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## Immigrants and integration in Finland

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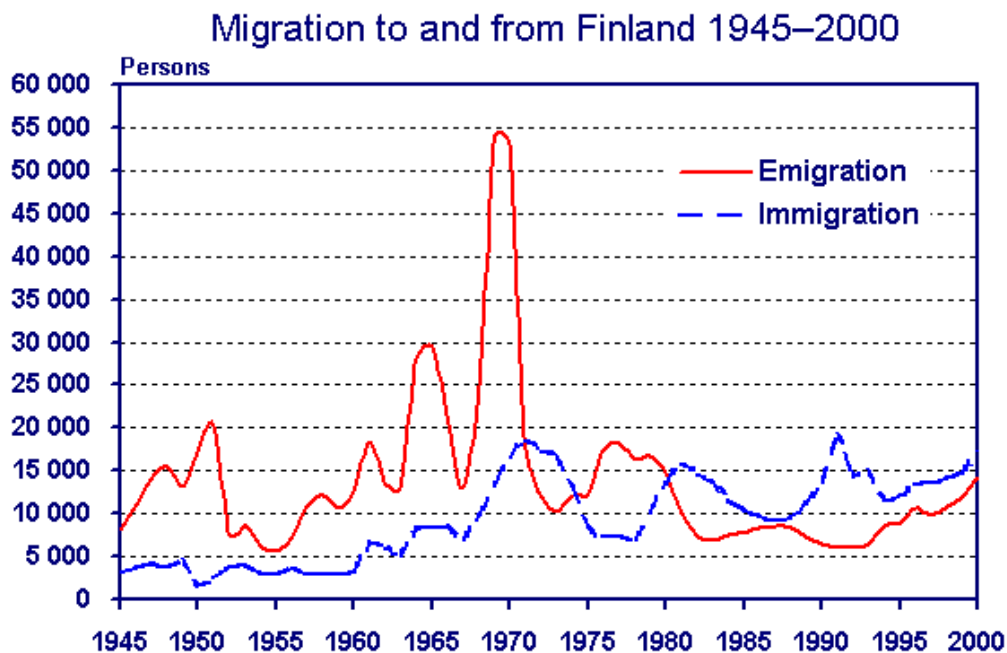
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## General overview

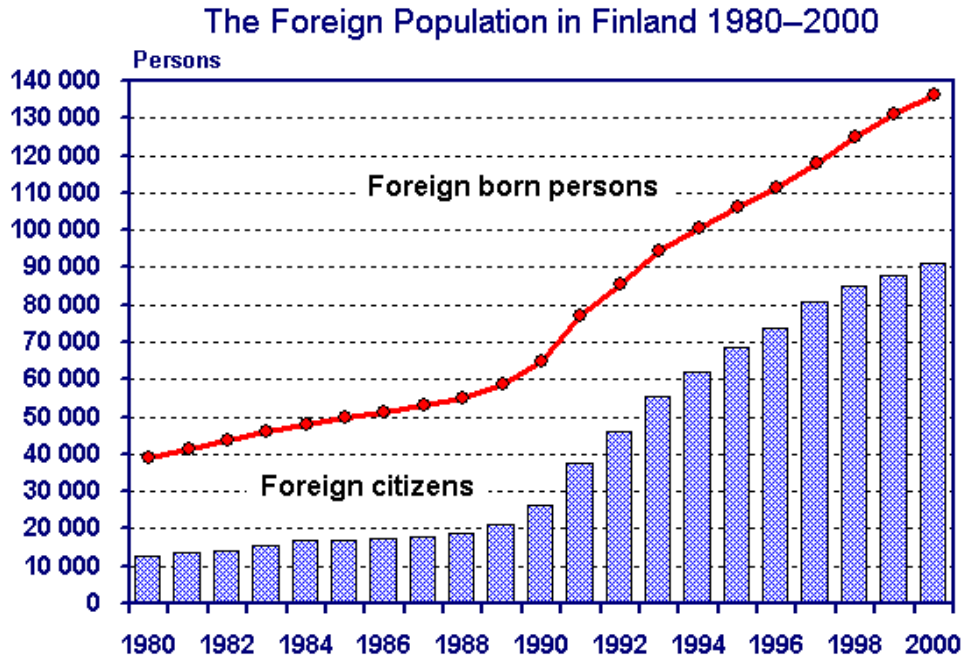
Finland has traditionally been an emigration country. People have migrated to other Western countries to seek better labour opportunities. Sweden has been the most popular target country of the Finnish emigrants. The migration flow to Sweden reached its peak in the year 1970. Since that the volume of the emigration has decreased and the immigration to Finland has increased. From the beginning of the 1980s has Finland received more immigrants than emigrants have left the country. Since that the net immigration began to increase. (Figure 1).



Source: Statistics Finland; Figure: Jouni Korkiasaari, Institute of Migration 2001

Figure 1. Emigration and immigration in Finland 1945-2000.

The population of Finland is considered more ethnically homogenous than the populations of the most other European countries. In 1980s the amount of the foreign population was still low in Finland, but it doubled during the decade. (Figure 2). In the beginning of the 1990s the immigration began rapidly to increase. The rapid growth of the immigrant population from the beginning of the 1990s coincided with a deep economic recession. By the end of the year 2000 the total number of foreign citizens residing in Finland was about 91 000 which is 1.6 % of the total population. The foreign-born population is rather larger, including not only the naturalized population but also ethnic Finns born elsewhere than in Finland (see Forsander 2001). Nowadays the total number of immigrants is 98 640 persons and their share is only 1.7 % of the total population (Monitori 2002).



Source: Statistics Finland; Figure: Jouni Korkiasaari, Institute of Migration

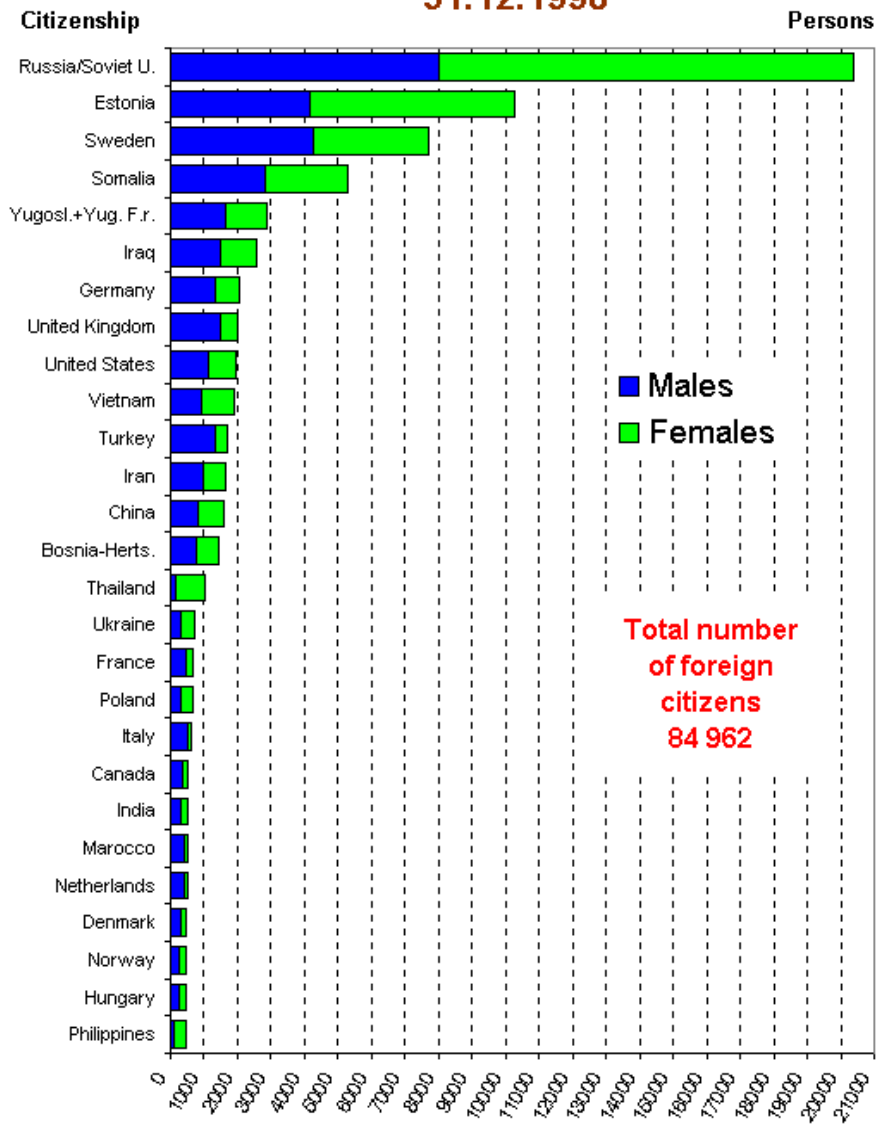
Figure 2. The foreign population in Finland 1980-2000.

The structure of the immigrant population and the reasons for its arrival have changed. In the 1980s people moved to Finland because they had a specific job to perform or for family reasons, for example marriage. Major proportion of arrivals in the 1990s have been Ingrian Finnish returnees and refugees who do not generally have a job waiting for them, nor do they enjoy the benefit of existing social networks that promote employment and integration (Forsander 2001; see Jaakkola 2000). The common labour market within Europe has not significantly increased the mobility of the labour force within the European Union and its internal flows of labour have grown more slowly than migration between the European Union and the third world. In EU countries about 2 % of labour force is from other countries of the Union (Heikkilä 2001).

Main groups of immigrants in Finland are coming from Russia, Estonia, Sweden, Somalia, former Yugoslavia, Irak, Germany, United Kingdom, USA and Vietnam (Figure 3, Table 1). The Russians, Estonians, Americans and Britons are so called voluntary immigrants, while most of the Bosnia-Herzegovinans, Iraqis, Somalis and Vietnamese came to Finland as refugees. The Bosnia-Herzegovinans, Iraqis and Somalis arrived in the 1990s, whereas the Vietnamese are more established immigrants from the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. Totally Finland has received over 21 000 refugees since year 1973. The refugee number includes quota refugees, persons who have applied for asylum and received a positive decision (asylum of residence permit granted based on the need of protection of humanitarian reasons), persons received through the family reunification programme.

The large number of Russian and Estonian citizens is mainly explained by the returnee status which was given to the Ingrians in the 1991. The return migration terms of the Ingrians have been restricted since the end of 1990s. Another significant reason for migration of the Russians and Estonians is a marriage with a Finnish male.

## The Major Foreigner Groups in Finland 31.12.1998



Source: The Population Register Centre. Figure: Jouni Korkiasaari, Institute of Migration.

Figure 3. The major foreigner groups in Finland 1998.

It has been observed that immigrants of the same ethnic origin prefer living close to each other. 40 % of the immigrants live in Helsinki conurbation, whereas the other large centres in the southern Finland, Tampere and Turku, are much less multicultural. Since the 1980s for refugees and later also for remigrants it has been the aim of integration policy to spread the incoming population into smaller towns and other sparsely populated areas outside of southern Finland. One consequence of this policy, especially among refugees, has been domestic migration to Helsinki and its suburbs. Helsinki, Espoo, Turku ja Vantaa are the only Finnish cities which number of immigrant population is over 5 000 (see Forsander 2001; Kokko 2002).

## Employment

The unemployment level of immigrants is higher than the native population (Figure 4). There are nationalities which have over 70 % unemployment rate like Bosnia-Herzegovinans, Iraqi and Somalis. The major impediments to recruitment are unemployment, lack of language skills and the low estimation of foreign work experience by Finnish employers. Russians perceive the lack of language skills as the major impediment to recruitment. 39 % of the Russians wish for more language training and 24.7 % for further training in their field of profession. A point of comparison is provided by the Estonians, of whom only 12.2 % wish for more language training and 28.6 % for further training.

Table 1. Refugees received by Finland 1973-2002.

Year	Continent of origin					Total
	Latin America	Asia	Near and Middle East	Africa	Eastern Europe	
1973-77	182	-	-	-	-	182
1978	-	-	1	-	-	1
1979	-	100	-	1	-	101
1980	-	15	-	-	-	15
1981	-	19	-	3	-	22
1982	9	21	-	-	-	30
1983	-	151	5	-	-	156
1984	3	62	-	1	-	66
1985	-	24	1	-	-	25
1986	3	131	1	1	-	136
1987	4	144	12	7	-	167
1988	1	311	27	1	-	340
1989	4	466	59	13	5	547
1990	1	461	365	20	11	858
1991	1	276	351	606	132	1 366
1992	-	138	642	1 255	314	2 349
1993	4	263	525	975	1 922	3 689
1994	24	163	365	582	278	1 412
1995	14	66	440	304	591	1 415
1996	5	28	594	160	406	1 193
1997	7	27	778	491	103	1 406
1998	2	41	482	349	84	958
1999	2	78	542	130	437	1 189
2000		342	370	142	358	1 212
2001	2	363	477	397	618	1 857
1.1.- 30.4.2002	9	55	172	99	177	512
<b>Total</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>3 745</b>	<b>6 209</b>	<b>5 537</b>	<b>5 436</b>	<b>21 204</b>

**Source:** [Ministry of Labour/Division for Migration](#)

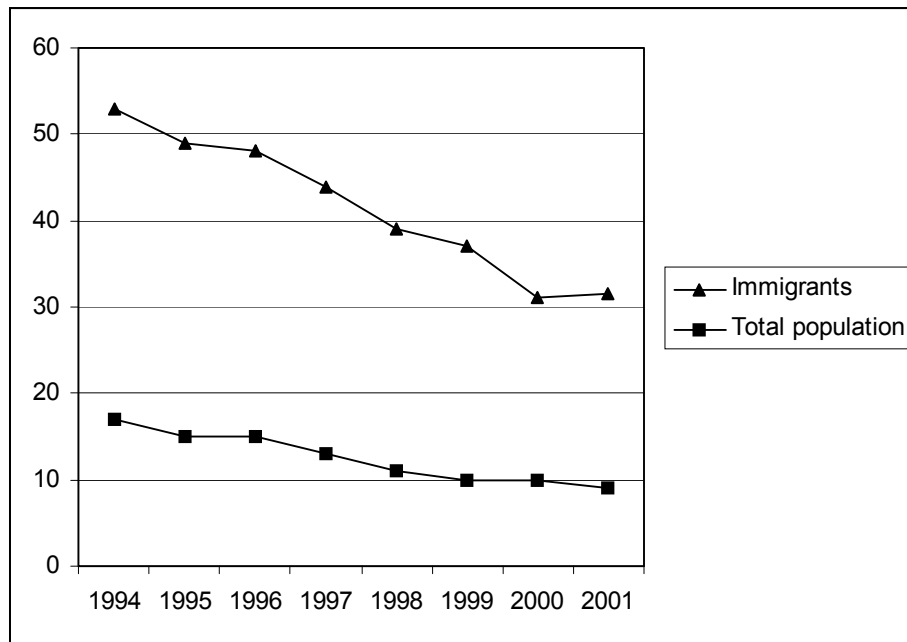


Figure 4. Unemployment rates for immigrants and total population in 1994-2001 in Finland (Heikkilä & Järvinen 2002).

Foreign training is largely not valued in Finland, particularly technical training given in Russia with the exception of teleinformatics. Some immigrants wish to update their training as nurses to fulfill the conditions in Finnish hospitals (Heikkilä & Jaakkola 2000; Heikkilä & Järvinen 2002).

Fortyfive per cent of immigrants (foreign citizens) was part of the labour force at the end of the year 2001 in Finland while for the whole population the proportion was 67 %. The smaller proportion of the immigrants is explained by immigrant population having on an average more children and more frequently women staying home taking care of their children. The number of participation in education is also high among immigrants. The proportion of working age population of the immigrants is 74 %, which is obviously higher proportion than among the whole population (67 %) (Statistics Finland 2001; Työministeriö 2002).

For the employment authorities, prejudices among employers are the major impediment to the recruitment of immigrants. In their experience, negative attitudes towards foreigners are usually to blame for a deterioration of the working conditions. According to the responses, the prejudices are caused by fears, language problems and different customs, whereas the attitudes are not affected by religion, colour of skin or the need for supervision. The employment authorities highlight the fact that, even if immigrants are recruited for their professional know-how, their recruitment is facilitated by language skills and cultural factors (Heikkilä & Jaakkola 2000).

Immigrants are most successfully recruited for jobs that require little or no training. Another problem for the immigrant job-seekers is that foreign degrees are not valued by the employers, despite the fact that they are officially recognised. Certifications from Finland, other Nordic or other Western industrialized nations are more appreciated in the local labour market system than certifications obtained in other countries. The recruitment of immigrant graduates is particularly problematic; immigrant experts are frustrated by the fact that the jobs offered to

them are far from always in keeping with their training. Finns and foreigners are drawn to different jobs on a dualistic labour market. In the high tech -branches there are highly educated experts from foreign countries. The labour markets are segmented also among immigrants (Jaakkola 2000; Forsander 2001).

## **Integration law**

In migration affairs the Ministry of Labour is primarily involved in the integration of immigrants, the reception of asylum seekers and refugees, the placement of refugees in the municipalities, work permit issues, the promotion of employment for immigrants, return migration, issues concerning expatriate Finns, as well as related information and publishing activities. The activities of the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations are coordinated by the Political Division.

Promoting a multicultural society and preventing racism is important target of actions. Integration does not concern only immigrants but also the original population of the receiving country. Finnish constitution guarantees equality, democracy, human rights and basic social security for the people. A follow-up system to chart discrimination and racism is being created. [ETNO, the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations](#), initiates the follow-up in discrimination issues. The increase in the number of immigrant members of the board is a significant change.

The new integration law was founded on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1999 and it is giving more active role for the immigrants in planning their own life in the Finnish society. The objective of this Act (Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers) is to promote the integration, equality and freedom of choice of immigrants through measures which help them to acquire the essential knowledge and skills they need to function in society and to participate in work life, and to ensure the essential livelihood and welfare of asylum seekers by arranging for their reception. The object of the law is also that at the same time immigrants could preserve their native language and their ethnical and cultural features.

Those who are unemployed or are outside of the labour force receiving social fee as clients of the social office have the right to an integration plan. This law considers people who have moved to Finland latest in the mid of 1997 and who have been under 3 years in the country and they have been registered as residents in a municipality in Finland. Integration plan is done in the labour office or in the social office of the municipality. Immigrants objected to integration law can study more freely than other immigrants or native population, while taking part in the actions followed by the law.

The basic course of Finnish language is usually the first action for the immigrants within the law. Other usual courses are for example occupational and craft courses arranged by the labour agency. Besides these 'official courses' immigrants who objected to law can choose quite freely different actions and educative courses, which help them to integrate into the Finnish society.

There are several problems emerging in the realization of the integration law. The resources given to realization are not sufficient. This is one reason that immigrants have to wait too long between language courses. Waiting time decreases the total time of the integration actions. Insufficient resources also affect that the language courses are too heterogeneous: participants

can represent different language groups and totally different levels of education. It is difficult to learn a new language in a group, where some of the students have university degree background and others don't have skill to read any language.

The evaluation of the law shows that the extra resources are needed and they will be also guaranteed. Special groups of the immigrants are the persons who are illiterate and those who don't have any education. Also women need special treatment, because many women have the background of origin where women's position differs remarkably from Finnish equality standards (Peltonen 2002; see Työministeriö 2002).

There are also specific international meeting points, like Caisa in the Helsinki capital area, and they are giving information and services for the immigrants. Also immigrant organisations for different nationalities have activities in helping integration into Finnish society.

### **Challenges for integration**

The level of education is constantly rising in Finland and, consequently, the number of persons willing to do manual work is expected to decrease. This hinders the suitable employment of immigrants, who have lower demands than Finns and are thus perceived by the employers as more qualified for manual labour (Paananen 1999). This observation tallies with the finding that immigrants are most successfully recruited for jobs that require little or no training. Another problem for the immigrant job-seekers is that foreign degrees are not valued by the employers, despite the fact that they are officially recognised (cf. Forsander & Alitolppa-Niitamo 2000; Paananen 1999). The recruitment of immigrant graduates is particularly problematic; immigrant experts are frustrated by the fact that the jobs offered to them are quite often far from their training (see Heikkilä & Jaakkola 2000; Peltonen 2002)

Attitudes towards foreigners may be influenced only in the long run. Some hopes rest on the new, more mobile generation of Finns; that they will learn the value of foreign certificates and foreign work experience and adopt some international working customs.

The immigration brings challenges to the Finnish society in the fields like education during the phase of immigration, in language education during working life, in the services of interpreters and in the education of foreign children and adults (Laakkonen 1992). Language education is a real challenge for Finnish authorities because weak skill of the Finnish language is the hinder to the enter to the Finnish labour markets (Peltonen 2002).

Ethnic segmentation based on varying human resources and human capital is taking place in the Finnish labour market structure. If immigrants are marginalized in the labour markets there is the risk that they are marginalized in the Finnish society, too (see Forsander 2001; Peltonen 2002). The use of real indexes generates a vicious circle on the labour market that leads to a growing frustration among immigrants. Some of the immigrants are unsatisfied with their work, others with the lack of work. There is a growing division between a small minority who have a better 'Finnish' job and the great majority doing manual work. Despite this division, a sufficient income is guaranteed for all immigrants through transitions of income (Heikkilä & Jaakkola 2000).

Immigration can be seen as the movement of human capital from one country to another and at the same time it is a part of the growth process of human capital. From the innovation point of view immigration is seen as the effect of bringing new skills and abilities to the labour



force (skills in work, language proficiency, foreign contacts) and modernisation (at the individual level an ability to take risks, courage, freedom from prejudice) which has influences on development trends in technology, entrepreneurship and internationalisation (see Pirhonen 1992).

There has been some discussion recently on whether Finland should recruit labour from abroad in order to prevent a shortage of labour that may occur after 10-15 years. This is the problem of many western countries because of population ageing. There has been wide discussion in Finland for more active immigration policy and the actions are coming in the near future in the political level.

### **Examples of "good practice" projects**

Good practice campaign of the enterprises –project started in 1997. Basic principles of the declarations of actions against exclusion (Firenze 10/95) among employer organization were the basic for launching this project. Big employers from private and public were involved to the targets of the project. The background factor was also the future lack of labour force which they might face (Työministeriö 2000).

The aim of the project was to get information how the Finnish employers recognize their multicultural labour force. The common feature for all study employers was that they were unprejudiced when recruiting immigrant population. In one hi-tech enterprise the employer has emphasized tolerance and multiculturalism. Personnel is trained to work in multicultural teams. One public employer is giving Finnish language courses for own immigrant workers, the most important working instructions have been translated in languages needed, for example eating, religion and vacation habits of immigrants have been recognized. Also equal treatment is used in salary payments and in advancing in the career for all workers (Työministeriö 2000).

In the city of Varkaus there is going a specific project which takes into account immigrants. The objectives are:

- to have tolerance education theme days; the target groups are teachers, NGOs, the young and children
- to have "god-families" actions; these are families which help immigrants to integrate in the new home municipality, to create new social networks and to know the culture of the municipality together with the city and NGOs
- mentor –education; older workers in the companies help new ones including immigrants to face different culture in the working places

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