



The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees and its tasks

Introduction

As a centre of excellence for migration, integration and asylum, the Federal Office carries out a wide variety of tasks. It decides on asylum applications and on the protection of refugees against deportation. Furthermore, the foci of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees include promoting and coordinating the linguistic, social and societal integration of immigrants in Germany.

Furthermore, as a central steering body in immigration and migration questions, the Federal Office helps in the distribution of Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union and provides information on voluntary assisted returns for foreigners who would like to return to their homes.

It also works to increase cooperation with its European partners in the fields of asylum and migration. In this framework, there is an exchange of personnel between the Federal Office and the partner authorities within the EU (liaison staff). Additionally, the Federal Office operates as a contact body for temporary protection in case of a mass influx of expellees.

Staff of the Federal Office decide on asylum applications after interviewing applicants in person and carrying out a conscientious examination of the grounds for asylum submitted. They ascertain whether they have a claim to asylum in accordance with the Basic Law, whether the applicant enjoys protection as a refugee in accordance with the Geneva Convention, or whether destination state-related deportation bans apply in accordance with the Residence Act.

The Immigration Act, which came into force on 1 January 2005, assigned additional tasks to the Office. These include developing and implementing integration courses (language and orientation courses) for immigrants, re-orientating advice on migration and promoting projects on the social and societal integration of settlers and foreigners living in Germany permanently. At the same time, the Office is developing a national integration programme and reports to the Federal Government in the field of integration promotion in factual terms.

The activities of the Office also include providing comprehensive information and drafting specialist information material, both for immigrants and for immigration authorities, organisations operating integration courses and further agencies involved in integration. Additionally, the Federal Office is the keeper of the Central Register of Foreigners and carries out academic research on migration-related issues in order to obtain analytical statements on how to manage immigration.

Integration

Germany has always been a country strongly characterised by immigration. Integration is hence of central significance for us today and in the future. Immigrants are to be enabled to enjoy equal partici-



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pation in social, political, cultural and economic life in Germany. All integration endeavours hence focus on the concept of equal opportunities.

The federal office is responsible for the conceptual and operative aspects of integration in Germany.

- § the planning and implementation of the integration courses, as well as for the approval of teachers and their skill-building, the authorisation of the course organisations, the planning of the tests, examinations and course books
- § the specific implementation of integration work in situ by the 23 regional agencies
- § the promotion and re-orientation of the initial migration advice facilities
- § the specialist reporting for the Federal Government in the field of integration promotion and drafting of information material on integration services of the Federation, the Länder and local authorities for foreigners and ethnic German resettlers
- § developing a nationwide integration programme
- § promoting community-orientated projects and measures serving the social integration of foreigners and ethnic German resettlers
- § the distribution procedures for Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union
- § the distribution of subsidies from the European Union (European Refugee Fund) for the reception, integration and voluntary return of refugees, displaced persons and asylum-seekers.

Integration courses

Language is the key to a successful integration. For this reason, a minimum framework of state integration services was created at the beginning of 2005, when the Immigration Act entered into force. The core of these state services is formed by the integration course.

Content and procedure

The integration course covers a total of 645 lesson units. The first part, consisting of 600 lessons, is the language course. The second part is known as the orientation course and consists of the remaining 45 lesson units. This course section focuses on the topical areas "Politics in a democracy", "History and responsibility" and "People and society". The goal: Migrants should make themselves understood in everyday life and be able to participate in German society.

Participants

Whether a migrant may attend an integration course or may be obliged to do so is regulated in sections 44 and 44a of the Residence Act, § 11 subs. 1 of the Freedom of Movement/EU Act and § 9 subs. 1 of the Federal Displaced Persons and Refugees Act. A distinction is made here between foreigners, citizens of the European Union, ethnic German resettlers and German nationals. The participants must as a rule contribute an amount of one Euro per lesson towards the cost of the integration course.

Course organisations and teachers



Private and public organisations which are approved by the Federal Office are commissioned with the implementation of the integration courses. Roughly 1,800 integration course organisations currently have such approval in Germany. The teachers who teach the integration course must have completed a study of "German as a foreign language" or "German as a second language" or acquire the qualification through special further training.

The national integration programme - Coordinating, networking, using potentials sustainably

Roughly 15 million immigrants live in Germany. Many private and state services are there to help them to integrate into society. The aim of the national integration programme is to coordinate and improve these services. The variety of integration services is important and has proven useful. In many cases, however, the services are not coordinated and there is a lack of information on promotion services and providers.

Ongoing process of quality development

This makes the successful promotion of integration more difficult. In order to change this and to guarantee a continuous process of quality development in integration promotion, the Residence Act (section 45) provides for the development of the national integration programme. With this tool to manage and coordinate integration policy, a framework is to be created for integration promotion to act exactly where it is needed and to be effective and sustainable. This task has been allocated to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. You will find more information on the quality development process in the Integration Internet portal.

Concrete strategies for improvement

The national integration programme initially establishes which integration services exist at federal, Land and local level and are provided by private organisations in Germany. Building on this, those areas which must be improved are to be identified and concrete strategies developed to this end. Everyone who is important in the field of integration promotion should therefore work together: the Ministries of the Federation which support integration promotion, the Länder, local authorities, immigrants and integration commissioners, representatives of the most important religious communities, trade unions and employers, the welfare associations as providers of integration measures, migrants' self-help organisations, as well as further experts from the practical and academic fields.

The integration programme is not a completed, one-off project, but an ongoing process which continually tackles topical issues and developments.

The areas of action

The following areas of action are concentrated on:

- § language training
- § vocational integration
- § education



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§ social integration

Language tuition

The primary emphasis in the nationwide integration programme was language tuition. New ways of working together were developed as a result of dialogue with the main stakeholders. The objective is the needs-focused optimisation of language tuition programmes for immigrants in Germany.

Language is the basis for mutual understanding. It is key to participating in society, a prerequisite for educational success and for entry to training courses and the labour market. As a result, language acquisition is the basis for an independent life. All stakeholders in integration work agree that having an adequate command of German plays a crucial part in integrating into society.

In addition, people with an immigrant background who speak many languages offer an important resource.

Language tuition in focus – central areas

Together with the key stakeholders in integration support, individual subject areas were identified that needed to be dealt with as a matter of urgency. As part of ongoing work on the evaluation of integration support, additional recommendations for developing the evaluation of language tuition programmes further have been formulated.

They cover the following areas:

- § language tuition in children's day care centres and schools:
- § fully and continuously promoting language development
- § language tuition during the transition from school to training:
- § promoting the job-related language skills of adults from an immigrant background
- § supporting language tuition in higher education
- § qualifications and further training for pedagogical staff / teachers
- § pedagogical staff from an immigrant background:
- § assuring and developing further the quality of teaching and learning German as a second language

The results of the working group in the area of activity of language tuition were collected in a BAMF publication entitled "Suggestions for the further development of language tuition for people from an immigrant background in Germany."



Jobs and the labour market

Integrating people with an immigration background can only succeed if they are offered the same opportunities in the labour market as those without an immigration background. Ensuring equal opportunities in the German labour market is therefore an important goal.

Equal opportunities as a key to integration

There are many examples of successful integration within the labour market. However, there is an above-average incidence of people with an immigration background in Germany who are either unemployed or who work in unskilled and semi-skilled low-paid positions. One key cause of this is that these individuals are often less qualified than applicants who do not have an immigration background. To date, people with an immigration background have not succeeded often enough in gaining a foothold in areas of work that require a higher level of qualifications and that in some cases are still marked by a rising number of workers.

Education and training are the basis for success in the labour market. Young people and young adults with an immigration background still face great disadvantages compared with their non-immigrant peers. They are less likely to find a training place and are more likely to drop out of training. They can therefore frequently be found on transition management programmes which provide a bridge between school and training. Approximately 60% of young people who attend these programmes have an immigration background.

Key areas of work

In the area of vocational integration as part of the nationwide integration programme, specific strategies and approaches are to be developed in conjunction with the main stakeholders in the area of training and the labour market in order to increase equal opportunities in the German labour market for people with an immigration background. The nationwide integration programme will build on the themes and preliminary work of by the National Integration Plan and assist in its further development and implementation. To this end, the following priorities have been set:

- **Recognition of academic qualifications**

Migration is often associated with a downgrading of vocational skills because qualifications gained in the country of origin are not recognised in the country of immigration. The Federal Employment Agency considers approximately 70% of unemployed foreign nationals to be “unqualified”. Of these, experts estimate that a high number are skilled workers who have gained qualifications abroad and whose potential could be tapped and put to good use.

On-the-job language support and language support to prepare people for work

People with an immigration background who have a lack of adequate German-language skills are often still confronted by a huge barrier when entering the labour market or when wishing to develop further vocational skills. Specific strategies therefore need to be developed within the context of the nationwide integration programme to break down this barrier in the long term.



Education

Education is the basis and the starting point for integration in all areas of society. As a result, it plays a key role in the integration of immigrants. Against this background, the nationwide integration programme wants to provide a platform for wide-ranging discussions on the topic of education.

To date, children and young people from an immigrant background on average have had less success in their education than other pupils. International studies (esp. PISA) illustrate that Germany lags far behind in terms of the educational integration of second generation immigrants, although these children have spent all of their school career in Germany. And another worrying finding is that the German educational system is strongly selective: ethnic and social background determine a child's future.

The following facts underline the problem

- § The number of children with an immigrant background attending special schools and the lower secondary school is higher than average
- § A disproportionately low number of children from a migrant background attend the upper secondary school (Gymnasium).
- § Many young people from an immigrant background drop out of school without a diploma

For the long term success of Germany as a knowledge-based society it is of great importance to foster and use the potentials of young migrants and help increase their academic performance.

The changes that have been brought about by migration impact on all aspects of school life; school becomes a central place of integration; target groups that need to be prepared for the job are students, parents as well as teachers. Students do not only need additional language tuition, they also need to gain social and intercultural skills, guidance at the transition from school to vocational training, etc. Teachers need to be prepared to act successfully in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms; at present, however, intercultural trainings are only a sporadic and in most cases non-compulsory part of teacher training. The central task in teacher qualification for the next years will be the introduction of comprehensive and compulsory intercultural trainings. In addition, teaching materials and teaching practices will have to reflect the heterogeneous reality of society and include culturally diverse perspectives on teaching content.

Federal System and Education

Due to the federal system in Germany, the federation, of which the federal office is a part, has no genuine competence in the whole area of education. Rather, the Länder are entitled by constitutional law to make their own regulations in nearly all areas that pertain to education. However, as stated before, there are certain education-related activities that are carried out by the Federal office- I will introduce them to you in detail now:

The federal Länder – which are responsible for education in Germany – have been strengthening their commitment to supporting children and young people from migrant families for years. The nationwide integration programme aims to support these efforts by providing a framework to discuss and further develop ideas in the areas of integration and education, exchange experiences, disseminate different



approaches and to generate new ideas together. Currently, together with the central players involved in the promotion of integration, work is being carried out in relation to parents with an immigrant background and attracting those from an immigrant background to teacher training courses.

Parents with an immigrant background

The educational success achieved by children in the German education is strongly dependent on the support provided by the parents/family. Many immigrant parents are willing to support their children in this way and to work together with the educational establishments. The educational success achieved by children in the German education is strongly dependent on the support provided by the parents/family. Many immigrant parents are willing to support their children in this way and to work together with the educational establishments.

Immigrant parents are often not familiar with the high importance of education, the structures of requirements, participation opportunities and the opportunities offered by the education and training system in Germany. Whilst there are some isolated examples of parent education programmes tailored to the target groups, these, with just a few exceptions, are not systematically enshrined in the structures of the education system on a long-term basis. Furthermore, cooperation geared towards individual support of the children has taken place too infrequently to date. The result is a lack of permanent or institutionalised cooperation between schools and parent bodies that represent the interests of migrant families.

Integration of parents

Both parents and those involved in the area of education should be provided with practical support in the design of cooperation with parents from an immigrant background and parent representative bodies, as well as with regard to suggestions for educating parents. This builds on the recommendations made on educating parents in the language tuition field of activity. There are also close links with the field of social integration and the existing cooperation projects with immigrant-run organisations. As part of the nationwide integration programme/the education field of activity, the following issues are currently being considered with regard to parents with an immigrant background:

- § Ways of improving education for parents, particularly by strengthening the role of immigrant organisations in work with parents/education for parents and greater use of existing integration programmes (e.g. parent integration courses) as tools for educating parents and intensifying cooperation between educational establishments and parents.
- § Opportunities for cooperation with parents from an immigrant background for the individual support of children, extending where relevant beyond traditional forms of communication and cooperation.
- § Reinforcing the involvement of parents with an immigrant background in institutionalised forms of parent representation.

Teaching staff with an immigrant background

The mix of pupils attending German schools is growing increasingly culturally heterogeneous. This has resulted in calls from policymakers and expert circles to increase the proportion of teaching staff from an immigrant background. Two possible strategies could be pursued in this regard. In terms of the area of professional integration, one approach would be to recognise teaching qualifications gained



abroad. The other approach would be to encourage more people from an immigrant background to train as teachers.

According to the Federal Office for Statistics, the number of students with/without an immigrant background as a proportion of the total number of students is the same for practically all courses of study. The only exception is teaching training courses. These account for 12% of students without an immigrant background and 6% of students who do come from an immigrant background. The suspected reasons, although these have not been proven in empirical studies, include the low level of social prestige associated with the teaching profession among migrant groups, the lack of career opportunities, bad past experience with teachers or school, and fears of not being able to meet the requirements of working in public service.

More teaching staff with an immigrant background

Increasing the proportion of teachers with an immigrant background is crucial, above all, in terms of professional integration and equal access to the highly qualified professions. Teachers with a migration background should therefore, first and foremost, be viewed as specialist teaching staff just like other teachers. Additionally, however, they also have a key role to play in areas specific to integration, including the intercultural receptiveness of schools, strengthening cooperation with parents with an immigrant background, promoting appreciation of multilingualism and providing role models for those looking to pursue successful careers in education.

Demonstrating opportunities for improvement

It is the federal Länder that are responsible for training and hiring teachers. The integration programme can provide support in the implementation of processes that have already been kicked off to increase the proportion of teachers with an immigrant background. The following areas are being discussed in the context of the national integration programme:

- § Opportunities for improving the perceived value of the teaching profession and school among young people with an immigrant background and their parents.
- § Ways of identifying and eliminating informal obstacles that prevent people with an immigrant background from accessing the teaching profession.
- § Ways of raising the awareness of educational establishments with regard to the importance of the teaching profession being receptive to different cultures.

Integration projects

In addition to integration courses and the various advisory services, integration projects are also an important component of the integration programme in Germany. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) supports local social integration projects. Fields of activity include:

- § Civic involvement
- § Reinforcement of existing skills
- § Working with parents – supporting parenting skills
- § Prevention of addiction, violence and crime Intercultural skills



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The most important task of many integration programmes is to increase mutual acceptance between immigrants and locals. These projects aim to promote the intercultural skills of people with and without a migrant background and to create awareness in the receiving society that migrants are an integral part of the German population. As a result, the projects aim to improve life as part of the same community and the social involvement of immigrants in the local community.

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