

EU-wide, youth who are either themselves foreign-born or who are native-born with foreign-born parents account for one in five 15 to 34-year-olds. Their outcomes in terms of education and the labour market are well below those of their peers with native-born parents. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the gaps risk widening, posing a threat to social cohesion.

This **Migration Policy Debates** has been prepared for the informal exchange on integration on 13 April 2021, under the Portuguese EU presidency. It summarises previous OECD work on how to strengthen the integration of youth with migrant parents.

How can European countries improve the integration of youth with migrant parents?

Key policy implications based on recent OECD work on the integration of youth with migrant parents (OECD 2020)

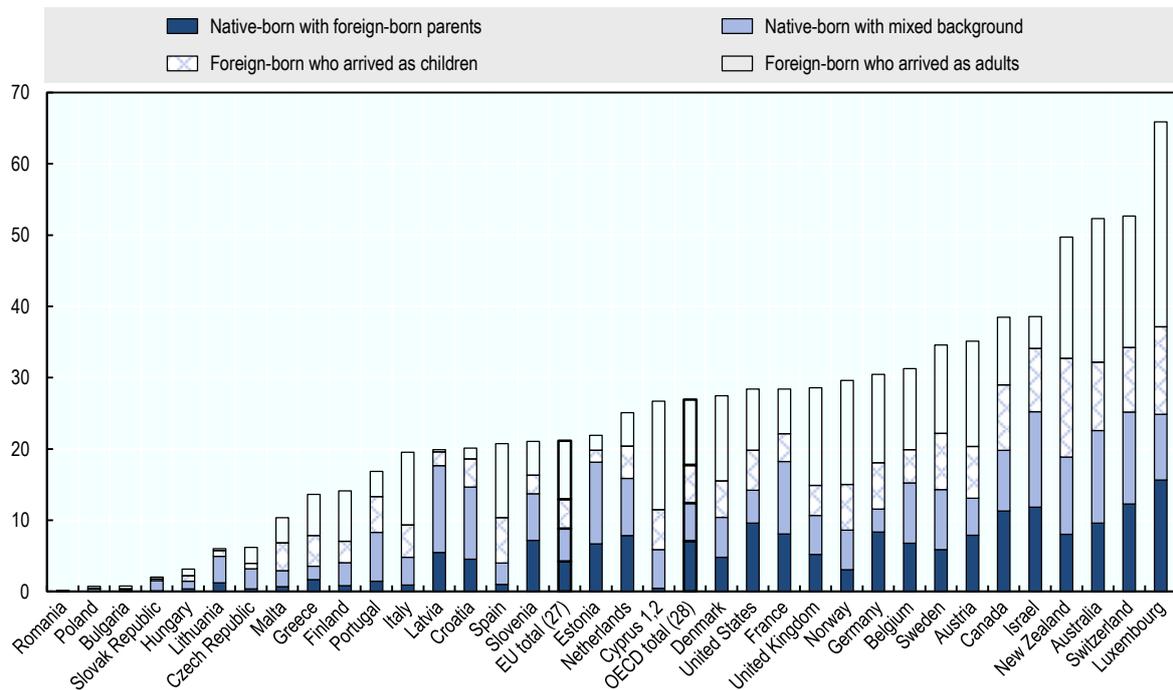
- Use inclusive language to refer to youth with migrant parents.
- Make sure all children start school on an equal footing
- Provide flexible education pathways for youth born abroad
- Involve immigrant parents in the education process
- Reduce the concentration of disadvantaged youth with immigrant parents
- Prevent school drop-out and establish second-chance programmes
- Promote educational excellence and role modelling
- Facilitate the school-to-work transition
- Tackle discrimination and encourage diversity
- Foster social integration through sports and associations
- Encourage naturalisation

Challenges in the integration of youth with migrant parents

EU-wide, youth who are either themselves foreign-born or who are native-born with foreign-born parents account for one in five 15 to 34-year-olds (OECD/EU, 2018_[1]). Their population share is increasing in virtually all EU countries, although the size and composition varies greatly across countries, reflecting countries' different migration histories (Figure 1).

One common challenge for youth with migrant parents in most EU countries - and in marked contrast with the experiences in non-European OECD countries like Australia and Canada – are pronounced gaps vis-à-vis their peers with native-born parents in terms of education and labour market outcomes. At the same time, there has been made considerable progress in many EU countries in the decade prior to the global pandemic in closing these gaps.

Figure 1. Share of youth with migrant parents among all youth, OECD and EU countries



.Source: (OECD/EU, 2018^[1]).

Regardless of migration status, the COVID-19 crisis poses considerable and disproportionate risks in the fields of education, employment, mental health and poverty for young people (OECD, 2020^[2]).

Within that group, youth with migrant parents are at particular risk due to on average lower educational attainment levels and lower labour market attachment already prior to the pandemic (OECD/EU, 2018^[1]). In times of slack labour market conditions, networks become more relevant for finding a job – and here youth with migrant parents tend to be at a structural disadvantage. There is also evidence that discrimination may be more pronounced (OECD, 2020^[3]).

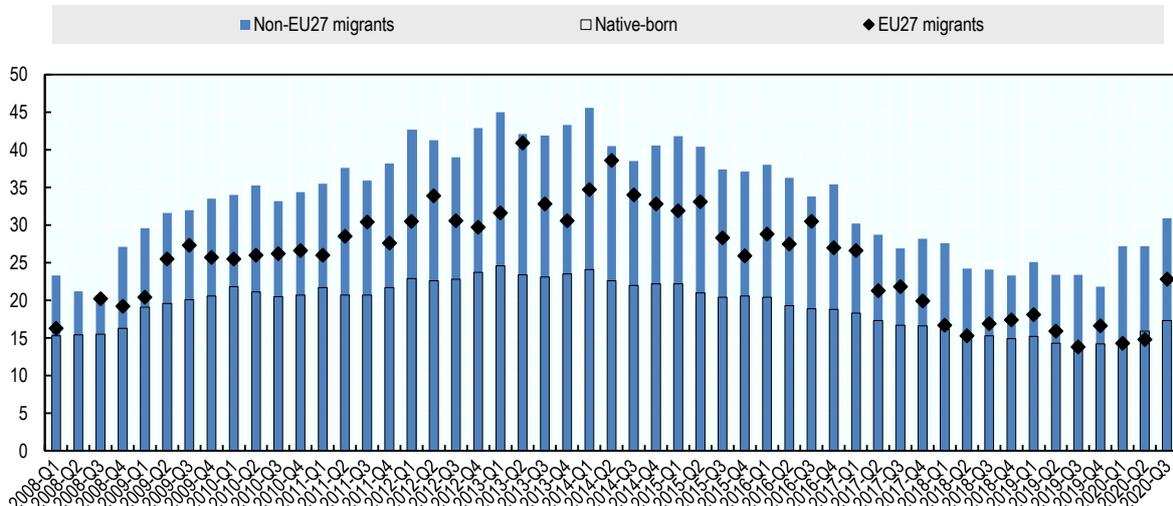
There is thus a high risk of the gaps in terms of education and labour market outcomes widening again, leaving not only lasting scars on the life-chances of youth with migrant parents but also posing a threat to social cohesion at large. While the initial labour market impact of the crisis has been cushioned for all workers by job retention schemes and other measures, between Q3-2019 and Q3-2020 there was nevertheless an increase in the EU-wide youth unemployment rates for the non-EU born of more than 6 percentage points – twice the increase for native-born youth and six times the increase for the prime age workforce (Figure 2).

Against this backdrop, it is important to put the integration of youth with migrant parents high on the integration policy agenda and to make full use of instruments available at EU level, notably the [EU reinforced youth guarantee](#), which pays a special attention to this group.

What is more, the OECD has recently put forward a publication that summarises the experiences of OECD countries to foster the integration of youth with a migration background, with a number of concrete recommendations for policy-makers (OECD, 2021^[4]). The key findings are summarised below.

Figure 2. Youth unemployment rates by quarter and country of birth, 2008-2020

Percentages



Source: EU-LFS

Use inclusive language to refer to youth with migrant parents

Language reflects and influences attitudes, behaviours and perceptions. Using inclusive language to refer to individuals and groups is thus essential for social cohesion. This implies three things: first, to raise awareness of why terminology used to refer to youth with migrant parents matters, by supporting a discourse about adequate language given the national context. Second, to avoid language and vocabulary that make full integration by definition impossible such as when talking about “migrant generations”. And third, to promote the use of inclusive language by setting an example in policy documents and official statistics. Here, EU countries could learn from countries such as Australia and Canada, where native-born youth with migrant parents are referred to as “second generation Australians/Canadians”.

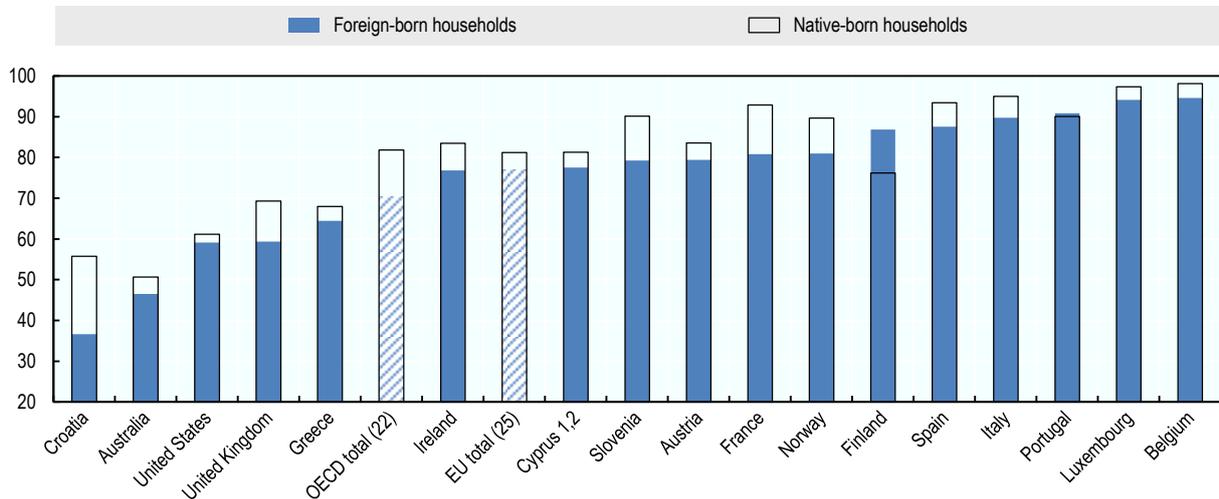
Make sure all children start school on an equal footing

Ensuring that all youth can reach their full potential means levelling the playing field before children start school. OECD-wide, children of immigrants are overrepresented in socio-economically disadvantaged families. Early intervention is therefore crucial, as children who enter school with a relative disadvantage often struggle to catch up throughout schooling. While attending Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) disproportionately benefits disadvantaged children, especially those with migrant parents, the latter remain underrepresented - particularly at the critical ages of three and four (Figure 3). Addressing this imbalance requires to remove obstacles to participation - such as lack of awareness or costs for ECEC – by working with migrant parents. The recently adopted EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the proposed European Child Guarantee provide a comprehensive framework to address this challenge.

An equally vital prerequisite to ensure that all children enter school on an equal footing is language screening and support. This can be done either by systematic language screenings and stimulation at pre-school age or systematic language screenings upon enrolment in primary school. In both cases, screenings need to be complemented by follow-up assessments and

support. Good practice examples in this respect are found in countries such as Austria, Denmark and various German *Länder*.

Figure 3. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) attendance rates, by place of birth of parents or guardians



Source: (OECD/EU, 2018^[1]).

Provide flexible education pathways for youth born abroad

Young people who arrive in the country past the start of primary education require flexible solutions. They face a higher risk of falling behind in the school system compared to their native-born peers and those who arrive at a younger age. To ensure that those youth who arrive without the necessary skills to integrate sustainably into the host-country labour market and society at large obtain them in the host-country requires to adjust mainstream education policy parameters, such as the school leaving age or the age at which students are sorted into different tracks. It also means to establish specific programmes for recently arrived students without proficiency in the language of instruction, such as time-bound reception or language classes. Finally, it is crucial to provide recently arrived students and their parents with supplementary information and orientation on the schooling system and education environment, including in their mother tongue.

Involve immigrant parents in the education process

Parental support is critical to children’s education outcomes. However, immigrant parents tend to be less likely to be connected with their child’s school community – in spite of higher aspirations for their children’s educational outcomes than native-born parents. A number of programmes have been successfully put in place across OECD countries to involve migrant parents, especially mothers, such as in Australia and France, where migrant parents get training and information sessions in schools. Other promising examples are the ‘neighbourhood mother’ or ‘district mother’ programmes that exist in Denmark, in the Netherlands, in various parts of Germany and Austria.

Reduce the concentration of disadvantaged youth with immigrant parents

Youth with migrant parents are often concentrated in certain neighbourhoods and schools. The concentration of disadvantaged youth with immigrant parents in schools is a particular challenge in European OECD countries, where significant shares of the immigrant population lack basic

qualifications. For instance, in France, Germany, Greece and Belgium, students with migrant parents in schools with a high concentration of students with migrant parents perform around 40 points lower in mean PISA scores than their peers in low-concentration schools – the equivalent of one year of schooling (OECD, 2017^[5]); in some countries the gap is even significantly larger.

Policy efforts to address the problems associated with a concentration of children of immigrants from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in the same schools can either aim at preventing the concentration of disadvantaged youth with migrant parents in the same schools or at mitigating the negative consequences of such concentration, including through additional funding and teaching support. For example, many countries provide additional government funding and resources to schools with a high share of students from low-educated or immigrant families.

Prevent school drop-out and establish second-chance programmes

The first step for successful labour market integration is to ensure everyone leaves school with the necessary skills to succeed, including a qualifying diploma. However, youth with migrant parents tend to be over-represented among the 15-24 year-olds who leave school prematurely. Where prevention and early intervention fail to avoid early school leaving, second-chance programmes allow youth to obtain a basic qualification and find a way into the labour market. Such programmes offer alternative pathways. These can lead back into mainstream education, or prepare early school leavers to integrate into vocational education and training (VET) to obtain a professional qualification.

In Germany, the Joblinge programme trains mentors and connects young people with the labour market. In Portugal, the 'Choices Programme' (*Programa Escolhas*) promotes the integration of 6 to 24 years old from disadvantaged social backgrounds, many of whom are children of immigrants. The programme involves local authorities and civil society organisations. It includes several strategic areas of intervention, including combatting early school drop-out through the creation of new educational tools; the development of personal, social and cognitive skills through formal and non-formal education; and the promotion of family co-responsibility in the parental surveillance process.

Promote educational excellence and role modelling

Youth with migrant parents need to be able to excel in the educational system. They are often very motivated and have high aspirations for their education and career – higher than youth with native-born parents (OECD, 2018^[6]). A key element to support young people's development are role models. The representation in prestigious education pathways and in the public domain can be promoted for example, by encouraging higher education institutions to attract youth with migrant parents into their programmes or by providing students with migrant parents with role models, for example via peer-mentoring schemes.

The public sector can also be a role model itself, by pro-actively promoting recruitment of candidates with migrant parents and encouraging immigrants and their children to apply to public-sector jobs. Yet, despite rising political awareness about the benefits of diversity in the public sector, youth with migrant parents remain underrepresented in public sector jobs in most countries, especially in longstanding European immigration destinations and in Southern Europe (OECD/EU, 2018^[1]). Norway introduced legal requirements for the public sector to invite a certain number of candidates with migrant parents for interviews. The country has also established diversity recruitment plans, set diversity targets and provides diversity training for recruitment staff in the public sector.

Facilitate the school-to-work transition

Youth with migrant parents - in particular those born abroad - are at a higher risk of not transitioning smoothly from education into the labour market and to find themselves neither in employment, education or training. While this is partly due to lower educational attainment and discrimination in the labour market, there are also other specific obstacles for youth with migrant parents, such as a lack of social networks. Such networks are essential for job-search, especially for the very first contact with the labour market.

Policies to facilitate the school-to-work transition of youth with migrant parents include offering remedy for insufficient networks and lack of knowledge about the host-country labour market and its functioning through targeted employment services or mentoring schemes.

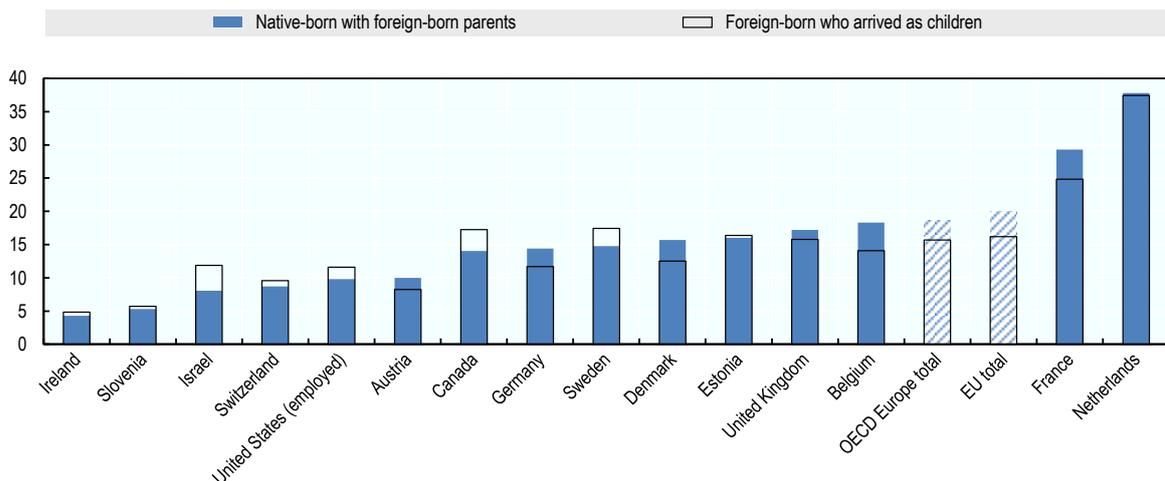
In Australia, the 'Pathways to Employment Program' offers youth direct guidance, employment opportunities, traineeships, apprenticeships, and work experience across a wide range of industries. The programme also includes a mentorship scheme that matches volunteers with professional work experience with tertiary-level students.

Tackle discrimination and encourage diversity

Discrimination plays an important role in the persistent disadvantage faced by many youth with migrant parents. It has two distinct facets: individuals' subjective perception of being discriminated against and actual discrimination, for example in the hiring process. In Europe, in several countries there are alarmingly high shares of youth with migrant parents who feel discriminated against (Figure 4). At the same time, testing experiments with fictitious CVs have shown applicants with a 'foreign-sounding name' often have to send twice as many applications before receiving a positive reply as their peers with otherwise similar CV but a "native-born" sounding name.

Figure 4. Self-reported discrimination, by migrant background

Percentages, 15- to 34- year olds



Source: (OECD/EU, 2018_[11]).

Tackling the issue of discrimination and, more broadly, structural disadvantage, requires a set of measures. At the EU level, under the Portuguese EU presidency, attention has been paid to tackling discrimination in the context of the Anti-racism summit (March 2021). In September 2020,

the European Commission also adopted an ambitious [EU anti-racism action plan](#) that sets out a series of measures for the next 5 years.

Tackling discrimination and promoting diversity also means to raise awareness about workplace rights and protection of all staff as well as about inclusive workplaces more broadly. Finally, employers – especially SMEs – need to be assisted in achieving and sustaining a diverse workforce. The French government, for example, provides companies with the possibility of passing an audit as to whether or not they use fair hiring and promotion practices. If enterprises satisfy certain criteria, they can obtain a diversity label ('label diversité'). Along similar lines, Belgium grants specific diversity awards to employers with diversity-friendly company structures.

Foster social integration through sports and associations

Integration of youth with migrant parents is more than the elimination of performance gaps vis-à-vis youth of native-born parentage; it also means to be full and equal part of the society. Participation in associations such as sports clubs, music groups or charities, provides an excellent opportunity for all youth to interact. Active participation in associations also promotes opportunities to demonstrate talent and assume leadership roles in ways that might not be feasible in other settings and can provide the relevant networks for better inclusion in the labour market. Signalling social engagement has also significantly limited discrimination in testing studies.

Alongside setting incentives for associations, policies can counter barriers and obstacles for youth with immigrant parents by reducing barriers to participate in associations through active reach-out, better information sharing and facilitated access through intermediaries like schools. There is also a case for supporting and showcasing successful projects that enhance the interaction between youth of native- and foreign-born parentage and facilitate entrance into the labour market. The Football Association of Ireland, for example, has set up a nationwide after-school programme in partnership with schools and grass-root clubs, linking students with migrant parents and their parents to local sports clubs. In Italy, Ministry of Labour has a longstanding "Sport and Integration" project in collaboration with the Italian Olympics Committee (CONI), to foster social integration and fight racial discrimination and intolerance.

Encourage naturalisation

Citizenship is a powerful asset that can positively impact various aspects of life. Citizenship legally enables full social and civic participation and also builds a sense of belonging and is associated with better labour market outcomes for youth with migrant parents. Youth with migrant parents who have host-country nationality are more likely to work in highly skilled jobs and the public sector than their peers with foreign nationality. Recently, a number of European OECD countries made amendments to their citizenship laws to facilitate access to citizenship among native-born children of immigrants.

Public information campaigns to promote naturalisation among eligible immigrant groups can help to increase citizenship take-up. Such programmes typically explain the required steps to naturalise, as well as the benefits of holding citizenship. Countries settled by migration have made such efforts for many years, in line with a longstanding perception of newly arrived immigrants as future citizens.

Canada, the OECD country with the highest citizenship take-up rate, has a long tradition of encouraging and facilitating naturalisation among eligible residents. An example is the 'Citizenship Awareness Program', includes the distribution of the citizenship study guide 'Discover Canada', the organisation of an annual citizenship week, and social media campaigns for promoting citizenship.

Box 1. Recent work on the integration of youth with migrant parents by the OECD

OECD flagship publications on migration and integration

- OECD (2020), *International Migration Outlook 2020*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ec98f531-en>.
- OECD/European Union (2018), *Settling In 2018: Indicators of Immigrant Integration*, OECD Publishing, Paris/European Union, Brussels, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264307216-en>.
- OECD (2017), *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264281318-en>.

Work on youth with migrant parents

- OECD (2021), *Making Integration Work: Young People with Migrant Parents*.
- OECD (2018), *Catching Up? Country Studies on Intergenerational Mobility and Children of Immigrants*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264301030-en>.
- OECD (2017), *Catching Up? Intergenerational Mobility and Children of Immigrants*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264288041-en>.

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- OECD (2021), *Young People with Migrant Parents, Making Integration Work*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/6e773bfe-en>. [4]
- OECD (2020), *What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrants and their children?*, OECD, Paris, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=137_137245-8saheqv0k3&title=What-is-the-impact-of-the-COVID-19-pandemic-on-immigrants-and-their-children%3F (accessed on 19 November 2020). [3]
- OECD (2020), *Youth and COVID-19: Response, recovery and resilience*, OECD, Paris, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/> (accessed on 9 April 2021). [2]
- OECD (2018), *The Resilience of Students with an Immigrant Background: Factors that Shape Well-being*, OECD Reviews of Migrant Education, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264292093-en>. [6]
- OECD (2017), *Catching Up? Intergenerational Mobility and Children of Immigrants*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264288041-en>. [5]
- OECD/EU (2018), *Settling In 2018: Indicators of Immigrant Integration*, OECD Publishing, Paris/European Union, Brussels, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264307216-en>. [1]

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🔗 Useful links

www.oecd.org/migration

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