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Further Reading: Ledwith, V, & Reilly, K (2013). Two Tiers Emerging? School Choice and Educational Achievement Disparities among Young Migrants and Non-migrants in Galway City and Urban Fringe. *Population, Space and Place*, 19(1), 46-59.
[DOI: 10.1002/psp.1708](https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1708).

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Read More About: The [Population and Migration Research Cluster](#) within the Whitaker Institute for Innovation and Societal Change.

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Two tiers emerging? Achievement disparities among migrants and non-migrants

Despite the reversal of net inward migration to Ireland after the international economic recession beginning in 2008, a sizeable number of migrant families have settled in communities throughout Ireland and have children who are currently moving through various stages of the education sector. Research in countries with a longer history of in-migration highlights an achievement gap between young migrants and their non-migrant peers which often has negative consequences for young migrants' socio-economic mobility.

Research Findings

There is evidence of an achievement gap emerging between migrant and non-migrant students in Ireland. There is no significant difference between migrant and non-migrant students achieving high grades in their Junior Certificate examinations *but* migrant students are significantly less likely to take higher level subjects in their Junior Certificate examinations than their non-migrant peers, controlling for differences in language fluency, gender and the socio-economic status of the school population. As such, it is possible that migrant students are being steered towards taking subjects at Ordinary Level because of teacher perceptions rather than student ability. In addition, students attending their school of choice do significantly better than those enrolled elsewhere. Since non-migrant children are 2.5 times more likely to attend their school of choice than migrant students, school choice itself is implicated in the production of the achievement gap.

Policy Implications

It is clear that the structure of the Junior Certificate examination system encourages school-based streaming that has direct and deleterious impacts on educational achievement. Such in-school divisions clearly disadvantage migrant students and remove them from the potentially positive peer effects of higher performing students and teachers. This streaming has detrimental consequences in the long-term, impacting Leaving Certificate pathways and ultimately undermining participation in education at the tertiary level.

In addition, the relationship between school choice and educational achievement highlights the pressing need for addressing school access policy. As it currently operates, Irish nationals have greater access to their schools of choice than their migrant peers thereby producing educational disparities and social stratification. Reforming admissions policy to ensure fairness to all future citizens of Ireland is a critical first step in halting the emergence of a two-tiered education system.