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# Barriers to Opportunity for Immigrants in Finland: A Source of Inequality

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## Abstract

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The thesis is designed to examine the barriers with which immigrants are faced in Finland and the resulting inequality. The definition of inequality is explored, highlighting how complex such a word is but showing the key denominator being that of disadvantages or unfair treatment. Furthermore, how inequality is measured is also considered and how the disparities are shown. It shows that there is not one comprehensive tool, but instead a combination of many different tools is required to inform policy decisions. In terms of integration, immigration and inequality there are many theoretical frameworks to be considered, with such theories showing how complex the interconnected relationship between integration, immigration and inequality is.

Finland is a country which has strongly progressive integration policies which can be seen from the high scores obtained on the Migrant Integration Index (MIPeX), however, immigrants continue to encounter significant problems and challenges which in turn hinder their ability to integrate wholly into Finnish society. This study seeks to highlight the obstacles faced, such as language barriers, discrimination and social prejudices, all of which help to contribute to the inequality that immigrants experience. In turn how it shows how immigrants are becoming more marginalised compared to Finnish natives.

The analytical approach of the paper helps to highlight how, despite having progressive integration policies, there is much room for improvement. The barriers faced by immigrants need to be tackled in order to ensure a more inclusive society and better opportunities for immigrants.

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# 1 Introduction

The paper will explore the barriers to immigrants' opportunities within Finland. The purpose is to examine why they are facing such barriers, the inequalities they are facing, and the potential solutions for these.

We live in a world which has become highly globalised, which in turn has fostered migration flows into western countries (Skaliotis & Thorougood, 2007). In Finland we have seen the immigrant population increase from just 13,000 in 1990 to just under 50,000 at the end of 2022, as highlighted in Figure 1 below.

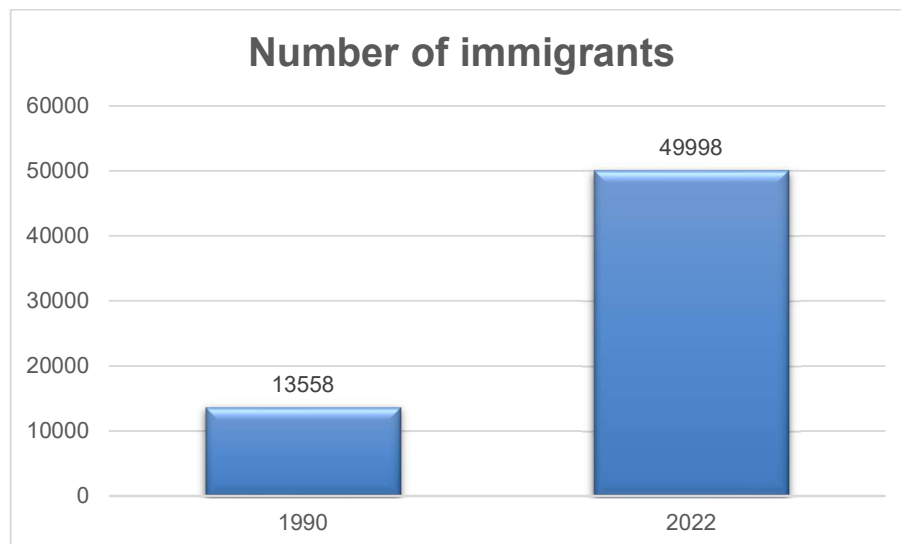


Figure 1: Number of immigrants to Finland (Statistics Finland, 2023)

A recent news article has highlighted the importance of immigration to Finland. It shows how in 90 years it is estimated there may be less than 1 million descendants of current Finnish people in Finland; as such it could be argued that Finland needs immigration more than it ever anticipated (Raeste, 2024).

With such a need for immigrants the integration of these individuals is key. Immigrants themselves face numerous challenges and barriers when trying to integrate into the host society which can have varying outcomes of success (Nshom, Sadaf and Ilkhom, 2022).

Therefore, the paper will examine the barriers which immigrants are facing and how these are impacting their opportunities. The paper will mainly consider the inequality aspect, drawing on key theories relating to immigration, integration and inequality. Finally, it will examine possible responses that might improve the situation.

## 2 What is Inequality?

Inequality is a term we have seen becoming more and more prominent in recent years, with the spotlight on this matter becoming more intense. So, what exactly is inequality?

Inequality is a word which can have a large broad meaning and scope. It can trigger several different definitions and ideas in the mind, of course depending on their training or prejudice (Cowell 2011: 1). As such there is a few definitions which can be explored.

If we were to simply use a dictionary definition of the word it offers a more simplistic definition. It can be defined as “the unfair situation in society when people have more opportunities, money etc. than other people” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024).

However, in truth the term is one which is much more complex, with multiple layers. The most common of these terms is that of income inequality, but it should be noted that there is also inequality of wealth and inequality of opportunity (IMF, 2020).

Sin-Yee Koh (2020: 269) argues that broadly it refers to the unequal or unjust distribution of resources and opportunities of members of a given society. Furthermore, Koh states that inequality is something which encircles distinct but overlapping economic, social and spatial dimensions.

As identified in the paper by Koh these three areas have very distinct characteristics that all interact with each other. Economic inequality can be defined as disparities in income and wealth. However, on the other hand, social inequality denotes differential rights of access to opportunities and social welfare / public goods based on gender, race, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, citizenship status and residential status. The final area to consider is that of spatial inequality, which can be defined as regional or rural-urban disparities (Koh 2020: 269).

From the above we can see there are varying definitions due to the complex nature of inequality. However, the one common denominator which can be taken is that it refers to that of a disadvantage, obstacle or hindrance.

## 2.1 Types of Inequality

The types of inequality can vary due to the varying societal and ecological dimensions. As such there are many different sub-categories which can be considered here. Generally, the following types of inequality are studied:

- Income & Wealth or Economic Inequality
- Social Inequality
- Educational
- Health
- Gender
- Racial or ethnic minority



For example, if we were to consider social inequality this can focus on two distinct types, inequality between persons or inequality between subgroups (Jencks et al., 1972). As such this can look at the individual, for example income inequality or it could focus on subgroups like that of gender, race, ethnicity (Jasso and Kotz 2008).

Another type of inequality to consider is that of economic inequality, this refers to disparities in income and wealth which can affect an individual (Abel 2008). Economic inequality looks at the differences in the levels of income and wealth and at the wider impacts this can have on the individual. For example, Abel (2008) demonstrates how this can impact a person's access to resources like healthcare, or food.

Educational inequality can be considered as the unequal distribution of resources and educational opportunities among students (Domagała-Kręciuch and Ocetkiewicz, 2012). This however only offers a simplistic definition, and it must also be considered that this type of inequality can be complicated and compounded by other forms of inequality. A study by Yun-Ping Chen (2015) highlights how there is a need to consider how this can include terms of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, socioeconomic status. This links into the immigration theory of intersectionality which is explored further on in this paper.

Health inequality can be defined as differences in health status or in the distribution of health resources between various groups of the population (World Health Organization, 2018). To break this down further, the types of inequalities can be analysed across four categories: geographical, socially excluded groups (asylum seekers), specific characteristics like race and ethnicity, and socio-economic factors (The King's Fund, 2024).

The last one we will consider is gender inequality. This is discrimination on the basis of one's sex or gender, as such one sex or gender will then have beneficial outcomes, being prioritised over the other (Save the Children, 2023). Alternatively, it could be defined as which men and women have unequal

access to the resources within their society, which in turn will determine how well they can achieve their goals (Wang et al., 2024).

Work conducted by Mount (2009) separates inequalities into five subgroups which are summarised below:

The five types of inequality –

Political equality – This refers to ensuring all have equal rights in society and before the law. In recent years this has expanded to ensure all have the right to participate in politics and have equal right, including all in a democratic process.

Equality of outcome or result – As previously highlighted, Mount refers to this as focusing primarily on the equality of income and wealth.

Equality of opportunity – This looks at ensuring all have the same chances or opportunities in life. This encompasses education, professional skills, and that of resources like housing and capital. Mount focuses on how each individual should be given the opportunity to reach their potential if barriers are removed.

Equality of treatment – Mount here suggests that no matter the individual's background or circumstances they should receive the same level of respect and fairness.

Equality of membership in society - when every individual feels that they belong equally within their community.

From the above we can see there are various types of inequality. However, the main thing to be drawn from the types of inequality is the concept of intersectionality. It is key to understanding how different forms of inequality can combine to compound and create obstacles (Aiston and Walraven, 2024).

## 3 How is Inequality Measured

From previous research we can see that inequality can be measured in a number of ways. These will be explored below. They will be split into the categories of Indices and Ratios.

Choosing the correct measure requires use to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each, as well as, understanding how these can complement each other to help provide a better picture (Alfonso, LeFleur, Alarcon, 2015).

### 3.1 Indices

The first section of measurements to be considered is that of Indices.

#### 3.1.1 Lorenz Curve

The Lorenz curve can be seen in Figure 2 below. It is one of the simplest ways of measuring inequality. The horizontal axis represents the cumulative number of income recipients from poorest to the richest, while the vertical axis represents the cumulative percentage of total income, as such the curve itself shows the percentage of income owned by x percent of the population. As can be seen, the straight line at a 45 degree angle represents everyone having an equal share of income, while the Lorenz curve compares the real situations to that line. The more the curve bends away from this line the more unequal the income distribution is, more concentrated in the hands of fewer people (Alfonso, LeFleur, Alarcon, 2015).

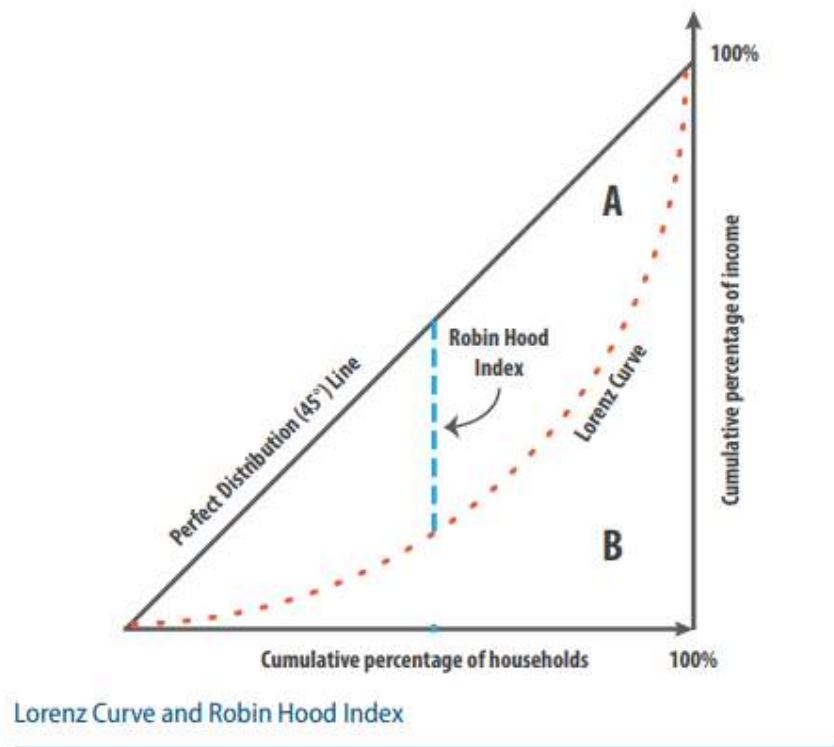


Figure 2: Lorenz Curve example, including Robin Hood Index (Alfonso, LeFleur, Alarcon, 2015).

### 3.1.2 Gini Index or Gini Coefficient

This index is what is most likely the most common and widely used measure of inequality. The index simply measures the level to which the distribution within an economy deviates from that of a perfectly equal distribution (Alfonso, LeFleur, Alarcon, 2015). The higher a Gini coefficient is the more unequal the distribution. The coefficient itself allows a direct comparison of two populations' income distribution, regardless of the size of the countries in question (Alfonso, LeFleur, Alarcon, 2015). However, the Gini coefficient has key flaws that must be considered also, the main point being it struggles to differentiate between kinds of inequalities. The Gini Coefficient is particularly sensitive to changes in the middle-income spectrum and as such it cannot be neutral or value free (De Maio, 2007).

### 3.1.3 Atkinson's Inequality Measure or Atkinsons Index

The Atkinson index gives the percentage of total income a society would need to decline to enable a more equal share of income between its citizens. It is seen as the most popular welfare-based measure of inequality. The index helps to show how much people dislike inequality, as determined by the researcher. The greater the level of aversion to inequality the more people are willing to make everybody's income equal even if this means individuals must accept making less money. The index itself can be decomposed according to differences not only in incomes between groups of people but also the differences between those groups (Alfonso, LeFleur, Alarcon, 2015). This was key as Atkinson the creator was concerned with the fact that the Gini coefficient was unable to give varying weights to the different parts of the income spectrum (Ravaillion, Atkinson and Micklewright, 1994).

## 3.2 Ratios

These are the most basic measures which are available, as they are simple and easy to understand (Alfonso, LeFleur, Alarcon, 2015). As such it could be interpreted that ratios may be the easy option for all to understand. However, due to their simplicity they lack the depth of indices, but are still effective (De Maio, 2007).

### 3.2.1 Inter-Decile ratio

The inter-decile ratio consists of the average income of the richest per cent of the population to the average income of the poorest percent. It therefore expresses the income or income share of the richest as a multiple of that of the poor. However, it should be noted that this ratio is one which is susceptible to extreme values and outliers (Alfonso, LeFleur, Alarcon, 2015).

### 3.2.2 Hoover Index or Robin Hood Index

This index is one which has many names: in addition to those above it is also known as the Schutz index or Pietra ratio. The index shows the proportion of all income which would need to be redistributed to achieve total equality. In other words, it shows the amount of income which needs to be moved from households that are above the mean to those which are below the mean in order to achieve perfect distribution of incomes (Alfonso, LeFleur, Alarcon, 2015). The index is one which is partnered with the Lorenz curve in order to give a graphic representation as can be seen above.

Figure 2 shows a graphical representation of the Robin Hood Index. It is the maximum vertical distance between that of the Lorenz Curve and the 45-degree line which represents that of perfect equality of incomes.

However, we must also acknowledge that it has some limitations as well. Most seriously, it focuses primarily on income distribution, ignoring other inequalities like wealth disparities and social inequalities (Ghosal, 2023).

### 3.2.3 Theil Index and General Entropy (GE)

GE normally varies between that of Zero (Perfect equality) and infinity to depict the levels of inequality. GE is one which is fully decomposable, allowing the user to break inequality down by groups for example population or income sources, making it a powerful tool for policy makers (Alfonso, LeFleur, Alarcon, 2015). The calculation uses  $\alpha$  (Alpha), a parameter that can be adjusted to measure the sensitivity of inequality at different parts of the income distribution (Alfonso, LeFleur, Alarcon, 2015). It can be broken down into the following: -

- 0 or the Theil's L is more susceptible to differences at the lower end of the income distribution, showing the changes which affect the poorest parts of society. The L equation is as follows:

$$L = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^n \left(\frac{\mu}{x_i}\right) \log \left(\frac{\mu}{x_i}\right)$$

- 1 or Theil's T gives a more balanced approach, it balances the sensitivity across the entire distribution. The T equation is as follows:

$$T = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^n \left(\frac{x_i}{\mu}\right) \log \left(\frac{x_i}{\mu}\right)$$

- 2 or the coefficient of variation: this setting is one which is more susceptible to changes at the upper end of the distribution, this helps to show how the upper end of the distribution is affected.

In the above equations  $x_i$  is the income of the individual,  $\mu$  is the mean average income of all individuals and  $N$  is the total number of individuals.

### 3.2.4 Palma Ratio

The Palma Ratio is a ratio which is the income shares of the top 10% of households within a population to the bottom 40% of households (Alfonso, LeFleur, Alarcon, 2015). The Ratio itself was created by Jose Gabriel Palma, due to his observations that the changes in the income distribution of a country over time are mainly the result in changes in the shares of the poorest and the richest as the share of income for the middle class tends to be relatively stable (Cobham et al 2016).

However, we must acknowledge that in recent years we have seen that the middle class is one which is shrinking, due to demographic changes, structural economic changes, and macroeconomic conditions (Pressman 2007). Due to how it is calculated this index could help to show the wider economic impacts created from a shrinking middle class and thereby help to inform fiscal policy decisions. As such it could be argued the Palma Ratio becomes more relevant, especially in countries with a shrinking middle class.

### 3.2.5 20/20 Ratio

The 20/20 ratio can be defined as a ratio which is used to compare the income of the top 20% of a population to that of the bottom 20% of the population (Alfonso, LeFleur, Alarcon, 2015). In practice this has been used by the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report and is referred to as the “income quintile ratio”.

## 4 Theories related to Immigration, Integration and Inequality.

Below the theories relating to immigration, integration and inequality will be explored.

### 4.1 Classical Assimilation Theory (CAT)

This theory states that over time, immigrants will develop more primary ties with the native members of the host society (Brown 2006). This would suggest that with time the social integration will deepen as these immigrants become more closely associated with native members, lessening social inequality.

Alternatively, the theory can be seen as the decline and disappearance of ethnic-racial distinction and the cultural and social differences that express it (Alba & Nee 1997). This view offers a slightly different perspective, but the notion is the same with classical assimilation theory the individuals become the same as the native. However, this theory in practice does not involve elimination of inequality due to the barriers which continue to be faced.

Is this something which is still relevant today? A study conducted by Greenman & Xie (2007) focused on Is Assimilation theory dead? The effect of assimilation on adolescent well-being provides a good summary of its relevance.

If the theory is interpreted to mean that this produces beneficial effects on the social outcome, the results of the study would reject this. However, if it is to be



used as a description of immigrants assimilating, there is evidence to support this (Greenman & Xie, 2008: 131). The conclusions made in this paper show that assimilation is not always going to be beneficial and may also create negative effects.

According to Essner (2010) CAT helps to give us a basic understanding of immigrant integration. However, this theory is one which has since been challenged as we have begun to understand that this assimilation for immigrants is one which is complex and influenced by multiple factors, such as societal dynamics.

## 4.2 Segmented Assimilation Theory

The next theory to consider is Segmented Assimilation Theory. This heavily focuses on assimilation of the second generation of immigrants. Primarily the theory looks at how this second generation becomes incorporated into the stratification system, which is present in the host society, with varying degrees of success in terms of incorporation (Zhou 1997).

This theory may appear limited as it only focuses on a specific generation and is very much based on US data. However, it also has its benefits. The theory acknowledges that this process is one which is highly complex and influenced a lot by a multitude of factors such as local societal context, political factors, and specific environments, which in combination determine if there is successful integration, marginalisation or downward mobility (Zhou 1997).

Furthermore, a study by Portes and Zhou (1993) highlights how people of specific ethnic and racial backgrounds may be affected by discrimination, which can in turn hinder their social and economic welfare. This holds a lot of relevance in the world currently with discrimination being something we see every day. Additionally, it shows how people from specific ethnic and racial groups may in fact face difference barriers to assimilation due to their paths being different.

However, the theory does have its weaknesses. The original study conducted had a very narrow understanding of, for example, how minority cultures are understood. To develop this theory further a greater understanding of minority cultures, and how they impact immigrant assimilation beyond the limitations of the original framework outlined in the theory (Neckerman, Carter and Lee, 1999).

### 4.3 Multiculturalism Theory

Multiculturalism theory has emerged in recent decades due to the phenomenon of globalisation and how it has impacted immigration trends. The term itself is one which can be used to describe diverse concepts and as such this means it can change depending on the context in which it is used (Mikelatou and Arvanitis, 2019).

Gingrich (2003) helps to highlight how this theory can take on many forms and can be defined as:

- The concept of cultural diversity
- The policies which manage immigration
- A pedagogical concept
- An ideology
- A management styles
- The composition of a society's population.

This shows how complex in nature such a term is, as it can mean a multitude of different things to different people.

However, a more simplistic approach would be that of Multicultural Theory, one in which distinct identities and cultures should be acknowledged or supported in

society (StudySmarter UK, 2019). This is what seems to be key: are these different cultures being supported and not marginalised with a resulting lack of equality?

#### 4.4 Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory is one which postulates that social relationships are key resources that can develop and accumulate human capital (Machalek and Martin 2015). The theory links social relationships and human capital.

The theory itself is important with respect to inequality as it has been shown throughout previous works that the theory and inequality are strongly linked together. An example to be considered here is the study by Kawachi et al. (1997) that showed that income inequality is linked with the social cohesion reductions. The study implied that these differences in income created could lead to unequal access to the benefits generated from social capital, including, for example, support, and information, in turn heightening health inequalities across different socio-economic groups.

The concept also highlights the importance of access to social capital and its importance on inequality. If people have different access to resources within a network, this in turn can lead to varying social and economic outcomes, further increasing the divides in these areas (Cook 2015).

Now looking at the above it may seem that the focus should primarily be on social capital. However, if this were the case and we failed to look at underlying macro-level social and economic process, the focus on social capital could be ineffective (Pearce and Smith 2003). Here we can see that social capital is important, but it plays part of a wider set of resources where other things need to be considered to get the best of out of the situation. In order to understand the relationship between social capital and inequality we must consider both networks and the broader socio-economic context.

## 4.5 World Systems Theory

The theory itself separates the world's countries into three categories: the core, the semi peripheral and peripheral countries, with the focus being on how due to the capitalist system's workings the rich countries at the core benefit at the expense of the poorer ones on the periphery (Wallerstein 1976). Dunn & Grell Brisk (2019) see the world system as hierarchical, with the inequalities coming from the already established systems of exploitation allowing certain countries to benefit at the expense of others. Now, while this focuses on the global scale, we can certainly apply this to the national scale where we certain sections of populations exploited for the benefits of others. It could be argued that these are driven by global forces, for example how global corporations outsource labour because it is cheaper. This can be seen as exploitation on the global scale.

The theory itself highlights how inequalities could not be simply from a nation's policies or economic practices but more as something which is driven on a much larger scale at the level of the world economy. The theory of combined and uneven development captures this fundamental pathology of the capitalist system perhaps better than world systems theory, because the latter, although arguably better known, concentrates on inter-state economic relations, whereas the purpose of this thesis is to investigate mainly intra-state economic relations while being aware of international and even transnational factors (Anievas and Nişancioğlu 2015, ch. 2).

## 4.6 Dual Labour Market Theory

This theory, as suggested by the name, has two layers to it. The theory states that the labour market can be separated into two segments with each possessing unique features (Doeringer & Piore, 1985). Like the world systems theory above we can see a hierarchical approach here as well, with a primary sector and a secondary sector.

The primary sector is one which can be set apart by having higher wages, stable employment, greater returns on human capital and desirable working conditions, which is in stark contrast to the secondary sector jobs which can be seen as lacking in all the departments (Meyer and Mukerjee, 2007: 301). The theory relies on the distinct differences between jobs with respect to various characteristics. Furthermore, it can be noted that there are significant barriers between the two segments, which limit the mobility between the two, meaning some peoples are forced in to the second segment (Meyer and Mukerjee, 2007: 301).

This theory could hold significance when examining the barriers faced by immigrants within Finland. An example which comes to mind is the acceptance of foreign professional or academic qualifications. The phenomenon to be considered here is the “Brain Waste Phenomenon”, which refers to the underutilisation of qualifications which a person with an immigrant background holds in the host country (Kristelstein-Hänninen, 2022: 11). In Finland, a study in 2018 showed 1 in 4 people between the ages of 20-64 of an immigrant background felt they were overqualified for their current job. Also, people of an immigrant background are often more likely to be unemployed compared to the indigenous population, with the “Brain Waste” phenomenon not being merely temporary (Kristelstein-Hänninen, 2022: p11). This shows there is a clear divide in the labour market within Finland, with a barrier around qualifications being created, we can observe that there are similarities with the Dual Labour market theory.

#### 4.7 Intersectionality

Intersectionality demonstrates how a combination of societal categories help to shape individuals' place within the social structure (Savaş et al., 2021). The theory itself seeks to show how societal categories like race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, ability, age and class are not something which operate separately but are process which can shape and influence each other (Collins 2015: p41).

The theory is one which maybe is not exclusive to that of immigration but it does seek to explain how the societal categories can criss-cross in order to shape the integration or inequality experiences which an immigrant faces. Intersectionality is a theory which has been mainly concerned with the issues which surround inequality, as the theory is one which focuses on the individuals' experiences at certain intersections it can help to identify prejudice or discrimination affecting certain groups (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008)

As such the theory is a relevant one as it would help to identify points at which there is a discrimination or prejudice being developed and what are the societal categories which are laying behind this.

## 5 Context of Finland

Now we will look at the context of Finland, specifically its immigration history and the policies designed to help immigrants integrate into life in Finland successfully.

Much of the immigration to Finland has been dictated by humanitarian motives. Some of the most common reasons for migrating to Finland have been return migration, asylum seeking, marriage migration and finally family reunifications (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2002).

### 5.1 Emigration and Immigration History of Finland

Pre 20<sup>th</sup> century it could be seen that Finland was mainly a country of emigration due to the fact it was under the rule of Russia at the time, and prior to that it was ruled by Sweden before 1809. Much of the emigration pre 20<sup>th</sup> century followed economic development in the target countries with the opportunity of a better quality of life (Korkiasaari 1992).

During the early 1860's and 1870's North America was one of these destinations, as it was facing a labour shortage and the influx of immigrants

helped to solve this, with a number of factory workers from Vaasa emigrating in search of work, for example (Pelo, 2020).

The Russian rule of Finland would end in 1917, and prior to this much of the population movement in Finland was in the form of emigration with Russia and North America being countries of choice due to the labour opportunities on offer for highly educated Finns (Croucher et al., 2021).

However, we must also note that while pre 20<sup>th</sup> century saw what can be deemed as a predominantly emigration culture, immigration was still taking place.

At the time, as Finland was ruled by Russia a significant number of the immigrants which were arriving in Finland were of Russian origin. Due to the Bolshevik Revolution many Russians were trying to escape via immigration to Finland. The Finnish interior ministry estimated that by 1920 this figure was totalling 33,000 (Nshom, Sadaf and Ilkhom, 2022). Despite this until the 1970's Finland remained a predominantly emigration country. This could be argued to have left Finland under prepared for receiving and integrating migrants (Ndomo 2024). Figure 3 below highlights how up until 1980 emigration outweighed immigration.

We should note that until the end of the 1970s Finland was a particularly closed society which did not attract immigrants and as such the number of foreign citizens coming to Finland was insignificant (Heikkilä and Peltonen, 2002).

### 5.1.1 Turning point

Whilst up until this point it could be seen that Finns predominantly emigrated this began to change in the 1980's, when the balance shifted from that of emigration to integration (Heikkilä and Peltonen, 2002). Figure 3 below, from the report produced by Heikkilä and Peltonen, provides a graphical illustration.

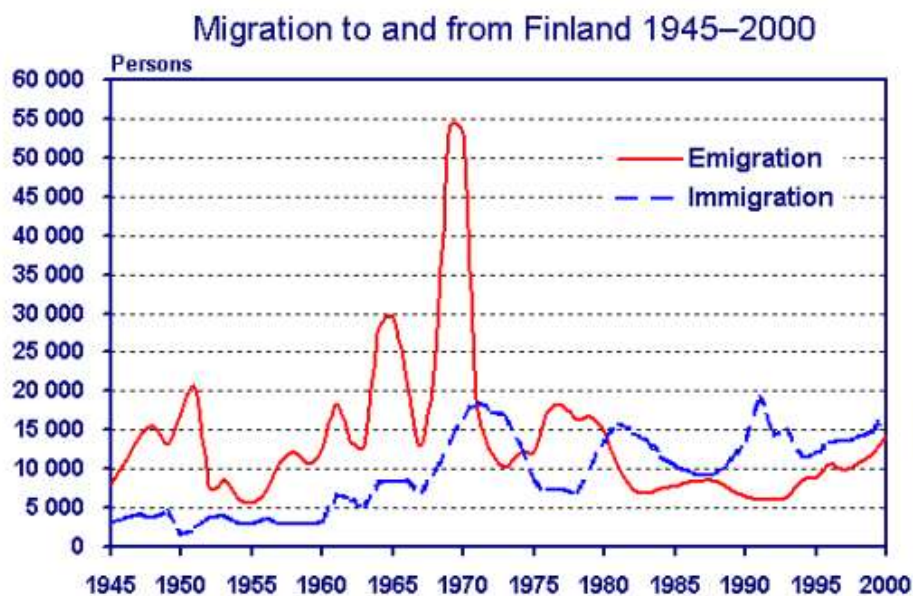


Figure 3: Emigration and immigration in Finland for the period 1945-2000 (Heikkilä and Peltonen 2002)

Figure 3 clearly shows a shift from emigration to immigration from 1980 onwards. For the period after 2000 this trend intensifies, as illustrated in Figure 4 below.

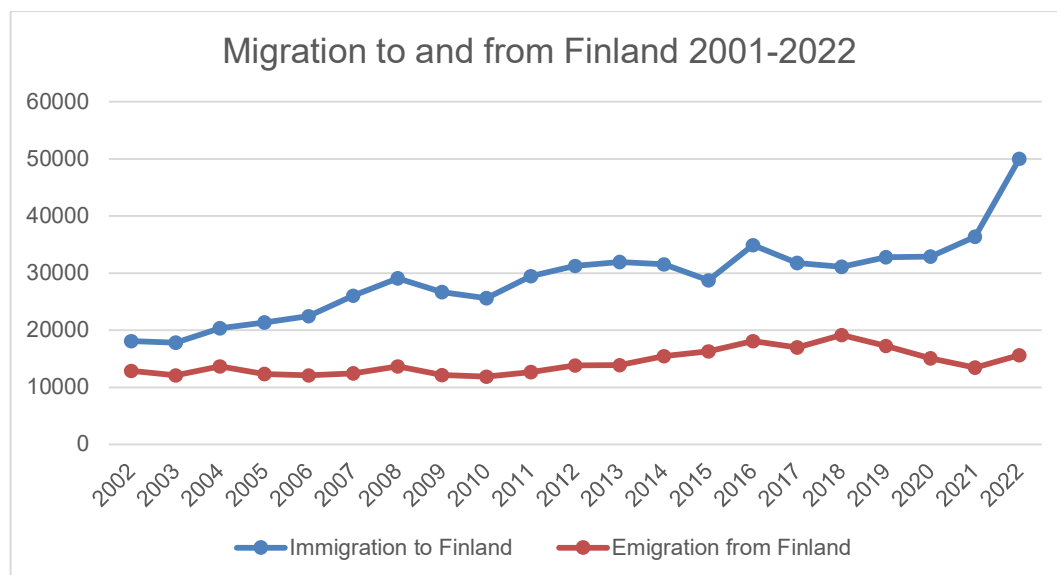


Figure 4: Emigration and immigration in Finland for the period 2001-2022 (Stat.fi, 2022a).



Figure 4 highlights that, since 1980, immigration has outperformed emigration year on year up until 2022.

Another key statistic to take into account here is the population size around this period. It was clear in the 1980s that the population of foreign-born citizens within Finland doubled within the decade (Croucher et al., 2021).

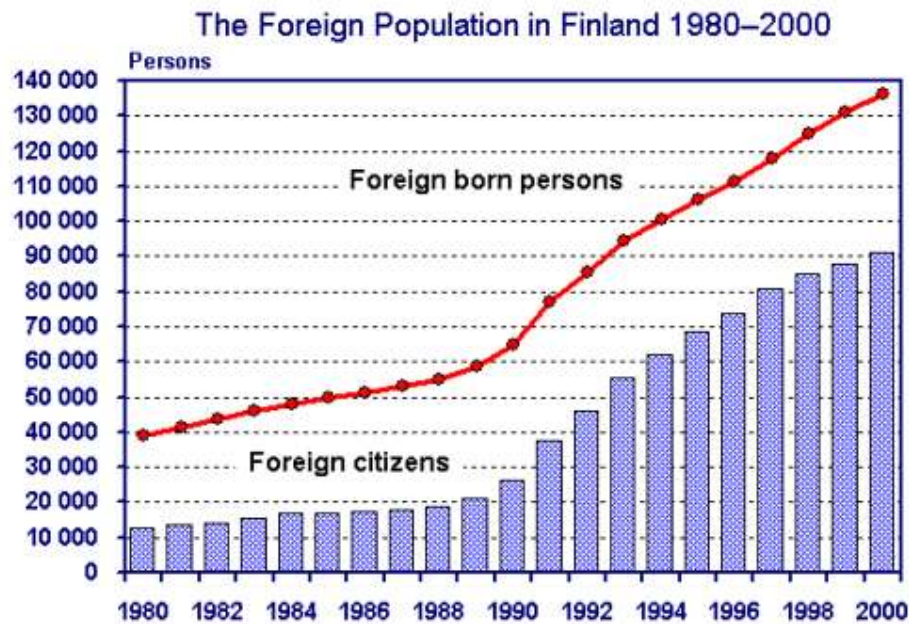


Figure 5: Foreign population in Finland 1980-2000 (Heikkilä and Peltonen 2002).

Figure 5 gives a graphical representation of this. Between 1980 and the start of 1990 the number of foreign citizens increased dramatically from just over 10000 to just over 20000 by the end of the decade.

To continue from the data in Figure 5, the data from 2001 until 2022 has also been extracted and illustrated in Figure 6.

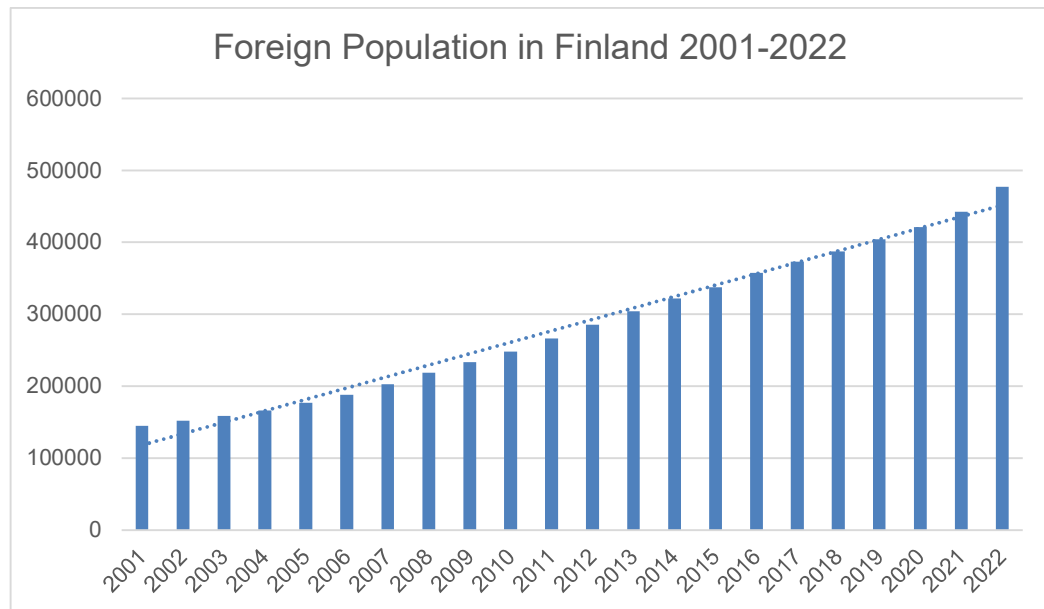


Figure 6: Foreign population in Finland 2001-2022 (Stat.fi,2022b)

Figure 6 shows how the immigrant population has continued to increase year on year with immigration from foreign countries.

As such we can see Finland has high immigration, and there is therefore a need to ensure these individuals are integrated into society. To this end, a number of key policies have been developed.

## 5.2 Integration Policies

We will now look at the policies which are used in Finland to promote the integration of immigrants into Finnish society and culture.

The first area to be considered is that of the Migrant Integration Policy Index. This will be looked at first to see how Finland performs in terms of integration policies compared to other countries in the world.

### 5.2.1 Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX).

The tool itself is one which is designed to measure the policies which are designed to integrate migrants into countries. It helps to firstly evaluate and secondly compare how governments are seeking to promote integration of migrants ([www.mipex.eu](http://www.mipex.eu), 2020).

In theory the tool helps to evaluate how successfully a country promotes the integration of migrants. Here we will show where Finland scores on the index.













| Country   | Approach to integration | Score | Change Since 2014* |
|---|-------------------------|-------|--------------------|
|  Sweden        | Comprehensive (Top10)   | 86    | ↓ 1                |
|  Finland       | Comprehensive (Top10)   | 85    | ↑ 3                |
|  Portugal     | Comprehensive (Top10)   | 81    | ↑ 3                |
|  Canada      | Comprehensive (Top10)   | 80    | ↑ 2                |
|  New Zealand | Comprehensive (Top10)   | 77    | – 0                |
|  USA         | Comprehensive (Top10)   | 73    | ↓ 2                |
|  Norway      | Comprehensive           | 69    | ↓ 3                |
|  Belgium     | Comprehensive (Top10)   | 69    | – 0                |
|  Australia   | Comprehensive (Top10)   | 65    | ↓ 4                |
|  Brazil      | Comprehensive (Top10)   | 64    | ↑ 12               |
|  Luxembourg  | Comprehensive           | 64    | ↑ 10               |
|  Ireland     | Comprehensive (Top10)   | 64    | ↑ 5                |
|  Spain       | Comprehensive           | 60    | ↑ 3                |

Figure 7: Ranking of the top countries on the MIPEX index (www.mipex.eu, 2020).

As can be seen in Figure 7, Finland in fact scores at number two on the index with a score of 85. From Figure 7 we can also see it offers a comprehensive approach to integration. We will dive further into why Finland has such a high score.

## KEY FINDINGS

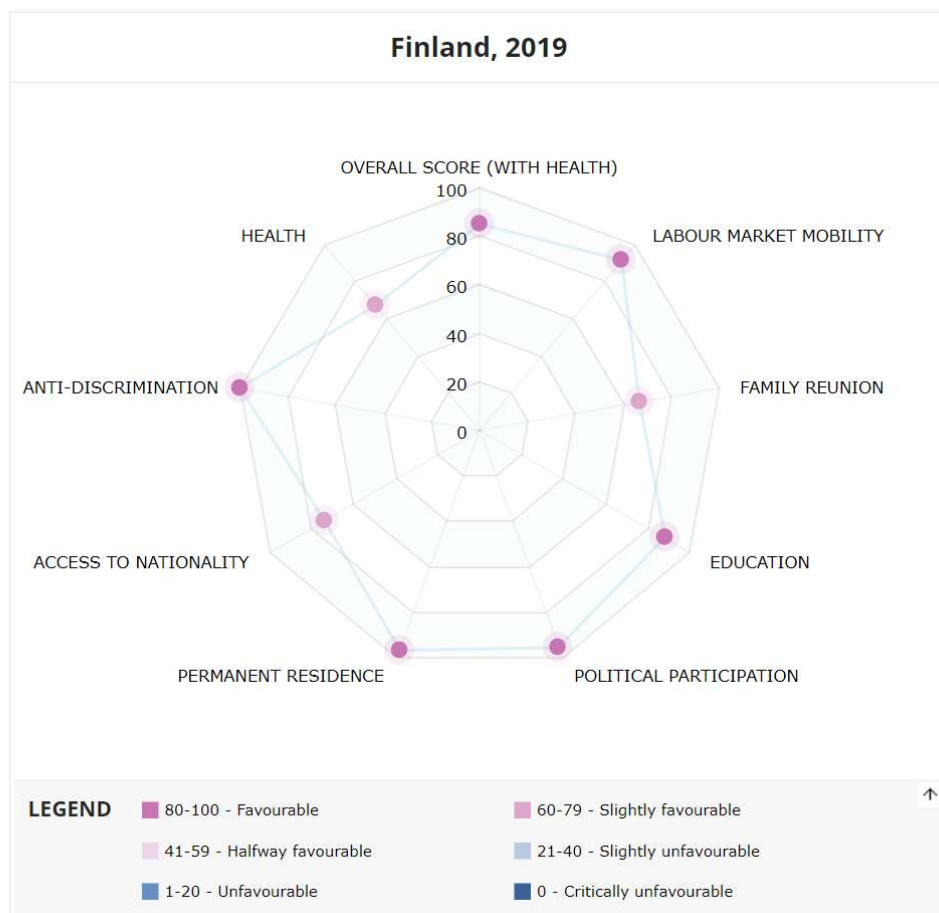


Figure 8: A breakdown of Finland's overall Mipex score (www.mipex.eu, 2020).

Figure 8 shows that in most categories like labour market mobility, anti-discrimination, and political participation Finland scores favourably. It does have

a few categories that are slightly favourable like that of family reunion and health, but it does not have any scores below these two categories. As such we can see that Finland integration policies are broadly favourable across the board with a couple areas for improvement. It is clear to see why it achieved such a high overall score and second place in the overall rankings.

Finland scores way above the average, which is 49/100. Its comprehensive approach to integration guarantees equal rights, opportunities and long-term security for both newcomers and citizens (www.mipex.eu, 2020).

The MIPEX index paints a good picture in terms of how Finland promotes integration for migrants and compared to many countries it offers a comprehensive approach. Further exploration shows that in terms of the MIPEX index there are various other countries which perform way worse, an example being Saudi Arabia.

### 5.2.2 EU Framework

Finland joined the European Union in 1995 and later the Schengen area in 2001. Both events led to an increase in immigration but also the adoption of EU laws and frameworks (Nshom, Sadaf and Ilkhom, 2022).

Before discussing details of Finnish integration policy, we will briefly look at the European Union framework. Due to the size and nature of the EU there is a vast amount of documentation to be considered relating to the issue of immigrant integration.

The framework originates from the Maastricht Treaty and includes roughly 89 directives, declarations, reports, etc., which deal with issues like migrant integration, social inclusion, anti-discrimination and racism, the rights of non-citizens and social cohesion, among others (Dodevska, 2023).

As such the framework is far reaching and comprehensive. This also does not take into account foundational documents like the Common Basic Principles of

2004, the 2011 European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country nationals and the 2020 action plan on integration and Inclusion (Dodevska, 2023). No surprises then that the top of the MIPEx index in Figure 7 is heavily dominated by EU countries.

However, despite the EU having no control direct control over these policies at national level, we have seen the Europeanisation of integration policy (Barbulescu 2015). This has had a heavy influence in how countries approach their integration policy.

### 5.2.3 Finland's Framework

In terms of Finnish law there are three key pieces which will be discussed. These are the Aliens Act (FINLEX 301/2004), the Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers (FINLEX 493/1999) and the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (FINLEX 1386/2010).

#### 5.2.3.1 Aliens Act (FINLEX 301/2004).

The Aliens Act can be seen as providing the backbone in terms of the regulations which are put in place in relation to immigration into Finland (Bontenbal and Lillie, 2021).

The act itself is designed to enforce and enhance governance and legal safeguards in matters which relate to aliens (Integration, 2024). With respect to the use of the word Alien, the act itself defines "alien" as a person who is not a Finnish Citizen (Aliens Act (301/2004).

Further to the above the Act also aims to support controlled immigration, whilst offering protection, with a focus on human rights and considering international agreements (European Website on Integration, 2021).

The Act itself contains various rules on the entry and stay in Finland, removal from Finland relating to different forms of immigration, rights and obligations of

foreigners in Finland and the procedures involved with the matters of immigration (Nykänen et al. 2012)

### 5.2.3.2 Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers (FINLEX 493/1999).

The purpose of the act is as follows:

To promote the integration, equality and freedom of choice of immigrants through measures which help them to acquire the essential knowledge and skills they need to function in society, and to ensure support and care for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of temporary protection in the context of a mass influx by arranging for their reception. The further purpose of this Act is to assist victims of trafficking in human beings (Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers (493/1999).

So, with the above we can see the emphasis here is on providing individuals with the skills they require to become part of life in Finland. The Act aimed to provide immigrants with a knowledge of the Finnish language, society and culture, as well as the opportunities for education and employment (Sagne, Saksela and Wilhelmsson, 2007).

The passage of this Act led to the creation of various programs in order to provide immigrants with the skills outlined above. The aim of such programs is to swiftly and easily help immigrants assimilate into their new society (Sagne, Saksela and Wilhelmsson, 2007). Ultimately integration would mean immigrants have the same rights and opportunities as natural born citizens of the host society (Sagne, Saksela and Wilhelmsson, 2007). This can be seen as the aim of such an Act, to integrate immigrants to the point where there is no significant difference between them and native Finns.

To achieve the desired level of integration, individual integration plans for persons who have moved to Finland and have a home municipality in Finland were

designed to assist them (Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers (493/1999)).

#### 5.2.3.3 Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (FINLEX 1386/2010).

The main purpose of the act is as follows: To support and promote integration and make it easier for immigrants to play an active role in Finnish society. The purpose of the Act is also to promote gender equality and non-discrimination and positive interaction between different population groups (Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010)).

Now while on the surface this may seem similar to the earlier legislation there was a reasoning for such an Act. We can see this now focuses on gender equality and non-discrimination between population groups, an evolution of the previous Act from 1999. Additionally, the Act itself was a response to the ever-growing immigration taking place within Finland (Integration, 2024).

Part of this key legislation is that it offers integration training to those who qualify for it. To be considered eligible, the individual must be an unemployed immigrant registered at the unemployment office (TE). If this is the case an integration plan is then drawn up based on the individual's previous experience and interests (Masoud, Holm and Brunila, 2019). In theory the integration approach is tailored to the needs and qualifications of the individual. The training itself could include language courses, vocational training or career guidance (FMEC 2016). While similar to integration plans from the 1999 Act this is more comprehensive with access to wider training available.

So, on the surface taking into account a high MIPEx score, as well as the approach which the EU and Finland have taken, there should not be any real barriers or difficulties for immigrants. It would appear that there should not be any real obstacles to the equal and fair opportunities which are offered in Finland.



However, in reality the immigrant experience is very different compared to the image which is painted by looking at just the indexes like MIPEX or focusing on the integration policies promoted by Finland and the EU.

## **6 Barriers and Inequalities**

This chapter will explore the reality faced by many immigrants with respect to their integration. The integration policies put in place have been developed based on the inclusive measures through various programmes, projects and other support systems (Benton et al., 2014). However, while they are developed based on understanding and good intentions, we must be aware that they also have consequences and hidden realities. Finland is no exception to this.

A study conducted by Nshom et al (2022) highlights the major barriers that immigrants face. They highlight four key areas: language barrier, discrimination in employment, racism and inequality.

This study leads us into the first area to be considered here: that of the Finnish language.

### **6.1 Language Barrier**

According to Kangas (2001), 92.5% of the population speak Finnish, 5.75% speak Swedish with a small number of people speaking Russian or Lappish. While this statistic is taken from 2001 it shows how heavily dominant the Finnish language is. Furthermore, linguistic distribution is not uniform, as many Swedish speakers live along the west coast, providing pockets of Swedish as the first language, the Åland Islands being the premier example (Kangas 2001). This helps to highlight the language difficulty: not only is Finnish the dominant language, you may encounter areas where they only speak Swedish also, possibly even exclusively the latter.

To highlight the language dominance Figure 9 was created from data provided by Statistics Finland.



Figure 9: Languages spoken in Finland. (Tilastokeskus, 2022c)

We can see that the Finnish language in the past twelve years is the dominant language. However, we can also see that the number of people speaking a foreign language has grown year on year.

It must be noted that as the Finnish language belongs to the Uralic language family, with no connections to the German or Latin linguistic groups, the initial stages of learning such a language can be demanding due to the need to acquire knowledge of unique vocabulary and grammatical rules (Rodríguez-Kaarto and Hahn, 2014). As such we can see the need to learn the language due to its dominance, but it also must be considered how difficult the language is to learn because of its unique nature and lack of common ties with other languages. Additionally, it can be argued that learning the language is the first and most important action taken by immigrants to assimilate into society (Mwai and Ghaffar, 2014).

A study conducted by Mwai and Ghaffar (2014) on the role of the Finnish language on the immigration process of migrant women specifically helps to show how the language itself can create a barrier.

A key finding showed that participants in the study were able to achieve successful integration through learning of the Finnish language. This allowed the participants to better integrate with the local community (Mwai and Ghaffar, 2014).

Furthermore, the study conducted shows how the learning of Finnish was able to bring about educational and economic change. Due to acquiring Finnish language skills many participants of the studies were then able to study various different courses in a university to obtain professional skills (Mwai and Ghaffar, 2014). This helps to show how the language provides a foundation for integration. Without the language skills the options and possibilities would have been limited.

The study conducted by Nshom et al (2022) showed how many of the respondents saw the language as a “linguistic barrier or ‘Language barrier’”. Respondents in the study voiced concerns on how the language is difficult and vital, especially if you want to work in Finland.

The language is key in reference to the matter of labour market integration. Many of the Finnish integration policies could be seen as being orientated by the labour market, with primary responsibility of these policies falling under the Ministry of Employment and Economy. Where these integration policies become important in terms of the language barrier is that language skills are particularly emphasised with employability in mind (Koskela, 2014).

From the studies and the emphases placed on the language we can see why this would pose a significant barrier for foreign people within Finland. Firstly, we can see how it is the foundation for access to education and employment. Secondly, it is very clear how the language plays a significant role in the

process of integration and more so how the language helps to integrate successfully.

## 6.2 Workplace opportunities and discrimination

Here we will look at the opportunities for immigrants in addition to the discrimination which they face within the Finnish labour market. In terms of Nordic states, the threshold for entering the labour market is high with a high unemployment rate amongst immigrants (Forsander 2002).

In terms of Finland, almost one-third of all foreign nationals living in Finland are unemployed, with unemployment considerably higher amongst certain nationalities (Sagne, Saksela and Wilhelmsson, 2007). The figures below highlight the unemployment rates between those of foreign nationality and those of Finnish nationality.

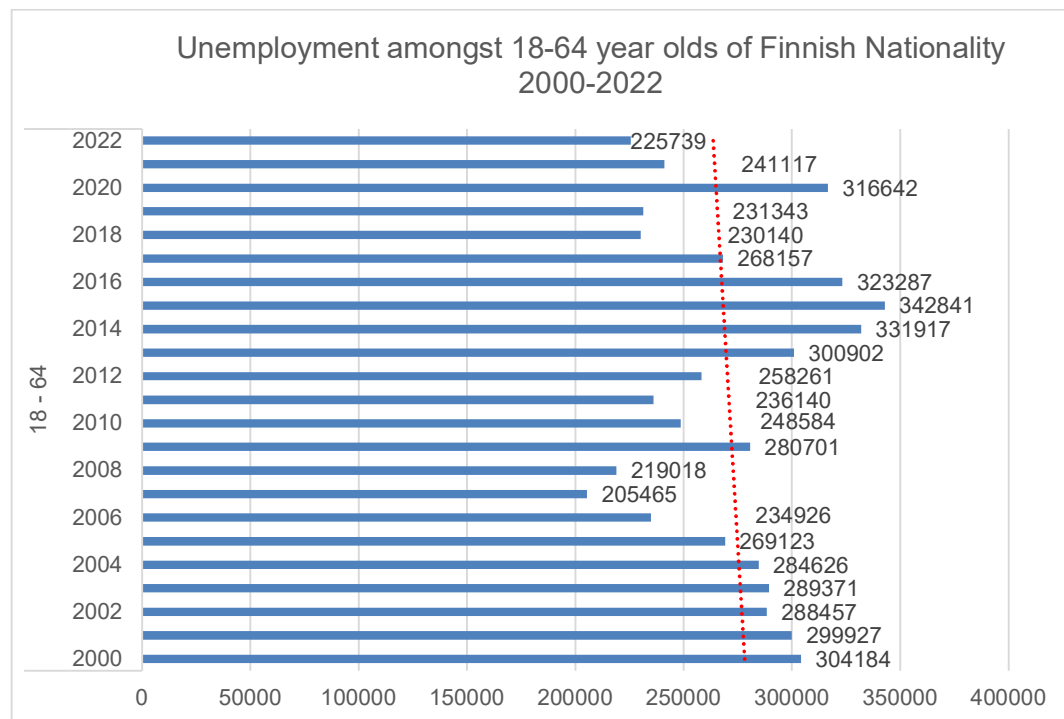


Figure 10: Unemployment amongst 18-64 year olds of Finnish Nationality 2000-2022 (Tilastokeskus, 2022a)

Figure 10 shows how the levels of unemployment amongst Finnish nationals has decreased from 2000 to 2022. This can be seen from the fact that in 2000 there were 304,184 Finnish nationals unemployed, whereas in 2022 the figure was 225,739. In addition, the linear trendline inserted shows a decrease over the twenty-two-year period.

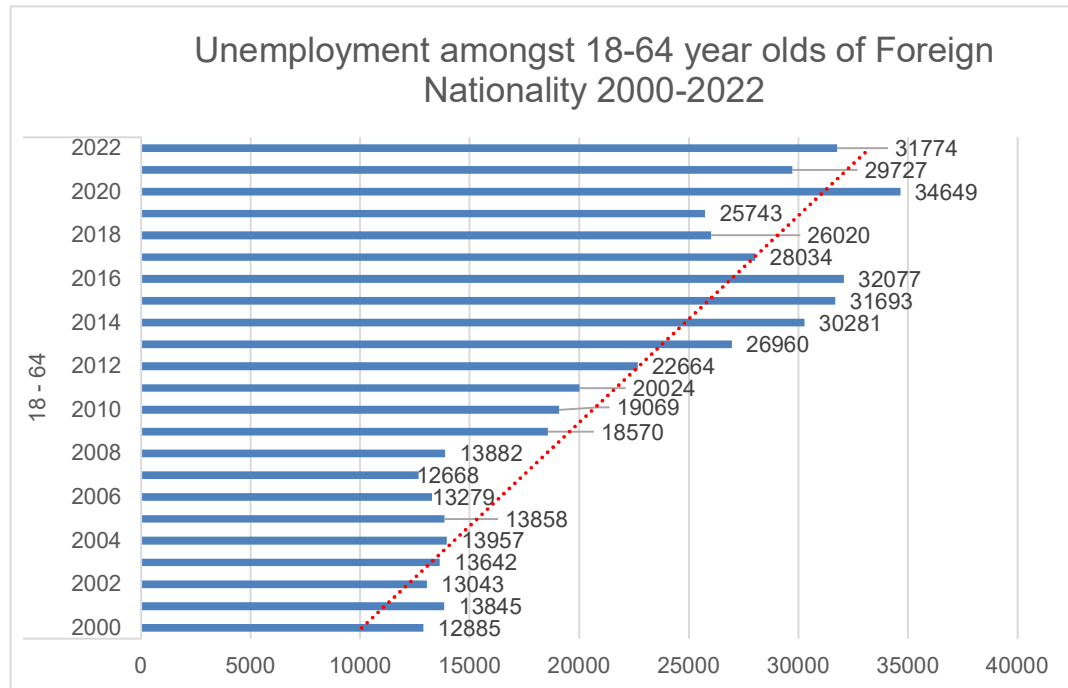


Figure 11: Unemployment of 18-64 year olds of Foreign nationality 2000-2022 (Tilastokeskus, 2022a)

Figure 11 shows a very different picture amongst the foreign population in Finland. We can see in the twenty-two-year period from 2000 to 2022 that unemployment has risen. In 2002 the figure stood at 12,885 and has risen to 31,774, more than doubling during this period. Additionally, the linear trendline shows an increase over the same time in contrast to Figure 10.

Of course, we must be mindful of the fact that the unemployment amongst immigrants could have risen due to increased immigration numbers, but we will

explore some of the issues that immigrants are facing in terms of employment. We already know the language barrier plays a key role but let us look at the other issues being faced.

#### 6.2.1 Discrimination hindering employment opportunities.

Discrimination can create barriers and have detrimental effects. Studies over the years have shown that discrimination and prejudice have the ability to significantly hinder how an immigrant adapts and adjusts to a new culture and society (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind and Perhoniemi, 2007). We will look at various studies that highlight the barrier being created in terms of discrimination hindering employment opportunities.

#### 6.2.2 Connecting with Work: The role of social networks in immigrants searching for jobs in Finland

The study by Ahmad (2011) looks at how the role of social networks helps immigrants to find jobs in Finland. A key finding from this study is that the respondents suggested the reason they more relied on social networks over the more formal channels was to avoid the discrimination of the job market which already belittled their qualifications. This already shows that many immigrants feel there is an institutionalised discrimination in place as the qualifications which they may already possess from their home country are deemed less valuable and not up to standard.

However, Ahmad (2011) also highlighted how the respondents see discrimination alone as the key factor in hindering their access to the job market. This even superseded the issue of the Finnish language skills and the lack of Finnish education. This study helps to show how immigrants again perceive there is a level of discrimination towards them, which can also be backed up by the unemployment statistics in Figures 10 and 11 above.

Another key finding of Ahmad (2011) is that the data indicate that 90% of people who were surveyed are in employment which is considered to be low

prestige, the most common areas of employment being restaurants and catering. The study links back to the theory discussed above on social capital, as it highlights how social networks are important for immigrants and provide the means for them to avoid the perceived discrimination present in the job market within Finland.

The conclusions drawn by Nshom et al (2022) also echo the sentiments raised by Ahmad. Nshom et al highlight how respondents of their survey felt that not only is it hard to find a job which matches the individuals' qualifications; immigrants felt that they also face prejudice and discrimination compared to the locals.

The study by Nshom et al (2022) helps to show how immigrants feel that their studies and qualifications have no value or recognition and as such their possibility of them finding a suitable job is almost impossible.

### 6.2.3 When the name matters: An experimental investigation of Ethnic Discrimination in the Finnish Labour Market.

The above is the title of a study conducted by Ahmad (2019) to show the ethnic discrimination present in the Finnish labour market. The study itself submitted fictitious applications to job openings to assess the extent of the discrimination. The study required the creation of 5000 fictitious job applicants.

Ahmad designed the study to determine how Finnish employers would react to people of an ethnic background, who possessed similar skills and qualifications to what was required. The study found that there was a clear favouritism towards those with Finnish names over those with an ethnic name and a favouritism towards European named candidates to those with non-European names. Furthermore, the study also went on to undermine the importance of human capital, especially that of locally acquired human capital, highlighting this only carried extra weight when the fictitious candidate belonged to what would be deemed as a higher ethnic group or at least one with a Finnish or European sounding name.

Again, it also helps to highlight how immigrants are facing various barriers despite there being legislation in place to prevent this. In terms of integration, it can be seen that immigrants face significant barriers in the areas of language proficiency, local education, work experience and recognition of qualifications (Ahmad 2019). The study itself is key in highlighting how despite having skills and qualifications on par with those of native candidates, they were still restricted due to the institutionalised discrimination present.

#### 6.2.4 The working underclass, highly educated migrants on the Fringes of the Finnish Labour Market

The above refers to the title of the dissertation written by Ndomo (2024). The dissertation highlights how the Finnish integration and immigration institutes have shaped immigrants into a subordinate workforce within the Finnish Labour Market (Hovi-Horkan, 2024).

Ndomo (2024) highlights how the Finnish labour market is one which is meant to be equal and provide equal opportunities for all. However, the study helps to show how immigrants are met with a very different reality, one in which they are working in lower status jobs on the edge of the labour market.

Ndomo also highlights the issues which migrants face in terms of integration. The study shows how in Finland integration is something which is heavily linked to employment rates, something which we have seen in Figure 11 continues to rise amongst immigrants within Finland, suggesting that in truth the integration of immigrants is not something which can be deemed totally successful.

Another point which Ndomo raises is how the integration programs in place within Finland are selective in nature. The study shows that many of these integration programs are set up to target unemployed job seekers who hold a continuous residence permit, as such, many fall through the cracks like that of migrant students or underemployed professionals.



A key point noted by Ndomo (2024) is the labour market segmentation. It shows how the labour market is one which is segmented, and jobs are not given based on skills and qualifications but more so on where you are from or your nationality. This ties back into dual labour market theory discussed at the start of the paper. Ndomo shows how this kind of labour market segmentation can create barriers and limit the mobility of the individuals between the segments and, as the paper suggests, create a subordinate working underclass.

Ndomo highlights how the system in Finland helps to contribute to concentrating migrants in lower status jobs, which places them in a lower social position compared to other workers and society. It is clear that many migrants face cases where their skills or qualifications clearly are not valued and as such, they end up working in lower class jobs, giving them a lower economic standing.

From the studies conducted we could infer that there is what can be defined as a preference discrimination taking place. This is when the employers prefer a certain ethnic background and practise a kind of ethnic ranking in the labour market (Robinson 1992). It is clear from these studies that immigrants feel they are facing a barrier due to the discrimination which they face regarding access to job opportunities. The studies help to show how immigrants' skills and qualifications are not as recognised compared to that of the local population. However, the key issue these studies highlight is the overall discrimination being faced based on ethnicity and race alone.

### 6.3 Racism and Prejudice

Racism is a significant barrier to integration: although one could achieve integration successfully, racism still creates a barrier, an "us and them". It is key we acknowledge that racism is significant in hindering integration, and additional rights will only help to achieve full integration (Wills et al, 2009).

### 6.3.1 EU Agency for Fundamental Rights Report 2023

We must consider Racism and the barrier which this creates within Finland. A study by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) found that people of African descent from the 13 member states in which the study was conducted found Finland to be one of the most racist countries (Teivainen, 2023).

The 13 countries which were included in the study can be seen in Figure 12.

---

#### Country codes

|    |                |
|----|----------------|
| AT | Austria        |
| BE | Belgium        |
| DE | Germany        |
| DK | Denmark        |
| ES | Spain          |
| FI | Finland        |
| FR | France         |
| IE | Ireland        |
| IT | Italy          |
| LU | Luxembourg     |
| MT | Malta          |
| PL | Poland         |
| PT | Portugal       |
| SE | Sweden         |
| UK | United Kingdom |

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Figure 12: Country Codes for report on Being Black in the EU, Experiences of People of African Descent (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023)

Figure 12 shows the limitations of the report as it was only conducted in 13 of the EU member states. The report could have been more comprehensive in its coverage of the countries. However, it does provide an insight into the racism present in Finland.

**FIGURE 9: PREVALENCE OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN THE 5 YEARS BEFORE THE SURVEY, BY COUNTRY AND SURVEY YEAR (%)<sup>a,b,c,d</sup>**

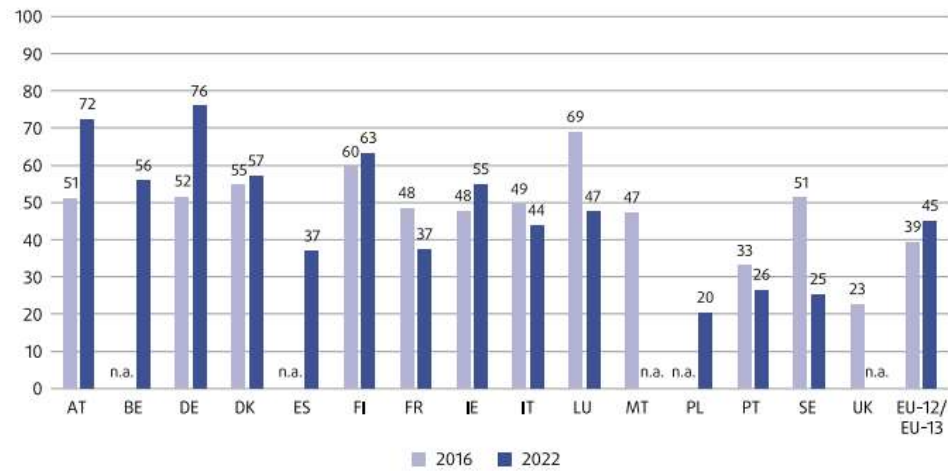


Figure 13: The prevalence of Racial discrimination in the 5 years before the survey and the year of the survey by country (European Union Agency For Fundamental Rights, 2023).

Figure 13 helps to show how Finland compares to the other countries in the survey. We can see that in the five years prior to the survey Finland was second on the list to Luxembourg, and the year of the survey being third to Austria and Germany. It is key because the five-year racial discrimination rate shows not only an increase in Finland but also highlights how this view has remained consistent. Due to the fact that Finland has maintained a top 3 position in the survey over the five-year period we can see that the viewpoint of African immigrants has not changed. If anything, Figure 13 helps to show that this has worsened slightly over time.

**FIGURE 16: RACIST HARASSMENT EXPERIENCED BY RESPONDENTS' CHILDREN AT SCHOOL IN THE 12 MONTHS BEFORE THE SURVEY (%)<sup>a,b</sup>**

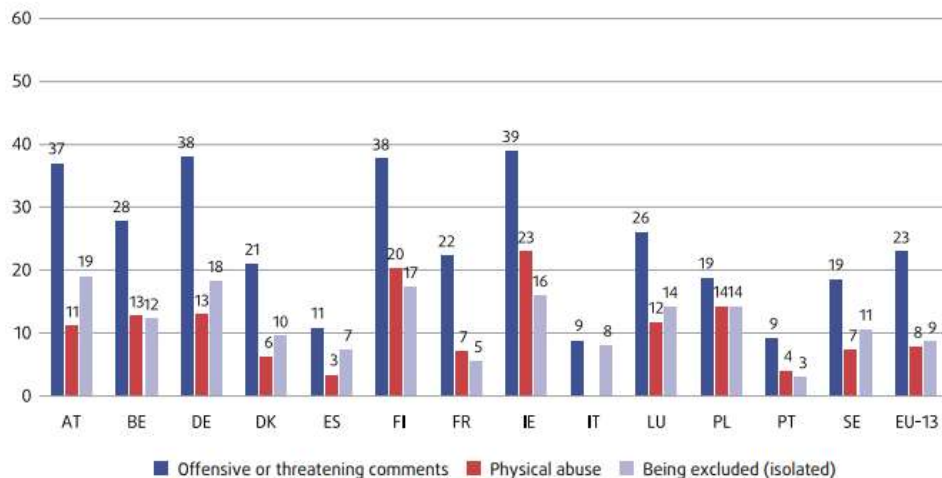


Figure 14: Racist harassment experienced by respondents children at school in the 12 months before the survey (European Union Agency For Fundamental Rights, 2023).

Figure 14 further reinforces this point when considering the racist harassment faced by African children at school. We can see that 38% of respondents had faced offensive or threatening comments, again placing Finland in the top three of respondents. What is more alarming is that Finland is placed second with 20% of respondents facing physical abuse at school.

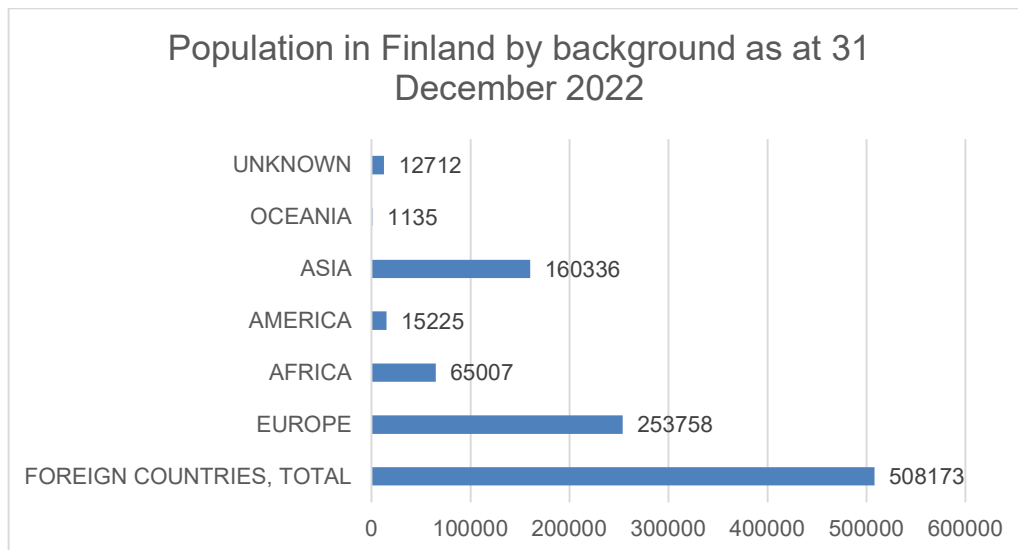


Figure 15 Population in Finland by background as at 31 December 2022. (Tilastokeskus, 2022b)

Figure 15 helps to show how important that report is because people of African descent living in Finland is the third largest after Europe and Asia.

Again, from the vast number of studies and resources available it is not just people of African ethnicity who face racism in Finland. Nshom et al (2022) show this is more widely spread amongst immigrants whose responses suggest they feel like “2nd class resident” or use words like “unequal”. In the study many of the respondents suggested they were discriminated against based on their colour or where they come from.

### 6.3.2 Prejudice

Here we will examine the prejudice present within Finland and how this is directed at certain ethnic groups. Finland itself can be seen as one of the most homogenous countries in terms of ethnicity and culture (Britannica, 2024). The evidence above does show how this has changed and continues to change with globalisation and immigration, we have seen already that the number of immigrants in Finland is increasing. This is not a problem which is only linked to Finland though: throughout history we have consistently seen how intergroup prejudice exists (Webster, Saucier and Harris, 2010).

Due to this increasing number, we have seen Finland becoming more diverse but at the same time we have seen a rise in prejudice. Such anti-immigrant prejudice is widespread throughout the whole EU, but is particularly prevalent in Finland, with one of the main factors behind this being threat perception (Schneider 2007).

Threat perception can manifest itself in many ways. The main reason for this fear in Finland arises from concerns relating to increases in unemployment, economic burdens, and the dangers which immigrants might pose to the Finnish society (Pitkänen and Kouki, 2002).

Due to the historical context it might be assumed that much of this prejudice comes from older generations. However, a study by Nshom and Croucher (2017) helps to show how this prejudice is also evident in young adolescents.

In their study, Nshom and Croucher examine how the young adolescents perceive threat from immigrants but also how this threat manifests. The key results of the study helped to show that firstly these adolescents do have a significant prejudice towards immigrants. The study helped to highlight how immigrants were viewed as a realistic and symbolic threat. This ties in also with what Pitkänen and Kouki (2002) observed: despite being adolescents they share the same fear as most of the Finnish population as this realistic threat could be interpreted as a competition over resources like that of job opportunities.

Of course, there are other viewpoints to be considered here. Nshom and Croucher (2017) also theorise that these perceived threats could also be based on differences in values, beliefs, and cultural norms.

This prejudice can manifest towards any ethnic group within Finland and something we have seen particularly aimed at Russian immigrants since the start of the Ukraine war and because of the historical ties with Finland. The community of Russian speakers is one of the largest immigrant communities in Finland and a news article from Yle (2021) shows how many young Russians have realised that assimilating into Finnish society is no longer easy or trouble free, even prior to the invasion of Ukraine.

Jaakola (2000) suggests that not only are Russian speaking immigrants subject to prejudice and discrimination; they are more likely to feel the most alienated of any immigrant group. This again is key because it shows that the prejudice is not merely linked to the skin colour or ethnicity. This is something which is much more widely spread within Finland and has become entrenched within what used to be a homogenous culture which is now having to adapt under the pressure of globalisation.

## 7 Impact on the welfare state

We have seen how foreign people's opportunities within Finland are limited for one reason or another. Now we will consider the wider implications in terms of how this can impact the Finnish welfare state.

We have already seen that the unemployment rates of foreign nationals are on the rise. Taking into account that successful integration in Finland is determined mainly on entry into the job market we can see that overall integration is not totally successful, and there are even wider implications.

### 7.1.1 Sweden as an example

Sweden is a country which has undergone significant immigration in the last two decades.

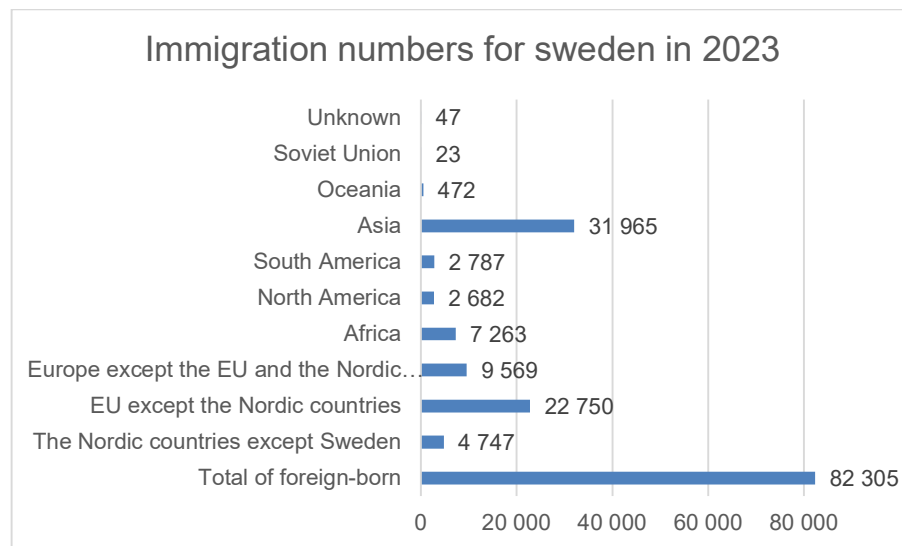


Figure 16: Swedish Immigration numbers for 2023. (Statistics Sweden, 2024)

Figure 16 demonstrates that, like Finland, Sweden has high numbers of immigrants. Again, like Finland, we can see a majority is from Europe and Asia.

In 2021 the Delmi report investigated whether strong welfare states are able to withstand significant immigration, but also how the relationship between immigration and support for the welfare state is affected.

Immigration in Sweden is an issue which has become polarising due to the fact that immigrants from outside of the EU are usually faced with higher unemployment and poverty, creating a higher dependence on the welfare state. Now this is key because evidence suggests that this could cause the welfare state to lose support, especially in areas where programs favour immigrants over than of native-born Swedes (Goldschmidt, 2021).

Like Finland, the key to integration in Sweden is economic integration: where this is not successful this has a detrimental effect on the native population's support of immigrants (Goldschmidt, 2021).

Goldschmidt shows how barriers not only impede immigrants in labour market entry but also create a negative attitude towards the welfare state amongst the native population if they feel they are being disadvantaged, where it is perceived the welfare state is supporting immigrants over them. This highlights how social cohesion is crucial. The welfare state would not be able to survive without the support of the native population.

We have seen how minorities like that of Somalis, due to their notable differences in physical appearance, culture and religion could lead to Finns mistakenly seeing Somalis as the face of immigration (Herda, 2015). This is key when looking at figure fifteen as we can see that Europeans and Asians, are the first and second largest foreign populations within Finland. Additionally, this misconception can be seen in the rise of anti-immigrant rhetoric in the Finnish electorate, something which can be linked to wider trends within Europe, especially as we see Europe struggling to adapt to diversity (Herda,2015). These misconceptions are key in terms of maintaining social cohesion. Any damage caused to social cohesion will not only impacts immigrants but everyone as a whole in relation to the welfare state.



A point of view to consider here is that an argument can be made that immigration has the tendency to damage the shared values needed to support a generous welfare state (Brochmann and Hagelund, 2011). This support is something we can already see changing in Finland with the recent reforms being put in place: for example, the introduction of the removal of people on a work-based work permit after a period of 3 months of unemployment. Additionally, we have seen wider cuts in the welfare state budget due to funding issues.

### 7.1.2 Reduced Social Mobility

Social mobility allows the individual to change their socio-economic situation, with equal access to opportunities to facilitate improvement (OECD, 2022)

Many of the theories outlined at the start of the thesis highlight the importance of mobility, especially in terms of immigrants improving their situation. If this mobility is hampered it is likely this will create a dependence on welfare states due the poor economic status of immigrants.

Many countries throughout the world are keen to use policies and legislation as controls on immigration. Much of the limitation is done via access to social rights that is based on residency/citizenship, with different levels of inclusion and exclusion, for example (Bendixsen and Näre, 2024).

Now while it is necessary to have checks and balance or “welfare state bordering” in place as these things need to be controlled, it must be considered that the policies are not creating barriers. With such things like welfare state bordering, it is clear that policies, while needed, can create barriers, such as to mobility. If individuals’ mobility is hampered, especially with respect to their social mobility, it can enlarge the gap and further marginalise immigrants (Bendixsen and Näre, 2024).

A study conducted on the Danish welfare state system has highlighted how immigrants are the main beneficiaries from the welfare state, with a

redistribution of resources from that of native Danes, leading to a strain on the public finances and questions over the long term sustainability of the welfare model (Nannestad, 2004).

Collaboration between the policy makers and the people who need it the most, immigrants, is key. Policy makers must be aware how these policies are impacting the people they are designed to help. Policy makers need to be aware of the implications which their policies create, something Finland would be wise to examine based on the evidence we have looked at. While integration and migration policies are needed, it is clear they are creating more barriers and an over dependence on the welfare state. This is something to be mindful of, considering the levels of unemployment we have already seen amongst immigrants earlier in this thesis.

### 7.1.3 Migration-Welfare Nexus?

Regarding the impact on the welfare state, we must consider the Migration-Welfare Nexus. This refers to the complex relationships which occur between migration and welfare policy (Vickers, 2020). The nexus examines how changes to one can significantly impact the other.

A study by Vickers (2020) highlights how, in the UK, many immigration policies have been shaped by wider socio-political contexts like austerity or welfare cuts and vastly stricter immigration rules. The UK is a clear example of how welfare and migration policies are designed to reinforce each other, and often to the detriment of migrants, or marginalised groups.

This study can be used to provide a stark warning for Finland, a country which is seeing an increased number of immigrants. The Finnish Integration Act which has recently passed into legislation, which will enter into force on 1st January 2025. On the surface the new Act is designed to improve integration, employment opportunities and better social inclusion for immigrants (European Website on Integration, 2024). However, as we have recently seen in many

news articles, the opinion of such reforms has not been positive due to the raft of other policy changes.

The reason such changes have occurred is that the government is seeking to change the trend of indebtedness the country has seen in recent years, and thereby improve the sustainability of public finances (Valtioneuvosto, 2024). However, as we have seen in the recent government announcements and changes many of the reforms have fallen at the feet of immigrants, with most of the changes centred around immigration and citizenship. However, these changes have been heavily criticised by a raft of professionals, including IT experts, doctors, academics, students and human right activists, stating that many of these changes send an unwelcoming message to migrants (Telang, 2023).

We have seen how the reform of the Integration Act is designed to benefit immigrants. An example of this the enhancement of language education for that of employment opportunities. However, it still fails to tackle the clear issue of language-based discrimination which is present in recruitment (Telang, 2023).

As such the Migration-Welfare Nexus is something Finland must be conscious of. It is clear that migration has a significant impact on welfare policy making in Finland and there must be a conscious effort to ensure it is not to the detriment not only of the migrants primarily but also to the country which is facing an ever aging population. Migrants will become key in the future of Finland's economy.

## **8 Conclusions and suggestions**

The simple conclusion to be drawn here based on the evidence which has been laid out is that, on the surface, the picture of immigration integration in Finland appears to be a positive one, with progressive integration policies present. However, with a little bit of digging we can see that the reality underneath this image is one which is very different.

In Finland immigrants face significant barriers and in turn greater inequality. The issue of inequality is one which is increasingly coming under the microscope, and based on the definitions outlined at the start this can be defined in numerous different ways. However, the simple definition taken from the Cambridge dictionary encapsulates what is currently happening within Finland. Due to the barriers hampering opportunities immigrants are clearly facing a unfair situation in many areas, with fewer opportunities.

We must acknowledge that measuring inequality is a difficult task. As shown above, how inequality is measured shows how none of the tools alone can provide a clear picture. It requires a combination of all the tools to help policy makers make an informed decision. Additionally, the MIPEX index only seeks to show the scope of integration policies; it does little to show how successful these are. The concluding factor here is that many of the tools and indices used miss the key factor, namely the feedback of those who are impacted. In this case we have looked at immigrants in Finland, but this is true when considering inequality in other areas also. A lot of the measurement tools rely on numbers. While this helps to inform decisions, it fails to consider the feedback of people who are directly impacted by inequality.

Numerous theories relating to immigration, integration and inequality have been examined and can be linked to the situations immigrants are facing within Finland. For example, with Social Capital Theory, we have seen how many immigrants rely more on their own social connections instead of institutions within Finland because the distrust in these institutions. Secondly, we can certainly argue that dual labour market theory applies, with the evidence highlighting many immigrants are working in lower status jobs. In terms of the multiculturalism theory are immigrants really being supported or are we seeing more and more barriers being created and immigrants becoming more and more marginalised. This, with the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment, could lead Finland down a dangerous path in the future, with immigrants facing greater barriers than they currently do.

## 8.1 What can be done?

As highlighted at the start of the thesis, Finland is facing an ageing population, to which immigration could be a vital response in the future. Therefore, examining the approach of countries like Japan could provide key insight for future Finnish policy makers.

In 2019 Japan implemented a specified skills visa program in order to accept low-skilled and semi-skilled foreign workers in order to combat labour shortages (Akimoto, 2021). Finland is looking to implement a similar work-based immigration program. Taking note of developments in Japan could be a key reference point as both countries face the issue of an ageing population.

Furthermore, much like Finland, Japan can be defined as homogenous and of course while labour immigration can help to alleviate some of the labour shortages, Japan has also faced issues around social integration (Pollmann and Yashiro, 2020). Therefore, as a country further along in this process it would serve as providing Finland with a key insight to shape its own reforms.

Additionally, we know that in Finland language provides a significant barrier, Germany could be used to provide an example of how German is so widely adopted by the immigrant population. In 2018 data released by the German Federal statistics showed that German was the most spoken language in immigrant households (DW, 2019). Of course, like Finland it does offer language courses as part of its immigration framework. However, from research Germany also seeks to promote their language abroad through Goethe Institutes, increasing exposure to the language and improving chances of successful integration in areas like the labour market due to a better command of the language upon arrival. Additionally, these institutions help to improve an immigrant's chances of successfully staying in Germany and integrating (Jaschke and Keita, 2021).

We must acknowledge here of course there is no one size fits all but the two examples above show that countries around the world have different approaches to integration with varying levels of success. As such, there are examples out there for Finland to study and build its wealth of knowledge to craft better decisions. The MIPEX index also gives good idea of additional countries like Sweden and Portugal, whose integration policies could be examined and potentially adopted in Finland with the goal of a better outlook for immigrants.

However, the final point to be made here and key area in which things can be done is that of interaction with the people who are affected. Much of the secondary literature drawn on for this thesis features the use of interviews. Through interviews it is shown how immigrants are feeling and impacted. It would be wise for Finnish policy makers to interact more with immigrants to understand their wants and needs but also the challenges they are facing. The paper shows there is a disconnect occurring here and despite the best intentions of integration policies, immigrants are still facing key barriers, which prevent them from equal opportunities. We must avoid what has been the norm, which is that, regarding socioeconomic integration, immigrants are disadvantaged compared to that of the native population (Hooijer and Picot, 2015). Based on the evidence above Finland appears to adhere to this norm. However, it must be noted Finland is far from the worst example in international comparisons, but it does show there is always room for improvement.

Given the evidence presented above and the concluding arguments, further development of this study could be to conduct first hand interviews in order to obtain further opinions, perspectives and data from immigrants. At the very least, this would provide more accurate data regarding the impact of policy, and a measure of the variance between the stated intentions of policy and its practical impact.

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