

## SCHOOL FAILURE AMONG DESCENDENTS OF IMMIGRANTS IN CATALONIA: MORE THAN JUST ANOTHER ASSIGNMENT

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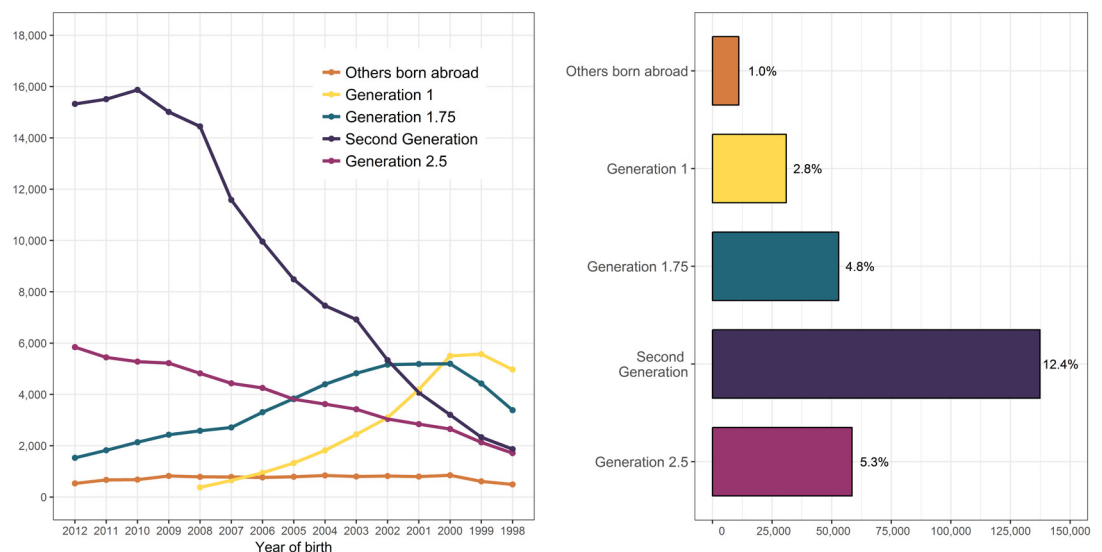
The descendants of international immigrants and their social integration must be among the priority focuses in the construction of social cohesion. However, the available statistical data are scanty, fragmentary, and clearly insufficient. In this issue of *Perspectives Demogràfiques* we present the demographic profile of descendants of immigrants, their relationship with immigration, their diversity, territorial distribution, and school performance as a tool for combatting inequality and discrimination in a population group which, in future, could come to represent a quarter of the young people residing in Catalonia. The data presented here have been provided by research carried out by the Secretariat for Equality, Migrations and Citizenship and published in the report “*Resultats escolars, migració i territori. Catalunya, 2011-2016*” (School Results, Migration and Territory: Catalonia, 2011 – 2016). They were made possible thanks to the link-up between data from the Department of Education of the Generalitat (Government) of Catalonia for students in the 2015-2016 academic year and the Population Statistics Register of the Statistical Institute of Catalonia (IDESCAT).

### THE MOST VALUABLE ASSET

There can be no doubt that the most valuable contribution of immigration to the host country is people and, still more, their descendants with all their potential. Popularly known as “Second Generation”, this population group, estimated in the 2011 census as numbering a little over 183,000 people (at present mainly children and adolescents) in Catalonia, brings with it the additional factors of diversity and the role of creating a bridge between the generation of their progenitors and the host society, as well as between their parents’ country of origin and Catalonia. Data crossing between administrative records and population statistics has made it possible to recover the place of birth of parents and the year of entry of the schoolchild into Catalonia. This information is essential for reconstructing a typology of students with regard to their migratory status.

Figure 1 shows students who are immigrants or descendants of immigrants, in Catalonia in the 2015-2016 school year, according to their “migratory status”. Of the 1.1 million students born after 1998 and enrolled in the general educational system at non-university levels, those with recent migratory backgrounds amount to a little more than a quarter (26.2%). A nomenclature of “Generations” has been used for their analysis. Although these approximations have been much criticised because they can give the impression that immigrants’ children

**FIGURE 1.** Migratory status of non-autochthonous schoolchildren in Catalonia by year of birth, in the 2015-2016 school year.



Source: Compiled by authors using data from the Department of Education and IDESCAT.

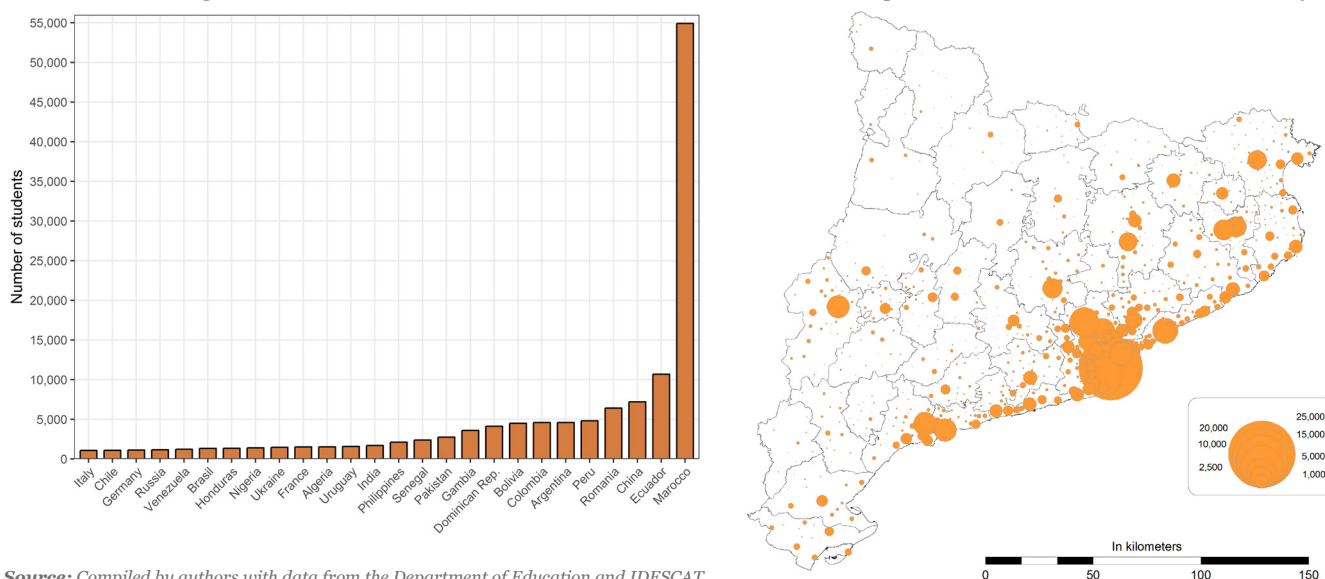
born in the host country are still erroneously being classified as “immigrants” and, consequently, that they contribute in some way to stigmatising them, their widespread use inside and outside academia, and their analytical capacity have nevertheless led us to decide to use them with a broader definition of the status of the child in keeping with his or her relationship with immigration. We have also adapted to the present reality of the Catalan school system the taxonomy employed by Ruben Rumbaut (2014), which is of especially widespread use in studies of educational integration among descendants of immigrants. Hence, our classification is: 1) **Generation 1**: schoolchildren born abroad and who arrived in Catalonia aged seven and older and who have therefore not been in the educational system from the start of their schooling; 2) **Generation 1.75**: schoolchildren born abroad but who arrived in Catalonia before the age of seven and who have therefore entered the obligatory educational system at the beginning; 3) **Second Generation**: schoolchildren born in Spain of two parents (or one, where information about only one parent is available) who were born abroad; 4) **Generation 2.5**: schoolchildren born in Spain, one of whose parents was born abroad; and 5) **Generation 3 or Autochthonous**: schoolchildren born in Spain of parents also born in Spain. When there is information about only one of the parents and that parent was born in Spain, the student comes under this heading.

Depending on the year of birth, one observes a diminishing percentage of schoolchildren in situations related with the migratory process. Among the older children, most of them studying for the Baccalaureate (School Leaver) examination or in training courses, these circumstances affect 22.7% of the students, and among the

children aged from three to six in nursery school the figure is 31.9%. But besides their presence in the total set of schoolchildren, one sees a major change in migratory status with evolution by ages. If Generation 1 and Generation 1.75 are most represented among the older children, the Second Generation is the largest one among the younger children. The slowdown of international migratory flows resulting from the economic crisis in addition to the duration and maturing of the migratory process itself would explain this development. The categories of schoolchildren born abroad add up to 8.5% of the total and constitute a minority group in the early school years, although they represent 17.2% among the children born in 1999. The two categories of schoolchildren born in Spain constitute 17.6% of the students, from 6.5% among those born in 1998 to 29% of those born in 2012. At present, three out of ten pupils who began their schooling in the 2015-2016 school year belong to the Second Generation or Generation 2.5. In absolute numbers, and in the ages under consideration, there were 137,377 students of the Second Generation in the 2015-2016 school year, from the 1,866 born in 1998 and still at school through to the maximum number of 15,871 born in 2010.

Henceforth, we shall focus on the Second Generation students, since this is the largest group after the autochthonous groups, with a considerable distance from the other migrant situations. This is also the group which will experience the most intensive growth in the coming years and will gradually become the majority situation related with immigration in the country’s classrooms. We can also use the current distance between school performance of autochthonous students and those of the Second Generation to measure existing inequalities among the children of immigrants.

**FIGURE 2.** Main origins of Second Generation students and territorial distribution on the municipal scale in Catalonia for the 2015-2016 school year.



Source: Compiled by authors with data from the Department of Education and IDESCAT.



## DIVERSITY AND TERRITORIAL DISTRIBUTION

Figure 2 represents 26 places of origin each with more than a thousand Second Generation students. Four in every ten, amounting to more than fifty thousand students, are of Moroccan origin, a situation which is the result of longstanding migrations from Morocco to Catalonia and also Moroccan family structure. There is greater dispersion with other places of origin, with students from Ecuador constituting the second largest group with more than ten thousand students. There are more than five thousand students for both China and Romania. Hence the first four places of origin for Second Generation students are in different continents and this indicates the great diversity of international immigration received in Catalonia. Another 22 origins each present more than a thousand Second Generation students. In terms of territorial distribution and in absolute numbers, there is a considerable presence in the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona, but also in coastal towns and in cities like Lleida and Girona. There is also a notable presence in hinterland regional capitals, among them Manresa and Vic. Although they represent 12.4% of all students, in some towns the percentages of their presence in the classrooms are much higher, and still more in the early years of schooling when the figures rise considerably, for example in Salt (47%), Castelló d'Empúries (33%), Manlleu (30%), Guissona (29%) and Palafrugell (28.7%). Among the towns with the highest numbers of students, these including l'Hospitalet de Llobregat (23.1%), Mataró (18.8%), and Santa Coloma de Gramenet (18.3%), the presence of the Second Generation is more notable.

## SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Children's school performance can be measured in a number of ways. Here, it is reckoned using data for achievement of the ESO (obligatory secondary education) academic qualification by fourth-year ESO students in Catalonia's public schools. By international standards, non-achievement of this level of education is referred to as school failure. At this level there are 42,687 students in Catalan public schools, 61.9% of the total number, and with an overrepresentation of students related with immigration or, to be specific, 12,976 (30.4% of the total). In the composition by origins of these students the First Generation is very significant (6,168 students) as is the Generation 1.75 group (5,041 students), while the Second Generation and Generation 2.5 still represent emerging situations (2,928 and 2,640 students respectively).

Table 1 shows the percentage of students who did not attain the ESO qualification in the 2015-2016 school year in terms of migratory status and gender difference. Non-achievement of ESO in the school year analysed here does not mean that this level cannot be achieved subsequently. Then again, the data refer to enrolled students aged eighteen or younger and might underestimate failure inasmuch as it has not been possible to recover data on students who leave before the fourth year of ESO. The upheaval represented by migration appears as the primary factor explaining the situation of school performance overall: late arrival, discontinuity and, of course, leaving school all have their impact on the children's more negative results. Hence, the generations most affected by immigration (1 and 1.75) tend to show worse results than those for children born in Catalonia. Many of the variations by origin are due to migratory strategies marked by this general factor of upheaval, and especially discontinuity in the second generations.

By comparison with autochthonous students, Generation 2.5 (with one parent born in Spain and one born abroad) does not show significant differences in the results attained. By contrast in the remaining situations, school failure increases and is, indeed, much greater. Second Generation boys show percentages of school failure that are eight points higher than those for autochthonous students, and the figure for girls, almost doubling the school failure rates of autochthonous girls, is six points higher. Schoolchildren born abroad but who came to Catalonia at very early ages (Generation 1.75) show results that are very similar to those for the Second Generation, which enables us to state that entering the school system at the beginning does not make any difference by comparison with immigrants' children who are born in Catalonia. The highest school failure rates are found among First Generation students who arrived when they were more than seven years old: one third of the boys and a quarter of the girls do not achieve the ESO qualification. These figures are frequently explained by recent arrival when, in many cases, school is merely an intermediate step before joining the job market in future.

**TABLE 1:** Percentage of public school pupils who do not achieve the ESO qualification, by gender and migratory status, 2015-2016 school year.

	Male	Female	Total
Autochthonous	13.2	7.3	10.3
Generation 2.5	12.5	7.7	10.1
Second Generation	21.2	13.7	17.3
Generation 1.75	21.7	12.2	16.7
Generation 1	34.6	23.5	29.2
<b>Total students</b>	<b>17.4</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>13.9</b>

*Source:* Compiled by authors with data from the Department of Education and IDESCAT.



If the focus is on Second Generation students according to origin, the low numbers of cases means that, for most origins, the values obtained are not representative. If the students are aggregated into the continents of origin of their progenitors, the failure rates would be lower for those of European (11.3%) and American origin (15.5), in which cases the socioeconomic situation of the former and the linguistic advantage of the latter would explain the better results. In the Asian group, the failure rate rises to 17.8 % (with no gender differences), although the widely varying results within this block must also be taken into account, with considerable differences between Chinese (13.6%), Philippine (21.9%) and Pakistani (35%) children, for example, and this is only to mention the three largest groups. At the far end of the school failure scale are students of African origin with a figure of 19.2%. In this case, the school failure rate of 15.9% among Moroccan students —the leading group— is worrying, and especially if the growth of this group in the immediate future is taken into account. Even more disturbing is the figure of 40.9% for students of Gambian origin (the second most numerous group of origin among second-generation fourth-year ESO students) who do not achieve the ESO qualification, a figure that rises to 54% among the boys (and this value is understated because of possible school leaving before completing ESO), which allows a glimpse of the failure of the educational system for certain origins and the future difficulties that these young people could have with their inclusion and subsequent progress in the world of work.

## IN THE NAME OF SOCIAL COHESION

The success or failure of descendants of immigrants is the touchstone for the success or failure of our society in future. What we would call social cohesion (referring principally to social classes) and community cohesion (emphasising ethnocultural

diversity) in the future (Cantle, 2005)— which is to say the feeling of shared belonging and mutual trust of a community comprised by people living in the same territory, over and above social class and ethnocultural or religious diversity— would then be equivalent to the social and intercultural integration of the population.

For all the undeniable efforts of the educational system over the past years —battling in times of austerity— the levels of school failure measured by achievement of the ESO qualification and the distance between the results of children of immigrant background and autochthonous children are unsustainable. This is a situation that requires special, urgent action. The negative results correlating with some groups of origin of children of immigrant descent point to an unacceptable racialisation of school failure with all the consequences this will have in constituting a major obstacle in the evolution of individual life paths of individuals who are adolescents today, and also as a fracture in Catalan society. There are structural changes which must be considered with the involvement not only of the educational community and other government departments —obviously including the Department of Education and the Secretariat for Equality, Migrations and Citizenship— but also society as a whole. It means beginning with the availability of accurate data which would allow systematic identification and follow-up of this segment of the population. Short- and medium-term shock tactics must be employed to combat inequality, independently of student origins, but consideration must also be given to inclusion of measures of positive discrimination for the most affected groups, and not only for students but the general community and territorial settings in which the children reside and where their schools are located.

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