



Doubly Disadvantaged?

Children and Young People with a Migration Background in the German Education System

Summary

One-third of children and young people in Germany have a migration background. These children and young people have fewer educational opportunities on average than their peers: they don't go to day care as often, are less likely to transfer from elementary school to *Gymnasium*, a secondary school with general qualification for university entrance, and don't perform as well in reading, mathematics and the natural sciences over their entire school careers. The Expert Council's Research Unit systematically analysed the results of 56 studies and arrives at the following conclusion: the fewer educational opportunities open to these children and young people can be explained to a large extent by their social origin, i.e. their parents' educational level or their social status. **Children and young people from immigrant families are therefore doubly disadvantaged over their entire educational careers: by their migration background, but even more by their social origin.**

Educational disadvantage has implications for their later participation in society, for example, in the labour market. To be able to develop strategies to promote more educational opportunities, it is important to know how discrimination emerges. It must be taken into account that there are more people with low levels of education and from families at risk of poverty among immigrants than among the native population. If only the migration background is considered, it is impossible to say with certainty whether less educational success is really due to a person's experience of having migrated or social origin. To make sure that the core issue is clear, this expert report reviews in brief the current research on the double discrimination these children face in the education system on behalf of the Stiftung Mercator.



To do this, **quantitative studies** were compiled that deal with the participation of immigrants at day care, primary and secondary school level. 56 publications were identified based on eight methodological criteria. They all explore the question of to what extent educational differences can be explained by migration background or by social origin. The qualitative analysis of these studies shows: all studies found evidence that children and young people with a migration background are *doubly* disadvantaged throughout their entire educational career until the day they finish secondary school.

- **Differences in skills** between students with and without migration backgrounds can be explained primarily by social origin and to a small extent by their migration background. The effect of social origin further increases in secondary education. **If social origin is looked at more closely, it is found that differences in skills have more to do with the parents' education and less with socioeconomic status.**
- **Differences in educational decisions are linked to both migration background and social origin.** Parents with migration backgrounds, low income and a low level of education are less likely to send their child to day care. When selecting a secondary school, however, social origin is more important than migration background.

However, **children from immigrant families also sometimes fare better:** they have a higher probability of attending a *Gymnasium* than a classmate without a migration background with comparable social origins and the same skills and assessments by teachers.

The disadvantages of children with migration backgrounds in the educational system emerge early on in the family. Children find different opportunities to learn at home. If they speak a language other than German in their family, they are often less proficient in German than their peers when starting day care and school. In transitional situations, e.g. when choosing a secondary school, the decision also depends on the educational level parents want their children to achieve. **Differences in skills intensify over the course of education** if they are not compensated for early on in day care and school. This applies in particular to proficiency in German. Differences in skills at school age are mainly due to structural attributes of the learning environment, e.g. the composition of the student body and the distribution to different types of school. The fact that students with a migration background are sometimes treated differently in the classroom also plays a role.



The research findings can be used to develop approaches for educational policy and practical action, as well as for future research.

- To eliminate educational disadvantages of immigrant children and young people, their skills must be encouraged. These measures should begin early on in their lives, and they should be continued and coordinated across all educational stages. This applies in particular to language development. One focus should also be educational transitions. A prerequisite for encouraging skills is suitable teaching and learning conditions that have to be established and further developed at pre-school and school level.
- Future research should examine the effectiveness of support measures. The participation of new immigrants in the education system should also be a focus of studies. In addition, more research needs to be conducted to determine how the opportunities in the education system develop.