



Policy Brief

Immigrant Organisations and Cooperative Work with Parents: Potential, Structural Conditions and Possibilities for Development

Executive Summary

Immigrant organisations have become important actors in German society and welfare state, but also in dialogue with policymakers. Their work in non-school education is particularly important: one focus of their activities is cooperative work with parents, which can have a decisive impact on the educational careers of children and young people from migrant families. This is important because parents share a great deal of responsibility for the future of their children in the German educational system: family educational resources, socioeconomic factors and parenting styles are stronger influences than the quality of instruction or other general school conditions. Pupils with a migration background in particular lack the necessary family support structures. However, this is often the case, e.g. because their parents are not able to give them the support they need due to insufficient information, a lack of individual educational resources or inadequate proficiency in German.

Immigrant organisations play a key role as intermediaries here: they are often better equipped than 'traditional' educational facilities to reach parents in their communities and provide them with the information they need, because often, parents with a migration background are not familiar with the ins and outs of the German educational system and have a great need for information. They also want to actively participate and be acknowledged for their role as parents and thus as experts in their children's education.

Through cooperative work with parents, seen as Family-School Partnerships, immigrant organisations can make a valuable contribution to tapping into the educational resources of families with migration backgrounds. To carry out this mission more efficiently, interest groups and networks have come together at federal, state and local level.

This Policy Brief of the Expert Council's Research Unit explores the structure of immigrant organisations and their role in cooperative work with parents. Based on interviews with experts and relevant scientific literature, the general conditions and potential of immigrant organisations in particular are discussed and starting points identified for the further development of cooperative work with parents.

Immigrant organisations often work under challenging structural conditions: they mainly lack financial resources which would allow them to professionalise their work and ensure its continued existence over the long run, for example, with permanent staff. Most are dependent on volunteer work by their members. As a result, the employees have too little capacity to learn about methodological tools and concepts or embed their work in systematic quality management.



How can these challenges be tackled so that immigrant organisations can also develop their potential? Most importantly, organisations need to be able to invest more in developing professional and sustainable work structures in the future. To achieve this goal, they require adequate funding. There is thus an urgent need for ongoing institutional support which immigrant organisations at all levels should have access to. Policymakers and administrators, particularly at the level of the Länder, should help establish these kinds of sustainable financing structures by creating fixed points of contact for immigrant organisations to receive advice on these types of issues.

Particularly in the area of cooperative work with parents, it would be important for immigrant organisations to strengthen their role as providers of standard educational services. On the one hand, they can improve access to families with a migration background because their shared language and cultural background makes it possible for them to specifically address and involve parents in their communities. On the other hand, they can also reach families in the native German population because their services are usually open to all families and not limited to a single group from a specific country.

It is only once immigrant organisations have secured their structural-organisational basis that they will also be able to enhance their professional expertise allowing them to develop and implement practical services for cooperative work with parents. They can not only improve the educational opportunities of children and young people with migration backgrounds in the future, they can also have a long-term impact on the process of intercultural openness in the German educational landscape.