

We study the educational choices of immigrant children in Italy, where the schooling system is characterized by stratification. We first show that immigrants tend to choose less demanding tracks relative to native students with similar ability. The gap is greater for male students and it mirrors an analogous differential in failure rates.

We then estimate the impact of a tutoring and career counselling program offered to a randomly chosen sample of immigrant children displaying high academic potential. We find that the program was successful in reducing educational segregation: male treated students have a 5.0 percentage point lower probability of failing and 12.4 percentage point higher probability of entering an academic-oriented track, compared with control students. The effects are smaller and not significant for girls.

To shed light on the mechanisms underlying these effects, we collected data on standardized test scores and psychological traits. We show that changes in academic motivation and teachers' suggestion induced by the treatment explain a sizable portion of the effect on the high-school choice, while the effect of cognitive skills is negligible. Finally, we find evidence of positive spillovers of the intervention on immigrant peers of treated students, while there is no effect on natives.