

INTERACT – RESEARCHING THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS’ INTEGRATION AS A THREE-WAY PROCESS - IMMIGRANTS, COUNTRIES OF EMIGRATION AND COUNTRIES OF IMMIGRATION AS ACTORS OF INTEGRATION

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Integration Policies Finland Country Report

Kaisu Koskela

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Immigrants, Countries of Emigration and Countries of Immigration as Actors of
Integration

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Integration Policies – Finland Country Report

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INTERACT - Researching Third Country Nationals' Integration as a Three-way Process - Immigrants, Countries of Emigration and Countries of Immigration as Actors of Integration

Around 25 million persons born in a third country (TCNs) are currently living in the European Union (EU), representing 5% of its total population. Integrating immigrants, i.e. allowing them to participate in the host society at the same level as natives, is an active, not a passive, process that involves two parties, the host society and the immigrants, working together to build a cohesive society.

Policy-making on integration is commonly regarded as primarily a matter of concern for the receiving state, with general disregard for the role of the sending state. However, migrants belong to two places: first, where they come and second, where they now live. While integration takes place in the latter, migrants maintain a variety of links with the former. New means of communication facilitating contact between migrants and their homes, globalisation bringing greater cultural diversity to host countries, and nation-building in source countries seeing expatriate nationals as a strategic resource have all transformed the way migrants interact with their home country.

INTERACT project looks at the ways governments and non-governmental institutions in origin countries, including the media, make transnational bonds a reality, and have developed tools that operate economically (to boost financial transfers and investments); culturally (to maintain or revive cultural heritage); politically (to expand the constituency); legally (to support their rights).

INTERACT project explores several important questions: To what extent do policies pursued by EU member states to integrate immigrants, and policies pursued by governments and non-state actors in origin countries regarding expatriates, complement or contradict each other? What effective contribution do they make to the successful integration of migrants and what obstacles do they put in their way?

A considerable amount of high-quality research on the integration of migrants has been produced in the EU. Building on existing research to investigate the impact of origin countries on the integration of migrants in the host country remains to be done.

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Abstract

This report outlines Finnish integration policies. As a relatively new country of immigration with a small immigrant population, Finnish integration policies were developed in their current form only in the past decade. The latest Integration Act was put into action in 2012. Although the main groups of concern in public and political debate about immigration are humanitarian migrants from culturally distant countries, integration policies are primarily concerned with labour market inclusion. The central tool for integration is the Personal Integration Plan, a contract between individual migrants and the relevant state authorities. In addition to state policies, the third sector is seen as an important facilitator in aiding immigrant integration, especially in terms of training on cultural knowledge and language skills.

Key words: Finland, immigration, integration, policy

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1. Introduction

Immigration is a relatively new phenomenon in Finland. The first noticeable groups of immigrants arrived in the early 1990s from Somalia as refugees. Before that there had only been very small numbers of refugees coming from Chile and Vietnam in the late 1970s (Forsander 2002). Migration in larger numbers started even later when the government passed a law allowing “ethnic return migration”¹ of people of Finnish descent from the territory of Ingria in what is today Russia. Currently there are about 195,000 people with foreign nationalities living in Finland.² The overall number of immigrants is very small compared to other European countries, making up only 4% of the population compared to for example 14% in Sweden.³ The largest groups come from Somalia and neighboring countries: Russia, Estonia and Sweden.

Immigration to Finland is largely characterized by humanitarian motives. The most common reasons for migrating to Finland have for a long time been return migration, asylum seeking, marriage-migration⁴ and family reunifications (Jasinskaja-Lahti *et al.* 2002). Labour or economic migration has not been an issue in Finland until very recently. As Forsander (2003: 56) puts it: “Finland’s immigration policy has not been determined by labor market considerations; instead it has developed as a result of external pressures, such as international agreements, or on the basis of ethnic loyalty”. The early 1990s saw Finland starting to heavily invest in the development of internet and communication technologies. The continued development of this sector has made Finland’s economy competitive in global terms. However, labour migration is still relatively small; an acceptable estimate accounts for around 30% of current immigration as work related (Söderling 2011). All in all, Finland has a heterogeneous immigrant population consisting of small clusters of various nationalities with different motives for residing in Finland.

2. Integration in public and political debate

Prior to the Parliamentary elections of 2011, immigration was not a major political issue. However, ever since the 2008 Municipal elections, the populist “The Finns Party” have been gaining support with their “immigration critical” stance, compelling all the main parties to re-establish and clarify their views on immigration issues for the 2011 elections. At the same time, immigration had become also a subject of public debate, coinciding with the rise of social media and web-based discussion forums (Keskinen 2009; Tanner 2011).

However, the political and public discussions are not so much about integration, rather they are about immigration itself. Major debates are about whether or not immigration should be more restricted (i.e. what type of migrants and how many of them should be allowed into the country, should family reunifications be allowed, etc.). A continuation of this theme is the discussion of accepting more/fewer labour migrants versus humanitarian migrants, and the cost of immigration (i.e. can immigration be useful for economic growth, or is it merely an economic burden on the society? How should the services of the welfare system be allocated to immigrants?). “The Finns Party” has also raised concerns about the vulnerability of Finnish culture to foreign influence via immigration, but even this discussion is not so much in terms of how integration should work, but rather in terms of

¹ The law is based on the kindred peoples thinking; “return” migration is allowed for those that are able to prove that at least two out of four grandparents are ethnic Finns. An estimated 25,000-30,000 Ingrian Finns have arrived to Finland since 1990.

² Source: Statistics Finland, 2012

³ Source: OECD data, 2012

⁴ I.e. people migrating to Finland because of a Finnish spouse. Foreign wives most often come from Russia, Estonia and Thailand, and husbands from UK, US, and Turkey (Janinskaja-Lahti *et al.* 2002).

restricting immigration especially from countries that are seen as culturally distant (Maasilta 2012; Pakolaisneuvonta Ry 2010).

In the discussion on immigration, a juxtaposition is drawn between humanitarian migrants and (skilled) labour migrants, whereby humanitarian migrants are the “unwanted” migrants, and assumedly difficult (or unwilling) to integrate (Koskela 2014). This is both because most humanitarian migrants come from countries that are seen as culturally more distant, and because the success of integration is measured in Finland in terms of labour market integration.

Target groups in integration policy discourse are, therefore, humanitarian migrants (refugees and those coming through family reunification). Somalis as the largest group of humanitarian migrants get the most attention, both because they are visibly different, and because they are seen as being culturally distant too. “Muslims” in general are viewed as a group with beliefs and customs that threaten Finnish culture. They are seen as resistant to change and even unable to change (Jaakkola 2009). A new source for concern are the Roma people coming from Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary, who beg on the streets and camp out illegally, a new phenomenon in Finland (Ahola 2011).⁵

3. Administration of integration policies

Finnish integration policies could be described as being labour market oriented. In fact, the primary responsibility of integration issues lies with the Ministry of Employment and the Economy. The focus on employment is also evident in the restriction of integration training only to those immigrants who are not employed. The guiding rationale seems to be that if a migrant can enter the labour market, all other aspects of integration (social, cultural) will follow. Language skills are also emphasised specifically with employability in mind.

Although the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for *immigration* issues (i.e. legislation), the primary responsibility for *integration* measures has been with The Ministry of Employment and the Economy since 2012 (before that it was also with the Ministry of the Interior). The Ministry’s responsibility is for the preparation, the monitoring and the managing of integration, but the actual tasks for implementing concrete integration measures are divided between several other ministries and authorities both at the state and at municipal level.

Municipalities are in charge of the initial assessment of integration needs and the “Personal Integration Plan” for each arriving migrant within their region. The Personal Integration Plan is drawn up in collaboration with the local Employment and Economic Development Office⁶ and the Social Insurance Institution.⁷ However, anything related to establishing a life in Finland is the responsibility of the same Ministry that would be responsible for that issue in relation to native Finnish populations. For example, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is in charge of the health and social welfare issues of immigrants. Similarly, the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the education of both migrants and natives. The government also works together with various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on integration matters.

A full list of administrators related to integration services can be accessed at: http://www.intermin.fi/en/migration/immigration_administration [Accessed 18 October 2014].

⁵ A national minority group of Finnish Roma people also exists, but they are not typically discussed together with the Roma from abroad.

⁶ See (in English):

http://www.te-services.fi/te/en/jobseekers/support_finding_job/integration_services_for_immigrants/assessment_integration_plan/index.html [Accessed 18 October 2014].

⁷ See (in English): <http://www.kela.fi/web/en/financial-assistance-for-unemployed-immigrants> [Accessed 18 October 2014].

4. Main policy tools

According to the Ministry of Employment and the Economy: “For adult immigrants, teaching of Finnish or Swedish and, if necessary, literacy education, are arranged in the form of integration training. In addition, other instruction is organised to promote the immigrant’s social competencies, cultural and life management skills, and entry into working life and further education. Integration training may also include the identification of previously acquired skills and the recognition of degrees, as well as vocational planning and career guidance. Integration training is primarily implemented as labour market training.”⁸

In practical terms, the tools of integration training include language studies, assistance in looking for a job, on-the-job training and/or further education to update one’s professional skills to the requirements of Finnish working society. They may also include recreational activities with different organizations (to improve language skills and cultural knowledge). Immigrant families get specific guidance in family and child services, for example schooling and health care (Ministry of the Interior 2009).

The measures used are decided on a case-by-case basis by a “Personal Integration Plan” that each qualifying immigrant draws up after an initial assessment of his/her needs. These plans constitute a mutual agreement between the immigrant and Finnish officials, whereby education, vocational training, and language courses that support integration are agreed upon. Any previous qualifications or degrees will be taken into consideration in the Personal Integration Plan when assessing the need for further training/education. Finland has ratified the “Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region”.⁹ The recognition of academic degrees from other countries and all professional qualifications will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

By agreeing to take part in the training specified in the integration plan, the immigrant will receive financial “integration assistance” from the Social Insurance Institution or the municipality. To be entitled, and at the same time obligated, to the Personal Integration Plan, an immigrant must be: residing in Finland; over 18 years of age (or an unaccompanied minor); unemployed; and registered in the information system either as getting unemployment benefits or as recipients of social assistance (e.g. for refugees). The right to qualify for integration training and to get access to the services designed to aid integration lasts three to five years from arrival in Finland.¹⁰

⁸ See: https://www.tem.fi/en/work/integration_of_immigrants/integration_services

⁹ Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, available on: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13522&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html [Accessed 18 October 2014].

¹⁰ More on the Personal Integration Plan (in English): <http://www.infopankki.fi/en/living-in-finland/as-an-immigrant-in-finland/integration-into-finland> [Accessed 18 October 2014].

5. Pre-departure training for immigrants

There is no publicly (i.e. state) organised pre-departure training. However, there are online guides for those wishing to relocate to Finland, where information is given on important issues including: how to apply for residency; the rights and duties of an employee; establishing an enterprise; Finnish and Swedish language courses; buying a home; what to do if you fall ill; and how to enrol your child in school.¹¹

Private, *ad-hoc* pre-departure training has been organised in the few attempts to actively recruit foreign workforce for work in Finland. In these cases companies looking to recruit have organised some pre-departure training, for example language courses and knowledge about living in Finland. A recent example would be the recruitment of nurses from Spain. Training is offered to them free-of-charge by the future employer, in this case the hospitals, and lasts five to six months, concentrating mainly on the language component. These projects are very small scale, though, and not part of the government's official immigration policy. Less than 100 nurses from Spain have arrived to Finland since 2011 when the project started.¹²

6. Engagement of non-state actors

The third sector, including native and migrant-led associations, voluntary organisations, church groups, international NGO's and so on, is seen as an important addition to the official integration services. Many groups and organisations therefore receive both state and municipal funding to carry out their efforts. The Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (ETNO), a working group appointed by the Ministry of the Interior, has recommended that the role of the third sector should be further clarified and emphasised in the integration of immigrants, and made into an official part of the integration programme (2008).

The objectives of non-state actors are similar to the state's aims in promoting integration. The third sector is growing all the time, and it is seen as an addition to more impersonal state integration measures. Although many continue the work on improving immigrants' cultural and language knowledge, they also aim at a more concrete introduction to Finland and to strengthen links between Finnish society and immigrants by providing a forum where Finns and foreign nationals can meet in person. The concentration is more on the social aspects of integration (rather than labour market integration that is the primary goal of state policies).

Therefore, although the objectives are the same, the methods and the scale are different. Through non-state actors immigrants can get a more personalised service and information in their own mother tongue. The smaller scale of the organisations makes targeting services for specific groups, for example handicapped migrants, single parents or women, easier.

A comprehensive list of associations (in English) is available on: <http://www.moniheli.fi/jaseneksi/jasenet/> [Accessed 18 October 2014].

¹¹ E.g. Infopankki, published by the City of Helsinki and financed by several Ministries, in 14 languages, see: <http://www.infopankki.fi/en/frontpage>. Private relocation firms may also be used by companies hiring employees from abroad (e.g. <http://www.finlandrelocation.com/en>).

¹² An example of such a project/training provider available (in Finnish only) on: <http://minfokeskus.kotisivukone.com/25> [Accessed 18 October 2014].

7. Assessing the implementation of the policy framework

The Ministry of Employment and Economy is in charge of monitoring integration and the implementation of related policies.¹³ According to recent assessments, the policy framework seems to be implemented successfully. However, there are some concerns whether or not all municipalities, who have the responsibility of the practicalities of implementing the policies, can offer all the services to a high enough standard (e.g. enough language courses, work-experience placements, etc.) (Ministry of Employment and Economy 2013).

As far as the design of the integration measures is concerned, connecting the Individual Integration Plan to financial assistance works as a measure to insure the implementation of integration measures; although the Individual Integration Plan places the responsibility for completing, say, language and professional training on the immigrant themselves, following the plan is made necessary by the fact that it is tied to the right to receive benefits. However, not all types of immigrants are entitled to these integration training measures: although all migrants groups are *in theory* eligible for the same policies, employment effectively stops this right. Therefore, for example, access to free language courses is not available to immigrants that have come to Finland for employment, or have managed to find work since arriving in the country.

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¹³ See: http://www.tem.fi/en/work/integration_of_immigrants/monitoring_of_integration [Accessed 18 October 2014].

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