

Native born but not yet citizen

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Impact Paragraph

This dissertation analyses the relationship between the citizenship status of the children of immigrants and their educational outcomes in the Netherlands. As in two out of three countries in the world, children of immigrants born in the Netherlands do not have automatic rights to the citizenship of their country of birth. They instead rely on their parents' ability and desire to naturalise if they are to acquire Dutch citizenship before the age of majority. Surprisingly, the potential effects of host country citizenship – or lack thereof – on the life trajectories of children of immigrants have received limited attention from either a research or policy perspective. This dissertation aims to enhance scholarly understanding of the relevance of host country citizenship for children of immigrants, specifically by examining how citizens and non-citizens find their way in a complex educational system such as the Dutch one. By doing so, it provides valuable evidence of the barriers and opportunities that children of immigrants face in relation to citizenship, which should inform current policy and public debates on immigrant integration. In this section, I will briefly highlight the scientific and social impact of my dissertation and consider its potential in the near future.

The main objective of this dissertation was to conceptualise and evaluate the potential effects of host country citizenship on education in a comprehensive perspective. While previous research has focused primarily on *whether* citizenship matters for children of immigrants, I combined different strands of literature to develop a nuanced understanding of *why* and *how* citizenship status affects educational outcomes. The empirical findings show that citizenship has positive and substantial effects on the school trajectories of children of immigrants: students who have acquired Dutch citizenship not only perform better on tests at the end of primary school, but are also better equipped to move upward through secondary education and avoid dropping out of school compared to their non-citizen counterparts. However, contrary to previous research, this dissertation shows that the effects of citizenship are not uniform. Dutch citizenship matters most when it is acquired early in the settlement process, when children have not yet entered primary school, and is most relevant for children whose parents are at a disadvantage in the labour market and housing market. The evidence of timing and heterogeneous effects adds new layers of complexity in the relationship between citizenship

and education, which merit greater attention in future research on the citizenship of children of immigrants. Finally, this dissertation employs innovative identification strategies to determine whether citizenship affects educational outcomes independently, beyond parents' self-selection into naturalisation. I provide additional evidence of a causal relationship between citizenship and education, where, with a few exceptions, previous studies were likely to measure spurious associations. In this respect, this dissertation contributed to the dissemination of methods that had previously received little attention in research on the citizenship of children of immigrants.

These findings are not only relevant to academic research, but also to policy makers. Ensuring equal opportunities for the children of immigrants is an important social challenge in most European societies, including the Netherlands. There is consistent evidence that some children face significant obstacles in school and in their adult life, including lack of socioeconomic and host country-specific resources and discrimination. Yet, it is rarely considered that ensuring smooth and rapid access to host country citizenship for these disadvantaged groups can be an effective policy lever. In particular, two important aspects have so far been neglected in Dutch political and parliamentary debates. First, while requirements for becoming a Dutch citizen have been increasingly restricted over the past decades to increase the obligations of naturalisation applicants, the potential consequences of such reforms for the children of immigrants are generally not taken into consideration. However, I demonstrate that restrictive naturalisation reforms not only prevent or delay the acquisition of Dutch citizenship by immigrants, but also have spillover negative repercussions on the propensity of their children to become Dutch. This dissertation therefore shows that the trend towards stricter naturalisation requirements has wider and longer-term consequences than currently envisaged in policy debates.

A second aspect pertains to school inequalities. In the Netherlands, differences in student outcomes based on ethnicity are widely discussed in public reports. Students with a migration background tend to perform less well than their native counterparts, which has drawn a lot of attention to the factors that differentiate children of immigrants and those of natives. This emphasis has obscured significant heterogeneity *within* the group of immigrants' children, and in particular their unequal access to Dutch citizenship. This dissertation shows that students' citizenship status should be considered as a potential factor of school success, helping some children of immigrants to overcome initial disadvantages in education. In doing so, it directs attention to the factors that are specific to the migration and settlement experiences of immi-

grant families, as well to the legal and institutional context that shapes these experiences. Policy makers should give more weight to these factors when addressing ethnic inequalities in educational achievement, in order to design policies tailored to the diverse needs of immigrant families. Besides, the empirical findings suggest that facilitating access to Dutch citizenship could be an effective policy lever to attenuate educational disparities, at limited cost: while direct educational interventions require significant funding, facilitating access to Dutch citizenship for children has a mainly administrative cost.¹

My research findings are relevant to different groups. First, from a research perspective, it speaks to researchers who have contributed in relative isolation to two major areas of study: the literature on the second generation, which has paid little attention to the legal obstacles that children of immigrants may face in host societies; and citizenship studies, which have neglected the role and place of children in the process of immigrant naturalisation. In this dissertation, I argued that a better integration of these two bodies of work allows for a more detailed understanding of the life experiences of children of immigrants. Second, from a policy perspective, this research is relevant to various actors involved in law and policy making. While parliamentary debates on strengthening naturalisation requirements should take into account the intergenerational effects of these restrictive reforms, educational policies should address the legal barriers that non-citizen children of immigrants can face while growing up.

Last but not least, this research is aimed at the main stakeholders: the native-born children of immigrants themselves. Although, to my knowledge, there is no strong public campaign calling for better access to Dutch citizenship for the children of immigrants in the Netherlands, such campaigns exist in other *ius sanguinis* citizenship regimes such as Italy and Switzerland. This dissertation provides a detailed study of the patterns and effects of Dutch citizenship acquisition, which can support the formulation of evidence-based claims for the introduction of conditional *ius soli*. Although the empirical findings are not directly transferable to other countries, they can nevertheless provide a relevant benchmark, which may be particularly valuable in light of the current lack of data and research on the citizenship status of children of immigrants in Europe.

These target groups were – or will be – informed about the research in different ways. During my PhD, I shared insights from my research by publishing

¹See the costs and benefits of introducing conditional *ius soli* in Germany, compared to direct educational interventions, estimated by Felfe et al. (2020, pp.173-174).

several peer-reviewed articles and presenting at ten international conferences and workshops. I have been careful to present at both education-focused and citizenship-focused conferences, in order to reach out and connect areas of research that rarely intersect. In a similar vein, in 2020, I co-organised the workshop “Citizenship of children of immigrants. Legal status and life opportunities in host country societies” with the aim of bringing together researchers from various backgrounds (political science, sociology, law and economics) to discuss ongoing research on how legal status affects the life opportunities of children of immigrants in Western countries. This workshop was designed to gather isolated and fragmented knowledge about children’s citizenship status and stimulate research on the topic.²

I used Twitter to communicate my research to a wider audience and to connect with relevant institutions and associations committed to improving access to legal status and citizenship for immigrants and their children.³ To reach out policy makers and the general public, I participated in November 2020 to the workshop “Societal Impact of your Research”, co-sponsored by Springer Nature, the Association of Dutch Universities (VSNU) and Maastricht University. During this workshop, I designed an impact plan to organise how I will reach and interact with relevant stakeholders in the future.⁴ On the institutional level, the impact plan includes the submission of a paper to *Statistische Trends*, the online medium of Statistics Netherlands, to draw attention to the citizenship of native-born children of immigrants. This publication, written in Dutch, will share my results in a more condensed and accessible way and highlight the need to rethink some of the statistical categories used by Statistics Netherlands to identify and analyse the Dutch second generation. At the societal level, the impact plan includes the publication of an Op-Ed in a Dutch newspaper that will summarise the main findings of the dissertation in a policy perspective. This will serve to raise awareness about the citizenship status of children of immigrants born in the Netherlands, and may initiate policy or societal debates on whether and how to address unequal access to citizenship for children of immigrants.

²Unfortunately, this workshop scheduled for June 2020 has been cancelled due to covid-19.

³My Twitter account is available at the following link: <https://twitter.com/LabussiereMarie>.

⁴For a short presentation of the impact plan, see the slide deck prepared while working on the Societal Impact Workshop at <https://zenodo.org/record/4271473> [accessed July 16, 2021].