

Immigrant youth's educational trajectories after lower secondary school: a longitudinal analysis using Austrian register data

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Research on educational disparities has long highlighted differences between immigrant-background youth and their native peers in terms of educational choices and outcomes. However, less attention has been paid to disparities within the heterogeneous group of youth with an immigrant background. Moreover, longitudinal perspectives are essential for a better understanding of how educational pathways unfold beyond crucial transitions points.

This paper examines the educational trajectories of an entire cohort in the Austrian education system using comprehensive longitudinal data provided through the Austrian Micro Data Center. The aim is to analyse how educational pathways after lower secondary school differ between immigrant youth and natives, by gender, and by country of origin. Conceptually, the study draws on sociological theories of educational inequality, particularly the interplay between primary and secondary origin effects. Immigrant youth are considered a potentially disadvantaged group due to their lower average socioeconomic status and additional barriers such as language skills. At the same time, research consistently shows that immigrant youth tend to make more ambitious educational choices than their native peers at equal levels of prior school performance.

The empirical strategy is based on longitudinal register data covering more than 75,000 pupils who entered the Austrian education system in the 2004/05 school year. Sequence analysis and clustering techniques are applied to identify patterns in educational trajectories over a period of seven years after lower secondary school. The resulting typology comprises several pathways leading to – either general or vocational – upper

secondary school completion as well as others characterised by switches between tracks or early school leaving. In the final step of the analysis, this typology is used as the categorical outcome in a multinomial logit model predicting individuals' likelihood of following specific pathways. Explanatory variables include the immigrant background and migrant generation, country of origin, and gender as well as a range of controls such as parental education and measures of prior school achievements.

The results of the analyses reveal diverse patterns in post-lower secondary trajectories, with notable differences both between immigrant youth and natives and within the immigrant group. Regression models indicate that gender, migrant generation, and country of origin are significant factors in shaping young people's educational pathways. These findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of inequalities in immigrant youth's educational pathways. They also highlight the need for targeted policies that address the distinct challenges and aspirations of diverse student populations in a stratified education system.