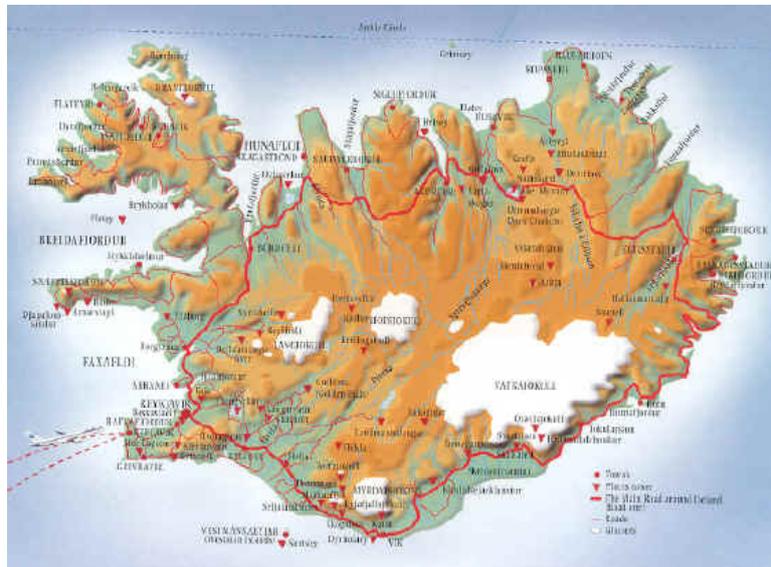


# REPORT

## ICELAND



### **Immigrant Pupils with Special Educational Needs: Cultural Diversity and Special Needs Education**

**This project is an initiative of  
the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education**

**Hulda Karen Daniélsdóttir, Teacher Advisor with the Miðborg and Hlíðar Service Centre**

**January, 2008**

**Contents**

Foreword .....3  
Population .....4  
Data .....5-6  
Provisions .....7-13  
Support .....14-17  
Assessment .....18-20  
Tables .....21-23  
References .....24

## Foreword

The project *Immigrant Pupils with Special Educational Needs: Cultural Diversity and Special Needs Education* is an initiative of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. Iceland's report was prepared by Hulda Karen Daníelsdóttir, Teacher Advisor with the Miðborg and Hlíðar Service Centre, Reykjavík.

This project addresses the lack of information in most European countries regarding students who are immigrants with Special Education Needs (SEN). The project is intended to collect data about the education of these students; and the interactions between these students and their families with social services in the receiving countries.

The final results of this project should be useful to specialists and to those responsible for implementing policy in the participating countries. These countries are Austria, Belgium, Cypress, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

In Iceland, data were gathered through interviews with school administration, department heads or teachers; in five compulsory schools with a large immigrant demographic. Participants in the interviews answered the questions provided by the project question list (see attachment 1). Responses were received from five compulsory schools and one upper secondary school via e-mail. Schools had been encouraged to participate via e-mail correspondence (see attachment 2). An interview was also taken with one teacher advisor working at a social service centre in Reykjavík. Data are from the 2006-2007 school year.

For the most part, this report is based on the answers to the questions on the project question list. These answers have mostly been paraphrased, though their content and meaning remain unaltered. Some quotes are presented verbatim.

The report is also based on the author's own knowledge and experience. She has worked as an advisor to teachers of Icelandic as a second language, and schools with immigrant populations for the past seven years.

# 1. Population

***Q.1. Short description of the population concerned by this analysis. Please use as a reference, globally or partly, the operational definition discussed in Brussels.***

In the *Government Policy on the Integration of Immigrants*, immigrants are defined in the following way: "The term *immigrant* refers to a foreign national who has settled long term in Iceland but is born overseas, or both of whose parents are born overseas or have held foreign citizenship at some time. Immigrants share the characteristic that their native language is not Icelandic. The term native language refers to the first language learned by a child."

(Icelandic Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007)

Further information about immigrants is available on the Statistics Iceland website: <http://stative.is/>. Among other data, information about the proportion of foreign nationals in the Icelandic population from 1950 to 2007 is available there. This information is organized further by country of citizenship, gender, age and length of stay in Iceland. Most immigrants to Iceland come from Poland, Denmark, Sweden, the United States, the Philippines, Lithuania, the countries of the former Yugoslavia, Norway, Thailand and Portugal.

As of December 2006, 6% of the Icelandic population was composed of immigrants, though they have increased significantly since then. According to the website's current data, the number of immigrants seeking Icelandic citizenship has also increased significantly. In 2006, 844 applicants received Icelandic citizenship. The largest group, 222 in number, are from Poland; then 89 from the former Yugoslavia, of those 79 from Serbia and Montenegro (Statistics Iceland, 2008).

## Project Target Population

The project target group was defined the following way at a meeting in Brussels in 2006:

- students with all kinds of special education needs, particularly those with learning disabilities
- and who are immigrants according to the following definition:
  - i) originating or his/her family originating from another country;
  - ii) using a different or similar language as the host country;
  - iii) with or without the nationality of the host country, and,
  - iv) with/without a low educational and economic background
- and who experience a different cultural background from the host country.

In Iceland, there are many terms used for this group. In the new *National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory School* (2007), in the chapter on the subject 'Icelandic as a Second Language', the word *immigrant* does not appear: rather, *students of foreign origin* are referred to, or *students with a mother tongue other than Icelandic*. Similar distinctions are made in proposed legislation regarding pre-, compulsory and upper secondary schools. The word *nýbúi* ('new inhabitant') was used for a while; but its use is disappearing because of negative associations.

## **2. Data**

Data related to pupils in compulsory education, in the 2005/2006 school year

### **General Data**

#### ***Q.2. Data concerning number of immigrant pupils***

Information concerning the number of immigrant students in compulsory education are available at Statistics Iceland; population statistics are provided on pages 21-23.

According to information from the Reykjavík Education Department, the City of Reykjavík allotted special funds to compulsory schools to service 389 immigrant pupils in the 2006-2007 school year. However, the total population of immigrants studying in Reykjavík compulsory schools was 630. The funds were, for the most part, required for the teaching of Icelandic as a second language.

In local authorities other than Reykjavík, special funds from the Equalization Fund (*Jöfnunarsjóður*) were sought for the education of 993 students in Icelandic as a second language. Students benefitting from this course of study are mostly immigrants according to the definition of this project's Target Population; or Icelanders returning from an extended stay abroad (The Association of Local Authorities in Iceland, 2007).

### **Specific Data**

#### ***Q.3. Data concerning number and percentage of immigrant pupils with SEN in mainstream schools, compared to number and percentage of non-immigrant pupils with SEN in mainstream schools***

This information is not available from the Ministry of Education, the Reykjavík Education Department or other centralized authorities. On the other hand, this information is available from the schools themselves. The student population can prove very fluid, as provisions for special education can be assigned for a limited time; and aim to train students in specific skills, such as reading, mathematics or other areas.

A paradox seems to arise when statistical information from participating schools is examined. It becomes apparent that in some schools, the percentage of immigrant students with special education needs is higher than non-immigrant students with SEN. In other schools, the reverse seems to be indicated.

A possible explanation for this might be that coincidence alone determines how many students with SEN study in each school. Another possibility might be that some schools assess student standing and progress more effectively than others. Or, immigrant students in some schools might be thought to have SEN, when in reality there might only be a language-related problem.

These statistical data from the schools must be considered tentative, and thus do not appear in this report in table form.

***Q.4. Data concerning number and % of immigrant pupils with SEN in special schools, compared to number and % of non-immigrant pupils with SEN in special schools.***

According to information from the Reykjavík Education Department, immigrant students with disabilities attending Reykjavík compulsory schools numbered 17 in the 2006-2007 school year. Of these, 12 were born in Iceland. Of these 17, 14 attended special schools.

The special schools in question are all in Reykjavík: Safamýrarskóli, for seriously disabled students; Öskjuhlíðarskóli, for developmentally delayed students. A third school, Brúarskóli, is for students with severe behavioural and mental health difficulties. It also provides educational services for students from the first to tenth grades undergoing treatment at the facilities of the National Hospital's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Department (BUGL); and at Stuðlar, a treatment centre providing services for young people with more serious behavioural, drug-related and crime-related difficulties. Brúarskóli is mandated as providing a temporary programme for its clients.

The following information also comes from the Reykjavík Education Department: in the 2006-2007 school year, the student population of Öskjuhlíðarskóli stood at 104, nine of whom were immigrants according to the definition agreed to in Brussels, mentioned above in section 1. Safamýrarskóli, on the other hand, had 17 students, 5 of whom were immigrants. No immigrant students attended Brúarskóli in the 2006-2007 period.

***Q.5. If no data are available, what is the reason for this lack of information?***

This question is answered in Q4, above: these data are available in the schools themselves.

### 3. Provisions

#### *Q.6. Which types of educational provisions are offered to immigrant pupils and their families?*

Regulation 391/1996, article 1 in the section 'On teaching Icelandic to students with a mother tongue other than Icelandic', states the following: "Students at the compulsory school level, who have a mother tongue other than Icelandic and are permanent residents of Iceland, are entitled to special Icelandic lessons." In article 4, it is stated that "students with a mother tongue other than Icelandic should receive 2 class periods per week in special Icelandic, while s/he is becoming proficient in the Icelandic language. Teaching can vary according to the similarity of the student's mother tongue to Icelandic; and according to the assessment of the school Principal and school specialist services."

Article 5 states: "Where possible, and with the consent of the appropriate local authority, students with a mother tongue other than Icelandic shall, in consultation with their legal guardians, receive instruction in their own mother tongue. This instruction should aim at making the students functionally bilingual. Students should be encouraged to maintain and cultivate their mother tongue."

In 2007, a new *National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory School - Icelandic* was made available on the Ministry of Education webpage. Icelandic as a second language is addressed in it. A bill will also be presented to the Icelandic Parliament (Alþingi) at the 135th legislative assembly, concerning pre-, compulsory- and upper secondary schools. The bill includes students who study Icelandic as a second language. Thus, issues related to immigrant students who study at the various levels of education are currently being re-examined by both the national government and local authorities. Further information can be found at the following links:

<http://www.althingi.is/altext/135/s/0319.html>

<http://www.althingi.is/altext/135/s/0321.html>

<http://www.althingi.is/altext/135/s/0320.html>

[http://bella.mrn.stjr.is/utgafur/adalnamskra\\_grsk\\_islenska.pdf](http://bella.mrn.stjr.is/utgafur/adalnamskra_grsk_islenska.pdf)

In the new parliamentary bill on compulsory schools, the number of teaching periods allotted for special education in Icelandic is not specified, as was the case in Regulation 391/1996, referred to previously. This must be considered a change for the better, as some schools have only allotted immigrant students 2 periods per week in special Icelandic classes; even for those who have only just arrived in the country.

Whatever the laws and regulations put forth, provisions and services for immigrant students and their parents vary greatly from one school to another.

In some schools, students are taken out of class for about one or two school periods per week. They are taught Icelandic as a second language, school skills and school-related vocabulary. In other schools, students are placed in a receiving department for immigrants for their first two weeks or longer, before entering a regular class: in this case they sometimes have a reduced timetable. And yet in other schools with such departments, students enter regular classes at different rates; usually entering non-academic classes before taking part in regular

classrooms.

Students can sometimes spend from up to a year or longer in a receiving department for immigrants, entering a designated home school after that. In some instances, the head of the department decides how many periods students in Icelandic as a second language receive per week in their home schools. The department head then works in collaboration with a teacher in the home school for about a year, after the student graduates from the receiving department.

Immigrant students who have lived in Iceland for a few years, or have been born there, in many cases receive some extra support in content-based Icelandic every week.

*Below is a list of provisions for immigrant students and parents in a few Icelandic compulsory schools. It is important to note that provisions are not the same in all schools, and that the number of immigrant students between schools varies greatly. The same also applies to the quality and number of provisions available to these students and their parents. The list is compiled from the answers provided by participating schools.*

*Some of the participating schools are exceptional, because many immigrant students study there. These schools thus have more experience, skill and knowledge regarding the needs of immigrant students.*

*Had the question list only been put before schools with little experience of these students' needs, the outcome would have been different: fewer provisions would have appeared on the list.*

### **Provisions available in some Icelandic compulsory schools for immigrant students and immigrant students with special education needs:**

- A special receiving department for students.
- One school is designated as a centre of expertise for multiculturalism.
- Official grants have been dispersed to schools and individuals for special projects for the benefit of these students.
- In some schools, entering students undergo an assessment of their standing in literacy, mathematics, English, physical education, swimming, arts, home economics and industrial arts.
- Some schools employ bilingual teachers. These teachers sometimes assess student standing in their own mother tongues. They also assess the student's standing in other subject areas.
- Student areas of interest are investigated, then worked into his or her studies.
- In the receiving and registration interview, the student's health record is examined: such as what immunization the student has received, etc.
- Students receive instruction in Icelandic as a second language.
- A variety of teaching methods are used.
- Special study materials, such as books and interactive materials on the internet, have been published by the National Centre for Educational Materials and other parties.
- Conversation and listening comprehension classes are offered.
- Study materials are adjusted according to the student's ability.
- Support with subject areas and homework.

- Volunteers from the Red Cross assist students with reading.
- Students in Grades 9 and 10 who have Icelandic as a mother tongue may choose to teach immigrant students reading and assist with homework, under the supervision of a teacher.
- In at least one compulsory school, upper secondary school students taking credits in education and development visit and assist immigrant students with homework, under the supervision of a teacher.
- In some schools, teaching and study takes its cue from the Curriculum and the student's progression, rather than from teaching materials, standardized entrance exams or number of students in a class, as is often the case in schools.
- Work is based on an individualized student lesson plan and curriculum.
- Study and teaching is based on close collaboration between a homeroom teachers and teachers in receiving departments for immigrant students. Teaching does not take place solely within the department.
- A multicultural approach to teaching is utilized to a certain extent in some schools. However, as far as can be determined, only one school has emphasized multicultural teaching practices as part of policy.
- In some schools, cooperative learning methods are used in work with all students.
- Students in some schools receive instruction in school subjects in their own mother tongue, along with studying the mother tongue as a subject.
- Bilingual teachers assist students with understanding concepts in Icelandic by providing support in the mother tongue.
- Students utilize study materials in their mother tongues on the internet.
- Students can utilize study materials and recreational reading materials in several languages from specially designated libraries.
- Teacher advisors assist teachers with organizing their teaching, selection of study materials and in other ways which the teachers may require.
- In certain schools, receiving classes bear complete responsibility for immigrant students, and for communication between the students' parents and the school. When students graduate from the receiving class, on the other hand, homeroom teachers bear this responsibility. This differs from the usual model in other schools, in which homeroom teachers bear this responsibility from the beginning, even though the school maintains a receiving class.
- Teachers use diverse assessing techniques when student work, knowledge and abilities are assessed.
- Students receive the assistance of teachers, or the heads of receiving departments, with applications to upper secondary schools.
- Students receive special needs education.
- Teachers are instructed about what and how to teach by other teachers.
- Work is based on the student's strengths.
- Students receive instruction according to ability.
- Eight teacher's aides work with students in the receiving class. They receive a work plan and accompany the students in class or receiving class.
- Teaching advice is made available to schools and individual teachers.
- Special educators work in the school and offer advice.
- Staff in a receiving department for immigrant students prepare extra materials for teachers who teach these students in a class.
- Teacher's aides and special education teachers work with these students.

- A special educator works in the school and is involved in making individualized lesson plans.
- Some students need and receive physiotherapy, periods with an occupational therapist, and speech therapy.
- Concerned parties do not wait for results from the State Diagnostic and Counseling Center; but begin immediately, with representatives from a social services centre and school staff, to find provisions connected to the particular situation and needs of the students.
- Social workers often become involved in because issues connected to the students' families.
- The social service centre emphasizes working together in a cross-disciplinary fashion, such that solutions for individual cases are expected to emerge through collaboration.
- Art therapists, special educators and special education departments play an advisory role to the teachers in the school.

**Provisions in Icelandic schools for immigrant families, including families of children with special education needs:**

Families of immigrant students receive the same services as the families of other students. However, an interpreter is often required at the receiving and registration interview at the school. Little emphasis has been placed on educational provisions for immigrant parents, most weight being placed on disseminating information. In this respect as in others, there is a great difference in the methods used by schools, and in how active the parents of immigrant students are.

Parents who are refugees, on the other hand, have received instruction in Icelandic as a second language, and many other supports, because of their status as refugees.

In some schools, only one designated individual is responsible for interaction with parents of immigrant children. In other schools it could be homeroom teachers, administrators, bilingual teachers or staff in a receiving department for immigrant students. Receiving and registration interviews take place in schools, and parents receive information about the school, recreational activities and information about other things offered within the school walls and without. The parents, in turn, provide information about the student and their family.

In the receiving and registration interviews, the schools present parents with diverse, informative materials about, among other things, the school itself; the importance of mother tongues; recreational activities; and curfew times. Some of this material has been translated into the most common immigrant languages. The materials are most often in booklet form, and accessible on the internet.

In many schools, emphasis is placed on the importance of the student taking part in the extracurricular activities on offer. Through them, immigrant students can socialize with other students, learn the spoken language and practice cultural skills.

The parent associations at very few schools have been active in connecting with the parents of immigrant students.

In most schools, parent-teacher interviews are held two to three times per year; or even more often if problems arise which require further follow-up.

The representatives of one school emphasized the importance of collaboration with parents. Homeroom teachers feel this takes up a lot of time, however.

***Q.7. Which services are responsible for and how do they co-operate? To which extent do these provisions differ from the ones provided to the local population?***

There is one instance of a school in Reykjavík which collaborates with the following entities on behalf of students, including immigrant students with SEN. This collaboration takes place mostly at formal meetings, at which ideas are discussed, and decisions and implementation plans are made. This collaboration can also take place in informal meetings, by telephone or through computerized media.

- **The City of Reykjavík Education Committee** and the **Reykjavík Education Department** in connection with policy, planning, registration, requisition of funds, and other services.
- **Social Service Centres** in connection with counselling in the areas of teaching, recreation, study and employment; social work; home services; and psychological services and diagnoses.
- **The Department of Sports and Leisure in Reykjavík** for after-school programmes, recreation centres and other services.
- **The Red Cross**, for support with student homework.
- **The Hringurinn Children's Hospital** for medical examinations for children from outside the European Economic Area (a service available only for immigrant students).
- **The State Diagnostic and Counseling Center** for students with special needs.
- **The National Hospital's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Department** for students with mental health issues.
- **The National Health Service** for students with health problems.
- **The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland** for trauma counselling, preparation for confirmation and other services.
- **The National Centre for Educational Materials** for the publication of study materials specifically intended for the use of students who are learning Icelandic as a second language.
- **The Intercultural Centre (Alþjóðahús)** for interpreter services (a service only available for immigrant students) and other projects.
- **InterCultural Iceland** for interpreter services (a service only available for immigrant students) and other projects.
- **The Benefit Society of Children with Disabilities** for disabled students.
- **Universities** and other agencies for teacher continuing education.
- Collaboration with various other parties because of projects which strengthen self image, cultural skills, spoken language and social connections for immigrant students (service which is available only for immigrant students).

In another local authorities, the school collaborates with the Red Cross for training students in social skills and cultural literacy. There is also a social centre there for all of the school's students, which employs a staff member whose job is specifically to care for immigrant students.

The school nurse supervises all registrations and has contact with the health services on behalf of immigrant students. The nurse is also a member of the school reception team, which includes a receiving department head, a department staff member; department heads of the various school levels; and sometimes school administrators also attend the team meetings. The reception team serves only immigrant students who study in a receiving department for students who are learning Icelandic as a second language.

The school also works with social services in certain cases; and also with the local authority school office for funding, psychologist and speech therapist services. Collaborative meetings are conducted as required.

Compulsory schools have a student protection committee, though its composition varies from school to school. The following is a sample of a student protection committee at a Reykjavík compulsory school: vice-principal, age-group department heads, receiving department heads, a psychologist, an art therapist, a nurse, a guidance counsellor; and sometimes a social worker and teacher advisor is invited to a meeting, according to the requirements of each case.

The student protection committees are involved in all kinds of problem situations students may have, including immigrant students with special educational needs. Their role is to connect the student in question, and his or her family, with intervention or aid from, for instance, the Child Protection Agency; social service centres; local authority school and family offices; and local authority social services.

***Q.8. Describe in what way services provide information to parents and to what extent families are involved.***

Service providers disseminate information to immigrant parents by supplying them with translated materials and through meetings, with the support of an interpreter's services if required.

Information for parents and students is disseminated in receiving and registration meetings and in parent-teacher meetings, as has been mentioned. Some schools try to have most information for immigrant parents translated. It is usually interpreters who supervise such translation work, or bilingual teachers who work in the school. Bilingual teachers also often work as interpreters for the schools, making telephone calls to students' homes and writing letters in their mother tongue as required. Despite translations and other ways of reaching parents of immigrant students, some schools complain about their poor attendance at parent-teacher meetings or other school events open to the students and their parents.

Some schools examine students' academic standing with parents and discuss what needs to be done at the school and at home in order that students progress in their studies; and that the opportunity to study is used well. Special education and support, in many schools, occurs in collaboration with parents: with, for instance, the composition of individualized lesson plans. A steady flow of information between home and school occurs throughout the school year.

In some schools, collaboration with parents of immigrant students amounts to little to nothing.

***Q.9. Can you describe the financial implications regarding provisions available to immigrant pupils with SEN and their families?***

Service and provisions for immigrant students with special education needs, and those who must deal with disabilities, are the same as for other students. All specialist services in compulsory schools; at social service centres in Reykjavík; local authority school and family offices; and local authority social services all across Iceland are provided to students and their families without charge. These services include the services of psychologists, special educators, social workers, teacher advisors, guidance counsellors, recreational advisors and art therapists.

Schools receive additional funding from the appropriate local authority for the teaching of Icelandic as a second language, and for special assistance for students with special education needs and/or disabilities. This assistance could be therapy with a school psychologist; many hours in a special study programme; periods with an art therapist; and many other provisions.

If it is necessary to look to independent specialists, such as speech therapists, occupational therapists and the like, a social worker is often called onto the case. This is because of the possibility of reducing the costs associated with those specialist services which the parents are responsible for paying. All students who have received medical diagnoses are allotted special funds. If students are seriously ill, parents may apply for special care compensation.

Some schools go to great lengths in order to help families of immigrant students. This is most often because the parents do not have enough knowledge of Icelandic society to get by without assistance. The staff of one particular school helped some parents without medical insurance to have their medical costs covered. In their interaction with parents, they also placed strong emphasis on the fact that students with poor dental health could receive subsidized dental care.

One school has even gone so far as to pay for the medicines required by hyperactive immigrant students because the parents did not have the resources to cover the costs themselves. Schools have also tried to get reduced costs or even complete subsidies for payments to sports associations, for school trips and other such expenditures for immigrant students in financial difficulty. In these cases, teachers and school administrators have made consensual decisions for each instance.

## 4. Support measures

### *Q.10. Can you list the main problems faced by schools, teachers, pupils and families.*

The problems and challenges faced by schools, teachers, and immigrant students and their families are highly individual in character and vary from one school to another. Below are answers taken from those who responded to the project questionnaire. The answers have in some cases been paraphrased, but their meaning is intact:

- Very few schools have determined a policy regarding immigrant students' issues. Schools need a multicultural policy and also have to educate and train their teachers, so that they can increase their knowledge and skills as teachers of immigrant students – whether in a regular class or using some sort of special provision. Changing conditions in schools also require working with the attitudes of teachers. The school community should look at a diverse group of students as a resource, not a liability.
- The students' main problem is that they don't understand the language.
- Advisors are often called for because of behavioural or adjustment problems, not for immigrant students' learning difficulties.
- There hasn't been nearly enough work done on mutual adjustment between immigrant students and students raised in Iceland. Immigrant students often have a hard time getting access into groups, classrooms aren't prepared for the arrival of new students and teachers make no special effort to introduce the students.
- It is often extremely difficult to get immigrant students to take part in social life and recreational activities, both those which are in school and those which are extracurricular. The teachers of these students often exert themselves getting immigrant students to take part in the school's social life. They even telephone the students' parents and send them letters in their respective mother tongues, to name just a few things. Unfortunately, this is often to no effect.
- It's difficult for teachers to adjust study materials for immigrant students.
- Sometimes teachers lack the skills and methodologies which would suit these students.
- A cooperative learning approach and a multicultural emphasis has been tried in a few schools. In some schools it has gone well, with the general participation of the teachers: but in others it has gone badly, with limited teacher participation.
- Some teachers find the work which accompanies teaching immigrant students burdensome, and would rather have specialized departments for immigrants bear responsibility for teaching them.
- The attitude of particular teachers and other staff to these students is sometimes not positive enough.
- The schools are allocated too little money for these students, so the students don't get enough assistance.
- Teachers don't have enough time to give these students special attention.
- Teachers are tired, and don't want to take special responsibility for these students.
- Students do not get appropriate instruction, and the language limits them.
- Parents can do almost nothing to help their own children with homework.
- There is often a great cultural gap between immigrants and Icelanders; and the cultural literacy, on both sides, isn't good enough.
- Parents often take too little – or no – part in their children's schooling.
- Teachers vary greatly in how ready they are to teach immigrant students.
- The problem is in the regular classes, not in the receiving class.

- There isn't an adequate flow of information between the receiving department and the homeroom and subject teachers, who also teach these students. Sometimes there's even a tug of war about where students should be at any given time.
- It is often unclear who bears responsibility for these students. Is it the head of the receiving class and the teacher there, or is it the student's homeroom teacher?
- If students need special study material, some teachers think that they are special education or receiving department students, and belong there instead of in regular classes.
- Immigrant students become isolated in class and “miss the train” – they can't follow their peers in assignments and subject matter.
- The language problems of one or both of the parents – and often of the child, too – lead to difficulties in communication. The parents don't attend Icelandic classes, and students vary in how quickly they pick up the language.
- There often aren't assessments of the students when they arrive in the country, and the services of an interpreter are required to translate the assessment tests for them.
- There are often great language and communication difficulties because of students who have one parent who is an immigrant. The language at home is often a distorted English, instead of Icelandic or the mother tongue of the immigrant parent.
- The greatest problem facing everyone is the lack of provisions when neither the students nor their parents speak Icelandic and English.
- Some feel that too much emphasis is placed on a diagnosis, because it often gives access to financial aid and medication.
- "I sometimes feel so very alone and isolated in teaching Icelandic to immigrants. While the immigrants haven't quite got a hold of Icelandic, it's just as difficult for the homeroom teacher as for the student to try to find an appropriate course of study in the classroom. Everyone's in just as much trouble. Everyone is trying their best, but a child who doesn't speak any Icelandic must feel terrible having to sit in a class where he doesn't understand anything for hours a day."

***Q.11. According to the existing local information, do you have results regarding support measures provided to/by the school, to/by the teachers and to the pupils? Please detail them.***

There are descriptions of support projects in, for instance, minutes and reports belonging to various parties, but their progress as such has not been measured or assessed in a formal way. There aren't many registrations of progress, but people know of good progress in particular support provisions; and many cases have been solved successfully (see for instance the list *Study and teaching provisions available in some Icelandic compulsory schools for immigrant students and immigrant students with special education needs* on pages 8-10 of this report).

Registration of individual cases are contained in case files at the social service centres, local authority school and family offices and in the local authority social service centres. Information about students can also be found in the minutes of the student protection committees and other parties.

Teachers and other compulsory school staff have been offered diverse continuing education courses and inservice training on immigrant student issues. In at least one school, there are a steering committee and support group which meet regularly with classroom teachers. They provide in-class support in certain cases, and training in useful working methods. The benefits of continuing education are reflected in teaching methods and student progress.

***Q.12. Please describe success factors and obstacles related to inclusive learning environment in the frame of a multicultural class.***

The answers below are provided by participants in the project. The answers have been paraphrased, but their content and meaning have remained intact.

**Success factors**

- Collaboration works well when carried out in a purposeful, organized way.
- Variable according to how a teacher works. In classes with younger children, there is great emphasis on practical cooperative learning and integration of subject areas.
- People are working towards this with greater and greater focus.
- Social connections between students are positive, when they occur.
- There are benefits to having immigrant students in class. The breadth of the class becomes greater, and support staff accompanies the students – which also benefits the class. The other children gain a wider perspective on life.
- The kids help each other. A co-teacher system in one school works well.
- It's rewarding, how the immigrants' have a positive attitude towards the school environment, and what goes on there every day.
- Better grades and great progress.
- Good social connections. Special education and other supports are good. Study materials and appropriate expectations such as an individualized assessment of progress in school. Good individual plans.

**Obstacles**

- Obstacles are embedded in the attitudes of some teachers, who look at this as an additional burden on themselves, because they can't teach how they're used to.
- Teachers are too limited by their emphasis on covering teaching materials.
- There's a need for additional continuing education for teachers because of 'school for all', and more multicultural classes, because many teachers aren't secure enough in this new environment.
- Teachers need to change their teaching methods in order to keep up with changing emphases.
- The reception of students needs to be better, and teachers need more knowledge and training.
- Often, the parents' adjustment process is very complicated, and they have to deal with social difficulties. Then the children's problems often reflect the parents' problems.
- There isn't enough cooperative learning.
- Teachers don't succeed in attending to immigrant students as they should, and they often don't have projects to work on or appropriate learning materials.
- Students are set on the back burner because of the teacher's lack of knowledge or time; that's why special educators are increasingly employed by schools.
- Some children have been sent to speech therapists but haven't received any support because they don't fulfill the conditions set by state social insurance. They don't have enough language difficulty to receive support.
- Multicultural teaching isn't used as it should be, and teaching methods vary among teachers.

***Q.13. Can you provide references to some conducted or planned evaluation on this issue (if any)?***

Most participants could not account for any assessment in preparation. On the other hand, many answered that student performance is assessed; that continuing assessment is being used; and that students are assessed in Icelandic as a second language.

One participant answered in the following way:

"The weakness was that we hadn't assessed the situation before the developmental project – connected to more multicultural teaching – was put into effect in our school; and again after it started. Attitude surveys, on the other hand, were sent out to parents twice. First, when the developmental project began, and then when it was over three years later. At parent-teacher meetings, the questions were explained to the parents who didn't speak Icelandic, with the assistance of interpreters."

## 5. Assessment

### ***Q.14. Can you describe the assessment tools used in order to identify the needs and abilities of immigrant pupils with SEN?***

The following are answers provided by project participants:

- Students sometimes arrive with assessments from their homelands.
- Non-linguistic assessments are attempted.
- Art therapists work in this area.
- Bilingual teachers, special education teachers, psychologists and teacher advisors can take part in assessing students.
- Student schoolwork is assessed through observation. Immediate provisions are made if necessary, while we wait on the conclusions of the diagnostic tests.
- Social skills are assessed.
- Role playing is used in the assessment.
- Literacy, concept formation and vocabulary is assessed, often with the aid of an interpreter.
- All kinds of tests and psychological diagnostic tools are used. They are the same that are used for assessments of immigrant students. Though most often the non-word-specific portions of the assessments are used.
- To begin with, students' academic standing is assessed in comparison with other students.
- Diagnostic tests such as the Aston Index reading ability test, the GRP10- and GRPH-14 reading ability test; the Talnalykill math assessment tool; and the Told 2-H and 2-I language development test are used: in addition to psychological diagnostic tests, if necessary. WISC IV, WPPSI and Kaufmann ABC are also used, but their results are interpreted carefully.

### ***Q.15. Can you describe how barriers such as the linguistic one are taken into consideration?***

When an assessment takes place, a department head, interpreter and parents are present with the psychologist. All considerations are taken to assure the security and well being of the student and his or her parents.

"Students are always ready to say yes, and deceive us, and that's often an obstacle. This causes the teacher to assess their abilities as being better than they really are. So we always need to have an interpreter with them when they take such tests, because it should be expected that they misunderstand something in the test, which doesn't give a correct picture of their abilities."

### ***Q.16. How does assessment take place when immigrant pupils with SEN enter the educational system. What kinds of documents (if any) are immigrant parents expected to bring from one country to another?***

School administrators ask for documents at the reception and registration interviews. Sometimes an assessment in math, English, physical education, home economics, art and industrial arts is conducted. The student's standing is sometimes assessed informally, where

skills in the English language are explored, along with literacy in the student's mother tongue. Student and parental expectations of the school are examined. Each respective student's school history is asked for, and information about his or her health and diagnoses as appropriate. This information is stored in the pupil's personal file. This assessment is sometimes conducted with the assistance of a bilingual teacher and special forms in several languages are used in the registration interview.

Often, immigrant parents do not bring the diagnostic records performed on their children from their countries of origin. If needed, the student's situation is assessed in Iceland. If one parent is an immigrant and the other Icelandic, and they have lived in Iceland for some time, then the student has been in the system since pre-school. If a student's case is exceptional, information about them is passed along from pre-school to compulsory school. Then special education periods are assigned to the student. These periods are arranged according to the seriousness of the diagnoses.

***Q.17. Can you describe who is involved in the assessment procedure (role of schools, assessment services, etc.)?***

The assessment revolves around the student, so those present at the first stage are the parents and school staff (special education teachers, department heads and homeroom teachers). Later, when students are assessed due to indications of exceptional circumstances, several parties become involved in the assessment. These parties vary according to school. In one school, for instance, the special education department head, with the aid of an interpreter, administers all of the diagnostic tests except those only psychologists and doctors may administer.

The parties who usually have the most involvement in assessing students in schools are psychologists, speech therapists, art therapists, special education teachers; and interpreters or bilingual teachers if necessary. Teacher advisors, guidance counsellors, department heads, special educators, teachers in receiving departments for immigrants, and homeroom teachers are often asked to participate as well.

Other institutions taking part in student assessments include the State Diagnostic and Counselling Centre; the National Hospital's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Department; Reykjavík Social Service Centres. In local authorities outside of Reykjavík, school and family offices and social service centres take part.

The process usually follows a specific structure. A teacher, the parents, the department head and a special education teacher hold a meeting about the student who has shown evidence of exceptional circumstances. In schools where a support team is in place, the team examines the student's circumstances, and proposes ideas for possible solutions.

The student's case can subsequently be presented to the student protection committee. These committees are in place in most, if not all, compulsory schools. Who sits on this committee varies between schools. The committee's role, according to Regulation 388/1996, article 1 in the section 'On student protection committees in compulsory schools', is "to coordinate the organization and proceeding of services for students in the areas of health, school counselling, and specialist services; and to assist school principals with making and carrying out plans for special student support."

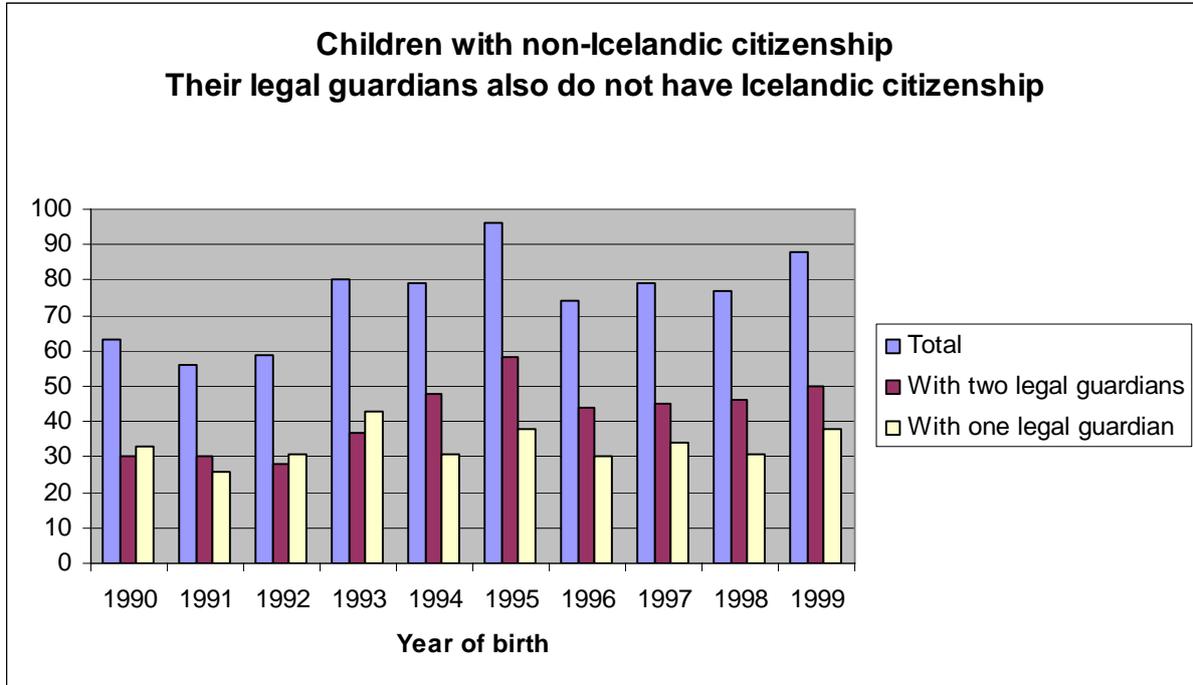
These services are usually organized in three stages:

1. First stage service is provided by the schools.
2. Second stage service is provided by a social service centre in Reykjavík, and the family and school office in other local authorities. Second stage service can centre around a psychologist's basic diagnosis to see if a child has the right to periods with a special needs teacher, and the funds accompanying such instruction. In reality, when a diagnosis is completed, the schools decide what they do with the diagnosis. Psychologists forward this information to appropriate agencies such as the State Diagnostic and Counseling Center, children's doctors at the National Hospital's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Department, child psychiatrists and other specialists.
3. Third stage service is then provided by the health system.

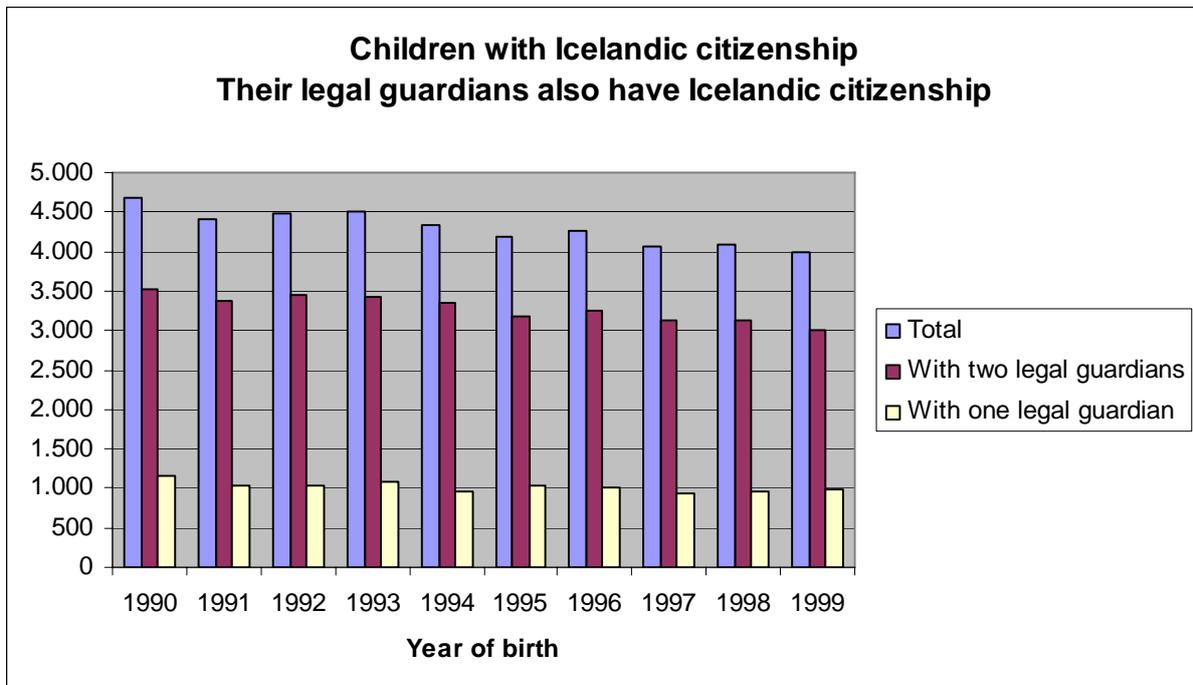
The referrer and the school in question are sent reports about students from the health system. Psychologists, and school representatives such as homeroom teachers, department heads, vice-principals, and art therapists, among others; are called to meetings as appropriate.

## Tables February 21, 2007

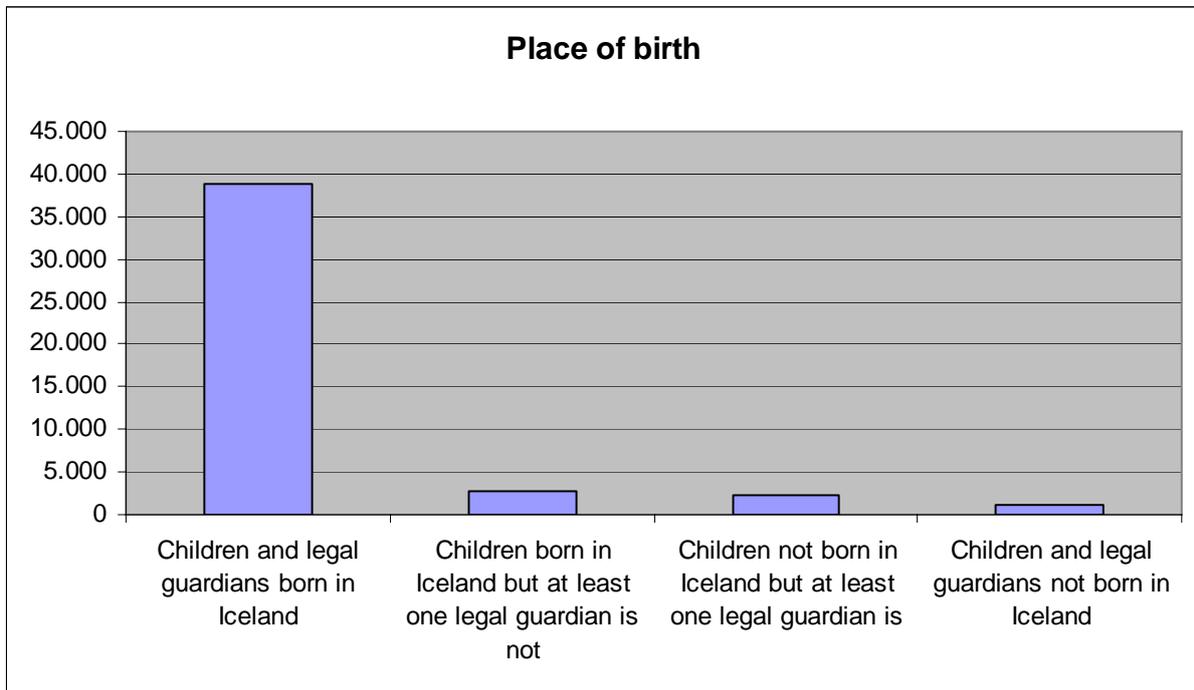
### Children without Icelandic citizenship living in Iceland, born 1990-1999



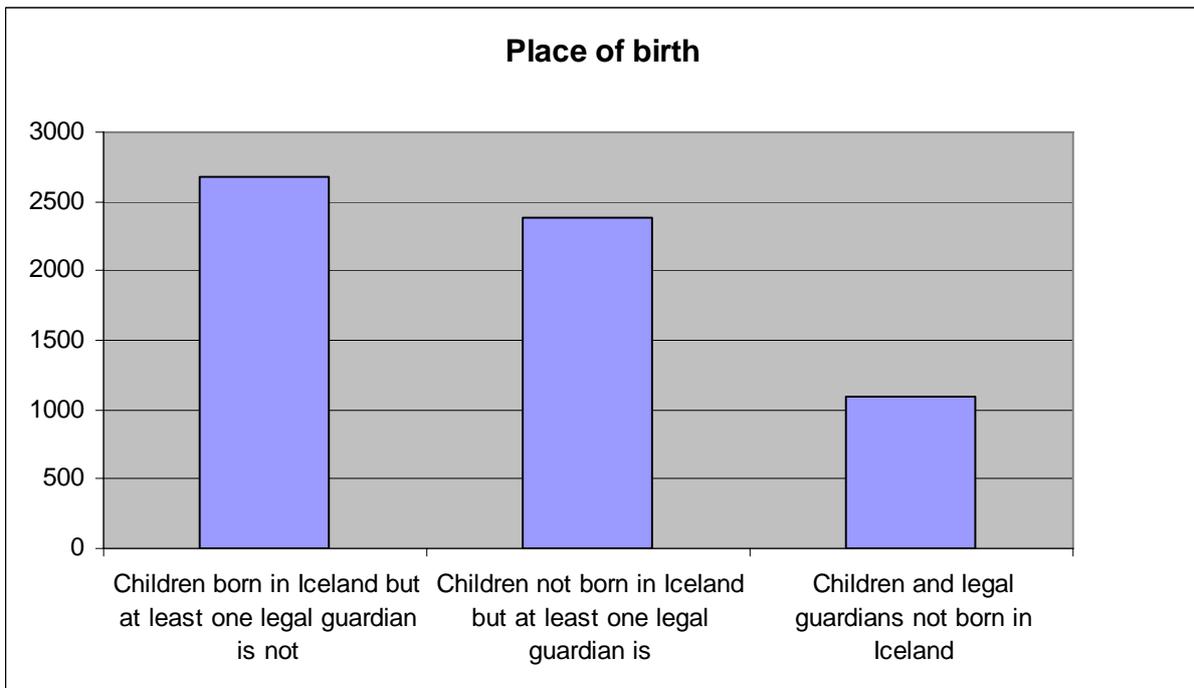
### Children with Icelandic citizenship, born 1990-1999



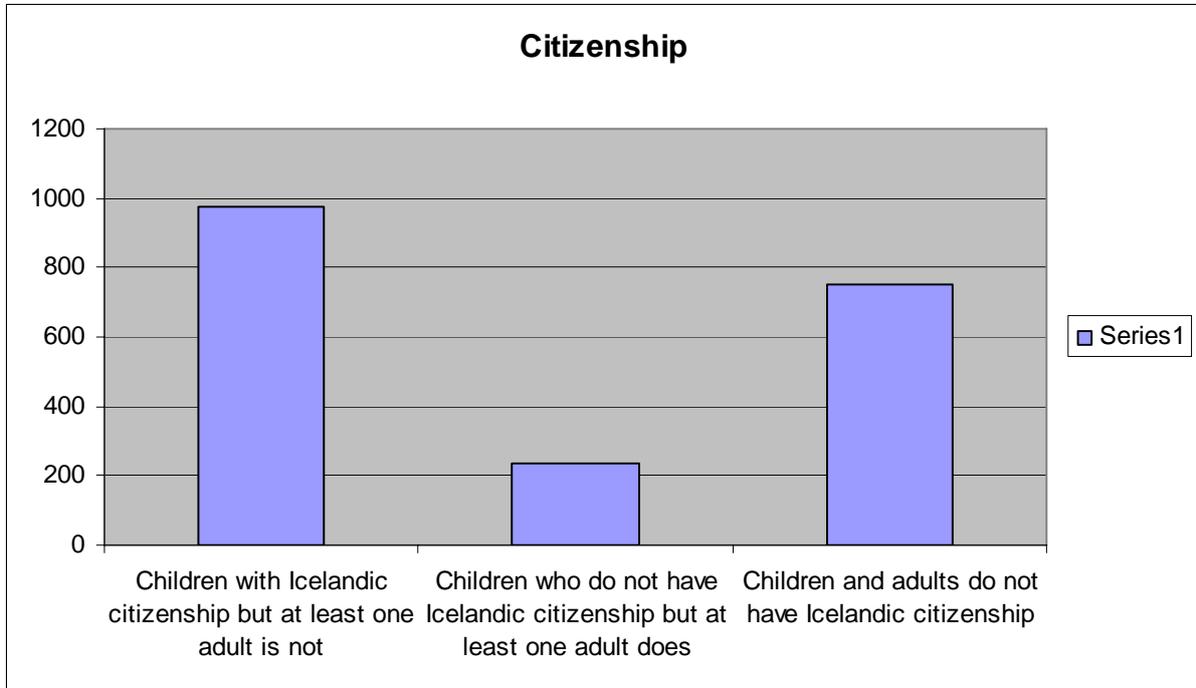
**Children in Iceland born 1990-1999**  
*Classified by place of birth and their legal guardians' place of birth*



**Children in Iceland born 1990-1999**  
**excluding those with both legal guardians born in Iceland**  
*Classified by place of birth and their legal guardians' place of birth*



**Children in Iceland born 1990-1999  
with mixed or no Icelandic citizenship within family  
Classified by citizenship and legal guardians' citizenship**



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Icelandic Ministry of Education (August 1, 2007). *Aðalnámskrá grunnskóla. Íslenska*. Sótt 26.09.07 <[http://bella.mrn.stjr.is/utgafur/adalnamskra\\_grsk\\_islenska.pdf](http://bella.mrn.stjr.is/utgafur/adalnamskra_grsk_islenska.pdf)>, accessed September 26, 2008.

The Association of Local Authorities in Iceland (August 8, 2007). *Skýrsla kennsluráðgjafa Árið 2006*. <[http://www.samband.is/files/1681079224Skýrsla\\_nybuaradgj\\_f\\_arid\\_2006.doc](http://www.samband.is/files/1681079224Skýrsla_nybuaradgj_f_arid_2006.doc)>, accessed September 20, 2007.

# **Attachment 1**

**Janúar 2008**

Thematic Project  
**Immigrant Pupils with Special Educational Needs:  
Cultural Diversity and Special Needs Education**

*Questionnaire for information collection*

The present document aims to be used as a working tool for the analysis we will conduct together. It takes into consideration reflections, comments and proposals suggested by the expert group meeting in Malmö, in December 2006.

We need to keep in mind a few general considerations:

- 1) Immigration is a sensitive area, with negative connotations. During our meetings, it was highlighted that migration has always been part of our society. It should not be perceived as a problem but as a source of enrichment for our society and our education systems, when differences are taken into account and respected and when adequate responses are provided.
- 2) Some general data are available regarding immigrant pupils, but data related to immigrant pupils with special educational needs are missing. One of the project's objectives is to provide some relevant and reliable information on this topic. But, we are all aware, and it was raised again in Malmö, that data collection will be difficult.
- 3) An operational definition was provided as a result of the meeting in Brussels (September 2006). A slight change was suggested, taking into account the possible negative confusion or misunderstanding related to the term of "cultural diversity". The three elements listed are general parameters and, more specifically, the ones under the second bullet below are to be taken in a very open way as fully or partly corresponding to the population concerned in the different countries. One of the questions inserted in the questionnaire is precisely focused on the type of population considered by the different countries. Our analysis will deal with:
  - pupils with all types of SEN (with a particular attention to be paid to those with learning disabilities)
  - and who are immigrants in the sense of: i) originating or his/her family originating from another country; ii) using a different or similar language as the host country; iii) with or without the nationality of the host country, and, iv) with/without a low educational and economic background
  - and who experience a different cultural background from the host country.

The *Questionnaire* includes the core relevant information to be provided by all countries involved. It concerns information:

- At local level
- To be collected by the nominated experts
- Related to pupils in mainstream education (primary, lower secondary and in some countries, even first years of pre-primary education)

Five issues are considered: targeted population; existing data; available provisions; types of support measures and general assessment procedures. These five issues will still be the basis: a) for the practical analysis to be conducted in the different locations where we will have the opportunity to discuss them with the professionals in situ; b) to have a common general overview of the situation in the different countries involved.

Further, each of the five issues can be detailed in a more extensive way at a national level. This is an optional additional task for those countries willing to provide more information.

<p><i>Questionnaire- Local information</i> (General questions to be completed by all countries involved in the thematic project)</p>	<p><i>Questionnaire- National information</i> (optional)</p>
<p><b>1. Population</b></p> <p>Q1. Short description of the population concerned by this analysis. Please use as a reference, globally or partly, the operational definition discussed in Brussels.</p>	<p><b>1. Population</b></p> <p>Q.1. National definition of immigrants (if any)</p> <p>Q.2. Detailed description of types and characteristics of the immigrant population in your country.</p>
<p><b>2. Data</b> (related to pupils in compulsory education, school year 2005/2006)</p> <p><u>General data:</u> Q.2. Data concerning number of immigrant pupils</p> <p><u>Specific data:</u> Q.3. Data concerning number and % of immigrant pupils with SEN in mainstream schools, compared to number and % of non-immigrant pupils with SEN in mainstream schools?</p> <p>Q.4. Data concerning number and % of immigrant pupils with SEN in special schools, compared to number and % of non-immigrant pupils with SEN in special schools.</p> <p>Q.5. If no data are available, what is the reason for lack of information?</p>	<p><b>2. Data</b> (related to pupils in compulsory education, school year 2005/2006)</p> <p><u>General data:</u> Q.3. Number of immigrant pupils.</p> <p><u>Specific data:</u> Q.4. Number and % of immigrant pupils with SEN in mainstream schools, compared to number and % of non-immigrant pupils with SEN in mainstream schools.</p> <p>Q.5. Number and % of immigrant pupils with SEN in special schools, compared to number and % of non-immigrant pupils with SEN in special schools.</p> <p>Q.6. If no data are available, what is the reason for lack of information?</p>
<p><b>3. Provisions<sup>1</sup></b></p> <p>Q.6. Which types of educational provisions are offered to immigrant pupils and their families?.</p> <p>Q.7. Which services are responsible for and how do they co-operate? To which extent do these provisions differ from the ones provided to the local population?.</p> <p>Q.8. Describe in which way services provide information to parents and to which extent</p>	<p><b>3. Provisions</b></p> <p>Q.7. National legislation, regulations and/or existing recommendations in relation to immigrant pupils with SEN and their families.</p> <p>Q.8. Which services are involved and how do they co-operate?.</p> <p>Q.9. Describe in which way services provide information to parents and to which extent families are involved.</p>

<sup>1</sup> In the sense of general available actions or measures offered to families or individuals.

<p>families are involved.</p> <p>Q.9. Can you describe the financial implications regarding provisions available to immigrant pupils with SEN and their families?.</p>	<p>Q.10. Can you describe the financial implications regarding provisions available to immigrant pupils with SEN and their families?.</p>
<p><b>4. Support measures</b></p> <p>Q.10. Can you list the main problems faced by schools, teachers, pupils and families.</p> <p>Q.11. According to the existing local information, do you have results regarding support measures provided to/by the school, to/by the teachers and to the pupils?. Please, detail them.</p> <p>Q.12. Please, describe success factors and obstacles related to inclusive learning environment in the frame of a multi-cultural class.</p> <p>Q.13. Can you provide references to some conducted or planned evaluation on this issue (if any)?.</p>	<p><b>4.Support measures</b></p> <p>Q.11. According to the existing national information, do you have results regarding support measures provided to/by the school, to/by the teachers and to the pupils?. Please, detail them.</p> <p>Q.12. Can you provide references to some conducted or planned evaluation on this issue (if any)?.</p>
<p><b>5. Assessment</b></p> <p>Q.14. Can you describe the assessment tools used in order to identify the needs and abilities of immigrant pupils with SEN?.</p> <p>Q.15. Can you describe how barriers such as the linguistic one are taken into consideration?.</p> <p>Q.16. How does assessment take place when immigrant pupils with SEN enter the educational system. What kind of documents (if any) are immigrant parents expected to bring from one country to another?</p> <p>Q.17. Can you describe who is involved in the assessment procedure (role of schools, assessment services, etc)?.</p>	<p><b>5.Assessment</b></p> <p>Q.13. Can you describe the assessment tools used in order to identify the needs and abilities of immigrant pupils with SEN?.</p> <p>Q.14. Can you describe how barriers such as the linguistic one are taken into consideration?.</p> <p>Q.15. How does assessment take place when immigrant pupils with SEN enter the educational system. What kind of documents (if any) are immigrant parents expected to bring from one country to another?</p> <p>Q.15. Can you describe who is involved in the assessment procedure (role of schools, assessment services, etc)?.</p>

# **Attachment 2**

**Janúar 2008**

Dear principal,

I am a participant in a project for the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education called *Immigrant Pupils with Special Educational Needs: Cultural Diversity and Special Needs Education*.

This project was initiated because, in most European countries, little is known about the students indicated in the project title. Minimal research has been done, and little has been published. One reason for this is the difficulty assessing these students because of language barriers. Few countries have the necessary assessment tools in these students' mother tongues.

I would appreciate information about the following:

How many of your school's students, who are immigrants or the children of immigrants, have been classified as having learning difficulties or disabilities?

How many students in your school are immigrants or the children of immigrants?

How many students attend your school, and how many Icelandic students have been classified as having learning difficulties or disabilities?

It would be enough to get answers to these questions.

In the attachment, there is also a list of questions in English. It would be good to get some answers to the questions marked in red. I would be happy even to get an answer to one question, if not all of them.

It would perhaps be best to save the document and register your answers directly under the questions marked red, then send me the document as an attachment.

I would gratefully accept all answers, long or short. The answers will be translated into English when I use them.

The names of schools, students and local authorities will not appear anywhere in the report.

Please contact me if you would like further information about the project, or clarifications of the questions. My telephone numbers are: 411-1600/411-1638/699-4941.

This e-mail will also be sent to my teacher post list.

With thanks in advance for your response and cooperation,

Hulda Karen Daníelsdóttir  
Kennsluráðgjafi í nýbúafræðslu  
Þjónustumiðstöð Miðborgar og Hlíða  
Skúlagötu 21  
101 Reykjavík