# FRANCE'S LE PEN PLEDGES NO SCHOOLING FOR ILLEGAL MIGRANTS

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The National Front leader has proposed that children of illegal immigrants should be refused access to public education. Le Pen's proposals are part of a platform to restrict migrants from accessing social services.

Outlining her hardline proposal, Marine Le Pen told a conference in Paris Thursday: "I've got nothing against foreigners but I say to them: if you come to our country, don't expect that you will be taken care of, treated [by the health system] and that your children will be educated for free."

"That's finished now, it's the end of playtime," she said, adding that France's free schooling lured immigrants "like a suction."

The FN leader's comments provoked outrage from the Socialist government. France's Socialist education minister, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, denounced Le Pen's stance as shameful and said it ran against the values of the French Republic.

"This declaration damages the image of our country and reminds all those who seem to have forgotten that Madame Le Pen refuses to be part of the Republican framework that forges the history and strength of our nation," Vallaud-Belkacem said. "I remind you that it's a matter of honor for the French republic to guarantee to children, to all children, the right to an education -- in other words, the right to a future,"

A move to prevent children from accessing education would currently be in breach of French law, which guarantees schooling for all children in the country.

Restrictions on public service access

Le Pen's comments were coupled with further proposals that migrants with legal status should go through a "waiting period" before benefiting from the country's social services, including free schooling for children.

"I think there is a certain amount of time for taxes from them before getting access to all the public services, like education, social security," she said during her annual visit to the Christmas market on the Champs-Elysees Avenue.

Le Pen and Fillon are expected to face-off in the second round of France's presidential election in May.

Le Pen has long advocated for the expulsion of illegal migrants and called for much tighter controls on asylum applications. She is also pushing for France's withdrawal from the European Union and eurozone.

The party sees itself as part of the global revolt against immigration, established political parties and globalization - a movement encapsulated by Donald Trump's election to US President in November and June's Brexit vote. The FN is hoping to carry that momentum into next May's national French elections. Le Pen has been tipped to qualify for the second round where she is forecast to face - and lose to - Republican candidate Francois Fillon.

While few analysts envisage the FN taking power, France's slow-moving economy and immigration remain key issues to voters.

Fillon has also adopted a tougher stance on newcomers. The Republican candidate has promised to reduce the influx to a "strict minimum." He has also rejected the idea of "multiculturalism," insisting that France must defend its traditions, language and identity.

Former Prime MinisterManuals Vals announced this week that he will try to capture the nomination for the Socialists in January's primary after unpopular President Francois Hollande said he would not seek a second term.

dm/bw (AP, AFP, dpa)

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