

KARELIAN INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN FINLAND

# **Finland country report**

## **Government responses to increased influx of protection seekers in 2015/16 and 2022/23**

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Abstract: This country report describes asylum, immigration and integration governance and policy changes from 2015-June 2023 in Finland. It particularly focus on developments in the periods of high influxes of protection seekers to Europe in 2015/16 and 2022/23.

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# 1 Welfare regime, immigration history and political situation

## 1.1 Welfare regime and immigration history

Finland has traditionally been a country of emigration and it became a net receiver of immigrants only in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1990, the share of foreign citizens living in the country was only 0.53% (26,000) and the foreign-born share was 1.3% (65,000). Especially in the 2000s, however, the rate of internationalisation has been rapid: by 2022, the share of foreign citizens rose to 5.8% (324,000) and the foreign-born population to 8.6% (477,000). (Statistics Finland 2023.)

Finland joined the Refugee Convention and Protocol in 1968 and has been a long-term contributor to the budget of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The first group of refugees to arrive in Finland was from Chile in the early 1970s. The first quota refugees, selected by the UNHCR, arrived in 1979 from Vietnam. The arrival of the first larger group of protection seekers in the early 1990s, the Somalis, marked an important change in the balance of incoming and outgoing migration. (Heikkilä 2017.)

The annual number of protection seekers arriving in Finland before the “European refugee crisis” of 2015/16 varied between 3000 to 4000. In fact, the rise in the foreign-background population in Finland is more due to immigration from the former Soviet Union, Russia, and Estonia, for example, than refugee migration. In this respect, Finland differs greatly from its western neighbour Sweden, which has been a much more attractive country of destination for humanitarian migration. Despite the low numbers of incoming protection seekers, the issue of managing migration was an important topic for policy discussions already before the “crisis”.

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, 2–4; see also Martikainen et al. 2012). In Esping-Andersen’s classification (1990), Finland belongs to the social democratic welfare system type. 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 a wide range of benefits and services. High employment levels, of both men and women, are required to finance the rather high standard of living typical for this region (Esping-Andersen 1990; see also Timonen 2003).

Finland has been a member of the European Union (EU) since 1995, so its laws are impacted by European legislation. Relevant directives include, for example *EU Directive 2013/32/EU (26 June 2013) on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection*, *EU Directive 2013/33/EU (26 June 2013) laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection*, *EU Directive 2003/109/EC (25 November 2003) concerning the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents*, and *Directive 2011/95/EU (13 December 2011) on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted*.

The Finnish constitution stipulates that everyone is equal before the law. It reads: “No one shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from other persons on the ground of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability, or other reason that concerns his or her person.” (Finlex translations 2023.) The requirement of equality is not only limited to persons with Finnish citizenship, so as a guiding principle, foreign citizens, be they protection seekers or other types of migrants, should also be treated equally when they live in Finland.

Matters pertaining to immigration and the provision of international protection are detailed in the *Aliens Act*, which is in line with the relevant EU-level directives and regulations e.g., on the EU free movement of persons and refugee and asylum policies (Finlex 2023a). Since its adoption in 2004, it has been amended more than 100 times, mainly for reasons related to new EU regulation, government measures, and amendments to other related laws that have an impact on the Act (Alitalo et al. 2023). In addition, the *Act on the Reception of Persons Applying for International Protection and on the Identification of and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings* lays down the practical implementation of the process of arranging international protection for those seeking protection (Finlex 2023b).

The *Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration* aims to make it easier for immigrants to play an active role in the Finnish society, promote gender equality, and ensure non-discrimination and positive interaction between different population groups living in Finland (Finlex 2023c). In addition, many other laws that regulate different welfare services and municipal residence, for example, also apply to foreign citizens living in Finland, as the social welfare system is not based on citizenship, but legal residence in the country.

## 1.2 Political situation and main policy processes in 2015/16

From June 2011 to May 2015, Finland was governed by the so-called “Rainbow government” led by the conservative National Coalition Party’s Prime Ministers Jyrki Katainen (2011–2014) and Alexander Stubb (2014–2015). The majority government included parties from across the political map: the Social Democrats, the right-leaning Swedish People’s Party, The Greens, and the Christian Democrats. Even though the number of arrivals of protection seekers to Europe began to rise already in 2014, this was hardly visible in Finland. The government adopted the *Future of Migration 2020 Strategy* (2013) which emphasised managed migration and saw migration as a natural part of globalisation and a way to tackle the worsening dependency ratio of an ageing nation. The strategy was to meet the possibilities and challenges offered by international migration through three guiding principles: Finland is safely open, Everyone will find their place in Finland, and Diversity is part of our everyday life. (Government of Finland 2013.)

The Rainbow government changed the *Aliens Act* (Finlex 2023a) 28 times and 12 of the amendments were made at the end of the government term in Spring 2015, when the “crisis” was already well underway (for examples, see section 5.1 Changes in 2015/16). The number of protection seekers arriving in Finland averaged around 340/month during the first four months of 2015, being just over 100 more per month than in the previous year.

The real rise in the number of protection seekers, mainly originating from Iraq, coincided with the start of a new centre-right government led by Juha Sipilä from the agrarian Centre Party in May 2015. The majority government also had ministers from the National Coalition Party and the populist, right-wing Finns party, which was in government for the first time. The new government’s programme was published on 29 May 2015. It emphasised managed migration

and efficient official procedures both in the processing of applications and in return-related matters and the prevention of possible abuses of the migration process. (EMN 2017.)

As the number of protection seekers arriving in Finland continued to rise during the summer months and peaked at nearly 11,000 in September, the government began negotiations for tightening policies that would make Finland seem a less attractive destination. A total of 32,477 individuals applied for asylum in Finland in 2015 (Migri 2023a). While this only signifies 2.6% of all first-time applications filed in the EU Member States in 2015, in comparison to what the Finnish people were accustomed to, the rise in numbers was highly significant. In fact, the rise of +822 percent in Finland from 2014 was the highest experienced by any EU member state (Eurostat 2016).

As a result, the Finns Party put pressure on the other parties to introduce new immigration restrictions, such as abolishing residence permits based on humanitarian protection and tightening the family reunification criteria (Wahlbeck 2018; Pirjatanniemi et al 2021). Many of these anti-immigration policies can be traced back to the so-called *Aloof Election Manifesto* (Nuiva vaalimanifesti), an election platform published by the radical wing of the Finns Party for national parliament elections in 2011. It combined cultural nativism, secularism, and economic neoliberalism with the fear of Islam and multiculturalism. (Nykänen 2016.)

Even though many Finnish civil society actors were willing to help protection seekers by opening their homes, organising donations and language courses, for example (Pirkkalainen 2022, see also Näre & Jokela 2023), there was also considerable opposition. Human rights activists arranged *Refugees welcome* demonstrations while the newly formed, nationalistic *Soldiers of Odin* patrolled the streets to “protect Finns from attacks by invaders” (Maasilta & Nikunen 2018).

### 1.3 Political situation and main policy processes in 2022/23

The Social Democratic Party gained most seats in the parliament in the elections of 2019 and their party leader Antti Rinne formed a majority coalition government with The Centre Party, The Greens, The Swedish People’s Party, and the Left-wing Alliance. When Russia launched its military attack on Ukraine in February 2022, Finland was led by the social democratic Prime Minister Sanna Marin as Prime Minister Rinne had resigned in December 2019. Within a year after the start of the war, this government changed the course of Finland’s foreign policy from a long-term position of neutrality to NATO membership. It also steered Finland through the Covid-19 crisis.

The Government Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin (2019) included several policy goals related to asylum seekers and refugees. For example, it promised to continue Nordic cooperation by promoting common policy lines and practices, promote the formulation of common European solutions for asylum and refugee policy that respect human rights, increase the number of quota refugees to a minimum of 850 in 2020<sup>1</sup>, and ensure a smooth asylum process without undue delays in an individual procedure that guarantees legal protection with an aim to process applications within six months. (Government of Finland 2019.)

The public reaction to the arrival of Ukrainians fleeing the war was more unitarily positive than during 2015/16. In 2022, Ukrainian protection seekers were welcomed with open arms

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<sup>1</sup> During the years 2001–2019, the number of refugees within the refugee quota was 750 per year. In 2020, the number was 850, in 2021: 1,050, in 2022: 1,500, and in 2023: 1,050. (Migri 2023b)



and the experience of injustice in the face of the attack resulted in substantial donations to humanitarian organisations. Active individuals around the country started their own humanitarian efforts in bringing Ukrainians to safety and transporting aid. For example, a total of €53 million was donated to charities fundraising for Ukraine during the first seven weeks of the war (YLE 2022).

After the *Council of the European Union* decided to activate Directive 2001/55/EC and offer temporary protection to displaced persons from Ukraine on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 (European Council 2022), the Finnish government decided to implement the directive using the widest possible interpretation. Temporary protection would be offered to 1) Ukrainian citizens and their families who fled the country on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, or slightly before, 2) Ukrainian citizens and their families already residing in Finland, and 3) stateless persons and third-country nationals who were legally resident in Ukraine and could not safely return to their country or region of origin<sup>2</sup>. (Finlex 2022.)

After the parliament elections in April 2023, a new majority right-wing coalition government took office in June 2023 with the National Coalition Party's Petteri Orpo as the Prime Minister with the second biggest partner the populist right-wing Finns Party, along with the Swedish People's Party and the Christian Democrats. The government programme includes plans to significantly tighten Finland's immigration legislation, reduce the number of quota refugees to 500, speed up the process of voluntary return, and lower the costs of immigration by various means, including lowering the financial benefits given to protection seekers. Some of the proposed changes target protection seekers especially while others apply to all foreign nationals. For example, those residing in Finland with a work-based residence permit will have to leave the country in the event of unemployment if they do not find a new job within three months. (Government of Finland 2023a.)

While these proposed policies are not primarily targeted at temporary protection holders from Ukraine, the restrictions and cuts on subsidies may also have an impact on them. However, the new government programme promises to continue supporting Ukraine and Ukrainians in Finland:

“An action plan will be drawn up to help people who have fled Ukraine, to support their participation in Finnish society and to help them enter the labour market. As part of the action plan, the employment of Ukrainians will be promoted by increasing workplace education and training, the identification and recognition of qualifications, continuing education, license card training as well as by increasing career coaching and online job search training in Ukrainian” (Government of Finland 2023a).

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<sup>2</sup> This decision was amended on September 7th, 2023, by the Government of PM Petteri Orpo. After that date, temporary protection will not be granted to third-country nationals legally residing in Ukraine. <https://intermin.fi/en/-/changes-to-temporary-protection-for-third-country-nationals-who-have-fled-ukraine>

## 2 Asylum flows to Finland, 2012–July 2023

Like other European countries, the influx of protection seekers to Finland was considerable in 2015 and 2022, but remained at a relatively low level in other years. In addition, there is demographic variation within cohorts from different sending countries. Here we present an empirical background on these asylum flows and permits, which provide context to the government response to the situation in 2015/16 and 2022/23, respectively.

### 2.1 Arrivals and permits 2012–July 2023

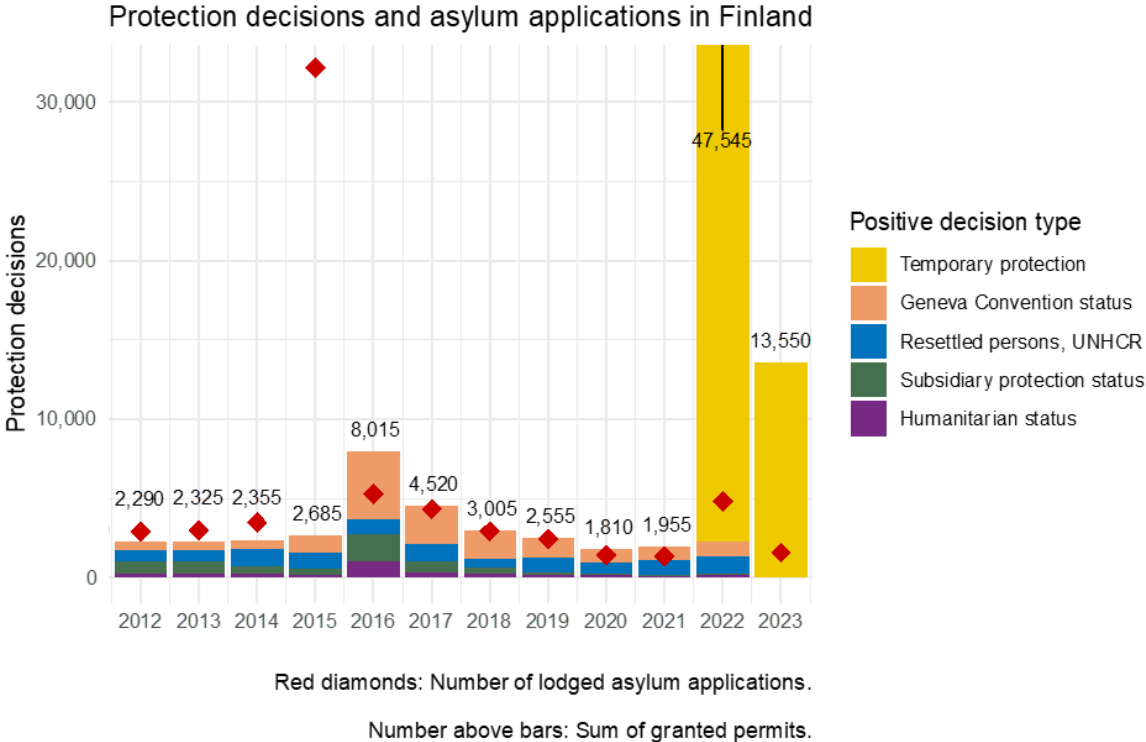
Like the other Northern European countries, the flows of protection seekers to Finland are heavily affected by the two major displacement events during 2015/16 and 2022/23. Before 2015, the number of residence permits granted to protection seekers was stable at around 2000 per year, and the number of asylum requests was just above this number (ref Figure 1). More than 30,000 arrived in 2015, dropping to 5000 the following year and sloping off towards the pandemic lockdown years of 2020 and 2021, when less than 1500 applications were filed per year. Figure 1 shows the total number of asylum applications (red diamonds) and permits for persons granted protection 2012–2023. Note that residence permits may be granted one or several years after application.

#### Data on asylum flows

Data on asylum flows are sourced from Eurostat Asylum Statistics. These data are based on **administrative sources**, supplied to Eurostat by statistical authorities, interior ministries or related immigration agencies. The data presented in this chapter is a combination of four different datasets provided by Eurostat: data on temporary protection, asylum applications, resettlement refugees, and decisions on asylum applications.

Source: Eurostat 2023a Information on data - Migration and asylum - Eurostat (europa.eu)

Figure 1: Persons granted protection in Finland by protection decision vs. lodged asylum applications 2012–2023.



Data: Eurostat 2023b (migr\_asydcfsta, migr\_asytprm, tps00195, migr\_asyappctza).

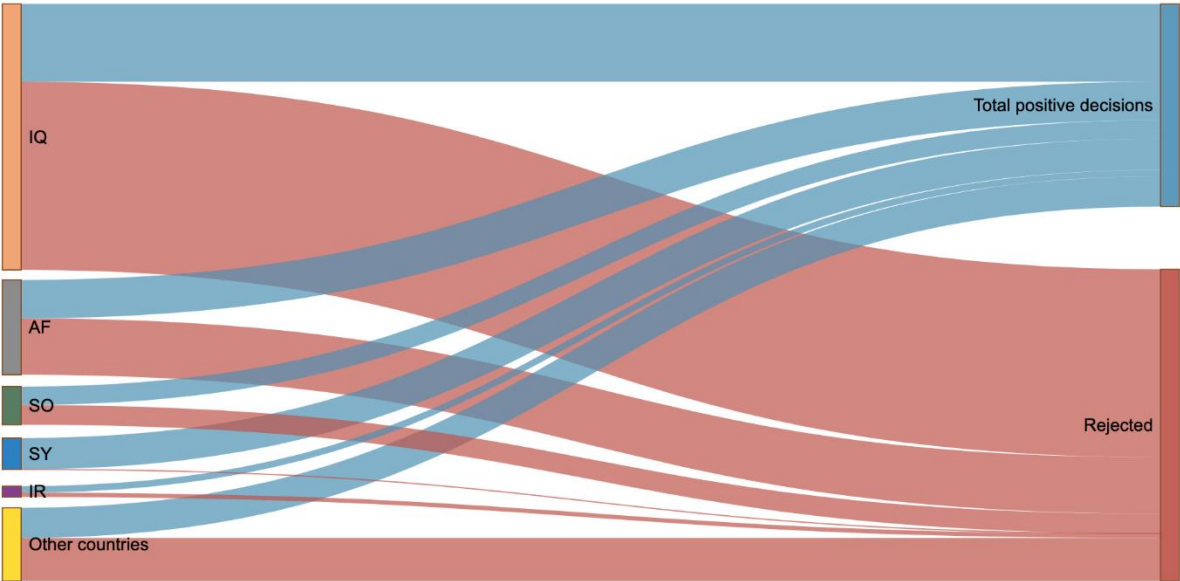
With the large influx of displaced persons following the war in Ukraine, asylum arrivals rose to 47,500 in 2022, and then an additional 13,500 in 2023, as of August. The residence permits given in the preceding decade were mostly Refugee Convention status (termed the Geneva Convention), of which a large share were asylum seekers from Iraq, while almost 2/3 of Syrians were resettlement, or so-called quota refugees. Subsidiary protection and humanitarian status were in large part given to asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, many UNHCR resettlement refugees have been granted protection in Finland (27% of permits in the decade before 2022). Half of them were from Syria. Over time, men have been the large majority of the protection seekers in Finland. Before 2022, the share of women among those granted protection has not varied much: Except for a female proportion of protection seekers at 22% in 2016, it has fluctuated by some percentage points around 30% in the decade preceding 2022, before spiking at 61% in 2022.

## 2.2 Situation in 2015/16

In 2015, the number of asylum seekers to the EU soared to 1.25 million, up from 560,000 the year before. Another 1.2 million arrived in 2016. In both years, half of the ~1.2 million were Syrians, Afghans, and Iraqis (Eurostat 2016). From 2014 to 2015, asylum arrivals to Finland increased almost tenfold, from a few thousand in 2014 to more than 30,000 in 2015 (Figure 1, red diamonds, above). This was the largest increase in the EU (ibid). As 1756 applicants (~5% of all applicants in 2015/16) arrived in Finland from Russia, Russia’s decision to “open” its borders for asylum seekers heading towards the EU became an even greater political concern in Finland than the extensive migration through Sweden (Virkkunen, Piipponen 2021; Virkkunen et al. 2024).

Finland had a higher ratio of arrivals (5876 applicants per million inhabitants) than the EU average (2470), and was the fourth largest receiving country relative to population in 2015 (Eurostat 2016). However, the rejection rate was far higher than in Scandinavia, visible in the large number of applications compared to positive decisions (Fig. 2). Like the other three Nordic countries, Finland experienced a drop in arrivals from 2015 to 2016, a drop only eclipsed by Hungary. The dominant origin countries in this period were Iraq (52%), Afghanistan (19%), and Somalia (8%), unlike in the Scandinavian countries, where Syrians far outnumbered Iraqis.

Figure 2: Relative shares of asylum seekers from the five largest sending countries to Finland, by asylum grants (blue) and rejections (red) in the period 2015–2017.



Data: Eurostat 2023b (migr\_asydcfsta, migr\_asytpfm, tps00195, migr\_asyappctza).

The overall approval rate in this period was 39%, somewhat lower than in the Scandinavian countries, where 61–67% were granted protection. Similar to Scandinavia, Syrians and Eritreans had very high approval rates – but unlike in Scandinavia, none of them were rejected in 2015–17, at a 100% approval rate. Approval rates were lower for applicants from Iraq (29%), Afghanistan (41%) and Somalia (48%). Iran was the fifth largest sending country, with an approval rate of 60%. One of the largest groups seeking asylum in this period were Albanians, but all 470 of them were categorically denied protection.

There were apparent differences in the demographic composition of those who were denied and granted asylum in this period. Of the positive decisions in 2015–2017, 34% were minors and 30% of adults were women, but among the rejected asylum seekers, 17% were minors and 14% of adults were women. A significant number of young asylum seekers were unaccompanied and separated children (UASC): 2500 in 2015 (8% of arrivals), and 370 in 2016 (7% of arrivals). The annual arrivals of UASC was at a steady 100–200 in the years before 2015 and after 2016 (Eurostat 2023b).

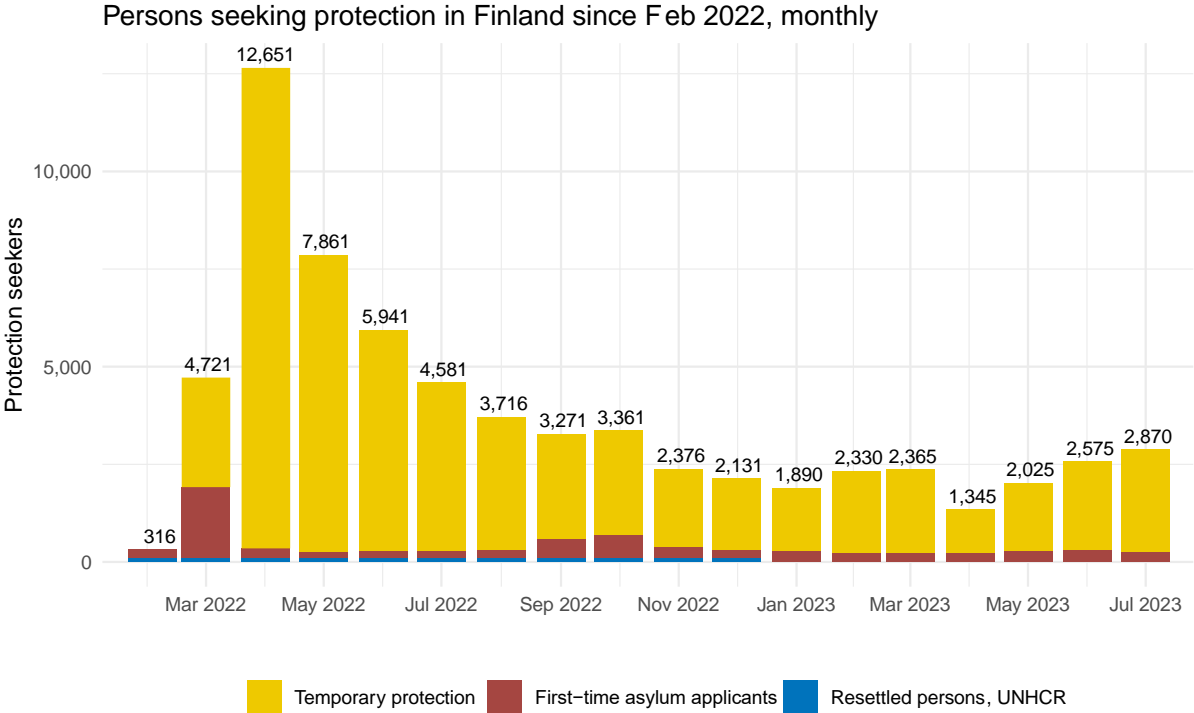
Among refugees granted protection in 2015–2017, the dependency ratio, defined as the ratio between young and old divided by the working age population, was low for Eritreans (7%) and Somalis (10%), meaning that 93% and 90% were of working age, respectively. Due to large numbers of children under 14 years of age, refugees granted protection from other dominant sending countries had a lower share of working-age refugees: the dependency rates of Syrians (39%), Afghans (21%) and Iraqis (28%). This pattern resembled that of the

Scandinavian countries, except for Somalis, who have a far higher dependency ratio in e.g. Sweden.

### 2.3 Situation in 2022/23

More than 47,500 individuals were granted protection in Finland in 2022, of which 44,900 were Ukrainians, following the decision by the EU to trigger the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) in March 2022 (Figure 1, above). This was not only a substantial inflow of refugees, but it immediately made Ukrainians the largest group of protection holders in the 15-year period ending in 2022. Regarding regular asylum applications (excluding TPD decisions), 5827 asylum seekers applied for protection in Finland in 2022. This number includes 1805 Ukrainians as well as Russians, who with 1172 applications were the second largest national group. This flow was slightly larger in 2016, and far larger in 2015 (red diamonds, Figure 1, see also Migri 2023a).

Figure 3: Asylum applicants, persons granted temporary protection after the invasion of Ukraine, and resettled persons in Finland since Feb 2022.



Numbers above bars: Sum of protection seekers each month.

Data: Eurostat 2023b (migr\_asyappctzm, migr\_asytpfm, tps00195). Note: Data on resettlement refugees is only available for 2022.

Arrivals of protection seekers have stabilised around 2000 a month in 2023, mostly being displaced persons from Ukraine. About 29% of Ukrainian TPD holders are minors, and 67% of adults are women. The dependency ratio of Ukrainians is 35%, which means that a smaller share is of working age than in the cohorts from major sending countries in 2015–2017, except for Syrians (39%). Though this is mostly due to the many children (12,800 under 14 years compared to 2500 over 64 years), the share of elderly adults is higher than in the cohorts in 2015/16.

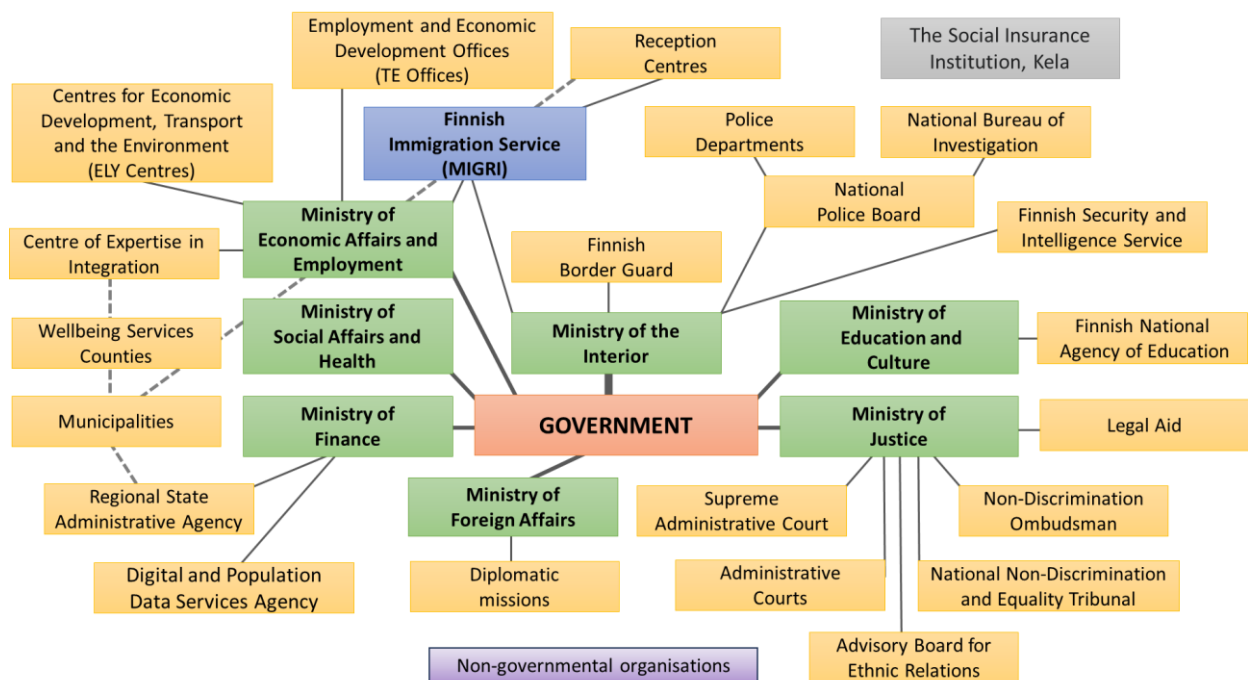
The Finnish authorities track the number of temporary protection holders who leave the country and produce monthly estimates on currently residing protection holders. For some countries, many Ukrainians have moved on since they obtained a temporary residence permit. According to these stocks data, which may be biased or incorrect, more than 60,000 displaced persons from Ukraine resided in Finland as of August 2023, up from 47,000 at the start of the year (Eurostat 2023b). They holders now comprise 1% of the Finnish population, just surpassing the EU average (0,9%). Already before the war, Ukrainians were an important immigrant group in Finland. The highest number of individuals applying for work-based residence permits were of Ukrainian nationality: during 2018/21, 10,300 residence permits for work were granted to Ukrainians, of whom many engaged in regular seasonal employment in Finland (Migri 2023a).

### 3 Governance and multilevel responsibilities

#### 3.1 National responsibilities and actors

The organisation of Finland’s immigration and integration policy is very complex as it is arranged in a cross-administrative manner. The structure of migration administration in Finland with the key ministries and other actors is presented below.

Figure 4: Structure of migration administration in Finland. Source: Elaborated from a table in EMN 2023: Annual Report on Migration and Asylum, Finland 2022.



**The Finnish Government** directs migration policy and its administration following the targets set in the government programme and the approved policies. There are two ministerial working groups that deal with issues related to immigration. **The Ministerial Working Group on Internal Security and Strengthening the Rule of Law** discusses matters relating to the development of judicial administration, prevention of exclusion, prevention of over-indebtedness, and realisation of fundamental rights, as well as matters of internal security and asylum and refugee policy. **The Ministerial Working Group on Promoting Employment** guides and directs the implementation of the government programme in the areas of employment promotion, labour market issues and employment legislation, and labour migration and integration. (EMN 2023.)

The responsibility of formulating Finland’s migration policy in practice and for overall legislation on migration and citizenship belongs to the **Ministry of the Interior** and its **Migration Department**. The Ministry guides and develops the administration of migration and coordinates the related issues between different branches of government. It is also responsible for the performance management and supervision of the **Finnish Immigration Service (Migri)**. Migri was established in 2007 when the Directorate of Immigration of the Ministry of the Interior was restructured. With several units and tasks related to the production of information, processing applications, and making decisions in matters of immigration, asylum, refugee status, and citizenship, Migri is one of the main implementing

authorities in migration affairs. It also runs the reception system of Finland and agrees with municipalities, municipal federations, organisations, and foundations on the organisation of reception services and the reimbursement of the resulting costs. (Intermin 2023a.)

**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 2023c). The Ministry and its regional offices also deal with the immigration of workers, students, trainees, and researchers, as well as with the legislation related to the integration of immigrants. It also hosts **The Centre of Expertise in Integration** which produces and disseminates information on integration to decision-makers, authorities and experts involved in integration. By monitoring the progress of integration and the state of the immigrant population through its databases and employment reports, the Centre supports the government's decision-making and steering tasks. Every four years, it produces an overall review of integration. The Centre also organises webinars, produces and distributes information material for authorities working with immigrants, coordinates the Integration Partnership Programme and maintains the Partnership Platform, and is responsible for the *Welcome to Finland* guide for new arrivals. Their social media accounts and their home page <https://kotoutuminen.fi/integration.fi> are some of the main public platforms of the Centre. (EMN 2023.)

**The Ministry of Foreign Affairs** and Finland's representations abroad are responsible for Finland's visa policy. Some Finnish Embassies abroad serve as contact points for those wishing move to Finland via the family reunification route, because the application must be submitted abroad. The **Ministry of Justice** is responsible for legislation relating to legal aid, and the **administrative courts** and the **Supreme Administrative Court** are the appellate authorities in asylum matters. Public **Legal Aid** offices offer legal counsel to asylum seekers. The **Non-Discrimination Ombudsman** is responsible for promoting equality and tackling discrimination. The Ombudsman is an autonomous and independent authority. (EMN 2023.)

**The National Police Board** plans, leads, develops, and supervises practical police operations carried out at police departments. Until 2017, The **Police of Finland** under the Ministry of the Interior dealt with matters related to the extension of residence permits and the residence of EU citizens. It now monitors compliance with the *Aliens Act* and serves decisions to protection seekers. Together with the **Finnish Border Guard**, The Police of Finland monitors entry into and departure from Finland, checks passports and, if necessary, makes decisions on visas and denial of admittance or stay at the border. Both organisations also receive asylum applications. (EMN 2023.)

Additionally, the **Finnish National Agency for Education**, which operates under **The Ministry of Education**, is responsible for matters relating to immigrant education and training, and for recognising the qualifications of foreign nationals, and the **Ministry of Social Affairs and Health** is responsible for promoting immigrants' health and well-being, and issues relating to immigrants' means of support. (EMN 2023.)

After asylum seekers receive a positive decision on their claim and, therefore, a residence permit, they can become residents of a home municipality. For displaced persons from Ukraine with a temporary protection status, this opportunity is available after staying in Finland for one year. The home municipality status is granted upon application by the **Digital and Population Data Services Agency** which registers and compiles data on the population on behalf of the state. (DVV 2023.)

**KELA, The National Social Insurance Institution**, an independent institution supervised by the Finnish Parliament, is in charge of paying a number of social benefits to citizens and



permanent residents in Finland. These include, for example, financial assistance to families with children, students, people of working age and pensioners, as well as benefits in the event of illness, incapacity, and functional impairment. To access KELA benefits, immigrants with a residence permit, and temporary protection holders after one year of residence, must apply to KELA for a decision determining whether their move to Finland and residence in Finland is to be considered permanent. (KELA 2023a, see also Homanen & Alastalo 2015.)

## 3.2 Regional and local government responsibilities

While the Ministries formulate, develop and guide migration and integration policies in Finland, the regional representations of the state, **Centres for Economic Development, Transport, and the Environment (ELY Centres)**, and municipalities are central in the promotion of integration, reception of refugees, labour immigration, and good population relations. **The 15 ELY Centres** are responsible for the regional coordination and development of integration, and coordination and agreement on the municipal placement of refugees with municipalities. They are also responsible for preparing for large-scale influxes of migrants at the regional level together with municipalities and NGOs. The ELY Centres decide on compensating municipalities for the costs related to the reception of refugees. (EMN 2023.)

The work permit units of **Employment and Economic Development Offices (TE Offices)** make preliminary decisions on applications for a residence permit for an employed person before the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) processes and makes decisions on the applications. In addition, the immigrant services of TE Offices provide immigrants with integration services and support for finding employment. (EMN 2023).

Due to the cross-administrative nature of integration, funding for the promotion of integration is distributed to several actors through different funding channels. Local governments do not have any official role in immigration policy, but they play a key role in integration and receive support from the state for these activities. Under the *Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration* (Finlex 2023c), **municipalities** implement the integration policies by providing housing, integration, health, education, and other services for those immigrants who have become municipal residents. As the responsibility for arranging social welfare and health services was transferred to **wellbeing services counties** from the municipalities in the **Health and social services reform** (Finlex 2023d) in the beginning of 2023, part of the services related to immigrant integration also now falls within the responsibility of these Counties.

## 3.3 Non-public actors

In general, non-governmental actors have not had a formal role in the reception or integration process of asylum seekers or refugees, apart from being one of the providers of reception services at reception centres or as partners in implementing (fixed term) projects that promote immigrant integration. NGOs, such as the regional branches of **the Finnish Red Cross**, can take part in the competitive tendering process for reception services organised by the Ministry of the Interior, which finances the costs of the reception process. Some reception centres are run by for-profit companies, municipalities, and the state itself. In addition, there are also many non-governmental and non-profit organisations, companies, and private citizens that have played a significant role in supervising, assisting, and accommodating international protection seekers and refugees in Finland. (EMN 2017, EMN 2023.)

## 3.4 Coordination measures in times of high influxes

### 3.4.1 Situation in 2015/16

Within a span of nine months, during the peak of the “crisis” of 2015/16, Finland received an unprecedented number of protection seekers (32,481). The largest national groups originated from Iraq (20,356), Afghanistan (5614), Somalia (1589), and Syria (947). (Migri 2023a.) In August 2014, The Ministry of the Interior had appointed a working group to write the first *National Risk Assessment 2015*<sup>3</sup>, which included a section on mass influx of migrants. It was defined as a situation where the number of arrivals exceeds 20,000 people in a very short period and when determining the right of entry and registering of the arrivals cannot be done as usual. It included recommendations for risk mitigation and coordinating the process among different authorities and branches of government. (Intermin 2016.) The assessment was published in January 2016, at a time when this risk had already become a reality. Despite having the risk assessment in place, Finland was not prepared for the reception of such a high number of asylum seekers, and new operating models were required for different administrative branches and stakeholders.

The migration policies of the centre-right government led by Juha Sipilä were published in September 2015. They emphasised, among other things, that migration must be brought under control and that immigrants must be directed to legal and safe routes. (EMN 2017.) To decide on the necessary measures and agree on leadership arrangements in the rapidly changing situation, on 4 September 2015, the Ministry of the Interior established a **Crisis Management Group (KRIJO)**. The group, also referred to as **Crisis Group**, was led by the Minister of the Interior Petteri Orpo. Besides the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) as the main responsible authority of migration, there were representatives from the National Police Board, the Finnish Border Guard, the Finnish Security Intelligence Service, and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Office of the President of the Republic, the Finnish Red Cross, the Prime Minister’s Office, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, the Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry of Finance participated occasionally. The **Government Situation Centre** provided overviews and The National Bureau of Investigation, and The Border Guard reported on the situation daily. (Nerg & Järvenkylä 2019, 39; EMN 2017.)

A **Ministerial working group on migration** was established on 24 September 2015 and it included the Minister of the Interior, the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of Finance, among others. Meeting up to once or twice a week, the aim was to compile and maintain situational awareness of the asylum seeker situation and related measures. (EMN 2017.)

To be able to register the extensive number of applications and, thus, to get the flow of incomers under control, on 19 September 2015 the government decided to open a **registration centre**. It was opened on 22 September in Tornio, a small city in Northern Finland, close to the Swedish border. According to Section 133 (17.6.2011/749) of the *Aliens Act* (30.4.2004/301, Finlex 2023a), the registration centres are sites where incomers can be identified, and their asylum applications can be registered as soon as possible after arrival. A coordinated and centralised identification and registration point close to the border relieved

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<sup>3</sup> The need for such an assessment is based on EU legislation, namely Chapter II, Article 6 of the Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism which stipulates that Member States must make a risk assessment every three years (Official Journal of the European Union 2013a).

the heavy workload of The Police and overcrowded asylum centres in different parts of the country. The Tornio registration centre operated until 29 February 2016. (EMN 2017, Nerg & Järvenkylä 2019.) 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 2016a). The role of the **Finnish Red Cross**, the private sector, municipalities, and associations was crucial in managing the situation as they provided up to 95 percent of the places in reception centres.

As the number of protection seekers and people working in different sections of the asylum process rose, so did the costs of the reception process. According to the budget proposals of the Finnish government for 2016–2018, the number of protection seekers using reception services rose from 3102 in 2014 to 27,393 in 2015 and 25,100 in 2016. Simultaneously, the total costs of the system rose from about €62 million in 2014 to €168 million in 2015, and €619 million in 2016. Besides the costs of the reception centres, these figures also include costs related to private accommodation, group or support housing units, and custody. (Government of Finland 2016a; 2017a; 2018a).

The increased costs of managing the rising numbers of protection seekers at this time are clearly visible in the state budget. Money spent on arranging reception services in 2015 was three times the sum of 2014 and even though arrivals dropped from 32,477 in 2015 to 5647 in 2016, this expenditure also stayed at a higher level in the following years. The two figures below show the overall amount allocated for reception services from 2008 to 2023 (Figure 5) and the increase in spending by the administrative branch in 2015 and 2016 (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Realised overall costs of the reception system in the state budgets (€). For comparability, all amounts have been converted to the value of the euro in 2022. Source: Budgets of the Government of Finland 2009–2023, <https://budjetti.vm.fi/indox/index.jsp>

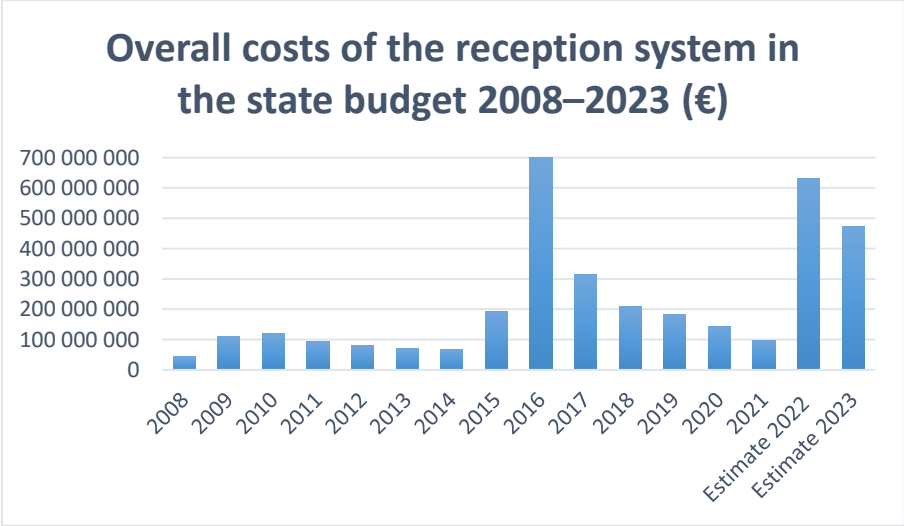


Figure 6: Additional costs to the state budget in different administrative branches caused by the increase in the numbers of asylum seekers, in millions of euros. Source: The Annual Report of the Finnish Government, 2016.

	2015	2016
<b>Ministry of Justice</b>	6	23
<b>Ministry of the Interior</b>	84	652
<b>Ministry of Finance</b>	1	1
<b>Ministry of Education and Culture</b>	0	27
<b>Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment</b>	0	65
<b>Ministry of Social Affairs and Health</b>	0	578
<b>Total</b>	90	825

To minimise the costs of reception and the asylum process, the government introduced several new initiatives. For example, from the beginning of 2017, matters related to the extension of residence permits and the residence of an EU citizen, tasks related to travel documents and permits, citizenship as well as initial asylum interviews, were transferred from The Police or The Border Guard to the Finnish Immigration service (Migri), thus strengthening the role of the organisation. (Kurvinen et al. 2020.) The key changes are presented in Ch 5.1. Changes in 2015/16.

### 3.4.2 Situation in 2022/23

Russia's war in Ukraine brought a record number of protection seekers to Finland. In 2022, a total of 53,129 individuals sought protection in Finland, including 47,302 temporary protection seekers and 5827 asylum seekers. Ukrainian citizens were by far the largest group with 48,446 individual applicants, followed by protection seekers from Russia (1395), Iraq (676), Somalia (308), and Afghanistan (264). (Migri 2023a.) Even though the numbers of arrivals were higher than in 2015/16, this time – it seemed – Finland was better prepared for the large influx of protection seekers, as the settlement of arrivals and setting up of new reception centres have been organised with much less public criticism and debate when compared with the crisis rhetoric of 2015. One explanation for this is that a much higher number of Ukrainians live privately and have thus arranged their own accommodation (Alho et al. 2022, Ahvenainen et al. 2023).

The Ministry of the Interior, the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) and the Finnish Border Guard monitor the migration situation in Ukraine. The exchange of information both nationally within the central government and with the EU and its other international partners has increased. The Ministry of the Interior coordinates humanitarian material assistance provided by Finland and the reception of Ukrainian refugees in Finland, and it has appointed a **cross-sectoral group to coordinate migration to Finland**. Cooperation within the group will ensure the smoothness of practices related to entry into, reception, and staying and working in the country. In addition, **The Department for Rescue Services of the Ministry of the Interior** coordinates the civilian assistance provided by the Finnish Government to Ukraine through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. (Intermin 2023b.) In the Asylum Unit of the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri), partial automation was used for the first time in the processing of the applications for temporary protection, which substantially accelerated the decision-making process (Migri 2022a).

According to the Ministry of the Interior (Intermin 2023c), Finland is well prepared for situations of mass influx of protection seekers because preparedness has been promoted based on the lessons learned from the situation in 2015/16. The contingency plans are more comprehensive and of higher quality than before, and their functionality is tested through regular practice. The Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) can increase accommodation capacity quickly and it has developed preparedness-related cooperation with municipalities and the third sector. Information systems and official cooperation between the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri), the Border Guard and The Police have been developed so that the protection seekers can be registered quickly. (See also Intermin 2017.)

In the 2023 version of the *National Risk Assessment* (Intermin 2023d), mass influx of migrants is defined as a situation in which a large number of foreign nationals enter the country in a short period of time and they apply for international protection or do not meet the preconditions for entry defined in the *Aliens Act* and the Schengen Borders Code. In comparison with the 2015 report (Intermin 2016), this latest assessment also takes into account instrumentalisation of migration, where migrants are intentionally directed towards Finland as an instrument of political pressure.

Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government issued some legislative changes in preparation for large-scale or instrumented influx of protection seekers. If necessary, Finland can now receive support from the **European Asylum Agency (EUAA)** as the EU regulation on the new European Asylum Agency entered into force in January 2022, and the national legislation related to its application entered into force in September 2022. In addition, several amendments were made to The Border Guard Act in July 2022, which improved preparedness for disruptive situations. The reception of asylum applications can now be concentrated at designated border crossing points if an exceptionally large number of protection seekers arrive in a short period of time. In the update of the *Emergency Act* that entered into force in July 2022, hybrid operations were added as a basis for declaring a state of public emergency, which grants authorities more powers than is usually the case to accommodate immigrants and organise transport services, for example. (Intermin 2023c, see Ch 5.2 Changes in 2022/23.)

Despite the increased capacity and preparedness, the reception of displaced persons from Ukraine did not always go smoothly, as the authorities at the regional and local level were somewhat unclear of the division of responsibilities. The arrival of Ukrainians independently and with transport arranged by Finnish individuals and *ad hoc* groups was a challenge to local authorities, who could suddenly learn that accommodation and resources are needed at short notice. In this response, the role of the non-governmental organisations and volunteers who helped accommodate Ukrainians and distribute material aid to the newcomers was vital. (Ahvenainen et al. 2023.)

In a 2022 Ministry of the Interior survey (Intermin 2022) targeting displaced persons from Ukraine (n = 2,136), almost all respondents (85%) were reception centre customers, even though every second respondent (55%) lived in private accommodation at their own cost, and only occasionally consulted advisory services at centres. They were mostly satisfied with the service, even though some complained about long waiting times, challenges involving communication or information delivery, issues with the personnel, and especially the difficulty of accessing medical care.

## 4 Protection statuses and permits

In Finland, a residence permit can be granted based on work, self-employment, family ties, studying, remigration or “other special grounds”, for example 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 or PEU). The first residence permit is always issued for a fixed term, but after living in the country for four years with a continuous permit (A), it can be turned into a permanent one if the grounds for the permit still apply and certain other conditions are met (see Ch. 9). (Migri 2023c.)

As an EU member state, Finland follows the EU directives and defines a refugee as a person who fulfils the requirements of the Geneva Convention Article 1 (Finlex 2023e). In Finland, one can get **refugee status** directly via the UN as a resettlement, i.e. a quota refugee or via the asylum application route. After receiving refugee status, one gets a continuous residence permit (type A) for four years (Finlex 2023a, 53 §). Living in Finland based on this residence permit also qualifies for permanent residency after four years, given that the grounds for living in the country as a continuous resident are still met or that new grounds exist.

Finland also grants **subsidiary protection** following the EU policy (EU rule, Finlex 2023a, 88 § and 88 d §, 8.5.2009/323). The residence permit based on subsidiary protection is also valid for four years. One can also be granted a residence permit on compassionate grounds and issued a temporary residence permit with an initial duration of 1 year, which can be extended for another 1-year period. It can be issued in cases, when removal from Finland would be manifestly unreasonable due to e.g., a medical condition or severe vulnerability if returned to home country. An unaccompanied minor asylum seeker can be granted asylum, or a residence permit based on subsidiary protection or other grounds. (Finlex 2023a, 53 §, Migri 2023d, Migri 2023e, UNHCR 2023.) Temporary protection has been included as a category in the *Aliens Act* (Finlex 2023a) since 2011, but in practice it has only been available when the EU activated the temporary protection mechanism when Russia attacked Ukraine on 24 February 2022 (Finlex 2022).

After receiving a positive decision and a residence permit, protection seekers become residents of a home municipality that provides them with services along with the wellbeing services county where their municipality is located. As municipal residents, they have access to financial and other assistance on the same grounds as any other resident. After living one year in Finland, temporary protection holders can apply for a home municipality based on the *Act on Municipal Residence* (Finlex 2023f). This Act has regulations on how and at what stage those moving from abroad are considered to live in Finland permanently enough to be counted as permanent residents. One can get a municipality immediately upon arrival, if one is a Finnish or EU/EEA citizen, has a continuous or permanent residence permit, or has a at least one-year residence permit and intends to stay in Finland, for example. Asylum seekers waiting for a decision on their claim do not have a right to a home municipality, regardless of how long they have already stayed in the country.

### 4.1 Changes in 2015/16

In 2016, Finland stopped granting subsidiary protection on the grounds of the security situation in the asylum seeker’s region of origin if the applicant was considered to have an internal flight alternative through relocating to a safe area in the country of origin. In addition, humanitarian protection, a national residence permit category, was removed from the *Aliens*

*Act* in May 2016, because it was seen to be more lenient than subsidiary protection which is based on EU regulation. The aim was to ensure that the Finnish legislation is not more favourable when compared with other EU Member States. The humanitarian protection status was a remnant from the time prior to the acceptance of the EU Directive 2011/95/. As the directive had a stricter definition of what counts as circumstances warranting subsidiary protection, humanitarian protection thought of as a more flexible category for Finland to maintain the level of protection options available for applicants who could demonstrate fear of indiscriminate violence and/or risk of death in their country of origin. In practice, the two categories were overlapping, and The European Court of Justice adopted a wider definition of what gives grounds for subsidiary protection than what was thought to be the case in Finland at the time. In practice the category was rarely used. (Pirjatanniemi et al. 2021, 74-76, Saarikkomäki et al. 2018, see also Ch 5.1. Changes in 2015/16.)

## 4.2 Changes in 2022/23

As the Russian invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022, the first Ukrainians arrived in Finland and filed a claim for asylum. According to the Schengen regulations, they were also allowed to stay in Finland for 90 days without a residence permit if they had a biometric passport. As the Temporary Protection Directive (EU Directive 2001/55/EC) was activated at the beginning of March 2022, those fleeing the war were instructed to file a claim for temporary protection instead of asylum. Those under temporary protection can still apply for asylum but their application will not be processed as long as they are under the temporary protection status. Displaced persons from Ukraine could also apply for a residence permit based on family ties, study, or work if they met the criteria. (Migri 2023f.)

Temporary protection was offered to (1) Ukrainian citizens and their families who fled the country on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, or slightly before, (2) Ukrainian citizens and their families already residing in Finland, and (3) stateless persons and third-country nationals who were legally resident in Ukraine and could not safely return to their country or region of origin<sup>4</sup>. Family reunification also applies to the family members of all stateless persons and third-country nationals who were legally residing in Ukraine and are unable to return. (Finlex 2022.) The Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) can grant a residence permit on the basis of temporary protection for a maximum of one year at a time (type B) to people displaced by the war. On 28 September 2023, the Council of the European Union decided to extend the temporary protection until 4 March 2025, so the residence permits issued so far can be extended again for one year in March 2024. (Migri 2023g, Finlex 2022.)

In the Government programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo (2023-) there are plans to significantly tighten Finland's immigration policy, reform the *Aliens Act* (Finlex 2023a) and review the provisions on international protection and entry bans. The programme states, for example, that:

- “The Government will make international protection temporary in nature, and the length of international protection permits will be shortened to the minimum allowed by EU law, i.e. three years for a permit based on granted asylum and one year for a permit based on subsidiary protection. The extension of permits will require an assessment of the need to continue international protection.”

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<sup>4</sup> Temporary protection will not be granted to third-country nationals after September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023. <https://intermin.fi/en/-/changes-to-temporary-protection-for-third-country-nationals-who-have-fled-ukraine>

- “The Government will create conditions for the prompt resolution of appeals concerning international protection.”
- “The Government will introduce a national border procedure with an approach that fully exploits the scope of the Qualification Directive as required by the situation. An accelerated asylum procedure will be introduced in situations permitted by the Asylum Procedures Directive.” (Government of Finland 2023a.)



## 5 Registration and application process

One can only apply for protection once in the Finnish territory. There is no specific application form as one only needs to state this intention either to a border guard at any point of entry, or to a police officer if one is already in the country. Either one of these authorities can then conduct the **initial asylum investigation** and register the applicant as an asylum seeker, record the applicant's personal details and reason for the claim for asylum, take the applicant's fingerprints, signature, and photograph. The fingerprints of the protection seeker are compared with the Eurodac database and the Schengen visa database to help determine the identity of the applicant. S/he is then directed to a reception centre. (Migri 2023e, OwlGroup 2019.) It has been noted that a process where the initial investigation is done in many different locations across the country by authorities which sometimes have limited experience of cases of international protection is not ideal in recognising those protection seekers who are in an especially vulnerable position and are, for example, underage youth or victims of human trafficking (OwlGroup 2019).

Based on the information recorded in the **Case Management System for Immigration Matters (UMA)** at the time the claim for asylum is made, the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) will determine whether it continues processing the application, if the applicant should be treated as a "Dublin case", or if there are grounds for an immediate refusal. Based on the Dublin Regulation, the application will not be processed in Finland if the applicant has family members, has been given a residence permit or visa, or if the applicant has been registered or applied for asylum in another EU Member State, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, or Liechtenstein. If this is the case, one of these states is then responsible for processing the application (Official Journal of the European Union 2013b). An application is manifestly unfounded and can be processed in an accelerated procedure if the grounds stated in the application do not entitle to international protection; the applicant's statements are clearly implausible; s/he has given false or misleading information or presented forged documents; or if s/he comes from a safe country of origin where s/he may be returned to. (Migri 2023h, Migri 2023i, OwlGroup 2019)

The next step in the application process is an **individual asylum interview**, where the applicant can explain his or her travel route, reasons for seeking protection in Finland, and the personal circumstances that are the cause for the claim for asylum. The applicant should provide as much information as possible and present all available documents in support of the asylum claim. Four offices of the Finnish Immigration Service, Helsinki, Raisio, Lappeenranta, and Oulu, hold asylum interviews. They will provide an interpreter who speaks the language that the applicant has stated as his or her mother tongue or another language that s/he can understand. The interview is always recorded, and the protection seeker is allowed to make his or her own recording or request the official recording afterwards. (Migri 2023j.)

The protection seeker has the right to have **legal counsel** during the asylum process. The counsel decides whether it is necessary for him or her to personally participate in the interview. The applicant can ask for legal counsel via the public **Legal Aid Office**, a government agency operating under the guidance and direction of the Ministry of Justice. If the protection seeker has no financial means of his or her own, the aid is provided free of charge. A lawyer from the **Refugee Advice Centre** ([www.pakolaisneuvonta.fi/en/](http://www.pakolaisneuvonta.fi/en/)) can offer legal assistance to asylum seekers who have yet to receive their asylum decisions if a Legal Aid Office has given the asylum seeker a legal aid referral or if the asylum seeker is ready to pay for the cost of the lawyer him/herself. Unaccompanied minors who seek asylum or temporary protection in Finland are given a representative who is an adult and who handles

the matters of the minor with the authorities. A district court appoints the representative. The representative will find legal counsel for the minor. The costs of their legal counsel are always covered by the Legal Aid Offices. For special reasons, the applicant can also request if another support person can be present at the interview. (Migri 2023j, Legal Aid 2023.)

Based on the interview and other relevant data collected, The Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) makes a positive or a negative decision on the claim for asylum. Migri relies on existing country information on the protection seeker's country of origin and assesses whether the facts and the statement of the applicant are credible. The process has faced criticism for lack of support to the protection seeker in preparing for the interview, lack of sufficient legal counsel, and the fact that the traumatized individual may not be able to talk about the experiences in the correct manner to convince the authorities of his or her situation (OwalGroup 2019, Puumala et al. 2018.) Either the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) or The Police will serve the positive or negative decision on the protection seeker. If s/he is granted international protection (asylum), a subsidiary protection status, or a residence permit on other grounds, s/he will then move to a municipality. If the decision is negative, the asylum seeker must leave Finland or appeal the decision. The applicant may also apply for assisted voluntary return (see Ch 5.3. Voluntary return). (Migri 2023e.)

## 5.1 Changes in 2015/16

According to the former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior Päivi Nerg, a leading public figure during the 2015/16 "crisis", the organisational model at the Ministry of the Interior, which is mainly responsible for asylum affairs, was relatively inflexible (Nerg & Järvenkylä 2019, 21). Different authorities were working in their own fields of expertise but there was very little cooperation. In this context, the unprecedented situation represented a turning point: It became clear that the different sections of administration had to coordinate their work and to work closely in cooperation with local and regional administrations, and with non-governmental organisations.

In 2014, the average processing time of an asylum application was 170 days and in 2015 117 days. Due to the high rise in the numbers of applications, the average processing time in 2016 rose to 261 days. (Migri 2015, Migri 2017a). To cope with the increased number of applications, the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) recruited nearly 500 new public officials to their Asylum Unit. This temporarily increased the number of personnel: in May 2016, it employed 589 persons, 545 of whom worked within the asylum process. As the number of applications dropped, the fixed term contracts of employees were not renewed and by August 2017, the number had been reduced to 233 persons, of whom 184 worked within the asylum process. Two new offices were opened in Vaasa and Rovaniemi for the processing of applications. They were closed in the beginning of 2017. (Migri 2017b.)

Ministry of the Interior promoted closer cooperation between The Police, The Border Guard, and The Customs (PTR cooperation) in creating situational awareness in a rapidly changing context, to intensify border management and to prevent irregular migration at Finland's borders. Finnish Immigration Service (Migri), The Police, The Border Guard and reception centres cooperated in exchanging information and in preparing and conducting asylum investigations and asylum interviews. In addition, the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) cooperated closely with the local Police, the National Bureau of Investigation, the Finnish Security Intelligence Service (SUPO), and The Border Guard in crime prevention and security in the asylum process in the framework of the so-called "Tupa" function. Within this function, the different authorities gathered, analysed, and passed observations and data on

asylum seekers in terms of irregular entry, possible war crimes, and offences involving asylum seekers. (EMN 2017, Kurvinen et al. 2020.)

Several key legal changes were made to the asylum process during this time. These include, for example:

- The protection seeker is entitled to reception services as long as his or her application is in the process. **In late 2014, PM Alexander Stubb's government** made an amendment to the *Act on the Reception of Persons Applying for International Protection and on the Identification of and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings* (Finlex 2023b, 22.5.2015/673). After the amendment, a citizen of a third country, who has not applied for assisted voluntary return, will be provided reception services no more than 30 days after the decision to remove from the country has become enforceable and The Police has informed the reception centre and the protection seeker. S/he will therefore lose his or her accommodation, reception allowance, and access to reception services. If s/he has applied for assisted return but the said return has not taken place within 90 days from the date of its application, or the protection seeker has not at that point received a residence permit, the services end at the 90-day mark. This does not apply to unaccompanied children. (Finlex 2023b.) However, one can still submit another application for protection arguing that new grounds for the application exist, and continue to stay in the reception system, as long the new application is in process.

At the same time, a compensation system was set up to promote the voluntary return of asylum seekers who received a negative decision on their application. The goal was to establish a functional and cost-effective voluntary return system that would save costs in the reception and deportation process. (Government of Finland 2014a.)

- **In 2015, PM Alexander Stubb's government** issued amendments to the *Aliens Act* (51 § 22.5.2015/674) where the granting of temporary residence permits was prohibited in situations when a foreign citizen cannot be returned to their home country or country of permanent residence because they refuse to leave or actively hinder the process. Prior to this change, the standard practice was to grant at least some type of legal residence for persons who did not meet the criteria for protection but could not be returned to their country of origin. (Government of Finland 2014a.)
- **In 2015, PM Alexander Stubb's government** issued amendments to the *Aliens Act* (Finlex 2023a, 6.3.2015/193 and 26.6.2015/813) and the *Act on the treatment of detained foreigners and the detention unit* (Finlex 2023g, 26.6.2015/814) regarding precautionary measures and supervision of foreign nationals in Finland. Foreign citizen applying for protection can be subjected to precautionary measures to determine the conditions of their entry or stay in Finland or to prepare or secure their removal from the country. In practice, the applicant has to register at The Police, The Border Guard, or a reception centre on a regular basis. If the applicant disobeys the order or does not inform the authorities of their actual place of stay, they can be taken into custody. In addition, to decrease the number of detentions while at the same time ensuring the applicants' availability for possible deportation, the so-called residence requirement was added to the *Aliens Act* in 2017 (1.2.2017/49). It enabled authorities to appoint applicants' residence in a specific reception centre, where they would have to report up to four times a day. (Government of Finland 2014b, 2014c; Government of Finland 2017b)

- **In 2016, PM Juha Sipilä's government** amended the *Aliens Act* (Finlex 2023a, 29.4.2016/332) and removed the category of humanitarian protection from the Act as a residence permit category which could be granted as a form of international protection. (Government of Finland 2016b).
- Until 2016, protection seekers were regularly interviewed twice: first by The Police or The Border Guard during or slightly after the they filed the initial claim for asylum. During this interview, the applicant's identity, travel route, and entry into the country were discussed and then during a more thorough second interview, The Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) consulted the applicant about the actual international protection application criteria. **In 2016, PM Juha Sipilä's government** amended the *Aliens Act* (Finlex 2023a, 29.6.2016/501) so that the responsibility for investigating the applicant's entire case was transferred to the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri). The motivation for the change was to speed up the processing of applications, because as a rule, only one interview would be required, and the change would strengthen the role of the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri). (OwalGroup 2019, Migri 2017a, Government of Finland 2016c.)

Further, the processing time of applications for international protection was set at six months from the date of submission for applications submitted after July 2018. The statutory processing time obligation can still be deviated from on special grounds. This change was related to the requirements of the *EU Directive 2013/32/EU* on minimum standards of procedures for granting and withdrawing refugee status in the European Union (EU) and it came into effect on 20 July 2018. (OwalGroup 2019, Government of Finland 2016c.)

- **In 2016, PM Juha Sipilä's government** issued several amendments to the *Aliens Act* (Finlex 2023a, 12.8.2016/646) and other relevant acts concerning the legal process relating to international protection. After the amendment, legal aid does not cover the presence of a counsel at an asylum interview of an adult protection seeker unless this is necessary for very pressing reasons. There were also changes to who could act as legal counsel during the administrative procedure phase. In addition, the fees for this service were now set to be fixed on a case-by-case basis. Before this amendment, protection seekers were entitled to legal counsel by private lawyers or persons with other types of legal training during the application process and in the appeals process at the administrative court. Private lawyers were compensated, primarily from public funds, on an hourly basis. It was argued that this level of legal aid is more generous than what is provided for persons seeking help for other legal matters and that it exceeds the requirements of the *EU Directive 2013/32/EU* on minimum standards of procedures for granting and withdrawing refugee status in the European Union (EU). (Government of Finland 2016d, Pirjatanniemi et al. 2021; OwalGroup 2019.)

At the same time, the appeal periods of the decisions made by the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) regarding protection were changed, so that the 30-day appeal period to the Administrative Court was reduced to 21 days. In addition, the appeal period to the Supreme Administrative Court was reduced to 14 days, and permission to file an appeal was to be granted only in exceptional cases. All cases had previously been handled in the Helsinki Administrative Court, but now the handling of the appeal phase of asylum cases was divided into four administrative courts. (Government of Finland 2016d, Pirjatanniemi et al. 2021; OwalGroup 2019).

In addition, changes were made regarding the appellate authorities in asylum matters. For example, matters concerning international protection are to be dealt with in the courts as urgent. The quorum composition of the Administrative Court and the Supreme Administrative Court was changed so that the courts have decision-making power in all appeal cases even in a composition consisting of two members, unless the nature of the question to be resolved in the case requires the use of a three-member composition. (Government of Finland 2016d, Pirjatanniemi et al. 2021; OwlGroup 2019).

- **In 2016, PM Juha Sipilä's government** changed the *Aliens Act* (Finlex 2023a, 29.6.2016/505) to tighten the conditions for family reunification. With certain exceptions, the sponsors who wanted to bring their family to Finland would now be required to have a secure livelihood. The aim was to try to manage and reduce the costs of humanitarian migration, make sure that sponsors who receive international or temporary protection can meet the costs of their family's livelihood and lessen the risk that Finland appears to be a particularly attractive country in which to seek asylum. (Government of Finland 2016e, for more details see Ch 9.1 Changes in 2015/16.)
- **In 2019, PM Juha Sipilä's government** changed the *Aliens Act* again. The changes included, for example, clarifying the grounds for accepting subsequent applications on already rejected claims for international protection, provisions regarding the possibility of The Police, The Border Guard, or the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) confiscating the protection seeker's travel documents, new rules on the enforcement of deportation decisions and clarifications on the right to family reunification of protection seekers who came to the country as a minor. (Government of Finland 2018b, OwlGroup 2019.)

## 5.2 Changes in 2022/23

There have not been any major changes in Finland's humanitarian migration system due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Displaced persons fleeing Ukraine can apply for temporary protection at the border or at a police station when they arrive in the country. Their application is processed by The Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) in a partly automated process (Migri 2022a). There is no interview or individual consideration involved, so a vast majority of the applicants are granted temporary protection within one to four weeks. The residence permit based on temporary protection is valid for one year, as it is a temporary residence permit (type B). (Migri 2023f, see also Berlina 2022). On 28 September 2023, the Council of the European Union decided to extend the temporary protection until 4 March 2025. (Migri 2023g, Finlex 2022.)

A study which analysed government proposals to identify how the *Aliens Act* (Finlex 2023a) was amended in 2004–2022 noted that a comprehensive reform of the Act is necessary (Alitalo et al. 2023). During 2022/23, some legal changes were made to prepare for possible instrumentalisation of migration and preparing for mass influxes at Finnish borders. In addition, amendments have been made in the *Aliens Act* related to labour migration rules (Migri 2023k). The changes include, for example:

- **In 2022, PM Sanna Marin's government** issued an amendment to the *Aliens Act* (Finlex 2023a, 9.9.2022/816) in preparation for large-scale or instrumented influx of protection seekers. If necessary, Finland can now receive support from the European Asylum Agency (EUAA) as the EU regulation on the new European Asylum Agency entered into force in January 2022, and the national legislation related to its application entered into force in September 2022. At Finland's request, the agency

can send support groups for tasks related to, for example, receiving asylum applications and asylum investigations, organising the reception of the protection seekers. (Government of Finland 2022a, Intermin 2023c.)

- **In 2022, PM Sanna Marin's government** issued an amendment to the *Border Guard Act* (Finlex 2023h, 8.7.2022/698) in preparation for large-scale or instrumented influx of protection seekers. The government can close a border crossing point or restrict border crossing traffic for a fixed period or until further notice, if the closure or restriction is necessary to combat a serious threat to public order, national security, or public health. The submitting of applications for international protection can be limited to only one or more border crossing points. (Government of Finland 2022b, Intermin 2023c.)
- **In 2022, PM Sanna Marin's government** issued an amendment to the *Act on the provision of social and health care services* (Finlex 2023i, 20.12.2022/1185) that made the wellbeing counties responsible for arranging not only urgent treatment, but also health care services that are deemed necessary for persons who do not have a residence permit in Finland, i.e. so-called paperless persons. (Government of Finland 2023b.)

In terms of legislation currently in preparation, The Government programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo states, for example, that:

- "The Government plans to bring Finland's key asylum policy statutes up to the general level of Nordic countries."
- "To support the Government's objectives to tighten asylum policy, we will introduce the more stringent provisions and best practices made possible by the Qualification Directive, Asylum Procedures Directive and Return Directive."
- "Finland's asylum system will be made more efficient and its quality improved. Rejected asylum applicants will return or will be returned to their countries of origin as soon as possible. The principle of non-refoulement will be complied with. The Government will ensure that the asylum process will not become a channel for job seeking and labour immigration."
- "Rejected asylum applicants will be prevented from switching to a work-related immigration procedure. It will be possible to remove a person who has been refused asylum from the country even if they have obtained a job during the asylum process."
- "The Government will make international protection temporary in nature, and the length of international protection permits will be shortened to the minimum allowed by EU law, i.e. three years for a permit based on granted asylum and one year for a permit based on subsidiary protection. The extension of permits will require an assessment of the need to continue international protection." (Government of Finland 2023a.)

### 5.3 Voluntary return

Finland follows the EU Return Directive (2008/115/EC) as per its *Aliens Act* (Finlex 2023a) that came into force in 2011. Reception services are provided for 30 days after a negative decision on an asylum application. However, following a negative decision, an asylum seeker can appeal or submit a new asylum application. One is not allowed to travel abroad when the

asylum application is in process. In case one decides to withdraw the application and return to the country of origin, they are assisted by the Finnish state with financial support and other benefits such as help in reintegrating into that country.

During 2015/16, voluntary return was increasingly presented as one of the solutions for protection seekers whose asylum applications could take up to two years to process. According to the former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior Päivi Nerg, it was clear that Finland's extremely cramped asylum process created a source of frustration and fulfilled the expectations of neither the protection seekers nor the employees working in the different phases of the asylum process. More active promotion of voluntary return was not only to lower the number of applicants in the system, but also provide an option for individuals whose hopes of asylum in the supposedly open and welcoming Finland were crushed with negative asylum decisions. (Nerg & Järvenkylä 2019, 56-59.)

After the change in law in 2015 (Government of Finland 2014a), protection seekers can apply for **assisted voluntary return**. Currently, assisted return cannot be arranged to: Eritrea, Yemen, Syria, Taiwan, or Afghanistan. A requirement for the assistance package is that the applicant withdraws all pending applications for asylum, a residence permit or an alien's passport. Voluntary return can also be applied for after a negative asylum decision. Assistance for voluntary return includes compensation for travel expenses, relocation costs and reintegration assistance. It can be either cash assistance or in-kind support. In-kind support can consist of different services or supplies, such as a small amount of financial assistance for starting a business, accessing education or training, renting an apartment, or receiving healthcare. The amount of cash assistance varies according to country of return but is between €200-1500 for adults and €100-750 for a child. The amount of in-kind support depends on the country of return, being €3000-5000 for adults and €1500 for a child. (Migri 2023l, Migri 2023m.)

For the time being, voluntary return does not apply to people who wish to return to Ukraine, so the assistance package cannot be granted to those returning there. However, there are no restrictions for temporary protection holders to **travel to Ukraine**. There is also no specific time limit on how long they can stay there. However, reception allowance can only be paid to persons residing in Finland. Therefore, if a temporary protection holder resides abroad for more than seven days in a month, the allowance is paid only for the days they are physically in Finland. A stay of a full month abroad cancels the allowance for the entire month. (Migri 2022b)

## 6 Accommodation and services during application process

The Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) is primarily responsible for the application process, during which protection seekers are provided accommodation and services in the reception centres. The purpose of reception services is to secure the livelihood and well-being of asylum seekers. The services are detailed in the *Act on the Reception of Applicants for International Protection and the Identification and Assistance of Victims of Human Trafficking* (Finlex 2023b). **Reception services** include accommodation, social and health services, reception allowance and spending money, interpretation, and work and study activities, and voluntary return. The reception centre shares information about living at a reception centre, the rules and regulations of the reception centre, access to legal aid, and information about Finnish society. The reception centre should also offer advice and guidance at the different stages of the application process. (Migri 2023n.)

The protection seekers are not obligated to live in the reception centres and do not lose reception allowance if they live independently. However, they do not get paid for renting an apartment or managing their own accommodation. Even if they decide not to live in a reception centre, they must be registered as a client with a designated reception centre and show the staff a rental agreement or proof of living at a specific address. (Migri 2023o, Migri 2023p, Migri 2023q)

The first place where protection seekers usually stay is called a transit centre, which is meant for short-term accommodation. Protection seekers are then transferred to another reception centre where they can stay for a longer period. The Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) closes units to cut excess capacity, so sometimes protection seekers are transferred to other reception centres, and they cannot choose in which city or part of the country they want to live. A transfer may also be necessary because of some issues related to the personal situation of the protection seeker or the processing of the application. There are many reception centres of different types and sizes in different parts of Finland. There are 1) reception centres with catering, where the reception centre offers meals to everyone who lives there, and 2) reception centres with individual or shared kitchens where the residents cook their own meals. (Migri 2023o.)

**Unaccompanied minors** who seek protection in Finland are housed in group homes (below age 16) or supported housing (16-17 years of age) that cater especially to underage protection seekers. These units are smaller and have more employees per client than reception centres for adults and families. The units offer meals and support from the employees with a focus on upbringing. It is also possible to live with relatives if they are assessed by reception centre staff to be able to provide a stable home. Children aged six to 17 years old can go to school. (Migri 2023r.)

### 6.1 Changes in 2015/16

At the beginning of 2015, there were only 20 reception centres with ~3300 registered protection seekers. There were eight units for unaccompanied minors with approximately 150 registered minors. As a response to the mass arrival of protection seekers, by the end of 2015, the number of reception centres and units for unaccompanied minors increased to 144 and 68, respectively. Some unaccompanied minors were accommodated in folk high schools instead of group homes. The Finnish Red Cross, in particular, assumed a greater role for establishing new units as it was in charge of opening 104 of the new centres. It had access

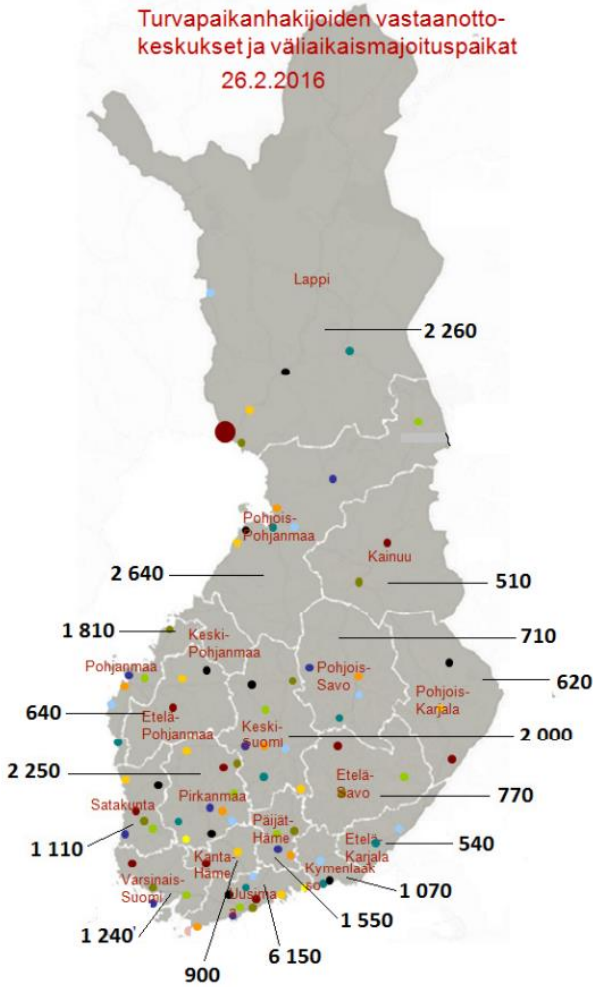


to more than 30,000 private individuals who could help in the process as volunteers. (EMN 2017, Finnish Red Cross 2016.)

Because of the haste in managing the rising number of arrivals, the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) did not arrange a public tender for the procurement of reception services. This led to appeals to the authorities and public discussion on whether the Red Cross had been unjustly favoured (Deputy Chancellor of Justice 2016). However, new actors also established reception centres, including, for instance, parishes, societies, and private companies. (EMN 2017.)

Numerous NGOs, citizens’ networks and individuals arranged Finnish language courses and other activities in reception centres, and organised clothing and goods collections (E.g. Pirkkalainen 2022, Näre & Jokela 2023.) In a relatively hostile and anti-immigrant political atmosphere, civic non-governmental actors also played a major role in protecting the rights of the protection seekers. This was partly in response to the 2016 amendment to Section 9 of the *Aliens Act* (Finlex 2023a) limiting asylum seekers’ right to legal advice during the asylum process (Government of Finland 2016d). Examples of local level but also nationally and internationally networked activism include the *Finnish Refugee Advice Centre*, the *Home Accommodation Network*, *Refugee Hospitality Group* (Finland), and *Refugees Welcome Finland* (Pirkkalainen 2019).

Figure 7: Reception centres and temporary reception units in Finland, 2nd of February 2016. The red dot is the Registration Centre in Tornio. Source: TEM 2016.



## 6.2 Changes in 2022/23

In 2022/23, the Finnish Red Cross upscaled its operations again. At the beginning of 2022, the organisation had reception services in nine of its regional districts in 12 different units. During the year, 40 additional units were set up in 11 districts. The head office started a mobile health and social service unit to support the districts in their efforts to cope with the increased number of arrivals. This activity reached 22,000 customers during the year. Red Cross volunteers were crucial in setting up the new reception units, providing emergency accommodation and with the help from the Finnish Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund, and providing the Ukrainians with food and clothing. (Finnish Red Cross 2023.) In addition, many new local non-governmental organisations and loosely organised voluntary groups were formed to provide help to those fleeing the war in Ukraine.

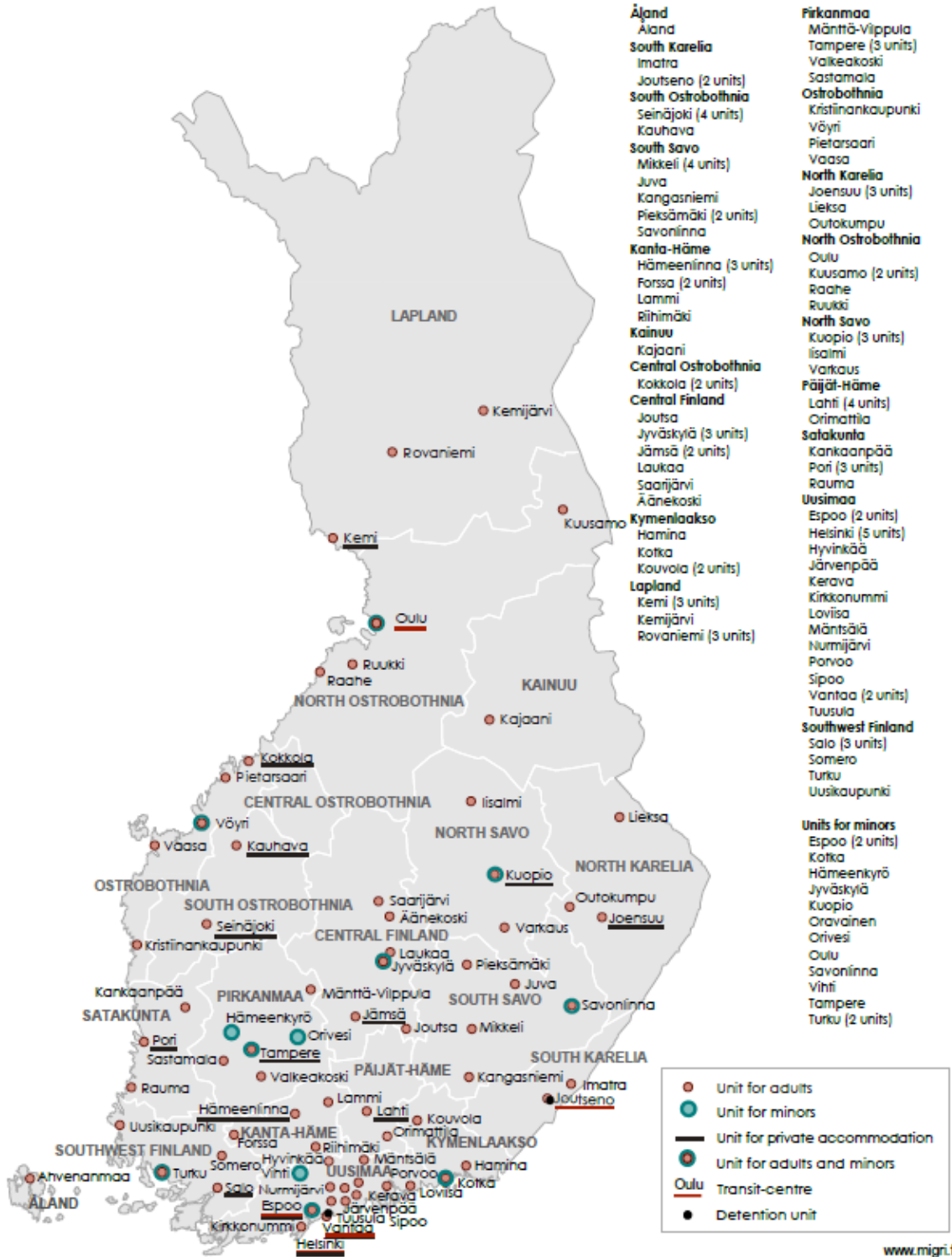
In May 2023, there were 107 reception centres, off-site branches, and service centres for those in private accommodation in operation. Additionally, there were ten units for unaccompanied minors. The reception system included 45,500 customers in all. Currently, the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) arranges a public competitive tendering process for providing reception services. It was last carried out in 2022/23. To maintain healthy competition, a maximum of two districts were given to any one bidder. Services are provided by 23 different operators in different parts of Finland: 10 regional branches of the Finnish Red Cross, the cities of Kajaani, Kotka, Tampere, Vaasa, the municipality of Vöyri, seven companies, such as Kotokunta Oy, Luona Oy, and Medevida Oy, and a non-governmental organisation called Kuopion Settlementti Puijola. (Intermin 2023f.)

In May 2022, The Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) introduced a new municipality model for the accommodation of temporary protection holders. It was a temporary solution for a situation where an unusually large number of people fleeing the war settled in accommodation provided by municipalities or private entities. The model compensated the participating municipalities for the costs of accommodation and guidance services for applicants and beneficiaries of temporary protection via an existing reception centre. It was also a way to enable people fleeing the war in Ukraine to stay in the place where they had settled when they arrived. It has been extended to 31 December 2023, after which the contracts will not be renewed. (Migri 2023s).

Figure 8: Reception units in Finland, 6th of July 2023. Source: Migri 2023t: Reception centres on the map <https://migri.fi/en/reception-centers>.

## RECEPTION UNITS

107 units for adults, 14 units for minors and 2 detention units  
6.7.2023



## 7 Settlement and intra-national distribution

After being granted protection and a residence permit, the Centres for Economic Development, Transport, and the Environment (ELY Centres) under the Ministry of Employment and the Economy become the responsible actors for coordinating the settlement process. When a residence permit has been granted to a protection seeker, the reception centre submits a **municipal placement** application to the ELY Centre. Those who arrive as quota refugees already have a municipal placement when they arrive in Finland, so they are settled directly to their municipality and not in a refugee centre. The state pays compensation to the municipalities for receiving quota refugees and organising integration services. (ELY 2023.)

Having a home municipality is important, because legal residence at a municipality 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. These benefits are administered by The National Social Insurance Institution (KELA). In addition, 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.)

In Finland, the settlement of humanitarian migrants is based on a whole-country approach, but the distribution works on a voluntary basis, so municipalities are not required to accept refugees. In some cases, the funding provided for municipalities for the placement may function as an opportunity for them to receive new residents. When offering a municipal placement, the municipality is committed to finding suitable housing for the newcomers and helping with access to municipal services. If one moves to a municipality independently, which is often the case, the reception centre can assist in organising the apartment and moving. The ELY Centre cooperates with other authorities and voluntary organisations. (Koikkalainen 2021; ELY 2023)

A reform in Finland's public healthcare, social welfare, and rescue services came into effect on 1 January 2023. After the reform, the municipalities' responsibilities were significantly lessened as providing these services was transferred to the wellbeing services counties (Finlex 2023d). The municipalities must, therefore, collaborate with the counties before making the final agreement on refugees' municipal placements.

## 8 Permanent residency requirements

The current requirements for a permanent residency (permit type P) in Finland are that one must live in Finland for an uninterrupted period of four years as a continuous resident (permit type A) and that the same grounds for the issuing of a continuous residence permit still exist. For the residence to be considered continuous, one needs to apply for an extended permit before the previous permit has expired and one must have resided at least two years during the past four years in Finland. Holiday, other travel, or working abroad as an employee posted by a Finnish employer does not interrupt the continuous residence. It is also possible to apply for permanent residency on new grounds if one meets the criteria or another type of continuous residence permit. Looking for work or studying cannot be grounds for a permanent residency permit. The application can only be submitted in Finland. (Finlex 2023a, Migri 2023d.)

Third-country nationals can also apply for the long-term resident's EU residence permit (P-EU). For this, one needs to have lived in Finland with a continuous residence permit (A) for five years, not to have lived elsewhere abroad for more than 10 months, and the grounds for the previous continuous residence permit still exist. One must also have sufficient financial resources regardless of the grounds on which one applies for the EU residence permit. (Migri 2023z.) For permanent residence (P or P-EU), the possible requirement for sufficient financial resources is linked to the type of continuous residence permit one has, as the requirements of that permit will still have to be met. For example, a work-based residence permit carries an income requirement, while refugee status or subsidiary protection does not. (Migri 2023u.)

The beginning of the four year-period required for permanent residency varies. If one arrives in Finland with a continuous resident permit from abroad, the time starts from the day of their arrival, while if one applies for the permit in Finland, it starts from the date when the first continuous residence permit is issued. For those who are granted asylum, the time starts from the day they arrived in Finland as a protection seeker. Those under temporary protection are not counted towards the four-year residency requirement for a permanent residence permit because temporary protection holders are given a B category residence permit which is temporary, not continuous. (Finlex 2023a, Migri 2023d)

The government led by Prime Minister Petteri Orpo (2023-) plans to bring significant changes to these requirements. If turned into law, such changes will significantly reshape the permanent residency requirements in Finland. There are also plans to change the conditions of gaining Finnish citizenship. The Government programme states, for example:

- *Permanent residence*: "In future, it will be possible to obtain a permanent residence permit based on a six-year period of residence subject to certain requirements in addition to the current requirements. These additional requirements are sufficient language skills demonstrated in a language test, a two-year work history without recourse to unemployment security or social assistance other than for a very short period of time, and a stricter integrity requirement."
- *Citizenship*: "The required period of residence in Finland will be extended to eight years. Only residence under a residence permit will be taken into account when calculating the approved period of residence. The number of days spent abroad that are approved as part of the period of residence will be decreased."
- "Passing a citizenship test and a language test will be made a requirement for naturalisation."

- The integrity requirement will be tightened. The Government will investigate the possibility of including a procedure for a national security assessment in the naturalisation process.”
- “An actual requirement for sufficient financial resources will be reintroduced as a requirement for naturalisation.” (Government of Finland 2023a.)

## 9 Family reunification

Family reunification refers to a residence permit granted to a foreign citizen based on family ties. It applies to the foreign spouse of a Finnish citizen, a family member of a foreign citizen working or studying in Finland, or a family member of a person who arrived in Finland as a refugee. The criteria for family reunification can be found in the *Aliens Act* (Finlex 2023a). Finland applies a narrow definition of family which includes spouses, registered partners, common-law husband and wife (regardless of gender, if they have lived together for at least two years), unmarried children under the age of 18, and the legal guardians of children under the age of 18. A broader definition is applied to family members of EU citizens, for whom a family member can also be a dependant older relative and a child under 21 years-of-age, for example. (Intermin 2023e, Migri 2023v, Migri 2023x.)

The family member living in Finland with whom the applicant intends to engage in family life is called the sponsor. The sponsor cannot file the application on behalf of his or her family. If the family member resides outside of Finland, s/he must submit the application while still abroad and visit a Finnish mission (embassy or consulate) to prove his or her identity. This may prove to be difficult as Finland does not have missions in all countries, so filing an application may require considerable resources and international travel. For example, citizens of Somalia have to travel either to Addis Abeba, Ethiopia or to Nairobi, Kenya, to file the application. In addition, all missions, such as the Embassy of Finland in Baghdad, do not provide this service. The consular and customer services for citizens of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Georgia are provided by the Embassy of Finland in Ankara, Türkiye. Once there, the family member must produce a passport and proof of family ties through official, legalised documents translated into Finnish, Swedish, or English, and also show that s/he resides in Türkiye legally with a visa or a residence permit at the time of submitting the application. (Migri 2023v, Finland abroad 2023a, Finland abroad 2023b.)

### 9.1 Changes in 2015/16

As one of the efforts to decrease the attractiveness of Finland as a destination for protection seekers, the government of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä (2015–2019) wanted to tighten the criteria for family reunification within the framework allowed by the EU Council Directive on the right to family reunification (EU Directive 2003/86/EC), because some other countries also did so at the time. Although the family members of those who received international protection had been the smallest group in applications made based on family ties, their number was assumed to increase in the future because of the increase in the number of asylum seekers. Finland's financial carrying capacity was strongly highlighted in the government's justification for this change. (Government of Finland 2016e, Pirjatanniemi et al. 2021, 144-145.)

With this change in the *Aliens Act's* (Finlex 2023a) rules on family reunification, Finland made a distinction between refugee status and persons who have received secondary or temporary protection, even though the importance of family ties and right to family life is not in any way linked to the reason why one receives international protection. The change came into effect on 1 July 2016, and it introduced an income requirement for granting a family member's residence permit for those sponsors who had a residence permit based on secondary, humanitarian, or temporary protection. This meant that the sponsor is required to have a secure means of support from sources other than benefits paid by society. (Government of Finland 2016e, Pirjatanniemi et al. 2021, 145-146, Migri 2023u.)

The income requirement would also apply to persons who have received asylum or quota refugee status if the family reunification application was not submitted within three months after they were informed of their asylum decision or acceptance in the refugee quota. The three-month statutory time limit for those granted refugee status was also problematic because, as stated above, translating and legalising the required documents and getting an appointment at the mission – often located in a different country from where one lives – may easily take more time. The change concerned so-called old families, i.e. those that were formed before the sponsor arrived in Finland. The families formed after the sponsor's arrival had already been covered by the income requirement before this change. The income requirement does not apply to the siblings of an underage person who has been granted international protection and who arrived in Finland alone, granted that they reside outside Finland, have lived together previously, and their parents have died or disappeared. (Pirjatanieniemi et al. 2021, 147-148, Migri 2023u.)

Even though 2015/16 signified an important period with many legislative changes in Finnish immigration policies, several restrictions had already been implemented earlier. These included, for example, a 2010 legal change stating that a forensic examination could be carried out to determine the age of a minor applying for family reunification and that to qualify as a minor, the applicant had to be under 18 when the residence permit based on family ties is granted, rather than when the application is submitted, and the 2012 change that the application on family reunification must be submitted abroad and only by the applicant, not the sponsor. (Miettinen et al. 2016, 9.)

## 9.2 Changes in 2022/23

The government led by Prime Minister Petteri Orpo (2023-) plans to bring significant changes to regulation related to family reunification. The Government programme states, for example:

- “The Government will investigate the possibilities of restricting the definition of family applicable in connection with family reunification so that in all situations it would only cover the spouse and children.”
- “The Government will introduce an age limit of 21 years required of a sponsor in connection with spousal family reunification, while ensuring the rights of any minor children.”
- “In a family reunification process initiated by a sponsor who has been granted international protection, a requirement of a two-year period of residence will be introduced to ensure the sponsor's integration, while safeguarding the effective realisation of the rights of the child.”
- “The Government will examine the possibilities to introduce a pre-entry language test. In the test, the spouse of a sponsor who has been granted international protection, seeking to enter the country on the basis of family ties, would have to demonstrate a certain level of language proficiency in the country of origin.” (Government of Finland 2023a.)



## 10 Integration measures

### 10.1 National goals, local and regional implementation

According to the *Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration*, 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 2023c). 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 (Koikkalainen 2021). In terms of integration into 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). The Finnish model of integration policy has been developed in a multiculturalist fashion with reference to the Dutch and Swedish systems (Saukkonen 2013, 97).

While the real integration process starts only after receiving a residence permit, already during the application process protection seekers must take part in work and study activities at the reception centre. They include Finnish or Swedish language classes, civic education and cleaning and other small chores at the centre. Each protection seeker agrees on a personal work and study activity plan with the reception centre staff. Taking part in these activities is obligatory, as non-participation reduces the reception allowance. One may be exempted from these activities if one has a job or studies outside the centre. The same rules apply to displaced persons from Ukraine living at a reception centre. (Migri 2023å, Migri 2023ä.)

Based on the *Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration*, all registered immigrants are entitled to receive basic, written material about Finland, including information on 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 need a plan promoting integration. (Finlex 2023c.) Those receiving temporary protection also have the right to these services, except that they are not entitled to **labour market subsidy** (työmarkkinatuki, the basic unemployment benefit). If they find employment on their own, it is no longer necessary to participate in these integration activities. (TE Keskus 2023).

While the rights and obligations are regulated at the national level, municipalities and other local-level authorities are responsible for implementation on the ground. Each municipality is responsible for making an “(...) *integration programme 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 2023c, Chapter 3, Sect. 32). Local-level integration work is carried out on a cross-administrative basis in cooperation between municipalities, wellbeing services counties, Employment and Economic Development Offices (TE Offices), The Police, and different organisations, associations, and other entities. Tasks related to the monitoring and development of integration activities are carried out at regional level in cooperation by ELY Centres, the Regional State Administrative Agencies and Regional Councils. (Kotoutuminen 2023a.)

Typically, measures and services promoting integration are provided as part of basic municipal services and the services of the TE Offices. The **initial assessment** of the needs

of an immigrant who is an unemployed jobseeker is initiated by the TE Office, and for those receiving social assistance, the municipality. In case an immigrant does not fall into either of these categories, s/he can request an initial assessment themselves. During the initial assessment, the authority examines the immigrant's previous education, training, employment history, language skills, life situation, and other factors influencing the person's employment and integration prospects. Based on this assessment, each immigrant is then made a personalised integration plan which matches their needs. (Kotoutuminen 2023b, Koikkalainen 2021.)

During the period covered by the integration plan, the migrant is entitled to financial support which is either paid as a **labour market subsidy** (työmarkkinatuki, the basic unemployment benefit) if the migrant is a jobseeker, or **basic income support** (toimeentulotuki, a means-tested form of last resort assistance) (Finlex 2023b, Chapter 2, §11–20). The level of the financial support is the same as for any other applicant relying on such assistance.

To provide integration services, smaller municipalities may employ an immigration coordinator, while larger cities with many immigrants may choose to set up an immigration unit that operates independently. Municipalities may also collaborate with other municipalities in their welfare services county in providing integration 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 & Holm 2016.)

Delegating the implementation of integration measures to the municipalities leaves considerable room for innovation at the local level and the possibility of tailoring the activities to match the needs of the immigrants and the local communities. However, it is common for the municipalities to implement the services with different types of projects including EU structural and regional funds and the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF), for example, which often leads to the innovations being abandoned once the external funding runs out. (Koikkalainen 2021.)

## 10.2 Funding of integration measures

Municipalities are compensated per capita costs and some actual costs for refugee reception and promoting integration once the protection seekers have a positive decision and are placed in the municipalities. In 2011, per capita compensation was set at €2300/year for those above 7 years of age and €6845 for those under that age<sup>5</sup>. Compensation for actual costs includes arranging interpretation services and social assistance, the last-resort basic subsidy to immigrants with no other source of income, for example. In addition, upon application, the municipalities get a separate compensation for making the initial assessment (€700 per person), which is a personalised preliminary assessment of the immigrant's preparedness concerning employment, study and other aspects of integration and the need for language training and other measures and services promoting integration. (Finlex 2023j.)

As the responsibility for arranging social welfare and health services was transferred to wellbeing services counties from the municipalities in the Health and Social Services Reform in the beginning of 2023, also part of the per capita compensation based on the *Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration* (Finlex 2023c) is now paid to the counties instead of the municipalities as of January 2023. (Finlex 2023k; Finlex 2023j.) In 2022, the sums paid from

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<sup>5</sup> In the currency of 2022, these would be €2743 and €8163. ([www.stat.fi/tup/laskurit/rahanarvonmuunnin\\_en.html](http://www.stat.fi/tup/laskurit/rahanarvonmuunnin_en.html))

state funds to the municipalities for the costs of organising the integration activities were €1955/year for a person over the age of seven and €6503/year for a child younger than this. In addition, the welfare services counties will receive €345/year for a person over the age of seven and €342/year for younger children. The overall sums, now divided between the municipalities and the respective welfare services counties, have not been raised since 2011. Considering the change in the cost of living and the value of the currency, the level of this compensation has therefore decreased. (Finlex 2023k.)

Reimbursable costs are, among other things, calculated compensation for the organisation of guidance, counselling and other activities supporting integration in municipalities and for the organisation of social and healthcare services that promote integration in the welfare service counties. In addition, organising the initial survey assessment, the costs of preparing for the reception of quota refugees, interpretation and translation services, support for unaccompanied minor children and other tasks can be compensated. Both the per capita compensation and compensation based on real costs are paid by the Development and Administration Centre (KEHA Centre), which provides development and administration services for ELY Centres and TE offices. (TEM 2022.)

In the government funding model to municipalities, there are also some other budget items that *de facto* support integration measures. For example, the municipalities get financial support from the state based on language diversity among their residents. This is meant to account for the costs of providing services to those inhabitants of the municipality who are not native Finnish or Swedish speakers. In addition, municipalities also get support to provide the necessary primary education and other forms of vocational education and courses to immigrants that are accepted as part of the immigrants' personalised integration plans.

# 11 Financial assistance to the protection seeker

All income and funds that protection seekers have at their disposal, including income and funds from abroad, affect the amount of the financial assistance they receive. Protection seekers who do not have sufficient funds of their own are entitled to a **reception allowance**. In 2023, for a person living alone, the sum is €348.50/month if one lives in a reception centre with no meals and €102.15/month if meals are provided. This is intended to cover the immediate basic needs of the person and his or her family. The basic component of the allowance is to be used for food costs, clothing, minor health care costs, expenses of local transport, and telephone costs, for example. A **supplementary reception allowance** can also be applied for to cover possible special needs (e.g. winter clothes, provisions for children). Underage protection seekers are entitled to a small **spending allowance**, which in 2023 was €30.04/month for persons under the age of 16 years and €54.08 for persons 16 to 17 years of age. (Finlex 2023b, Migri 2023q.)

The maximum rates of the reception allowance and spending allowance are fixed – granted that the protection seeker does not have prior financial means that they can rely on. They are indexed, so the level of the allowance is adjusted automatically in response to the rising cost of living. The total sum of the reception allowance is considerably lower than the sum of the **labour market subsidy** (työmarkkinatuki, €913.75 €/month<sup>6</sup>) that is intended to support a person without prior labour market experience while looking for work. It is also smaller than the **basic income support** (toimeentulotuki, €555.11) which is a last resort form of financial assistance for people who cannot support themselves by any other means. (STM 2023, KELA 2023b.)

When the *Act on the Reception of Persons Applying for International Protection* (Finlex 2023b) defining the different means for assistance for protection seekers was passed in 2011, the amount of reception allowance was set at around 70% of the basic component of the basic income support. However, since then, the level of basic income support has been raised and thus the reception allowance is nowadays only around 60% of the basic income support. The difference was justified by the fact that protection seekers living in reception centres get some facilities and equipment, e.g., computer access and cleaning supplies, from the centre. So far, the reception allowance has been indexed, so the level has risen with the cost of living. (Government of Finland 2010.)

The protection seekers right to work begins three or six months after submitting the asylum application, depending on whether one is able to produce a biometric passport or not. Without a biometric passport, one gains the right to work only after six months. Those under temporary protection have the right to work immediately after arrival once they have been granted protection. Any possible salary the protection seekers or those under temporary protection receive, reduces the social benefits they are entitled to. (Migri 2023y, Migri 2023q.)

## 11.1 Changes in 2022/23

The key changes during 2022/23 are not related to all protection seekers, but specifically to those under temporary protection. For them, the level of financial support changes significantly after they have lived in Finland for one year, which for many of those fleeing the

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<sup>6</sup> This subsidy is means-tested. The sum is for an adult living alone without children and without any other social security subsidies or salary.

war in Ukraine was in March 2022. At this stage, they can apply for a home municipality based on the *Act on municipal residence* (Finlex 2023f). This Act has regulations on how and at what stage those moving from abroad are considered to live in Finland permanently enough to be counted as residents of the municipality they live in. One can get a municipality immediately upon arrival, if one is a Finnish or EU/EEA citizen, has a continuous or permanent residence permit, or has at least a one-year residence permit and intends to stay in Finland, for example. Those under temporary protection get this right after one-year's residence in Finland, but asylum seekers waiting for a decision on their claim do not, regardless of how long the processing of their application takes.

Seeing as temporary protection seekers are registered as residents of a municipality in Finland, they are treated as regular residents and, thus, their benefits become more comprehensive. For example, they are paid a housing allowance in case they rent an apartment or a house from the open market, their children become eligible for daycare and child subsidy, and their health coverage becomes more comprehensive. One must apply for the municipality of residence from the Digital and Population Data Services Agency (DVV), so there is no automatic process in place. The new rights and services are bestowed only when the home municipality status has been granted, not before. (DVV 2023.)

In the government programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo (2023-), there are plans to lower the level of many social benefits and remove the indexing, so that the level of the benefit is no longer adjusted in relation to the rising costs of living. The reception allowance is one such benefit. In addition, the government has stated:

- “The amount of the reception allowance will be reduced to the minimum amount permitted by the Constitution and the Reception Directive.”
- “Reception services during the processing of a subsequent application will be limited to the minimum permitted under the Reception Directive.”
- “The Government will explore ways to amend the Integration Act so that only one integration plan will be drawn up. For example, the practice of carrying out a separate initial assessment will be discontinued.”
- “The Government will implement a reform of integration services, which will make the system more efficient and will bring funding under a single umbrella.”
- The Government will shorten the duration of integration support. The funding granted to organisers of integration training will be made partly performance-based.” (Government of Finland 2023a.)

## 12 Healthcare services

The Finnish social security system is exceptional in the European Union, as it is divided into **residence-based** and **employment-based social security**. Residence-based benefits are funded primarily by tax revenue, and municipalities and wellbeing services counties are mainly in charge of the service provision. By paying social insurance contributions, both employers and employees participate in the funding of employment-based, earnings-related benefits. These include, for example, earnings-related unemployment allowance and pensions. (Koikkalainen 2021.)

Finland has an affordable **public health care system** that provides services for everyone who lives permanently in the country. In addition to this, employers have the obligation to offer occupational health services to their employees. Private healthcare services are also available. Adult protection seekers in Finland are entitled to urgent and essential treatment. Urgent medical care also includes urgent oral health care, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, and psychosocial support. The decision of what exactly is essential care is based on individual assessment, so there are no specific instructions on what kinds of treatments are included. Maternity clinic services are part of essential health care. Minor protection seekers and those under temporary protection have a right to health care on the same grounds as municipal residents. (Finlex 2023b, THL 2023.)

Protection seekers have the right to receive necessary health services as part of their reception services. This includes health information, a health questionnaire, an initial health interview, and medical or nurse consultation. In addition, the necessary vaccinations can be organised at the reception centre. In certain cases, a reasonable fee can be charged. Health care services for protection seekers may be provided by welfare services counties or by private health service providers if the service is outsourced to a for-profit provider. These services can relate, e.g., to communicable disease screenings among asylum seekers, initial examinations of special groups, and illness-related appointments during office hours. (E.g. Helve et al. 2016.) After receiving a residence permit, protection seekers become residents of a home municipality and start receiving health services from the welfare services county where they live.

In 2015/16, reception centres were quickly opened in new regions, which required a new kind of cooperation between health care providers. There were no changes to these rights at this time, but a study conducted among directors and nurses of reception centres (Helve et al. 2016) revealed that there were serious problems with providing the asylum seekers the health care they were entitled to. The study indicated that the initial health interviews, screening examinations and vaccinations were behind the target schedule set in the national guidelines and there were major differences in the realisation of health care between different regions of the country. In addition, there were considerable deficiencies in the realisation of preventive health care services, such as prenatal and child health clinics and school health care. The study concluded that deficiencies in health care resulted, on the one hand, from slowness to implement various types of preparedness plans and, on the other, from lack of experience among health care providers.

Those fleeing the war in Ukraine are in a better position compared with (adult) asylum seekers, because their temporary protection status grants them access to health services under the same conditions as those with a municipal residence in Finland. For asylum seekers, the law only guarantees urgent and essential care. (Finlex 2023b, §26.)

## 13 Pre-school and mandatory schooling for minors

Finland has a system of compulsory education (Finlex 2023l). Primary school-age children are obligated to study in school or be homeschooled and follow a national curriculum. Pre-primary education is mandatory for children aged six. It lasts for 4 hours/day and is provided at schools and early childhood education centres. Primary school starts at age seven. Compulsory education applies to those with permanent residence in Finland, but the relevant laws do not restrict the right of protection seeker children to attend schools. In fact, the municipality is obligated to arrange pre-school and primary education for protection seekers who reside in the municipality even though they may not yet have the status of a municipal resident. (OPH 2022; OKM 2023a.)

Prior to starting pre-school, children in Finland have a subjective right to early childhood education provided by their home municipality. According to the *Act on early childhood education* (Finlex 2023m, § 6), the municipality must also organise early childhood education for a child who lives in the municipality due to the work, study, illness, or similar reasons of their guardians, even if the child does not have a municipality of residence in Finland. The municipality must also provide early childhood education when it is deemed necessary for the child's welfare.

Children of asylum seekers who have no home municipality before they are granted protection may also be entitled to early childhood education if the above conditions apply to their case. However, because there is no clear regulation in law regarding these specific children, the situation varies between different municipalities. (OPH 2023b, Finlex 2023m, OKM 2019.) A 2020 study (Junttila et al. 2020) focused on this service received responses from 157 municipalities, of which 15 percent (41) stated that they currently provide early childhood education to children of asylum seekers. The main reason why this service was not available was that there were no such children living in the municipality. Some municipalities only provide early childhood education if attendance is necessary for the child's welfare based on an assessment by social services.

Preparatory education for basic education is available for pupils whose language skills and other abilities are not adequate to study in Finnish or Swedish in comprehensive education. Municipalities are not required by law to provide this service, but it is highly encouraged as the transition to regular schooling is easier after this individualised study period. A minimum of 900 hours of teaching is given to 6–10-year-olds and a minimum of 1000 hours to older children. There is a national curriculum (OPH 2015a), but the exact content of the studies is determined based on the existing skills and current needs of the pupil. During this time, the pupils are integrated into age-appropriate Finnish-language education groups according to their personal study plan. (OPH 2015b.)

Protection seekers may apply for and be accepted to study in secondary (pre-university level) education if they fulfil the application criteria. The *Aliens Act* (Finlex 2023a), or any other laws governing education, do not restrict the study rights of protection seekers. The exception to this is the instruction preparing for general upper secondary education for immigrants and foreign-language speakers, which is only available for those with a residence permit. (OKM 2023a.)

In 2021, Finland's compulsory education was extended from the 9-year-long primary school period (7-15) to include secondary education (16-18) (Finlex 2023l). This extension applies to all young people transitioning from comprehensive school education to upper secondary

education. Protection seekers continue to have the right to attend school, but they are not obligated to do so.

Displaced persons from Ukraine under the temporary protection scheme can become residents of a municipality after living one year in Finland. At that point, pre-school-age children are entitled to early childhood education. As permanent residents in Finland, attending pre-primary education is mandatory and school-age children are obligated to attend school or, alternatively, be homeschooled within the compulsory education system.



## 14 Overall analysis

The time frame 2015/16 to 2022/23 of this report covers the periods of four governments: PM Jyrki Katainen and PM Alexander Stubb (2011–2015); PM Juha Sipilä (2015–2019); PM Antti Rinne and PM Sanna Marin (2019–2023); and the start of the term of PM Petteri Orpo (2023–). A thorough analysis of all the changes in immigration law and policy during this time is beyond the scope of this report, but based on existing literature and what is presented here, it can be concluded that Finland's policy on humanitarian migration displays both restrictive and liberal tendencies (e.g. Välimäki 2019). A review of Finnish immigration policy and legislation from the 1980s provides empirical evidence that there has been a clear movement toward increased securitization of migration since the year 2000 (Palander & Pellander 2019).

In reaction to the “crisis” of 2015/16, 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” (Government of Finland 2015). Based on the action plan, the government amended the *Aliens Act* (Finlex 2023a) several times: the category of humanitarian protection was removed from the law, the application process was streamlined, family reunification criteria tightened, the protection seeker's access to legal counsel was limited, and the appeal periods of negative decisions were shortened.

A study examining the decisions on international protection given in 2015–2017 to 18- to 34-year-old asylum seekers from Iraq – the single most important nationality among the 2015/16 arrivals – noted two important policy changes that lowered the chances of these protection seekers getting asylum in Finland. Without any related change in law, The Finnish Immigration Service's (Migri) decision-making practice tightened considerably and the fear of physical or mental violence cited by the applicants was no longer considered as justified grounds for protection. In 2015, the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) considered the fear of violence presented in the applications as clearly justified in most cases, but in 2017, it only did so in some exceptional cases. In short, the accounts of the protection seekers were no longer believed as they had been before. In addition, it issued new guidelines in May 2016 concerning the improved security situation in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia. Because the applicants had the option – however theoretical in practice – of internal flight within their country of origin, getting a residence permit based on subsidiary protection became more difficult. (Saarikkomäki et al. 2018, see also Migri 2016b.)

The focus of the government and the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) in 2015/16 was on reducing the attractiveness of Finland as a destination and making the asylum process speedy and efficient, rather than ensuring that the protection seekers' human rights are protected at all times. The policies adopted have had unintended consequences: there has been an increase in cases where protection seekers have not been granted residence permits and, at the same time, it has not been possible to remove them from the country. Therefore, marginalised groups have emerged which have been impacted disproportionately. Further, procedural amendments have resulted in an increase in the number of appeals and of subsequent renewed asylum applications. (Pirjatanniemi et al. 2021).

Therefore, these changes in law and policy not only worsened the position of protection seekers and weakened their legal status, but it also managed to create a long-term problem of paperless persons in Finland (Ahonen & Kallius 2019, see also Intermin 2021). The Finnish Refugee council (2023) estimates that there are 3000–6000 paperless persons

without a valid residence permit in Finland, many of whom have been here since 2015/16. Some protection seekers are in a cycle of repeat applications to secure access to reception services and avoid deportation to a country where they are not willing to return. In April 2023 there were nearly 300 protection seekers in the reception system who had filed their fourth, fifth, or even 15<sup>th</sup> successive application for international protection (Intermin 2023f).

During the government period of social democratic Prime Ministers Antti Rinne and Sanna Marin (2019–2023), some steps towards a more human rights-oriented immigration policy were taken. The government adopted, for example, *the Action Plan for the Prevention of Irregular Entry and Stay for 2021–2024 — Tackling the Parallel Society* (Intermin 2021) which states as its pervasive principle the safeguarding of fundamental and human rights and improving the detection of human trafficking and the identification of vulnerable persons. An example was the change in the *Act on the provision of social and health care services* (Finlex 2023i) which promised also to give necessary health care services to paperless persons who do not have a residence permit in Finland (Government of Finland 2023b.) However, the government also engaged in the rhetoric of closing borders by amending the *Border Guard Act* (Finlex 2023h) in preparation for large-scale or instrumented influx of protection seekers so that the submitting of applications for international protection can be limited to only some border crossing points. (Government of Finland 2022b.) The government also sanctioned the building of a border barrier fence along some key locations of the Finnish-Russian border (Finnish Border Guard 2023).

The 2022/23 arrival of an unprecedented number of protection seekers due to the war in Ukraine has so far not resulted in major legal or policy changes. The Ministry of the Interior is confident that they are prepared to receive a large number of migrants during a short period of time, to face long-term migration pressure and are capable of rapidly increasing the places of accommodation in reception centres, directing migrants to registration centres, if necessary, and concentrating their resources on the rapid processing of applications. (Intermin 2023b). So far, the settling of Ukrainians under temporary protection in Finland has proceeded without much crisis rhetoric – a very different response to the situation in 2015/16.

In the Government programme of the National Coalition Party's Prime Minister Petteri Orpo (2023–), there are plans for significant changes to immigration laws and policies. As in 2015/16, the anti-immigrant, populist Finns Party is in government, and they were successful in getting many of their long-term goals for restricting immigration into the government programme. While the programme promises to help people fleeing war, persecution, and other human rights violations and to comply with human rights and other international treaties, its obligations under EU legislation and the rule of law, there is a clear emphasis on tightening policies, enforcing deportations and “preventing abuses of the system”. It remains to be seen how many of the new policies will pass the legislative process and how the changes have an impact on those seeking international protection in Finland.

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