underrepresentation of women in the labor market. The directive urges Member States to promote fair family leave, emphasizing the importance of accessible childcare services. The lack of such services often leads mothers to reduce paid work, despite their potential to reduce the risk of poverty. The provision of high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) should be part of broader family policies, with coordination between family leave and childcare. In many European countries, there is a gap in childcare coverage when parents are no longer eligible for parental leave, yet their child has no guaranteed right to a place in ECEC services.

[79] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019L1158&from=EN

Specifically, the COFACE Families Europe[80] argues that parents want effective ECEC which combines accessibility, affordability, and quality in order to meet the needs of all families.

2.2.1 Availability

The main problem in making ECEC available is that there is often a high demand for places in nurseries and kindergartens. Not all countries manage to meet this demand. For this reason, it is necessary for national, regional, and local authorities to allocate resources towards establishing early childhood education and care (ECEC) infrastructure. This should be coupled with the recruitment of highly qualified and trained personnel to guarantee the delivery of high-quality ECEC services to all children and families seeking access to such facilities. Ensuring availability is particularly crucial, especially for children with a migrant background who may encounter additional hurdles in accessing these essential services. It's vital to recognize that several key factors facilitate the increased involvement of children from migrant communities. These factors encompass the availability of free and accessible provisions, as well as services tailored to individual needs.

As highlighted earlier, families with a migrant background may encounter challenges accessing ECEC systems due to language barriers or limited knowledge about legal rights. Clearly, the limited availability of places would deprive children and families facing difficulties of access to ECEC systems. Therefore, it is crucial to expand the number of kindergartens to ensure that this service is accessible to all.

A good example of a country addressing the issue of availability of places in nurseries and kindergartens is Estonia. This country invested 47 million EUR during 2014-2020 in the ECEC system, which had allowed local governments to create around 3,200 new ECEC places. This result was possible also thanks to the fact that local governments had cooperated with the private sector to provide new subsidized places of ECEC for children under the age of three.

[80] https://coface-eu.org/

The strategy adopted by the Estonian government was based on the Estonian Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2020, which investments were possible thanks to the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).
Estonia keeps going on this wave since the government adopted in 2021 the Estonian Education Strategy 2021–2035[81].

2.2.2 Accessibility

Despite the presence of infrastructure and services for ECEC, families may encounter obstacles to fully benefit from these services; this is especially true for families facing specific difficulties, such as living in poverty, low literacy levels, limited proficiency in the national language, etc.
The European Commission highlights the need by national and local decision-makers, along with ECEC institutions, to adopt diverse approaches to improve the accessibility of the ECEC.

A first possible measure to improve the accessibility of ECEC is to give priority to children and/or families in disadvantaged situations; in Italy, for example, although individual ECEC settings set their own priority criteria for access, there is a common awareness of prioritizing single-parents families as well as families with financial difficulties.

Another key recommendation highlighted by the EU Commission is to enhance the flexibility of opening hours in ECEC facilities, thereby fostering increased involvement, particularly among children from families with working mothers, single-parent households, and those from minority or disadvantaged backgrounds. This emphasis on flexibility stems from the recognition that rigid operating hours pose a significant obstacle to accessing ECEC services. While most European countries ensure ECEC settings are open for 20 to 29 hours per week, it's crucial to acknowledge that families require services that can adapt to their diverse needs. Given the varying nature of employment, which may

[81] https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/estonia/lifelong-learning-strategy

involve extended hours, flexible schedules, or weekend and evening shifts, there is a growing demand for ECEC facilities to offer more accommodating options. The need for flexibility in ECEC services is particularly pronounced among migrant families, who often face irregular work hours, including weekends. Additionally, migrant families, especially those in unskilled worker positions, experience challenges due to occupational and residential segregation, low earnings, and difficulties in balancing work and childcare responsibilities. Their situation is exacerbated by the absence of close kin networks for childcare support, leading to increased reliance on ECEC services[82].

In this respect, in Slovenia, each kindergarten establishes its opening hours through a meeting held with parent representatives at the beginning of the year.

Additionally, it is mandatory to remove the physical obstacle that can jeopardize access to ECEC systems. Accessing high-quality childcare can be challenging due to various factors such as insufficient infrastructure for children or parents with disabilities, as well as lengthy travel times for families residing in rural or remote areas, which may encounter daunting distances to reach ECEC facilities. In Poland, due to technical issues, a local kindergarten in the city of Żory was closed. With a large preschool-age population and many families on the waiting list, the city built a new school with EU funding. This new building, designed to be accessible to children with disabilities and environmentally friendly, ensures that every child can attend kindergarten.

Lastly, it is suggested that Member States ensure increased engagement and provision of information to parents from disadvantaged backgrounds who may be less familiar with the institutions, rules, and regulations of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). In the specific case of children with a migrant background, this can be achieved by ensuring that policies targeting children from migrant communities actively involve parents, promote trust, and demonstrate a collaborative approach.

[82]Managing Work and Care: A Difficult Challenge for Immigrant Families - Karin Wall and José São José (2004).

2.2.3 Affordability

It is well known that providing high-quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is expensive and offering a fully inclusive service for all children increases the cost of provision. In Europe, most families have to pay fees for ECEC for the youngest group of children. The availability of free ECEC increases significantly around the age of three or shortly before, and this trend continues with each year of age, becoming almost universal across Europe in the last year before compulsory primary education. The primary obstacle to accessing ECEC services continues to be cost. Findings from the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) 2011[83] and the EU statistics on living conditions (EU-SILC)[84] 2016 surveys indicate that cost poses a more significant challenge in utilizing these services compared to issues such as availability, distance, or operating hours. In the EU, 39% of users of formal childcare services reported difficulty in accessing ECEC services due to cost, according to the EQLS 2016.

After the staggering data of 2016, according to the Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee, in every country, funding mechanisms have been strengthened to ensure that ECEC is affordable. These mechanisms often follow the principle of proportionate universalism, which aims to provide access to all while offering additional support to those in financial need. These measures may involve offering free access to ECEC or providing financial assistance to families and/or ECEC facilities.

The key to ensuring affordability in the ECEC system lies in providing free access to ECEC services, particularly for specific disadvantaged groups. For instance, in Italy, families with a low-income certificate can access services for free. In Ireland, the National Childcare Scheme offers free childcare to families in various vulnerable groups, such as homeless families, those with child welfare concerns, refugees and asylum seekers, and teenage parents.

[83] https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-quality-of-life-surveys
[84] https://www.eui.eu/Research/Library/ResearchGuides/Economics/Statistics/DataPortal/EU-SILC

To support families facing financial difficulties, the European Quality Framework for ECEC suggests adjusting childcare fees to ensure access for low-income households. In addition to fee reductions, various financial support measures can be introduced, such as maximum fees or vouchers. However, it's crucial to carefully assess the impact and conditions for the success of such schemes. For instance, some countries provide tax refunds for childcare services, but these refunds may not be received until up to a year after the expense, offering little immediate relief to low-income families at the time of payment.

In Denmark, the Act on Day Care[85], implemented since 2000, mandates municipalities to guarantee ECEC services for all children aged between 26 weeks and the beginning of primary school. Municipalities risk financial penalties if they fail to comply, ensuring that all municipalities meet the established standards. Parents are responsible for covering up to 25% of a facility's estimated gross operating costs. To accommodate families with varying income levels, a sliding fee scale is utilized, offering fee reductions of up to 100% for low-income parents.

Additionally, in Ireland, the National Childcare Scheme provides financial support to assist families with the cost of childcare in regulated services (both center-based and home-based). It consists of two types of subsidies: a universal subsidy for children aged from six months to three years, and an income-related subsidy for children from six months to 14 years of age.

Finally, another strategy for national policymakers could be to provide support to ECEC facilities situated in disadvantaged neighborhoods or to endorse private initiatives that supplement the public services available.

In Slovenia, for example, local municipalities fund public kindergartens according to the requirements of the local population. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport provides funding to kindergartens for the higher operating costs of development departments (known as "razvojni oddelki"). These departments, which typically consist of a maximum of six children, are staffed by specially trained preschool teachers and assistants. The ministry covers the difference between the average cost of development group programs and the average cost of regular group programs in kindergartens.

[85] https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=124871&exp=1

2.3 Qualified Staff

The quality of ECEC depends on staff training, especially in promoting inclusivity. By prioritizing children's needs and interests, inclusive practices create welcoming environments that support their well-being, learning, and development. Staff training also helps in valuing children's languages, cultures, and backgrounds, fostering a sense of belonging and contributing to their overall growth.

Staff training and education in ECEC typically occur in three stages: initial preparation, induction, and continuing professional development (CPD). Initially, trainees learn about social inclusion strategies. Induction builds on this by focusing on practical activities, policies, and values relevant to the ECEC setting. In the final stage, training addresses individual strengths and weaknesses, tailoring learning to meet specific developmental needs.

The European Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care emphasizes the significance of staff training by urging Member States to guarantee that the sector employs well-qualified staff. These professionals should receive both initial and ongoing training to effectively carry out their professional role[86].

It's crucial to develop cutting-edge initial education programs in collaboration with practitioners, ensuring a well-balanced mix of theory and hands-on experience. These programs should incorporate training on effectively engaging with linguistically and culturally diverse groups, including minorities, migrants, and low-income families.

Furthermore, it's essential to acknowledge that staff equipped to understand and address the developmental needs, interests, and potential of young children, while also identifying developmental and learning challenges, can significantly contribute to child development and learning. Regular, tailored, and ongoing professional development opportunities benefit all staff, including assistants and auxiliary personnel. Ultimately, it's important to integrate training on child protection systems and children's rights into various training programs.

[86]Council Recommendation (EU) (2019/C 189/02) on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems.

Very important on this matter is the work of the EU Commission regarding the recruitment, training, and motivation of well-qualified staff[87], which contains a set of values[88] and regulatory arrangements which are determined at a local, regional, or national level about the staff itself. Furthermore, it is highly recommended the recruitment of staff from marginalized, migrant, or minority backgrounds, as it could enhance community diversity within ECEC settings.

It is interesting to notice that there are already numerous EU Member States that offer training aimed at promoting inclusion and fostering a more inclusive professional approach among staff within the ECEC systems.

One example is represented by Denmark, where the reinforced pedagogical curriculum underscores the importance of inclusivity for all children within the community. This principle is central to Denmark's pedagogical philosophy and training programs. All ECEC institutions are required to detail in their local curriculum how they address the needs of vulnerable children. In 2018, several courses were introduced for staff, leaders, and childminders to better implement the curriculum. Additionally, as part of the 1,000 Days program[89] for a better start in life, four courses were developed specifically to enhance the skills of ECEC staff working with disadvantaged and minority ethnic children.

Also in Germany, the Early Start (Frühstart) program[90] targets daycare centers in multicultural and disadvantaged areas, aiming to support pedagogic staff with high-quality educational opportunities on-site. It promotes diversity, aids in German language development for children and parents, encourages parental involvement, fosters networking with communities, and facilitates team training and consultation.

[87] European Commission (2020) - Early Childhood Education and Care – How to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified staff

[88]Specifically, here some values: promote each child's development and learning; keep children safe; support children's transition into and from ECEC settings; be aware of the impact their practice has on children for whom they have responsibility; recognize the different cultural and social backgrounds of children; work with all families including those who may have different values and attitudes; and
treat all children and families with respect; work with the local community and within the ECEC system and work as part of a team. – European Commission (2020) - Early Childhood Education and Care – How to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified staff

[89] https://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1510727/FULLTEXT01.pdf

[90]https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/integration-practice/fruhstart-german-and-intercultural-education-kindergarten_en

2.4 Inclusive Curriculum

The Council Recommendation[91] encourages Member States to improve the development of early years' curricula by focusing on children's interests, nurturing their well-being, and addressing the unique needs of each child, including those with special needs or facing vulnerabilities. Approaches to support holistic learning and children's development may include: maintaining a balance between social-emotional and cognitive development, recognizing the importance of play, outdoor experiences, music, arts, and physical activity; promoting active participation, initiative, autonomy, problem-solving skills, and creativity, while fostering a mindset for reasoning, investigation, and collaboration; cultivating empathy, compassion, mutual respect, and awareness of equality and diversity among children; and, providing opportunities for early exposure to language through engaging activities while considering tailored multilingual programs for children with diverse linguistic backgrounds.
These strategies aim to create inclusive and enriching environments that facilitate the comprehensive development of all children, regardless of their individual circumstances or backgrounds.

Concerning this point, a good example is represented by Italy, particularly by the city of Milan, which offers professional support, including e-learning courses, to implement the city's Pedagogical Guidelines for 0-6 childcare services. These guidelines, based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, place the child at the center of provision and acknowledge childcare services as educational contexts where children's rights are achieved by fostering inclusion and dialogue, supporting children with disabilities, compensating for disadvantaged cultural backgrounds, and enhancing resource provision. The promotion of the rights of all children in educational services are guaranteed by accepting each child's situation as they experience it; listening to and understanding the perspectives of girls and boys and promoting their participation, identifying appropriate forms of participation based on their age; providing educational and pedagogical attention to the integrity of each individual child; viewing children's differences as "normal" (e.g., children with special educational needs, disabilities, developmental difficulties, learning

[91] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(01)&from=EN

difficulties); and, designing and implementing interventions in the best interest of the children.

3. Current status of ECEC systems in EU

Considering the crucial role of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) systems in providing high-quality and inclusive education, particularly for children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds such as immigrants, it is valuable to obtain an up-to-date overview of how the different ECEC systems across Europe are currently operating. By examining the ECEC actual system's policies regarding affordability, accessibility, quality of the staff, and educational guidelines provided by public authorities, it is possible to have a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and challenges associated with ECEC provision across different EU countries.

3.1 Access

In Europe, there are currently two approaches to ensuring universal access to Early Childhood Education and Care. Some countries provide a legal entitlement to an ECEC place, while others make ECEC attendance compulsory. Both approaches require public authorities to commit to guaranteeing access to ECEC, but there are fundamental differences between them.

Under a legal entitlement framework, a child has the right to access ECEC, but attendance is not mandatory. In this system, public authorities are obligated to ensure that a place in ECEC is available for any child within the specified age range whose parents request it.

On the other hand, in countries where ECEC attendance is compulsory, children are legally required to attend ECEC for a certain period or at a certain age. In this case, public authorities must ensure not only that places are available for all children in the specified age range but also that there are a sufficient number of places to accommodate the entire cohort of children who are mandated to attend.

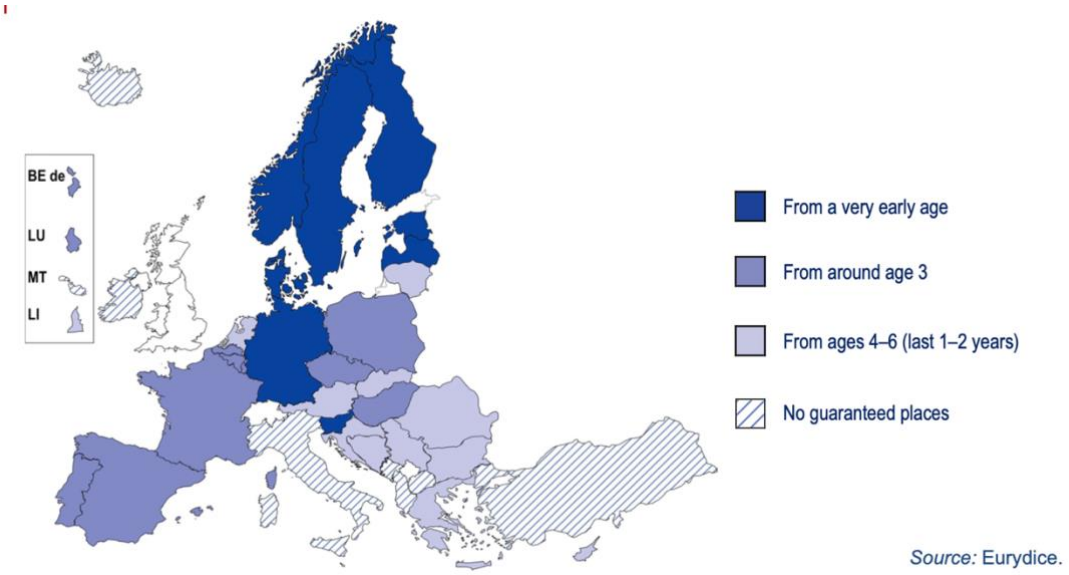


Figure 8 – Age from which a place in ECEC is guaranteed, 2022/2023 (European Commission, 2023)

Figure 8 provides an overview of the age at which children are guaranteed a place in ECEC across Europe, grouping together both legal entitlement and compulsory attendance measures. The map illustrates the earliest age from which a place guarantee is available in each country. The map highlights significant variations across Europe.

Only seven EU Member States (Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Finland, and Sweden), along with Norway, guarantee a place in ECEC for each child from an early age, typically starting from 6 to 18 months, often immediately following the end of childcare leave.

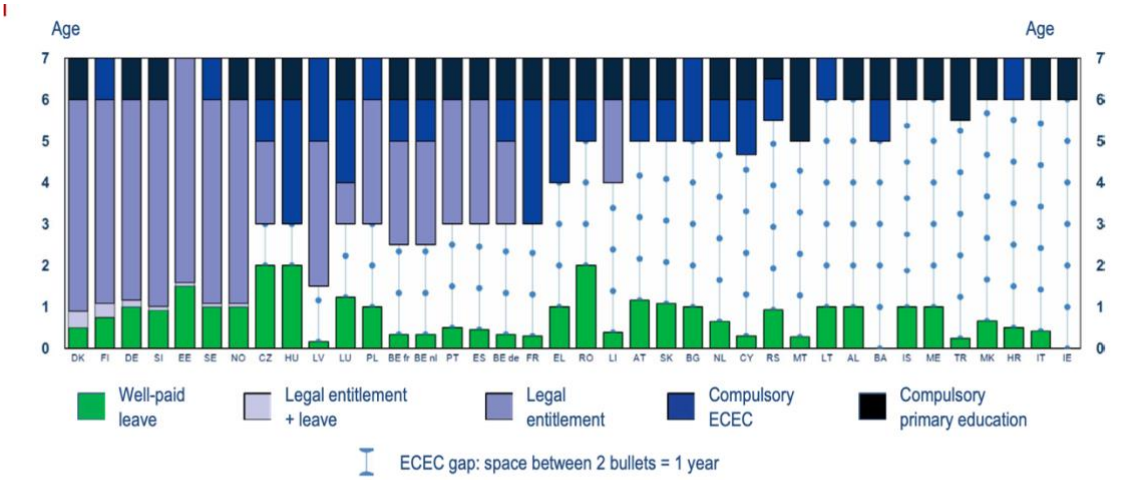
In other countries, a place in publicly subsidized ECEC is guaranteed from the age of 3 years or slightly earlier. This is the case in the three Communities of Belgium and in Czechia, Spain, France, Luxembourg, Hungary, Poland, and Portugal.

Approximately a third of European countries guarantee a place only for the last 1 to 2 years of ECEC, indicating a varied approach to early childhood education and care access across the continent.

Furthermore, in several European countries, there is no formal legal framework to ensure a place in the ECEC. Specifically, three EU Member States - Ireland, Italy, and Malta -

have not established legal entitlement or compulsory ECEC measures. However, in practice, ECEC places are typically available from around the age of 3 in these countries.

When considering the accessibility to ECEC systems, is important also to analyze the ECEC gap or the amount of time a child is not covered either by childcare leave or a guaranteed place in ECEC.



Source: Eurydice.

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU
Leave	0.3	0.3	0.3	1	2	0.9	1.2	1.6	-	1	0.5	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.2	1	1.2	2
Legal entitlement	2.5	3	2.5	-	3	0.5	1	1.5	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	1.5	-	3	-
Compulsory ECEC	5	5	5	5	5	-	-	-	-	4	-	3	6	-	4.7	5	6	4	3
Compulsory primary	6	6	6	7	6	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	7	6	6	7	7	6	6
	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
Leave	0.3	0.7	1.2	1	0.5	2	1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1	-	1	0.4	1	0.7	1.1	0.9	0.3
Legal entitlement	-	-	-	3	3	-	0.9	-	0.8	1	-	-	-	4	-	-	1	-	-
Compulsory ECEC	-	5	5	6	-	5	-	5	6	6	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	5.5	-
Compulsory primary	5	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	7	7	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6.5	5.5

Figure 9 - Gap between childcare leave and place guarantee in ECEC, 2022/2023 (European Commission, 2023)

Figure 9, besides showing the specific age ranges for each country where a place in ECEC is guaranteed either as a legal entitlement or through compulsory attendance, shows the difference between the end of maximum childcare leave and the earliest start of universal place guarantee in ECEC varies significantly across European countries.

Only six EU Member States (Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Slovenia, Finland, and Sweden), along with Norway, have no ECEC gap. In these countries, there is an overlap between childcare leave and the availability of ECEC places, providing flexibility to families during the transition.

In Latvia, access to ECEC begins at 1.5 years old, with varying durations of parental leave.

In Belgium, Spain, France, and Portugal, the period without childcare leave and without entitlement to ECEC lasts between 2 and 3 years. In other countries such as Ireland, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, and others, this gap can extend up to 5-6 years. Many of these countries offer only brief parental leave or do not guarantee a place in ECEC until the age of 3-4 years.

3.2 Affordability

Affordability is a crucial factor in ensuring widespread access to ECEC; it should be discussed in conjunction with availability, as without a guaranteed place, free ECEC in public settings may be limited, and waiting lists may be lengthy due to complex priority rules.

Figure 10 illustrates the availability of free ECEC in relation to a guaranteed place for three broad age groups:

1. Early age (under age 2)
2. Around age 3 (more than age 2, less than age 4)
3. Last year of ECEC (age 4, 5, or 6, varying by education system)

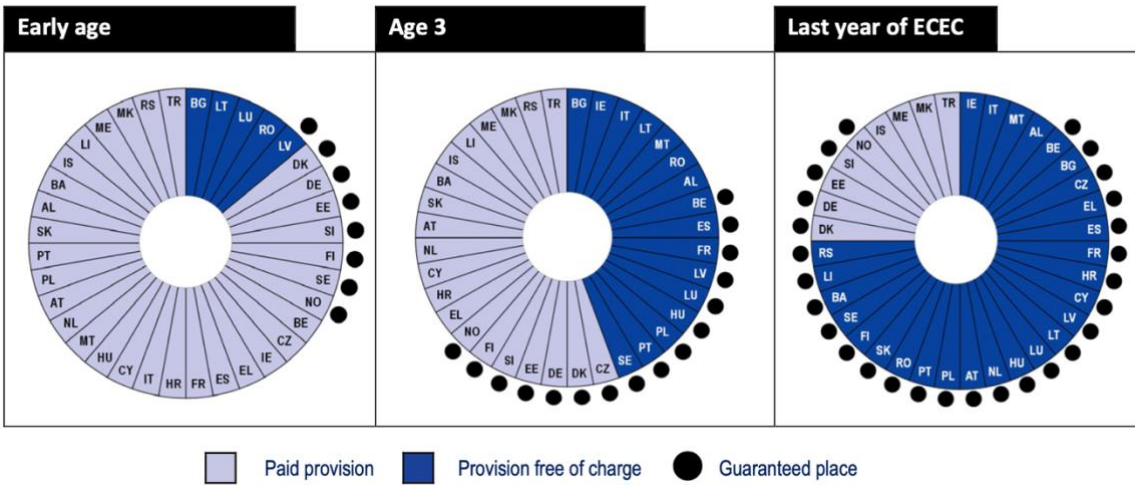


Figure 10 - ECEC free of charge and guaranteed places, 2022/2023 (European Commission, 2023)

Figure 10 shows that in Europe, most families pay fees for ECEC for younger children. Free ECEC becomes more available at age 3 and continues to increase with each year, becoming nearly universal across Europe before primary education starts. Five countries - Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Romania - offer free public ECEC for all children from early years. Latvia is the only European country that provides free public ECEC from as early as 1.5 years old[92].

In the four other countries (Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Lithuania, and Romania), there isn't a legal assurance for the availability of free ECEC from an early age in some countries. In Lithuania and Luxembourg, free ECEC is provided for 20 hours per week, whereas Bulgaria and Romania offer funding for free full-time places.

In the rest of European countries, either all or some parents pay fees for ECEC in the earliest years, although the costs vary significantly between countries. From around age 3, almost half of European countries offer free ECEC. In many nations, this marks a transition period when children move from childcare-type to education-type settings. Most of these countries combine free ECEC with a placement guarantee (such as Belgium, Spain, France, Luxembourg, Hungary, Poland, and Portugal).

3.3 Staff

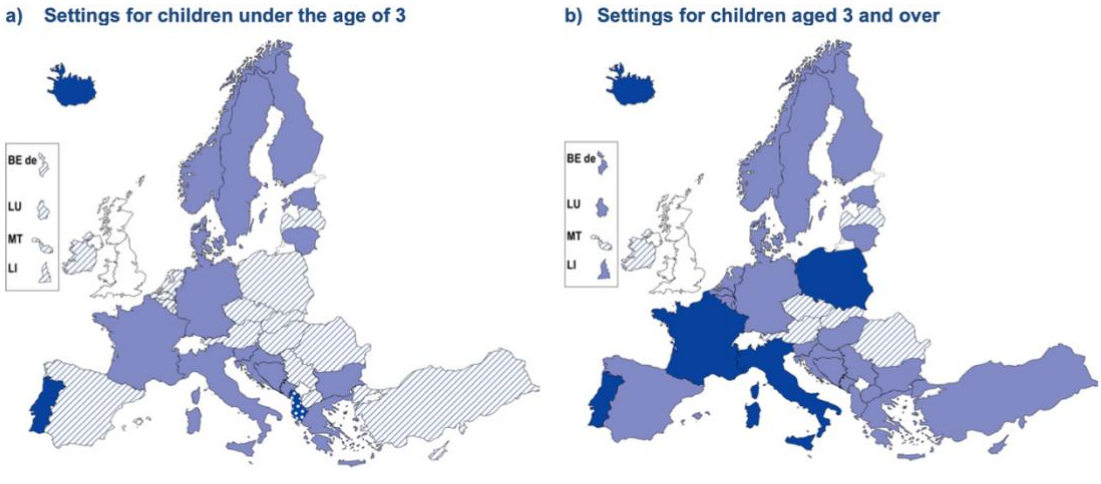
Given the extremely important role played by ECEC staff, qualifications requirements are needed to ensure a quality education. Not all EU countries require the same minimum qualification levels.

It is important to specify that ECEC staff is categorized into two main groups: "core practitioners" and "assistants."

A core practitioner is someone responsible for guiding a group of children within a classroom or playroom setting, directly engaging with the children and their families.

[92]In Latvia, if a child is unable to secure a place in a local government-run educational institution and instead attends a preschool program at a private educational institution, the local government is obligated to subsidize some of the costs incurred by the private service provider. This subsidy is based on the average cost of a child enrolled in a pre-primary education program at a local government educational institution, as stipulated by the Education Law, Section 17. https://likumi.lv/ta/id/50759-izglitibas-likums

These professionals may also be referred to as pre-primary or kindergarten teachers, early childhood educators, pedagogues, childcare practitioners, or pedagogical staff.
An assistant is someone who aids the core practitioner in managing a group of children or a classroom on a daily basis; they oversee children during outdoor playtime, supervise meals, and participate in various activities organized by core practitioners. They often have less stringent qualification criteria compared to core practitioners, but the job title must be anyway consistent/related to the activity of caring for or looking after children.
For the purposes of this research, only core practitioners will be analyzed.



ISCED level required to become a core practitioner in centre-based ECEC settings

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU
Under age 3	4	3	4	6	3	6	6	6	4	6	5	6	6	6	5	5	6	4	4
3 years and over	6	6	6		3					6	6	7		7	6			6	6
	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
Under age 3	4	3	5	3	7	3	6	3	6	6	O	6	7	3	6	3	6	3	3
3 years and over	4	6		7		3		3			6			6		6		6	6

O No minimum requirements

Source: Eurydice.

Figure 11 - Minimum qualification levels required to enter the ECEC core practitioner profession, 2022/2023 (European Commission, 2023)

Figure 11 reveals large differences between regulations for work with younger and older children. In less than half of the European education systems, it's mandatory for at least one team member responsible for a group of children, regardless of their age, to have a high level of education. This requirement typically entails a Bachelor's degree (ISCED 6) throughout the entire ECEC phase in several countries including Bulgaria, Denmark,

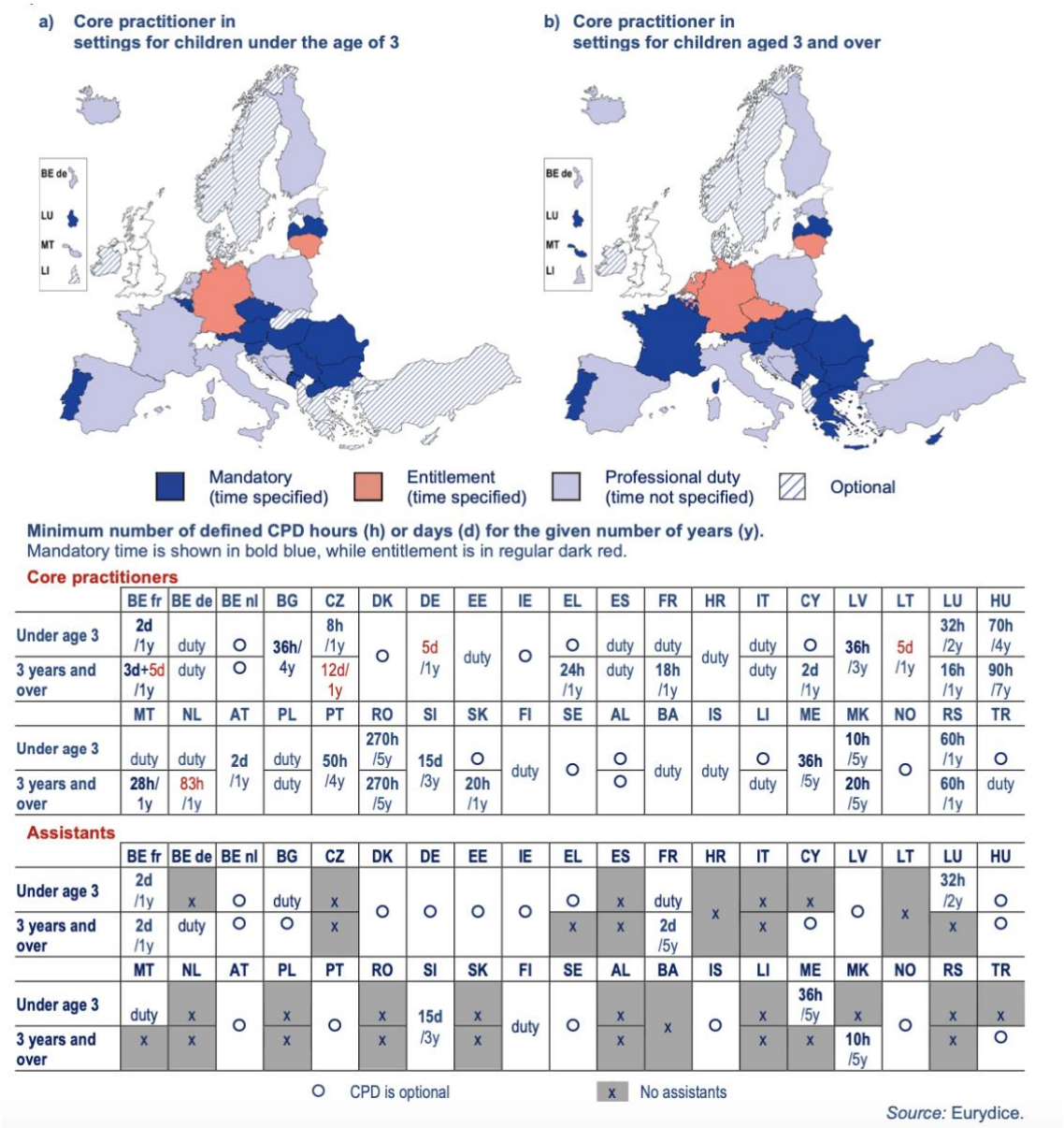
Germany, Estonia, Greece, Croatia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Norway. In Portugal and Iceland, the requirement is elevated to a Master's level (ISCED 7). Meanwhile, in Italy and France, the requirement is a Bachelor's degree (ISCED 6) for children under 3, and a Master's degree (ISCED 7) for those aged 3 and older.

In approximately one-third of education systems, a high level of qualification is deemed necessary during the second phase of ECEC, or the pre-primary education. However, this requirement is not mandated during the initial phase (early childhood educational development or childcare) for groups of children under the age of 3. This approach is observed in Belgium (across all three Communities), Spain, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Albania, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey.

In seven European countries, including Czechia, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Austria, Romania, and Slovakia, the minimum qualification level needed to work as a core practitioner throughout the entire Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) phase, regardless of the age group, is below the level of a Bachelor's degree[93].

As seen in the previous section of this chapter, it is important that ECEC staff constantly participate in the Continuing Professional Development (CDP). Countries regulate the CPD of ECEC staff in different ways, as reported in Figure 12; the fundamental distinction is whether CPD is considered a professional duty or an optional activity.

[93]For example, in Malta, only an ISCED 4 education diploma and the successful completion of a 1-year probationary period are required to work as kindergarten or childcare educator. https://recruitmentadmin.gov.mt//attachments/circulars/33f175ce-6734-4f77-b2d7-865f5dc88583_p.pdf.



Minimum number of defined CPD hours (h) or days (d) for the given number of years (y).
Mandatory time is shown in bold blue, while entitlement is in regular dark red.

Core practitioners

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU
Under age 3	2d /1y	duty	O	36h/ 4y	8h /1y	O	5d /1y	duty	O	O	duty	duty	duty	duty	O	36h /3y	5d /1y	32h /2y	70h /4y
3 years and over	3d+5d /1y	duty	O		12d/ 1y					24h /1y	duty	18h /1y		duty	2d /1y			16h /1y	90h /7y
	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
Under age 3	duty	duty	2d /1y	duty	50h /4y	270h /5y	15d /3y	O	duty	O	O	duty	duty	O	36h /5y	10h /5y	O	60h /1y	O
3 years and over	28h/ 1y	83h /1y		duty		270h /5y		20h /1y		O	O			duty		20h /5y		60h /1y	duty

Assistants

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU
Under age 3	2d /1y	x	O	duty	x	O	O	O	O	O	x	duty	x	x	x	O	x	32h /2y	O
3 years and over	2d /1y	duty	O	O	x					x	x	2d /5y		x	O			x	O
	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
Under age 3	duty	x	O	x	O	x	15d /3y	x	duty	O	x	x	O	x	36h /5y	x	O	x	x
3 years and over	x	x		x		x		x			x			x	x	10h /5y		x	O

O CPD is optional x No assistants

Source: Eurydice.

Figure 12 - Continuing professional development status of ECEC core practitioners, 2022/2023 (European Commission, 2023)

There are two main types of time allocation for CPD: mandatory and/or entitlement. CPD is mandatory when there's a specified minimum requirement of CPD hours, days, or credits within a certain period, typically a school year or a few years. On the other hand, CPD is considered an entitlement when a certain amount of CPD time is granted to staff during or outside of working hours, but it's not compulsory for them to utilize these hours. In about one-third of education systems, CPD is mandatory for core practitioners working with younger children, with a specified minimum duration over a defined period. For core

practitioners working with older children, this requirement applies to slightly fewer systems. When CPD is mandatory, support is usually provided to staff to participate, such as offering CPD during working hours or reimbursing the costs of courses and travel.
Generally, teachers are required to engage in CPD for 1 to 3 days per year, although some countries have higher requirements[94].
In numerous education systems, CPD is provided as an entitlement, with a specific amount of time allocated according to top-level regulations or collective agreements. Typically, this entails granting around 5 working days annually for CPD, although some countries advocate for a greater allocation[95].

3.4 Educational guidelines

Educational guidelines for ECEC are documents issued by national governments to help ECEC services provide high-quality education and care for young children. These guidelines outline developmental and learning goals, as well as age-appropriate activities, aiming to improve the quality of care and ensure consistency across ECEC services. While some countries provide a single comprehensive document, others may have separate publications covering different aspects of ECEC education. These guidelines may take the form of education programs, skill reference frameworks, care and education plans, or practical guidelines for practitioners, issued by various public authorities. Their purpose is to ensure high standards and consistency in ECEC services.

[94]For example, in Slovenia, professional education and training for teachers is mandated by the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (Articles 105 and 119). According to regulations, teachers must undertake a minimum of 5 days of CPD annually or 15 days over a 3-year period. Refusal to participate in CPD without justification is considered a minor violation of work obligations under the Collective Agreement for Education (Article 65). The Ministry of Education initiates invitations for in-service training for pedagogical staff and provides financial support for programs aligned with the Ministry's priority themes.
[95]For example, in Lithuania, all teachers, including those in pre-primary education, are required and entitled to participate in CPD activities for a minimum of 5 days per year.

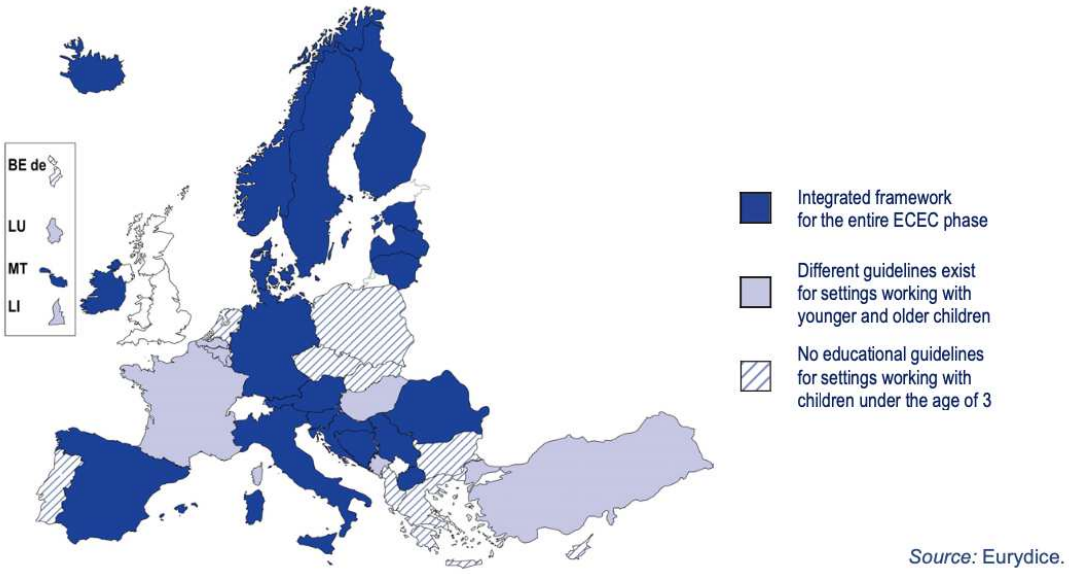


Figure 13 - ECEC curricula, 2022/2023 (European Commission, 2023)

In all European countries, governing bodies have established official guidelines to ensure that ECEC facilities incorporate deliberate educational components. However, in approximately a quarter of European education systems, these curricula are applicable only to facilities catering to children aged 3 and older. This division between "childcare" and "pre-primary education" persists in such countries, where educational frameworks are delineated in separate documents for younger and older children, often issued by different authorities. The status of these top-level educational guidelines varies across countries and, in some instances, within countries based on age groups. While some countries have issued multiple documents with different legal statuses, in cases where integrated curricula span the entire ECEC phase, these documents are typically binding. The exception to this trend is Bosnia and Herzegovina, where guidelines for implementing common core curricula are non-binding across the entire ECEC phase.

In recent years, there has been a growing trend towards incorporating educational elements into ECEC systems, starting from the earliest ages. Over the past decade, several countries, including Belgium (Flemish Community), France, Italy, Luxembourg, and Liechtenstein, have introduced educational guidelines specifically tailored for ECEC settings catering to younger children[96].

[96]In Italy, for example, educational guidelines for the integrated system (for children aged 0–6 years) were issued at the end of 2021.

However, it's encouraging to note that several countries have recently introduced new educational guidelines for early childhood education and care (ECEC). These updates include revisions to existing guidelines as well as the introduction of new areas of instruction[97].

[97]For example, in Germany, the common education framework of the Länder for the whole phase of ECEC was revised in 2022.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Second-generation immigrants encounter many challenges in accessing educational systems and achieving success within them, and are burdened by an educational disadvantage, as compared to the children of natives. Yet education is a crucial element for integration of young people with a migration background into a host country and for their individual and social development.

My research has, first of all, proposed an analysis of some theories that recognize social background and ethnicity as sources of educational disadvantage. Both of these factors, separately, play a significant role in generating educational inequality. However, what emerged particularly interesting from the analysis is the intersection of these two factors, which can further exacerbate the educational disadvantage of second-generation immigrants. It is important to note that intersectionality is not always universally applicable, as not all second-generation immigrants experience disadvantages related to social background and ethnicity at the same time. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that immigrant families are often socio-economically disadvantaged, so the intersection of these two disadvantage factors is very likely, although not universal.
Furthermore, the research delves into the concept of "cultural dissonance" as a potential explanation for the observed educational disadvantage among ethnic minorities, even after controlling for parental socio-economic background. This highlights the complexities of navigating educational systems for individuals with migrant backgrounds, particularly concerning cultural differences and language barriers, which can further contribute to educational disparities.

The research, then, analyzed some empirics of the educational disadvantage of the children of immigrants, mainly based on an important longitudinal study in four European countries– the CILS4EU project – which looked at various aspects and factors that contribute to the educational disadvantage of second-generation immigrant children, while identifying factors that can help reduce the gap between second-generation immigrant and native children.

Among the factors that exacerbate educational disadvantage and represent a constant challenge for second-generation immigrants within the school system are ethnic homophily and the return of social capital. With regard to ethnic homophily, although it has been verified that individuals tend to associate primarily with others of the same ethnic background and thus to create more subgroups in the school system (a negative aspect especially for second-generation immigrants who benefit from interactions with their peers), it is important to address this aspect not only as a cause of immigrants' isolation but also to recognize that isolation itself fostered by school contexts fuels ethnic homophily.

About social capital, it was found to be possessed equally by second-generation immigrant and native students. However, attention must be paid to the difference in social capital returns between these two distinct groups. The disparity may arise from the fact that contacts within minority groups may be less inclined to provide assistance compared to those within the majority group, influenced by negative perceptions, stereotypes, or discrimination. This highlights the link between social capital and ethnic homophily, demonstrating how social networks within ethnic groups can significantly impact opportunities and support available to individuals belonging to those groups.

Interventions are necessary to prevent immediate school segregation, ensuring the avoidance of an increase in ethnic homophily and guaranteeing an equal return of social capital for both categories. By addressing these issues, educational institutions can foster inclusivity and facilitate the integration of students from different ethnic backgrounds, as in the case of second-generation immigrants.

With reference to factors that can contribute to reducing the educational disadvantage of second-generation immigrants, teachers play a crucial role. Teachers' academic support, rather than teacher's social support, can make a difference in providing meaningful educational support to second-generation immigrants by improving their educational opportunities and reducing their problematic behavior.

It is noteworthy that the CILS4EU project focuses on four EU countries (Germany, Netherlands, England and Sweden) with distinct educational systems and it is found that

the institutional setup of education matters for inequality. Choice-based education systems and performance-oriented systems exhibit different levels of stratification and selectivity. Although initially it was thought that selectivity and stratification were the main drivers of ethnic disparities in education, the results demonstrate that high aspirations among students, regardless of ethnicity, are the key factor influencing ambitious educational choices. Essentially, fostering high aspirations among all students is crucial for achieving equitable educational outcomes. The main question is not much about the existence of an overall better educational system for second-generation immigrants, but rather whether there is an educational system capable of guiding and shaping the educational aspirations of second-generation immigrant students. The school tracking system plays a crucial role in shaping these educational aspirations. It is essential to strike a balance between systems with rigid tracking and those with more flexible tracking, in order to ensure the creation of realistic educational aspirations for second-generation immigrants, while also avoiding that the tracking itself limits educational opportunities.

The European Union is addressing the educational disadvantages faced by second-generation immigrants and individuals with migrant backgrounds by providing directives, guidelines, and toolkits to promote inclusive education across the EU. At the heart of inclusive and high-quality education is the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system. The EU offers comprehensive guidance on the organization and functioning of ECEC systems, emphasizing the significance of qualified staff, inclusive curricula, and the availability, accessibility, and affordability of ECEC services.

My research has shown that ECEC is essential for ensuring quality education for all children, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. However, these systems hold particular importance for children with migrant backgrounds as they aid in their integration into society. Ensuring access to ECEC during the critical 0-3 age range has been identified as particularly crucial.

Despite the vital role of ECEC for immigrant families, accessing these services presents significant challenges for them. While some states have implemented good practices to address these difficulties and ensure immigrant families' participation in ECEC systems, such initiatives remain largely exceptional cases.

The current situation of ECEC systems in the European Union demonstrated that there is still a lot of work to be done to achieve EU goals, regarding the proper functioning of ECEC systems.

Data report significant divergences on the internal organization, functioning, and policies of ECEC systems between EU countries.

Regarding the aspect of access to ECEC systems, in some countries, although access to ECEC systems is legally mandated, attendance is not compulsory, while in others, attendance at ECEC is mandatory. Recognizing the pivotal role of ECEC in children's development, it is imperative for all states to prioritize compulsory attendance, even if this necessitates substantial investment to ensure ample availability of places for all obligated children.

Furthermore, it is evident that the Mediterranean area suffers in terms of the percentage of access to ECEC systems, as no legal rights or mandatory ECEC measures have been established.

It is essential to address the challenge of ensuring universal access to early childhood education and care (ECEC), particularly by making the first few years of ECEC free for all children, a practice that currently begins at age 3 in most EU countries.

Some countries have different policies regarding teacher qualifications and continuing professional development; this raises the question of establishing a uniform minimum level of qualification across all member states, along with consistent educational guidelines.

In conclusion, the European Commission's report "Structural Indicators for Monitoring Education and Training Systems in Europe 2023" addresses access to ECEC systems for all children, without differentiation based on background. However, future efforts should aim to collect specific data to monitor the situation of children with a migrant background, facilitating targeted improvements in policy.

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