

A vibrant yellow background with various colorful illustrations. In the top left, there are stylized buildings with windows. Below them, a woman with dark hair in a ponytail, wearing a green and orange striped shirt, is looking through a magnifying glass. To her left is a large clock face with a green segment. Below the clock is a key with a green handle and a red ring. In the bottom left, there are colorful geometric shapes. The central focus is a large white starburst shape with a red and orange border, containing the text 'PARTICIPACIÓ A L'ORIGEN'. To the right, there are green hills, a white cloud, and a dashed green line. The bottom right corner contains the English text 'HOW TO INCORPORATE A DIVERSITY OF VOICES FOR NEW EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES'. The top right corner has a black vertical bar with the text 'aFFac' in white.

**PARTICIPACIÓ
A L'ORIGEN**

**HOW TO
INCORPORATE
A DIVERSITY
OF VOICES FOR
NEW EDUCATIONAL
PERSPECTIVES**

The involvement of families in their children's education has a positive influence on their academic progress. International research supports this, emphasizing the significant role families play in decision-making within primary and secondary schools.

By participating in school life, families become active members of the educational community. However, structural and social barriers can hinder involvement, especially for immigrant and racialised families.

AFFaC believes the involvement of all families is key for social transformation and therefore promotes projects to incorporate immigrant families into PTAs.

The study *Participació a l'Origen* (*Participation at Origin*) explores the experiences and participation methods of Moroccan, Romanian, Pakistani and Senegalese families in Catalan schools.



By highlighting the differences between their countries of origin and Catalonia, the study aims to provide better support for PTAs through an intercultural and anti-racist approach.

Using a qualitative methodology, the study actively involves these communities. Below, we present the main barriers to involvement we have identified, as well as suggestions to encourage the participation and inclusion of immigrant families in schools.

BARRIERS TO THE INVOLVEMENT OF IMMIGRANT FAMILIES IN SCHOOL LIFE

1. The first barrier: language

Lack of fluidity in the new language of the host country can create insecurity within families and limit their involvement in school life while favouring discrimination.

In Catalonia, there is the added difficulty of speaking two languages: Catalan and Spanish. On the one hand, these families are encouraged to learn Catalan because it is the official language of schools; on the other hand, they have to learn Spanish to find a job, integrate into society, and carry out procedures to obtain a driving licence or Spanish nationality. Thus, they often have to choose one language over the other.



2. Choosing priorities

When arriving in Catalonia, immigrant families must quickly find a job, a place to live and regularise their situation. Once they have covered these basic needs, they can become involved in other areas, such as school life.

3. Education level

Families with a higher education level have more resources and capabilities to help their children, so they tend to be more involved in school life.

Furthermore, education level also influences the family's conception of the educational system and the value given to education.



4. Discrimination hinders involvement

Immigrant people face direct and indirect discrimination based on prejudices such as the colour of their skin, origin, religious beliefs, social class, etc. These prejudices are also present within the educational community. For instance, the drop in PISA results is attributed to the rise in foreign students, an argument that data has rebutted. Another case of discrimination happens to Muslim students who observe Ramadan and are questioned.

These discriminatory practices in schools create mistrust, causing immigrant families to feel uneasy about engaging with the educational system.

“They don’t communicate with us; from the start, they treat us like we don’t know anything”



5. Ignorance of cultural differences

Some teachers may misinterpret certain interactions or attitudes from students and immigrant families that are due to cultural or religious differences in expression. For instance, in some cultures, not looking the teacher in the eyes is a way of showing respect and not indifference.

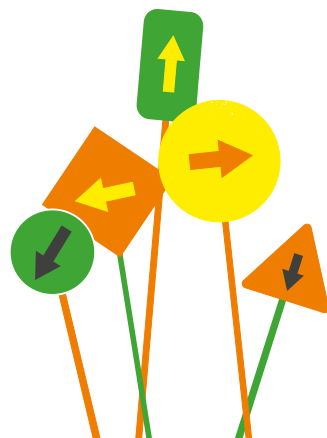
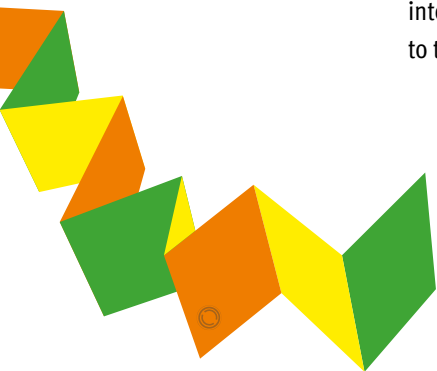
Lack of knowledge among teachers and school staff regarding students' cultures of origin is another obstacle to understanding and communication.



6. Miscommunication

Many immigrant families consider that they do not receive all the information related to the functioning of the Catalan educational system, their children's school, or their progress. They point out that meetings and informational spaces are often limited or too formal and therefore, not inclusive enough.

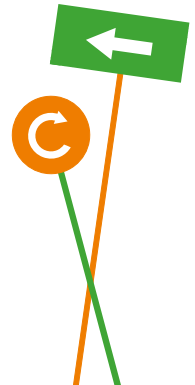
This situation is exacerbated by the fact that information is often communicated by telematic means, without taking into account the digital skills of families and their access to the necessary technology.



7. Difficulties in balancing work and life

Workload, long working hours, and jobs with little flexibility limit the time available for families to participate in formal and informal school activities, such as informational meetings organised by school staff, socio-educational events, and PTA work groups.

Additionally, many immigrant families relied on established support networks in their countries of origin, which are lost or reduced when they migrate. Without this support network to assist in raising their children, they face increased challenges in balancing work and family life.





STRATEGIES TO INCORPORATE IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

The willingness of all educational community stakeholders is key to promoting the involvement of immigrant and racialised families in schools, but to transform this intention into concrete action, a **Welcome Plan for New Families** is essential.

This plan should be formalised across the Catalan educational system by the Education Department, codesigned with immigrant communities with actions defined according to education levels and stakeholder diversity.

Ideally, schools should be given the necessary resources and tools to ensure that the plan is implemented properly, taking into account the reality of each school.

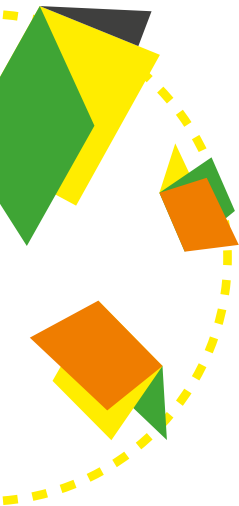
To this regard, aFFac proposes a series of strategies, classified according to the stakeholders targeted:

1. Immigrant and racialised families

- ✓ Avoid homogenising immigrant communities, considering the differences between collectives.
- ✓ Feel empathy and understanding that processes require time. Immigrant families need to cover basic needs before becoming involved in school.
- ✓ Encourage immigrant families to express their needs and complaints, considering it might take time.
- ✓ Promote that the immigrant community is also part of the school's different representation spaces.
- ✓ Include mentors from the same community, to support newly-arrived students and their families, explaining how the education system works, its stages and moments of transition.

“We have to keep on fighting. I know it's hard, but if we are not involved, we won't get rid of this look”





- ✓ Facilitate immigrant communities to organise themselves and collectively discuss the role they want to fulfil as a community in Catalonia.
- ✓ Network with other immigrant groups that have already fostered the participation of families in their children's education and who have the knowledge and experience.

2. Schools and staff

- ✓ Work and train on antiracism and interculturality in schools so that staff working with immigrant students and families get to know their context and reality.
- ✓ Drive socio-educational interventions involving families as a relevant actor, such as shared conferences and learning communities.

- ✓ Deploy strategies to approach families considering their background and needs both in and outside school.
- ✓ Set up meetings before or at the beginning of the school year to share what the school can offer and the family's expectations.
- ✓ Make meetings with staff more flexible to encourage the attendance of all families.
- ✓ Work on the subject of identity with students from an antiracist, intercultural and feminist approach, considering it is a tough subject for immigrant or racialised students.
- ✓ Promote and coordinate a community network for tutoring lessons: An environment capable of offering academic and emotional support during secondary education for new students or students with special needs. This tutoring should rely on teacher participation in the design phase.



- ✓ Inform on the dates of the main cultural and religious traditions of the various communities present at school and organise activities to explain them to all students.
- ✓ Incorporate other organisations and associations of the social fabric to promote the inclusion of immigrant families.

3. Teaching staff

- ✓ Train teaching staff on the educational and cultural context of their students to educate without prejudices towards racialised and immigrant students.
- ✓ Increase the diversity of teachers and incorporate teachers from diverse origins. This calls for political action and several regulatory changes.
- ✓ Encourage teachers to take the initiative when approaching families of their class at the beginning of the school year with a friendly and available attitude.

- ✓ Arrange frequent and flexible follow-up meetings between teachers and families. Meetings should have a preventive rather than a reactive approach, i.e., focusing on sharing information to prevent a situation from becoming problematic and impacting the performance and well-being of students.
- ✓ Encourage and motivate students: families trust teachers who show involvement when guiding students.

4. PTA and families

- ✓ Collectively discuss how PTAs can identify prejudices and discriminations towards immigrant families.
- ✓ Avoid assimilation positions in which people have to change their way of being to adapt to the host country. Instead, favour respect towards cultural differences.

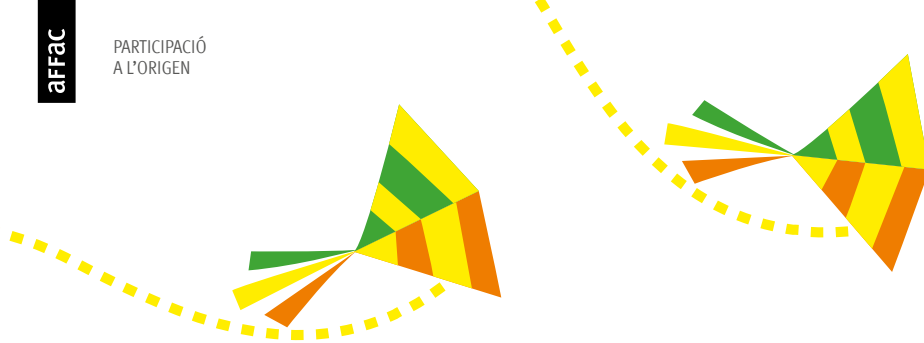


- ✓ Remember that involvement is gradual, starting from more discrete ways and then progressing.
- ✓ Incorporate people from diverse origins in PTAs.
- ✓ Rely on education and diversity professionals, if required.
- ✓ Find strategies to avoid that the insecurity some families feel from not being proficient in the official language hinders their participation.
- ✓ Find strategies to reach immigrant families and invite them to participate, being aware of their diversity.



- ✓ Begin by explaining the Catalan education system to immigrant families and why PTAs are important within this context.
- ✓ Create safe spaces for immigrant families to express their needs and worries.
- ✓ Carry out activities that consider the needs and interests of all families. To gather this information, a diagnosis can be reached using tools such as forms, assemblies, etc.
- ✓ Consider cultural diversity to promote mutual respect also in spaces outside of school, such as parties, socio-educational activities, cafeteria, workshops, etc.





- ✓ Promote informed dialogue with families when approaching coeducation and taking into account religious diversity, particularly when taking on subjects that might be controversial like sexuality.

5. Language and intercultural mediator

- ✓ Find strategies to encourage families to learn the official language.
- ✓ Rely on intercultural mediators who can help translate and are aware of key cultural aspects and the barriers to participation.

- ✓ Provide intercultural mediators with better working conditions. These figures should work with teachers to adapt their communication strategies with families and attend the beginning of the school year meetings.
- ✓ Inform families about official language classes, such as those offered by the Consortium for Language Normalisation.
- ✓ Create spaces for learning the official language adapted to families within schools.
- ✓ Use bilingual dictionaries from the languages of immigrant families into Catalan.
- ✓ Provide language guidance to new students so they can attend school with the maximum normality.
- ✓ Offer certain flexibility to students who are not yet fluent in Catalan so they can adapt and not fall behind.



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at affac.cat

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