

## 4. Involve immigrant parents in the education process

### WHAT and WHY?

Parental support is critical to children's education outcomes. Students are more likely to remain in school and perform successfully if their families are well informed and involved in their education (Wilder, 2013<sup>[37]</sup>; Borgonovi and Montt, 2012<sup>[38]</sup>). However, immigrant parents tend to be less likely to be connected with their child's school community (OECD, 2018<sup>[2]</sup>). Various barriers can prevent immigrant parents from maintaining regular contact with their school and teachers. For instance, they might have low levels of education themselves, face language barriers or lack knowledge about the functioning of the education system (Antony-Newman, 2018<sup>[39]</sup>). As a result, they may be unable to intervene at the right time and to adequately support their child's learning at home.

### WHO?

Immigrant parents frequently have higher aspirations for their children's educational outcomes than native-born parents (Hagelskamp, Suárez-Orozco and Hughes, 2010<sup>[40]</sup>; Becker and Gresch, 2016<sup>[41]</sup>). In a study of four European countries, immigrants also assigned a higher value to education than non-immigrants (Hadjar and Scharf, 2018<sup>[42]</sup>). Further, parents' psychological engagement and behavioural involvement appears to have a stronger effect than parental socio-economic and education levels on immigrant children's achievement-related motivation and achievement (Kim, Mok and Seidel, 2020<sup>[43]</sup>). Nevertheless, high aspirations are not sufficient when actual knowledge on how to overcome disadvantage and attain educational goals is lacking. Indeed, many immigrant parents, especially in Europe, have low levels of formal qualification and/or lack knowledge about the host-country education system. As a result, the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage is often higher for immigrants than for comparable native-born (OECD, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>).

### HOW?

Efforts to involve immigrant parents to support their children's education can take various forms. The most common types are

- reaching out to immigrant parents in a proactive manner to provide information on the education and school system, the child's performance in school as well as possibilities for parental involvement
- strengthening immigrant parents' skills to enable them to support their children's learning

The most obvious way to *reach immigrant parents* is via the school itself. Schools can, for example, provide translations of documents about the education system, about the development of the child's behaviour and performance in school and about opportunities for parents to get involved in school activities. They

can also arrange regular meetings between teachers and parents and provide childcare for the duration of the session. An example is the French initiative ‘Parent’s Tool Box’ (La mallette des parents), which provides schools with educational guidelines and a structured set of topics. This approach allows teachers to discuss with parents during regular meetings to build trust and encourage parents to engage in their children’s education. Meetings happen around pivotal moments in the school trajectory, such as the transition from primary to lower secondary education. The scheme was piloted in 2008 in urban areas with a high concentration of migrant students and has since been rolled out widely across French public schools.

Schools can also reach parents with the support of dedicated liaison staff who maintain a working relationship with them. In Canada, elementary and secondary schools with large newcomer populations may include settlement workers from community agencies, funded under the federal government’s Settlement Workers In Schools (SWIS) initiative. SWIS workers reach out to immigrant parents, help them understand the school system, support their children’s education and deal with challenges that may arise. Along similar lines, the New South Wales Department of Education in Australia provides Community Information Officers to help schools strengthen links with immigrant parents and communities. (OECD, 2015<sup>[17]</sup>).

Another way to inform immigrant parents is via municipal authorities. In New Zealand, for example, recently arrived refugee parents have a meeting with a senior education advisor in their local community. This advisor introduces them to New Zealand’s school system and explains how they can support their children’s education.

In some cases, the easiest way to reach immigrant parents is via another migrant parent who speaks their language. Based on this idea, various mentoring programmes have been developed across the OECD that train immigrant parents to visit and advise other immigrant parents in education matters. An example are the ‘neighbourhood mother’ or ‘district mother’ programmes that exists in Denmark, in the Netherlands, in various parts of Germany and Austria (OECD, 2017<sup>[30]</sup>). In Norway, the Multicultural Initiative and Resource Network follows a similar approach. The volunteer organisation raises awareness about the importance of parental support in education among immigrant parents. It encourages bilingual parents to co-operate with schools to facilitate the learning of bilingual students more general (OECD, 2018<sup>[21]</sup>).

Efforts to *strengthen immigrant parents’ skills* aim at helping migrant parents engage their children in learning activities linked to their school curriculum. Typically, these programmes focus on host-country language acquisition and literacy training and are often small-scale programmes at the local level. In Boston (United States), the Intergenerational Literacy Project (ILP) provides English literacy support to immigrant parents. With this support, they can support their children’s literacy development and also have a forum through which adults can share their family literacy experiences. The programme is based on a partnership between Boston University and surrounding urban communities. It seeks to improve immigrant students’ chances of to attain the objectives of their schools and to reinforce positive attitudes towards education more generally. In the German city of Hanover, elementary schools organise biweekly meeting groups (‘backpack parent groups’) for immigrant parents. During these sessions at their children’s school, parents learn about the topics taught in their child’s class. The groups also teach them host-country language skills and encourage them to participate in school activities. The meetings are tutored by immigrant parents with host-country language proficiency, who have completed a 9-months training module. Sessions take place during school hours and include childcare for younger children. Similar programmes exist in several Austrian states and Luxembourg (‘Sac d’histoire’). France has a large-scale national initiative to “open the school for parents for the success of the children” (Ouvrir l’école aux parents pour la réussite des enfants) which provides language training in schools for parents to help them better understand the education system. The training is provided in 2x2 hours per week, for a total of 60 to 120 hours per year, in groups of 12-15 participants. The programme is jointly financed by the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Education. Detailed information on the programme is available

in nine languages. Video films explaining the French education system are also available in these languages.

Projects that strengthen migrant mothers will also convey benefits for their children, albeit the link is more indirect – across generations. In Germany, the initiative “Strong in the work place – Migrant mothers get on board” campaigns for better opportunities for migrant mothers. Over 90 nationwide contact points offer coaching, qualification or language practice, as well as contacts to find gainful employment. Since 2015, the initiative has reached over 14 000 mothers and about two thirds of former participants are in employment, in the process of gaining additional skills or qualification recognition after completing the programme (German Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth, 2021<sup>[44]</sup>).

An alternative way to foster migrant parents’ language and literacy skills is to provide courses in which parents and children participate together. Programmes of this type exist in several countries, including in Austria, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Slovenia and Sweden. Vienna, for example, runs a learning support programme for immigrant mothers, who can learn German in parallel with their children at their ECEC centre or school. Other projects involve immigrant parents in further learning activities. New Zealand, for example, provides refugee families and secondary school-aged children with computer literacy training, a computer and a one-year internet connection through the “Computer in Homes” programme.

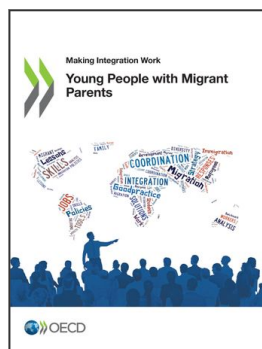
**Table 4.1. Initiatives to involve immigrant parents in their children’s education in OECD countries, 2016**

	Yes/No	Type of instrument
Australia	No (with few exceptions)	Resources may be developed by a range of organisations, with and without government funding (e.g. after an initial government funded pilot project “ <i>Connecting CLD Parents</i> ” the non-for-profit Centre for Multicultural Youth developed and funded a resource kit “ <i>Opening the School Gate. Engaging culturally and linguistically diverse parents in schools</i> ” and later created state-specific editions in conjunction with State Governments)
Austria	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)</li> <li>• Parental education facilities</li> <li>• DVD and brochure in various origin country languages informing about possibilities for parental involvement in school (e.g. parent representatives)</li> <li>• Language training programmes for mothers at schools</li> </ul>
Belgium	Yes	
Canada	Yes	Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) help families (immigrant parents and guardians) understand the school system and support their children, as well as receive referrals to other community resources
Chile	No	/
Czech Republic	n.a.	n.a.
Denmark	Yes (not systematic)	E.g. Outreach activities to involve parents via the “We Need All Youngsters” campaign
Estonia		
Finland		
France	No (except small-scale pilots)	/
Germany	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-operation between schools, administration and migrant organisations</li> <li>• Information material in different languages</li> <li>• Information and advice about VET options in the framework of the KAUSA initiative</li> <li>• Support to migrant associations and projects that work with and engage with migrant parents</li> <li>• Special integration courses for parents combining language training with instruction about the school system and connecting parents with teachers</li> </ul>
Greece	Yes	Monthly meetings with parents in primary schools and training programmes on parents’ literacy, children’s health education, parents’ involvement in pupil’s homework, etc.
Hungary	No	/
Iceland		
Ireland	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family involvement training programmes</li> <li>• Host country language training for parents at their children’s school</li> </ul>

	Yes/No	Type of instrument
		• Training in using public libraries
Israel	Yes	Family involvement training programmes
Italy	Yes (not systematic)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information sessions</li> <li>• Reach out activities</li> <li>• Encounters with parents</li> <li>• Joint mother-child training groups for Italian as a second language ("classroom moms" or "mothers to school")</li> </ul>
Japan		
Korea		
Latvia	No	/
Lithuania	No	/
Luxembourg	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of information through systematic radio broadcasts in Portuguese and English language</li> <li>• Project <i>sac d'histoires</i> providing literacy support to and involving parents in schools for children aged 6 to 8 years</li> </ul>
Mexico	No	/
Netherlands	Yes	Family involvement training programmes
New Zealand	Yes (but not systematic)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bilingual liaison workers assist schools in making contact with families and communities (funded through <i>Refugee Flexible Funding Pool</i>)</li> <li>• Refugee parents meet with senior education advisors in local community</li> </ul>
Norway	Yes	Grant scheme for municipal parental guidance services used by health stations, schools and child welfare services including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group discussions</li> <li>• Information sessions</li> <li>• Home assignments</li> </ul>
Poland	Yes	Annual competition for public projects to counteract intercultural conflicts at schools through developing co-operation between the school community and the parents of students with migrant parents, especially of refugees
Portugal		
Slovak Republic	Yes	Cooperation between schools and parents
Slovenia	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Translated information material to parents of kindergarten children about the education system and the rights and duties of children and parents</li> <li>• Encouragement of parents to participate in the school/kindergarten's work and activities and to learn Slovenian language together with their children</li> </ul>
Spain	Yes	
Sweden	Yes (but not systematic, depends on municipality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach out activities, information sessions</li> <li>• Family involvement training programmes</li> <li>• Host country language training for parents together with their children</li> <li>• Training in reading children's books and use of public libraries</li> </ul>
Switzerland	Yes (part of cantonal integration programmes)	Varies across cantons
Turkey	No (but in development)	Various modules are planned at Public Educational Centres including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parenting Education Course Program</li> <li>• Father Support Training Program</li> <li>• Child Nutrition</li> <li>• Child activities for 0-3 years</li> <li>• Family Support for 0-36 month children who are under developmental risk</li> </ul>
United Kingdom	Yes	Individual schools may run initiatives (e.g. "Key to Integration" programme providing language training to mothers and involving them in school communities
United States	Yes	Funding to schools for family literacy programmes, parent outreach, and training activities for migrant parents

Note: n.a. = information not available.

Source: OECD questionnaire on the integration of young people with migrant parents 2016.



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