

Police and immigrants – a case study of Turku, Finland

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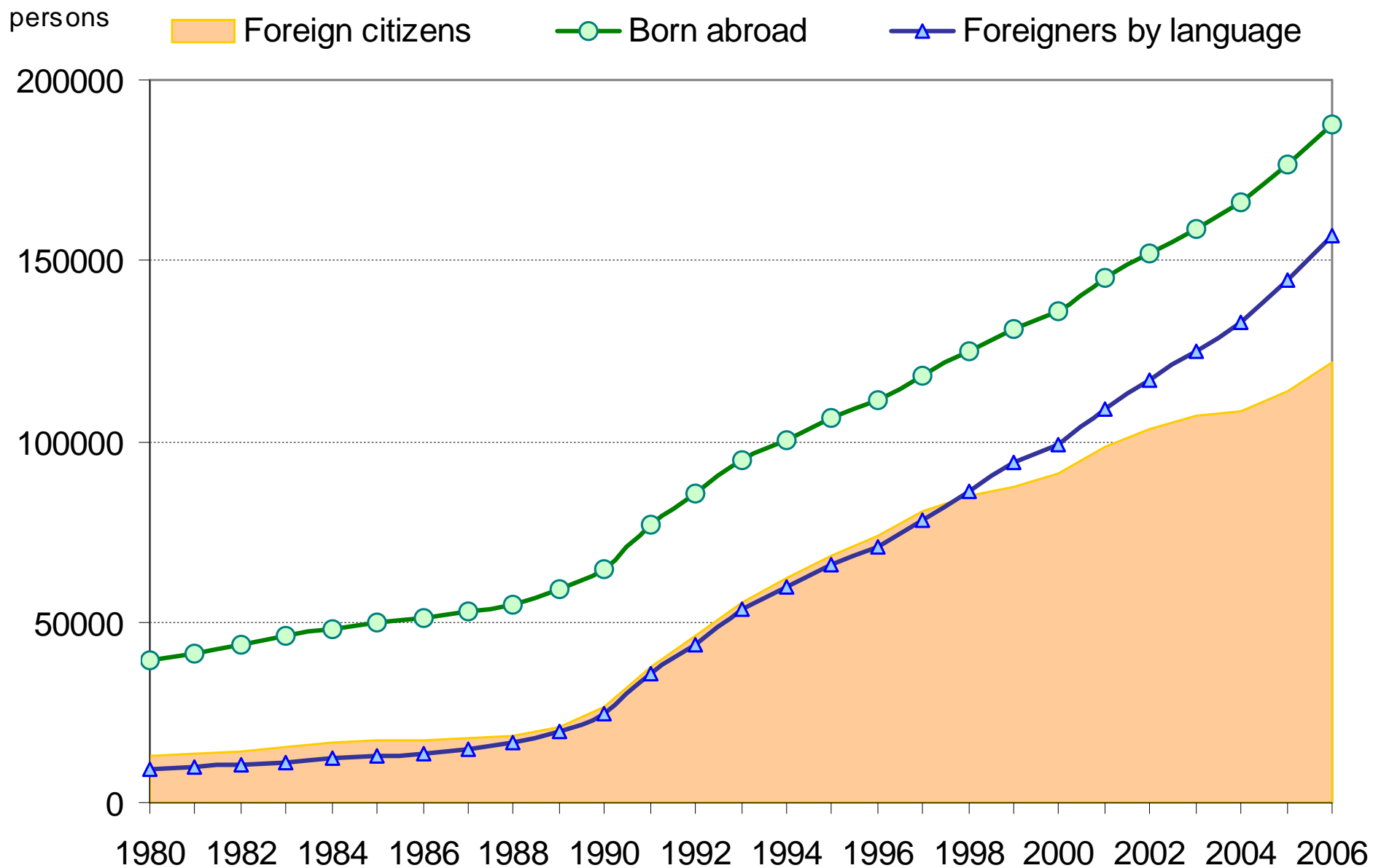
Institute of Migration

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The purpose of the study

- Police and immigrants – Towards interaction that leads to integration -book project
- Article on Police and Immigrants in Turku Today
- Authors of the article Elli Heikkilä, Maria Pikkarainen and Sirkku Wilkman
- Data is based on eight police interviews of Turku Police Department by Riikka Susi.
- Most of the interviewees have working experience as a policeman tens of years and some of the interviewees have worked as a policeman also in other cities in Finland.

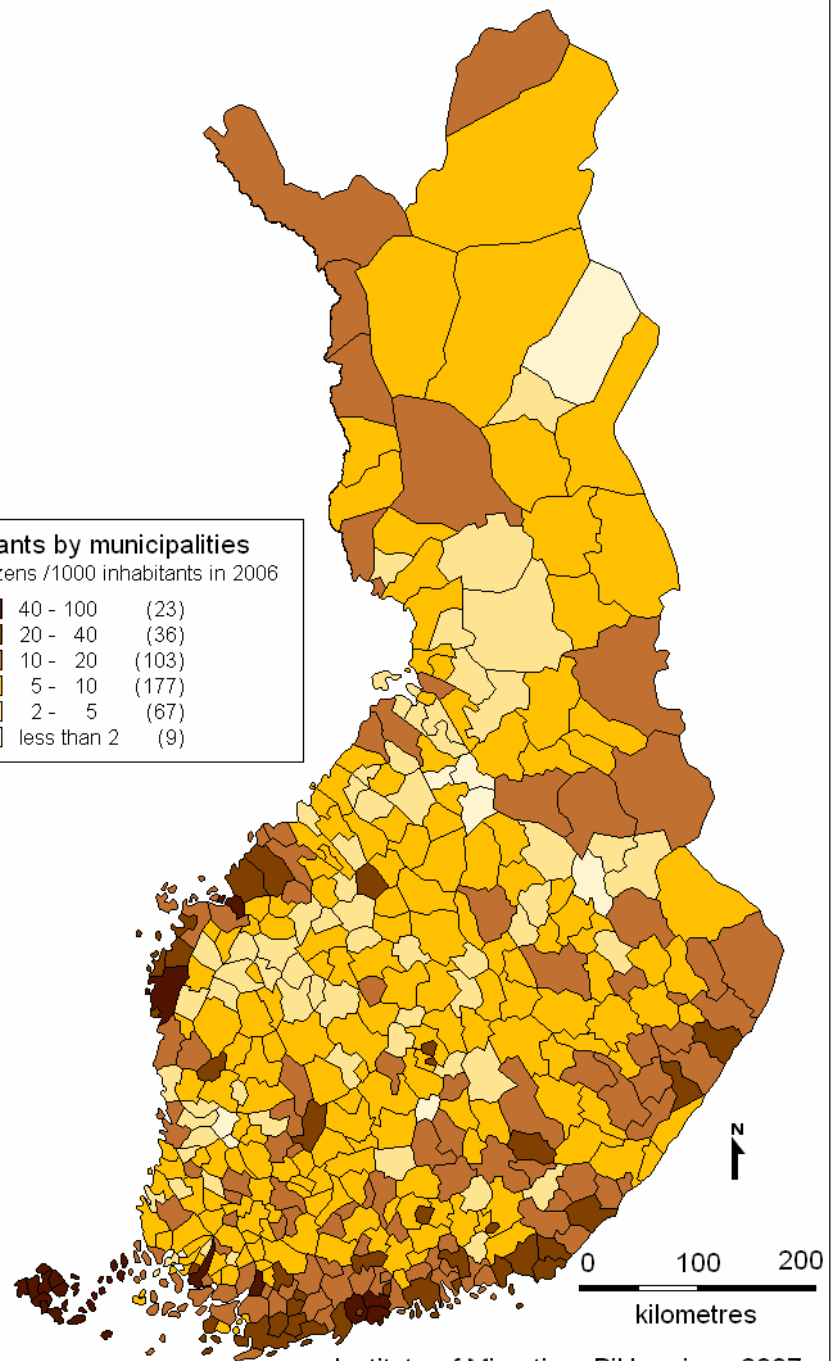
Immigrants in Finland in 1980–2006



Immigrants in Finland's municipalities in 2006

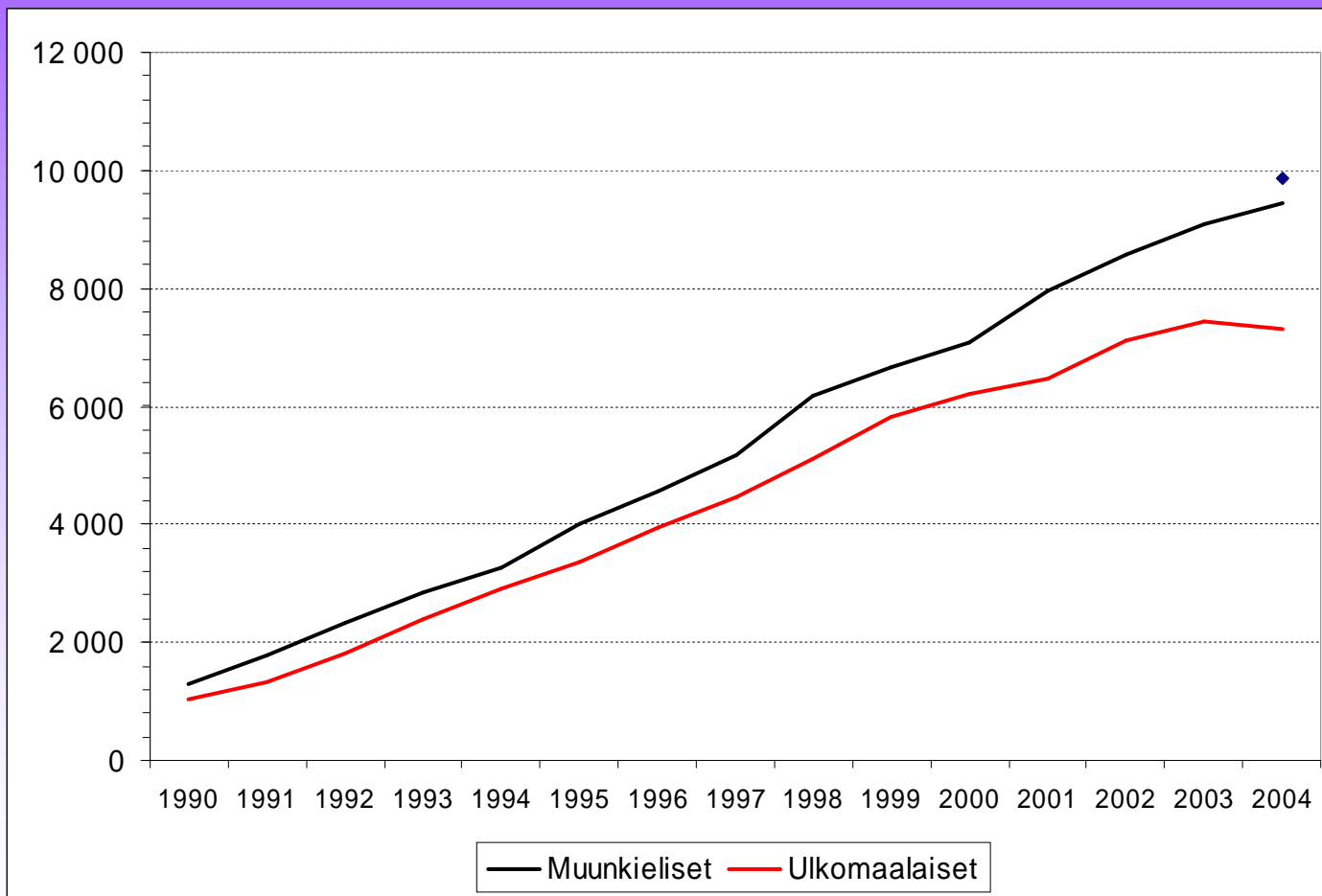
Immigrants by municipalities
Foreign citizens /1000 inhabitants in 2006

| | |
|-------------|-------|
| 40 - 100 | (23) |
| 20 - 40 | (36) |
| 10 - 20 | (103) |
| 5 - 10 | (177) |
| 2 - 5 | (67) |
| less than 2 | (9) |



Immigrants in Turku and number of native speakers of other languages than Finnish or Swedish as a mother tongue 1990-2004.

(Source: Statistics Finland; City of Turku/ Statistics and Research, Lemmetyinen)



Immigrants in Turku

- Turku is one of the most important immigrant accumulation areas in Finland.
- 7 786 foreign citizens or 4,4 % of population in Turku in 2007.
- Largest groups by citizenship in 2006 are Russians (1 165), Estonians (745), Iranians (622) and Iraqis (550).
- By language groups in 2006: Russians 2 310, Arabics 1 162, Kurdish 901.
- In Varsinais-Suomi county 18 720 foreign born in 2007

- Turku has attracted immigrants not only from abroad but also from other regions of Finland.
- For example free rental apartments and already existing ethnic communities are the major reasons to move to Turku. Immigrants are settling mainly in suburbs, where the proportion of immigrants is significant.
- The proportion of native speakers of other languages than Finnish or Swedish in suburbs of Turku: Varissuo 29 %, Lauste 23 % and Halinen 20 %.
- The increasing number of immigrants in the city tends to increase the encounters between immigrants and majority population and immigrants and the police. Because of that the police will face new challenges also in Turku.

The staff of Turku Police Department and its adequacy

- The number of staff in Turku Police Department is 283 and 6 of them work mainly on immigration affairs. In addition approx. 10 persons work partly with immigration affairs, although all the staff in Turku Police Dept. are in contact with immigrants one way or another, mostly in License Services.
- According to interviewees the number of employees working with immigration affairs is adequate.
- Based on interviews the fieldwork should be more supervisory if the prevention is to be improved. The staff wants to improve its proficiency to serve foreigners and immigrants better.

- According to interviewees at least one police working in Turku has immigrant background (2. generation). The person has already special skills in immigrant affairs because mother tongue is other than Finnish.
- In Licence Services there is another employee with immigrant background. Also some trainees have been immigrants.

Skill requirements and education

- As the society turns to be more multicultural, the proficiency qualifications of the police rise, e.g. language skills, juridical knowledge and taking into account other cultures and the requirements.
- The number of immigrants has increased and due to that the legislation is updated as well.
- Every police is ought to know and understand the Aliens Act and regulations concerning immigration. The police has to know on which grounds foreigner can reside in Finland and what sort of licences are needed for that. Police has to know what to do if foreigner doesn't follow the regulations.

- According to interviewees the police training has improved in many ways and the newly graduated polices have also better theoretical background. Nowadays police training corresponds better with social development. The police has to adopt new knowledge about everchanging society.
- Interviewees assumed that polices with immigration background can change the attitudes of other polices and the Finns in general towards a more tolerant society.
- According to interviewees, it is important to teach polices to understand other cultures. They agreed that teamwork with more experienced police and one's own practical experience will increase the know-how of multicultural interaction. In addition, mentoring and guidance are crucial.

- Police Dept. of Turku does not organize special training for those working with immigration affairs. If needed, some courses can be arranged.
- Also conferences and seminars have been organized to improve the interaction between police and immigrant clients. Employees mainly working with immigration affairs have guided the fieldworkers about foreigners' requirements to move or to reside in Finland and what sort of documents immigrants need to show the police if asked.

Immigrants as clients

- The number of immigrants in Turku rises continuously and at the same time also the number of immigrated clients of Police Dept. of Turku increases.
- Often persons accused of a crime are not first-timers.
- Police Dept. of Turku deals with many different sorts of crimes committed by foreigners, like they do with native Finns as well.
- Typical crimes committed by immigrants are fights and assault. Sometimes group fights occur. These crimes are committed at night time during the weekends, only rarely at daytime. Crimes committed at homes employ police quite seldom.
- Regardless of the ethnical background offenders are young, 15-25 -year-old men, very rarely women.
- In the last few years the gangs of marginalised immigrants have formed. Some of these gangs have features close to professional crime. In the 1990s there was not this sort of phenomenon in Turku.
- Most of the crimes committed in the suburbs are disturbances like noisiness and vandalism. Also for example bikes are often stolen. Sometimes there are disagreements among the residents in the living areas and police services are needed.

- The police organizes meetings with immigration associations and informs about the role of the police. These meetings are useful to all parties, because it increases the understanding and decreases prejudices.

Misunderstandings between the police and the immigrants

- Usually misunderstandings emerge when police is asked to solve the social issues. This causes misunderstanding also among native Finns and the police.
- Police can be asked to solve the problems for example between neighbours if there is the feeling of harassment but no crime has occurred.
- It is important to inform immigrants in simplified language about Finnish society, the role of the police, and the rights and duties that a person has when living in Finland. If lacking the language skills, the immigrant gets civic knowledge from the people around him/her. Information can be altered and incorrect. E.g. in family reunifications, one member of the family can act as a "cultural interpreter" to the rest of the family coming to Finland.
- In some cultures it is inappropriate to work with opposite sex, but the interviewed polices hadn't confronted any problems concerning this situation.

Working with immigrant clients

- Interviewees were asked what was the hardest and the most rewarding issue when working with immigrants. The replies varied depending on the task of the interviewee.
- For one police the most difficult part was being unable to help even though there was the possibility to help from police side and thus to see how immigrant client was unable or not willing to take help. According to this police the most important task of the police is to create equal social system and to help people live a happy life. Immigrants are one part of Finnish society and everyday life.

- As one interviewee said, the lack of common language is the hardest thing. Especially it is a problem for a community police, whose main task is to prevent the marginalization of the youth and the problems due to that (e.g. crimes). Police is not able to discuss with the parents without the youngster interpreting in between. To prevent the false interpretation in this kind of situations, the police sometimes has an objective interpreter with him/her.
- According to interviewees the situation where immigrant youngster is in between the two cultures is difficult for the police. The conflict between family traditions and the outside world is large, and because of that youngster can behave totally different when he/she is with the parents and when with friends. Parents may not know what their child is doing on his/her leisure time. When the reality comes to light there is the need for cooperation between authorities to accomplish a durable solution.

- For one police, it is difficult to know some immigrant youngsters in person and to see how their problems increase. Some have even died for example because of drugs. Another interviewee said that it is hard to draw the line between work and leisure time, because some clients call during the leisure time and ask for help.
- According to one police working with asylum seekers, the best part in his/her job is to tell clients about positive decision and to see their relief and gratitude for that.

- The interviewed polices have been glad that immigrants are often brave and independent. They are grateful of the work done for them, and the encounters are easy. Usually they give feedback, which helps to improve the work of the police.
- Positive aspects at the work of police are to meet new people and to enlarge the social network.
- Many interviewees said that they feel they have succeeded in their work when clients learn their lesson and start to live a law-abiding life. Either with the help of police or without.

Police and partner groups

- Partners in cooperation with the police are for example the reception centre, school system, social services, the interpretation centre, The Police College of Finland and Finnish Immigration Service. According to interviewees especially the cooperation with schools is effective and successful. The police attending (either as a trainer or a trainee) different kinds of meetings, seminars and events concerning multiculturalism is a good form of cooperation.
- Personal level interest groups were understood to be unofficial contacts between individual police and immigrant or small group of immigrants, which aim to better cooperation. The immigrants have usually been the initiators to this unofficial cooperation. For example, the situations in which immigrant parents are worried about their children's behaviour in public spaces, can lead them to take the first step towards the police. The interviewees emphasized the importance of the immigrants being the initiators themselves, because the police as an initiator could appear too authoritative.
- The so-called cultural interpreters could have know-how to prevent the criminal behaviour of the immigrant youth.

- For police work in recent times Internet is a good instrument. The interviewed policemen find for example web-communication as a good way of reaching customers and sharing an useful information in many languages.
- Co-operation with the press was also mentioned as a well working communication channel, and local newspapers were experienced as a good way of reaching the big audience.

Interpretation services

- If the interpretation in The Police Department of Turku is needed, they call to the interpretation centre and ask for interpreter. During the office hours and even after that it is quite easy to get one, but during the night-time it is difficult to get an interpreter. Especially the interpreters of the more rare languages are often difficult to find. Sometimes the interpreter can only be contacted by phone. For hearings the interpreter is usually booked in advance.
- There are interpretation services also in other cities like in Helsinki or Tampere, but the police of Turku can't use them if the interpreter is needed in place.
- It is crucial that the interpreters are trustworthy, because the police has to secure the preliminary investigation. In other words, the interpreter can not be the partner of the client, but only the intermediary between the police and the client.
- The police has made a written contract about confidentiality and other essentials with the interpreters, who are not working in the interpreter centre .
- There are also special requirements for interpretation. For example, if the client is a deaf Russian, the police needs interpreter of the sign language and the Russian language at the same time.

The effect of reception centre for police work

- The reception centre for asylum seekers is situated in Turku. That affects the work of the local police especially in foreign investigation, because they deal with the hearing of the whole provinces' asylum seekers.
- In other respects the residents of the reception centre do not, according to the interviewed, employ the police much. On the contrary the offenders are, according to the interviewed, the immigrants who live permanently in Turku.

Ideas to improve interaction with immigrants and the police

- Increasing immigration causes new requirements to the police proficiency and training.
- In general, the interviewees emphasized that they meet the clients as individuals, not as representatives of some group.
- Lack of knowledge of Finnish language among immigrant population can cause misunderstandings in interaction with the police and immigrants.
- More resources have to be directed to education of immigrants and teaching Finnish language.
- Civic knowledge of immigrants has to be emphasized already in integration phase.
- It is important to inform immigrants in simplified language (e.g. handbook) about Finnish society and the rights and duties of person living in Finland.
- Positive aspect is that immigrant youth is interested in police profession and the amount of immigrant students in Police College of Finland is increasing.