

Survey shows significant education discrepancies among second generation immigrants in the Netherlands

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No less than one quarter of second-generation immigrants in the Netherlands drops out of school. This is the most alarming result of a recent survey conducted among the second generation of Turkish and Moroccan descent in the two largest Dutch cities – Amsterdam and Rotterdam. However, this is only one side to the story as the survey report also shows that other second generation immigrants are doing extremely well, with a third continuing to higher education. How can these immense discrepancies in educational performance among second generation immigrants be explained?

The high drop-out rate among the children of immigrants – who are consequently labelled as 'at risk youth' – seems to be explained by two main factors: "Of course, the low educational level as well as the disadvantaged position in society of the parents of the second generation is part of the explanation", said Liesbeth Heering, International Coordinator of the survey from the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI). "However, the inability to cater for the diversity of the pupils in Dutch schools, especially in vocational schools, is an equally big problem" continued Heering.

On the other hand, the successful third of second-generation immigrant students made a huge educational jump in one generation when looking at their parents' situation. Why they are doing well while others of their second-generation immigrants peers drop out of school is an intriguing

yet still open question which will be addressed in an ongoing international research project 'The Integration of the European Second Generation' (TIES).

Going the extra mile

The initial survey results for the Dutch section of the project, which have recently been published in a book, show that almost half of them enter higher education making a 'detour'. First they attend lower vocational school, then middle vocational school, before finally reaching higher education which encompasses both higher vocational school and university in The Netherlands. This detour takes three more years than the direct path, where only the most persistent make it all the way through.

But why is that extra persistence even needed from immigrant children? "It could be that some of the talent was not recognised by the teachers at the end of primary school and students didn't get the teacher's advice to enter higher education directly" suggested Dr. Maurice Crul, International Coordinator of the TIES Project. In the Dutch educational system, students have to pass national exams as well as get teachers' assessment ("advice") at the end of primary school, which directs them either to higher or lower vocational school. The fact that many members of the second generation, who reached higher education, originally had got the advice to go to lower vocational school, puts the validity of that advice to doubt.

Dr. Crul, who is also actively involved in discussions with the Dutch Ministry of Education as well as with local policy makers, has come up with a series of suggestions of how to improve the situation, "One idea would be to introduce an extra year at the end of the primary school allowing students one more chance to improve their final marks and go to higher education directly" said Crul. "At least in this way they would

lose only one year and not three. Another idea is to make up-streaming in secondary school easier" continued Crul.

Schools need to find new ways of keeping the interest of the 'at risk youth'. The report shows that remedial teaching and 'extra homework classes' do not reach this group. The projects, in which more successful students act as 'role models' for other members of their communities, have worked well. "The newly emerging 'elites' among the second-generation groups seem to be willing to be the link between the 'at risk group' and the wider society", explained Crul. "There are already about 20 projects with student volunteers here in Amsterdam, which deal with mentoring, home work classes and week-end schools" continued Crul.

Gender plays a role, too

The differences between boys and girls regarding educational performance are also quite pronounced, especially among the Moroccan second-generation youth, where significantly more girls than boys continue to higher education. "Differences between boys and girls are partly due to the way children are raised: while girls are more protected, staying in the family and getting more of parental attention, boys are mostly left on their own", said Dr. Heering. "We found out that boys are also more likely than girls to enter into conflict with teachers or switch classes or even schools" added Crul. "Boys move around more which often results in drop out. On top of this, boys prefer to get a job earlier, while girls prefer to study – especially since studying may also be a way to postpone a marriage" continued Crul.

Language capacity – another key to integration

The level of language capacity seems to be another decisive factor when it comes to integration. Three quarters of the 'at risk youth' among the

Turkish and Moroccan second generation married a partner born in Turkey or Morocco. The latter have come to the Netherlands to marry and need to learn the Dutch language to be fully integrated in the labour market. Often, as a result, there is only one family member working, which makes these households dependent on social and housing support.

Global problems require global solutions

As many countries in Europe and across the Atlantic are facing similar problems, more comparative studies are needed to understand which institutional arrangements and policies are most successful in the integration of immigrants into wider society. The ECRP project 'The Integration of the European Second Generation' (TIES) supported by the European Science Foundation (ESF) on behalf of its Member Organisations is offering just that. The project allows for cross-national comparison in several European countries for the first time. This will enable scientists to analyse relevant factors on the success of integration, including institutional arrangements in education and labour market as well as immigration and citizenship policies.

The survey conducted in the Netherlands will be matched with other surveys conducted among the second generation of Turkish, Moroccan and former Yugoslav origin in seven additional countries: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Since little internationally comparable statistical material has been gathered on the second generation, the first objective is to create a systematic and rigorous European dataset of more than 10,000 respondents in 15 European cities - relevant not only for a better general understanding, but also for the development of policies at all levels of governing. The findings and the comparative analysis will be presented at the TIES Conference to be held in Amsterdam from 11 to 13 December 2008.

Source: European Science Foundation

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