

School tracking and intergenerational social mobility

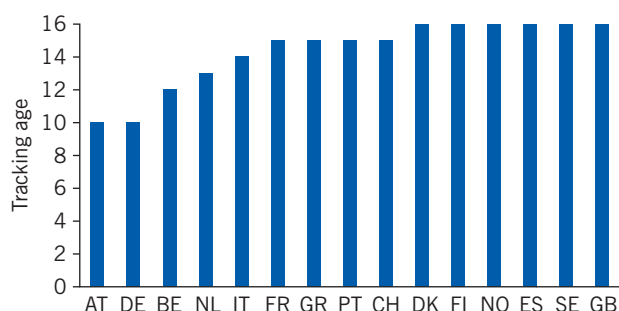
Postponing school tracking can increase social mobility without significant adverse effects on educational achievement

Keywords: tracking, intergenerational mobility, educational attainment

ELEVATOR PITCH

The goal of school tracking (assigning students to different types of school by ability) is to increase educational efficiency by creating more homogeneous groups of students that are easier to teach. However, there are concerns that, if begun too early in the schooling process, tracking may improve educational attainment at the cost of reduced intergenerational social mobility. Recent empirical evidence finds no evidence of an efficiency–equality trade-off when tracking is postponed.

School tracking age in European countries, 2002



Source: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice./documents/key_data_series/105EN.pdf

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KEY FINDINGS

Pros

- + There is no empirical evidence of an efficiency–equality trade-off when school tracking is postponed.
- + Postponing school tracking weakens the association between pupils’ educational achievement and parental background, improving social mobility.
- + Postponing school tracking leads to greater income mobility across generations.

Cons

- There is no evidence that postponing school tracking has large effects on average achievement.
- Postponing school tracking may increase dropouts among low-achieving students.
- Postponing tracking may increase the total cost of the educational system.

AUTHOR’S MAIN MESSAGE

The effects of early tracking on educational achievement are very modest, even slightly negative. However, empirical evidence shows that delaying school tracking until a later age is good for social mobility without significantly affecting average educational achievement. Thus, there is no evidence of a trade-off between educational efficiency and equality of educational attainment. But postponing tracking is not a cure-all policy that can be used to improve educational achievement regardless of other factors.