

# Inequalities in Educational Opportunities by Socioeconomic and Migration Background: A Comparative Assessment Across European Societies

Jesper Rözer and Herman van de Werfhorst

**Document Identifier**

D1.2 Report on comparative assessment educational inequalities in Europe

**Version**

1.0

**Date Due**

31 December 2017

**Submission date**

22 December 2017

**Work Package**

WP1

**Lead Beneficiary**

UvA

## PARTNERS INVOLVED

Number	Partner name	People involved
4	Universiteit van Amsterdam	Jesper Rözer (J.J.Rozer@uva.nl) Herman van de Werfhorst

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study analyses and describes inequalities in educational achievement scores by socioeconomic and migration background. Drawing on a quasi-panel methodology, international student assessment data (e.g., TIMSS, PIRLS, PISA) collected at different grades and ages (grades 4 and 8 and age 15) are pooled with adult survey and assessment data (e.g., PIAAC), allowing comprehensive assessment of inequalities in mathematics, science and literacy skills over time and at various stages of the educational career for various cohorts.

We show that there are substantial differences between socioeconomic groups (indicated by parental education and the number of books at home) as well as between migrants (and their descendants) and non-migrants in Europe. The magnitude of the inequalities differs widely across countries, however. Socioeconomic inequalities are particularly large in Central-Eastern European countries, while differences between migrants and non-migrants are particularly large in North-Western Continental European countries.

While a substantial part of the differences by migration background is explained by taking socioeconomic background into account, the overall effects of migration background provided very similar country rankings as without controls for parental education and the number of books in the household. Moreover, in most societies where the migration gaps were to the disadvantage of children with a migration background, the gaps were still there when controlling for socioeconomic background.

Socioeconomic inequalities seem to be stable over time, but may have slightly increased between 1995 and 2015. Inequalities by migration background fluctuate more, and were observed to increase again, especially in later stages of the school career, in recent years, after a steady decline since 2007.

Inequalities by socioeconomic and migration background seem to evolve similarly over the life course: being already large at grade 4 (approximately age 10), remaining stable or even declining while children follow primary and secondary education, and increasing again around age 21 when children leave secondary and tertiary education. Inequalities by socioeconomic and migration background may tend to increase over the life course because children and young adults with a migration background and low socioeconomic background grow up, live and work in a cognitively less stimulating and beneficial environments. Primary and secondary schools, who offer more or less equal high quality environments, may reduce these trends and work as equalizers.<sup>1,2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This report is written as part of the ISOTIS project ([www.isotis.org](http://www.isotis.org)). Additionally, part of this research was made possible through a personal Vici grant to Herman van de Werfhorst, awarded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), Grant number 453-14-017.

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Jan Skopek, Giampiero Passaretta, Henrik Daae Zachrisson, and Paul Leseman for their contributions.

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.

ISOTIS