

## **Do Mobility Trajectories Reduce or Increase School Segregation? Findings of a study**

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Equity and inclusion are at the center of the European and national educational policy agenda. In this framework, school segregation represents a significant challenge for every education system. School segregation is defined as the high concentration, beyond a certain critical threshold, of students attending the same school who are homogeneous in their socioeconomic or ethnic characteristics. When school segregation occurs, a significantly large group of students belonging to minority groups concentrates in one school: this concentration diverges from the average distribution of the student population in the same territory.

As a result, ‘segregated’ schools are often characterized by a strong presence of disadvantaged groups, high marginalization, and low levels of academic performance. The complex phenomenon of school segregation is determined by different factors, often associated with inequalities: it rises from inequalities, but at the same time it can contribute to the reproduction of educational inequalities, creating or exacerbating cultural, social, and economic barriers, and limiting opportunities for students’ interaction and exchange, with potential long-term negative consequences. Thus, school segregation poses a significant challenge to the educational systems, requiring policymakers and public administrators’ monitoring, and researchers’ attention.

In literature, the focus is often on the “school factor”, as what educational institutions can do to attract students and to potentially reduce social inequalities. Among those, in the Italian educational system, institutional factors (such as the great freedom of families on school choices) can act as a major driver for reducing overall school segregation, but at the same time new forms of segregation in smaller areas may arise, especially when considering spatial factors (e.g. urban quality, distance between home and school) and social class factors (e.g. social composition of the school).

Between 2020 and 2023, Fondazione per la Scuola of Compagnia di San Paolo, in collaboration with the Municipality of Turin and the University of Turin, developed a study on school segregation in public primary schools in Turin, aiming at quantifying the phenomenon and analyzing its causes. The focus of the analysis are students enrolled in one of the 107 primary schools (in Italian ‘plessi scolastici’) in Turin in the academic year 2022-2023.

The data used for the analysis was provided by the Municipality of Turin and collected through book vouchers. These are documents issued by the local administration that allow families to obtain

textbooks free of charge. Through these book vouchers, it is possible to obtain accurate information about students' primary school enrollments and to link it to other data on the socioeconomic background of their families. This allowed the creation of precise indicators of ethnic and economic segregation, as well as an in-depth analysis of mobility trajectories. The indicators were created through odds ratios comparing i) percentages of immigrant students, ii) students with low SES and iii) students enrolled in schools outside their residential area, at different geographical levels: the city, the districts, and the school catchment areas.

The results highlight the presence of forms of segregation in some of Turin's public primary schools, although the extent of the phenomenon is less intense compared to other large cities where similar studies have been conducted. Geographic proximity between school and residence influences the educational choices of most families, who tend to enroll their children in the area where they live. This reinforces the structural segregation, connected to the spatial segregation already present in the city between its different districts.

At the city and district level, mobility trajectories are almost negligible. However, when looking at the school catchment areas (micro level), the situation becomes different. For a non-negligible portion of families in Turin (40%), even though geographic proximity of their house to the school is still an important element to consider, other factors may come into play, such as the school's reputation and educational offering.

For children that are enrolled in schools in a different catchment area than the one of their residences, the research reveals a dynamic of convergence: the concentration of students from families with migratory backgrounds in some schools often overlaps with a concentration in the same schools of families facing greater economic difficulties. This process of clustering and convergence determines a more pronounced segregation in certain schools compared to the school catchment area or district of reference.

The study confirms the need to observe school segregation at the smallest geographic level possible. At the level of school catchment areas, a dual phenomenon can be observed: on one side, the social, cultural, and economic barriers already present in the area become more severe; on the other, factors other than residence - such as the attractiveness of individual schools – come into play in determining families' educational choices, increasing overall mobility. These results underline the importance of analyzing the role of educational institutions in increasing equity and inclusion within the educational system, especially in liberal systems as the Italian one.