



# Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe

Country Reports



# INTEGRATING IMMIGRANT CHILDREN INTO SCHOOLS IN EUROPE

## SWEDEN

### 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**

Since the year 2000, as the result of a government initiative, an agreement has been in place at national level in Sweden relating to the definition of the term 'immigrant'. The designation 'immigrant' is now reserved for persons who were born abroad, have themselves migrated to Sweden and have been granted a permanent residence permit in the country. A term with a broader definition is a 'person with a foreign background', which refers either to a person born abroad who has immigrated to Sweden or to a person having at least one parent who was born abroad.

Refugees, who are people who were persecuted in their country of origin or who have fled from countries at war, are considered as immigrants as defined above, as well as asylum-seekers.

### **1.2. Rights to Education and to Support Measures**

'A school for everybody' is the ideological basis for education in Sweden. According to the terms of the 'Ordinance relating to education, pre-school activities and child care for school-aged children, for asylum-seeking children, etc. (Ref. 2001:976)', since January 2002 children and young people who have applied for a residence permit (asylum seekers), or who have received a limited-period residence permit, are entitled to attend pre-school, compulsory school, upper-secondary school or an educational programme for pupils with learning disabilities. They are also entitled to benefit from child care for school-aged children on the same terms as children and young people resident in Sweden, irrespective of where they live or which ethnic or other minority or majority group they belong to. The only difference is that these pupils are not covered by the law making education compulsory. This means that, while the municipal authorities are required to make an educational place of the appropriate kind available, the family in question may choose to decline the offer.

It is the municipality in which these children and young people are staying that has the responsibility for ensuring that education and pre-school activities are provided. A state grant fixed at a standard rate per pupil is paid to the municipal authorities to cover the costs of providing this education. Municipalities can request additional funding to cover extra costs, such as the provision of support to pupils with disabilities.

Municipalities are not obliged to provide places in pre-school or school education for children or young people who are irregularly resident in Sweden – for example, in cases where people go into hiding after having their application for asylum turned down. Many schools choose however to allow these pupils to continue attending school until they are sent away.

For educational purposes, the National Agency for Education (NAE/*Skolverket*) gathers annual information relating to school pupils whose mother tongue is not Swedish, since these pupils are entitled to receive tuition in their mother tongue.

### **1.3. Demographic Information**

Official Swedish population statistics indicate a person's country of birth, and the population register also records the country of birth of a person's parents. However, there are no data relating to the language a person speaks, or the ethnic group to which he or she belongs. The consequence is that, for example, Kurdish immigrants are registered in the statistics, not as Kurds, but among those who have immigrated from Turkey, Iraq or Iran; Roma are found both among persons born in Sweden and among immigrants from a wide range of countries.

As of 31 December 2002, the population of Sweden amounted to 8 940 788; of these people, 1 053 463 were born abroad (11.8 %). The figures are from the National Statistics Office, (Statistical Table 1.3, Population by country of birth, 1990–2002). In 2002, 279 580 people resident in Sweden were born in another Nordic country, 343 782 were born in a European country other than the Nordic countries, 59 507 were born in Africa, 25 450 in North America, 53 315 in South America, 280 916 in Asia, 3 285 in Oceania, 7 285 in the former Soviet Union, and for 353 the country of origin is unknown.

Over the last five years, immigration to Sweden has been as follows:

Year	Number of Immigrants
1998	29 649
1999	27 566
2000	33 789
2001	34 732
2002	37 216

Most of the immigrants who have arrived in Sweden over the five years have come from Iraq (31 553), from former Yugoslavia (9 959), from Germany (7 285), from Iran (5 803) and from Bosnia (5 961), according to The National Statistics Office Statistical Table 7a, which does not include immigration from the other Nordic countries. Immigrants from Germany are usually either asylum seekers who come from Serbia and Montenegro, and have been refused a residence permit in Germany but do not wish to return to their country of origin, or persons who have family ties with Swedish residents.

Most immigrants live in or near Sweden's three main conurbations – Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. There are several reasons why the majority of the immigrants live in or near the major cities. Many of these people have relatives and friends who live there, and a large number live with their relatives until they can arrange their own accommodation. The opportunities for training and education, and the wider range of job opportunities are further explanations for why so many immigrants choose to live in these areas.

All children and young people living in a given catchment area go to the same school, thus guaranteeing that children from differing backgrounds meet each other. However, in areas where there is housing segregation, this segregation is also reflected at school. Today in the socially and ethnically segregated districts of the major cities, there are schools where the proportion of students from an immigrant background is close to 100 %; in medium-sized municipalities there are schools where the proportion of students from an immigrant background, though not quite this large, is nevertheless considerable. In these areas the unemployment rate amongst the adult population is higher than average, and a large proportion of families are dependent on various social welfare benefits. The result of these factors is that such areas are characterised by marginalisation. As far as school education is concerned, this situation calls for special initiatives if the schools in these areas are to prepare young people for an adult life in which they participate and take responsibility in society.

In 2002, 458 405 children were registered at pre-schools; of these, 59 592 spoke a language other than Swedish as their mother tongue (13.0 %). In the same year, 1 057 225 pupils were registered in the country's compulsory schools (compulsory comprehensive education is from age seven to age sixteen); of these 135 945, or 12.9 %, spoke a language other than Swedish as their mother tongue. During the last five years, the number of pupils with a mother tongue other than Swedish has increased by approximately 16 600 pupils.

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

### **2.1. Reception and Guidance**

For children who do not attend pre-school, many municipal authorities run what are called 'open pre-schools', which children and their parents can attend for a few hours a day. For many families with a foreign background, these open playgroups function as a meeting place and provide a good first step into Swedish social life. Some municipal authorities also run what are called 'special language pre-school groups', which children with a mother tongue other than Swedish can attend for two to three hours a day in order to learn Swedish. Both courses are free of charge.

### **2.2. Integration into School Learning**

Most municipal authorities offer newly arrived pupils the opportunity to start off at school in a reception class; these classes usually include both asylum-seeking pupils and pupils who have been granted a residence permit. The pupils receive tuition in the Swedish language, learn about Swedish society and are taught school subjects at a level based on what they have already learned. How long a pupil attends the reception class varies, depending on the individual pupil's level of previous education and how quickly he or she acquires a good enough command of Swedish to follow lessons in a mainstream class.

Newly arrived pupils who have moved into a mainstream class are taught with the same national subject syllabuses as other pupils. Generally speaking, newly arrived pupils are placed in classes with pupils of the same age. This may mean that newly arrived pupils need additional support to be able to follow the lessons. If so, they are entitled to what is called 'study guidance'. This extra help, which is given by a support teacher, may be provided either in Swedish or in the pupil's mother tongue. The support teacher often brings together a small group of pupils who need extra help for special lessons but he or she may also assist individual pupils during their 'normal' classes.

Many schools in areas with a high proportion of students with immigrant backgrounds have now started to set up what are called 'study workshops'. These are often located in premises near the school library, in a room with a computer and an Internet connection. Pupils can go to the study workshop whenever they wish during the day to receive study help and guidance from subject teachers who can speak their mother tongue.

The school performance of the newly arrived pupils is assessed using the same grading criteria as for all other pupils. In Sweden, pupils do not receive subject grades until the autumn term of their eighth year at compulsory school. A pupil who does not achieve the standard required for a passing grade is entitled to a written certificate stating what he or she has learned.

All students whose mother tongue is a language other than Swedish can study Swedish as a second language throughout their time at compulsory and upper secondary school. The subject 'Swedish as a second language' (SSL) has its own syllabus and is deemed equivalent to the subject 'Swedish' when students are applying for entry at a tertiary education institution, for example.

A relatively large range of teaching materials is available for teaching Swedish as a second language, and, under the aegis of the Stockholm Institute of Education, there is a National Educational Resources Centre for Swedish as a second language.

It is desirable for teachers who teach pupils with a foreign background to have competences that correspond to the abilities and needs of bi- or multilingual pupils. It has become more common for Swedish-speaking teachers to be trained in teaching Swedish as a second language, but the majority of teachers do not yet have this competence.

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

According to The Curriculum for Pre-school Education (Lpfö 98<sup>(1)</sup>) bilingual (or multilingual) children enrolled in pre-school are entitled to support in improving their knowledge of both (or all of) their languages. In practice, however, this provision does not work particularly well, though municipal authorities are gradually becoming more conscious of the importance of mother-tongue support for a child's intellect and identity.

The regulations governing school education make it possible to offer pupils lessons in some subjects in their mother tongue. This is most often the case in schools with a high proportion of immigrant pupils and in independent schools<sup>(2)</sup> with a language profile, where the language of tuition is a different language than Swedish. If possible, the pupils in reception classes are also given tuition in their mother tongue. (They may attend lessons in Mother-Tongue Studies and may be taught other subjects using their mother tongue.)

Students with a mother tongue other than Swedish have the right to receive tuition in their native language as a school subject. This subject, 'Mother Tongue Studies', has its own separate syllabus, which also covers the literature, history and culture of the country of origin. Grades awarded in this subject are equivalent to grades in other subjects. Just over half of all pupils who are entitled to receive mother-tongue tuition do so in fact.

Mother Tongue Studies courses are taught in approximately 60 languages (e.g. Arabic to 21 073 pupils, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian to 14 829 pupils, Finnish to 11 384 pupils and Albanian to 7 704 pupils (National Agency for Education Statistics 2003:3, Table 3.8B). The situation as regards teaching materials varies from language to language: for some languages teaching materials can be bought from the countries of origin, while for others, which are spoken by refugees, there may be a total lack of teaching materials. However, teaching materials in these languages are being developed, with the support of the Swedish National Agency for School Improvement. The most important project concerns bilingual dictionaries; state funding has made possible the preparation of dictionaries in over 20 different languages.

Many teachers of mother tongue studies in a minority language are not actually trained to teach the subject, even though they may have had teacher training in their countries of origin. In a nutshell, in the whole of this field, even in pre-school education, there is a very great need to develop competence.

The government has given the National Agency for School Improvement special instructions to support the development of education for Romany students (As mentioned above, Roma include persons born in Sweden but also immigrants). This work is carried out in close collaboration with representatives of the Roma.

### 2.4. Adaptation of Daily School Life

The staff of schools which have a large proportion of pupils with a foreign background are used to meeting the pupils on terms that correspond to their cultural background; it is seen as a matter of course that at lunchtime there will be vegetarian and pork-free alternatives to the basic dish of the day. At other schools, parents have to ask for special food for their children, in the same way as would parents of children with allergies or diabetes.

Physical Education and Health is a compulsory subject at both compulsory and upper secondary level. The subject is usually taught in groups that include both sexes. If schools find it appropriate, they can divide classes up for some of the teaching time so that boys and girls are taught separately. This means that if, for example, swimming is on the schedule, Muslim girls can be taught without boys and can dress in the way they feel most comfortable.

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(1) The Curriculum for Pre-School Education, known as Lpfö 98.

(2) Since the early 1990s there have been greater opportunities to start up what are called 'independent schools' (which are also financed from public funds, but are not managed by the municipal authorities). These schools often have their own 'profile', and therefore attract parents from, for example, a given ethnic, religious or language group. Although independent schools with a specific 'profile' are at present mainly to be found in the major cities, the growing number of this category of school nevertheless presents new challenges to ensuring that all children and young people receive an education which prepares them for life in a society which to an ever-increasing extent is characterised by cultural and ethnic diversity.

Multicultural pre-school groups and schools are starting to take note of festivals other than traditional Swedish ones – Ramadan, for example. Certain municipal authorities and schools have local agreements regarding how many days' leave pupils can take in connection with religious or national festivals.

In the terms of Lpo 94 <sup>(3)</sup>, 'education in school shall be non-denominational'. Furthermore, 'it is a duty of school to encourage all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals and, on that basis, to actively participate in social life by giving their best in a spirit of responsible freedom'.

Nowadays, the fact that some Muslim girls wear headscarves hardly attracts any notice. That being said, in autumn 2003 two girls went to classes in upper secondary school wearing burqas (garments that cover the whole body and are worn with gloves and a veil covering the entire face). The school did not find this acceptable and has now reached a compromise whereby the students will not cover their faces during lessons or in tests but may dress as they wish outside the classroom. The NAE has since then given the right to all schools to ban students from wearing burqas. Priority is given to schools being able to fulfil their educational mandate where face-to-face communication is seen as an important part of the educational process. The NAE stress that a ban should be accompanied by a discussion of values equality and democratic obligations and rights.

## **2.5. Access to School Services and Special Financial Aid**

All pupils have access to school services on equal terms. School meals, books, school transport etc. are available free of charge for all children. There is no special financial aid for compulsory school pupils.

## **2.6. Language Tuition for Parents and Families**

The schools or the municipalities often arrange language tuition for parents. This is especially common in the bigger cities, such as Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö.

## **2.7. Information to Parents**

Municipal authorities have a responsibility to inform newly arrived families of their rights with regard to pre-school and school education. Families are also to be given an introduction to the basic values that underlie the national curricula. At these introductory meetings, an interpreter is to be provided if necessary. Many municipal authorities follow up this introduction by inviting the newly arrived parents to discussion groups, often led by teachers of Mother Tongue Studies in the relevant language or by other staff with relevant cultural competence.

The schools have an obligation to invite all parents and pupils twice a year to a 'personal development dialogue' in which the pupil and one or both parents talk to the pupil's teachers to discuss the pupil's academic progress, how she/he experiences school life in general, and how best to meet the pupil's individual study requirements. At these meetings too, parents who do not speak good Swedish are entitled to an interpreter.

# **3. INTERCULTURAL APPROACHES IN EDUCATION**

## **3.1. Curriculum and School Activities**

In Sweden, the state governs education through a series of statutes, government orders, curricula and syllabuses. These contain aims and guidelines for all aspects of education. The curricula start with a section on the fundamental values and tasks of school. The quotation below is from the curriculum for compulsory school education, known as Lpo 94. There are similar passages in the other national curricula.

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<sup>(3)</sup> The Curriculum for Compulsory School, the Pre-School Class and Leisure-time Centres, known as Lpo 94.

### **'Understanding and Compassion for Others'**

'Concern for the welfare and development of the individual should characterise all school activity. Schools must actively resist any tendency towards bullying or persecution. Xenophobia and intolerance must be actively confronted with knowledge, open discussion and effective measures. The internationalisation of Swedish society and increasing cross-border mobility place great demands on people's ability to live together and to appreciate the values that are to be found in cultural diversity. School is a social and cultural meeting place with both the opportunity and the responsibility to foster this ability among all who work there.'

The basis of shared values mentioned above constitutes the foundation on which the organisation and content of school education are built. The national curricula give instructions, and every individual school is expected to work to ensure that these fundamental values permeate all aspects of their work. At national level, the National Agency for Education has drawn up course syllabuses for the subjects taught at school and has compiled supplementary materials, which illuminate the different aspects of this shared foundation of common values.

### **3.2. Teacher Training**

There are no national guidelines on this issue, as the responsibility for the education of teachers lies with each higher education institution, providing teacher-training programmes. Therefore the intercultural approach in the education of teachers varies between institutions.

## **4. EVALUATION, PILOT PROJECTS, DEBATES AND FORTHCOMING REFORMS**

Within this field, a great deal remains to be done with regard to the evaluation of how well national curricula and the organisation of education are providing students and teachers the support and guidance they need in order to ensure that students from an immigrant background receive a good education. That being said, in the following areas important analytical and development work is in progress.

The National Agency for Education (NAE) annual statistical report regularly examines 'students at risk': what percentage of students is not attaining the nationally agreed educational objectives? What percentage of students in the various national study programmes at upper-secondary level is not completing their courses? What proportion of these students is from a non-Swedish background?

With regard to the measures concerned specifically with students whose mother tongue is a language other than Swedish, the NAE has initiated research and methodological development. In spring 2002, the NAE presented a wide-ranging survey of education in all the minority and immigrant languages. (The survey, 'More Languages – More Opportunities', covered both the teaching of mother tongue studies and the use of these languages as the medium of communication for teaching other subjects.). The findings of the survey have already led to changes in the law with regard to teaching in mother tongues other than Swedish.

In collaboration with the Regional Development Centre at the University College of Malmö and fifteen schools situated in areas where a very high proportion of the population is from immigrant backgrounds, the Agency for School Improvement is conducting a project aimed at developing methods for measuring success at school in ways other than the traditional assessment of academic knowledge. The project is called 'Alternatives for Success – When outsiders and insiders meet at school'. The final report is scheduled for publication in spring 2004.

The government has also highlighted this aspect of education by declaring, in its instructions to the newly created Agency for School Improvement, that the *foremost task* of the new authority during the period 2003-2005 will be to support municipal authorities and schools in segregated areas so that the pupils at such schools are enabled to achieve better results at compulsory school and are thus given improved chances of completing courses of study at upper secondary school.