



Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe

Country Reports



INTEGRATING IMMIGRANT CHILDREN INTO SCHOOLS IN EUROPE

FINLAND

NATIONAL DESCRIPTION – 2003/04

The national contributions contained on this CD-Rom and on the Eurydice website formed the basis for the comparative study on the integration at school of immigrant children in Europe. Each contribution has exactly the same structure with four main sections entitled as follows:

- 1) National definitions and demographic context of immigration
- 2) Measures offering school-based support to immigrant children and their families
- 3) Intercultural approaches in education
- 4) Evaluation, pilot projects, debates and forthcoming reforms

Contributions are available in English and, in the case of some countries, in French.

1. NATIONAL DEFINITIONS AND DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF IMMIGRATION

1.1. National Definitions and Legislative Sources ⁽¹⁾

An immigrant is a general concept used to describe all the persons who have immigrated to the country, asylum-seekers, refugees, returning Finnish emigrants and others not of Finnish nationality.

Finnish legislation defines an alien as a person who is not a Finnish citizen. Thus an alien may be a citizen of another country or without a citizenship, e.g. a tourist, a businessman, who is in Finland for a short period of time, or a migrant, a refugee or an asylum seeker who has immigrated to the country with the intention of residing there long-term.

Finnish legislation accepts dual or multiple nationality. A Finn who acquires a foreign nationality will not lose his/her Finnish nationality, nor will a foreigner who acquires Finnish nationality be obliged to renounce his/her current nationality. It should be noted, however, that the nationality legislation of the country of origin does not necessarily accept multiple nationality.

A person can acquire Finnish nationality by virtue of either birth, marriage of parents (legitimation), adoption, application for nationality or declaration to the authorities. A child acquires Finnish nationality at birth if the child's mother or father is a Finnish citizen. Also, a child born in Finland who does not acquire the nationality of any other state acquires Finnish nationality.

1.2. Rights to Education and to Support Measures

According to the Basic Education Act (628/1998), all children permanently resident in Finland are subject to compulsory education. Permanent residency means that the child living in Finland intends to stay in the country and has a permit of residence at least for one year. However, irrespective of his/her status, no immigrant child is denied access to the school-based measures described in section 2.

The Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers took force in 1999. The purpose of this act is to set clear objectives for policy on the integration of immigrants and to create cross-sector administrative cooperation with clear areas of responsibility. The Act obliges the municipalities to create an Integration Plan that includes public services geared to the integration of immigrants into society. Educational provision (from early childhood care and education to higher levels) is one of the areas to be covered by the integration plan.

1.3. Demographic Information

The number of immigrants, whose citizenship is other than Finnish, and who live permanently in Finland is 103 682 (January 2003), 2.0 % of the population. 'Living permanently' in Finland means here that the person has been resident in Finland at least for one year, his/her residence is considered permanent and he/she has a Finnish personal identity number. The largest group are Russians (23.5 %), the second largest Estonians (12.0 %), followed by Swedes (7.8 %) and refugees from Somalia (4.4 %) (see also table in annexe).

Most of the immigrants who have settled in Finland are from the former Soviet Union, and many of them are of Finnish nationality, so called Ingrian-Finnish returnees (i.e. people who were transferred in 1943 and 1944 to Finland from the Soviet Union but had to be returned back after the war). The majority of immigrants live in southern Finland.

(1) Relevant legislation includes Nationality Act (2003), Finnish Aliens Act (1991), Finnish Aliens Decree (1994) and Act and Decree on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers (1999).

There are some ten countries in the world, which receive quota refugees. Finland is one of them. Quotas are approved annually in conjunction with the national budget. In its programme for immigration and refugee policy in 1997 the Government set a gradual increase in the quota to 1 000 as the goal. The total number of refugees at the moment (early 2004) in Finland is about 23 000. They are considered to be living permanently in Finland.

A total of 3 184 persons sought asylum in Finland in 2003. The largest group (561 applicants) came from Serbia and Montenegro and its predecessors the former Yugoslavia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The second largest group were the Bulgarians (287) and the third largest group the Russians (288). Seven applicants were granted asylum in 2003 (and thus the residence is considered permanent). 494 asylum applicants were granted a residence permit, 142 of which on the basis of the need for protection and 345 for other reasons. The residence permit of persons in these groups is temporary.

The official languages of Finland are Finnish (94 %) and Swedish (5.6 %), and the third official language is Sami, spoken by approximately 1 700 inhabitants (0.03 %) in the northern parts of Finland.

The number of immigrants living permanently in Finland, whose mother tongue is other than Finnish, Swedish or Sami, is 117 013 (January 2003), 2.2 % of the population. This group includes immigrants who have gained Finnish citizenship. The largest language groups here are Russian (28.5 %), Estonian (10.2 %), English (6.6 %) and Somali (6.3 %).

Figure 1: Number of pupils with Finnish/Swedish as a second language in the age of basic education

	1997	2001
Total number of children with Finnish/Swedish as a second language grade 0 (pre-primary) (1)	1 020	1 593
Total number of pupils, grade 0 (2)	N/A	61 677
Total number of pupils with Finnish/Swedish as a second language, grades 1-9	10 997	14 294
Total number of pupils, Grades 1-9	567 625	567 116
Pupils with Finnish/Swedish as a second language of total, grades 1-9	1.9 %	2.5 %

Source: Statistics Finland/National Board of Education.

Note: Asylum-seekers are not included in the figure.

- (1) Offering pre-primary education became mandatory for municipalities only in 2001. Attending pre-primary education is voluntary. Information on number of pupils with Finnish/Swedish as a second language attending pre-primary education is not available.
- (2) This row gives the number of pupils in pre-primary education, not all children of that age. That is why the percentage of the previous row cannot be calculated.

Figure 2: Pupils in basic and general upper secondary education with Finnish/Swedish as a second language participating in the school-based measures preparatory teaching, remedial teaching and teaching in the own mother tongue (the measures are described in section 2)

	Preparatory teaching (pre-primary / basic)	Remedial teaching	Teaching of mother tongue
1993	1 221	n/a	2 870
1994	869	5 165	3 464
1995	397	6 730	5 013
1996	482	6 890	6 446
1997	779	7 021	7 893
1998	1 072	8 130	9 786
1999	1 304	n/a	10 025
2000	1 537	8 003	10 227
2001	1 300	7 700	10 690
2002	1 497	7 552	11 408

Source: National Board of Education.

2. MEASURES OFFERING SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT TO IMMIGRANT CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

2.1. Reception and Guidance

National authorities maintain websites with information about educational opportunities in Finland ⁽²⁾. Municipalities, as education providers, publish information about their educational services on their websites and in separate brochures. For instance, Helsinki has produced a brochure in English, Russian, Estonian and Somali. Some municipalities publish guides with information for immigrants – not just about schools – but also housing, day-care, health services, leisure and cultural services, etc.

In some schools, immigrant parents have been invited to attend information sessions given in their own language on the Finnish education system etc.

Schools having pupils with an immigrant background often appoint some of the teachers as coordinators or guidance counsellors. Using pupils as tutors is another way of promoting the integration of immigrant pupils. School assistants are also used to support immigrant pupils in the learning process. Assistants, like all other school staff, are employed by the education provider (usually the municipality).

2.2. Integration into School Learning

Pre-Primary Education (Esiopetus)

Education for immigrant children of pre-primary age (6 years) can be organized in conjunction with other pre-school education, in the form of preparatory instruction for basic education or as a combination of these. Government funds based on the number of participants and unit price set by the government are made available to the education providers (municipal and private) for arranging preparatory teaching.

Instruction follows the general educational and learning objectives of pre-school education (as set forth in the core curriculum for pre-school education in Finland 2000) taking into account, however, children's backgrounds. Instruction aims to support the development of the Finnish (or Swedish) language as well as that of children's own mother tongue and to provide immigrant children with the opportunity to grow into two cultures.

Immigrant pupils of pre-primary age can be integrated into basic education groups teaching the mother tongue of the child or Finnish (or Swedish) as a second language.

Basic Education (Perusopetus)

All government funding mentioned here is available for municipal as well as private education providers ⁽³⁾.

Teaching of recently arrived immigrant children can be arranged in preparatory teaching groups, if possible, or integrated into mainstream education, with support being provided according to the children's needs. Such support usually requires flexibility in the organisation of teaching, and the statutes allow special arrangements for instruction in religion and the second national language as well as for pupil assessment (see below).

According to the Basic Education Act (628/1998), municipalities and other bodies authorised to provide education may arrange **preparatory teaching** for basic education. This is designed to provide a transition to basic education and concentrates on Finnish culture, the various subjects of basic education, Finnish (or Swedish) as a second language and the mother tongue of the pupil. Teaching is aimed at immigrants of the age of six and those in compulsory education. Preparatory teaching is provided for a minimum of 450 hours for the six-to-ten year olds and 500 hours for the older pupils. Pupils can be integrated into Finnish- or Swedish-speaking classes

⁽²⁾ See, for example, the website of the National Board of Education: <http://www.edu.fi/english/SubPage.asp?path=500;574>.

⁽³⁾ Only 2.2 % of the pupils in basic education attend private schools.

already during the preparatory teaching when appropriate (e.g. for sports, music or the arts). Teaching comes under the regulations issued by the National Board of Education (69/011/95). According to the terms of the relevant regulations the Government will refund part of the expenses incurred by preparatory teaching.

Immigrant pupils in basic education whose knowledge of the Finnish (or Swedish) language is not at the level of their mother tongue follow the syllabus of **Finnish (or Swedish) as a second language**. Immigrant pupils generally study Finnish (or Swedish), and literature in mainstream classes as well as in separate groups of their own. The latter can be funded by a separate subsidy from the government.

The Basic Education Act entitles all pupils to **remedial teaching**; this applies also to immigrant pupils. In addition, extra funding may be provided for remedial teaching for immigrant pupils.

Remedial teaching in various subjects may be given to immigrant pupils who have been in the country for less than four years in their mother tongue. Those who have been in the country longer and pupils in pre-primary education may also participate, but no extra funding is granted.

In basic education, the government subsidy for remedial teaching provides at most one weekly lesson per school and a lesson every two weeks for each pupil entitled to remedial teaching; this subsidy covers at the most 86 % of calculated costs.

In 2001, a total of 7 700 pupils participated in remedial teaching in basic and upper secondary education. This is 48 % of the total number of immigrant pupils on these levels of education (16 141). (Source: National Board of Education)

A pupil, whose mother tongue is other than the one of the school (Finnish/Swedish) and his/her knowledge of Finnish/Swedish is estimated not to be at the level of his/her mother tongue, is assessed according to the syllabus of Finnish/Swedish as second language. The background of the pupil and the increasing command of Finnish/Swedish is taken into consideration also in the assessment of other subjects. To reduce the impact of possible deficiencies in the Finnish/Swedish language versatile and flexible methods of assessment are used. In the leaving certificate, if at least half of the lessons in certain subject on grades 7 – 9 of basic education have been given in some other language than Finnish/Swedish, the language in question is mentioned (Framework for pupil assessment in basic education, 1999).

The National Board of Education has set up teacher networks to help in matters related to immigrant education. One is a network of regional support staff. Such staff consists of teachers in basic education or upper secondary schools that can be contacted in matters related to teaching and teaching material. The support teacher may also be invited to give lectures or to attend seminars, with the organising body covering lecture fees and other expenses.

The National Board of Education produces learning material as well as supplementary material for use in schools that teach immigrant pupils. The selection includes textbooks on Finnish language and culture, glossaries on various subjects, bibliographies, support material for teaching minority languages etc.

In the 2001 development programme for teacher training (see 3.2), the Ministry of Education included an immediate reinforcement of in-service training in minority languages and cultures; this was seen as an important topic in continuing teacher education and training.

2.3. Support for the Language, Culture and Religion of Origin

Immigrant pupils in basic education may study their mother tongue as their first language within the school's normal curriculum, which also emphasises the importance of cultural aspects in mother tongue teaching (Framework curriculum for the comprehensive school, 1994). Teaching can also be arranged in some other way, normally using special resource hours (two weekly lessons for each group). It is not mandatory for the education provider to arrange teaching of the immigrant pupils' mother tongue. However, 96 municipalities did so in 2002, the total number of languages being 50.

A specific government subsidy is granted for arranging the teaching of immigrant pupils' mother tongues. There is a similar subsidy for maintaining the knowledge of a foreign language acquired abroad by Finnish- or Swedish-speaking pupils if this language is not included in the pupil's study programme.

To qualify for the government subsidy, there must be a minimum of four pupils per group at the beginning of the term. Pupils in the group may be drawn from different grades in different municipalities, from private as well as state schools and from pre-primary education.

The government subsidy provides for two weekly lessons for each group. It covers at the most 86 % of calculated costs.

The Basic Education Act also allows education to be carried out, wholly or in part, in the mother tongue of the immigrant. Some municipalities have offered either bilingual or own-language education in Arabic, Somali, Russian, Vietnamese and Estonian.

In 2001, 10 690 pupils in basic and upper secondary education participated in mother-tongue lessons. This is 66 % of the total number of immigrant pupils on these levels (16 141). (Source: National Board of Education)

Tuition in religion is arranged in accordance with the religion of the majority of the pupils. Pupils not belonging to this religious community are entitled to tuition in their own religion if their parents/guardians so wish, and if there are three or more pupils of the same religion to form a group. If instruction in a pupil's own religion is not available, the pupil must be provided with some other form of teaching or supervised activities.

2.4. Adaptation of Daily School Life

A free lunch is served to all pupils in pre-primary and basic education. Special diets can be arranged for reasons of personal belief, religion, allergies etc. There is also flexibility and the possibility of exemption regarding participation in sports (e.g. swimming), music lessons, school festivities etc.

2.5. Access to School Services and Special Financial Assistance

According to law, the local authorities are obliged to organise basic education free of charge for school-aged children living within their respective areas. In addition to instruction, other school services, including learning materials, daily meals and school health care are provided free of charge. Pupils with immigrant background have equal access to these services.

2.6. Language Tuition for Parents and Families

(See 2.7)

2.7. Information to Parents

Special measures to support cooperation with the parents of immigrant pupils can be taken at the discretion and initiative of individual schools/municipalities. There is a wide range of good practices, including e.g. regular meetings arranged specifically for immigrant parents, tuition in Finnish (or Swedish) provided by the children's school and the availability of interpreters for communication between school and parents. Immigrants have a statutory right to interpretation only in issues raised at the outset by the authorities. However, the provision of interpretation services is encouraged by national authorities and also occurs in practice in accordance with the municipal resources available ⁽⁴⁾. There is also a specific State (Ministry of Labour) subsidy to promote the use of interpreters in municipalities, whose interpretation costs in home-school cooperation may be reimbursed. One of

⁽⁴⁾ To illustrate this, the Espoo website states that 'Immigrants in Espoo are offered a variety of activities and counselling for different situations in life. It is often possible to find service in one's native language.'

the main principle is that there should be cross-sectoral and multi-professional cooperation so as to ensure pupils' welfare.

At national level, initiatives include e.g. meetings of parents from different cultural groups organised annually by the National Board of Education.

In the new national core curriculum for basic education cooperation between homes and schools is emphasised (see 4.3).

3. INTERCULTURAL APPROACHES IN EDUCATION

3.1. Curriculum and School Activities

The role of pre-school education is to promote children's growth into humane individuals and ethically responsible membership of society by guiding them towards responsible action, compliance with generally accepted rules and appreciation of other people. It is also hoped that children will, insofar as possible, familiarise themselves with other cultures.

Internationality is only mentioned specifically in legislation in connection with basic education. Government Decree 1435/2001 lays down national objectives for basic education, including the provision that pupils should be educated to be responsible and co-operative and to act in a spirit of tolerance and trust between groups of people, peoples and cultures.

The new Core Curriculum for Forms 1-2 of Basic Education, adopted in 2002, includes internationality as one of the general objectives. The values of basic education are based on respect for human rights, preservation of biodiversity and the viability of the globe and acceptance of multiculturalism. In their instruction, pupils familiarise themselves with their cultural heritage and are prepared for the development of culture and an active participation in an increasingly international world.

One of the objectives of foreign language instruction is to create curiosity and an unprejudiced attitude towards different languages and cultures.

The framework curriculum for the comprehensive school (1994) views the appreciation of one's own culture as an integral part of internationalisation. The transition of the Finnish school system into a multicultural environment and its subsequent growth into tolerance and openness to different cultural backgrounds, opinions and languages provide a framework for international cooperation. The internationalisation of operating environments and the European integration process require schools to place greater emphasis, in terms of curriculum content, on increasing interaction in the various areas of culture, diversifying language studies and intensifying education for international understanding.

The framework curriculum for the comprehensive school (1994) encompasses inter-curricular issues which must be taught in different subjects and which play a role in other schoolwork. International education is one of these inter-curricular themes: 'The contents of international education include skills in international interaction, peaceful solutions to conflicts, knowledge of different cultures, tolerance towards difference, elementary cultural literacy, the ethics of human rights, preparation for global citizenship, and attention to and evaluation of international developments.'

Specific instructions given to teachers related to immigrant issues are left up to the initiative and activity of the education providers. The National Board of Education has support material on its web-pages and offers in-service training for teachers also on this field.

A wide range of cultural activities promoting multiculturalism exists at local level.

In Finland, schools are encouraged to establish contacts and to network with schools in other countries, for example, via ICT, twinning of schools, bilateral exchange programmes, participation in Comenius projects and use of assistant teachers from abroad.

3.2. Teacher Training

The national degree regulations (in this case, Decree on Degrees in Education and Teacher Education – 576/1995 – as well as other relevant decrees on university degrees) define the objectives, scope and overall structure of degrees. Within the framework of these regulations, the universities decide on the contents and structure of their degrees in more detail. They also decide on their annual curricula and forms of instruction. The provision varies between universities, ranging from optional courses on multicultural aspects of education to internationally oriented Master of Education Programmes.

The Teacher Education Development Programme published by the Ministry of Education in 2001 gives recommendations for development of initial and continuing teacher education and training. According to the recommendations, multiculturalism should be one of the important elements in pedagogical studies for teachers. For continuing education, the 'education of linguistic minorities and immigrants' is defined as a specific priority area:

The teacher needs an ability to cope with the growing diversity of learners, multiculturalism, changes in the work environment and diverse expectations emanating from the surrounding society.

The teacher needs skills in taking part in international cooperation and working in a multicultural institution. Knowledge of cultures, intercultural action and multicultural aspects must be included in all teacher education and training. In-service training relating to minority languages and cultures must be intensified without delay.'

The Government gives financial support to in-service training, which is an important part of education policy.

4. EVALUATION, PILOT PROJECTS, DEBATES AND FORTHCOMING REFORMS

4.1. Evaluation

The National Board of Education is currently conducting a survey on teaching immigrant children in Finland. A questionnaire has been sent to all municipalities asking how teaching of the immigrant children is arranged in basic education and vocational and general upper secondary education.

4.2. Pilot Projects

Various stakeholders are providing support material and ideas for schools' intercultural education and cultural activities. These include e.g.:

- Global Challenge, a joint project of the National Board of Education and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Department for Development Policy) to support the internationalisation of schools. The activities include production of teaching material and the organisation of seminars and training.
- A three-year project of the Service Centre for Development Cooperation, *Kepa*, and its member organisations to boost global education in Finland. The network of global education produces web pages, training and teaching materials.
- Finland's Summer High School Association arranges courses for immigrant children. Courses on the native language and culture of the refugee children and youth in Finland are arranged to help them maintain and strengthen their cultural identity. These courses are held in different parts of the country, and vary from a

weekend to a ten-day course and they are intended for schoolchildren. The information on these courses can be obtained e.g. from schools and other local authorities.

4.3. Debates and Forthcoming Reforms

According to the government program the linguistic and cultural rights of children belonging to different language groups should be strengthened. For example, there have been demands for extension of the preparatory teaching from half a year to a whole school year.

The Ministry of Education will appoint a working group to look into the challenges and development needs of teacher education relating to immigrant pupils and the increasing multiculturalism of Finnish schools.

The new national core curriculum for basic education, which replaces the framework curriculum for the comprehensive school (1994) was approved by National Board of Education in January 2004. All education providers have to apply this core curriculum to their own curricula at the latest from August 2006. Compared to the 1994 core curriculum the new one defines the measures for immigrant pupils more clearly and enables e.g. individual study plans for them. In the cooperation between homes and school the cultural background of the families is taken into consideration as well as experiences from the school system in the country of origin. Parents and carers are acquainted with the Finnish school system, curriculum, evaluation, teaching methods and pupils' study plans.

The National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES) has drawn up guidelines for early childhood education in day-care. It offers a framework for municipalities for developing their curricula for early childhood care and education including recommendations regarding immigrant children.

ANNEXE

Country of origin for immigrants in Finland 1990-2002

Country of origin	1990	1995	2000	2002
Russia	.	9 720	20 552	24 336
Estonia	.	8 446	10 839	12 428
Sweden	6 051	7 014	7 887	8 037
Somalia	44	4 044	4 190	4 537
Yugoslavia	75	2 407	3 575	4 224
Iraq	107	1 341	3 102	3 420
UK	1 365	1 865	2 207	2 535
Germany	1 568	1 748	2 201	2 461
Iran	336	1 275	1 941	2 363
USA	1 475	1 844	2 010	2 146
Turkey	310	1 335	1 784	2 146
China	312	1 412	1 668	2 086
Former Soviet Union	4 181	6 163	2 447	2 011
Thailand	239	763	1 306	1 784
Vietnam	292	2 084	1 814	1 713
Bosnia-Herzegovina	.	928	1 627	1 701
Ukraine	.	366	961	1 248
Other	9 900	15 811	20 963	24 506
Total	26 255	68 566	91 074	103 682

Source: Statistics Finland.

Note: The figure does not include refugees, asylum seekers or persons who have gained Finnish citizenship. In the years 1991-2002 the total number of immigrants who gained Finnish citizenship was 24 183.