

School Segregation of Immigrants and Educational Outcomes in Europe

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The flow of immigrants into Europe has increased sharply in recent years, leading to an increase in the share of immigrant pupils in schools. Immigrants usually concentrate in less affluent neighborhoods, and natives tend to abandon schools with a high share of immigrants in favor of institutions with fewer or no immigrants, reinforcing segregation patterns. The existing evidence indicates that both natives and immigrants benefit from a lower share of immigrant students in the class or school.

A measure of the segregation of immigrants and natives in specific schools is the dissimilarity index, or Duncan index. This index ranges from zero in the case of equal distribution of native and immigrant students in schools to one in the case of full segregation between immigrants and natives. The Figure overleaf plots the Duncan index by country for 2003 and 2012 (for a subset of European and non-European countries), using data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The index has decreased in the majority of sampled countries, especially in Italy, Greece, and the Czech Republic, partly because immigrant students are more evenly distributed across schools when their number increases.

IS SCHOOL SEGREGATION EFFICIENT?

Equity considerations suggest that appropriate policies should be designed to reduce segregation and improve equality of opportunity. But are desegregation policies also justified on efficiency grounds? Since human capital is a recognized key engine of economic growth, average school performance is a useful indicator of efficiency. Desegregation improves overall efficiency when one of the following conditions holds: the negative effect of a higher share of immigrants on school performance

- a) increases with the share of immigrants or
- b) is larger for immigrants than for natives.

The available empirical evidence indicates that both native and immigrant students are negatively affected by a higher share of immigrant students in the class or school, and that the effect tends to be larger in absolute value for immigrants, pointing to an important asymmetry. In addition, the evidence – while not conclusive – broadly supports condition a). This evidence leads to the conclusion that desegregation policies are not only equitable but also efficient.

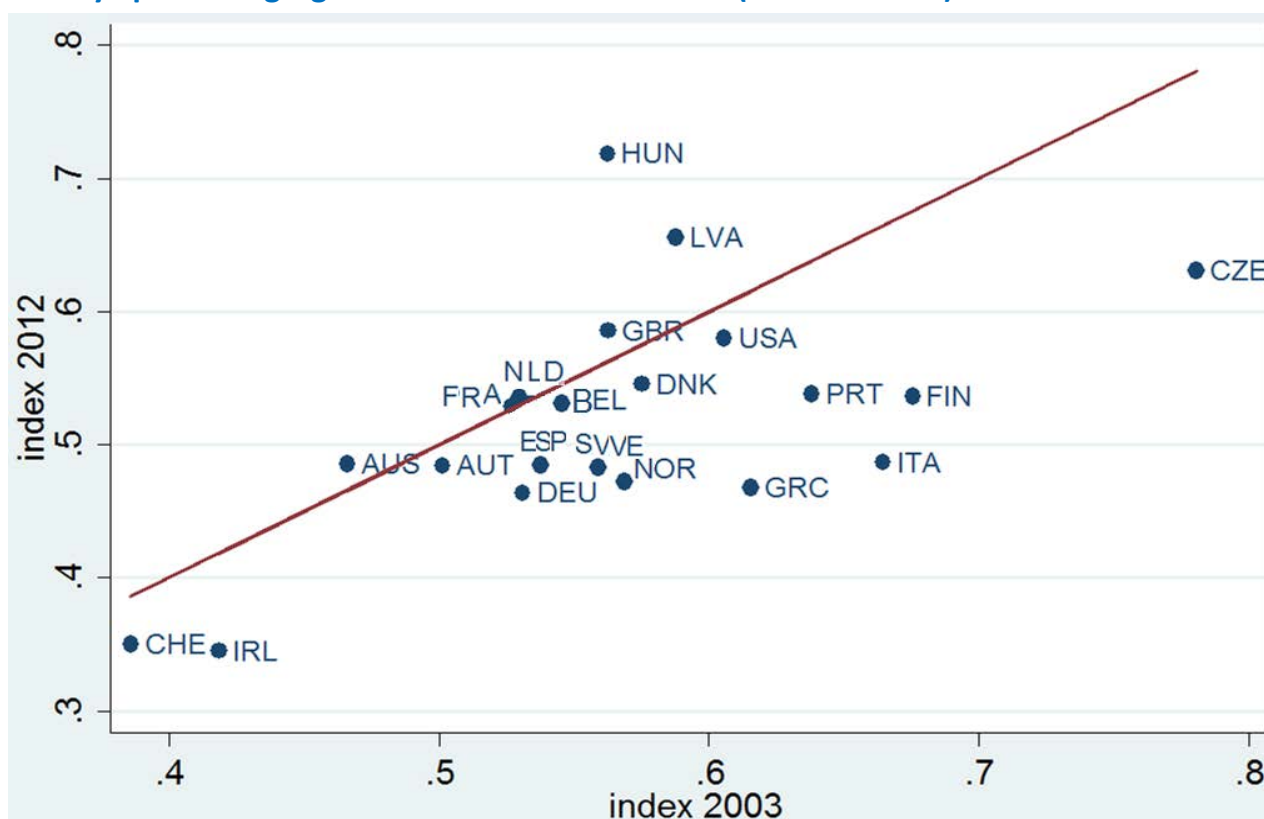
There is also evidence that the negative effect of the share of immigrants increases in absolute value when a tipping point in the share of immigrants is reached. Unfortunately, the estimated values of tipping points vary too broadly to provide useful policy recommendations, from 5 to 50 percent.

Segregation can have additional personal and social effects, including xenophobia, social exclusion, radicalization, insecurity and violence. When considering the efficiency of desegregation policies, these additional dimensions should also be considered because of their social costs.

POLICIES AIMED AT REDUCING SEGREGATION

Several desegregation policies have been implemented in the United States and in Europe, including admission lotteries, bussing students from schools with a high share of immigrants to schools with low shares, providing additional resources to schools with a high

Country-specific segregation in PISA 2003 and 2012 (Duncan index)



share of immigrants, parental information about enrolment opportunities, and the introduction of ceilings to the share of immigrants in classes and schools.

Lotteries to allocate places in over-subscribed schools have been used mainly in the United States. Their aim is to promote the access to the best schools also to students from a disadvantaged background. The literature investigating the impact of this policy shows little evidence that winning a lottery provides any systematic benefit across a wide variety of traditional academic measures.

Bussing policies, implemented initially in the United States to allow students from inner-city neighborhoods with high shares of minority students to attend schools located in suburban neighborhoods, have been adopted also by some European countries to distribute immigrants more evenly across schools. For instance, in some Danish municipalities schools with

predominantly native Danish students are receiving migrant students from other schools. The re-allocation of students across schools can also be accomplished by introducing ceilings to the share of immigrants in classes or schools.

A relevant alternative to moving students across schools is adding extra financial resources to schools with a high share of immigrants. The empirical research evaluating the impact of these policies in European countries is scant. The few available studies show that providing extra resources to schools with a high concentration of immigrants may be more effective than reducing the share of immigrants.

Which is the best policy? Unfortunately, there is very little research providing a comparative analysis of the costs and benefits of each policy. Clearly, more needs to be done to evaluate the policies in place and provide a comparative assessment of alternative policies.

For more details see: Giorgio Brunello, Maria de Paola, *School Segregation of Immigrants and its Effects on Educational Outcomes in Europe*. EENEE Analytical Report 30, February 2017, http://www.eenee.de/dms/EENEE/Analytical_Reports/EENEE_AR30.pdf.