

Summary Chapter 3: The Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and their Children in France

The 1950s saw the arrival in France of substantial numbers of labour migrants from Italy, Spain, Portugal and North Africa to satisfy generally lower skilled labour needs in the post-war industrial expansion. These movements largely came to halt after the first oil crisis in 1973 but family and humanitarian migration continued. The French experience with migration dates back earlier than this and integration services for migrants were introduced on an as-required basis as early as the 1920s. However, the elements of a systematic introduction policy for new arrivals were only put in place in the 1990s and formalised in the Reception and Integration Contract for new arrivals in 2005.

Perhaps because of the recency of the introduction programme, the outcomes for recent arrivals (those having arrived within the past five years) in France have been among the least favourable in OECD countries. However, after ten years of residence, the situation becomes much more positive, with employment rates that compare favourably with those of the native born, in particular for men. The problem is thus a slow integration process, which is a structural feature of the French labour market for new entrants generally, especially youth. This is especially the case for more highly educated persons. Qualifications recognition procedures are weak and need to be considerably reinforced, along with the initial introduction to the French labour market provided at the time of arrival. As in other countries, a recourse to subsidised jobs may help to overcome employer hesitancy in the face of foreign qualifications and experience.

In contrast to the labour market outcomes for immigrants, those for their children are on the whole much less favourable, even for those who were born and educated in France. This is especially the case for persons of African origin. In part this is due to poor educational attainment levels, which are themselves associated with low parental education and large families. The ability of immigrant parents to invest in the education of their children is more limited and the educational system has not been able to counteract the influence of cumulative background disadvantages. School support structures therefore need to be reinforced, especially at early ages, and sustained throughout compulsory schooling.

However, attainment levels are not the only explanation. The labour market outcomes of the children of immigrants trail those of the children of native-born persons of the same educational attainment. Discrimination testing studies have shown that youth with African names must make at least three times as many applications as those with a “French profile” to obtain a job interview, all other things being equal. However, there are a number of indications that some of this selective screening may be “soft” and amenable to policy intervention.

A number of policies appear to be yielding positive results. These include mentoring, personalised accompaniment in job search, the use of intermediaries and the demonstration of job skills in workplace situations. All of these should be expanded. In addition, youth from disadvantaged areas appear to be underrepresented in many labour market programmes, especially those oriented to the market sector. This needs to change.

Despite the prevalence of selective screening by origin revealed by the testing results, children of immigrants are almost as well represented in the private sector as children of the native-born. This suggests a greater job-search effort on their part. The gap in employment rates is thus largely accounted for by the underrepresentation of the children of immigrants in public-sector employment. Some of this may be due to lack of information, but some

may also be attributable to structural features of the recruitment process. A high priority needs to be given to addressing this imbalance.

All stops are being pulled out to address the problem of the inadequate labour market outcomes of the children of immigrants. The policy response is omnipresent, but lacks a strong focus. More concerted action on some major issues, such as early school performance, selective hiring practices and public sector recruitment is required.