

# What Neighbourhood Context Do Immigrants and Their Descendants Grow up in? A Comparative Study of Four Distinct Generations in France and Sweden

## Introduction

A considerable literature has shown that the neighbourhood context during childhood plays an important role for the later life outcomes of immigrants, their descendants, and natives (Chetty & Hendren, 2018; Zuccotti & Platt, 2017). European studies further report strong intergenerational persistence of living in deprived neighbourhood contexts among immigrant populations (Hermansen et al., 2022; McAvay, 2018). However, findings differ across national contexts (Tran, 2020) and the specific dimensions of the neighbourhood context studied (Andersson et al., 2014).

This study contributes to the literature by analysing different dimensions of the neighbourhood context in France and Sweden, two countries with very distinct migration histories and immigrant compositions. While Sweden and many other European countries were countries of emigration during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, France already received immigrants from Italy, Spain and Belgium during this time. After WWII, immigration to France continued in high numbers from Spain and increasingly from (former) colonies in North and Sub-Saharan Africa. By contrast, Sweden has a considerably shorter history of immigration. During and after WWII Sweden became a country of net immigration, receiving increasing numbers of refugees and family reunion migrants from former Yugoslavia, Iran/Iraq and Somalia in the 1990s. This trend peaked in 2015/6 when more than 71,000 refugee permits were granted to asylum seekers from Syria. Differences in migration histories entail that immigrants and their descendants hail from different origins in Sweden and France. While the top countries of birth in Sweden were Syria, Iraq and Finland in 2019, the top countries of birth in France were Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. In this study, we compare France and Sweden with the aim of assessing whether we observe similarities in the residential integration patterns of immigrants and their descendants in these two distinct reception contexts, despite sharp differences in their migration histories and immigrant compositions.

## Research questions

Using information from the French *Trajectories and Origins 2* (2019-2020, TeO2) survey and *Swedish register data*, we consider the neighbourhood context during childhood across multiple dimensions—immigrant composition, socioeconomic composition, and median income—and across four distinct immigrant generations.

- *Is neighbourhood sorting across generations in the two countries more indicative of straight-line or segmented assimilation? Does the region of origin (non-European vs. European) or the reason for migration (non-refugee vs. refugee) lead to diverging patterns of spatial integration?*
- *Given the differences in migration histories and immigrant compositions in the two countries, are the two cases more different than they are similar or vice versa?*

## Theoretical framework and previous research

The *segmented assimilation theory* highlights the role of disadvantaged socializing contexts for the segmented character of assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993). According to this theory, immigrant groups follow upward or downward assimilation pathways, at least in part, due to differences in their neighbourhood context. This underlines the importance of studying the residential childhood context of immigrants and their descendants.

The segmented assimilation theory further assumes that immigrant groups follow different integration pathways (Portes & Zhou, 1993). The theory posits that the segmented character of assimilation is the result of an interaction between individuals' human capital, parental socioeconomic status, on the one hand, and the characteristics of the co-ethnic community and the policies, values and prejudice in the

receiving society, on the other hand (Zhou & Gonzales, 2019). This leads us to expect distinct spatial integration patterns across regions of origin, and potentially across national contexts.

In contrast, according to *neo-classical assimilation theory*, integration takes place across generations and immigrants' descendants are expected to resemble natives to a greater extent than the first generation (Alba & Nee, 2003; Drouhot & Nee, 2019). This leads us to expect a pattern of convergence in terms of the neighbourhood contexts inhabited by G1.5, G2, G2.5 and G3 towards natives. Previous work indicating overall similar patterns of integration across generations in Europe and the US (Drouhot & Nee, 2019), also leads us to expect similarities in patterns observed in France and Sweden.

Patterns of spatial integration or a lack thereof may be the result of housing market discrimination, economic constraints, and/or the preferences of natives and immigrants for living in certain areas.

## Data and methods

This paper analyses the French *Trajectories and Origins 2* (2019-2020, TeO2) survey and *Swedish register data*, which provide information on geographic units that are comparable in size in the two countries (on average 2,000 inhabitants). Within these geographic units, we construct indicators capturing the neighbourhood composition: (1) the immigrant share, (2) employment rate, (3) median disposable income and (4) percentage with a high school diploma.

Given that we study individuals' childhood context, we restrict our analytical sample to individuals aged 18 and below and who live in the parental home in 2019, when most of the TeO2 interviews were conducted. We identify four distinct generations: immigrants who were below age 18 when they arrived (G1.5), native-born individuals to two foreign-born parents (G2), native-born individuals to one foreign- and one native-born parent (G2.5), and native-born individuals with at least one foreign-born grandparent (G3). We compare these generational status groups to natives (G4+) without immigrant ancestry up to the grandparents' generation.

## Main findings

We analyse four different indicators of neighbourhood composition in France and Sweden and present results from linear regressions in Figures 1-4. The baseline model controls for age and age squared. In a second model, we additionally control for parents' educational attainment, parents' employment status, and household income (labelled Parental SES). All generations are compared to natives (G4+), indicated by the horizontal reference line. Given that the distinction between European and non-European origins is salient in France as in Sweden, we distinguish between non-European and European origins in our analyses of whether patterns of assimilation are segmented. We also identify refugees as they face distinct challenges of incorporation and constitute a sizeable share of the immigrant population in Sweden.

### *Share of immigrants in the neighbourhood*

Figure 1 shows that the share of immigrants in the neighbourhood decreases and approaches that of natives in France and Sweden. The patterns are smoother in France than in Sweden, where G1.5 and G2 live in neighbourhoods with a considerably higher share of immigrants than G2.5 and G3. However, in France we also observe less of a *straight-line* pattern among refugees, who constitute a considerable share of the immigrant population in Sweden. Note that we do not have information on refugee G3 in France, as the TeO2 survey did not include a question on the residence permit of grandparents.

### *Employment rate in the neighbourhood*

Figure 2 indicates that the employment rate in the neighbourhood increases across generations and approaches that of natives. In France, European G2.5 and G3 live in similar neighbourhoods in terms of employment rate as natives. In Sweden, we observe again that G1.5 and G2 live in quite different neighbourhoods than G2.5 and G3 (among non-Europeans, Europeans and refugees). Having a native-born parent (one in the case of G2.5 and two in the case of G3) appears to play an important role for the childhood

context in Sweden, more so than in France. In France, the patterns follow a relatively straight line among non-Europeans, Europeans and refugees.

### ***Median disposable income in the neighbourhood***

In France, all four generations of Europeans live in neighbourhoods where the median disposable income is similar to natives (Figure 3). Among the other groups, the median disposable income is considerably lower in the neighbourhoods inhabited by G1.5 and G2. In Sweden, we observe that G1.5 and G2 tend to live in neighbourhoods with a lower median income than natives and G2.5 and G3. In Sweden, G3 further tend to live in neighbourhoods where the median disposable income is somewhat higher than for natives. The median disposable income in neighbourhoods of non-European G3 is especially high.

### ***Share completed high school or higher in the neighbourhood***

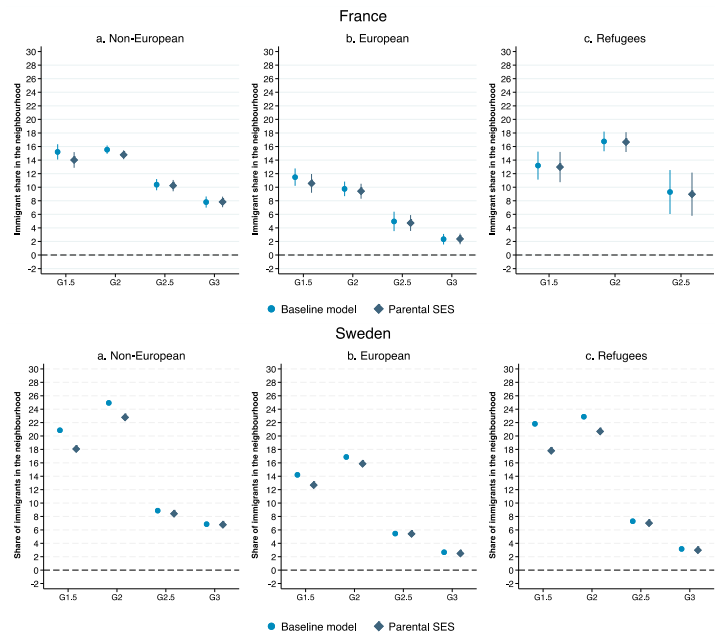
In the baseline model, non-European and refugee G1.5 and G2 tend to live in neighbourhoods where a lower share of individuals has completed high school or higher than natives (Figure 4). We observe this both in Sweden and France. However, once we control for parental SES the share of individuals who completed high school or higher in the neighbourhood (is similar or) higher in typical neighbourhoods inhabited by non-Europeans and European than those inhabited by natives both in France and Sweden. In Sweden, non-European G3 live in neighbourhoods with particularly high shares of individuals who completed high school and higher.

## **Conclusion**

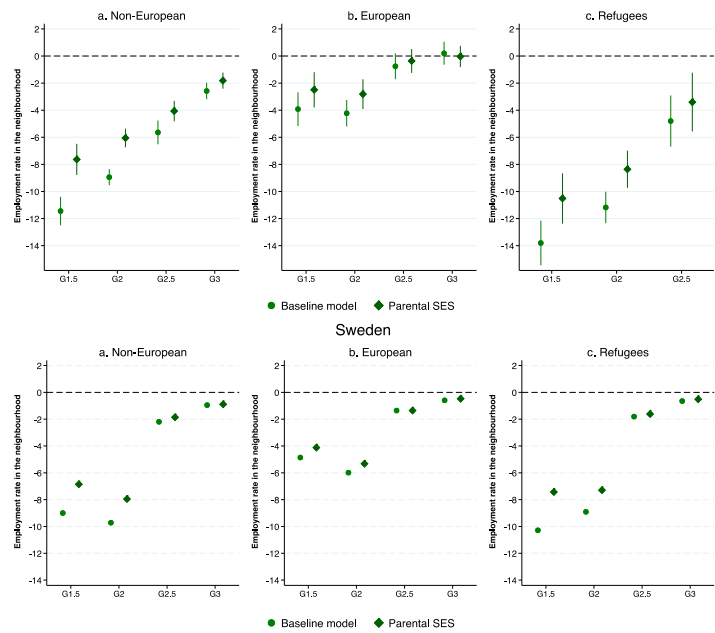
Despite different migration histories and immigrant compositions, we observe many similarities between France and Sweden, and most importantly a similar overall pattern across immigrant generations. In both countries non-European immigrants and their descendants live in neighbourhoods that are distinct from those of natives (at least up to G2). By contrast, differences between Europeans and natives are smaller and sometimes non-significant across the four generations analysed. However, there are some notable distinctions between generations in Sweden. Having one or two native born parents seems to play a more important role for the childhood context in Sweden, while this appears less important in France.

## **References**

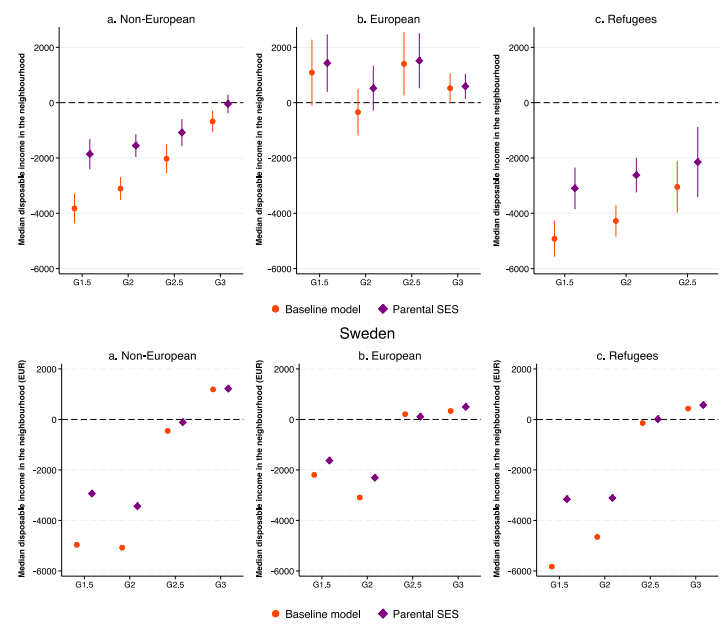
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**Figure 1.** Share of immigrants in the childhood neighbourhood across generations in France and Sweden.

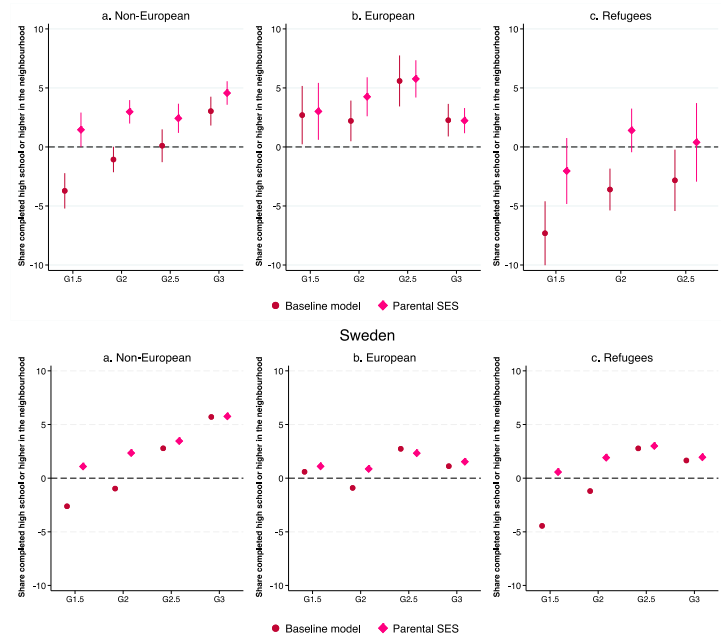


**Figure 2.** Employment rate in the childhood neighbourhood across generations in France and Sweden.



Based on 2023/10/23 conversion rates: 1 SEK = 0.09 EUR

**Figure 3.** Median income in the childhood neighbourhood across generations in France and Sweden.



**Figure 4.** Share completed high school or higher in the childhood neighbourhood across generations in France and Sweden.