

NIEM French national baseline report – Summary

Integration policies targeting refugees in France

In France the integration of beneficiaries of international protection (BIPs) is predominantly managed through a mainstream approach. That is to say once an individual obtains international protection, they enter the regime of common law (*droit commun*). This means that they are treated equally to any other French citizen and can themselves of all mechanisms of social protection. Thus, according to the common law approach there is little need for specific measures for BIP populations.

France's main targeted integration policy is that of the Republican Integration Contract (*Contrat d'Intégration Républicaine*, CIR). The CIR is obligatory for all third country nationals, including beneficiaries of international protection, who wish to settle in France. Last revised in 2016, the CIR espouses to provide signatories with a personalized integration process. The main tools for integration in the framework of the CIR are a two day civic course and up to 200 hours of language training courses to reach an A1 level (of the Common European of Reference Framework for Languages). These integration measures have been widely criticized by institutional and civil society actors alike. Evaluations of the civic course tend to point towards its dense content, its removal from the challenges of everyday living in France, and the lack of interpreting facilities during the course. Criticisms of the language training courses include concerns about the course duration; the A1 level seen as too low to allow for professional integration; heterogeneous class populations that do not take into account different levels; or lack of targeted support for illiterate populations.

Beyond the CIR, one of the key challenges for the integration of BIPs in France regards access to (adequate) housing. BIPs often experience extremely precarious living situations once they receive their protection status and have to leave the reception centres for asylum seekers. There is often a waiting period of between one to two years before refugees are able to access social housing. While the French state has devoted more resources towards facilitating refugee access to housing, this remain a chronic problem.

Furthermore, BIPs are confronted with difficulties regarding accessing the labour market from insufficiently speaking the language, to holding no professional experience in France or not being able to have their qualifications recognised and a lack of social networks. Young refugees are a particularly vulnerable group in France. Under 25 year olds are not eligible for minimum income support (RSA), thus young refugees can find themselves in situations in which they have no source of assistance from the state. The programme "Garantie jeune" (Youth Guarantee) which provides some form of assistance to this age group has recently been extended to include BIPs, although only a few schemes for this population have been set up so far.

There is growing recognition that the successful integration of BIPs requires targeted approaches that go beyond a common law approach. To this effect various pilot programmes have been created to improve integration prospects, often adopting a comprehensive approach. That is to say they provide BIPs with a kind of package support including, for instance, accommodation, language and vocational training and minimum income support. These initiatives tend to involve collaborations between state and non-state actors at the national, regional or local level. While they remain at the pilot level they may be extended in the coming years. The mobilisation of non-state actors regarding the provision of language training is noteworthy. Indeed, many NGOs and local authorities, like the City of Paris, have set up specific training programmes for illiterate migrants and refugees, a group that was somewhat neglected by the French state's integration policy.

The integration landscape is certainly moving in France. The recently elected President Macron declared refugee integration as a priority for his migration agenda. In late 2017 MP Aurélien Taché was commissioned to carry out an in-depth consultation with relevant stakeholders involved in refugee integration. In February 2018, his findings were published as a comprehensive set of recommendations aimed at improving integration policies. The Ministry of Interior also organised a series of multi-stakeholder working groups on integration. Finally, an interministerial delegate for refugee integration was created in early 2018, which will strive to improve harmonisation between different sectors. Thus, in the following years we can expect less reliance on a mainstream approach and more targeted policies to promote the integration of BIPs into French society.