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The need for multicultural approach in Finland

**This article is published earlier in Koivukangas, Olavi (ed.):
Entering multiculturalism: Finnish experience abroad. FinnForum VI.
Migration Studies C15. Institute of Migration. Turku 2002. (pp. 24-25)**

Siirtolaisuusinstituutti – Migrationsinstitutet

Turku – Åbo 2002

<http://www.migrationinstitute.fi>

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Introduction

As the new millennium is still young, no contemporary development has more far reaching consequences than the process of globalization. The breaking down of national, regional and local boundaries and barriers is creating a new world. The world of segregated national units is dissolving. The global village of Marshall McLuhan predicted in 1967 is upon us. -- John Meisel (1)

A European paradox: Europe needs immigrants, but the Europeans do not want them. -- Max Jacobson (2)

How about Finland?

The general internationalization has increased cross-border migration also in Finland. This is due to the deep-going changes in the neighboring areas and Finland's accession to the European Union in 1995.

The new immigration to Finland is young; in larger numbers for less than 10 years. This increased immigration has created a number of unsolved problems, especially a high unemployment rate among many immigrant groups as well as the negative attitudes among the main population. But most important: there is also the awareness of the change to a more open and multicultural society. It will be a long way with many challenges for the nation to go.

A land of emigrants

Over the past 130 years nearly 1.3 million Finns have emigrated to every corner of the world. There were a number of Finns to the "New Sweden Colony" in the Delaware River Valley since 1638, but the main population movements were directed to North America before the 1930's and to Sweden since World War II, the peak years being 1969-70 when the population of Finland temporarily declined. There was quite an extensive return migration from Sweden in the early 1970's and during the whole of the 1980's. In the 1990's Finnish emigration was quite insignificant. Altogether there are 1,2 million Finnish expatriates in the world, and 600,000 persons with at least one parent born in Finland.

Old ethnic minorities

It has been said that with regard to immigration Finland has been almost an isolated "island" untouched by European and global migration streams. But looking at the history this is not true. In the old cemeteries of Turku and Helsinki are old tombs with names from many different nationalities and religions. In 1900 eight per cent of Helsinki's inhabitants had been born abroad. A century later, in 1999, this proportion was 5,7 per cent. Immigrants to Helsinki a century ago came mostly from Russia and its Baltic provinces and from Sweden. A hundred years later about half of the immigrants in Helsinki are still born in Russia or Estonia, whereas the proportion of immigrants from other parts of Europe has stayed around 10 per cent. The big change during hundred years was that the proportion of immigrants from outside Europe has grown from a small fraction to around 40 per cent of immigrants in Helsinki.(3)

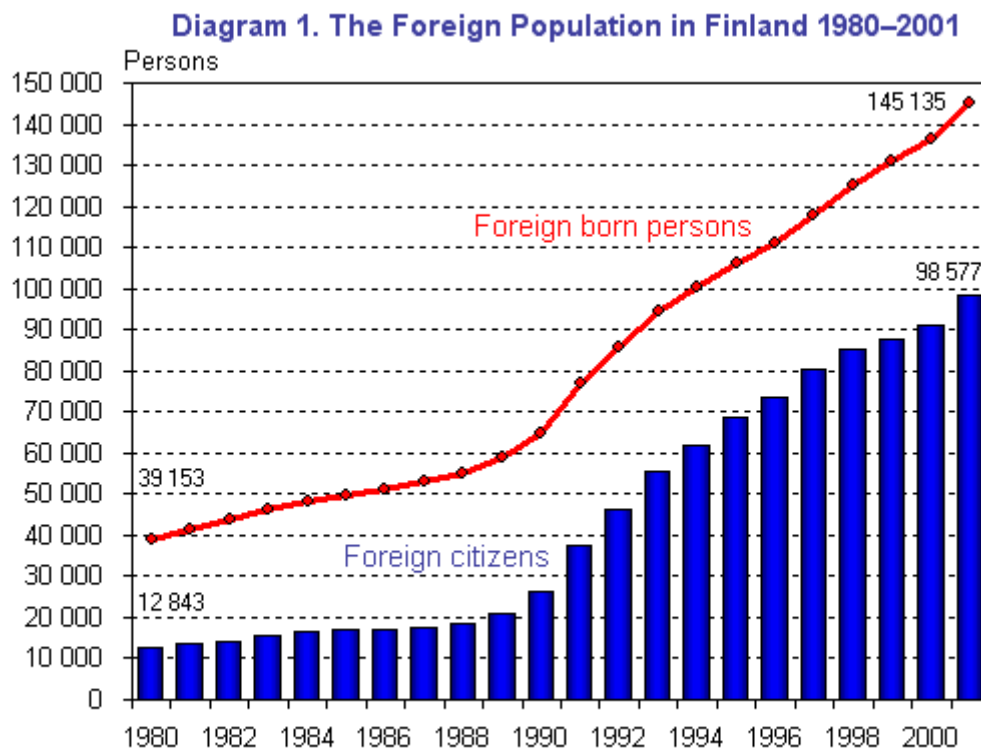
Finland has a few old ethnic minorities as follows:

- **The Swedish-Finns** in some coastal areas have been living in Finland for some 1000 years and represent six percent of the population - 300,000 person. Due to extensive emigration and marriages to Finns there number has declined proportionally.
- **The Lapps**, the only indigenous people in Finland numbering 6,400 persons according to an estimate in 1992. The Sami people have mixed with the main population and many have double identities.
- **The Jews** have arrived in Finland for a long time ago via Sweden and later from Russia. A law in 1918 guaranteed them Finnish citizenship. Before the war there were 2000 Jews in Finland. Also the Jews have integrated to the main population by marriages. At the moment there are 1,300 members in the Jewish congregations in Finland.
- **The Tatars**, a Turkish related people from Niznij-Novgorod Russia arrived in Finland by families in the 19th century. The Tatarian language and culture have survived until the fourth and fifth generations while in Russia many Tatars have forgotten the language. There were 939 Muslim Tatars in Finland in 1980. In Finland Tatars, as well as the Jews, have been employed especially by trade and textile industry.
- **The Romanies** started to arrive in Finland in the 16th century via Sweden. A law in 1637 allowed anybody to kill a loitering gipsy. It is estimated that we have in Finland 10,000 Romani, of these some 3,000 in Sweden, originally coming from Finland.
- **The Russians** are not generally counted to the ethnic minorities in Finland, although we have had a small Russian minority for a long time. E.g. in 1900 there were 6,000 Russians in Finland, mainly merchants in Vyborg, Helsinki and other towns. After the Russian revolution of 1917 33,000 Russian refugees arrived in Finland, but many of these continued to other countries. Of these only a half were ethnic Russians and another half ethnic Finns. (4)

New ethnic minorities in Finland

Finland has never experienced flows of labor migration. Our foreign population came in small numbers e.g. as students or due to a marriage to a Finnish citizen. Only during the past ten years greater numbers of immigrants and refugees have arrived in Finland. With a population of 5.2 million persons Finland has been quite a homogeneous society until the 1990's. In January 1990 there were only 21,000 foreign citizens in Finland - or only 0.4 per cent of the population. The number of the refugees was only 2000.

As appears from the Diagram 1 in 1991 the pattern changed dramatically due to the political crisis in Soviet Union. The number of foreign citizens tripled in a few years. At the end of the year 2000 there were about 92,000 foreign citizens in Finland, including more than 20 000 refugees. In 2002 there are around 100,000 Foreign Citizens in Finland. But still the proportion of the foreign population, 1.9 per cent, is one of the lowest in Europe.



Source: Statistics Finland; Figure: Jouni Korkiasaari, Institute of Migration 2002

The real number of the "foreigners" in Finland is about 130,000-140,000 persons - as a foreign citizen may apply for the Finnish citizenship after living in the country for five years - and in some cases the time may be shorter. But it must be borne in mind that the number of immigrants is still low in the Western European context. If Finland had proportionally as many immigrants than e.g. in Germany, Finland would have half a million immigrants.

It must also be remembered that many immigrants were returning former Finnish emigrants and their children.

Refugees in Finland

As mentioned earlier, there have earlier been political refugees in Finland, especially in the 1920's. In 1973-77 Finland accepted nearly 200 supporters of President Allende of Chile, and in 1979 the first Vietnamese "boat people" were accepted from the refugee camps of South-East Asia. In the 1980's Finland accepted at most a few dozen asylum seekers per year. The Finnish refugee policy has been quite restrictive. Since 1986 there has been an annual refugee quota established with the UNHCR. Initially the quota was 500 but was increased due to the pressures of the worldwide refugee situation aiming at 1,000 refugees annually. In 2000 the quota was 650, and in 2001 about 750 refugees. The biggest refugee groups have been the Somalis, the citizens of the former Yugoslavia and the Vietnamese.(5)

There has been a considerable increase of asylum seekers arriving in Finland from Eastern Europe, and especially from Poland and Slovakia. This development stimulated a debate culminating in an amendment to the Aliens Act in summer 2000. The amendment imposes a seven-day time limit on the Directorate of Immigration to issue a decision on certain asylum applications stipulated in the Act. Also the family relations will be investigated through DNA Tests.

Altogether there are 20,000 refugees in Finland.

The profile of the foreign population in Finland

The Russians form the largest foreign group in Finland. There are over 21,000 Russian citizens, 11,000 Estonian citizens - and 2000 still with the Soviet Union passport in Finland. Some 60 percent of the Russians are women married to Finnish men. The proportion of children is only 10 percent while the proportion of old persons (over 65 years) is above other nationalities. Many of these Russians are Finnish "returnees" called the Ingrians. They are descendants of the Finns who from 1617 onwards settled in areas around St. Petersburg. Since 1990 about 20,000 Ingrians have arrived in Finland and there are still long queues waiting for entry permission. Generally immigrants from Russia are well educated, and in the future more immigrants from Russia to Finland are expected.(6)

After the Russians the most numerous in Finland are the Estonians - about 11,000 citizens. Due to the closeness of the Finnish and Estonian languages, the Estonians have good chances to find work in Finland and integrate quickly into the host society.

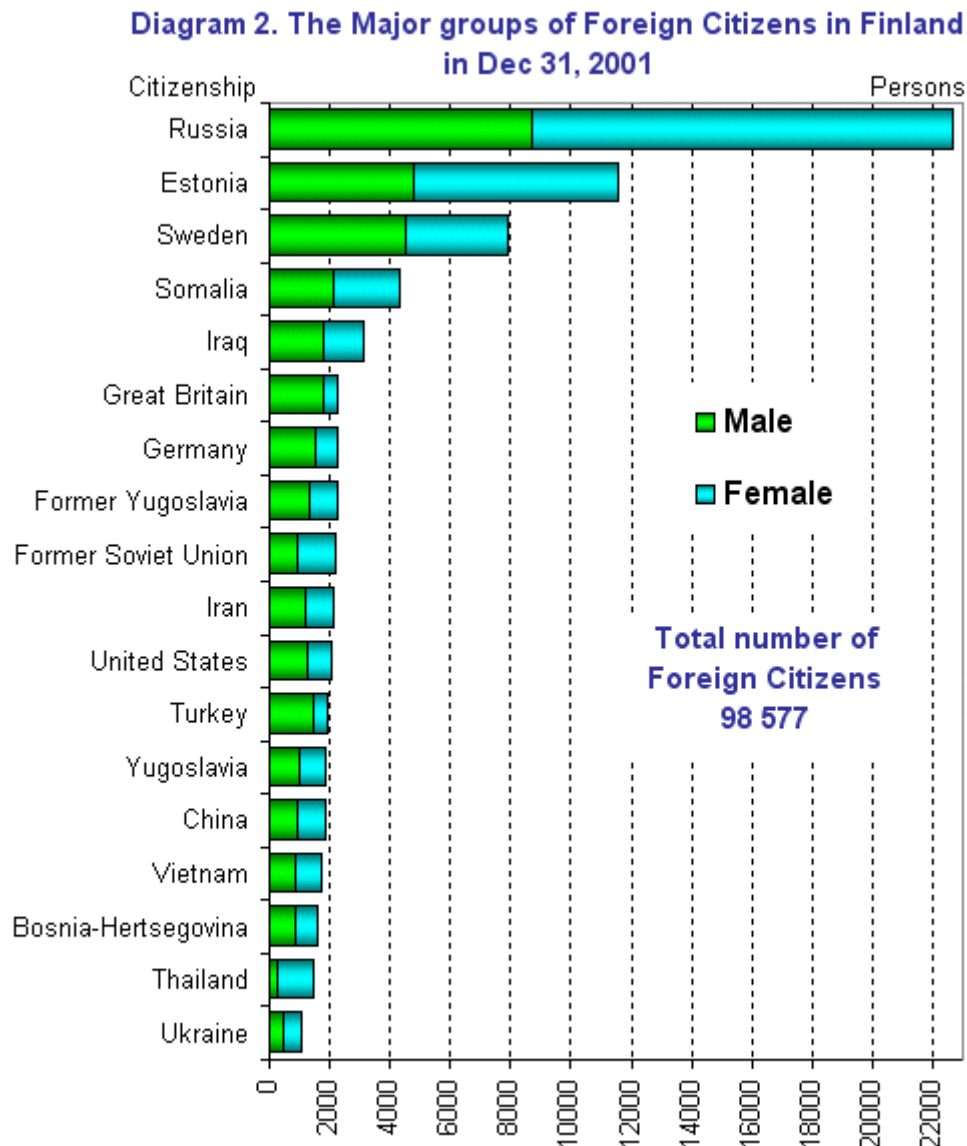
Citizens of Sweden come next in numbers - mostly former Finnish citizens and their children who have to returned to Finland.

The following group is the Somalis who started to arrive as refugees in 1990, the peak year being 1992. In Finland we have some 6,000 Somalis - and almost half of these are under 15 years. They form a very heterogeneous group: some are well educated some, especially those from rural areas, have only very elementary training. During the economic improvement in Finland the Somalis have been able to find more work opportuni-

ties, e.g. as cleaners and bus drivers. The Somalis have got a reputation of being hard-working, and they have also been politically active in Finland, some even receiving a seat in some city councils.(7)

Altogether there are foreign citizens in Finland coming from about 150 different nationalities from all over the world.

The immigrant population in Finland is heavily concentrated in Southern Finland - a half in the province of Uusimaa - and especially in the "metropolitan" area of Helsinki. The majority of the immigrants are in working age, the largest group being 25-34 years old. The proportion of children is about 20 percent - or approximately the same proportion as in the whole Finnish population. But e.g. almost half of the Somali population are children and the corresponding number for the Yugoslavian immigration is 40 percent. The proportion of women in the immigrant population is 49 per cent, but there are big differences among the nationalities.(8)



Source: Statistics Finland. Figure: Jouni Korkiasaari, Institute of Migration, 2002.

It was unfortunate, that the increase in immigration to Finland took place in a period when the country was struck by a heavy depression in the early 1990' causing mass unemployment among the main population and especially affecting the newcomers. The national unemployment rose from 3.5 per cent in 1990 to 17 percent in 1995. Among the immigrant population the rate of unemployment was about 50 per cent and among certain immigrant or refugee groups 80 per cent and more. The employment situation has improved slowly since the middle of the 1990's. (9)

Attitudes towards the immigrants

The new immigrant groups arrived in Finland at the time when the recession was the deepest in the early 1990's, and this was a major factor behind resentful attitudes among Finns. Another factor of importance was the role of media. According to studies by Magdalena JAAKKOLA (1995 and 1999) in Finland there has been a growing mood of attitudinal severity towards foreigners due to the increase in numbers of immigrants and refugees in the 1990's. Another reason has been the bad employment situation in Finland.(10) The tightening attitudes have been shaped by the anxieties related to the influx of immigrants (with different cultures) from the undeveloped countries.

Even with the economic recession in Finland there is still high unemployment among the immigrants due to the marginalization in the labor market. The key questions will be the attitudes and the potential discrimination of the employers towards the recruitment of immigrants. Work would be the best way to integrate immigrants into the Finnish society as well as for multiculturalism in Finland. The issue of integration and, by implication, of creating social cohesion, has become one of the most important challenges for political decision-making - not only in Finland but in the whole European Union.(11)

In Finland "multiculturalism" has been considered to be an issue directly related to immigrants: firstly as a being a consequence of their presence, and secondly as giving them the responsibility to learn Finnish customs and the Finnish language while preserving their own culture. The conceptual boundary between a Finn and a foreigner appears to be virtually insurmountable according to a study by Outi LEPOLA (2000) immigrants are fundamentally left outside of the idea of a Finnish identity - with the exception of the In-grian Finns.(12)

According to Matti SIMILÄ (2000) whether foreign residents will ever actually be regarded as "Finns" will depend on whether Finnish identity stresses ethnic origins or Finnish citizenship, residence in Finland and participation in the Finnish society. (13) Perhaps there will be a need for a new term - e.g. "New Finn" - in Finnish "suomenmaalainen" (a person living in Finland) as suggested by Outi Lepola.

The importance of work to a new arrival

According to the Finnish culture and the Lutheran religion work is the most important part of the everyday life. Consequently the employment of the immigrants - or integration through work - is of crucial importance. The same approach was accepted e.g. in the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries a decade ago.

The employment of the immigrant population is much more difficult than among the main population. In 1988 the rate of unemployment of the Finnish citizens was only five percent and among the foreign citizens eight per cent. Due to the large scale of immigration and the economic depression in Finland in the first half of the 1990's the unemployment of the foreign citizens went up near 50 percent - and among certain nationalities (Somalis, Kurds, Russians etc) as high up as 80 per cent. Due to the economic growth in the country the unemployment of foreign citizens was 33 per cent in April 2001 - but still too high.

The most difficult employment situation is among the refugees, although the refugees from Chile in the 1970's and from Vietnam in the 1980's have integrated quite well into the labor force of Finland. Of the adult refugees, arriving in Finland in 1979-86, 93 percent found work, especially in the Finnish industry, soon after the basic language and trade training. But during the depression of the 1990's even among the Vietnamese 70 percent were unemployed. It can be said that Finland got closer to the European pattern of high unemployment of the foreign population. The reasons were as follows:

1. The increase in the numbers of immigrants and refugees, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.
2. In addition to general depression the automatization and high tech diminished the need for unskilled labor.
3. Negative attitudes of the Finnish population towards newcomers during the depression.

The improvement in the employment of immigrants took place after the middle of the 1990's due to the economic growth as well as the activities of the government and communities in teaching and training. But there are still differences between the ethnic groups. The arrivers from the USA and China have found work best while among the Somalis, people from Iraq and from former Yugoslavia unemployment is still high. The way and key to employment is the command of the Finnish or Swedish language.

The unemployment concerns also the second immigrant generation. There are examples e.g. in England and Sweden of the marginalization of the second generation. The integration of the second generation of immigrants by education and trade is a challenge to the host society.

Most of the immigrants have lived here for a very short time - often just for a few years. Generally Finland seems to follow the patterns of the bigger immigrant countries in Europe. In the beginning the immigrants are marginalized as unemployed and find work in lower paid trades. The ethnic segregation in Finland has not advanced far, the basic difference still being between the host society and the immigrant population. There is a danger that also in Finland immigrants will become a second-class labor force. Also in

Finland there seem to be quite a clear segregation of ethnicity according to the model of the Western world, i.e. the immigrant population is hired for work where the host population is not available. In the former decades it was heavy industry, but nowadays especially service occupations, e.g. in cleaning offices etc. This model was found also among the Finnish emigrants in many parts of the world, e.g. in Sweden, Australia and New Zealand. The manual work has generally been regarded as the incoming trade for the newcomers.

There are a lot of prejudices among the Finnish employers, especially if they do not have any former experience of foreign workers. Although basically ethnicity and race should not have any role in the labor market in a modern democratic society, a foreigner, however, must show that he or she is really competent for the job. In Finland the immigrant is considered to be an asset in the labor market with the following prerequisites:

- knowledge of the language of the main society
- skills and trades by education
- social ability and the wish to integrate
- mastering the networks and culture of the host society

Many immigrants in Finland have started their own businesses, founding ethnic shops and restaurants to satisfy the needs of their compatriots. This is a general European model; e.g. in Sweden the enterprises of immigrants employ 200,000 people. Especially the Russians have started business in Finland - but proportionally most active have been the Turks, and least active the Somalis and immigrants from Iraq and former Yugoslavia. At the moment only four percent of the immigrants in Finland are entrepreneurs - but this proportion will most likely increase in the future.

Also the third sector, i.e. organizations, societies, co-op enterprises, etc. have been able to employ immigrants to some extent. Many of these activities are based on the ethnicity of the newcomers, and it is in the interest of Finland to give support to these ethnic societies, media etc.

Mental health is a problem also among immigrants

Moving to a foreign country is a great change. Integration into a new society demands resources and takes its own time. If the integration of a newcomer into a new society causes unreasonable difficulties, it is worth seeking help.

Getting mental health services was nearly impossible for foreigners living in Finland until the end of the 1980's. In 1989 the Finnish Association for Mental Health opened "The Crisis Prevention Center for Foreigners" with a staff of four workers. During its first 10 years the Center had 2,033 clients covering the whole diversified group of foreigners of 113 different nationalities. Among them there were students, workers, refugees and asylum seekers.

The most common reasons that brought these people to the Crisis Prevention Center were anxiety and depression. People with marital or family related problems form another big group of clients. Especially asylum seekers, waiting long for the final decision are living under great psychological pressure. According to the crisis workers one of the most important findings of the crisis therapy is that the work is completely same regardless of nationality.

The aim of the Crisis Prevention Center is to achieve the same equal assistance and support services for foreigners as the Finns have. The work also endeavors to promote the implementation of human rights in Finland. Tolerance and seeing people's dissimilarities as an enrichment are central values of the work of the Crisis Prevention Center for Foreigners. The final goal is to make the Center unnecessary.(14)

The integration policies

Integration means that immigrants participate in the economic, political and social life of the society as equal members, sharing its duties and rights. At the same time they have a possibility for maintaining and developing their own culture and religion in harmony with the legislation in Finland.

As discussed earlier the labor market and finding work is the most serious problem for many new immigrant groups in Finland. Work is also the main key to successful integration to a new environment. The labor market is also regarded as the main area for integrating immigrants into the Finnish society.

The Act of the integration of immigrants was enabled on May 1, 1999, including the following levels:

1. The National integration policy
2. The municipal integration program and the integration plan
3. Integration plans for individuals and families, language teaching etc.

A registered unemployed immigrant is entitled to an integration plan for a maximum of three years. The main purpose of the Integration Act is to promote employment among the immigrants.(15)

Active immigration policy?

The baby boom generation born in Finland after the war shall reach retirement age in the next few years. It has been estimated that by year 2011 about 700,000 Finns will retire and the additional demand created by the economic growth will be 400,000 employees. The small age groups finishing their education and moving on to working life cannot satisfy the demand for over a million employees.

Consequently in Finland a debate has started on shaping an active immigration policy. The major reasons are the demands of the labor market, especially in service and IT-occupations, as well as the quick ageing of the Finnish labor force. Such an immigration policy is expected to be proactive, selectively focusing on the needs of the labor market.(16)

In the five Eastern Finnish provinces there is a project launched on the field of active immigration policy. These five provinces in Eastern Finland have lost 7,000 inhabitants annually to Southern Finland and other destinations.

On the national level of the permit policy and administration there will also be a need to have a positive element in any such active immigration policy. With comprehensive revision of the Aliens Act and nationality Act currently under way the time is right to introduce the necessary far-reaching policy reforms, as stated in the Annual Report 2000 of the Directorate of Immigration.

Also the Schengen Agreement, in force since March 2001, is also a challenge to Finland with a common border of over 1000 km with Russia - the only EU border with Russia.

Conclusion

The major message of this presentation is that the minority communities in Finland are to stay and to grow in the future. There is a challenge of change through out the whole Finnish society. Consequently we should trust each other and develop mutual respect and partnership.(17)

It is a two way process. Okan Daher, a Tatar of fifth generation living in Finland and teaching the language and culture of the Tatars, has formulated the process of integration well as follows:

The minorities should aim to maintain their language, religion and the cultural heritage, but at the same time to try to adapt themselves flexibly to the circumstances of the main society.(18)

We Finns and our immigrants, \"the new Finns\", together should aim to build a prosperous, open, tolerant and democratic society with many ethno-cultures in harmony with the European and global integration.

At the same time more and more Finns, especially the young and educated, are going abroad to learn and work - and hopefully to return back to multicultural Finland one day.

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