

## **Democratizing the ivory tower: Organizing for diversity, inclusion and the representation of descendants of immigrants in research and academia.**

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### **Research Domains**

Academic practice, work, careers and cultures (AP)

### **Abstract**

The representation of academic staff with minority backgrounds remains low in Norwegian higher education (Steine, 2023). This article examines institutional barriers and opportunities for recruiting second-generation migrants to research and academia. It employs for a balanced structure/actor approach where different sources complement each other to answer the research questions: statistical register data, political and institutional steering documents, in particular emphasising the view of descendants of immigrants among master- and Ph.D students, such as their experience of accessibility of the academic community, anticipations of possible future career, and various forms of support, guidance, and mentorship needed to be provided to apply for academic positions. It explores ethical and implementation challenges, as risk of stereotyping identities and career aspirations of ethnic minorities and the challenges of recruiting and securing meaningful engagement from minoritized informants with institutions who have not yet successfully fostered psychological safety and belonging or meaningful commitment to change.

### **Full paper**

Although the Nordic countries are often are frequently regarded as a paradigm of social equality and egalitarianism, especially with regard to access to education, the representation of Norwegians with minority backgrounds (often referred to as second-generation immigrants) in research and teaching positions remains low in Norwegian institutions of higher education, particularly in contrast to increasing rates of participation in higher education among youth with minority backgrounds and high recruitment rates of

international scholars (Steine, 2023), Furthermore, studies have shown compelling evidence that second-generation immigrants face pervasive and enduring discrimination in the job market, and that stigma threat negatively influenced minority students' sense of belonging in higher education institutions (Froehlich et al., 2023; Larsen & Midtbøen, 2024; Midtbøen & Orupabo, 2024). Based on collected empirical data, relevant theory and previous research, this article examines institutional barriers and opportunities for recruiting second-generation migrants to research and academia.

The participation of children in immigrants in higher education and working life has captured political attention in many European countries. However insufficient attention has been directed, from either central authorities or institutions in higher education, at the significance - for democracy, for relevance and quality in knowledge production, of descendants of immigrants being integrated into the academic system. Gradually, this group makes up a larger part of the youth cohorts. However, the universities, as "old institutions" and strategic organizations seems not particularly prepared for their responsibility to facilitate, in this sense, more diverse recruitment for doctoraleducation and academic positions. The underrepresentation of descendants of immigrants (from the global south) in academia is often subject to rationalizations, generalizations, and assumptions including a preference for careers associated with economic security and stability among second-generation immigrants versus precarious research careers, or the generational hypothesis - that it will take time before there is a sufficient "pipeline" of suitable graduate candidates to achieve representation that reflects the composition of the population (Christensen, 2021; Griffin, 2019). These are explanations bypass institutional and structural causes of exclusion and disparity - of material, social and cultural conditions that affect selection and recruitment processes in academia.

The analysis draws on sociological perspectives on the role of institutions in higher education in the production- and reproduction of social inequality, as well as the structural and cultural characteristics of the barriers to recruitment of descendants of immigrants. Garrett (2024) argues that "racism and whiteness is an organizational structural feature" of universities as predominantly white spaces, and that UK higher education institutions "strips racialized minority PhDs and academic staff of their culture and communities" while attempting to increase their representation. PhD degrees are a particular critical stage of career building for early career researchers, and these early experiences of what an academic career would look like for racialized minority PhDs have large effects on their career trajectories and imagined futures (Garrett, 2024, 12). Experiences of not being supported or being granted reasonable adjustments as PhD students made dubious of the institutional capacity to support their intersectional identities as staff members.

This article employs for a balanced structure/actor approach a mixed method approach where different sources complement each other to answer the research questions:

statistical register data, political and institutional steering documents, in particular emphasising the view of descendants of immigrants among master- and Ph.D students, such as their experience of accessibility of the academic community, anticipations of possible future career, and various forms of support, guidance, and mentorship needed to be provided to apply for academic positions. It also explores ethical and implementation challenges, including as risk of stereotyping identities and career aspirations of ethnic minorities as well as in the challenges of recruiting and securing meaningful engagement from minoritized informants with institutions who have not yet successfully fostered psychological safety and belonging or meaningful commitment to change.