

# Finland's Immigration Policy: State Objectives, Local Solutions

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## 4.1 Introduction

Finland, a Nordic country situated between Sweden in the West and Russia in the East, has been a member of the European Union (EU) since 1995. With a population of 5.5 million (2017), it is one of the less populous member states, ranking in the 17th place among the current 27 members of the EU (EUROSTAT 2020). Finland has traditionally been a country of emigration (Korkiasaari 2008); it became a net receiver of immigrants as late as in the 1980s and 1990s, and the share of foreign citizens permanently living in Finland is still only 4.4% (241,000) and the share of the foreign-born 6.8% (349,000) of the population (EUROSTAT 2020).<sup>1</sup>

Finland has traditionally stressed the role of international law and agreements in its formulation of international policies, such as asylum policies. It joined the Refugee Convention and Protocol in 1968 and has been a significant contributor to the budget of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The first group of Chilean refugees arrived in the early 1970s and the reception of so-called quota refugees, selected in collaboration with the UNHCR, began in 1979 with the arrival of refugees from Vietnam. The country's immigration and refugee reception policies have been developed within the framework of its traditional Nordic welfare state policies and as a part of the extensive public sector (Wahlbeck 2018, pp. 2–4; see also Martikainen et al. 2012). An important change in Finnish immigration policy occurred in 1990 when Ingrian Finns, the descendants of Finns who had migrated to Ingria near the St. Petersburg area in the seventeenth century, were categorised as return migrants. This led to the return migration of around 30,000 Ingrian Finns from the present-day Russia and Estonia by 2016 when the immigration programme was closed (Mähönen and Yijälä 2016). Also, the arrival of the first larger refugee group, the Somalis, in the early 1990s marked an important change in the balance of incoming and outgoing migration (Heikkilä 2017).

The Finnish welfare state has a residence-based, universal model of social protection (Kangas and Palme 2005). The Nordic or social democratic welfare state regimes are typically based on high levels of taxation and income redistribution as all citizens are entitled to wide range of benefits and services. High employment levels, of both men and women, are required to finance the system and the rather high standard of living typical for this region (Esping-Andersen 1990; see also Timonen 2003). Legal residence in Finland entitles individuals to basic social security, including family allowances, health care, sickness and parental benefits, national pensions and basic unemployment allowance and labour market subsidy. In addition to the welfare benefits available for the whole citizenry, administered by The National Social Insurance Institution (KELA), there are also benefits related to employment, such as earnings-related unemployment allowance and pensions, which are administered by semi-public insurance bodies. These include work-related pensions and trade union administered unemployment funds (Koikkalainen et al. 2011; Helander et al. 2016; Kiuru 2014).

This chapter examines the Finnish immigration system, its relationship to the welfare state and immigrant access to the labour markets. As the basic social security is not tied to either Finnish citizenship or employment *per se*, the system has both benefits and drawbacks for a migrant entering the system from the outside. The chapter begins with a presentation of how a migrant gains residence in Finland, then continues to describe how immigrant integration measures are administratively organised at the national, regional and local levels and concludes with immigrant data, public opinion and reflections on what are the best qualities of immigrant integration processes in Finland.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the longer immigration history and more liberal policies, in Sweden the share of foreign citizens is 6.8% and of the foreign-born 21.7% of the population (EUROSTAT 2020).

## 4.2 Becoming a Permanent Resident in Finland

Migrants intending to stay in Finland for longer than three months are required to acquire a residence permit. Citizens of an EU Member State, or of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland do not need a residence permit for Finland, but they do have to register their right of residence with the authorities. Matters pertaining to immigration and the provision of international protection are detailed in the Aliens Act (Finlex 2018b), which is in line with the relevant EU level directives and regulations on e.g. free movement of persons and refugee and asylum policies.

A residence permit can be granted based on work, self-employment, family ties, studying, remigration or “other, special grounds”, for example because of an intention to marry a Finnish citizen or being a victim of human trafficking. The residence permit can be either fixed (Type B, max duration one year at a time), continuous (Type A, max duration four years at a time) or permanent (Type P). The first residence permit is always issued for a fixed term, but after 4 years of residence with a continuous permit (A) it can be turned into a permanent residence, if the grounds for the permit still apply. Migrants who enter Finland as asylum seekers can either receive an asylum or refugee status, a residence permit based on subsidiary protection or a residence permit on other grounds. In addition, there is a quota (currently 750 individuals/year) for refugees who already have a refugee status defined by the UNHCR (MIGRI 2018).

Once a migrant is granted a residence permit based on one of the reasons above, there are still two thresholds s/he has to cross before becoming a real resident, who is able to access public health care, different benefits and other welfare services available to citizens and permanent residents. First, s/he will have to apply for coverage under the Finnish social security and health insurance scheme from National Social Insurance Institution (KELA), and second, s/he will have to be registered as a resident of a city, town or municipality where s/he plans to live.<sup>2</sup> Namely, there are two different authorities who are in charge of residence-based benefits and services and thus are required to officially assess whether the migrant’s move to Finland is considered “permanent” (Homanen and Alastalo 2015, p. 147). For example, when a migrant’s personal data is recorded in the Finnish Population Information System<sup>3</sup> at the local register office in the capital city Helsinki, home to the largest concentration of foreign-born individuals in Finland, s/he then has the right to the same services as any other resident of the city. The Population Information System, a detailed and extensive register on all those who reside in the country, was developed as a part of the building process of the Finnish welfare state, as it was considered essential that all authorities have access to reliable data on those legally resident in Finland (Homanen and Alastalo 2015, p. 149). By law, all residents are required to notify the authorities in charge of the register whenever they move permanently or temporarily for more than three months. This applies to moves within the same city, within Finland or to abroad, and the information is thus automatically available to the postal services (Local Register Offices 2018). The information stored in the register is widely used throughout the country in public administration, elections, taxation, judicial administration and statistics (Population Registration Centre 2018).

## 4.3 Integration Policy: National Aims and Objectives

Integration is a term with multiple meanings. Kivisto (2015, p. 10) rightfully asks: into what do immigrants become integrated to when they move to a country like Finland? Does integration imply simply being employed or perhaps also embracing mainstream culture, religion, identity or values? In Finland there has been a strong emphasis in integration of immigrants primarily via the labour markets as the input of all residents has been seen necessary for the financing of the welfare state system (e.g. Martikainen et al. 2012; Koikkalainen et al. 2011). In terms of integration into the Finnish society, a dual logic is often implied: immigrants are expected to become full members of the public sphere primarily through employment, but are given the right to maintain their “own culture” in the private sphere (Leinonen 2015, p. 6). The Finnish model of integration policy has been developed in a multiculturalist fashion with reference to the Dutch and Swedish systems (Saukkonen 2013, p. 97). The chapter on Basic rights and liberties of The Finnish constitution (Finlex 2018a, 6§) states that everyone is equal before the law and no one shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from other

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<sup>2</sup> These two registrations are based on different legislation: *The Finnish Act on the Application of Residence based Social Security Legislation* (Finlex 2018c) and *Finnish Municipality of Residence Act* (Finlex 2018d).

<sup>3</sup> 3 Foreigners can acquire a Finnish personal identity code when they register for the *Population Information System*. This can be done either at the local register offices, tax office or already when the migrant deals with the Finnish Immigration Service MIGRI as long as the right to reside in Finland permanently is clear (Population Registration Centre 2018).

persons on the ground of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or other reason that concerns his or her person. To fulfil this obligation and foster the attainment of equality for migrants, The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (Finlex 2018b) aims to make it easier for immigrants to play an active role in Finnish society, promote gender equality and ensure non-discrimination and positive interaction between different population groups living in Finland. The Act defines integration as follows: “integration means interactive development involving immigrants and society at large, the aim of which is to provide immigrants with the knowledge and skills required in society and working life and to provide them with support, so that they can maintain their culture and language” (Finlex 2018b, Sect. 3<sup>4</sup>). According to the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (Finlex 2018b), which has been in force since 2011, all immigrants who are legally resident in Finland are entitled to integration measures, regardless of their nationality or reasons for moving to Finland. The right to integration assistance and education applies, therefore, both to an intra-European migrant married to a Finn and to a refugee resettled directly from an UNHCR refugee camp as a quota refugee, even though integration measures are often understood to be targeted primarily at those arriving due to humanitarian reasons. All registered immigrants are entitled to receive basic, written material about Finland, including information on the Finnish society and working life, one’s rights and obligations, and services available for assisting integration. In addition, all immigrants have the right to a personalised integration plan if they are unemployed jobseekers or recipients of social assistance, under-aged without a guardian in Finland, or if based on an initial assessment, they appear to be in need of a plan promoting integration (Finlex 2018b, Chapter 2, Sect. 12).

The aim of integration activities is to bring the strengths of the immigrants’ own cultures to full fruition in the new context, make sure that immigrants can play an active role in society and to promote the achievement of equality of rights and responsibilities for immigrants in Finland. At the national level, The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment is responsible for the preparation of a government integration programme, which contains the integration objectives for four years at a time (Finlex 2018b, Chapter 4, Sect. 34).<sup>5</sup> The fact that a Ministry in charge of, for example, industrial policy, promotion of competition and consumer policy, public employment services and energy policy is also tasked with immigrant integration, speaks to the importance that employment plays in the ethos of integration policy in Finland.

#### 4.4 Integration Activities: Regional and Local Practices

While the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (Finlex 2018b) details the overall goals of integration policy, the responsibility for providing the integration measures lies at the local level with the cities, towns and municipalities. The Act clearly states: “Measures and services promoting integration are provided as part of basic municipal services and the services of the employment and economic administration and as other measures promoting integration” (Finlex 2018b, Chapter 2, Sect. 6). Here lies the special nature of the Finnish integration system: each municipality is tasked with and responsible of making an “(...) *integration programme*<sup>6</sup> for promoting integration and for strengthening multi-sectoral cooperation that is approved by the municipal council of each municipality and that is reviewed at least once every four years” (Finlex 2018b, Chapter 3, Sect. 32). The municipalities, therefore, have considerable autonomy in how the integration process is supported, and may, for example, choose to collaborate with neighbouring municipalities in providing the necessary services. By law, offering placements to quota refugees or asylum seekers is not compulsory for the municipalities. In fact, the lack of these municipality places has hindered the path towards integration for many, as those already granted international protection or a residence permit have been stuck at a refugee camp abroad or at a reception centre in Finland until the authorities manage to find a municipality that agrees to offer them a placement. To manage the integration activities, smaller municipalities may simply employ one immigration coordinator at the social services office, while larger cities with higher numbers of immigrants may choose to set up an immigration unit that operates as a part of the social services. The role of third-sector organisations, such as the Finnish Red Cross and other non-governmental organisations, is often significant in arranging cultural activities, language courses and fostering contacts between the locals and the newcomers (Hansen and Holm 2016.)

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<sup>4</sup> This is a direct quote from a translation that is prepared by the authorities, but not considered official law text. In legal matters, only the official versions available in Finnish or Swedish are to be used.

<sup>5</sup> Matters pertaining to immigration policy are the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior. Integration policy was transferred from that ministry to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment during the government negotiations after the 2011 parliamentary elections (Saukkonen 2013, p. 94).

<sup>6</sup> Italics added.

At the regional level, the main authorities responsible for promotion of integration of immigrants and the promotion of good ethnic relations are the 15 Centres for economic development, transport and the environment, working under the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. They also collaborate with other regional authorities and provide municipalities with reimbursement for the costs arising from the integration measures implemented during the first three or four years of the migrant's residence in a given municipality.<sup>7</sup> The reimbursement is conditioned on the municipality having an integration programme in place (Finlex 2018b, Chapter 4, Sects. 37–40, Chapter 6, Sects. 44–45). The exact duties of each party are listed in the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (Finlex 2018b). The Centres for economic development, transport and the environment are tasked with monitoring that the municipalities have adopted and are implementing their respective integration programmes. At the grass-root level, local Employment and economic development offices are in charge of interviewing individual migrants and preparing their personalised integration plans. This applies to the plans prepared for migrants who apply for work or training. As an alternative, the personalised plan can also be drawn at the municipal social services office, if the migrant is not actively looking for work, but is, for example, staying at home taking care of the family's children. This process highlights the key principles of the Finnish system: that integration is seen as a labour market question, not so much as a cultural or social issue, and that migrant services are integrated to the basic services offered to all residents, not delegated to administratively separate immigration offices at the local level.

The personalised integration plan has to be drawn up within three years of the receipt of the migrant's first residence permit. The first plan is made for the maximum duration of one year at a time and the migrant is entitled to having the plan in place for three years with the option of getting an extension for two years. The plan includes an individualised set of activities and services that will support the migrant's efforts in getting a good enough command of either the Finnish or Swedish language as well as other skills necessary in living and working in Finland. The plan may also include teaching of the migrant's own mother tongue, studies on the Finnish society, studies complementing basic education or, if necessary, basic reading and writing skills and other personalised measures. The plan may also cover self-motivated studies in open university or in a programme leading towards a vocational or professional qualification or university or university of applied sciences degree. During the period covered by the integration plan, the migrant is entitled to financial support which is either paid as a labour market subsidy (the basic unemployment benefit) if the migrant is a jobseeker or social assistance (a means-tested form of last resort assistance) (Finlex 2018b, Chapter 2, Sects. 11–20.) As per the monetary level of the financial support, the same rules apply as to any other applicant applying for such assistance.

#### 4.5 The Challenges of Achieving Integration

Despite the emphasis on employment as the key sign of integration, immigrant unemployment levels have continued to be around three times higher than with the native population (Wahlbeck 2018; Heikkilä 2017). There is considerable variation among immigrants of different backgrounds. Reliance on unemployment benefits is highest among those who migrated from refugee-sending countries and lower among those who moved from OECD or so-called Western countries (Tervola and Verho 2014; Heikkilä 2017). A study on immigrant labour market integration also noted that immigrants born in Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq also earned less, received more social benefits and had lower employment rates than other immigrant groups or natives in 1990–2013. The difference seems to persist over time, as the average earnings of men from these countries were still only 22–38% of the average earnings of native men of the same age while the earnings of female migrants were even smaller (Sarvimäki 2017.) These differences in labour market participation are attributed both to reasons pertaining to the Finnish labour markets and to the migrants living in Finland. For the former, there are employer prejudices towards foreign qualifications and workers, lack of easily accessible entry-level jobs and the tendency to rely on social networks when looking for employees. For the latter, many migrants have difficulties reaching a high-enough command of the Finnish/Swedish language, they lack local qualifications and easily transferable work experience, and thus are in a disadvantaged position in comparison with the native jobseeker (e.g. Heikkilä 2017). The integration process does not, therefore, manage to adequately address the problem of labour market integration of first-generation migrants, even though the situation may be different for the second generation that goes to school in the country.

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<sup>7</sup> The reimbursements are divided into imputed reimbursements and those paid on the basis of actual costs. In 2018, the imputed reimbursement rate is 2.300e/year for each person aged 7 or over, and 6.845e/year for children under 7 years. These are paid for four years for quota refugees and three years for persons arriving through the asylum procedure (Centre of Expertise in Immigrant Integration 2018).

It has been argued that the Finnish welfare system based on universalism is an important inclusion mechanism for migrants, as the basic accessibility to benefits and services reinforces also wide participation in other areas of society (Wahlbeck 2018; Martikainen et al. 2012). As the migrant living permanently in Finland gains access to the same basic services as any other Finn, it could be assumed that the playing field would be rather even, so to speak. However, the situation has a number of drawbacks both for those wishing to start life anew after coming to the country for humanitarian reasons and some potential complications also for those coming to work in Finland. Some risks inherent in the system may target immigrants with a refugee background at a higher rate than the native-born. Namely, Finnish social policy programmes are structured to target specific social risks, such as unemployment or work disability, rather than tackle poverty or social exclusion at a more general level. In addition, there are only few programmes that specifically target immigrants. Second, the system is somewhat difficult to navigate as some benefits are tied to individual work history and income while others take into account the income of the entire household. Also, the system does not recognise dependencies between adult generations, so the understanding of what constitutes a household or a family is narrower than among many immigrant groups (Koikkalainen et al. 2011, pp. 145–146). In addition, there is a constant debate between the municipalities and the state concerning the adequate level of reimbursements provided for the municipalities to finance the integration measures implemented at the grass-roots level (Saukkonen 2013).

When a migrant moves to Finland because of work, the authorities need to determine whether this implies the intent to stay in the country permanently. This, in turn is vital in terms of the benefits the migrant and his or her family is entitled to. The variables to consider include, whether the employment contract is temporary or permanent, is the migrant from an EU/EEA member state or a third country, is there a social security agreement in place between Finland and the country of origin, and whether the migrant has family members living either in Finland or back in the country of origin. For example, if a Russian citizen lives and works in Finland on a permanent employment contract, his or her entitlements to different benefits and services may depend on the fact whether the family lives in Helsinki (residence considered permanent) or St. Petersburg (residence considered temporary) (Ministry for Social Affairs and Health 2018). The complexity of the system makes it difficult to fathom and the migrants may have hard time understanding what services and benefits they are entitled to. Also, the system is at times somewhat arbitrary, as individual public servants have the power to decide who is entitled to which benefits (e.g. Helander et al. 2016).

#### 4.6 Immigrants, Minorities and the “European Refugee Crisis”

Even though the first small refugee groups arrived to Finland already in the 1970s, the country is still often perceived as a country of emigration. It has been estimated that during the past hundred and fifty years over 1.3 million Finns have emigrated abroad (Martikainen et al. 2013, p. 26). Many European countries imported workers for post-WWII reconstruction during the guest-worker period (1950–1970). For Finland, this meant the migration of approximately 530,000 Finns to work in Sweden.<sup>8</sup> This history plays a role in how many Finns still perceive their country as a rather homogeneous place from where one may leave, but not as a place where foreigners are necessarily welcome to settle. However, according to Statistic Finland data, 2018 was the third year in a row when deaths exceeded births in Finland, and according to their population projection, birth rate is still decreasing and the current numbers of incoming migrants can only sustain the country’s population growth until 2035. The demographic dependency ratio is worsening and thus the country needs more immigration to sustain the services of the Nordic welfare state (Statistics Finland 2018a).

In a European perspective, both the size of the foreign-born population as well as the numbers of those seeking protection from Finland have remained modest. Yet during the past twenty-five years, the speed of internationalisation has been rapid: in the year 2000, the share of inhabitants with a foreign background was 2.1% of the population, while in 2017 the share had risen to 7.0%. In terms of numbers of this signifies a rise of 348,000 persons<sup>9</sup> (Statistics Finland 2018b). A statistically representative interview study on the migration motivations of the foreign background population living in Finland 2014 concluded that for a majority the reason for moving was

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<sup>8</sup> An estimated half of these migrants have since returned to Finland (Korkiasaari and Tarkiainen 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Finland has migration-related data on the numbers of foreign citizens, foreign-born individuals and the share of those, whose mother tongue is some other language than Finnish or Swedish. As a way of estimating the numbers of first and second generation immigrants living in the country, the category of “foreign background” is used. In this type of classification all persons, who have at least one parent born in Finland are categorized to have a Finnish background. Foreign background thus signifies a person whose parents (or the only known parent) were born abroad.

related to family and close personal relationships (54%, 123.000 individuals). A fifth of the interviewees had moved primarily for work (18%, 41.000) and one in ten for studying (10%, 23.000) or as a refugee or an asylum seeker (11%, 24.000) (Sutela and Larja 2015). The largest minority group living in Finland are the Swedish-speaking Finns, who form about 5.4% of the population and enjoy extensive rights guaranteed, for example, by the fact that Swedish is the country's second official language. Among the other so-called traditional minority groups, who have lived in <sup>356</sup> the country for more than a century, there is a small indigenous Sámi population (9.000), and a Roma minority (10.000) as well as small communities of Jews, Tatars and Karelian Finns (Minority Rights Group Finland 2017). By country of birth, the largest groups of immigrants living in Finland in 2017 originated from Russia and the former Soviet Union (70.900), Estonia (46.000), Sweden (32.000), Iraq (16.300) and Somalia (11.400) (Statistics Finland 2018b). It is good to note, that of those born in Sweden, many are in fact return migrants with roots in Finland. Even though the public opinion in the country with regard to immigrants is in general more positive than the EU-28 average (European Commission 2017), the "European refugee crisis" of 2015 brought forward heated media and online discussions between those promoting the rights of asylum seekers and those fearing a deterioration of internal security or even "islamisation". At the opposite ends of the debate were the human rights activists arranging *Refugees welcome*—demonstrations and the newly formed, nationalistic *Soldiers of Odin*, who organised groups of young men to patrol the streets to "protect Finns from attacks by invaders" (e.g. Maasilta and Nikunen 2018).

Unfortunately for the asylum seekers looking for a future in Finland, the "crisis" happened at a time when the populist, anti-immigration Finns Party had just joined the Finnish government for the first time after the 2015 parliamentary elections. After gaining 17.7% share of the votes, it held five ministerial posts in the government formed together with the agrarian Centre Party and the conservative National Coalition Party (e.g. Nykänen 2016.). In reaction to the "crisis", the government led by Juha Sipilä of the Centre Party published a "Government action plan on asylum policy" (8 December 2015) which stated that "Finland's short-term objective is to stop the uncontrolled flow of asylum seekers into our country, to bring asylum costs under control and to integrate effectively those who have been granted asylum" (Finnish Government 2015, p. 1). The paper was largely based on the Finns party's critical views on immigration. Based on the action plan, the government implemented a total of 12 different amendments to the Alien's Act (Finlex 2018e)<sup>10</sup> which governs immigration and asylum policies.

The changes made in the Alien's act include, for example, removing the possibility of granting asylum seekers a residence permit based on humanitarian grounds, limiting access to council during the immigration interviews, shortening the time within which an appeal has to be made on the negative asylum decision and tightening the family reunification criteria (Wahlbeck 2018; Saarikkomäki et al. 2018). To manage the highly increased workload, the Finnish Immigration Service MIGRI opened seven new branch offices, recruited more than 200 new employees and commissioned the opening of a total of 184 new reception centres around the country (MIGRI 2015). The role of the Finnish Red Cross in managing the situation was crucial: it was in charge of opening 104 of the new centres and had access to more than 30.000 private individuals as volunteers (SPR 2016). In addition, the country of origin information on Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan was updated in May 2016 with the implication that these countries were considered safe for return for at least some asylum seekers. Due to this policy change, the recognition rates for applicants from these countries have been lower than the EU average (e.g. Horsti 2017). This is evident, for example, in the first instance decisions granted to the largest group of asylum seekers arriving in Finland in recent years, the Iraqis. While in 2015 the decision was positive for 85% of the applicants in Finland, the same as the EU-28 average of that year, in 2016 it first plummeted to 24% (EU-28: 63%) and in 2017 rose to 37% (EU-28: 57%) (EUROSTAT 2018).

The geo-political location of Finland at the Northern edge of Europe, and as a neighbour of Russia with a tight border enforcement system, has largely prevented any larger refugee movements towards the country. In the recent years, Finland has received an average of 3.400 asylum seekers per year until the year of the "crisis" in 2015, when the situation changed drastically as the number of asylum seekers rose by nearly a tenfold to more than 32.000 (EASO 2018). The highest share of applicants came from Iraq (20.500), Afghanistan (5.200), Somalia (2.000), and Syria (900). In addition, 1.000 quota refugees were selected directly from refugee camps. Since then the numbers of applicants have returned closer to the long-time average as 5.600 asylum applications in were submitted in 2016 and 5.000 in 2017. A summary of recent trends in humanitarian migration towards Finland is presented in Table 4.1.

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<sup>10</sup> 10For an overview of the development and the *Alien's Act* see Signe et al. (2007, pp. 99–101).

**Table 4.1** Humanitarian migration in Finland 2013–2017

| <i>Finland</i>                             | 2013  | 2014  | 2015   | 2016   | 2017  |
|--|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| Asylum applicants                          | 3210  | 3620  | 32,345 | 5605   | 4990  |
| First time asylum applicants               | 2985  | 3490  | 32,150 | 5275   | 4325  |
| Pending cases at the end of the year       | 2495  | 1795  | 27,750 | 15,000 | 9335  |
| <i>First Instance Decisions</i>            |       |       |        |        |       |
| Refugee status                             | 570   | 490   | 1060   | 4320   | 2400  |
| Subsidiary protection                      | 785   | 475   | 460    | 1705   | 650   |
| Humanitarian protection                    | 295   | 300   | 160    | 1 045  | 380   |
| Rejection                                  | 1 565 | 1 070 | 1 280  | 13 685 | 3 745 |
| <i>Second or Higher Instance Decisions</i> |       |       |        |        |       |
| Refugee status                             | 50    | 75    | 50     | 185    | 535   |
| Subsidiary protection                      | 75    | 60    | 45     | 50     | 195   |
| Humanitarian protection                    | 50    | 30    | 15     | 60     | 95    |
| Rejection                                  | 55    | 45    | 55     | 395    | 435   |

Source EASO (2018) Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union 2017

## 4.7 Conclusion

The Finnish immigrant integration system relies upon the inclusion of migrants into the welfare state services offered to all citizens and permanent residents. In addition, speedy entry into the labour markets is a stated goal that should also ensure that migrants become “stakeholder citizens” (Bauböck 2009) and participants in their new home country. Implementing the integration measures has been delegated to the lowest administrative level possible and thus municipalities have the responsibility and freedom to implement the kinds of services that they see fit within the overall aims of the national integration policy. This is a clear strength of the system, as each municipality can design the kind of service structures that best suit the size of the town or city, the types of immigrants that live there as well as the mix of other actors, such as local non-governmental organisations, willing to provide cultural and language services to the newcomers.

The Finnish system has both advantages and disadvantages. While the general welfare services and benefits provided by the state should be equal to all residents, immigrants may suffer as the system is complicated and does not necessarily recognise their special needs. Because of the amount of local freedom in arranging integration activities, the quality is not the same throughout the country, as some municipalities are willing to invest more resources than others. The integration of migrants into the labour market also continues to be a challenge, which leads into welfare dependency and the risk of social exclusion for the migrants and to the loss of tax income and the benefit potentially achieved from the skills and expertise of the immigrants for the state and the Finnish labour markets.

It is clear that the delegation of implementing integration measures to the municipalities leaves considerable room for innovation at the grass-roots level. In a best-case-scenario, stressing local solutions provides opportunities for flexible, context-specific integration activities that are tailored to the needs of the immigrants and the local communities. Yet, due to disagreements on the adequate level of state support for the integration effort, it is common for the municipalities to implement the services with different types of project funding, which often leads to the innovations being abandoned once the external funding runs out. There is, therefore, room for improvement if Finland wishes to achieve the aims listed in the legislation related to immigrant integration and to tackle the challenges posed by the demographic trend of ageing population.

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