

## **‘I Feel Good, thus I Could?’: Subjective Well-Being and Educational Attainment of Children of Immigrants and their Native Peers in Italy**

**Angela Paparusso** – Department of Political Sciences, Roma Tre University, Italy. Email:

[angela.paparusso@uniroma3.it](mailto:angela.paparusso@uniroma3.it)

**Elena Ambrosetti** – Department of Methods and Models for Economics, Territory and Finance, Università degli Studi di Roma La Sapienza. Email: [elena.ambrosetti@uniroma1.it](mailto:elena.ambrosetti@uniroma1.it)

**Giulia Bettin** – Department of Economics and Social Sciences and MoFiR, Università Politecnica delle Marche, Ancona, Italy. Email: [g.bettin@univpm.it](mailto:g.bettin@univpm.it)

**Eralba Cela** – Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan, Italy. Email: [eralba.cela@unimi.it](mailto:eralba.cela@unimi.it)

### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

As recognized by a wide range of scholars, the life chances and future integration of youths with an immigrant background are shaped by both personal resources generated from their own families and communities and by the educational and social opportunities that institutions provide (Holdaway et al. 2009). Evidence, however, shows that opportunities and life chances for minors and young adults with immigrant background are significantly lower compared to those of peers born to non-immigrant parents (Heath et al. 2008; Cheung and Heath 2007; Van Niekerk 2007).

There is a great deal of literature on the integration patterns of immigrants’ children in European Union (EU) countries starting from 2000 onwards, following the debate developed on the same topic in the U.S. (Portes 1996; Portes and Rumbaut 1996; IMR 1997; Foner 2000). The pioneer research in Europe (Crul and Vermeulen 2003: 966) proposed two theoretical approaches for the analyses of integration patterns of minors and young adults with migration background among EU countries: the citizenship approach (Joppke 1999; Brubaker 1992; Castles and Miller 2003) and the institutional approach (Crul and Vermeulen 2003; Crul and Vermeulen 2006). The first explains differences in integration paths relying on the assumption that heterogeneous national models of integration have a substantial effect on the socio-economic position of immigrants and their children. Nonetheless, Crul and Vermeulen (2003) argued that there is no precise effect of such models on the socio-economic integration of immigrant children in terms of both their educational and labour market outcomes. Instead, the institutional approach related to national changes in institutional arrangements, as opposed to distinct national models of integration, offers better explanations for different integration patterns for children of immigrants across Europe (Crul and Vermeulen 2003). Scholars have also

found that differences in educational systems (in terms of age of school enrollment, number of contact hours in primary school, and the importance of early or late selection in secondary education, as well as the transition from school to the labour market) are key elements. The institutional approach turns the spotlight on the societal context instead of focusing on immigrant groups themselves. Subsequent research, relying on quantitative cross-countries comparative data on children of immigrants (the Integration of the European Second Generation project -TIES), acknowledged the key role of the context in the integration process, highlighting the role of ethnic enclaves which are functional and protective for first generation immigrants, although being potentially detrimental to the children of immigrants by limiting their social mobility (Osypuk et al. 2010). Similarly, scholars that analyzed the link between migration experiences, context and health of immigrants found that the community of origin context can often have a persistent and continued influence on the lives of immigrants abroad and in particular on minors and young adults with migrant background. Moving on from the TIES project's main findings, the same group of scholars have now established the "Pathways to Success" consortium and the ELITES project: the former focuses on successful life paths and intergenerational social mobility of the descendants of immigrants and among peers of non-immigrant parents in major European cities; the latter follows a sub-sample of TIES's children of immigrants in their school and labour careers. Another research project focusing on the intergenerational integration of children of immigrants was launched in 2010: the Northface initiative "Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study in Four European Countries (CILS4EU)". Over three years, three waves of panel data were collected on teenagers in four European countries: Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Using the same methodology the ILSEG study (Investigación Longitudinal de la Segunda Generación) was carried out also in Spain (Aparicio and Portes 2014).

In a country of relatively recent immigration, such as Italy, the literature on the second generation of immigrants has emerged only recently compared to the European context. The first studies addressing such phenomenon were realized by scholars in the fields of education and pedagogy: they focused on integration at school as main place of socialization with a key role in preparing the inclusion path into society. With the aim to investigate the integration patterns of second generation immigrants in Italy the ITAGEN2 nation-wide survey was carried out among students living in Italy with at least one foreign parent and attending middle school during the 2005–2006 school year. The first Wave includes a sample of 6,368 foreigners and 10,537 natives, while two years after, in 2008, a follow-up was implemented to have information about scholastic attainment and achievement among a subsample of the original one. Researches based on ITAGEN2 survey showed that second generation children have lower educational attainment, lower education aspirations - being more concentrated than natives in vocational education. However, the situation changes for children of immigrants that

arrived at very young age in Italy or were born in Italy: for them the differences with native Italians are lower and to some extent disappear (Barban and White 2011; Minello and Barban 2012).

The research carried out so far in Europe has found that children of immigrants are generally disadvantaged in education in most receiving European countries and this remains true even after controlling for their socio-economic status, which is also lower compared to that of natives. Education is not the only aspect in which the children of immigrants perform worse. In fact, they are disadvantaged also in terms of cognitive development, socio-emotional development, physical health, self-esteem, satisfaction with life, etc. Nevertheless, the knowledge about the gap between children with migration background and native children in such spheres and related determinants is much more limited. Understanding how these spheres can influence educational attainment is essential to create educational opportunities for all children independent of their origin and therefore to building more equal and cohesive societies.

Research on education among immigrant and native origin children in Europe suffers from two main limitations. First, there is a limited range of educationally relevant indicators of child development. The literature is often focused on objective indicators, such as long-term educational careers. It is, thus, difficult to know whether the educational disadvantage of migrant children is associated with lower cognitive development, more significant socio-emotional problems, lower perceived satisfaction in different domains of life, such as the school environment and the friendship and kin relations. Second, several factors at both origin and destination, including material deprivation, the reason of migration, the timing of family migration, perceived discrimination, poor living conditions and well-being, legal status and the acquisition of citizenship should be considered, in order to formulate successful policies addressing migration-related disadvantages.

In the Italian context, despite research on objective dimensions of immigrant children' integration, with a particular focus on educational attainment, indicators of subjective well-being remain little explored. In this paper, we aim to fill the above gap by analyzing how subjective well-being in different domains of life influences the educational attainment of both immigrant and native origin children residing in Italy, controlling for several other relevant socio-demographic factors. We use data from the Survey on the "Integration of the Second Generation" carried out by ISTAT in 2015.

The survey includes a national representative sample of 68,127 students interviewed in both lower and upper secondary schools. Around 47% of them are immigrant children without Italian citizenship. The largest share (72%) was born abroad, while the remaining part was born in Italy.

By looking more in detail to self-reported well-being, children of immigrants have a limited sense of belonging to their host country. Less than 40% states to feel herself/himself more Italian than foreigner and almost a third is not able to give a precise answer to this question. Among those who

were born in Italy, 52% would stay in Italy in the future; the share drops to 30% when we focus on those immigrant children that were born abroad. When comparing native and immigrant children in terms of subjective well-being, differences emerge: the latter report about being a victim of mockery, scorn, slander and exclusion more frequently.

At the same time, it is interesting to highlight that no differences emerge between natives and immigrants in well-being at school, with both schoolmates and teachers. Surprisingly enough, the belief that teachers treat everyone equally is more widespread among immigrant children compared to natives, they feel more appreciated by their teachers and they also trust them more.

School performance are also different: the median (and mean) grade of Italian students is higher than immigrants in both Italian and Mathematic. When asked to assess their own outcome, the share of good ratings is almost 10 percentage points higher among natives than immigrants.

The self-reported standard of living is on average lower among immigrant children, both in terms of wealth and in terms of housing condition. Poverty incidence is almost twice as large among immigrants than natives (8.57% vs 4.59%, respectively).

Against this background, we aim to explore the relationship between subjective well-being and school outcomes by building a wide set of indicators that account for different domains of well-being: school, family and social domain. In this respect, a comparison between immigrant and native children will be carried out, in order to understand and explore the existence of possibly significant differences in either school performance and/or in the factors influencing it. The estimated empirical models will address endogeneity concerns, related to: i) reverse causality bias, in the form of feedback effects from school performance to subjective well-being; ii) possibly omitted factors that are likely to affect both schooling outcomes and subjective well-being. To this end, both Instrumental Variable techniques will be adopted and simultaneous equations models will be employed.

Detailed results will be ready for EPC conference.

## **References**

- Aparicio, R. and Portes, A. (2014). *Crece en España. La integración de los hijos de inmigrantes*. Obra Social “La Caixa”.
- Barban, N. and White, M. J. (2011). Immigrants’ children’s transition to secondary school in Italy. *International Migration Review*, 45(3), 702-726.
- Brubaker, R. (1992). *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Castles, S. and Miller, M. J. (2003). International population movements in the modern world. *International Migration Review*, 37(4), 1-15.

- Crul, M. and Vermeulen, H. (2006). Immigration, education, and the Turkish second generation in five European nations: A comparative study. In *Immigration and the Transformation of Europe* (pp. 235-250). Cambridge University Press.
- Crul, M. and Vermeulen, H. (2003). The Second Generation in Europe. Introduction to the Special Issue. *International Migration Review*, 37(4): 965-986.
- Foner, N. (2000) *From Ellis Island to JFK New York's Two Great Waves of Immigration*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press
- Heath, A. F. Rothon, C. and Kilpi E. (2008). The Second Generation in Western Europe: Education, Unemployment, and Occupational Attainment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34: 211-235.
- Heath, A.F. and Cheung, S.Y. (2007). *Unequal Chances: Ethnic Minorities in Western Labour Markets*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- International Migration Review, Vol. 31, No. 4, Winter, 1997, Special Issue: *Immigrant Adaptation and Native-Born Responses in the Making of Americans*
- Joppke, C. (1999). How Immigration is Changing Citizenship: a Comparative View. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22(4): 629–652.
- Minello, A. and Barban, N. (2012). The educational expectations of children of immigrants in Italy. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 643(1), 78-103.
- Osypuk, T. L., Bates, L. M. & Acevedo-Garcia, D. (2010) Another Mexican birthweight paradox? The role of residential enclaves and neighborhood poverty in the birthweight of Mexican-origin infants, *Social Science & Medicine*, 70 (4): 550-560.
- Portes, A. (Ed.). (1996). *The new second generation*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Portes, A. and Rumbaut, R. (1996) *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Van Niekerk, M. (2007) Second-generation Caribbeans in the Netherlands: Different migration histories, diverging trajectories, *Journal of Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33(7): 1063-1081.