



Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe

Country Reports



INTEGRATING IMMIGRANT CHILDREN INTO SCHOOLS IN EUROPE

FRANCE

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

A *foreigner* is a person who does not have French nationality.

An *immigrant* is a person born abroad who does not possess French nationality and who has entered France with the intention of settling there permanently.

The statuses of asylum seeker and refugee currently in force correspond to the terms of international conventions.

Children born in France automatically acquire French nationality (which they may renounce when they reach the age of majority). Application may be made for French nationality after five years of residence on French territory.

1.2. Rights to Education and Support Measures

From a strictly legislative and regulatory standpoint, the **grounds for action** on behalf of immigrant pupils lie in the right of any child or young person to education and in the absence of discrimination between French and foreign citizens as regards the legal obligation to provide it; they are upheld by the legislative part of the education code adopted by order No. 2000-549 of 15 June 2000, and particularly article L.131 – 1 which states: ‘instruction is compulsory for both French and foreign children of both sexes between the ages of 6 and 16’.

The education code also states specifically that citizens of the European Union or a State within the European Economic Area are subject to the same provisions as French pupils as regards continuation of their education: this applies whenever they are admitted to a particular stage of education or training or if they have not reached a recognised level of education on completion of compulsory schooling.

New regulations concerning the registration of immigrant pupils and the education of new arrivals whose mother tongue is not French, were published in 2002 to update actions that have been carried out for some 30 years ⁽¹⁾.

Circular No. 91-124 of 6 June 1991 draws attention to the fact that: ‘no discrimination may be exercised as regards the admission of foreign children into nursery school classes’.

It is not for the Ministry of Education to ensure that children and their families are legally resident, as it has been invested with no responsibility for doing so by the legislator. The temporary or full residence permit are issued subject to formal proof that the young person concerned is receiving education or training in France. Registration of pupils of foreign nationality irrespective of age must not therefore be dependent on their producing a residence permit. Registration and de facto allocation of immigrant pupils to a school following an assessment of their knowledge should take no longer than a month.

In the French education system, the expression *soutien scolaire* (‘educational support’) has particular connotations and is used to refer to pupils in difficulty. Immigrant pupils who have been in France for a long time and who encounter problems at school benefit in the same way as French pupils from arrangements for assistance and support provided by the education system.

However, new arrivals whose mother tongue is not French are offered special supporting measures.

⁽¹⁾ See the *bulletin officiel de l'éducation nationale spécial* No.10 of 25 April 2002.

1.3. Demographic Information

The most recent demographic data dates from the last general census in March 1999. At that time, 4 310 000 immigrants (a third of them with French nationality) were resident in metropolitan France, and represented 7.4 % of the population, a proportion which had remained constant since 1975.

In recent years, by far the great majority of immigrants have come from outside Europe. They have arrived primarily from the Maghrib countries and Turkey (across France as a whole, with Turks mainly in the east), sub-Saharan and West Africa and south-east Asia (in the three largest French cities and their suburbs). Also noteworthy are the relatively high proportions of Chinese and the presence of large communities from the Comoros in Paris and Marseille, from Senegal and Mali in the Île-de-France and, more recently, from Pakistan and Sri-Lanka in Paris. Immigration from the countries of central and eastern Europe and from Russia is starting to develop in Île-de-France and its surrounding *académies* (educational catchment areas corresponding to geographically decentralised departments of the Ministry of Education).

According to Ministry of Education statistics for 2002, immigrant pupils accounted for 6 % of enrolments in primary education (as opposed to 10.5 % in 1985), and 4.6 % of enrolments in secondary education (as against 7.5 % in 1990).

Out of 372 000 immigrant pupils in primary education, the most strongly represented nationalities are Moroccan (86 000 pupils), Algerian (54 000), Tunisian (27 000) and Turkish (48 000), while 48 000 pupils are nationals of an African country. At 37 000, the Portuguese are the most numerous among the 60 000 European Union citizens.

Out of 245 000 immigrant pupils in secondary education (compared to 412 000 in 1990), 64 000 are Moroccan, 26 000, Algerian, 18 000 Tunisian, 32 000 come from African countries and 22 500 from Turkey. Out of 43 500 European Union citizens, 26 400 are Portuguese. There are also 11 000 pupils from European countries outside the EU.

The majority of immigrant pupils are concentrated in the conurbations of the three largest French cities (Paris, Lyon and Marseille), on the eastern fringes of France (from Strasbourg to Corsica), in the 'Nord' *département* (corresponding to the Lille *académie*) and French Guiana ⁽²⁾.

Even if the percentage of immigrant pupils is tending to fall (partly as a result of those who take out French nationality), new immigrant flows (particularly from certain eastern European countries and republics in the former USSR) have led in recent years to the arrival of increasing numbers of young people, some of whom had little or no education although many of them were close to the upper age limit for compulsory education. Also noteworthy is the arrival of a significant number of young pupils in the *lycée* (upper secondary school) age-group, who have been soundly educated in their country of origin. In the 2002/03 school year, the total number of young new arrivals in the age-group subject to compulsory education was close to 34 350. The corresponding number in 2000/01 was 27 026.

According to the May 2002 report of the General Inspectorate for (national) Education and the General Inspectorate for the Administration of (national) Education and Research, concerning procedures in eight *académies* ⁽³⁾ for educating pupils who had very recently arrived in France and whose mother tongue was not French, their numbers have increased from 6 % to 20 % of all immigrant pupil arrivals over the last decade, with a very clear deterioration in the situation regarding the rights of immigrants. Indeed, the number of irregular immigrant children is rising and may account, for example, for as many as five-sixths of immigrant pupils in the big towns of the Montpellier *académie* for example. The same report also reveals a general increase in the age of children arriving in France and, therefore, a relative increase in those enrolled in secondary education.

⁽²⁾ The *académies* which enrol the greatest numbers of pupils, with respect to the total number, are the following: (French) Guiana (30.2 %), Paris (18.7 %), Corsica (14.9 %), Créteil (11 %), Versailles (9.9 %), Strasbourg (9.4 %), Lyon (8.7 %) and Nice (8.1 %).

⁽³⁾ The *académies* of Paris, Versailles, Créteil, Aix-Marseille, Lyon, Strasbourg, Toulouse and Montpellier, in which 80 % of immigrant newcomers are concentrated.

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

In pre-primary education, there are no special supporting measures for immigrant children. The arrangements for support for new arrivals whose mother tongue is not French, which are described below, relate to primary and lower secondary education. Their aim is to encourage sound attainment at school on the part of these young people and contribute to their integration, by enabling them to master French and then consolidate their knowledge of it.

In primary and secondary education, there is also an educational provision – the scheme for *Zones d'éducation prioritaire* (ZEPs, or priority educational areas) – which entitles certain schools to higher teacher/pupil ratios, as well as increases in their grant for operational resources. Certain criteria are used to decide whether a school should receive additional resources, including the number of families sending pupils to it in which at least one member is a national of a non-European country.

2.1. Reception and Guidance

Circular No. 2002-100 of 25 April 2002 on educational provision for pupils who are newcomers to France and have an inadequate knowledge of French or difficulty with learning, states that their knowledge should be evaluated by the school concerned. They should then be enrolled in a mainstream class corresponding to their age and educational level, either on a fully integrated basis with special support provided if necessary, or while simultaneously enrolled part time in a reception or introductory class (see 2.2) In secondary education pupils may, depending on their attainment, be enrolled in a class at a lower level provided this is no more than two years behind their age-group.

The initial assessment of immigrant pupils, which should as far as possible be conducted in their previous language of instruction, should focus on:

- the skills they have developed at school using that particular language and how far they have learnt to read and write there;
- ability in French, in order to determine whether they are total beginners or whether they master rudiments of spoken and written French;
- experience acquired in various areas, including personal interests, which may constitute important educational building blocks.

It is especially crucial to find out how far these pupils have become familiar with the written medium, irrespective of the particular system of writing involved, so that they are not automatically regarded as unable to read and write because they do not know how to read and write in French.

It is recommended that these assessments should be reasonably flexible in determining how many years pupils have to recoup vis-à-vis the skills under consideration and the effort required for them to catch up, as for some of them a shortfall of one or even two years does not ultimately impede their progress if they have to attend school for a long time.

Many bilingual tests have been prepared to assess the school attainment of young people on their arrival in France, in particular by the *Institut national d'Étude du Travail et d'Orientation professionnelle* (INETOP, or the National Institute for the Study of Work and for Professional Guidance) ⁽⁴⁾ and by numerous *académie* centres for educating newcomers to the country and the children of travellers.

⁽⁴⁾ Since 1999, the INETOP (Paris) with financial support from the EU Socrates Programme (phases 1 and 2) has updated its tests in 27 native languages for evaluating the ability of *collège* (lower secondary school) pupils in mathematics using closed questions. The Institute has also produced mother tongue multiple-choice tests intended to assess logical reasoning skills. An investigation in the area of professional interests is also available.

Information for parents on the kind of education suitable for their children: see 2.7.

2.2. Integration Into School Learning

Pupils who are newcomers to France and have an inadequate knowledge of French or difficulty with learning receive intensive daily part-time tuition for a limited period in French as a second language (for learning school subjects and for socialisation). This provision, which is distinct from tuition in French as a foreign language, is offered in **classes d'initiation** (CLINs, or beginners' classes) in primary schools, and **classes d'accueil** (CLAs, or introductory classes) in secondary education. It is relatively more intensive at the outset and then gradually reduced, and those targeted are increasingly taught various subjects in mainstream classes.

The aim is to achieve full mainstream integration of these pupils as soon as possible by the end of a year or, at most, two years in the case of those who have either arrived in France during the school year, or who on arrival possess a low level of attainment for admission to the final stage of primary school (cycle III corresponding to the last three years) or to secondary education. The provision of support with learning French is advocated where necessary when pupils transfer to the mainstream curriculum.

A more precisely targeted scheme of **classes d'accueil pour élèves non scolarisés antérieurement** (CLA-NSA, introductory classes for pupils with no previous education), is provided in secondary education, essentially in the *lycées professionnels* (vocational *lycées*) but also in *collèges* (lower secondary schools) for them first to acquire everyday spoken French and then the rudiments of reading and writing French. Pupils nevertheless join mainstream classes in which good knowledge of French is not a basic consideration (physical and sports education, music, plastic arts, etc.). The aim is for these young people to establish clear professional objectives.

For schools to provide beginners' or introductory classes, they must enrol at least 15 pupils who are newcomers to France with inadequate knowledge of French. Otherwise, tuition in the language is in most cases offered to pupils by teachers paid overtime for the work involved.

The CLIN and CLA are financed by the State, which also remunerates the teachers who offer this tuition. The corresponding budgetary provision is paid out as overtime with respect to allocations for the basic hourly rate by the *académie* inspectorate in the case of primary schools and *collèges*, and by the *rectorat* (*académie* administration) in the case of *lycées*. All such arrangements are included in the school development plan.

In primary education, the number of beginners' classes in all *départements* in France (including overseas *départements*) went up from 893 in 1994/95 to 1 137 in 2002/03. In secondary education, the corresponding figures for introductory classes, which are offered mainly in *collèges*, rose from 126 in 1980/81 to 464 in 1996/97, and then to 762 in 2002/03.

For purposes of CLIN and CLA, the *académie* authorities appoint first and foremost those who have received training in teaching French as a second or foreign language. This training is offered by the *académie* centres for educating newcomers to the country and the children of travellers, in collaboration with *Instituts universitaires de Formation des Maîtres* (IUFMs, or university teacher training institutes) and universities. It is intended for teachers of French but also of other subjects. Further assistance may sometimes be provided by auxiliary staff in an extramural setting.

A brochure for *collège* teachers was published by the *Centre national de Documentation pédagogique* (CNDP, or national centre for information on education and teaching) in December 2000. Entitled *le français langue seconde* ('French as a second language'), it provides guidelines for teachers, which are designed to supplement standard curricula for French language teaching, and model exercises. Preparation of a similar brochure for primary school teachers is in hand.

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

The mother tongue (native language) is taught in courses on the language and culture of origin organised by primary schools and *collèges* when the language concerned is not offered as a modern foreign language. This teaching is provided in accordance with bilateral agreements that have been reached with the following countries: Algeria, Spain, Italy, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia, Turkey and Serbia-Montenegro. Teachers are remunerated by the country of origin and the courses concerned are being made fully compatible with French curricula.

France is a secular republic respectful of all beliefs as stated in Article 1 of the Constitution. However, beliefs of this kind belong to the private domain and religious instruction as such is not provided. That said, French language and history curricula offer an introduction to various religions.

2.4. Adaptation of Daily School Life

Menus on offer in school canteens take account of the customary culinary preferences of immigrant families, and several days' holiday are granted to mark Armenian, Buddhist, Jewish, and Muslim festivals for the pupils concerned.

2.5. Access to School Services and Special Financial Assistance

Like other pupils, immigrant pupils receive family means-tested grants and grants awarded on the basis of merit in ZEPs and, depending on their family resources, they are exempt from certain financial contributions to the provision of school services.

2.6. Language Tuition for Parents and Families

Groups of secondary schools may provide courses for adult immigrants.

2.7. Information to Parents

Teams of educators are asked to develop an ongoing dialogue with immigrant families to explain to them the regulations that govern the functioning of the French education system, the arrangements for advising and guiding pupils as regards particular courses or types of provision, and the right of parents to take part in school councils or in certain activities.

Primary and secondary schools are strongly encouraged to supply this information with the assistance of interpreters or by means of a document introducing the school both in relevant first languages and in French.

They may also use a document entitled *École au coeur de la vie* ('School at the Heart of Life') and widely circulated in the *académies*, with back-up in the form of printed materials and audio and video cassettes. Published in 1996 at the request of the Ministry of Education by the *Office national d'Information sur les Enseignements et les Professions* (ONISEP, the national information office on education and training services and the professions), this document is intended for families but also teachers and partners of the Ministry at local level and is available in English, Arabic, French, Tamil, Turkish and Soninké.

3. INTERCULTURAL APPROACHES IN EDUCATION

3.1. Curriculum and School Activities

Primary school, *collège* and *lycée* curricula focus proactively on other cultures, thus enabling all pupils, French or immigrant, to study other civilisations and what they have to offer, as part of the normal school curriculum.

While learning French, it is possible to study works of foreign literature, and a recommended list of authors' works is provided at all levels of education. It includes authors from Europe, the Maghrib, Turkey, Asia (Vietnam, China, Japan, the Indian sub-continent), Africa (particularly Senegal and Mali), and North and South America.

In history, Arab Islamic civilisation is part of the primary and lower secondary school curriculum; in geography, study of Europe, the Maghrib, Africa, Asia and America is included in the curriculum. Similar scope is offered by courses in music, the plastic arts and the sciences.

Language teaching also includes a cultural dimension. More in-depth provision is offered in the international, European or the oriental languages sections of schools (more intensive language teaching, teaching part of the timetable for some subjects in a foreign language, ensuring that courses in literature, history and geography that include parts of the curriculum from the country of origin are fully compatible).

Emphasis has also been placed on education in civics in order to help nurture tolerance, fight racism and introduce pupils to republican values.

3.2. Teacher Training

Centres in the *académies* providing tuition for newcomers to France and the children of travellers offer teachers short courses (lasting a few hours) to familiarise them with immigrant cultures. Such provision may be part of initial or in-service training.

4. EVALUATION, PILOT PROJECTS, DEBATES AND FORTHCOMING REFORMS

4.1. Evaluation

A comprehensive study by the Ministry of Education directorate for evaluation and forward planning, entitled 'Immigrant pupils or pupils of immigrant origin in French primary and secondary schools' was published in issue No. 67 of *Dossiers d'éducation et formations* in April 1996. It monitored an age cohort of pupils who entered the first year of secondary education (the so-called 'sixth' class) in 1989 up to 1995. Its conclusions pointed to differences between the proportions of immigrant and French pupils who achieved satisfactory attainment rates, and the fact that the former were more frequently encouraged to enrol in branches of vocational education than French pupils. Such disparities are especially marked if immigration is a recent occurrence and if pupils come from a disadvantaged social background.

In May 2002, these data were corroborated by the report of the General Inspectorate for (national) Education and the General Inspectorate for the Administration of (national) Education and Research, on arrangements for educating pupils who had recently come to France and whose mother tongue was not French. The report was concerned with CLA in eight *académies* (see 1.3 above)

4.2. Debates and Forthcoming Reforms

An inter-ministerial committee for integration in which the Ministry of Education is involved was set up in 2003. At its meeting on 10 April 2003, the committee drew up an annual programme for action consisting of some 50 measures, some of them concerned with the education system. They uphold and strengthen the policies discussed above.

After giving rise to intense national debate, the legislative proposal seeking to regulate the practice of wearing conspicuous confessionary items such as the Islamic headscarf for Muslim girls, (the kippa for Jewish boys and outside (Christian) crosses) on school premises, was adopted by the National Assembly on 10 February 2004. It states that 'in public-sector primary and secondary schools, it is forbidden to wear tokens or garments by means of which pupils conspicuously draw attention to their faith or religious affiliation.' This law comes into force on 1 September 2004.