

# Inequality in Various Stages of the Educational Career: Patterns and Mechanisms - Literature Review

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**Document Identifier**

D1.1 Report on literature review WP1

**Version**

1.0

**Date Due**

M2

**Submission date**

28<sup>th</sup> February

**WorkPackage**

WP1 Inequality in various stages of the educational career

**Lead Beneficiary**

UvA

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In modern societies education is a key resource for economic and societal progress and a pivotal factor structuring socio-economic outcomes and life chances of individuals. Organization and outcomes of labor markets are increasingly stratified on the basis of education (Goldin & Katz, 2009; van de Werfhorst, 2007). Moreover, education is associated with health outcomes (Cohen & Syme, 2013; Mirowsky & Ross, 2003), political involvement (Dee, 2004; Emler & Frazer, 1999), as well as family life and demographic behavior (Blossfeld & Timm, 2003; Härkönen & Dronkers, 2006; Kravdal & Rindfuss, 2008). In addition, education and training has been identified as a key driver of economic and social integration of immigrants and their offspring in host countries (OECD/European Union, 2015).

Yet, *educational chances of children* still remarkably depend on their family origin in modern societies. The impact of socio-economic (and cultural) conditions in the family background on children's educational outcomes is well documented for educational achievement in primary school (e.g., Gustafsson, Hansen, & Rosén, 2011) and secondary education (e.g., Marks, Cresswell, & Ainley, 2006), but also for educational transitions and final educational attainment (Breen, Luykx, Müller, & Pollak, 2009; Jackson, 2013; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993). Since education as human capital is an increasingly important resource for labor market outcomes, social inequality in educational attainment is at odds with equal opportunities by offsetting generational mobility in income and socio-economic status (Corak, 2004).

Beyond differences by mere socio-economic background, *immigrants and children of immigrant families* sometimes find themselves additionally disadvantaged compared to native children in terms of educational participation and outcomes, although achievement gaps tend to wane across generational state of immigration (Riederer & Verwiebe, 2015). Additionally, origin and destination cultures as well as the socio-cultural interaction between various origin and receiving countries can make a large difference with regard to migrant-native gaps in education and labor market outcomes (Levels & Dronkers, 2008; van Tubergen, Maas, & Flap, 2004). For instance, migrant-native gaps turn out to be smaller in receiving countries with more selective migration (like UK) as compared to countries with a long-standing 'guest worker' tradition (like Germany or Netherlands) or humanitarian migration countries (like Sweden or Norway) or southern European countries (like Italy, Portugal, or Greece) which have experiencing a recent inflow of low educated migrations in the 2000s (OECD/European Union, 2015). Within countries, enormous differences in the educational success between children of particular ethnic backgrounds and natives exist, which is only partly attributable to different socio-economic compositions, educational aspirations and acculturation conditions (Levels & Dronkers, 2008; Levels, Dronkers, & Jencks, 2014; von Below, 2007; Worbs, 2003). This paper provides a short overview on the state of more recent research on roots and development of social and ethnic inequality in education across various stages of the life course. A major purpose of this review is informing the comparative research design on roots and development of skills gaps that is pursued by Working Package 1 of the ISOTIS project. Our discussion starts with a conceptual clarification of inequalities in education. Subsequently, adopting a life-span perspective, we discuss the state of research on the development of skill gaps in early childhood, at the transition to and during primary and later secondary school. In a third part, we focus on some recent comparative research that studies the impact educational systems have on educational inequality across children from different family backgrounds. We conclude with highlighting gaps in the literature and discuss the needs for further research that are going to be addressed by ISOTIS.

ISOTIS

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SUPPORT  
TO TACKLE INEQUALITIES IN SOCIETY**



This project has received funding from the  
European Union's Horizon 2020  
research and innovation programme  
under grant agreement No. 727069.

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