

IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT AND MANAGING LABOR MIGRATION IN FINLAND

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In this article, I will briefly describe the history of Finland as a country of migration and its current position *vis-à-vis* international mobility. With its fairly small, aging population of 5.4 million inhabitants, Finland is already facing the need for a mobile work force. Several government actions support recruiting as well as development programs for efficiently integrating newcomers, but many challenges continue to exist for meeting the needs of a multicultural population and coherently managing immigration.

Finland, a Few Facts about the Development Of the Nation-state

Finland is situated in Northern Europe between Scandinavia and Russia. From the thirteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth, Finland was an autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Sweden (from about 1200 until 1809) and the Russian Empire (1809-1917). During these periods, Finland experienced the influence of foreign languages, rule, and religion. Despite the extensive period under the rule of other countries, it has preserved its own cultural history and identity, distinctly represented through the Finnish language, which is related neither to Scandinavian nor Slavic languages; its origin is in the Uralic language family, of which the three most spoken languages are Hungarian, Finnish, and Estonian. Development of the nation-state accelerated when Finland gained its independence during the 1917 Russian Revolution. Following independence, a cruel and intense civil war took place in 1918.

During World War II, Finland fought against the Soviet Union and strived successfully to maintain independence and sovereignty. In the end, even though Finnish losses were severe both in territory and manpower, the mere act of defending the nation-state has been considered one of the factors that united the opposing fronts of the civil war into one Finnish nation. The years after WWII brought rapid

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industrialization and urbanization. Development of the metal industry and high technology were boosted by the heavy reparations that Finland paid to the Soviets. Today Finland is one of the Nordic advanced welfare states and member of the European Union since 1995 as well as a member of the eurozone. With the current population of 5.4 million, and a GDP of €35 559 per capita, Finland is among the wealthiest in Europe (Finnish Statistics n.d.).

Changes in Migration Flows

Finland has only recently changed from a country of emigration to an immigrant-receiving one with today's yearly net immigration of 15 000 people. This development is simplified into three periods in this article following a study by Korkiasaari and Söderling (2003). The first period of emigration was the journey of the landless population mainly to the United States and Canada and to lesser extent to other parts of the world after the famine of 1860 and until the war years (1944). The second period is the emigration from 1945 to 1999, after WWII, especially to Sweden and Central Europe. The third period began in the early 1980s, when Finland first started attracting Finnish returnees and gradually, as a result of economic growth and the need for workers, more and more work-related immigration. Finland's humanitarian immigration goes back to the signing of the UNHCR Refugee Convention in 1968 and receiving its first group of refugees in 1985. Since 2001, the quota of refugees accepted by Finland has been 750 per year (Finnish Immigration Service n.d.).

TABLE 1
EMIGRATION FROM FINLAND (1860-1999)

<i>Destination</i>	<i>1860-1999</i>	<i>1945-1999</i>
Sweden	(45 000)	535 000
Other Countries in Europe	(55 000)	125 000
United States	300 000	18 000
Canada	70 000	23 000
Latin America	1 000	5 000
Asia	500	6 000
Africa	1 000	4 000
Oceania	3 500	20 000
Total	476 000	736 000

SOURCE: Korkiasaari and Söderling 2003, 3.

Immigration in Finland

After the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991 and the following crisis in the Balkans, the Ingrian Finns from the former Soviet Union, refugees from the former Yugoslavia, and the first asylum seekers of Somali origin were among the first groups to immigrate to Finland. The Finnish authorities were taken by surprise by this new situation and had to improvise activities, trying their best to adapt the service system to the needs of the refugees and to help the newcomers settle in the country. For the Somalis, integration into the Finnish labor market has taken a relatively long time. They were the first group of asylum seekers to come to Finland, a visible minority that entered the country after a period of very little immigration except for Finnish returnees. At that time, there was no established resettlement program or any Somali community to help the newcomers (Linnanmaki-Koskela 2010, 77).

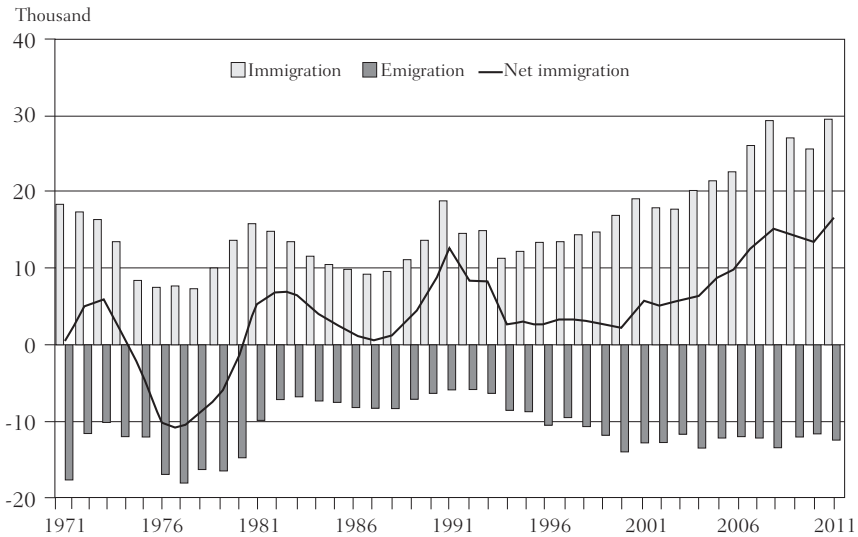
Since the 1990s, immigration to Finland has steadily grown as the economy has continued to develop positively. Today Finland has a resettlement program for a yearly quota of 750 UNHCR refugees, plus a growing number of work-related migrants, international students, and family-related immigrants, with a net immigration of approximately 15 000 persons a year. The number of asylum seekers is linked to international crises, but has stayed at a relatively low level compared, for example, to Sweden. In all, 1 271 of the persons seeking asylum were granted permission to stay in Finland in 2011. The total 3 086 asylum-seekers in Finland in 2011 compared to Sweden's 29 648 says something about the different policies in the neighboring countries, suggesting that Finnish policy has concentrated more on control and security issues (Salmio 2000).

The current public discussion on immigration issues in Finland is guided, on the one hand, by the concern with a declining population and future labor force needs, and, on the other hand, by the fairly recently voiced populist opinions against foreign influence and some even with racist overtones. The number of immigrants is still expected to grow and to continue at the yearly level of 15 000 net immigration. A report by the Finnish National Board of Education anticipating the long-term demand for labor and educational needs states that the declining supply of labor in Finland will pose significant socio-political challenges. Improving immigrants' standing in the labor market is necessary in order for the economy and employment to develop positively (Hanhijoki et al. 2012, 62).

Immigrant Employment

The years from 1989 to 1993 were a period when Finland opened up economically, politically, and culturally. The strong links with the Soviet economy and its collapse drove the Finnish economy into a deep recession and spawned massive unemploy-

FIGURE 1
IMMIGRATION, EMIGRATION, AND NET IMMIGRATION (1971-2011)



SOURCE: Statistics Finland.

ment. At the same time immigration to Finland started to increase and these unfavorable conditions delayed immigrants' integration and employment. However, recent research in the Helsinki area shows that over time, even the immigrants with a refugee background have achieved a strong foothold in the labor market (Linnanmaki-Koskela 2010, 79). The study shows that getting settled and learning the language and new skills to find your place in the community is a process that takes time. One factor separating immigrant groups is how long the integration process takes. As a conclusion, immigrants' integration and employment should not be observed only in cohorts, but over several years, a longer period of time

The government in Finland has acknowledged and taken seriously the future need for workers given the aging native population. A government program sets overall employment policy goals as well as a framework policy for integration. The revised *Integration Act* and the National Integration program are based on the assumption that integration is a mutual, two-way development of the society and newcomers. The act applies to all legal immigrants regardless of the grounds for their residence permit. During the initial integration period of a maximum of three years, a variety of support actions are available starting with an information package about Finnish society (www.lifeinfinland.fi). Measures include recommendations for community activities, social services, and the labor market, as well as managing the integration of international students and refugee resettlement. According to the *Integration*

Act, integration training for adult migrants must be provided in compliance with the National Core Curriculum for Integration Training for Adult Migrants adopted by the Finnish National Board of Education. A National Policy Framework for recruiting workers internationally and the employment of immigrants sets the ground rules for actors in the recruiting business.

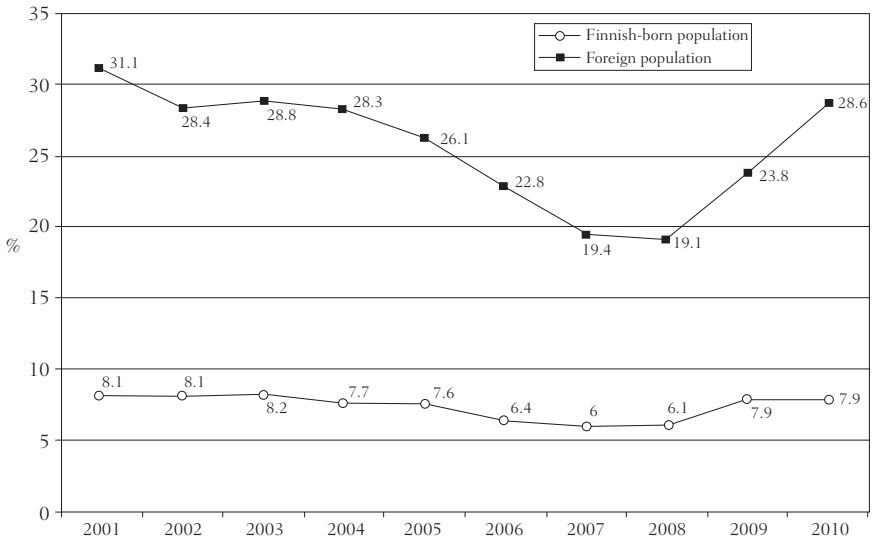
Managing Labor Migration

Managing labor market needs is no simple task. Varying needs and the local environment in different parts of the country call for local solutions. The Finnish language can be an obstacle when individuals of the mobile international work force are making decisions about choosing their destination country. Even if recruited by an international employer, learning the local language is still considered key to overall integration into Finnish society. The Helsinki metropolitan area is clearly benefitting from mobility, with over 50 percent of the total number of immigrants settling there; it has already been successful in adapting public services to meet the needs of the international work force. The need for labor in the countryside is also becoming obvious, but attracting workers and managing the practicalities can be challenging.

Even after 30 years of immigration, regions still exist in Finland where immigration is not usual and only a few foreign-born inhabitants live. In some rural areas, community service-providers or employers are not familiar with mobility issues. For example, the procedure for applying for residence permits and managing an integration program are not equally well executed as in growth centers. Even some suspicion and mistrust of foreign credentials may exist among employers, causing reluctance to hire foreigners. Education acquired in Finland can be seen as proof of trust in the system and taking on Finnish values. Linnanmaki-Koskela's study shows that after 14 to 17 years from the year of immigration, 19 percent of all the persons in the group studied had acquired a Finnish diploma, which can be understood as a sign of internalizing the Finnish value of seeing education as an important asset (Linnanmaki-Koskela 2010, 75). There are also good examples of developing smooth initial integration measures even for smaller numbers of immigrants outside growth centers (for example, see the City of Iisalmi Guide for Immigrants, n.d.).

Together with high unemployment rates, certain industries suffer from a constant labor shortage. For example, farmers with livestock report difficulties in recruiting, and this speaks to a serious labor shortage in rural areas. In farming, interest seems to be growing in recruiting a more motivated, well-educated foreign work force. In many cases in remote rural settings, it has already become routine to recruit from abroad, especially from the neighboring Estonia and Russia, as well as from the Ukraine.

FIGURE 2
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (2001-2010) (PERCENT)



SOURCE: Statistics Finland.

Public opinion has been somewhat negatively impacted, in part due to the high unemployment rate of newly arrived immigrants. Nevertheless, generally speaking, over the past 30 years of immigration, interaction has increased confidence among members of the community, regardless of the populist political movement.

To attract more labor, Finland can still benefit from the good reputation and high quality of its educational system. It is still a welfare state where equality and safety are important values.

As the research of Linnanmaki-Koskela states, for policymakers and the public alike, it is important to deliver a clear message of the benefits of immigration's increasing economic solidity over the long term, but that it brings no quick profits.

The current government is committed to an active and anticipatory immigration policy. It recently signed a resolution on the Strategy of the Future of Immigration in Finland 2020, which takes a position on questions of equality, people's welfare, and economic competitiveness. To enhance immigrants' chances of improving their standing in the labor market and to achieve all other strategic objectives included in the resolution, the government will prepare a separate action plan to set up goals and measures, as well as to determine the parties responsible and scheduling.

The strategy aims at a more workable and pro-active immigration policy in a situation of emerging global mobility, an aging population, and increasing diversity. To be able to resolve the issue of competitiveness and the balance of resources, immigration issues should become more visible in national policy-making, and Finland should formulate coherent, active policies at the EU level and in other international forums. The strategy's success depends on the commitment of a wide range of actors across society and among Finnish nationals (Siäasiainministeriö 2013, 25).¹

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¹ For a brief discussion in English of this strategy, see Ministry of the Interior (n.d.).

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Information for Newcomers: <http://www.lifeinfinland.fi>

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