



France 2004

Reception and integration of new migrants

Comment Paper,
EAPN (European
Anti Poverty Network)





(Part 1: A brief assessment of the possible relevance of the policy/measure to the peer country (e.g. what social inclusion problems in the peer country it could potentially solve, the extent to which it fits with the policy and legislative system in the peer country, etc.);)

The new Immigrant Integration Programme is intended to cover immigrants with permission to reside in the territory of France; that is, it includes:

- Political refugees who have passed all the “selection” stages and have been officially accorded refugee status by the government of France.
- Persons who have benefitted from the government’s Family Reunification Policy
- Spouses of French nationals.

The above list clearly indicates that the programme does NOT in any way concern persons residing illegally on the territory of France (400 to 500,000 persons). Nor does it concern persons in need of help in integrating into French society despite having resided in French territory for several years.

The objective of the present circular is to follow programme goals set by the government of France as well as inform the public for which they are intended. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that needs in this area are considerably greater than what can possibly be addressed by the programme. Note that France receives 100,000 foreign immigrants every year. Hence the inadequacy of a programme such as this one.

The April 2003 Interministerial Committee on Integration had take certain steps in this regard. What fruits have these yielded in September 2004?

1/ Progress report on integration programmes and their operational implementation

In April 2003 10 programmes existed, the goal being to draw up 5 additional ones within the year to arrive at a total of 34 in départements that receive 80% of immigrants.

No immigrant reception facilities exist for the entire territory of France and some services are not accessible without difficulty to beneficiaries because of their location in départemental or regional capitals.



2/ Existing services:

One day's introductory lecture on "living in France" (compulsory)
One day's introductory lecture on the French administrative system and related rights (optional)
Language training of longer duration (200 - 500 hours) according to need.

21/ The first point does not require any comment.

22/ It should be noted that a day's lecture on rights, especially social rights is clearly insufficient.

Also, the *Service Social d'Accueil aux Etrangers* (Social Service Centre for Immigrant Reception in France) now part of the OMI (*Office des Migrations Internationales* or Office of International Migrations) intervenes only from time to time whereas previously it did so regularly throughout the period of immigrant reception.

This has given rise to several problems – the situation faced by first-generation immigrants can on occasions be extremely complex and may require a special approach followed by subsequent guidance towards other human rights organizations.

To imagine that such immigrants are better integrated if they are directly sent to human rights centres run by départements with personnel having received no special training in immigrant handling is no better than taking a dangerous risk or only a publicity stunt.

This obviously oversimplified integration programme, (sometimes referred to as "faster" or "accelerated" integration) actually involves a considerable loss in the quality of the services provided. A certain transitional period is not only useful but necessary.

23/ As far as the **language training courses** are concerned, we do not possess the necessary statistics to determine how many persons have benefited from it or for how many hours. We also have considerable doubts regarding the number of persons having actually followed all the classes or even half the number of classes initially planned. **The rate of student admission is NOT enough to evaluate the efficiency of this training scheme.**

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the course is too short for those who do not speak French at all or who have not received any formal education



in their country of origin. Its shortness may be explained by the fact that it is only a course of oral learning. However, reading is equally necessary for long-term memorising and also furthers integration. Being able to read safety instructions at work or understanding the contents of government forms are part of everyday life and should be one of the objectives set by any integration programme.

4/The security and legal stability of immigrants.

A 10-year resident permit *indicates the holder's willingness to settle in France for an extended period of time.* To integrate into a particular society is to plan one's future in that society, by learning the language spoken obviously, but also by planning for one's children's future development in that country.

Yet, social service organizations find that the 1-year residence permit is being increasingly preferred to the 10-year permit, which is hardly ever delivered. The complexity of the renewal process only adds to feelings of insecurity and fears of being expelled from French territory. How can one plan ahead for the future if there is the constant fear that one's residence permit will be cancelled? How can one integrate into one's adopted country if the transition from the 1-year to the 10-year permit is made so difficult even contradictory, with time restrictions (5 successive 1-year permits), minimum salary requirements (during the temporary permit period) and housing requirements imposed? Such measures go against the very philosophy of integration. The organizations feel that what they are witnessing today is a dismantling of the existing system without the creation of any other system to replace it.

5/The role of the civil society in the integration of new immigrants

The law wishes that new residents are integrated into the immediate social network. Integration certainly means linguistic adaptation with the possibility of entering into verbal exchanges with one's neighbours. But it also supposes that the host society is willing to accept different types of people, to appreciate them and establish close ties with them.

This can only be done within a close network of relations, which implies the existence of and effort from local associations and the civil society.



Before the creation of this programme, FASILD (*Fonds d'action et de soutien pour l'intégration et la lutte contre les discriminations* – Funds for integration and the fight against discrimination) used to subsidise small local associations who helped migrant families. **These organizations are mostly based in areas which receive a large influx of immigrants.** They offer language courses, opportunities for meeting other people, scope for socialising, cooking classes and activities for children, etc.

FASILD's recent policy shift to lectures on living in France and language courses without any increase in funds have meant that these training plans have been at the cost of social integration work at the local level.

Effective and multidimensional local integration programmes that served immigrants in their place of residence have therefore had to be abandoned. Women immigrants stood especially to benefit from these measures. Because these associations addressed themselves to the needs of immigrants, their families as well local residents, they acted as a strong integrating factor and a meeting place. One can only with difficulty imagine how one can hope to further integration by stopping subsidies to such organisations.

6/ Concerns regarding the place of women in the new programme

The family reunification programme and marriage to foreigners usually concern women.

According to the new policy, such women are seen as “demanders” of integration from the time of their arrival. Yet, integration may not actually be a priority for them. As they face numerous material and familial problems which need their immediate attention, the need for integration may in fact take several years to be felt.

In certain cultures, the husband does not allow his wife to attend classes away from home, which can pose a problem as well. For those with very young children there are no baby care facilities while their mothers attend classes.

To give a recent example – *a newly arrived Turkish woman with a baby to look after had to attend 600 hours of classes, which meant that the child's grandmother had to give up her job in order to look after the child while the mother was away attending classes.*

Finally and this is especially true in the provinces, the mode of transport available, the time taken to travel from home to the place of instruction and transport costs may also play an important role in the matter.



7/ Children's schooling

The 2003 Interministerial programme plans to take measures on the scholastic integration of children and young immigrants. Apart from the usual programmes available, an investigation should be made into the real conditions of migrant children reception, integration and adaptation to the national education system.

8/ Access to employment and professional training

The 2003 programme also raises the issue of employment and professional training and this aspect of the integration programme needs to be carefully examined. There have been talk of an accord between the OMI and ANPE (the French Employment Agency), but has this accord materialised? In any case, it does not seem to have been well communicated and no methods for assessing its efficiency exist.

Organizations working in this area have observed that training schemes that existed before do not exist any more. The cost of training were supposed to have been borne by the government but this is no longer possible and new immigrants are obliged to pay for their own training.

What is more, the question of remunerating immigrants during both professional and linguistic training that is one of the features of the Foreigner's Reception / Integration contract (*Contrat d'Accueil*) is not mentioned any where.

9/ Right to health care

If OMI's compulsory medical test reveals health problems, what kind of treatment may be envisaged for the immigrant and under what kind of medical coverage? At this stage, the person concerned does not have access to social security coverage that comes from being employed in France.

The recent restrictions imposed on government medical aid further pushes new immigrants into financial precarity.

The new programme makes no reference whatever to these practical aspects of the immigrant problem.



Case study

Paris, October 2004.

Mrs X's Integration and Reception Contract (Contrat d'accueil et d'intégration):

Originally from Mali, Mrs X lives alone with her 16-month baby. She has been in France for the last 2 years, without papers and a fixed domicile. Her case was taken up by an organizations who supported her in her efforts at getting valid papers and in her bid to regularise her situation.

These efforts finally bore fruit and **she is soon to receive a 1-year residence permit**. She has been living under the care of the association in a hostel with her child for the past few months at the Paris centre of the Emergency Medical Service (*SAMU*). Her situation is very unstable since she is regularly obliged to change her room and her sole support is the association that has been helping her regularise her situation.

She now falls in the "refugee regularly admitted into French territory" category.

- **She was recently summoned for the OMI medical test** (compulsory for a 1-year residence permit) but was asked to appear without the child which meant that the association had to look after the baby during the half day she spent at the centre.
- She was then asked to attend the **1-day's introductory lecture on "living in France"** for which once again the problem of looking after the baby rose and was resolved in the same manner. During this training, her linguistic abilities were evaluated and she returned with a paper classifying her as category 4. The association was at a loss as to what that meant. She had also to sign the Integration Contract but was never informed whether she had the right to refuse. In any case, there was no way of knowing whether signing the Integration Contract is determinant in the government's decision to allow the immigrant to reside in France.
- She is soon to attend the **lecture on the French administrative system** for which once again she will have to resolve the problem of where to keep her baby.

The association that has been helping this woman and which organises the language classes have not been selected through tenders (only 2 organizations have been selected in all of Paris). FASILD informed this association that it no



longer received funds for helping this category of women. It is because this woman has been supported by 2 employees and a volunteer from the association for the last 2 years that she will perhaps be able to get out of the situation.

The association is however worried that once her residence permit is accorded, her case will be transferred from the *state* social aid system (SAMU Social or the Social Emergency Services) to the *départementale* social aid system (of the City of Paris) and her file will have to be transferred as well. Obviously, the social worker working on her case will then be replaced by another.

The association believes that this woman being young and dynamic, is likely to extricate herself from this situation but the system is likely to discourage many others who will surely be intimidated by the obstacle course created by the government.

Paris

September 2004

The CAI lecture on “living in France”

As seen through the eyes of a young American working for CIMADE and married to a French national. (This young American woman has been living in France for several years):

There were about 15 of us (although originally 25 were expected to attend the lecture) of different nationalities – American, Senegalese, Camerounian, Malagasy, Turkish, Moroccan, Mexican (1 each) and the rest Algerian. Our legal status were very different. As far as I could tell, there were spouses of French nationals for their first residence permit, some who were awaiting a change of status and most certainly other categories as well. Most of us had been in France for a number of years and spoke French well. The Turkish woman (a Kurd, I think) did not speak a word of French and there was no interpreter for her. The community instructor told me that it was a last minute organizational hitch and that there are usually interpreters, which was not what I was told in September during the first stage of the programme. Well, so much the better! The Mexican however had difficulty following the lecture and the lack of an interpreter could hardly be a last minute problem for her.

To begin with, the community instructor gave us a sheaf of papers on government structure and that of the local départements, on citizenship (French and



European), the basic principles of the French Republic (liberty, etc.) and how these principles are translated in daily life. She explained these principles in general terms and tried to work up a discussion but without much success. The diversity of the group made any such debate difficult.

The problem was how to deal with the subject in general terms for those who knew nothing about the subject without losing the interest of those who already knew a great deal about it?

In the morning, 3 FASILD employees came to supervise the training. They were asked to explain what the FASILD was and its role within the programme. In brief, they explained that OMI was the direct participant, the field worker while FASILD was the behind-the-scene fund provider. They also spoke about their support of other organizations that promote integration and fight against discrimination. A list of organizations were provided with the papers we had been given and we were encouraged to contact them if required. I took this opportunity to inform the others that I was from CIMADE and that I was free to answer their questions during lunchtime. (No one came to speak to me except the instructor).

During lunch break, we all ate together in the cafeteria of the hostel for young workers where the training programme was held. During the meal, I discussed the programme and CIMADE with the instructor.

There had been a misunderstanding with the OMI regarding the care of children. The OMI had announced that there was provision for looking after children on the premises where the training programmes were held although they had been repeatedly informed by the organization that that was not the case. There is still no provision for child care (a man had had to come without his wife to attend the training precisely because there was no such provision).

It seemed that this type of organizational problem may be resolved among the participating organizations, which are FASILD, OMI, AEOEVEN (language classes), CCPS (lectures on living in France), COMMED, FOL (citizenship training) and GRETA (support for professional insertion).

The instructor agreed that the training programmes could be useful for the participants but the contract itself could be dangerous "in the wrong hands" (such as the Police) if it is demanded as proof of integration at the time of residence permit renewal.



The training programme ended far sooner than anticipated (2:30 p.m. instead of 5 p.m.) so it was naturally not too heavy going. This seemed to me a plus-point – the programme’s excessively bureaucratic nature was balanced by the flexibility and humanity of the participating organizations.

Part 2: A brief assessment of the potential transferability of the policy/measure (as a whole or parts of the approach) to the peer country and of the likely conditions for its application;

(Part 3: A note of any important questions about the policy/measure that are being raised and debated in the peer country.)

Social service organizations would like to felicitate the government on its willingness to accept and integrate legal immigrants to France and its insistence on the importance of quality training in French. They would nevertheless like to point out the following lacunae in the government’s programme:

- The cursoriness and inefficiency of the Immigrant Reception Centre’s interventions in case of complex cases because of its exclusive concern with immigrant rights and other related legal matters.
- The drastic reduction in the number of local social service centres that formerly ensured better integration at the local level.
- Neglect of such important issues as infant care, children and adolescent schooling, professional training opportunities, links with employment agencies and health care.

Furthermore, it should be stressed that NGOs play an equally important role in immigrant integration but they have not been consulted in framing policy, nor are there any plans of doing so in the future.

The NGOs are also working with a certain section of the population without valid papers for whom solutions seem even more uncertain, even non-existent, not to speak of foreigners who have settled in France many years back but who require language classes and other kinds of help to integrate into French society.

This lack of cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organizations is all the more regrettable considering the job of social integration is impossible without help from such organizations.