

Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe

Communication with families and opportunities for mother tongue learning

Catering for the growing diversity of mother tongues present in schools and building bridges with immigrant families are two key issues addressed in the green paper 'Migration & mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems' [COM (2008) 423 final]. As a contribution to the debate around the green paper, Eurydice produced a short study focusing on two aspects of particular importance – policies and measures to improve communication between schools and the families of immigrant pupils and teaching the heritage language of the immigrant children. This leaflet sums up the main findings.

What is Eurydice?

The Eurydice Network provides information on and analyses of European education systems and policies. It consists of 35 national units based in all 31 countries participating in the EU's Lifelong Learning programme (EU Member States, EEA countries and Turkey) and is coordinated and managed by the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) in Brussels, which drafts its publications and databases.

All Eurydice publications are available free of charge at <http://www.eurydice.org>.



Measures to ensure a good flow of information between schools and immigrant families exist in some form everywhere in Europe

The involvement of parents in their children's education is widely recognised today as a crucial element of integration and school success. However, many immigrant parents are likely to encounter difficulties of a linguistic or cultural nature and measures to ensure that information is passed on efficiently between schools and immigrant families, specifically by using languages other than those used at school, are therefore essential.

This document focuses in particular on three methods of promoting communication between schools and immigrant families: publication of written information on the school system in the language of origin of immigrant families; the use of interpreters in various situations in school life; and the appointment of resource persons, such as mediators, to be specifically responsible for liaising between immigrant pupils, their families, and the school.

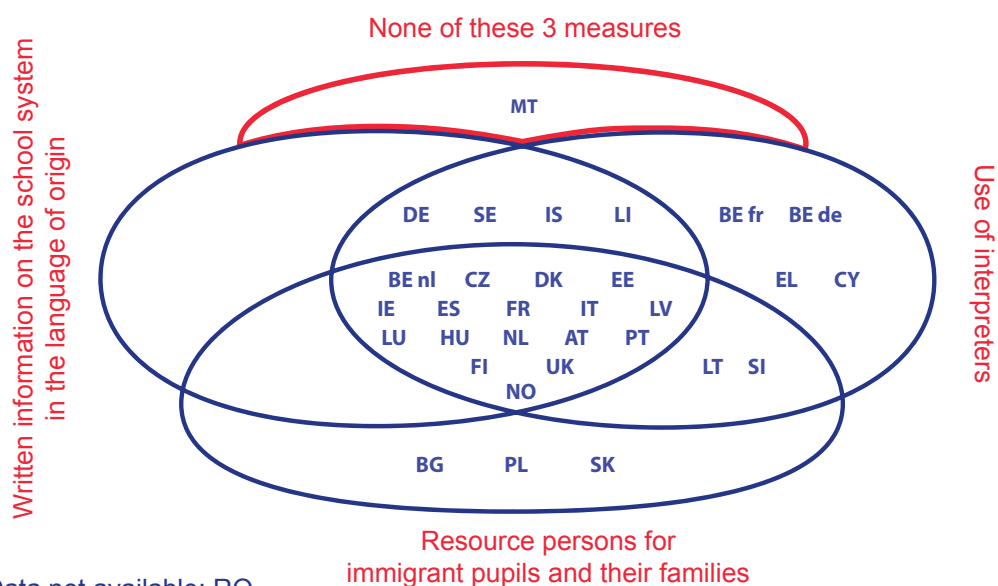
In Malta, where no legal measures have yet been introduced, such policies may be defined in the near future as a result of an increase in the number of immigrant pupils. Everywhere else, in 2007, at least one of the three methods exists (Figure 1) and the majority of countries have developed two of these elements in a strategy for communication between schools and

immigrant families. In many cases, these measures have been quite recently introduced.

Provision of interpreters speaking the mother tongue language of the immigrant family is the most widespread of the practices, and is often supported by central authorities. However, it is rarely an obligation, and in certain cases the cost of these services can be charged to schools. Indeed only three Nordic countries (Norway, Finland and Sweden), two Baltic states (Estonia and Lithuania) and Hungary have made the use of interpreting a legal entitlement. And even in these six countries, the entitlement applies only to a specific category of immigrant family (refugees, asylum seekers) or in very specific situations where contact between immigrant families and schools is required

In around two thirds of the countries, written information on the school system is published for immigrant families present in the country or region in question, but these publications are generally published in a limited range of languages. In around half of the countries, the national or highest-level education authorities are responsible for these publications. In some cases, local authorities or schools may be responsible

Figure 1: Measures enhancing communication between schools and immigrant families, general education (ISCED 0-3), 2007/08



Data not available: RO

Source: Eurydice.

for publications, and this may facilitate more appropriate responses to local linguistic needs.

Information more often than not addresses general matters, such as how the education system is structured at the different education levels, enrolment, assessment and orientation procedures, parental participation, and parental rights and obligations.

The appointment of resource persons specifically responsible for welcoming and guiding immigrant pupils and serving as a liaison with their families is a widespread practice in Europe. **Resource persons responsible for reception and orientation of immigrant pupils are most commonly teachers, and less often working for local specialised agencies.** It is mainly primary and secondary education levels that are the focus of such measures.

Two principal methods of organising mother tongue tuition for immigrant pupils: provision of tuition funded by the national educational system and bilateral agreements

Proficiency in their language of origin is widely considered to be of great importance for immigrant pupils.

Proficiency can make it easier for these pupils to learn the language of instruction and thus stimulate their development in all areas. In addition, the manner in which their mother tongue is viewed in the host community helps secure the self-esteem and identity of immigrant children and their families. With regard to organisation, the extent to which mother tongue tuition is incorporated within the core school curriculum appears to be critical. According to a report issued by the European Parliament on the integration of immigrant pupils ⁽¹⁾, tuition given outside the standard curriculum adds to pupils' school hours and can lead to feelings of rejection, mainly owing to the stigmatisation that attending such lessons can create.

In most European countries, educational support measures exist or are recommended to enable immigrant pupils to learn their mother tongue but the implementation of such measures may be hampered by their dependence on the human resources available. Mother tongue tuition for immigrant children is provided more often at compulsory education level than at upper secondary education level. Few countries have yet taken steps to introduce teaching in the language of origin at pre-primary education level. In some countries, mother tongue tuition for immigrant pupils mainly depends on voluntary and private initiatives, such as those initiated by the immigrant communities themselves. In Latvia, the

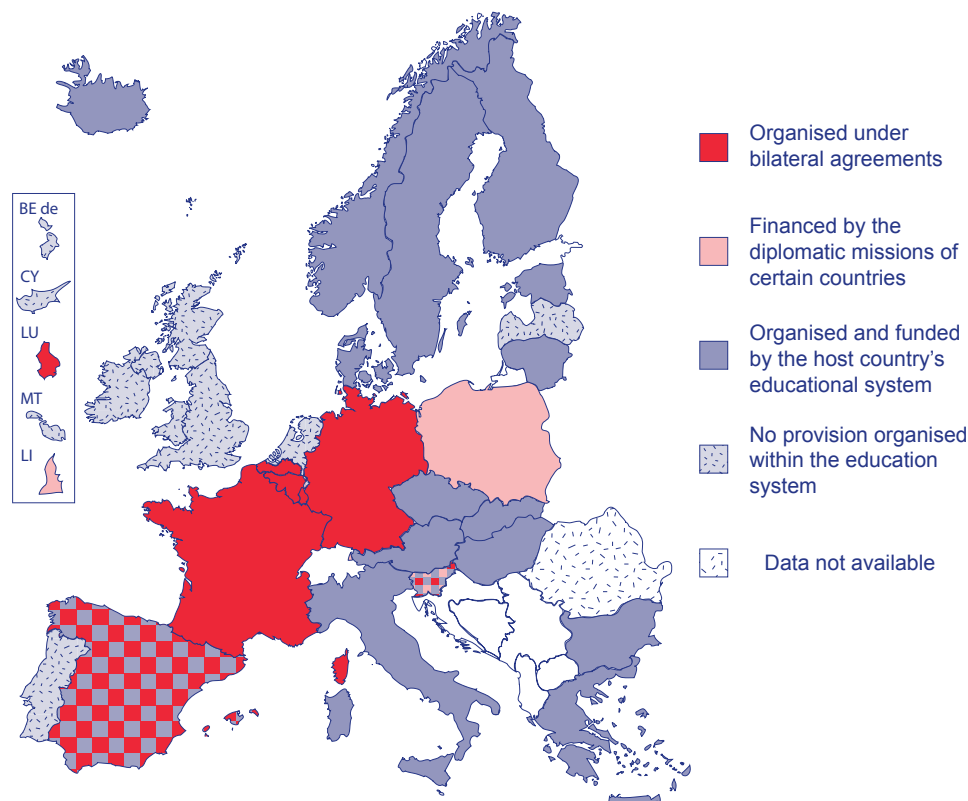
possibility of immigrant pupils learning their mother tongue is provided for in the minority language programmes established for national ethnic minorities.

There are two main types of policy in respect of mother tongue tuition for immigrant pupils (see Figure 2). The first approach is to adopt the principle that all immigrant pupils have the right to mother tongue tuition, albeit generally subject to a minimum demand threshold being met and the necessary resources being available. Tuition is then provided within the national educational system. The second approach, less often found, consists of arranging for the provision of tuition under bilateral agreements concluded between the host country and the countries from which the main immigrant communities present in the country originate. The policy adopted in Spain and Slovenia combines elements of both these approaches.

Where bilateral agreements for the provision of mother tongue tuition exist, responsibility for the resources to be allocated and decisions to be made is shared between the two countries party to the agreement. Infrastructure is provided by the host country while the teachers are generally employed by the country of origin and thus have considerable pedagogical autonomy. **The language tuition given under bilateral agreements also encompasses elements of the culture of origin. These lessons are most often held outside normal school hours.** Spain and Luxembourg are exceptions in this respect, in that they more often incorporate such tuition within the mainstream school curriculum.

⁽¹⁾ Report on the integration of immigrants in Europe via schools and plurilingual tuition, (2004K2267 (INI)), Commission for culture and education, author: Miguel Portas. 2005.

Figure 2: Provision of mother tongue tuition for immigrant pupils, general education (ISCED 1-3), 2007/08



Source: Eurydice.

Six countries have signed bilateral agreements with both EU member states and non-member states, reflecting historical patterns of immigration in their countries. There are several such immigration profiles. In Belgium, Germany, France and Luxembourg, there have been sizeable communities of immigrant workers for decades, while in Spain, immigration is a far more recent phenomenon. Luxembourg has the highest percentages of non-native 15-year old pupils (40.1 %) and pupils with a non-indigenous language as their mother tongue (23.7 %) in Europe.

Tuition organised by the host country for all immigrant pupils is often dependent on availability of resources. In around half of the countries, mother tongue tuition is organised and funded by the host country. In most cases, the official texts recommend that schools offer mother tongue tuition to all pupils of immigrant origin, irrespective of their precise status (asylum seekers, newly-arrived pupils, etc.) and nationality. This tuition may in principle cover a diverse range of different languages. The extent to which the central authorities are involved in establishing these courses varies from one country to another, as do the conditions that must be met before tuition is provided.

However, in all countries, the decision on whether to organise such tuition is ultimately dependant on demand and the availability of material and human resources.

As a general rule, no systematic correlation between national immigration profiles and the policies adopted in respect of mother tongue tuition is apparent.

National strategic policies that value linguistic and cultural diversity in the school system exist as much in countries where immigration is a relatively recent phenomena as in those where immigration is more historical, and in countries with varying proportions of immigrants in the school population.

For further information, please see the Eurydice – EACEA website: www.eurydice.org.

Eurydice, 2009, *Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe: Measures to foster communication with immigrant families and heritage language teaching for immigrant children*.

Eurydice, 2004, *Integrating immigrant children into schools in Europe*.