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7- 8 October 2026

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Introduction

The Council of Europe Division on Migration and Refugees (DMR) was established on 1 February 2025 within the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DG I) Its mandate includes carrying out missions to member States, to collect and analyse information on migration law and policies, good practices as well as challenges in this field, assess member States' needs and identify areas of particular interest in order to further enhance member States' cooperation with the Council of Europe.[1]

On 7 and 8 October 2026 the DMR delegation consisting of Mr Nikolaos Sitaropoulos, Head of Division and Ms Eleana Kypriotaki, Legal Advisor, conducted a visit to Finland in order to look into good practices and potential challenges concerning the integration of migrants and refugees, as well as developments in the field of international protection.

1. Meetings with national and international stakeholders

At the outset, DMR would like to thank the Finnish authorities in Strasbourg and in Helsinki for facilitating the excellent organisation of this mission during which the DMR delegation held meetings with competent national authorities (see below), international organisations and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) involved in the area of integration and international protection. The issues that stood out regarding integration of migrants and refugees included the role of municipalities, access to language courses and the labour market and the possibility for individualised integration plans. The international protection issues focused mainly on the implementation of the European Union (EU) Pact on Migration and Asylum, the processing of asylum applications, the protection of vulnerable groups and the implementation of temporary protection for people displaced by the war from Ukraine.

At the Ministry of the Interior (Migration Department, Border Security Unit- Border Guard Department/VTC and International Affairs Unit), discussions focused on issues of international protection, while the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (Labour Migration and Integration Unit) provided an insight into the national integration policy together with the Ministry of Education and Culture (Department for Early Childhood Education and Care and Department for Higher Education and Science Policy) and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Department of Clients and Services in Healthcare and Social Welfare and International Affairs Unit). Additionally, the participation of Finland in the Council of Europe activities and the thematic work of the DMR were discussed during a working lunch with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Unit for Human Rights Policy, Unit for Human Rights Courts and Conventions and Visa Unit).

Moreover, the DMR delegation had informative meetings with representatives of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, the Deputy Ombudsman dealing with asylum and immigration matters, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for the Nordic and Baltic Countries and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Helsinki, as well as the following CSOs: the Refugee Advice Centre, the Finnish Red Cross, the Finnish Refugee Council, MONIKA- Multicultural Women's Association (written contribution) and Moniheli.

The meetings held during the mission enabled the DMR delegation to acquire a comprehensive overview of the national law and practice, including of the vital role of the CSOs in providing support and services to refugees and migrants. Some of these organisations have been established by migrants, aiming not to replace but to complement public services in order to enable integration into local communities. These services include counselling, language training, orientation activities and peer learning, even the operation of

[1] On the 2026 country missions and reports by DMR see Council of Europe Division on Migration and Refugees.

reception centres through which they can provide information notably to newcomers and encourage their participation in the labour market and Finnish society.[2]

2. Measures enhancing integration of migrants and refugees

The 2025 Integration Act and the role of municipalities

In 2025, Finland ranked second in the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) with favourable policies covering sectors such as labour market mobility, education, permanent residence and anti-discrimination.[3]

Nevertheless, the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (Integration Act), which entered into force at the beginning of 2025,[4] marked a shift of responsibility in national integration policy which is now seen as an individual obligation rather than a shared responsibility between the society and the migrants.[5] The National Integration Programme (2024-2027), setting out the government's goals in the area of integration, supports this paradigm shift promoting integration into the Finnish society notably through employment.[6]

In practice, this change gives a more proactive role to third-country nationals in the integration process. For this, the government has proposed to link integration benefits to language learning.[7] However, in order to ensure the sustainability of this policy, the availability and accessibility of these programmes should be guaranteed to those who need integration support, otherwise potential vulnerability of migrants and refugees may be exacerbated.[8]

It is to be noted that a proposal to amend the 2025 Integration Act passed through the Finnish Parliament in 2026 and the new legislation will be in force at the beginning of 2027, raising concerns among stakeholders about the possible discrepancies between earlier and current legislation, not allowing much time for constructive consultations all parties concerned.

Another major practical change that was included in the 2025 Integration Act was the transfer of the competence for integration services to the municipalities. In this way the 308 municipalities in Finland and their employment areas are the main providers of integration services, including general guidance and advice, language courses and multilingual civic orientation, and the 21 "well-being service counties", which function on regional level, are responsible for health, social and rescue services. This multilevel governance[9] has been characterised by interlocutors as complicated and challenging, especially taking into consideration the restrictions in funding and the limitations in data exchange between different services, due to data protection legislation.[10] As a result, different levels of integration services is reportedly provided depending on the geographical location of the municipality, the number of third-country nationals registered in them and the funding they receive from the state.

Nevertheless, municipalities in Finland have implemented certain good practices, aiming to provide high-quality integration services, especially to vulnerable people and families. For

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[2] Nordic Council of Ministers, "Policy frameworks for migrant integration in the Nordic countries 2025 – an overview: Finland", Copenhagen: Nordisk Ministerråd, 2025, p. 28 and European Migration Network (EMN) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD joint study, "Fostering sustainable labour market integration: skills matching policies and practices", July 2026, p.43.
[3] Migrant Integration Policy Index, 2025.
[4] Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration 681/2023.
[5] European Migration Network (EMN), "Asylum and Migration Overview, Finland 2025", p.11.
[6] Nordic Council of Ministers (ft.2), p.28.
[7] Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Press release, "New integration assistance to improve incentives to work and strengthen language skills", 4.6.2026.
[8] DMR Thematic Paper, 'Vulnerability of migrants, asylum seekers and refuges: Council of Europe and European Union Standards', 2025.
[9] Also see Council of Europe, "Guide for municipalities: multi-level governance and multidisciplinary cooperation", 2025, at pp. 14, 18 and 26.
[10] Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation).

example, the Family Centre services, organised and coordinated by the well-being service counties in cooperation with municipalities, function as a one-stop-shop providing all those services needed by families and those intended for children, such as early childhood education, school services and early support and family work. The goal is to bring together health, social and community support to provide accessible, preventive and family-centred services.

The City of Helsinki has taken this approach one step further, providing health and social services through the Helmi Service, a multidisciplinary group of experts (nurses, family work instructors, social workers) who carry out outreach, pre-emptive work with families with immigrant background in order to ensure children's protection. They are out in the field, actively looking for families in need of their services and they work with the entire family, even if the child reaches adulthood, providing everyday skills, emotional skills and social interaction.

Adding to these services, municipalities offer multilingual integration services for migrants, as it is easier to process information in a language that they can understand.

The individualised integration plan

This shift of responsibility on the individual together with the transfer of competence for integration on the municipalities has been supported notably by the promotion of the individualised integration plan. This programme is offered to refugees, unemployed jobseekers, those receiving social assistance benefit on a non-temporary basis, parents receiving child home care allowance, unaccompanied minor immigrants, victims of human trafficking and other persons in need of assessment, who were issued with their first residence permit or residence card or whose right of residence was registered no more than three years previously. The most important requirement is to have a valid residence permit and not be in the process of requesting international protection.

The defining feature of this programme lies in the concept "no size fits all" which is applied in the integration procedure timewise, as its duration can fluctuate from two to four years depending on the integration needs of the individual, but also in its substance, as it can include other types of training, on top of language and integration courses, taking into account that some of the newcomers might have had higher education or might be illiterate.

In order to follow this procedure in practice, the DMR delegation was provided with the opportunity to visit the City of Helsinki integration and employment services and witness one session of a migrant's individualised integration plan.

The City of Helsinki integration and employment services promote employment, coordinate and develop related activities and provide integration for working-age people. Their target audience includes mainly unemployed migrants, stay-at-home parents (mostly women, around 300-400 per year) and beneficiaries of international protection who come mainly from countries in the Middle East, Asia and other neighbouring countries. It has been estimated that out of 7,000 newcomers, around 300 are outside the labour market.

The integration programme offered by the City of Helsinki integration and employment services is intended to last for two years with the possibility to be extended up to four years in total. Through this programme, guidance and advice is provided after an initial assessment of language competence and need for integration services. As part of the plan, a multilingual civic orientation course is offered for three weeks in order to provide information on the Finnish society and the way of life, followed by further integration and language training.

An individualised integration plan is drawn up in cooperation with social and healthcare services, when necessary, especially for people belonging to vulnerable groups, for example victims of trafficking in human beings (THB). The overall aim of the programme is to provide the individual with the required language skills to find a job or practice their profession. There are different teams of experts who take up the individualised plans, for example the International Talent Employment Service provides integration plans for skilled, highly

educated individuals in cooperation with employers and professional networks and as a result, 43% of the people benefiting from this integration service, which also includes beneficiaries of temporary protection, enter employment within a year, usually in the IT sector or in business.[11]

The first step in formulating an individualised integration plan is the interview, where the background of the individual is registered and a language test is done. The results of this interview indicate which services will be needed and suggestions on the content of the integration plan are made. An advisor follows its progress, in cooperation with the providers of the courses. There is provision for the evaluation of the progress and the needs of the individual at different stages of the programme, for example if language training has reached the needed level, the individual can move on to vocational training and in case the individual finds a job during the integration programme, it is optional to continue with language training.

Integration courses usually include language training in Finnish or Swedish (both are official languages – up to B1 level) and information on work life and the Finnish society. Additionally, the individual has to undertake two traineeships, based on a curriculum set by state authorities, focused on language and working life.

Integration services in the City of Helsinki are provided by 80 employees, case workers, course coordinators, procurement experts and job ability experts in 3 different locations in the city, although cooperation with the private sector is common, with 10 private companies offering training through vocational schools and consultative firms at the moment. The budget for the City of Helsinki integration and employment services for 2025 was 13.5 million euros.

Nevertheless, the fact that the implementation of the individualised integration plan belongs to the municipalities raises concerns about the availability and accessibility of integration services depending on the geography of the municipality and the population diversity (number of people, educational background, age and sex) of the participants, which might hamper its effectiveness.

Additionally, certain interlocutors during the mission expressed their concern that the recent changes in the duration of residence permits for refugees (three years) and for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection (one year)[12] but mostly for first residence permits for work, study or family reasons, which are now issued for one year or less,[13] may potentially act as a barrier to the conclusion of the integration plan, whose duration may be longer than the permit.

Access to the labour market and recognition of professional qualifications

In Finland, it is a long-standing practice for access to employment to be connected to language learning and integration courses on the Finnish way of life. Despite the establishment of strong anti-discrimination legislation,[14] instances of discrimination in employment have been well recorded,[15] with reported cases of Islamophobia rising, and with migrant women struggling the most with unemployment.[16] A study commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in 2024, to follow up on the findings of a previous study in 2016, on how people with a migratory profile and equivalent qualifications have access to the labour market, showed

[11] See also, European Commission, "Changes in migrant employment and education in Finland", 26 March 2026.
[12] EMN Asylum and Migration Overview (ft.5), p.35.
[13] Finnish Immigration Service, Residence Permit.
[14] Marjo-Riikka Ylhainen, "Non-discrimination transposition and implementation at national level of Council Directives 2000/43 and 2000/78, Country report: Finland", Directorate General for Justice and Consumers, European Commission, 2026, at pp.31-32 and also see Council of Europe, "Seeking real equality: a practical guide for Finnish municipalities to combat discrimination", 2025.
[15] On this topic, also see: Report by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman to Parliament 2026 (available only in Finnish), p.31, stating that in 2026 a total of 543 complaints were received on the basis of discrimination regarding origin (324), skin colour, ethnicity, citizenship and language.
[16] Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), "Report on Finland", 6th monitoring cycle, adopted 1 July 2025, published 28 October 2025, pp. 23-24.

that the labour market is more open to non-nationals compared to 2016, but still a "Finnish job candidate" would be preferred over one with a foreign-sounding name.[17]

In some cases, reportedly, professionals have been pushed by labour market needs to other, mostly low-skilled jobs in Finland. Indicative of the importance of this issue is the establishment by migrants of the CSO "International Professionals Finland", aiming to provide support and guidance to international professionals in order to overcome administrative difficulties and have meaningful careers.

Another obstacle in entering the labour market is the recognition of professional qualifications. Although the Professional Qualifications Directive (2005/36/EC) has been transposed into Finnish legislation, the recognition of third-country qualifications is governed by sector-specific legislation, which is currently under revision in order to streamline the different procedures.

For non-regulated professions, which account for the majority of cases in Finland, formal recognition is not required, and employers can decide the eligibility criteria.

For regulated professions, mostly in the field of healthcare, there is a formalised procedure in each case but there is a lack of clear pathway. Reportedly, the recognition process is time-consuming and burdensome, as the decision is taken by different authorities, and it bears a fee of around 400–500 euros. This fee is waived for third-country nationals going through the individual integration plan but in some cases further training courses in the Finnish language might be required, for example for doctors and nurses.

Access to education and recognition of academic qualifications

Asylum seekers have the right to schooling and education and as soon as they receive a residence permit and they are placed in municipalities, children are obliged to attend Finnish school until the completion of upper-secondary education or until the age of 18. The municipalities provide non-mandatory preparatory courses for one year for basic education intended for children of migration background who have not been born in Finland, funded by the state,[18] while additional preparatory training is now available within the basic education year, in order to enhance language proficiency of pupils in Finnish and Swedish languages.[19] Additionally, a special "S2 syllabus: Finnish language" is provided to children whose mother tongue is not Finnish.[20]

Another good practice identified in the area of education concerns the establishment of dual language university programmes: third-country nationals who have not mastered the Finnish language can start a course in English and gradually move on to Finnish. This is possible mainly for professions where the national language is considered as a prerequisite to practice, for example nursing.

Although most migrant background children reportedly choose not to follow general upper-secondary education, and instead they prefer to go into vocational training, in principle, all third-country nationals have access to university education. If they have previously acquired academic qualifications in their home countries, they will need to present the relevant documents to the university institution. If this is not possible, their eligibility can be proven through a knowledge test in order for each institution to decide.[21] Academic recognition does not require separate decision as it is part of the decision to grant a study place.

Aiming to promote the identification and recognition of previously acquired qualifications, the Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education (SIMHE) services have been established in Finland. Ten higher education institutions in cooperation with the Finnish National Agency for

[17] Akhlaq Ahmad, "A Comparative Analysis of the Reception of Immigrants into Finnish Working Life in 2016 and 2024", Publications of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment Integration, 2025.
[18] Nordic Council of Ministers (ft.2), p.32.
[19] EMN Asylum and Migration Overview (ft.5), p.46.
[20] Ibid, pp.46-47.
[21] Universities Act (558/2009, articles 37 and 44) Universities of Applied Sciences Act (932/2014, articles 25 and 37).

Education provide SIMHE services to migrants through preparatory education, language training, career guidance and advice in order to facilitate their access to higher education and promote the identification and recognition of previously acquired qualification. There are around 4,000 users of SIMHE guidance every year.

Access to health services

As mentioned before, the competence for health, social and rescue services moved to the 21 well-being service counties in the beginning of 2023.[22] This transfer of services has contributed to their efficiency, since they are provided by independent, regional authorities, run by democratically elected representatives, receiving their funding from the state. The well-being service counties, in cooperation with municipalities, also provide health care services in schools, including counselling and psychological support for pupils of migratory background, a need especially seen in the case of children coming from Ukraine due to the war.

A third country national is entitled to the same health and social services as nationals as long as they have a valid residence permit and they are registered in a municipality. Therefore, asylum seekers who are still in reception centres waiting for a decision on their application for international protection have access to urgent and necessary healthcare, with the exception of minors and people in need of services relating to pregnancy, childbirth and post-partum care which are entitled to healthcare services on the same grounds as those with a municipality of residence in Finland. Once recognised as refugees and granted a residence permit, adults are also able to claim the same healthcare rights as nationals.[23]

Certain concerns have been raised regarding access of undocumented migrants to healthcare, since well-being service counties are no longer obliged to provide non-urgent services to irregularly residing nationals.[24] However, there is always room for consideration by the medical personnel, especially in the wider Helsinki area where most undocumented migrants are located, and in case of urgent situations medical care should always be provided, especially regarding children and pregnant women.[25] Discussions during the mission highlighted that keeping undocumented migrants away from official state reception services, especially in the case of vulnerable people, may increase the risk of their exploitation especially through THB.

3. Provision of international protection

In November 2023 Finland closed its eastern border for reasons of national security, as almost 1,300 migrants entered the country through this area within a year, compared to very few arrivals in the past years, something which was perceived as an act of instrumentalisation.[26] In July 2024, the government prepared the Act on Temporary Measures to Combat Instrumentalised Migration (Border Security Act),[27] which provided, as a temporary measure, for the restriction of access to international protection in a limited part of Finland's national border and in its immediate vicinity.[28]

The validity of the Border Security Act was extended one year later until 31 December 2026,[29] and recently the Finnish government proposed its further extension until the end of 2028.[30] However, although officially in force, the Border Security Act has not been activated since the situation at the border has been reported as exceptional but “stable”, meaning with practically

[22] Act on Organising Healthcare and Social Welfare Services 612/2021, as amended by Law 616/2021.
[23] Nordic Council of Ministers (ft.2), p.32.
[24] EMN Asylum and Migration Overview (ft.5), p.58 and ECRI Report (ft.16), p. 11.
[25] Finnish Government, Press Release, “Government proposes changes to rights of migrants with illegal status to healthcare services”, 15.5.2025.
[26] See also Report of the fact-finding mission to Finland by the former Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, 2024, p.15.
[27] Finnish Government, Press Release, “Finland enacts legislation to combat instrumentalised migration”16.7.2024.
[28] EMN Asylum and Migration Overview (ft.5), p. 53.
[29]Anna P. Santos, “Finland extends law that restricts asylum rights” in Infomigrants, 4.6.2025.
[30] Ministry of the Interior, Press release “Finnish Government proposes extending validity of Border Security Act”, 3.9.2026.

no[31] or very few illegal border crossings, with only 10 asylum applications reportedly submitted at the eastern border in 2026.

Concerns about the constitutionality of the Border Security Act have been voiced,[32] taking into account its scope both in terms of its content regarding the right to seek and enjoy asylum and protection of human rights (including the principle of non-refoulement, private and family life) and its duration, as an initially temporary measure has been in place for three years.[33] Although the constitutionality of the Act per se has not been brought before national or European courts, cases regarding family reunification from people with dual citizenship are pending before the Finnish Administrative courts and a similar case was introduced to the European Court of Human Rights in March 2025.[34]

In this framework, it has been suggested that the implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum could provide alternative tools for managing a precarious situation such as this one, through the newly established legislation.[35]

Implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and the establishment of the Independent Monitoring Mechanism (IMM)

In view of the official implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum[36] on 12 June 2026, Finland transposed its legislation to harmonise it with the minimum EU standards, following the wider changes envisaged in the 2023 Government Programme to reform Finland's immigration policy in order to make asylum procedures more efficient and avoid abuse of the system.[37] Taking into consideration the extent and multiplicity of the legal changes, the preparation procedure was reportedly characterised as lacking transparency and openness, as CSOs and international organisations had very limited time to submit their comments and proposals.[38]

One good practice identified in the implementation of the EU Pact is the provision of free legal aid and counselling through all stages of the asylum procedure by the public legal offices of the Finnish Immigration Service or private lawyers mostly in the appeals stage. However, it was reported that free legal aid in the administrative procedure is provided in Finland only if the lawyer considers it necessary in relation to each individual measure and free legal counselling is offered only if the asylum seeker asks for it. This compromises the legal certainty of asylum procedures and potentially increases appeals.

Another promising practice introduced through the EU Pact is the establishment of the Independent Monitoring Mechanism (IMM) on the basis of Article 10 (2) of the Screening

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[31] Fundamental Rights Agency, "Migration and Fundamental Rights Bulletin", Section 1.2.1. - 3/2026, 22.10.2026.
[32] Report by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman to Parliament 2026 (available only in Finnish) (ft.15), p.174.
[33] Report of fact-finding mission to Finland (ft. 26), p. 19, Amnesty International, "Finland: Emergency law on migration is a "green light for violence and pushbacks at the border", 10.6.2024 and European Parliament, LIBE Committee, "Temporary Measures to Combat Instrumentalised Migration", 27.1.2025.
[34] *D. and Others v. Finland*, Application no. 16398/24**,** Case communicated to the Government in March 2025 concerning the impact on the applicants, Finnish nationals or residents of Finland who are of Russian origin, of the temporary closure of the land border between Finland and Russia.
[35] UNHCR letter to Ministry of the Interior: Government Proposal to Parliament for amending Section 7 of the Act on Temporary Measures to Combat Instrumentalized Migration (SM007:00/2026), 13 August 2026 and Integration.fi, News item, "EU Pact on Migration and Asylum: changes to Aliens Act and Reception Act enter into force", 12.6.2026.
[36] European Commission, "Pact on Migration and Asylum, A common EU system to manage migration", 11 June 2026 and Integration.fi, "EU Pact on Migration and Asylum: changes to Aliens Act and Reception Act enter into force", 12.6.2026.
[37] EMN Asylum and Migration Overview (ft.5), pp.10-11.
[38] European Union Asylum Agency (EUAA), "Asylum Report 2026, Finland- National developments in 2025" - Input by civil society organisations to the Asylum Report 2026 – Finnish Refugee Advice Centre and UNHCR Observations on the Proposal for the implementation of the acts constituting the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, February 2026.

Regulation,[39] aiming to ensure the protection of fundamental rights during screening and asylum procedures at the border. After internal debate,[40] the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman took over this mechanism as it is already the competent authority for monitoring return procedures,[41] with oversight by the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman is responsible for the observance of fundamental rights (Article 10 (2) (a) Screening Regulation), while the police retain the competence to investigate relevant allegations (Article 10 (2) (b) Screening Regulation). To this end, the necessary financial support has been provided through EU funds, a point of reported concern as long-term funding is necessary to ensure the sustainability of the mechanism.

Asylum applications and processing

Until the end of September 2026, a downward trend in asylum applications has been noted in Finland, with 1,300 first asylum applications submitted, while the Finnish Immigration Service estimates that, in 2026 and 2027, between 1,500 and 2,500 first asylum applications will be submitted each year.[42] One of the reported reasons for the limited number of asylum applications is the closure of the eastern border in Finland, although applications for international protection can be submitted at the other borders and at the Helsinki airport.

It should be noted that the 500 applications submitted after the implementation of the EU Pact on 12 June, are being processed under the new legislation and for this reason, great emphasis was put on clearing the backlog of applications submitted until then with 2,400 decisions made in 2026 and 4,200 in 2025.

In the framework of the 2023 Government Programme, a general shift towards temporariness of the protection has been introduced by shortening the duration of residence permits. As a result, since the beginning of 2025, recognised refugees are granted a three-year residence permit (it used to be four years) with the possibility to extend it for three more years at a time, whereas the residence permit for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection lasts for only one year with a possible extension of two more years at a time.[43] As mentioned before, this can lead to increased uncertainty for people who find it more difficult to integrate in local society since their right to be in the country is continuously under review.[44]

Moreover, issues with the timeliness of the asylum procedure have been brought up during the mission since reportedly the deadlines have not been followed in practice by the Finnish Immigration service due to reported case file bottlenecks, leaving applicants in a legal limbo while creating inconsistency with the work of other national services who are involved in the procedure. Although the main reason for this is the limited resources of the Immigration Service, and the difficulty to adjust to numerous legal changes in a short time, it is important to find viable solutions through established procedures.[45] Nevertheless, according to the authorities, the case backlog has now been cleared and processing times are currently very short, while the Finnish Immigration Service monitors processing times very closely.

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[39] Regulation (EU) 2024/1356 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 introducing the screening of third-country nationals at the external borders and amending Regulations (EC) No 767/2008, (EU) 2017/2226, (EU) 2018/1240 and (EU) 2019/817. See also summary report by DMR of the on-line thematic session on IMMs of the Network of Focal Points on Migration, 30.1.2026.

[40] Parliamentary Ombudsman of Finland, Summary of the annual report 2024, pp.17-18.

[41] Non-discrimination Ombudsman 2025 Annual Report (available only in Finnish), pp. 36-38, underlining the importance of the IMM for the protection of the rights of asylum seekers at the borders and the need for its reinforcement through sustainable funding.

[42] Finnish Immigration Service, Press release, "Assessing the future of immigration: the number of work-based residence permits is expected to grow while applications from students are declining", 29.6.2026.

[43] Finnish Immigration Service, Press release, "The validity periods of international protection permits will be shortened and protection becomes temporary", 2.1.2025.

[44] See also DMR Thematic Paper, Ensuring a human-rights compliant end to refugeehood through integration, naturalisation or voluntary repatriation, 2026, esp. p. 65 ff.

[45] Parliamentary Ombudsman of Finland, Summary of the annual report 2025, pp.35-37.

Provision of temporary protection to war-displaced people from Ukraine

According to information received from the national authorities there were around 51,000 Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection in the country at the end of September 2026. In total, Finland received 96,000 applications since the implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD)[46] in March 2022.[47]

Displaced people from Ukraine were welcomed in Finland and had immediate access to the labour market, education and healthcare services. For the first year they had the option of staying in a reception centre[48] and then be placed in a municipality. Their participation in the labour market was encouraged, and their professional and academic qualifications were recognised through an online system, while they benefited from free access to courses in the Open University and exemption from university fees since December 2024. The employment of beneficiaries of temporary protection has been challenging, mainly due to language barriers.[49]

In preparation for the eventual future end of temporary protection, Finland is considering participating in the Voluntary Return and Recovery Programme Pilot, proposed by the European Commission, which is planned to begin in 2027 aiming to enable the voluntary return and reintegration of temporary protection beneficiaries when possible.[50] Although no specific plan for transitioning to other immigration statuses has been put in place, beneficiaries of temporary protection can apply for any other legal residence permit and so far, 7,900 residence permits based on family ties or employment have been issued. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the majority of the displaced people from Ukraine appear to intend to stay in Finland after the end of temporary protection, applying for another residence permit or asylum.[51]

The positive attitude and solidarity shown to war-displaced people from Ukraine became evident during a visit of the DMR delegation to the Ukrainian Assistance Centre, which was established in 2022 by the Association of Ukrainians in Finland. The Centre was established as a space providing urgent and immediate assistance to Ukrainians in a building provided free of charge by the private construction company YIT. Through its Information Desk more than 4,000 consultations have been provided, including guidance on temporary protection, emotional and psychological support, immigration services and integration support. Additionally, language courses are provided, with the support of the Finnish Red Cross, and Ukrainian school courses are offered to children. The Centre receives around 500 visitors in person every week.

Naturalisation and voluntary returns

Although the integration policies in Finland are predominant, the requirements for naturalisation have been tightened on the basis of the recent legislative amendments. In order to apply for Finnish citizenship, eight years of legal residence in the country are needed, along

[46] Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof.

[47] According to data DMR received from the national authorities. It is also noted that in 2026 the number of temporary protection applications are declining (6,800), while 1,398 negative decisions in total were issued mostly on the ground of previous grant of temporary protection in another EU Member State (according to CJEU judgment in C-753/23, *Krasiliva*), and until 22 September 2026, seven negative decisions were issued on the grounds that the person did not meet military service obligations (according to Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2026/1912 of 30 July 2026 extending the temporary protection). Since the application of temporary protection (2022) three negative decisions have been made on the grounds of security and public order.

[48] At the moment there are 34 reception centres, 24 for adults and 10 for minors, hosting around 9.000 people (80% of which are beneficiaries of temporary protection). Due to the low number of newcomers in general, it is planned that only 20 reception centres will continue their function.

[49] Anastasia Koptsyukh and Arseniy Svynarenko, "Temporary Protection for Ukrainians in Finland: present situation and outlook. Results of the survey", Ministry of the Interior Helsinki, 2025, pp.51, 57.

[50] European Commission, "Commission proposes to extend temporary protection of people fleeing Ukraine for an additional year", 26.6.2026.

[51] A. Koptsyukh and A. Svynarenko (ft.49), pp.64-66.

with adequate financial resources and integrity checks. Moreover, the imposition of a citizenship test in Finnish and/or Swedish in a digital form has been announced for 2027.[52] More favourable time requirements are in place for example for stateless people,[53] but there is an extensive backlog in citizenship applications and as a result it can take years to receive a decision on citizenship. However, citizenship applications of beneficiaries of international protection and stateless applicants are considered urgently.

Returns, on the other hand, are being encouraged through the 2023 Government Programme. In 2026, 191 voluntary returns were supported through IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVVR) programme to 39 different countries (mainly Syria, Türkiye and Iraq). All returnees received reintegration support in cash before leaving Finland and additional reintegration services are provided for one year after the return by IOM staff present in the country, in order to ensure sustainable reintegration, including support for mental health issues.

4. Particularly vulnerable migrants and refugees

In general, no significant issues regarding vulnerable[54] migrants and refugees in Finland were reported. The EU Pact has introduced minimum protection standards which are transposed in the national legislation and reportedly, a strong vulnerability screening is in place at the borders, performed by border guards. However, more clear procedures and the regular training of police and officers at reception centres would provide more visibility to vulnerable groups.[55]

Unaccompanied minors

The number of unaccompanied minors seeking international protection (UAMs) in Finland is relatively low. In 2025, there were 156 registered UAMs and 130 by September 2026, adding to 186 UAMs under temporary protection.[56] As soon as an UAM is identified, a temporary representative is appointed to accompany the minor through the screening and registration procedure, and a permanent representative should be appointed within 15 days. UAMs have the right to free legal aid and counselling for the whole asylum procedure.

UAMs in Finland receive support and aftercare until the age of 23, a good practice which is implemented within a multi-level governance framework of municipalities and regional counties and based on the individualised integration plan of the minor. Any kind of healthcare service but also language training and education needs are registered in the individualised integration plan, reflecting the minor's wishes and aspirations, aiming to smooth their transition to independent living in Finland.[57]

However, after the beginning of the EU Pact implementation, returns of UAMs who arrive in Finland on secondary movements, have begun under the new Asylum and Migration Management Regulation (AMMR).[58] Since this procedure is recent, there are no clear indications of how the best interests of the child have been assessed or whether they have

[52] Section 13 Citizenship Act (359/2003, amendments up to 552/2026 included) and EMN Asylum and Migration Overview (ft.5), p.11.
[53] For stateless people, five years of legal residence is required in order to apply for naturalisation, and they also benefit from an expedited procedure (Sections 20 and 20a of Citizenship Act (359/2003, amendments up to 552/2026 included)).
[54] The Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe (2021-2025), defined vulnerable persons in the context of migration and asylum as: "persons found to have special needs after individual evaluation of their situation and [who] are entitled to call on States' obligation to provide special protection and assistance", see DMR Thematic Paper, Vulnerability of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees: Council of Europe and European Union standards, 2025, p. 15 ff.
[55] Report by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman to Parliament 2026 (available only in Finnish) (ft.15), pp. 202-203.
[56] EMN Asylum and Migration Overview (ft.5), p.42.
[57] Integration.fi, "Aftercare according to the Integration Act is available until the age of 23".
[58] Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on asylum and migration management, amending Regulations (EU) 2021/1147 and (EU) 2021/1060 and repealing Regulation (EU) No 604/2013.

been given primary consideration, while detention for children in immigration procedures is still possible, although very rarely used in practice. Reportedly this has resulted in difficulties for administrative authorities and child protection services, since there have been instances where minors did not have the opportunity to be heard, especially during the first month of the EU Pact implementation.

Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) and labour exploitation

The issues of THB and labour exploitation are at the forefront of national policies in Finland, as third-country nationals moving to the country for reasons of work or study occasionally end up as victims. Faced with difficult work conditions, high cost of living and problems regarding access to services, some become vulnerable to exploitation in order to avoid losing their residence permit.

In the case of asylum seekers, the reception services in Finland are active in the identification and screening of victims of THB and their referral to the national assistance system. However, despite the existence of a variety of residence permits available, the threshold for receiving a special residence permit as a victim of THB is very high[59] and only three such permits have been granted in the last year. At the same time, there is a possibility to extend the residence permit for a victim of labour exploitation for one more year, in order to provide a safety net and encourage them to make formal complaints, but not many people are aware of this, resulting in the establishment of an accepted, low level but still present labour exploitation for the third-country nationals.

For this reason, the government has put in place a national policy against labour exploitation, which includes a range of 33 different measures, aiming to improve legislation in this field and cooperation between national authorities.[60] In parallel, penalties have been adopted for employers and checks of residence permits have been established in order to detect exploitation.

Statelessness

Compared to the number of asylum applications in Finland, the number of stateless people is relatively high, with 1,326 stateless people registered in 2024. Although Finland has acceded both to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and the European Convention on Nationality (ETS No 166), it does not have a formal statelessness determination procedure. Nevertheless, it has a solid legislation to protect stateless people who have been in the country for many years.[61]

A good practice identified in this area is the effective nationality determination procedure to which babies at risk of statelessness born in Finland must be referred. This automatic use of the nationality determination procedure, that the law provides for, prevents statelessness of children upon birth.[62]

Refugee resettlement

Finland has contributed, in cooperation with UNHCR, to the resettlement of quota refugees from asylum countries since the1970s.

Each year, when the state budget is approved, the Parliament decides on the number of quota refugees that Finland will take, and the government decides on the territorial allocation of the refugee quota specifying the nationalities and regions from which they will be selected. Then, the Finnish Immigration Service is responsible for the implementation of this decision and selects the refugees to be admitted within the quota on the basis of documentation and

[59] Report by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman to Parliament 2026 (available only in Finnish) (ft.15), p. 236.
[60] European Commission, "Finland: Government tackles labour exploitation", 28.3.2024.
[61] Michel Rouleau-Dick, "The Finnish reform of the Nationality Act from a statelessness perspective: the good, the bad and the ugly", European Network on Statelessness, 18.4.2024.
[62] According to Section 9 of the Citizenship Act and also see, OSCE-UNHCR, "Opening Doors for Children: Prevention of Childhood Statelessness - Good Practices in the OSCE Area", pp.55-58.

selection missions. IOM also provides pre-departure orientation to the selected refugees for three days before arriving in Finland, providing information on the Finnish society, their rights and obligations.

Upon arrival, quota refugees are directly allocated in municipalities, which take the responsibility of their integration. Calculated compensation is paid by the government to municipalities and well-being service counties to support refugee reception and services that promote integration. Recent cuts in state funding to municipalities and well-being service counties for these duties have so far not affected the municipalities' eagerness to offer placements to refugees. Notwithstanding, it was noted that while in 2022 1,500 refugees were included in Finland's refugee resettlement plan, for 2026 this number is set at 500.

Particular emphasis is placed on the most vulnerable groups, women and children, persons with disabilities, gender and sexual minorities and other persons in particularly vulnerable situations. The 2026 resettlement plan includes 150 Afghan and 100 Syrian refugees in Türkiye, 120 Congolese refugees in Rwanda, 30 refugees evacuated from Libya to Rwanda via the Emergency Transit Mechanism, 50 Venezuelan refugees in Peru and an unallocated quota of 50 places which are dedicated to urgent and emergency cases without restriction as to region or nationality.

Conclusion

Throughout the years, Finland has managed to put in place strong structures and institutions that protect human rights, especially in the area of migration and asylum. The national integration policy is perceived as a collaborative task, with the individual at its centre, aspiring to provide the necessary information, tools and skills for comprehensive inclusion of individuals and families and the reinforcement of the labour market. Three years after the closure of the eastern border and with the implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum ongoing, there is an overall stability in the asylum procedures and special provisions are made for vulnerable groups, with particular attention to UAMs and quota refugees.

Nevertheless, at a time of heightened migratory movements towards European countries, instigated by armed conflicts in neighbouring areas, and threats to national security, challenges do exist for Finland, a country at the external border of the European Union. Issues such as the continuous changes in national legislation[63], cutbacks in funding both of CSOs and national authorities[64] and the resulting reduction of available information, especially for vulnerable people[65] underpin and affect the implementation of all national policies, including the many good practices which are in place.

The Council of Europe and Finland have established a long-lasting and growing partnership which could be reinforced through possible further cooperation in areas such as the following:

- Refugees and displaced people may not always have access to documentation of their academic and professional qualifications, which makes it more difficult to pursue higher education or enter skilled employment. Although Finland has established procedures for the recognition of qualifications, the European Qualification Passport for Refugees (EQPR),[66] which is based on the Council of Europe Lisbon Recognition Convention, also ratified by Finland could reinforce these procedures, providing a clearer and more easily accessible path.

[63] EUAA Asylum Report 2026, Finland (ft.38) and Report by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman to Parliament 2026 (ft.15) (available only in Finnish), p.168.
[64] Benjamin Bathke, "'Worried and desperate' – How Finland's restrictive policies affect migrants and NGOs" in InfoMigrants, 09.10.2025
[65] For example, it was pointed out that victims of THB often are not aware of the possibility to be granted a special one-year residence permit.
[66] See also Recommendation CM/Rec (2025)6 of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers to member States on qualifications and linguistic competences of refugees in Europe.

- As Finland pays particular attention to the integration process of migrants and refugees, it has already been engaged at different levels with the Council of Europe Intercultural Cities (ICC) Programme, an established network of more than 160 cities, regions and local authorities which aims to enhance diversity through the exchange of practical experiences and support each other in creating local and inclusive communities. From September 2022 until March 2025, seven municipalities in Finland (Hämeenlinna, Kuopio, Oulu, Tampere, Turku, Vaasa and Vantaa) participated in the Council of Europe / European Union joint project "Building an inclusive integration approach in Finland" which supported municipalities in developing intercultural integration policies based on the Finnish Good Relations concept and the Council of Europe Intercultural Integration Model. It should be noted that two of these municipalities, Hämeenlinna and Kuopio, have since joined the ICC programme. Further participation of more municipalities in the ICC programme could be encouraged, promoting Finland's good practices on integration, implemented by the municipal and regional services.

- The Council of Europe Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) Programme offers courses on the protection of human rights in different areas, including the protection of migrants and refugees and vulnerable groups. Although intended for legal practitioners, public officials who would like to acquire more targeted knowledge and expertise on human rights issues can also benefit from the HELP courses, which could be translated into the Finnish language.

- Lastly, one of the priorities within the Council of Europe is to ensure the effective enjoyment of human rights by the most vulnerable, including those faced with statelessness issues. In this framework, the work of the European Committee on Legal Co-operation in 2024 - 2026 focused on issues of statelessness of children and their access to nationality, aiming to develop child-friendly administrative procedures. A possible cooperation with Finland, on the basis of the already developed good practice in this area could be mutually beneficial, as Finland could provide insights into its practical implementation and possible challenges.