The integration of refugees in Finland
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Abstract

This paper examines the amendments of legislation pertaining to the reception and integration of refugees in Finland in the years 2014 – 2018. The paper includes recommendations to improve reception and integration in Finland.

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<td>AMIF</td>
<td>Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund</td>
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<td>CEAS</td>
<td>Common European Asylum System</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
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<td>Migri</td>
<td>Finnish Immigration Service</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Finland has a functioning reception and integration system, in particular for quota refugees. The reception system and preparedness plans have allowed stakeholders to accumulate and hold on to the knowhow of reception and integration activities. In 2015, the reception system was able to stretch to adapt to the ten-fold increase in the arrivals of asylum applicants. Everyone who arrived had a bed to sleep in and a roof over their head. However, the increase in applications created a public panic that led to vast and permanent amendments in the migration legislation and serious deficiencies in the right of asylum seekers to a fair procedure, the right to family unity and the right to non-discrimination. For example, the restrictions in access to free legal aid, the restrictions of the appellate procedures and the political pressure to accelerate decision-making, have led to fears that individuals with the right to international protection will not receive protection due to the deficiencies in the asylum procedure. The legislative amendments have also created a new group of irregular migrants in Finland, leaving failed asylum seekers who cannot be returned outside the remit of society and vulnerable to exploitation.

Integration measures combine activities by municipalities, authorities and the third sector. This is seen as a positive aspect of the Finnish system, but the current measures lack adequate resources and longsighted planning. Too many integration activities rely on project-based funding, thus not allowing stakeholders to make long-term plans. The policy that asylum seekers lack access to integration measures does not take into account that asylum seekers may spend several years in the country before their procedure is finished and that they would benefit from integration activities already from the beginning of their arrival.

Conclusions and recommendations

Finland should reconsider the legislative amendments made in the years 2014 – 2016 and commit to provide a fair procedure to all asylum applicants. Integration should be seen as a long-term project that benefits society and refugees.

- The right to free legal aid throughout the asylum determination procedure should be reinstated.
- Asylum applicants should have access to expert legal advice on their rights and duties in the asylum determination procedure before the asylum interview.
- The deadlines and other restrictions on the appellate procedure, that are only applicable to asylum cases, create a discriminative procedure and should be revoked.
- Restrictions on the right to family reunification should be revoked.
- The right to a temporary residence permit for failed asylum seekers who cannot be returned should be reinstated in order to avoid pushing failed asylum seekers into irregular status.
- Asylum seekers should have access to integration activities upon arrival.
- Access to work for asylum seekers should be made easier.
- The government should work with municipalities to ensure that there are enough places in municipalities for those who have been granted international protection.
- Asylum seekers should be part of the integration measures upon arrival in the country and have access to measures that currently are offered to all other regular groups of migrants except asylum seekers who are in the midst of their asylum proceedings.
• Integration activities should be sufficiently resourced.
• Integration activities by the third sector should be evaluated on the basis of commonly agreed indicators.
1. THE DIMENSIONS AND MAIN FEATURES OF THE INFLOW OF REFUGEES AND OTHER MIGRANTS

1.1. Evolution of the inflows of refugees and other migrants in the country since 2010

Finland applies a two-tiered system to refugee protection. Refugees may be accepted for resettlement as quota refugees or may receive international protection as a result of an application for international protection. Quota refugees are mainly received through the UNHCR resettlement system. The number of quota refugees admitted per year is decided by the Parliament in conjunction with the annual budget. Since 2010, the refugee quota has been set at 750 – 1,050 refugees per year. The focus of the refugee quota is set on aiding vulnerable refugees such as families with children and vulnerable women. Individuals applying for international protection may not be admitted in the refugee quota.

The annual number of asylum applications in Finland has stayed more or less stable in the years 2010 – 2018, apart from the year 2015 when the number increased almost tenfold. However, the year 2015 has stayed as a statistical anomaly, already in 2016 the number of applications had decreased to 5,646. By limiting the analysis to the years 2010 – 2018, one could conclude that the number of applications has since risen from around 3,000 – 4,000 applicants to over 5,000 applicants per year. However, it must be noted that already in 2009 there were 5,988 applications, and therefore, one cannot draw the conclusion that there would have been a steady increase since 2010. On the contrary, the number of applications is inconsistent (Figure 1. Applications for international protection 2010 – 2018).

Another noteworthy issue is that the number of renewed applications has risen since 2015, which indicates that the number of applications for international protection does not correspond to the number of annual arrivals. In 2015 there were 518 renewed applications, in 2016 834, in 2017 1,845 and in 2018 1,909 up to 11/2018. Taking into account these renewed applications, and deducting the renewed applications from the total number of applications, the number of first time applications in 2017 was 3,201. (Figure 2. Renewed applications 2015 – 2018)

In the beginning of the 2010’s there was a steady increase in recognition rates, which is attributable both to the transposition of the Status Determination Directive (Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (recast)), which, according to the Immigration Service, consolidated protection statuses as well as the development of reasonings for decisions of the Immigration Service. (Figure 3. Recognition rates for international protection in Finland). The decrease in recognition rates in 2015 and 2016 can be explained in part by the removal of one protection status: humanitarian protection, which in previous years had accounted for 0.1 – 11 % of all recognised applicants. The normalised amount of applications

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2 Upon submission, data was only available until 11/2018. Upon review, the report will be completed to correspond to data containing 12/2018, subject to availability.

has also “normalised” the recognition rates to the levels of the years prior to the surge of applicants in 2015.

Since 2015 the number of asylum seekers has decreased, while there is an increase in the number of migrants applying for a residence permit in Finland on the grounds of employment or family relations⁴. For example in 2017, the number of residence applicants on the grounds of employment grew by 17 % in comparison to the year 2016. The largest groups who received a permit on this ground arrived from the Ukraine, India, and the Russian Federation⁵.

Around 6.6 % of the population are born abroad or are of foreign descent⁶. The number of individuals with a foreign language as their mother tongue has risen from 3.1 % of the population in 2010 to 4.5 % of the population in 2017⁷.

The majority of migrants (47 %) in Finland live in Southern Finland in the capital region, Uusimaa and 12 % of migrants live in Western Finland (for example in the counties of Satakunta, Varsinais-Suomi, Åland islands, Ostrobothnia). The rest of the counties of the country house 7 % – 9 % of migrants⁸.

1.2. Evolution of the profile of recent inflows

The main country of origin of asylum seekers is Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, the Russian Federation and Syria are other recurring top countries of origin. The surge of Eritrean applicants in 2016 and 2017 can be explained with internal transfers within the EU, which form part of the total statistics concerning asylum seekers. (Figure 4)

The main countries of origin for refugees within the quota system are Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Syria. Finland keeps 100 of all 750 quota places for urgent resettlement cases arriving from various countries depending on needs. In 2016 all quota refugees were Syrian. There is no statistical data available on the age and gender of quota refugees. The political goal of Finland is to aid women, children, and families. On this account it is fair to make an assumption that there is a larger percentage of women and children among quota refugees than among asylum applicants⁹ (Figure 5).

The largest age group of asylum seekers is 18 – 34 year olds. The age group 65+ remains the smallest age group.

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1.3. Overview of the level of integration of refugees in the country

In comparison with many other European nations, migration is a fairly new phenomenon in Finland. More widespread migration to Finland began in the beginning of the 1990s and has grown through the 2000s. This means that some studies and statistics on integration are not yet fully developed, in particular on long-term integration or on the integration of second generation migrants.

Even though the majority of migrants arriving in Finland are of working-age, little is known about their careers and experience in the work-life. A study conducted by the Finnish Centre for Pensions (hereinafter the “Pensions Study”) followed the employment and work careers of migrants arriving in Finland at different times in the 1990s and 2000s, up until 2013, found that most migrants begin working within a year of their arrival. Migrants from Estonia, Western and Southern Europe find employment quickly, have longer careers and their revenues have increased over time, while migrants from the Middle-East and Somalia face the most difficulties. There are differences in the work careers of migrants depending on migration cohorts, gender and regions of origin. Migrant men work more than migrant women and have a higher yearly median income: migrant women earn a median €13,000 per year while migrant men earn a median salary of more than €20,000 per year.

A welfare study conducted by several government agencies of Finland in 2014 (hereinafter “2014 Study”) concluded that the level of unemployment was higher among migrants with 14.4 % of the men and 17.0 % of the women unemployed. Among Finns 8.4 % of men and 6.3 % of women were unemployed at the time. A study commissioned by the Audit Committee of the Parliament and published in May 2018 (hereinafter “Audit Study”) concluded that the employment level of migrants was 60 %, which is 9 % lower than for the Finnish population. However, there are large differences depending on the background, age, and gender of the migrants.

Unemployment is more common among those who have migrated for reasons other than employment. Of those who had migrated to Finland originally for work, 6.3 % were unemployed and 8.8 % of those who had migrated to Finland originally for studies were unemployed. Migration for other reasons raises the unemployment levels. For example, for those who had migrated for family reasons, 18 % were unemployed and for those who had a refugee background, 34.5 % were unemployed.

The family situation of migrants has a surprisingly great impact on their work careers. Migrant men who are married are more likely to work, whereas married migrant women are less likely to work. Being unmarried and childless increases the likelihood of migrant women working. Tailored integration measures, such as language courses and low threshold opportunities to receive work experience,
should be offered to migrant women with families in order to support their integration into the job markets\textsuperscript{16}.

Beyond unemployment, 36\% of men and women with a migrant background remain outside the workforce if also counting those who do so due to choice, legislation or a life situation: for example students, conscripts, stay at home parents and retirees. Out of Finnish men and women, 26 \% remain outside of the workforce. The difference is higher when comparing only women: 44 \% of migrant women remain outside the workforce in comparison to 27 \% of women with a Finnish background. Based on interviews conducted with the migrant groups who remain outside of the workforce, it was concluded that 44 \% were unemployed, 25 \% were students, 16 \% were taking care of their families and 8 \% were sick or unable to work. In comparison to Finns, more migrants stay at home to take care of families and fewer migrants stay at home due to sickness, pension or disability\textsuperscript{17}.

Family life also played a bigger part in the termination of employment relationships for migrants than for Finns. The most common reason for the termination of an employment relationship was reported as “other reasons” (29 \%). Other reasons were the running out of a fixed-time contract (35 \%), being fired (15 \%) and studies (6 \%).

The impact of education is evident. Migrants with a higher education are more likely to find jobs and have longer careers, and this is true for both men and women\textsuperscript{18}. 11.5 \% of migrants with a higher education were unemployed while 18 \% of those with a lesser education were unemployed. Among Finns, only 4.6 \% of those with a higher education were unemployed\textsuperscript{19}. A lack of education and basic skills, such as reading and writing, impacts the unemployment levels of refugees in particular, as 40 \% of refugees who arrived in Finland only had a basic education.

However, this changes over generations. The Audit Study compared the education level of 29 year olds and concluded that among the first generation immigrant population, 60 \% only have a basic level of education, while this number halves among second generation immigrants. However, the number of second generation immigrants in Finland is still so low that the statistics are not yet fully reliable\textsuperscript{20}.

Language skills play an integral part in integration to the labour market in particular. The Finnish language is notoriously difficult to learn\textsuperscript{21} and this also impacts the integration and employment of migrants. In the 2014 study noted above, 40 \% of unemployed migrants believed that a lack of fluency in Finnish or Swedish was the main reason for their unemployment. Language skills in Finnish or Swedish also impact how quickly migrants become employed and what kind of jobs they have access to in the job market\textsuperscript{22}.

Only 6 \% noted their migrant background, their religion or their social background as the main reason for their unemployment and less than a few per cent were unemployed due to problems with getting
their diplomas recognised\textsuperscript{23}. Trauma and mental or physical issues impact the ability of refugees to integrate into society more generally but also to the job market\textsuperscript{24}.

Comparing the employment level of migrants per origin of country/continent, the Pensions Study concluded that the lowest level of employment is among migrants from the Middle-East and Somalia, of which only around 15\% are employed. This is in part explained by the fact that the majority of migrants from these countries have a refugee background. In terms of employment integration, Somalis face most difficulties with an unemployment rate of 55\% among Somali refugees\textsuperscript{25}. For Asian migrants over 30\% are employed and around 5\% are entrepreneurs. Of migrants from Northern Africa and Southern Africa over 40\% are in the workforce and less than 5\% are entrepreneurs\textsuperscript{26}.

The longer migrants stay in Finland, the more likely they are to work and the longer their careers become. The likelihood for men to work increases by 4\% and for women by 7\% for each year they stay in the country. However, this is not true for migrants from the Middle East and Somalia\textsuperscript{27}.

The current social security system is not flexible enough and too bureaucratic to allow for short time job opportunities in between unemployment. For some, it is simply easier and financially more beneficial to stay unemployed than to take on short job offers. More flexibility and targeted labour market measures could facilitate working. There is a higher likelihood for migrants to become employed if they have been beneficiaries of integration measures, such as language courses\textsuperscript{28}. The individual integration plans have also had a positive impact on employment\textsuperscript{29}.

The financial and political situation of the country seems to have a permanent impact on the employment and work careers of migrants. Those who arrived in years when integration measures were scarce, general unemployment was high and attitudes towards migrants less accommodating, appear to have more difficulties in finding jobs\textsuperscript{30}.

While people with a migrant background have higher levels of unemployment, there is a high willingness to work. Migrants are more active job-seekers than Finns: according to the 2014 study 51\% of migrants had an active job application with the Employment and Economic Development Offices in comparison to 32\% of Finns\textsuperscript{31}. However, in the end most migrants found a job through acquaintances and friends (34\%), an advertisement (21\%) or by actively contacting employers (13\%) and not through

\textsuperscript{27} YLE, 18.8.2017, Joka toinen työvoimaan kuuluvan Suomen somalialaisen on työtön – lasten tulevaisuus huolestaa. Available at: https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-9783136.
the Employment and Economic Development Offices (only 9% of migrants, and 8% of Finns, found employment through them). Personal contacts are highlighted in the job-seeking of migrants because in comparison to migrants only 25% of Finns find employment through friends and acquaintances.

1.4. Overview of the main challenges related to asylum seekers and refugees inflows in the country

In recent years the main challenges have included the peak of arrivals of asylum seekers in 2015 and the administrative, judicial and practical issues relating to this increase of applicants. The Immigration Service had to recruit hundreds of case workers, it was difficult to find enough interpreters and lawyers, and the courts were faced with an increase in appeals. Finding enough places in the municipalities for asylum seekers was an additional challenge following the surge in the number of applicants in 2015. Effective integration remains a challenge, in particular with the increased number of individuals who have received international protection.
2. EVOLUTION OF THE POLITICAL CLIMATE AND POLICY DEBATE IN THE COUNTRY

Media has reported more widely on migration, refugee protection and relating issues since 2015. The discussion is more polarised with a clear distinction of, on the one hand people who loudly oppose migration, and on the other hand people who speak of solidarity and have a welcoming attitude towards migration.

During 2015 – 2016 most of the reporting focused on coverage of the numbers of applicants and the subsequent immediate effects of the increase of asylum seekers – the word “crisis” was often used to describe the situation. There were weekly stories about the numbers, focusing both on all asylum applicants and on specific profiles. For example, on the country of origin of the asylum seekers, the increased number of asylum seeking unaccompanied children was noted and the gender profile of the majority of the asylum applicants. News stories noted how different municipalities were affected. There was also coverage about how different government and municipal agencies, cities, and communities were dealing with the inflow. There was also coverage on individuals, groups of people and civil society helping the asylum seekers with health care and other issues. For example, the small Kyyjärvi municipality with 1,300 inhabitants was raised as a good example of reception and integration of asylum seekers. Many asylum seekers had received jobs in a local cement factory that had been struggling to find workers. Over time, the reporting took a more nuanced approach towards the processing of the asylum seekers, the decisions, as well as returns and voluntary returns, in particular of Iraqi asylum seekers. The difficulties to return failed Iraqi asylum seekers was reported on widely, as were the costs relating to returns. Due to a number of unusually violent crimes committed by former asylum seekers, the reporting in recent years has geared towards the problems with cultural differences, criminality, and failed integration. Overall, the public discourse is more focused on the threats of migration and the tone of the public discourse has become harsher.

Public opinion, or a perception of what public opinion may be regarding refugees and asylum seekers, is relevant in terms of policy. In recent years, politicians and the government have responded to the

33 Iltalehti, 25.8.2015, Näistä maista tulee eniten turvapaikanhakijoita - ja tällaisista olisista he oikeasti tulevat. Available at: https://www.iltalehti.fi/uutiset/a/2015082520238171.
34 Iltalehti, 22.1.2016, Alakaisiä turvapaikanhakijoita saapui yksin yli 3 000. Available at: https://www.iltalehti.fi/pakolaiskaari/a/2016012221000235.
35 YLE, 5.10.2015, Ylivoimainen enemmistö on miehiä – Yle kokosi tuoreimmat fakat turvapaikanhakijoista. Available at: https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-8354207.
37 Kuntalehti, 25.5.2015, Kunnilta varautumissuunnitelmat isoon pakolaismaraan. Available at: https://kuntalehti.fi/uutiset/sote/kunnilta-varautumissuunnitelmat-isoon-pakolaismaraan/.
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reactions of the public either by statements or by changing policy and legislation. In 2016, a study commissioned by the newspaper Iltalehti found that 56 % of the population considered that Finland should take fewer asylum seekers and refugees, which was a 22 % increase from the opinion in spring 2015. Another study carried out in 2016 by Kunnallisalan kehittämissäätiö (A foundation for developing municipalities) found that 43 % of the population have a neutral position regarding the creation of reception centres in their own municipalities, whereas 28 % were in favour and 26 % were against.

The role of civil society and NGOs remains important in the reception and integration of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. The Finnish Red Cross is in charge of administering several reception centres, arranges the reception of quota refugees, and has several programmes relating to the integration of refugees. The Finnish Refugee Council has a number of integration projects, for example on local integration in neighbourhoods. Following the peak of arrivals of asylum seekers in 2015 a number of new NGOs and volunteer networks were set up. For example, there are NGOs and networks that arrange home accommodation, work opportunities, and clothing and other necessities for asylum seekers. One such example is the Startup Refugees network, which brings together entrepreneurs, companies, NGOs and individuals to support refugees in finding a way to earn their living. It has supported hundreds of refugees to find jobs and supported 60 businesses run by refugees. Global Clinic, a clinic run by volunteering medical professionals, was set up for irregular migrants in Helsinki in 2011. Today it functions in six cities across the country and offers also free legal aid to those in need. The discussion on irregular migrants is new in Finland, as is the phenomenon. Often, irregular migrants are not recognised.

Migration, in particular humanitarian migration and irregular migration, remains an endemic topic in the political landscape and humanitarian migration is often used as a tool by political parties to promote their agendas. The popularity of parties that have a strong anti-immigration agenda has been on the rise. In 2015, the Finns Party gained a number of seats in parliament and entered into government with the Centre Party and the National Coalition Party. The Finns Party noted in 2016 that their policy goals on migration were becoming a reality. It is reported that the other government parties adopted, at least in part, the political agenda of the Finns Party by agreeing to some of their terms.

A speech by the President of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, can be seen as an example of how the debate on migration has changed. In 2016 President Niinistö noted that international treaties on refugee rights were negotiated in a different time and for different purposes. He questioned whether a similar outcome would be possible today. The government has requested the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to

43 Iltalehti, 8.10.2016, IL-kysely paljastaa: Suomalainen suhtautuminen pakolaisiin kiristynyt. Available at: https://www.iltalehti.fi/uutiset/ai/2016100722431772.
45 Suomen Punainen Risti, Tukea Suomeen kotoutumiseen. Available at: https://www.punainenristi.fi/hae-tukea-ja-apua/suomeen-kotoutumiseen.
50 MTV, 3.2.2016, ”Meillä on ongelma” – Tässä presidentti Niinistön pystyttävä puhe sanasta sanaan. Available at: https://www.mtvuutiset.fi/artikkeli/meill on-ongelma-tassa-presidentti-niiniston-pysayttava-puhe-sanasta-sanaan/5720126&gs.252Vf1ZM.
conduct a study on the interpretation of international treaties governing migration and whether migration can be managed more effectively by changing the interpretation of treaties\textsuperscript{51}.

In 2017, the Finns Party was divided into two different parties: the Finns Party and Blue Future. This division took place in part due to internal differences on migration. However, both parties have an anti-immigration agenda. It must be noted that as such, there were anti-immigration views and anti-immigrant policy recommendations by the predecessor party to the Finns, the Finnish Rural Party, already in the 1980s\textsuperscript{52}. What has changed is the tone of language used by the parties and the tacit or direct acceptance by the public of anti-immigrant and xenophobic language.

The thoughtless, but often also racist language used by politicians publicly and posts on social media has resulted in citizens practising less self-control in their language on migration and migrants. It is now more socially acceptable to use racist language.

It appears that citizens do not fully understand that hate speech is a punishable act. While some parliamentarians have been sentenced for hate speech (James Hirvisaari in 2011, Jussi Halla-aho in 2012 and Teuvo Hakkarainen in 2016), the sentences they received were not harsh enough to deter citizens from engaging in hate speech.

Political parties still have quite different views of many critical aspects relating to migration and there are many politicians and political parties that speak up against racist and xenophobic language. A study conducted by the National Broadcasting Company YLE found that the majority of political parties are in favour of increasing the number of quota refugees Finland takes each year. Only one party, the Finns, wanted to decrease the refugee quota. Four parties would like the EU to handle asylum seekers in offshore processing facilities, whereas five parties were against this suggestion\textsuperscript{53}.

What is still lacking is a versatile and comprehensive discussion on the questions and challenges that come together in our societies and how to respond to them without falling back on simplistic options that turn different groups of people and interests against each other. On migration issues, the political discourse often dismisses and ignores views by researchers if they do not provide easy answers or results that serve the interests of the political agenda.

A study by the Police University College concluded that the majority of crimes committed by asylum seekers were crimes committed in the reception centres, such as threats and assaults. Crimes against property, sexual crimes and crimes against the reception centres and their staff were also amongst those most reported. The study covered crimes reported in 2016. In total, there were 1,565 reported crimes out of which 161 were sexual crimes. At the time there were between 20,000 and 30,000 asylum seekers in Finland. The majority of the victims of crimes by asylum seekers were also asylum seekers, two thirds were men under 25 years old and 49 % were Iraqi. The majority of victims of sexual violence were young Finnish women and 46 % were under 18 years old. One of the reasons for violent acts committed in the reception centres was the dissatisfaction of the asylum seekers with the reception amenities\textsuperscript{54}.

\textsuperscript{51} Helsingin Sanomat, 18.1.2019, Hallitus selvittää, ovatko Suomen tulkinnat maahanmuuton sopimuksista oikeita – ”Tarkoitus ei ole irtisanoutua ihmisoikeussopimuksista tai ihmisoikeuksien noudattamisesta”. Available at: https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000005969849.html.

\textsuperscript{52} Jussi Förbom, 2010, Hallan vaara – merkintä maahanmuuton puhetavoista, Into kustannus.


\textsuperscript{54} Suvi-Tuuli Mansikkamäki, Jarmo Houtsonen & Kari Laitinen, 2018, Poliisin tietoon tullut turvapaikanhakijoihin liittyvä rikollisuus 2016, available at: https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/144663/Polamk_rap129_verkko.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
In 2018 there was a surge in reporting on sexual violence and rapes committed by asylum seekers on women and girls in particular after several cases of sexual violence committed by asylum seekers on girls under the age of 15 were reported in the city of Oulu\(^{55}\). This resulted in increased reporting on asylum seekers as perpetrators of sexual violence\(^{56}\) and a political debate on migration in general and on the criminal justice system, in particular on whether the sentences in Finland are harsh enough for sexual violence and rape. It has also increased aggressiveness towards refugees and asylum seekers in the form of harassment and threats online and even on the streets.

In public discourse there is an emphasis on fear and worry, which is not ideal for finding good solutions. Due to the highly polarised public discourse on migration there is less room for a neutral and analytical discussion on and approach to migration. Many researchers in the field avoid participating in the public discourse on migration due to invidious consequences.

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3. **EVOLUTION OF THE LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK**

3.1. **Evolution of the legal and policy approach and strategies**

Since 2014, the aliens' legislation of Finland has been amended on numerous occasions for example relating to access to protection, the asylum procedure, access to services, and legal aid.

In 2014, the Aliens Act was amended to include voluntary return in the definition of a “return” of a migrant. The amendment followed a decision by the Supreme Administrative Court that individuals who had objected to voluntary return, and who could not be returned forcibly due to technical or diplomatic reasons, should be granted a temporary residence. With the inclusion of voluntary return in the definition, individuals who refused a voluntary return were no longer eligible for a temporary residence permit. At the same time, the reception legislation was amended so that asylum seekers who have been denied international protection in an asylum determination procedure and subsequently refuse to take part in a voluntary return can be denied reception services after 30 days and at the latest 90 days after the asylum application has been rejected.

As noted above in chapter 1.1, in mid-2016 humanitarian protection as a ground for a temporary residence permit was repealed with retroactive effect on applicants and persons who previously had enjoyed international protection on that ground. Those who had pending asylum applications during 2016 were not eligible to receive humanitarian protection. In addition, residence permits on humanitarian grounds were not renewed on the same grounds, but applicants were forced to file a new asylum application or an application for residency on other grounds. Those who would not receive a new permit on other grounds would be returned. A report by Amnesty International noted that the amendment “may force people into irregular migration status”.

A number of changes in the asylum determination procedure came into effect during 2016. The right to free legal aid in the first instance of the asylum determination procedure was restricted so that only minors or vulnerable individuals have the right to free legal assistance at the asylum interview. Furthermore, the provision of legal aid was centralised to Public Legal Aid Offices, which have a varying degree of experience in handling cases concerning international protection. A submission by Amnesty International provides that the Public Legal Offices are not specialised in cases concerning international protection.

The deadline for submitting appeals before the Administrative Court was reduced from 30 days to 21 days. The deadline for submitting a leave of appeal before the Supreme Administrative Court was reduced from 30 days to 14 days. These reductions are only applicable to cases pertaining to migration.

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57 Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle laeiksi kansainvälistä suojelua hakevan vastaanotosta annetun lain ja ulkomaalaislain muuttamisesta, HE 170/2014. Available at: https://www.finlex.fi/fi/esitykset/he/2014/20140170.


on the grounds of international protection⁶⁵. Furthermore, the right to appeal a case on international protection to the Supreme Administrative Court was restricted in terms of the substance. A study commissioned by the government concluded that the amendments of the asylum determination procedure have compromised the asylum seekers’ right to a fair process⁶⁴.

There is no list of safe countries in Finnish legislation, but each asylum application is compared to Country of Origin reports produced by the Immigration Service. These are frequently updated and have been updated several times since 2015. For example, in June 2018 the Immigration Service published its updates on Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia⁶⁵.

The right to family reunification was restricted in 2016. Subsequently income requirements are applicable also on refugees and persons who have received international protection⁶⁶. Persons with refugee status are exempted from the income requirement provided that they file their application for family reunification within three months of receiving protection. Individuals who have received subsidiary protection must meet the income requirement, for example a family of two adults and two children must have an income of €2,600 per month⁶⁷. This requirement is so high that very few refugees or recipients of international protection can attain it.

The TRUST project by the Academy of Finland (2016 – 2018) developed practices to support unaccompanied children in their new home countries and published a set of policy recommendations for their housing⁶⁸. The children’s needs and capabilities should be taken into account in holistic housing arrangements that also provide, for example, social support for the children. Unaccompanied children in their late teens, approaching adulthood, should be supported in a manner that encourages them to become independent participants of society. Currently, many unaccompanied children stay in family group homes, which makes them subjects of prolonged institutionalised care. Housing that includes different options and different levels of support for children and youngsters, encourages independence.

Finland is in the process of overhauling its integration legislation. However, as the current government resigned on 8 March 2019, the bill proposed by the government will become moot and the draft legislation will not return for preparations at the ministerial level until the next parliamentary elections in April 2019. The new integration legislation will therefore depend on what political parties will make up the new government.

⁶⁶ Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle laeiksi ulkomaalaislaisiin muuttamisesta, HE 43/2016. Available at: https://www.finlex.fi/fi/esitykset/he/2016/20160043.
⁶⁷ Migri, Toimeentuloedellytyksen kansainvälistä suojelua saaneen perheenjäsenelle. Available at: https://migri.fi/toimeentuloedellytys-kansainviallista-suojelua-saaneen-perheenjasenelle.
3.2. Main strengths and weakness of the approaches/strategies adopted and lessons learned

The impact of the legislative and policy changes in recent years was raised in the stakeholder interviews.

It was noted by relevant stakeholders that legislative amendments to the Aliens Act and the procedural rights of asylum applicants should not be made in panic, nor should they be made in several separate increments. It is difficult to assess the overall impact and long-term consequences of different amendments that are implemented short-sightedly. When the amendments approved by the Parliament in 2015 and 2016 of the Aliens Act and other legislation concerning asylum seekers and those who have received international protection are summed together they increase the perceived and real inequality of migrants in relation to the general population. When effective and successful integration is the goal, the continuous emphasis of the otherness of migrants is not a sustainable solution.

The reception centres have been given more tasks relating to the asylum procedure, which should actually belong to the authorities or legal counsellors. Guidance notes issued by the Immigration Service to the reception centres are sometimes unclear and may thus cause problems relating to access to a fair asylum procedure.

The amendments to the asylum procedure and the fee system for legal counsellors in 2016 have also caused challenges to the functioning of the reception system. The shortened deadlines in the appellate proceedings has led to applicants completely missing the deadlines and the opportunity to appeal a decision when lawyers have failed to inform their clients of the decision on time. Finding a lawyer for the appellate proceedings is challenging due to the shortened deadlines but also due to the changes in the fee system.

Due to the lower and insufficient fees for lawyers in cases concerning international protection, lawyers are no longer as accessible to their clients as before and applicants are not duly given notice of decisions of lower instances by their lawyers. Due to the current fee system it is furthermore virtually impossible for an applicant to change a lawyer mid-procedure, even if the applicant no longer trusts his or her lawyer. This infringes upon an individual’s right to choose his/her own legal representation.

There is currently an increase in renewed applications; however, the fee system does not allow for a sufficient fee for the lawyers in comparison to the number of work hours needed for renewed applications. Due to this, it is very challenging for applicants to find a lawyer to represent them at the renewal stage.

After legal aid in the first instance was transferred to Public Legal Aid Offices, the practices relating to legal aid have been very varied in different parts of the country and amongst lawyers. For example, there are different practices regarding the timing when lawyers book appointments for clients and what activities lawyers consider as constituting legal aid. This creates inequalities among asylum seekers as the quality of legal services they receive is at times arbitrary and only depends on what part of the country they end up in. At times, there have been concerns in the reception centres regarding the professionalism and expertise of the lawyers of the Public Legal Aid Offices. Lawyers of the Public Legal Aid Offices have, for example, also refused to file appeals to the Supreme Administrative Court. While this infringes upon the rights of asylum seekers to a fair procedure, it additionally creates challenges for the reception centres, who have to try to find a new lawyer for the applicant within the new appellate deadline of 14 days. As the fee is set to a fixed amount of €400, it does not cover all the
work that a new lawyer will have to take on with a new client (getting to know the case, meeting the client, writing an appeal etc.).

The restrictions and cuts made in legal aid create problems in the reception activities. When legal aid is not functioning properly, the reception centres are in reality the only ones who receive this information. It is the task of reception centres to help asylum applicants receive legal aid, but due to the legislative amendments it is in practice very challenging. For example, reception centres have to use several hours or make tens of phone calls to Public Legal Aid Offices and law firms when trying to find a new lawyer for the asylum applicant.

The study on legal aid of asylum seekers commissioned by the government noted that none of the experts and actors interviewed for the study saw a reason for the shortened appellate deadlines in cases concerning international protection69.

The restrictions of legal aid in the first instance and the shortened appellate deadlines endanger the right to a fair procedure and increase the risk of refoulement. The restrictions have also shifted the focus of the asylum procedure from the first instance to the second and third instance. The focus should lie in the beginning of the asylum procedure with legal aid and other possible support mechanisms available for asylum seekers in the first instance. This would increase the odds of a right decision in the first instance and make the lengthy and costly appellate proceedings unnecessary for many applicants who now have to resort to appeals or even renewed applications due to a lack of legal aid in the first instance.

Lengthy appellate proceedings, renewed applications, living in reception centres for years and a constant worry over one’s future cause unnecessary human suffering in addition to the obvious financial costs. Ensuring a fair and effective asylum procedure at the beginning of the asylum determination procedure should include professional, general legal counselling (for example to large groups of applicants at once in reception centres) to all applicants and individual meetings with a lawyer before the asylum interview. A well-informed lawyer can also ensure that the asylum seeker recounts as accurately as possible all the individual reasons for international protection. This allows the Immigration Service to make a more informed decision in the first instance.

Currently, the Immigration Service organises asylum interviews with a very hurried timetable, which in practice leads to the fact that asylum seekers may not have the opportunity to receive basic legal information or meet with a legal counsellor before the asylum interview. In practice this means that applicants do not even receive the required information on their rights and duties in the asylum procedure and the asylum interviews as required by the Asylum Procedures Directive.

However, one of the key challenges relating to the reception of asylum seekers is the length of asylum proceedings, which prolong the time asylum seekers spend in reception centres and in a “societal” limbo or transit period. This uncertainty makes it difficult for asylum seekers to build a normal life and ties to society. It is made worse when asylum seekers do not benefit from integration measures due to difficulties with the proceedings (length of proceedings and difficulties with legal aid). There are several studies that support the notion that integration begins immediately after arrival in the country and not after regularisation of the stay. People do not stay idly waiting during the proceedings, their life continues. Whether their life progresses in a manner where the asylum seekers become part of the

society, and do not stay in the margins, is already determined during the reception time and the asylum proceedings.

One major, additional challenge is that asylum seekers are moved from one reception centre to another. As a result, they face difficulties in forming connections with society or a normal everyday routine, which are both important for integration.

The discontinuation of reception services on the basis of Section 14 a of the Reception Act creates a group of irregular migrants that are knowingly marginalised and pushed out of official society. It leads to social exclusion and forces migrants to seek housing and jobs from informal markets placing them at risk of different kinds of exploitation. The situation has created a new black market for housing. It is harmful and damaging for society as a whole.

After 2015 a number of private companies surfaced in the field of reception of asylum seekers. There were some problems reported with these centres and it remains to be seen what the future of reception centres is, should private companies remain in the field as service providers.

The strength of the Finnish reception system is that its role is to provide all asylum seekers with accommodation and financial support and that it manages to fulfil this task. The system functions well and it also aids the authorities in acquiring a full picture of the situation with asylum seekers and their whereabouts.

Since 2015 it has become more common for asylum seekers to be housed with individuals who volunteer to house them in their own homes. It is administered through networks and NGOs. In the best case scenario, home accommodation can support integration. Home accommodation could be further explored and developed, including by looking into how to respond to possible risks and problems and what kind of support the volunteers would need to facilitate everyday life with their guests.

The amendments to the asylum procedure and the reception system and their effects on asylum seekers indirectly give a message to asylum seekers that they are unwelcome and seen as a nuisance in Finnish society. This may perhaps be an intentional consequence. It becomes a practical problem when this indirect message is given to both those who in the end will not be allowed to stay and to those who end up staying in the country. Practices possibly create a group of people who become marginalised by society while already being a target for prejudice. This is detrimental for the integration and participation of refugees in society. The consequences of legislative amendments on the integration of asylum seekers should be studied in greater detail.

Preparation and readiness for arrivals is functioning well. Existing contracts have allowed, for example, the Red Cross to accrue and hold on to the know-how in reception of asylum seekers and preparedness. However, there are also reception centres that are established and closed according to refugee flows and subsequent needs. This leads to a loss of know-how and trained employees. A reception system should be flexible, yet allow for the accrual of knowledge and institutional memory.

A main weakness in the integration system is that the integration of asylum seekers only begins when the asylum seeker has received a residence permit. Integration is not a part of the reception services. However, in reality the asylum seekers already begin to form contacts with society while they are at the reception stage, awaiting the decision on their application. The reception centres should thus be more connected to the local communities.

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70 See for example: https://kotimajoitusverkosto.fi.
One challenge with integration is that municipalities are more eager to offer placements to refugees who arrive within the refugee quota rather than to asylum seekers who have received residence permits. The placement of refugees in municipalities does not always correspond to the needs of the refugees in terms of their health and wellbeing such as their mental health as well as education and employment opportunities. Finland takes swift decisions on emergency cases within the remit of the refugee quota. However, it is difficult to find placements in municipalities for emergency cases. It is extremely important that the emergency quota remains open to all nationalities without restrictions.

Integration is strongly focused on employment, while in reality it relates to all aspects of the lives of refugees. With regard to employment, the skills and knowledge of individuals who have received international protection are not identified and they are mostly employed in low-skilled and low-paid lines of business.

With regard to the integration of quota refugees, the roles of authorities and the third sector are not sufficiently defined. Authorities do not recognise the know-how and possibilities of NGOs to support integration. Municipalities do not know how to benefit from the activities and knowledge of NGOs in the integration of quota refugees. There are no indicators for or systematic follow-up of the effectiveness of integration work by NGOs.

The restrictions on family reunification can have a long-term impact on the abilities of refugees to integrate into society. The situation is particularly difficult for unaccompanied minors.

The changes of the reception legislation, removing the right to reception services upon a final rejection of the asylum application, have not led to an increase in voluntary returns, as envisioned by the government. On the contrary, the legislation has created a new group of irregular migrants in Finland and has also pushed individuals to file renewed applications.

Due to the rapid increase of asylum applications in 2015, tens of thousands of asylum applications have been handled by hundreds of inexperienced caseworkers under high pressures of effectiveness and rapid decision-making. At the same time, asylum applicants have received less information about their rights and duties in the asylum procedure and have not had access to expert legal advice during the procedure. These serious issues with the asylum procedure have also led to an increase in renewed applications.

With regard to the strengths of the Finnish system, the quota refugee system which works in practice through a partnership with Migri, IOM and the Finnish Red Cross, functions well and provides a safe route to protection for refugees. Within the quota refugee system, Finland has traditionally been able to support particularly vulnerable refugees with urgent resettlement needs (refugees with health problems, single parents, LGBTI refugees) by providing them with swift relocation. The integration measures of quota refugees is handled by the authorities and the third sector, thus providing an organic platform for contacts with the local communities.

It is beneficial that the same integration law is applicable to all migrants, including refugees and recipients of international protection. Thus, they all have equal access to integration services. The fact that asylum applicants are allowed to work (though after a quarantine time) is beneficial; however, the current quarantines should be reconsidered in order to allow asylum applicants to work earlier.
4. THE ROLE OF EU SUPPORT

4.1. The role of EU law, guidance and mutual learning in strategy development and implementation

The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) system has been transposed in Finland. EU law and experiences from other EU Member States has had an impact in particular when the government has introduced restrictions to the legislation. Many of the amendments put through have been explained in part by the fact that Finland has had a “better” or more “allowing” legislation in the past and thus making the legislation a “pull factor” for applicants to arrive in Finland. A more restrictive legislation was sought in order to decrease the amount of arrivals. This was, for example, the motivation for restricting family reunification and restricting access to reception services for failed asylum seekers who cannot be returned to their countries of origin. In addition, while the original purpose of CEAS was to provide minimum rules for the asylum procedure across EU Member States and not to lower the standards in States with functioning systems, Finland has used the CEAS system to push down the standards of its own asylum system towards the minimum standards of CEAS. For example, the restrictions in legal aid were in part based on the notion that Finland provided more legal aid than the minimum standard set out in the Asylum Procedures Directive. However, currently it appears that Finland does not provide even the minimum requirement on the right to basic legal advice about the rights and duties of asylum applicants in the beginning of the asylum procedure.

Regarding EU policies, there are still vast differences between EU Member States in the functioning of asylum proceedings, reception services, return and detention practices. It remains unreasonable to assume that the Member States with the highest number of asylum seekers could on their own manage the inflows in a humane manner. The current Dublin system has provided some protection to those failed asylum seekers who have sought refuge in Member States with different return policies, for example Afghani and Iraqi asylum seekers whose applications were rejected in Finland have received protection in France. It proves that secondary movement is not only triggered by failed reception in hotspot states, but also by differences in recognition rates and return policies. As long as these differences remain, secondary movement will continue. The development of CEAS is closely related to the development of legal routes within the legal migration system and the EU visa system.

While CEAS was put together to provide minimum standards throughout the EU, currently there seems to be a tacit “race to the bottom” among the EU Member States in international protection, with which EU Member States are trying to minimise the number of asylum seekers and refugees arriving on their territories. This focus on national interests and sovereignty should be shifted towards a focus on solidarity among EU Member States and solidarity between the EU and those global states that currently take on the most refugees and migrants as the routes to Europe are becoming more closed.

As such, the question is not so much about what specific changes should be made in the current system but about what kind of approach the EU should have on migration and humanitarian migration more generally. This is perhaps not within the interests of Member States -n the short-term, but it is a necessary discussion in the long-term.
4.2. The use of EU support and funding for reception

In 2016 – 2018 the “Frendi” project was administered by Föreningen Luckan r.f. and funded from the AMIF. The purpose of the project was to create organic meeting opportunities for young Finns and migrants. The project was realised with the help of local schools. A common course was developed for Swedish-speaking students and students from schools with migrants. The courses included cooking, drama, and filmmaking. A review by Luckan of the project concluded that the project was welcomed with enthusiasm but it had been a challenge to bring together the timetables and expectations of different schools and participants.

The three year long Stig in! Astu sisään! Come in! project run by Centret för livslångt lärande (CLL) at Åbo Akademi, the Swedish School of Social Sciences at the University of Helsinki and Folkhälsan Utbildning Ab was launched on 1 February 2017. The project focuses on the integration of refugees in bilingual (Finnish & Swedish) municipalities and offers a platform for networking and sharing best practices. It was implemented across bilingual communities in Finland. The project organises an event called the Great Ostrobothnian Integration Days where focus is on refugee integration into bilingual communities.

The “Kulttuuriorientaatiokoulutus Suomeen valituille kiintiöpakolaisille 2017 – 2018” project administered by the Immigration Service and funded by AMIF in 2017 – 2018 seeks to train and educate quota refugees on cultural aspects of Finland before their arrival in the country. This project is governed by the Immigration Service and realised by the International Organization for Migration in Finland. The purpose of the project is to give a realistic view of Finland for refugees moving to Finland as well as to support their integration in Finland. The project includes development of webpages and other materials to support the integration of refugees. A study on the integration of Congolese quota refugees in the Utajärvi municipality in the Northern Ostrobothnia region of Finland concluded that while refugees are satisfied with the health and social services available to them, there is a weakness in integration groups that are too small during refugee integration courses.

4.3. The use of EU support and funding for migrants’ and refugees’ integration

The Kotona Suomessa project (At Home in Finland) has been running for several years. Its goal is to develop services and processes that support the integration of refugees. The project has two principal sub-projects: Hyvä alku (Good Start) and Hyvä polku (Good Path). The Hyvä alku project focuses on the first steps of integration and supports different pilot projects across the country. The Hyvä polku project

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71 Föreningen Luckan, accessed on 14 January 2019, Frendi-projektet och det interkulturella mötet: Available at: https://integration.luckan.fi/frendi/.
supports local knowledge on integration and seeks to root good practices into municipalities with the help of a regional coordinator.\textsuperscript{77}

The Kummin kanssa työkokeiluun (“Work trials with a godmother/godfather”) project ran until the end of September 2018. It was a cooperation between the ViaDia Pohjois-Savo ry NGO and the Employment and Economic Development Offices of Northern Savo. It sought to connect migrants with a personal “godmother/godfather” who would assist them with entering the job market. At the end of the project it was found that personal assistance was helpful in the integration of migrants in the job market.\textsuperscript{78}

The University of Jyväskylä runs a project called Perustaidot haltuun: malli maahanmuuttajien opetus- ja ohjaushenkilöstön koulutukseen (Getting a grip on basic skills: pedagogical design for teachers and advisers in migrant education). It seeks to plan and pilot training for teachers and counsellors working with adult migrants. It is an internet-based training tool which looks at different teaching methods in a challenging environment, for example reading, writing, mathematics, ICT skills and learning skills for adult migrants.\textsuperscript{79}

Työväen Sivistysliitto runs a project called Ote työhön (Catch up with Work) which envisages to guide migrants who have been away from the workforce for a longer period, back to work and education.\textsuperscript{80}

The project connects career counsellors and volunteers from trade unions with migrants in order to facilitate career counselling, networking and the improvement of language skills. It seeks to ameliorate the participation of trade unions in the integration of refugees. The project also arranges networking groups and runs specific groups for women only.

The Starttivoimaa-project (2016 – 2018) developed activities for the beginning of integration. New, agile methods were developed for volunteers, such as Arjen apu (“Every day help”). The activities included guiding and induction of volunteers. The project also sought to increase cooperation between the authorities and NGOs. The project arranged several workshops all over Finland.\textsuperscript{81}


\textsuperscript{80} Ote työhön, available at: https://www.otetyohnon.fi.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

Finland has a functioning reception and integration system that has gone through several changes, in particular following the surge of asylum applicants in 2015. Several legislative amendments in 2016 have changed the functioning of the asylum procedure and infringed upon the right of asylum seekers to a fair procedure. The overall trend in recent years has been to try to make Finland a less attractive destination country for asylum seekers, rather than focusing on the international responsibilities of Finland to allow asylum seekers fair access to protection. While Finland still has a well-functioning reception system with a good level of preparedness, the impact of the recent amendments are long-term. The restrictions of the asylum determination procedure (as the restrictions on procedure only apply to asylum seekers) and the restrictions on the right to family reunification create actual and perceived inequality, otherness and discrimination among asylum seekers and refugees, which leads to difficulties in integrating into society.

Several projects on integration have received EU funding and while there have been several successful projects with new innovations and an accumulation of know-how, integration activities should not rely on project-funding as heavily as they currently do. Project-based integration is realised by different actors, with different timelines and in different regions and areas of the country. It is essentially fragmented integration. Integration is by design a long-term, holistic undertaking - for many it is perhaps even a life-long undertaking. Project-based funding does not allow for the long-term planning and activities required for thriving integration.

5.2. Policy recommendations

The main challenges in terms of policy, relate to the permanent cuts and restrictions made in the asylum determination procedure after 2015. The lessons learnt from such restrictions is that restricting free legal aid only prolongs the procedure and pushes the focus of the asylum determination procedure to the appellate phase. It also leads to a rise in renewed applications and thus prolongs the overall length of the asylum procedure.

One of the key challenges is that a lot of the activities and expertise in reception and integration in Finland is fragmented to projects that function with short-term project funding. This impairs the development of more comprehensive practices and the scaling of information into larger aggregates and may thus also undermine integration measures. On the whole it is therefore imperative to have more long-term funding and large-scale projects, with enough flexibility to carry them out locally. This would decrease the regional inequality of asylum seekers and refugees when it comes to the access and quality of services.

In addition to the policy recommendations listed below, some research projects have very recently produced interesting and novel policy recommendations for integration and tools for better understanding integration. For example: the TRUST-project supported by the Academy of Finland produced a roadmap for the integration of unaccompanied minors and the currently running Dwellers in Agile Cities project has produced a two-way research-based integration path for adults who

have recently arrived in the country and a map tool to increase the understanding on social participation or disengagement and exclusion from society. These projects highlight that there is a growing interest for novel, flexible approaches to reception and integration.

Asylum seekers and refugees’ reception and integration policies

- The integration process should start immediately after an asylum seeker enters the country and thus already support and enable active engagement with individuals when they are in the reception centres.

- More efforts should be put into the language courses in Finnish/Swedish at the reception level to better support the integration of asylum seekers, but also at later stages in order to support the integration of migrants into the job market.

- There needs to be more resources and expertise in identifying traumatised individuals and they should be guaranteed sufficient health services, including psychological/psychiatric services.

- Asylum seekers should receive general legal aid from a lawyer with expertise in the asylum and migration law during the asylum procedure.

- The legislation on legal aid and fees for lawyers should be amended so that asylum seekers have access to legal counselling throughout the asylum procedure from the beginning to the end by an instance that is under supervision (e.g. attorney, licensed lawyer or public legal counsel). Lawyers should receive fair compensation for their work which should be in the same range as the compensation received for other judicial matters where public legal aid is used. This is also a question of non-discrimination.

- The amendments to the appellate deadlines should be revoked and returned to 30 days for both the Administrative Court and the Supreme Administrative Court. A 30 day deadline is used for all other administrative matters except cases pertaining to international protection, and changing them back to their previous length is thus also a question of non-discrimination.

- The practices relating to decisions by the authorities should be based on a well-informed asylum determination procedure as well as a credibility assessment, independent country of origin information, international obligations and the law.

- The asylum procedure should be focused toward the beginning of the procedure, as opposed to the current situation where legal aid and support mechanisms are only available in the appellate proceedings. This creates risks relating to wrong decisions and lengthens the total duration of the procedure.

- Long asylum procedures lead to mental health issues among asylum seekers. There is not enough focus on supporting the mental health of asylum seekers and recognising their issues.

- The mental health problems of asylum seekers have an impact also on the employees and volunteers at reception centres, who would need regular support for their activities and their own coping mechanisms.

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• Current obstacles relating to the employment of asylum seekers should be removed. The quarantine time for the right of asylum seekers to work should be reconsidered and should not under any circumstances be lengthened.

• The know-how and education of people moving to Finland should be better identified and recognised. Employment discrimination should be addressed.

• Integration is a long process. Tailormade integration services should be available to migrants after the three year period of integration has ended, at least to vulnerable individuals. The sanctions for hate speech are unclear and insufficient.

• The restrictions on staying in reception centres after a rejected asylum application should be removed.

• Migrant women who have families should be better supported and offered training opportunities, language courses and low threshold opportunities to gain work experience in order to better integrate them into the job market.

• Develop a practice that allows for a flexible reception system which corresponds to the number of arrivals while also holding on to know-how and knowledgeable staff.

• Means to support integration and good population relations upon arrival in the country should be developed.

The governance and coordination of these policies at the EU and national level

National level:

• Successful implementation of national, regional and local integration programmes requires that they have sufficient resources and that the integration activities by different NGOs on these different levels are included in the programmes. The earlier NGOs are included in the planning and implementation of integration measures, the clearer their role is in the integration process;

• Authorities and NGOs have engaged in long-term cooperation in different expert networks over several years. The expertise of these networks should be taken into account also in the future when making integration plans;

• In joint planning processes it would be beneficial to start a more detailed monitoring of integration activities run by NGOs and consider what kind of indicators could be used to measure the effectiveness of integration;

• In order to achieve consistency and long-term effects in the implementation of integration measures, integration policies should be adequately resourced so as to not rely solely on project funding;

• In certain municipalities, which receive quota refugees, the first employment contract of the refugee counsellor is only for a couple of months. This does not allow for long-term integration planning. In the worst case scenario, some refugees are left without local counselling. Recruitment and employment policies of refugee counsellors should meet the goals of long-term integration;

• NGOs should have increased resources to support asylum seekers and refugees in their integration;
The CEAS reform should respect the dignity and fundamental rights of all migrants and guarantee each asylum applicant has effective access to protection and a fair procedure. Accelerated procedures, admissibility procedures and border procedures must be limited;

Free legal advice throughout the entire asylum procedure should be provided by the Member States;

The CEAS reform should ensure a fair balance between responsibility and solidarity amongst all Member States while respecting the principles of family unity of asylum applicants.

The use of EU funds/policies to address these challenges

More resources and expertise are needed in the supervision of hate speech.

Data collection and research

Better gender aggregated data to increase knowledge about the differences in integration depending on gender.
REFERENCES


The integration of refugees in Finland


The integration of refugees in Finland


ANNEXES

ANNEX I – LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

- The Finnish Red Cross.
- PhD, Special Researcher, Migration Institute of Finland.
- PhD, Academy of Finland postdoctoral researcher at the Tampere Peace Research Institute in the University of Tampere.

ANNEX II – ADDITIONAL TABLES

Table 1: Main legal and policy provisions for the reception, recognition and integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Finland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Field</th>
<th>Asylum seekers (during asylum procedure)</th>
<th>Persons granted asylum (refugees)</th>
<th>Main changes since 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residence permits</td>
<td>Asylum applicants have the right to remain in the country during the first and second instance of their procedure. In the third instance (Supreme Administrative Court) a failed applicant may be removed from the country, unless the Supreme Administrative Court grants a stay.</td>
<td>For persons who have received asylum status or subsidiary protection, the first permit is in force for 4 years.</td>
<td>Removal of one category of protection status (humanitarian protection) in 2016.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to Family reunification</td>
<td>No right to family reunification during asylum procedure.</td>
<td>Refugees with refugee status have the right to family reunification without income requirement, provided that application for FR is submitted within three months of receiving refugee status.</td>
<td>Income requirement entered into legislation for refugees and persons enjoying subsidiary protection in 2016.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Settlement restrictions (for persons granted asylum)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asylum seekers are assigned to a specific municipality and a specific reception centre during their application procedure.</th>
<th>After receiving international protection, a person will receive a place in a municipality.</th>
<th>No changes since 2014.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Initial reception, emergency measures, and referrals

- Emergency housing
- Emergency health care
- Basic subsistence needs
- Reception and recognition provisions
- Family reunification
- Settlement restrictions
- Referrals

#### Distinguishing between exceptional and ordinary reception procedures

- Upon arrival, an asylum seeker is placed in a reception centre. Some individuals may stay the first period in a reception centre in the capital region and later be transferred to another reception centre. Applicants may also stay in private accommodation, should they decide to do so. During the application procedure applicants have access to necessary and urgent health care. Upon a separate application, asylum applicants are entitled to financial support during the application period. This is called reception allowance.

- The amount of the reception allowance depends on the type of housing the applicant has chosen. In reception centres with meals, applicants have a lower allowance (€75.36 / month) than in private accommodation (€263.78 / month). The amount is higher for families and individuals with dependencies.  

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### Access to accommodation/housing
- Housing/accommodation/
- Housing support
- Other…

Asylum applicants have access to housing in reception centres throughout the asylum procedure. If the application is rejected by the first and second instances, the right to housing ends, if the failed applicant does not agree to assisted voluntary return.\(^96\)

Benefits of international protection have the right to housing benefits which may take the form of placement in housing owned by municipalities or financial aid for housing rented from private markets. Housing is arranged for quota refugees before their arrival in Finland. For asylum seekers who have been granted international protection, housing is arranged normally before they are transferred from reception centres to their municipality. Beneficiaries of international protection are also free to seek their own housing.\(^97\)

Access to housing and other assistance (social benefits, health care) is cut off for failed asylum applicants who are not willing to participate in assisted voluntary return. This was amended in 2014.\(^98\)

### Access to health care
- Access to Emergency/urgent healthcare;
- Access to Full health care, …

Asylum seeking adults have access to urgent or necessary health care. Asylum seeking children have access to the same health care as permanent residents of Finland. Asylum applicants take part in a health care information session and a health interview within two weeks of their arrival. The purpose is to give them information regarding what services they have access to as well as to make an assessment of their health needs and scan for potential infectious diseases. Children are vaccinated according to the Finnish vaccination programme.

Access to health care in Finland is based on residency in a municipality. Beneficiaries of international protection are residents of municipalities and therefore have access to full health care, including emergency health care and dental care.\(^100\)

No significant changes since 2014.

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The integration of refugees in Finland

Access to education and training

- School enrolment and attendance
- Adult education
- Vocational education & training
- Language courses
- …

Asylum applicants do not automatically have access to adult education or vocational education. Access to education depends on the entry requirements of the education institutions. Language courses may be available in some reception centres. Asylum seeking children have access to primary and secondary education, in principle, but in practice it varies in municipalities. Asylum seekers do not automatically have access to adult education or vocational education. Access to education depends on the entry requirements of the education institutions. Language courses may be available in some reception centres. Asylum seeking children have access to primary and secondary education, in principle, but in practice it varies in municipalities.

Access to the labour market

- Skills assessment/validation
- Active labour market policy (counselling, mentoring, job search assistance, entrepreneurship promotion, and social networks)
- Grants and preparatory courses
- Employment subsidies, apprenticeships, traineeships, on-the-job trainings, temporary/voluntary work
- Unemployment benefits

An asylum applicant has the right to work three or six months after applying for asylum in Finland. Individuals with a passport or similar documentation may start working 3 months after filing their asylum application. Individuals without a passport or valid documentation may start working 6 months after filing their asylum application. The right to work ends if the asylum application is rejected and the applicant does not appeal the rejection decision.

Individuals who have received international protection have the right to work.

No significant changes. There has been a discussion on shortening the quarantine time for asylum seekers in order to allow asylum seekers to enter the workforce more flexibly than under current legislation, but no concrete amendments have been proposed to date.

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Eligibility for welfare benefits (Social assistance services)

- Income support, eligibility for welfare benefits
- …

Asylum seekers do not have access to financial welfare benefits. They only have access to reception benefits. However, asylum seekers have access to non-financial social assistance services such as counselling, guidance and troubleshooting of social problems. No significant changes.

Social and political integration measures

- Early orientation programmes (language, practical orientation, civic education etc.)
- Integration programmes such as sport, culture, diversity promotion
- Political participation (local level)
- Residence and religion rights
- …

The integration law is not applicable to asylum seekers. Asylum seekers are entitled to guidance and counselling within the remit of the activities of the reception centres. Asylum seekers may attend language courses in Finnish which are organised in all reception centres, except transit centres. All asylum seekers must take part in employment or education activities at the reception centre. The asylum seeker may decide which path to choose. No significant changes since 2014.

Measures for unaccompanied minors

Unaccompanied minors are entitled to have legal representation at the asylum interview.

Unaccompanied minors are assigned a representative.

Unaccompanied minors are housed in reception centres.

Unaccompanied minors who have been granted international protection are housed in family group homes with other unaccompanied minors and possibly with families, depending on the housing arrangement. An individual integration plan is drawn up for unaccompanied minors. The detention legislation was changed in 2014 in order to restrict the detention of unaccompanied minors.

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The integration of refugees in Finland centres for minors. The detention of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum is prohibited until there is a possible final decision on the rejection of their application.

who have been granted international protection. This plan may consist of different measures and goals depending on the needs of the child. These measures could include counselling, hobbies, education etc.

Source: own compilation.

Table 2: Examples of good practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/title of the measure</th>
<th>Startup Refugees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Period of implementation</td>
<td>Founded in 2016, still ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Specify when the project/strategy/experience started, if it is still ongoing or finished and if concluded, indicate when]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body responsible for implementation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of intervention</td>
<td>The initiative concerns the integration of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants through employment and entrepreneurship. It seeks to promote the idea that immigration is a gain for society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[e.g. specify if the initiative concerns the reception or integration of migrants/asylum seekers; the policy field of intervention: employment support; education/training; health care; accommodation; transportation, other…]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territorial coverage (national, regional, local)</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial allocations</td>
<td>The network has fundraised among private individuals and businesses. It reportedly also received €150,000 in funding from a Suomi 100 foundation celebrating Finland’s 100 years of independence. In late 2018, it was reported that the network has an annual budget of €600,000 out of which approximately half comes from the private sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[If possible specify the overall financial assignment and the source of funding (European, national, regional, local). If EU funds involved specify which funds]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

### Main goals and reasons for introduction

*Specify the objects of the project/strategy/experience and the results it is supposed to achieve*

The project seeks to re-invent integration, which it considers to be sluggish and too bureaucratic. The goal of the project is to help refugees gain independence by supporting their entrepreneurship and professionality and thus making refugees taxpayers, entrepreneurs and active members of society.

### Main target groups

Asylum seekers and refugees, as well as companies as possible employers.

### Main partners/stakeholders involved

*promoter and partners of the project/policy; typology and roles of actors involved*

The project was set in motion by Riku Rantala and Tunna Milonoff who are known TV presenters and producers. Several NGOs, educational institutes and businesses are involved in the project such as AIESEC, Aalto University, Lundia, Supercell, Affecto and Slush.

### Main implementation and coordination procedures and mechanisms adopted

Through the network, companies can make jobs available for refugees and refugees can seek jobs through the network.

### Main actions/measures implemented

As of October 2018, Startup Refugees have profiled the skills and professional goals of over 2,700 newcomers in 17 cities, offered 500 job opportunities, organised 94 business workshops for 811 participants, supported over 60 businesses of newcomers, and offered over 3,000 courses and education opportunities to develop new skills.

### Main results/achievements to date and expected longer term expected impacts according to available monitoring/evaluations

[Both quantitative and qualitative – specify results and outputs]

### Main weaknesses/obstacles and how they have been addressed

In the beginning, the network received a lot of criticism and ridicule due to a pilot project selling design objects made by refugees, but since then the network’s activities have been geared towards employment and entrepreneurship projects.

### Main strengths

The main strengths of the network are the innovation to work with private enterprises and to harness their support in integrating refugees into society. It is also very flexible in comparison to publicly available employment and entrepreneurship counselling.

### Innovative elements if any

As noted above, the main innovation is connecting the private sector to the integration of refugees into society.

### Main lessons learnt

Main weaknesses/obstacles [encountered in the implementation and the ways they were overcome]

The project is a new way of connecting the private sector with a matter (integration) that traditionally has been only the task of the public sector.

### Additional comments (if any)

The integration of refugees in Finland

Figure 1: Applications for international protection 2010 – 2018

![Graph of applications for international protection 2010-2018]

Source: Migri.

Figure 2: Renewed applications 2015 – 2018

![Graph of renewed applications 2015-2018]

Source: Migri.
Table 3: Recognition rates for international protection in Finland 2010 – 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total recognition rate</th>
<th>Refugee status</th>
<th>Subsidiary Protection</th>
<th>Humanitarian Protection</th>
<th>Other grounds*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>30 %</td>
<td>3 %</td>
<td>11 %</td>
<td>11 %</td>
<td>5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>36 %</td>
<td>5 %</td>
<td>20 %</td>
<td>4 %</td>
<td>7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>43 %</td>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>3 %</td>
<td>7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>45 %</td>
<td>14 %</td>
<td>19 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>12 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>36 %</td>
<td>13.5 %</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>0.1 %</td>
<td>9.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>25 %</td>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>5 %</td>
<td>1.5 %</td>
<td>3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>16 %</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>0.2 %</td>
<td>4.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>40 %</td>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>7 %</td>
<td>-**</td>
<td>6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>43 %</td>
<td>29 %</td>
<td>7 %</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Migri.

*Other grounds include residence permit on compassionate grounds as well as residence permit due to family relations (subsequent to an original application for international protection).

**In mid-2016, the legislation was changed and the possibility of obtaining a residence permit on the grounds of humanitarian protection was removed.

Table 4: Country of origin of asylum seekers top 5 states 2010 – 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Iraq</td>
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<td>1. Iraq</td>
<td>1. Iraq</td>
<td>1. Iraq</td>
<td>1. Iraq</td>
<td>1. Iraq</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Migri.
The integration of refugees in Finland

Table 5: Country of origin of quota refugees top 3 states 2010 – 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Migri.

Figure 3: Asylum applicants by gender 2010 – 2018

Asylum applicants by gender 2010 - 2018

Source: Migri.
*Gender aggregated data not publicly available for the year 2014

Table 6: Age distribution of asylum applicants 2015 – 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>0 – 13 years</th>
<th>14 – 17 years</th>
<th>18 – 34 years</th>
<th>35 – 64 years</th>
<th>65 +</th>
<th>Age unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>4,250</td>
<td>3,402</td>
<td>19,585</td>
<td>4,995</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1,419</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>2,811</td>
<td>1,019</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>1,116</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>2,630</td>
<td>1,002</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>2,368</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Unaccompanied minors as asylum seekers 2010 – 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total applications</th>
<th>Recognition rate %*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>79 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>87 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>84 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>80 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>82 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>3,014</td>
<td>66 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>86 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>81 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Of the total amount of decisions concerning unaccompanied minors.

International protection up to 2015: [https://migri.fi/muut-tilastot](https://migri.fi/muut-tilastot).
Quota refugees: [https://migri.fi/kiintiopakolaisilatilastot](https://migri.fi/kiintiopakolaisilatilastot).
This paper examines the amendments of legislation pertaining to the reception and integration of refugees in Finland in the years 2014 – 2018. The paper includes recommendations to improve reception and integration in Finland.

This document was provided by Policy Department A at the request of the European Parliament’s Employment and Social Affairs Committee.