



## Where are the immigrant girls?

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### SUMMARY

Girls and women, especially the most vulnerable, are more likely to be excluded from education than their male counterparts. Exclusion and gender disparities in access to and performance in education are also observed among immigrant children, with immigrant girls often being the most disadvantaged. Data from the IEA's Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2011 for lower secondary schools (Grade 8) show that in certain countries in Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the percentage of immigrant girls enrolled in schools at the lower secondary level is much smaller than that of immigrant boys. For example, in several countries (such as Iran, Romania, Chinese Taipei, Lithuania, and Turkey), more than half of immigrant girls are not enrolled in schools. This unequal access threatens gender equality in educational outcomes within the immigrant population and hinders overall development efforts towards the attainment of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) (or 'the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'). Policymakers need to identify and address the underlying factors preventing immigrant girls from exercising and benefiting from their right to education.

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### INTRODUCTION

Education and gender equality are fundamental human rights, provided for in numerous international, regional and national legal instruments and normative frameworks (UNESCO, 1960, 1974, 2015b; United Nations, 1948, 1979, 1990a, b). Most recently, on 30 June 2016, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on 'Realizing the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl' urging support for girls' educational access, including immigrant girls (United Nations, 2016). Education and gender equality are also an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015a, b). Significant improvements have been achieved in education over the last several decades, especially with respect to educational access. However, although the gap between the proportions of out-of-school boys and girls is closing, gender disparities persist across countries and between groups within countries, especially between the richest and the poorest segments of the population (UNESCO,

2016a). Those belonging to the most vulnerable groups, such as immigrant girls, are often affected the most. These disparities are both a cause and an outcome of wider gender inequalities and discrimination facing girls and women in all spheres of their lives, including education.

**Globally, rates of international migration have increased significantly in the last decade**, going from 191 million in 2005 to 243 million in 2015 (United Nations, 2015c). The growth of international migration is underpinned by a range of economic, political, environmental, and sociocultural factors. These include, for example, the search for better economic and life opportunities, escape from war and conflict, and environmental disasters or degradation associated with climate change. As more individuals migrate, there are greater concerns about issues of access and inclusion of migrants into receiving societies.

Many immigrant children need access to basic social services, such as shelter, water and sanitation, nutrition, health, and education. Specific to education, receiving countries face significant challenges in the face of the growing numbers of immigrant pupils, especially in cases of forced migration where there is a large and unanticipated influx of refugee children. These include such issues as school overcrowding, teacher shortages, staff working double or more shifts, increased costs, a lack of curriculum and teaching materials, appropriate teacher training, and accommodating cultural and linguistic diversity within schools. Many education systems have initiated policy changes to accommodate immigrant pupils, including the influx of refugees. Nonetheless, a substantial percentage of these children still do not have access to education, with immigrant girls being disproportionately affected.

## DATA

The analysis presented in this policy brief uses data for lower secondary school (Grade 8) from the IEA TIMSS 2011 assessment. In TIMSS 2011, grade eight students from 60 countries around the world were assessed in mathematics and science, and rich background information was collected from students, teachers, and schools. Further details on the study can be found in the international report (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Arora, 2012). Among other questions, students were asked if they and their parents were born in the country in which they were currently attending school. This question helped identify native students (where both the student and parents are born inside the country), first generation immigrant students (where students are not born in the country where they are currently residing), and second generation immigrant students (identified as students born in the country, but with at least one parent not born in the country) (see also Hastedt, 2016).

## KEY FINDINGS FOR IMMIGRANT GIRLS IN SCHOOL

**In almost all of the 44 education systems included in the study, there is gender parity in educational access among native students** (Table 1). The percentage of native girls in schools is around 50% (47–53%) of the total school population in most education systems, with the exception of Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates (where the percentage is 44%), Oman (54%), Thailand (55%), and Lebanon (58%).

**However, for students with an immigrant background, the situation differs for girls and boys.** Indeed, regionally, the enrollment of immigrant girls in schools varies. In 26 of the 44 education systems examined, the percentage of immigrant girls in schools is significantly below the percentage of immigrant boys. This gap is clearly identifiable in several education systems in Asia (Chinese Taipei, Indonesia, and Malaysia), Eastern Europe (Macedonia, Hungary, and Slovenia) and the MENA region (Morocco, Jordan, Palestine, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Abu Dhabi). In Iran, for instance, only 30% of first generation immigrant students in school are girls, while 70% are boys. Assuming that the number of immigrant boys and girls is likely

to be equal, this means that more than half of all immigrant girls in the country are excluded from education at Grade 8. These results confirm findings from previous research undertaken with TIMSS 2007 data (Hastedt, 2016).

Although **the situation of second generation immigrants is typically better**, possibly because of investments made by immigrant families in the education of their children (Immigration Canada, 2012), lower enrollment patterns can also be observed for second generation immigrant children in some Eastern European countries, such as Hungary (44%), and Georgia (27%).

There are several possible reasons that may contribute to these cross-national findings. These include in-school and out-of-school factors preventing girls' access to education, compromising their educational achievement or resulting in school drop-out, which ultimately makes girls more vulnerable to exclusion, poverty, marginalization, and exploitation. Often, schools and education systems are not ready to receive girls and respond to their specific socioemotional and physical needs. For example, this might be, among other factors, due to the presence of school fees and other costs; lack of toilets, and basic water and sanitation facilities; learning contents that may reproduce gender stereotypes; lack of teacher awareness and gender-sensitive training; and prevalence of school-related gender-based violence, among other factors. It is also important to examine out-of-school factors which include gender norms, societal perceptions, and expectations about the status of girls and women, such as early marriage and pregnancy; the role of girls and women in family and community structures; gender-based violence. Migration can exacerbate these issues and challenges, or create additional demands and obstacles for immigrant children, in particular immigrant girls.



Table 1: Percentage of native, first generation immigrant, and second generation immigrant girls enrolled in grade 8

Country	Percentage of girls in school					
	Native	*	1st generation immigrant	*	2nd generation immigrant	*
Armenia	49		43	↓	47	
Australia	48		52		53	
Bahrain	50		46	↓	55	↑
Botswana	52	↑	47		45	↓
Canada (Alberta)	52		48		50	
Canada (Ontario)	48		48		51	
Canada (Quebec)	52		53		50	
Chile	53	↑	53		54	
Chinese Taipei	49		31	↓	48	
England	48		49		48	
Finland	49		43	↓	47	
Georgia	48	↓	43		27	↓
Ghana	47	↓	51		48	
Hong Kong, SAR	51		47	↓	50	
Hungary	49		38	↓	44	↓
Indonesia	51		40	↓	28	↓
Iran, Islamic Republic of	47	↓	30	↓	42	
Israel	51		45	↓	52	
Italy	49	↓	44	↓	52	
Jordan	51		37	↓	50	
Kazakhstan	50		46	↓	48	
Lebanon	58	↑	45	↓	49	
Macedonia	50		38	↓	55	↑
Malaysia	51		41	↓	53	
Morocco	48	↓	34	↓	40	↓
New Zealand	47		43	↓	51	
Norway	50		43	↓	51	
Oman	54	↑	39	↓	57	↑
Palestinian National Authority	53	↑	38	↓	57	↑
Qatar	52	↑	46		53	
Russian Federation	48	↓	47		53	↑
Saudi Arabia	49		40	↓	49	
Singapore	49		48		50	
Slovenia	49		42	↓	50	
South Africa	50		42	↓	48	
Sweden	49	↓	46	↓	48	
Syria, Arab Republic of	52		43	↓	52	
Thailand	55	↑	44		51	
Tunisia	52	↑	59	↑	47	
Ukraine	50		44		53	
United Arab Emirates	50		47		53	↑
United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi)	50		41	↓	51	
United Arab Emirates (Dubai)	44	↓	47		52	
United States	51	↑	49		51	

\*Upward arrows indicate it is statistically significant there are more girls than boys, downward arrows that it is statistically significant there are more boys than girls.

## CONCLUSIONS

**Education and gender equality are fundamental and inalienable human rights that are prerequisites for achieving both inclusive societies and sustainable development.** Yet, the findings show that the majority of out-of-school immigrant children are girls. This pattern is particularly evident in certain countries in the Asia, Eastern Europe and the MENA region, as revealed by findings from the IEA TIMSS 2011 assessment. Immigrant girls tend to be disadvantaged in terms of access to

education, which ultimately puts them at risk of discrimination, increasing their vulnerability to poverty, exclusion and violence. In order to guarantee their right to education and ensure that immigrant girls are safe and equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to lead fulfilling lives, the underlying in-school and out-of-school factors affecting their education opportunities need to be further examined and properly addressed.

*Education of immigrant girls is a matter of concern, and policymakers need to pay special attention to this internationally.*

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As the global rates of migration grow, with forced migration creating a large and rapid refugee influx, ensuring the well-being of immigrant children, and particularly/including refugees, and providing them with basic social services, including education, must be a policy priority. While education for immigrant children is receiving increased attention from policymakers, specific issues hindering immigrant girls' education seem to be overlooked in education policies and programs. In order to ensure their right to education and avoid the reproduction of gender-based discrimination that threatens individual well-being, as well as system-level social cohesion, immigrant boys and girls must have equal educational opportunities. For all children and youth to benefit from education equally, education policies must ensure their right *to education* (namely equal access to education); their right *in education* (fair treatment in the learning process), and, their right *through education* (equitable outcomes and access to opportunities in all spheres of life). In addition to the need for targeted education policy initiatives, it is equally important to consider not only pre-existing gender-based discrimination patterns and their root causes in the country of origin but also the new dynamics created by immigration, including social and gender dynamics.

Providing equal educational opportunities for immigrant girls and boys requires targeted measures that should include:

1. Identifying the underlying factors hindering access to and performance in education, particularly for immigrant girls, both from the education supply and demand side. Further research is required to examine the contributing factors, such as pre-existing discrimination patterns against girls in the country of origin, which are reproduced in the resident country; the education system and policies in the resident country; circumstances created by migration, such as, for example, new family, community, or social roles for girls and boys; or cultural and linguistic differences that may affect girls' and boys' engagement in the resident country.
2. Taking appropriate preventive and corrective measures. Policymakers and other education stakeholders in systems, especially in Asia, Eastern Europe and the MENA region, need to be aware of the factors that negatively affect immigrant girls' education opportunities and take appropriate measures to address them effectively. Backed by existing evidence-based research on inclusive school practice, these measures may include teacher training, curriculum development, community awareness campaigns, and family and community engagement in schools.
3. Identifying out-of-school immigrant girls. While findings in this policy brief present the status of immigrant girls in education, the findings also raise questions about immigrant girls who are not in school:
  - Where are they if they are not in school?
  - Are they healthy and safe or subject to violence of any form?
  - Are they engaged in paid or unpaid labor?
  - Are they married early and at risk of early pregnancy?
  - What are their future prospects, and those of their children, without education?
  - Does lack of education for immigrant girls create risks for gender equality and social cohesion among the immigrant population and the wider community in the receiving countries, as well as sustainable development efforts globally?
4. Establishing synergies and enhancing collaboration among different departments not only within Ministries of Education but also with other sectors, such as Social, Health, and Immigration agencies.

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# **IEA** POLICY BRIEF

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The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, known as the IEA, is an independent, international consortium of national research institutions and governmental agencies, with headquarters in Amsterdam. Its primary purpose is to conduct large-scale comparative studies of educational achievement with the aim of gaining more in-depth understanding of the effects of policies and practices within and across systems of education.

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