

Chapter 2

Key challenges and opportunities

The size and the composition of the immigrant share of the student population in schools is changing; this poses challenges to education systems as they strive to meet the learning needs of immigrant students. This chapter identifies key challenges and opportunities for immigrant students. It first describes history and identifies economic factors affecting migrant education policy. It then presents facts about education outcomes of immigrant students, identifies factors that may help explain the gaps, and suggests policy implications.

On average, immigrant students face greater difficulties in education than their native peers. Their performance in reading, science and mathematics in compulsory education is comparatively lower than that of their native peers. In some countries immigrant students (first-generation) are less likely to attend early childhood education and care institutions and more likely to repeat a grade, attend vocational schools and drop out from secondary education. They have more limited access to quality education. They are more likely to attend schools that are located in big cities that serve students who are on average from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds and usually also immigrant students.

The performance gap between immigrants and native students is largely explained in most countries by parents' occupations and educational background and the language spoken at home. Other factors associated with better educational performance for immigrant students include: educational resources at home, early home reading activities, attending early childhood education and care institutions, a more advantaged school average socio-economic composition, more hours for learning language at school, and school accountability measures (i.e. informing parents of student performance and the use of performance data).