

European Immigration and Integration : Finland

OLAVI KOIVUKANGAS

Director, Institute of Migration, Finland

National Europe Centre Paper No. 63

Paper presented to conference entitled
*The Challenges of Immigration and Integration in the European
Union and Australia,*
18-20 February 2003, University of Sydney

Abstract: The 1990s witnessed a period of strong immigration in Finland with the number of foreign arrivals increasing five-fold during the course of the decade. A major reason was the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the arrival of the Ingrians and other ethnic Finns. A significant proportion (roughly one-fifth) of the immigratory flow were refugees. Yet Finland remains an homogeneous society, with the proportion of foreign citizens accounting for only 1.9 per cent, the lowest among EU-countries.

Nevertheless, the challenge Finland faces is one of transition from a monolithic to a polyvalent culture. The recent increase in immigration has created a number of problems. Unemployment among foreign citizens is still over 30 per cent; it is eight per cent nationally. Negative attitudes and xenophobia among the native population towards foreigners remains. The varied composition of migration - refugees, asylum seekers, displaced persons, ordinary migrants and family members – places unique pressures on policy-makers and the citizenry alike. The flows have become more flexible, and the incidence of illegal migration and people smuggling is increasing.

To address these challenges, the EU is gradually moving towards adopting a common policy on immigration and refugee issues as flagged under the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. This shift to greater supra-national authority is inevitable. Finland is currently alone among EU states in having a Russian border. However, this will soon change with the imminent enlargement of the EU to Central and Eastern Europe, constituting a major challenge for the EU's migration policies. The eastern parts of Germany and Austria will receive most of the migratory labour from the newly-admitted nations, although the size of this flow is uncertain. Obviously the net intake of immigrants from existing EU nations will continue to increase, but access will be strictly controlled and mostly short-term. The EU's express objective is to ensure the efficiency of migration policy by emphasising integration.

Finland is not alone in needing migrants to resolve problems associated with a rapidly ageing population. The test will be its willingness to do so. Immigrants are still often seen as undeserving competitors in the labour market. Finnish society's attitudes will have to adjust to both the temporary and permanent presence of an increasing number of people of a foreign background. Immigrants and their children will be a great asset to Finland in the future, as the Australian example attests. The key questions are how many and what type of immigrants should the country admit? On these and other issues, clear goals and guidelines are yet to be defined.

A Land of Emigrants

Since the famine of the 1860's 1.3 million Finns have emigrated to every corner of the world. The major migration streams went mainly to North America before the depression of the 1930's and to Sweden since the World War II. Due to the long distances Australia, New Zealand and other Southern hemisphere destinations have received only a trickle of Finns. (Diagram 1)

Between 1945-2001 about 755 000 emigrants left Finland. The peak years were 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. The major reasons for the return were good employment situation in Finland and the wish of parents to have a Finnish education for their children. In the 1990's the Finnish emigration was quite insignificant. (Diagram 2)

Since the 1960's Finns have started to settle in Central and Western Europe. The newest Finnish emigration is directed mainly to the EU-countries. Finland together with Sweden joined the EU in 1995. (Diagram 3 and Table I) Many young and well-educated Finns work abroad in Finnish or international companies, often just as a part of their career, although in many cases they will stay permanently outside Finland due to marriages and other reasons. The emigration of well-educated population should not be seen only as negative but rather as an invaluable resource of returning emigrants with know-how and expertise in international business and foreign cultures. (1)

Altogether in 2001 there were over 300 000 first generation Finns abroad and about 450 000 second generation persons, with at least one parent born in Finland. Also thousands retired Finns live in Spain and other warm countries, particularly in wintertime.

A Country of Immigration

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 history this is not true. Finland has some old ethnic minorities as follows:

The Swedish speaking Finns have been living in Finland for 1000 years and still represent six per cent of the population – 300 000 persons. *The Sami* are the only indigenous people in Finland numbering over 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 arrived long time ago to Finland via Sweden and Russia. A law in 1918 granted them Finnish citizenship. Before the war there were 2 000 Jews in Finland. At the moment there are 1 300 members

in the Jewish congregations in Finland. Also the Jews have integrated to the main population by marriages.

The *Romani* or Gipsies started to arrive in Finland in the 16th century via Sweden. It is estimated 10 000 Romanis of Finland, 3 000 of these living now in Sweden.

The *Tatars* arrived in Finland from Russia in the 19th century and their language, Islamic religion and traditions have survived until the fourth and fifth generations. There are about 1 000 Muslim Tatars in Finland and they have been employed especially by trade and textile industry.

The *Russians*: Between 1809-1917 Finland was an autonomous part of the Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. During this period thousands of Russians, mainly soldiers, merchants, civil servants and tourists, lived in Finland as permanent or temporary residents. The Russians, however, are not generally counted to the ethnic minorities in Finland although eg. in 1900 there were 6 000 Russians in Finland. After the Russian revolution of 1917 33 000 refugees arrived in Finland from Russia, half of these ethnic Finns. About half of the Russian refugees continued to other Western countries. In the late 1930's the Russian community in Finland consisted of about 15 000 persons.

New Ethnic Minorities

Finland has never experienced flows of labour migration. Excluding the old ethnic minorities and with a small foreign population Finland, with a population of 5,2 million persons, was quite a homogeneous society until the 1990's.

From the World War II up to the early 1970's Finland was quite a closed society and did not attract immigrants. The number of foreign citizens coming to Finland was insignificant and they tended to stay for a short period only. The major reasons for immigration were studying, temporary work and marriage to a Finn. In 1980 the number of foreign citizens residing in Finland was about 13 000 persons. (Diagram 4) Until the end of the 1980's, some 85 per cent of the immigrants coming to Finland were return migrants, mostly from Sweden. But in the 1990's the majority of immigrants were of foreign origin. In 1990 there were only 21 000 foreign citizens in Finland and 10 years later nearly 100 000. The real number of the "foreigners" in Finland is over 140 000, as appears from the Diagram 4, as a foreign citizen may apply for Finnish citizenship after living in the country for five years – and in some cases a shorter period.

The reasons for increased immigration were both international and domestic in origin. A major reason was the collapse of the Soviet Union and other Eastern European "socialist" countries in 1991, the civil war in former Yugoslavia as well as the developments in Asia and Africa causing refugee problems. During recent years, the number of immigrants from the former Soviet Union and the Asian and African countries has increased rapidly. Citizens of the former Soviet Union form the largest single

national group in Finland today, Estonians being the second largest group. In fact, many of the people of these both groups are of Finnish origin. Russian Finns – also known as Ingrian Finns – are descendants of the Finns, who in the 17th century settled in the area around the present day St. Petersburg, when it was a part of the Kingdom of Sweden. According to the census of 1926 there were 135 000 Ingrians living in the Soviet Union. The arrival of Ingrians to Finland, about 22,000 persons, can be compared with the “Aussiedlers” to Germany from Russia.

The number of foreigners in Finland includes over 20 000 refugees. In the 1970's Finland first accepted refugees from Chile and Vietnam. The Finnish refugee policy has been quite restrictive. Since 1986 there has been an annual refugee quota established with the UNHCR. Initially it was 500 but has been increased to 750, the annual aim being 1 000 persons. The biggest refugee groups have been the Somalis, the citizens of the former Yugoslavia and the Vietnamese. During the last few years there has been an increase of asylum seekers arriving in Finland from Eastern European countries. In 2002 there were 3 334 decisions of asylum made by the Directorate of Immigration. Of these only 591 were positive.

In 1990 the foreign population of 21 000 persons represented only 0,4 per cent of the population of Finland. In 2002 nearly 100 000 foreign citizens is only 1,9 per cent of the population, but still one of the lowest in EU and Europe. It must also be remembered that many immigrants were former Finnish citizens and their children. If Finland proportionally had as many immigrants as eg. Germany, Finland would have an immigrant population of half a million.

The Profile of Immigrants

As appears from Diagram 5 the Russians form the largest foreign group in Finland with nearly 23 000 persons, followed by citizens of Estonia, Sweden, Somalia, and Iraq. In addition there are over 2 000 persons with the old Soviet Union passport. Many of the Russians are women married to Finnish men.

Altogether there are foreign citizens in Finland coming from about 150 different nationalities from all over the world. Finland is becoming a multicultural society.

The immigrant population is heavily concentrated in Southern Finland – and especially in the “metropolitan” area of Helsinki. The majority of the immigrants are in working age, the largest group being 25-43 years old.

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's. The national unemployment rose from 3.5 per cent in 1990 to 17 per cent in 1995. Among the immigrant population unemployment was over 50 per cent and among certain minorities over 80 per cent. Since the middle of the 1990's the employment situation has slowly improved, but still the immigrant unemployment is about 30 per cent while the

national level is nine per cent. (2) In the whole EU the unemployment is about seven per cent, or 14 million persons.

A dissertation (2002) on immigrants in the 1990's Finnish labour market reveals the unstable status of the majority of immigrants. They are extremely vulnerable to the labour markets effects, over-represented among those who are the last to be hired and then first to let go, at the mercy of economic highs and lows. (3)

EU-migrations

Migration flows to Europe are very mixed, comprising many different kinds of people: refugees, asylum seekers, displaced persons, family members of migrants already in the EU, migrant workers and growing numbers of business migrants. The flows have become flexible and dynamic, short-term and cross-border movements have increased. There are also large numbers of illegal migrants in the EU and the smuggling and trafficking have increased. (4)

In 2000 there were 850 000 central and east European (CEEC) nationals in the EU, including 300,000 in the EU work force. There may be another 500,000 to one million Eastern Europeans illegally in the EU nations. The European Commission released in 2001 a report estimating the entry of 10 CEEC countries would lead to 335,000 additional net immigrants a year to the current 15 EU members. (5)

When the EU will receive 10 new member states in 2004 (Diagram 6) the major immigration flow – up to 80 per cent -- is expected to come to Austria and Eastern parts of Germany. The total number of immigrants from the new EU countries to the old ones is expected to be about 355 000 persons a year in the beginning, then going down to 100 000 annual immigrants. Finland is expected to receive only a trickle -- or annually about 5 000 immigrants from these new EU countries. Sweden is expected to receive twice as much of these immigrants as Finland. (6)

International migrations are one of the key problems in the contemporary integration process of the European Union. However, there is no common definition of integration, as it means different things to different people. But generally integration is a dynamic two-way process. Concerning the integration of immigrants the key questions will be the attitudes and the potential discrimination of the employers towards the recruitment of immigrants. The issue of integration and, by implication, of creating social cohesion, has become one of the most important challenges for political decision-making in the whole European Union.

With globalisation the pattern of migration is changing. The restructuring of the global economy has forced many of the receiving countries to again ask two fundamental questions in the immigration debate:

How many immigrants should the country admit? And which types of immigrants should be granted the scarce entry visas? (7)

The process of enlargement of the EU to Central and Eastern Europe will constitute in the foreseeable future new elements in migration movements in Europe. The EU is going through a dynamic phase in migration matters including asylum. The increase in migrations is inevitable and a great challenge to the EU, which will receive 10 new member states in May 2004. In particular the Baltic Sea states will form the new borders of the enlarged EU and are obliged to guard the EU external border according to the Schengen Treaty.

Many analysts predict that the flow to the West will grow in the future. It has been claimed that Europe will need some more migrants, whom it is presently trying to keep out, to prevent labour shortage and population aging. (8)

It has been estimated by the UN in 2000 that the EU should receive 1.5 million immigrants each year in order to maintain its working-age population at its current level. (9)

An often quoted European paradox is: "Europe needs immigrants, but the Europeans do not want them."

Migration Policies

Integration is an essential part of an efficient migration policy. The EU member states have different migration policies and different relations towards emigrants and their descendants. Through the Maastricht Treaty the EU is gradually moving towards a common immigration and refugee policy. With the integration the migration policy will shift more and more away from national to a sub-national level. With the signing of the Amsterdam Treaty, in which asylum and migration policy became a core topic in the EU policy-making, all the member states promised that their co-operation in this political area would take the highest priority and that they were willing to give up at least a part of their national sovereignty. (10) A central objective of the EU is a controlled immigration through fluent decision making supported by open and active communication nationally and internationally. Within the EU geographical mobility is expected to be low unless there will be radical changes in the European economy.

Finnish immigration policy focuses primarily on national interests and on the framework of the EU membership. Finnish refugee and migration policy is moving towards multiculturalism, following the development in the EU immigration policy. Finland envisages co-operation with the other EU countries as well as with Eastern Europe and international organizations. For Finland a special challenge is its long eastern border – until May 2004 the only EU border with Russia, with its high

number of crossings. Measures have been implemented against illegal immigration from Russia, either to apply for asylum in Finland or to go further West.

“What kind of Europe are we building in the 21st century ?”

To this question John Parry from England answered as follows:

“The principles of democracy, respect for human and civil rights taken together with freedom of movement would seem, in my view, to demand a common citizenship which is inclusive, not exclusive, and based on equality. It would not challenge national citizenship but be broader in scope. Above all, it would respect the differing cultures, languages and customs of its diverse population.” (11)

Finland between East and West

In Finland migration movements will depend on domestic and international developments. During the next few years unemployment is expected to remain high and the low demand of labour will obviously keep immigrant numbers at a low level. (Diagram 7) Refugees and asylum seekers from the Third World will be creating the strongest migration pressure. The low immigration situation could change at short notice, however, with adverse developments, especially in Russia.

For the moment the Russian economy is developing in a positive direction. In the future also Russia will have serious need for immigrants. The population of the country is aging rapidly, and the present population of 145 million is expected to decline. The fertility rate for women is only 1,12 children – among the lowest in the world - while the mean life expectancy for Russian men is under 60 years. Russia is lacking a coherent, integrated immigration policy, but attempts are being made to gradually develop such a policy. The problems occurring in Russia are basically the same as those found in Finland and elsewhere in Europe. When EU is now developing its own immigration policy, mutual dialogue and cooperation with Russia is important. (12)

The immigrant population in Finland will probably become more diverse. Employment, social and cultural problems will continue to be acute, so more attention will have to be paid to integration and minority policies. According to the forecast of the Statistics of Finland, net immigration until 2010 is estimated at 3 000 a year. From this year onwards the baby boom generation will reach the age of retirement and will need more care and service. It is generally predicted that Finland will not be able to maintain population numbers at the present level due to lower life expectations and low net migration. (Diagram 8) (13)

The baby boom generation born after the war will reach retirement age in the next few years. It has been estimated that by the 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 estimated demand of a million employees.

Much of the future development will depend also of the fertility of the Finns. But the forecast for Finland does not look good as appears from the following table:

Over 65 years of the Labour Force (20-64) in 2000 and 2020 (14)

Country	% in 2000	% in 2020	Change %
FINLAND	25,9	41,4	15,5
ITALY	30,7	42,1	11,4
IRELAND	20,3	26,2	5,9
TOTAL EU	28,3	37,3	9,0

This aging and labour force forecast indicates that in the EU there will be an obvious and urgent demand for young labour force.

The decline of birth rate and aging of the population in Finland have raised discussion about an active immigration policy. Competition of the skilled people is global, and Finland cannot stay behind. When this question is considered, there is no reason to look at the unemployment rates of this moment, but first of all at the fertility rate, 1,9 children per woman, and the shape of the present population pyramid of Finland.

Finland – as well as the whole EU – can expect growth in immigration flows. In Finland immigrants are often seen as a threat and as competitors in the labour markets. The Finnish society and attitudes will have to adjust to the temporary and permanent presence of an increasing number of people with foreign background. Immigrants and their children will be a great asset to Finland in the future, Australia being a good example. A new aspect for Finland will be the question:

How many and what type of immigrants should the country admit in?

What we in Finland really need now, is a comprehensive population and migration policy to be defined by the Parliament, naturally coordinated with the European Union.

REFERENCES

1. Jouni Korkiasaari & Ismo Söderling, "Finland: From a Country of Emigration into a Country of Immigration", *A Changing Pattern of Migration in Finland and Its Surroundings*, Ismo Söderling, ed., Publications of the Population Research Institute, Series D 32/1998, pp. 7-28.
2. Olavi Koivukangas, "The need for multicultural approach in Finland", *Entering multiculturalism: Finnish experience abroad*, ed. by Olavi Koivukangas, Turku 2002, pp. 25-26.
3. Annika Forsander, *Luottamuksen Ehdot. Maahanmuuttajat 1990-luvun suomalaisilla työmarkkinoilla* (Conditions of Trust. Immigrants in the 1990'Finnish Labour Market), Vammala 2002, p. 283.
4. Elli Heikkilä, "Migration and integration in Europe", *Siirtolaisuus-Migration* 4/ 2002. p. 37.
5. *Migration News*, April 2001, Vol. 8, Nr 4.
6. Timo Metsä-Tokila, "Suomeen ei ole odotettavissa laajaa muuttoaaltoa (Finland is not expecting extensive immigration)", *Turun Sanomat* (Turku News), 22.12. 2002.
7. Christina Boswell, Feff Crisp and George Borjas, " Migration Matters", *Wider Angle* No. 2/2002, p. 2.
8. D.A. Coleman, Oxford University , *International Migration: A Long-term Challenge to the Industrial World*, manuscript 1994 for the book of the INED series.
9. Kari E.O. Alho, *EU Labour Markets and Immigration Connected to Enlargement*, ETLA Discussion papers No. 791. 282.20002.
10. Steffen Angenendt, "Introduction", *Asylum and Migration Policies in the European Union*, Ed. Steffen Angenendt, Berlin 1999, pp. 57-59.
11. John Parry, "Migration, citizenship & democracy in the EU", *Entering multiculturalism: Finnish experience abroad*, ed by Olavi Koivukangas, Turku 2002, pp. 15-23.
12. Olavi Koivukangas, "Russia and immigration: present and future", *Siirtolaisuus-Migration*, 3/ 2002, p. 2.

13. Elli Heikkilä & Sirpa Korhonen, "Supply and demand of labour force in Finland", *Siirtolaisuus-Migration*, 2/2002, pp. 27-31; and E. Heikkilä and T. Järvinen, "Past, Present and Future of Urbanization in Finland", *International Handbook of Urban Systems, Studies of Urbanization and Migration in Advanced and Developing Countries*, Ed. H.S. Geyer, Cheltenham, UK, 2002, pp.241-270.

14. Editorial, *Helsingin Sanomat* (Helsinki News) 19.1. 2003.