INTEGRATING IMMIGRANT CHILDREN INTO SCHOOLS IN EUROPE

AUSTRIA

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

In Austria, the general definition of an ‘alien’ is anyone who does not have Austrian nationality. (Source: Austrian Aliens Act, BGBl. (Federal Law Gazette) I Nr. 75/1997, most recently amended by BGBl. I Nr. 134/2000, Article 1(1).)

The definition of ‘asylum seeker/person applying for asylum’ is as follows: an alien is considered to be an asylum seeker from the time he/she submits an application to grant or extend asylum status until the relevant procedure is either finally concluded or abandoned. (Source: 1997 Austrian Asylum Act, BGBl. I Nr. 76/1997, Article 1).

Children of parents who are not Austrian nationals are not automatically granted Austrian citizenship, even if they are born in Austria, but normally take the citizenship of their parents. Dual citizenship is legally impossible, unless acquired by birth from parents of two different nationalities or in certain other rare cases.

The Austrian Nationality Act 1985 [BGBl. Nr. 311/1985, most recently amended by BGBl. I Nr. 124/1998, Article 10 (1)] defines the rules for naturalisation: ‘Citizenship may be granted to an alien if he or she has maintained his or her principal place of residence in the federal territory for at least ten years without interruption. The provisions of Article 1 Z 1 may be disregarded on the grounds of a special consideration’. (Under Article 4 Z 1, birth in the federal territory is seen as a special consideration.)

1.2. Rights to Education and to Support Measures

The Austrian constitution stipulates that state schools be accessible to all pupils, regardless of their origin, sex, race, class, language or religious belief. School attendance is compulsory for all children who have their permanent residence in Austria, regardless of their nationality. Permanent residence is accorded to those pupils who express the intention to stay for at least one semester (six months); this includes children of asylum seekers, since the asylum procedure usually takes longer than six months, and children whose residence status is unclear. Ideally, pupils are immediately admitted by the local school.

1.3. Demographic Information

In 2001, 764,314 residents (9.4 % of the total population) were non-Austrian nationals. Of these, more than a third (286,661) live in the capital, Vienna (1). The percentage of non-Austrian nationals in Vienna was 17.83 % in 2001 with more than 25 % in certain districts (2). In the eight other federal states, the percentage varies from 4.5 % (Burgenland) to 13.55 % (Vorarlberg).

The Austrian National Census of 2001 found that 85.88 % of all non-Austrian residents were not EU nationals. This is largely due to Austria’s geographical location, its earlier policy of recruiting workers from abroad and the admission, in the early 1990s, of refugees from the former Yugoslavia. In 2001, approximately 45 % of all non-Austrian residents in Austria were nationals of the former Yugoslavia and 17.5 % were Turkish nationals. Other relevant groups were Germans (10.5 %), Poles (3.1 %), Romanians (2.5 %), Czechs (1.9 %) and Hungarians (1.8 %).

Since kindergarten is not compulsory, admission is voluntary and at the discretion of children’s parents or guardians. There are 221,657 children in day nurseries and kindergartens in Austria, of whom 26,127 (i.e. approximately 11%) are immigrants (day nursery statistics).

In the educational context, a person’s nationality is not a crucial factor, whereas the number of pupils who are (potentially) bilingual is considered of relevance. Therefore, the number and percentage of pupils whose mother tongue is a language other than German is of far greater importance than their nationality. Hence, the official description of this group of pupils is ‘pupils whose mother tongue is a language other than German’ (1).

The total number of pupils attending compulsory schools in 2002/03 whose mother tongue is a language other than German was 103,877 (15.2% of all pupils), compared to 76,701 in 1993/94 (2). In compulsory schools in Vienna the number of immigrant pupils is extremely high (43.3% in 2002/03); in certain schools the vast majority (in some districts more than 80 or 90%) of pupils come from immigrant families.

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

2.1. Reception and Guidance

Foreign-language material giving special information on school registration is provided: the folder ‘Educational opportunities in Austria’ (general information on the Austrian school system and the different school careers) is available in Albanian, Bosnian/Croat/Serbian, English, Polish and Turkish. The folder ‘Hello! Intercultural education in Austria’ is available in Bosnian/Croat/Serbian, English, French and Turkish. The brochure ‘Language acquisition under migration circumstances’ is available in Albanian, Bosnian/Croat/Serbian and Turkish. All these information materials are published, updated and distributed by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. In addition, regional school boards and advice centres issue their own information leaflets (usually in Bosnian/Croat/Serbian and Turkish). Various forms (school enrolment, letters to parents and the like) have also been translated by some of the regional school advice centres.

2.2. Integration into School Learning

In the Austrian kindergarten system, measures consist primarily of teaching services (support staff, sensitive intercultural educational work, parent counselling), which are funded and organised by federal provinces, refugee and integration organisations, as well as different private organisations.

Austrian education policy rejects the idea of segregation. Hence, pupils who are not Austrian nationals and who have a mother tongue other than German are not taught in separate schools or classes but are educated alongside Austrian pupils. The establishment of separate classes needs the consent of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, which is usually given only in special or emergency cases.

Pupils are admitted to school according to their age. There are no formal test procedures for assessing the child’s competence in German. When a six-year-old child is enrolled at school, the head teacher usually talks with the child so as to find out whether she/he understands German or not. Pupils whose competence in German is not yet sufficient to follow classes held in German are admitted as so-called ex-matricular pupils for a maximum period of two years. This is the case for six-year-olds as well as for ‘late comers’ (pupils older than 6) who have not studied German as a foreign language in their country of origin.

(1) They are also referred to as ‘immigrant pupils’, ‘the second and third generations’, ‘pupils with a migration background’ or ‘bilingual pupils’.

(2) The source for statistical data concerning school attendance of pupils whose mother tongue is other than German is: bmbwk (2003): Informationsblätter des Referats für interkulturelles Lernen, Nr. 2/2003, if not otherwise stated.
Ex-matricular pupils are not necessarily given marks during this period but can nevertheless move up to the next year. After this period of ‘special treatment’, it is assumed that pupils can generally follow tuition in the classroom, even though their competence in German is not yet comparable with that of native speakers. However, the general assessment criteria, as laid down in the legal guidelines, do not take into account the special learning situation of these pupils, so that they are basically treated like everyone else when it comes to marking, although teachers have a wide range of discretion and are actively encouraged not to neglect the pupils’ individual circumstances.

**German as a Second Language**

Curricula for German as a second language (GSL) (5) have been in force since the academic year 1992/93 in compulsory schools (primary schools, general secondary school, special schools, pre-vocational schools). In 2000/01 ‘Educational guidelines for German as a second language’ were added to the curriculum for the first phase of academic secondary schools (years 1-4 of the *allgemein bildende höhere Schule*). They are identical to the respective guidelines for general secondary schools (*Hauptschule*).

Depending on local circumstances, schools are free to offer German as a second language (GSL) in parallel or supplementary classes or integrated into the general schedule. This means that a team of two teachers (the class teacher or subject teacher, plus the assistant teacher) works with the whole class. A maximum number of lessons dedicated to GSL is set forth (6).

In practice, due to limited staff resources, relatively few schools provide the maximum number of lessons per week. As a rule, pupils with a mother tongue other than German receive two GSL lessons per week. Since 2001/02, the nine provincial school boards have had discretion to allocate resources for special purposes to individual schools. This has led to further reductions in the lessons devoted to GSL.

**Teacher Training**

The relevant law (*Akademien-Studienordnung*; AstO 2000, § 8) stipulates that teacher training colleges where future compulsory school teachers are trained must design their own curricula in the light of the current social situation and likely trends in the region, with the aim of offering future teachers realistic and practical assistance. Working with heterogeneous groups of pupils is a very important aspect of this training, and German as a second language (GSL) is an optional subject at most teacher training colleges.

University students training to be teachers of German must take a course of GSL and a course entitled ‘Linguistic variety as a starting point and a source of motivation’. Additionally, they can choose among a number of options in the field of GSL.

Institutes for in-service teacher training offer a variety of courses and seminars in GSL. It must be noted, however, that in-service training is not compulsory. While some GSL teachers have additional competence in the field of language teaching, others are not sufficiently qualified to teach GSL. Nevertheless, all support teachers are qualified teachers, though the Federal Ministry does not know in detail how many of them have had some extra training in German as a second language. In addition, a number of teachers who are themselves immigrants now work in this field, even though they may not have received specialised extra training.

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(5) The curriculum for GSL for primary school children has been in force since the school year 1992/93 (BGBl. 528/1992). The GSL curriculum for general secondary schools was revised in 2000 (BGBl. II Nr. 134/2000). It is identical to the curriculum for the first phase of academic secondary schools (BGBl. II Nr. 133/2000).

(6) Ex-matricular pupils in compulsory schools may have up to twelve GSL lessons per week, matricular pupils in primary schools and special schools may have a maximum of five GSL lessons per week, and in secondary and pre-vocational schools the maximum number of GSL lessons is six a week. In all other school types the number of lessons per week is laid down by the school itself.
2.3. Support for the Language, Culture and Religion of Origin

Kindergarten teachers are made particularly aware of this issue in their basic and advanced training and acquire the appropriate expert knowledge. Special support staff or assistants are trained and paid by the local authority, and work with the kindergarten teacher leading a group.

At school, the children’s mother tongues may be taught as optional subjects, either in separate (afternoon) classes (7) or integrated into the general schedule, with the mother tongue teacher working alongside the class or subject teacher (team teaching). The integrated model is widely practised in Vienna, whereas afternoon provision is preferred in the other federal states. The number of lessons may vary from two to six a week. Mother tongue instruction is part of the mainstream school system, and the teachers are employed by the Austrian school authorities like all other teachers.

The curriculum for mother tongue instruction at primary schools is laid down in BGBl. 528/1992, the curriculum for (general and academic) secondary schools is laid down in BGBl. II Nr. 134/2000 respectively in BGBl. II Nr. 133/2000. It should be noted that there are no separate curricula for each language, but a curriculum that can be used as a basis for all the languages offered.

Currently, the following languages are offered: Albanian, Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, Farsi, Hungarian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Romany, Russian, Serbo-Croat (Bosnian/Croat/Serbian), Slovak, Spanish and Turkish. Any language may be taught, provided that there is enough demand, that trained teachers are available for the language in question and that sufficient posts are provided for in the annual budget. In the current academic year, 353 mother tongue teachers are employed throughout Austria, though some of them, notably teachers for the less common languages, work part time, teaching only a few lessons per week.

Since 2000/01, it has been possible to study the two most commonly spoken languages of immigrants in Austria (i.e. Serbo-Croat and Turkish) as foreign languages at general secondary schools. It should be pointed out, however, that this option is not frequently exercised as, in practice, English is offered as a first foreign language by the overwhelming majority of all secondary schools. Serbo-Croat, but not Turkish, has been added to the curriculum of academic secondary schools.

2.4. Adaptation of Daily School Life

Apart from mother tongue instruction (see 2.3) and the educational principle ‘Intercultural Education’ (see 3.1), linguistic and cultural diversity should be adequately reflected in the classroom (posters and worksheets in different languages, celebration of Christian and non-Christian holidays etc.).

2.5. Access to School Services and Special Financial Assistance

As is the case for Austrian children, the parents’ ability to contribute to the cost of kindergarten is subject to a means test on the basis of social need.

Social benefits for pupils include schoolbooks at a low cost (parents/guardians pay 10% of the total cost) plus transport to school (parents/guardians pay a fixed amount per school year). In the case of asylum seeking pupils, the company ‘European Homecare’ carries the expenses for schoolbooks and transport.

2.6. Language Tuition for Parents and Families

Appropriate measures have been introduced in Vienna and Lower Austria for teaching German to parents of children attending kindergarten.

Some primary schools organise German courses for immigrant parents in the afternoon.

(7) Optional subjects are usually taught in the afternoon (i.e. outside the compulsory schedule).
2.7. Information to Parents

(See sub-section 2.1)

3. INTERCULTURAL APPROACHES IN EDUCATION

3.1. Curriculum and School Activities

In Austrian compulsory and academic secondary schools, intercultural education was introduced as a so-called ‘educational principle’ in the early 1990s. An ‘educational principle’ is not a subject but a theme that teachers are recommended to take into account across the curriculum. Other ‘educational principles’ are inter alia environment education, sex education and political education.

Intercultural education aims at a mutual understanding between pupils of various social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It also aims to make them aware of their similarities and differences and to combat Eurocentrism and racism.

To support the teachers’ efforts in the field of intercultural education, the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has published a series of intercultural teaching materials for pupils aged ten to fourteen.

3.2. Teacher Training

Kindergarten Teacher Training Colleges

In kindergarten teacher training colleges an intercultural approach is encouraged highlighting the enriching effect of cultural difference and stressing the need to avoid discrimination and hostility towards immigrants. The curriculum aims to strengthen the ability for self expression, imparting tradition, encouraging problem-solving and cooperative behaviour, promoting peaceful resolution of conflicts, imparting a knowledge of cultural customs (e.g. calendar of religious festivals) and a critical analysis of social values.

The optional subject ‘Intercultural education’ may be taken as part of the training at the kindergarten teacher training college (as a five-year or college programme) for two or three class periods per week in the third or fourth year. (It can also be taken as a course over several years). The areas covered are: raising awareness of problems arising from migration; of the situation of ethnic groups in Austria and the hazards and opportunities of mobility and globalisation, a critical reflection of the concept of identity, a discussion of the attitudes required if people from different cultures are to live together, the recognition of one’s own and other people’s values, and learning how to deal with barriers to integration in one’s own occupational field.

In addition, the project ‘Pre-school integration through knowledge of language(s)’, which provides materials, models and practical instructions, is used as a starting point for various discussions and projects in the main subjects of training (teaching, practice, pedagogy). The project is financed by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and carried out by the Verein Projekt Integrationshaus (‘House of Integration’). A description of the project has been sent to all schools and colleges that train kindergarten teachers, so that they can inform the students about the project.

Teacher Training Colleges

Intercultural education is an optional subject at most teacher training colleges. All support teachers are qualified teachers, though the Federal Ministry does not know in detail how many of them have had some extra-training in intercultural education (see also 2.2).
4. EVALUATION, DEBATES AND FORTHCOMING REFORMS

4.1. Evaluation

Mother tongue instruction (number of pupils/teachers/lessons, broken down according to federal states, languages, school types and the like) has been evaluated since 1998/99. The results are published annually and disseminated widely. The statistics show that attendance has slightly increased over the past few years and that some federal states have taken considerable efforts to add new languages.

A long-term study (‘Bilingual language acquisition under migration circumstances’) explored the linguistic development of over 100 bilingual and monolingual Viennese pupils from the beginning of their school career (at age 6) up to the end of primary education (at age 10). All the pupils were tested in German and in (the additional language) English, the bilingual pupils were also tested in their mother tongue. Extra-linguistic factors that come into play were also investigated. The researchers underline the importance of school-based support for the children’s mother tongue, particularly in the first school years, and stress the role of adequately qualified teachers.

4.2. Pilot Projects

A pilot project carried out in the academic year 1999/2000 investigated the practical implementation of the educational principle ‘Intercultural education’ in 18 (general and academic) secondary schools (‘Intercultural education in practice – a case study in schools in Vienna and Lower Austria’). The outcomes of the studies were recently published. The authors recommended a number of measures in the field of educational policy, notably in the field of initial and in-service teacher training.

4.3. Debates and Forthcoming Reforms

In the field of kindergarten education the subject of assistance for immigrant children is being very thoroughly discussed in the education policy debate in the provinces (in the field of kindergarten education); Lower Austria and Vienna in particular have advanced training programmes and in-service training of support staff and personnel. The new theoretical issues brought to the fore by the publication of the academic project ‘Pre-school integration through knowledge of language(s)’ (see 3.2) need to be put into practice. Specialised diploma and doctoral dissertations are being written (e.g. ‘Kindergarten: the playground of cultures, an ethnological and pedagogical approach’) at universities.

Since the PISA 2000 study found out that pupils from immigrant families performed relatively poorly in the field of literacy, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture considers it an absolute priority to improve the reading skills of pupils whose mother tongue is a language other than German. A group of experts has been set up for this purpose; it will inquire into the reasons for pupils’ failure and recommend measures to improve their performance.