French immigration policy

France is a country with traditionally big immigration. There were immigration peaks after the First World War and then in the 1960s until 1974. Since then, the proportion of immigrants in the total population has remained stable: in March 1999, it stood at around 7.4% according to the census carried out by the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE). But migration pressure is still felt at borders. Moreover, France has become the leading European host country for asylum seekers following a sharp increase in applications for asylum since 1998.

French government immigration-related action really began with the passing of the Order of 2 November 1945 that was often modified between 1974 (date on which borders were closed following the oil crisis) and 2005. For France, which must both address migration pressure and join the process for the approximation of European legislation, has embarked on a reform process. For four years now, immigration control has been regarded as a priority by the Ministry of the Interior.

Law 2003-1119 of 26 November 2003 on immigration control, the residence of aliens in France and nationality aims to ensure the "generous welcome of immigrants" and "to strengthen the fight against illegal immigration rings without which a proper welcome cannot be extended to immigrants". This law reformed in particular the "double penalty" system and made it a requirement to take account of aliens' real integration into French society. The principal measures for combating illegal immigration include the creation of databases of fingerprints and photographs of aliens applying for a residence permit or a visa, and imposes penalties for marriages and paternity of convenience.

Law 2003-1176 of 10 December 2003 reformed asylum procedures. It aims to reduce the time-limit for processing asylum applications by unifying asylum procedures and refocusing them around an overhauled French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA).
The most recent text to date is Law 2006-911 of 24 July 2006 on immigration and integration. It provides for "chosen immigration", i.e. for the possibility of choosing labour to meet the needs of the French economy and welcoming aliens "with an economic, scientific, cultural or humanitarian project". This law also promotes the reception of foreign students. Concerning private immigration, the law strengthens the fight against marriages of convenience and changes conditions for family reunification. Concerning integration, the law makes it a requirement to sign a "Reception and Integration Contract" (Contrat d’accueil et d’intégration – CAI) instituted under the 2005 Social Cohesion Plan. Finally, concerning regularisation and the fight against illegal immigration, the law abolishes de facto regularisation after ten years of illegal residence on French territory and combines the refusal of residence and deportation order into a single decision.

To find out more

**WEBSITES**

- **Chronique de la politique d’immigration en 2006 - Rupture, transition ou continuité?** dossier d’actualité du site Vie publique, March 2007 [in French only]

- **Immigration et politique migratoire**, dossier du site de la Documentation française, January 2007 [in French only]

- **Immigration : vers une politique d’immigration choisie ? [Immigration: towards a chosen-immigration policy?]**, "Vie publique" website, July 2006 [in French only]


- **L’accueil des étrangers en France [Reception of aliens in France]**, survey available on the website of the French Ministry of Employment, Social Cohesion, and Housing, March 2005 [in French only]

**KEY FIGURES**

- **Key figures on immigrants to France**, INSEE website

- **Immigration et présence étrangère en France en 2005**: rapport annuel de la Direction de la population et des migrations, Ministère de l’emploi, de la cohésion sociale et du logement, Corinne Régnard, décembre 2006
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- Code de l’entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d’asile [Aliens Entry and Residence and Right of Asylum Code], Journaux Officiels [Official Journals], 2005 [in French only]
- Les immigrés en France [Immigrants in France], INSEE, Insee Références, September 2005
- Les immigrés dans la société française [Immigrants in French society], Problèmes politiques et sociaux no. 916, La Documentation française, September 2005
- Immigration : les impacts sur le marché du travail [The impact of immigration on the labour market], Problèmes économiques no. 2851, La Documentation française, May 2004
- Immigration, intégration [Immigration and integration], Regards sur l’actualité [Focus on current issues] no. 299, La Documentation française, March 2004