

**Integration Policy Programme
(adopted 2008)**

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Finland is part of the European Union and of a world where people more than before move between countries and labour markets. During the next ten years Finland will need at least a hundred thousand new immigrants, since more than a hundred thousand persons will be leaving many of the key functions in society and moving into retirement. But in order to achieve sustainable immigration we need a change in attitude. We must change ourselves and our attitudes in the labour market, in our daily lives, and in the way we think.

Lack of stability in many parts of the world causes immigrants and asylum seekers to try to find a safe place in which they can live free from persecution and repression. We have, in our society, immigrants from different backgrounds, both newcomers and those who have lived in Finland for a long time. For all individuals with immigrant backgrounds their own cultural and social identity is important.

Integration concerns different groups with different needs and backgrounds, but their most general needs are a knowledge of Finnish/Swedish, education and employment. What they all have in common is a desire for a happy life and a feeling that they belong to Finnish society. Finland must become better at integrating immigrants into society.

Multicultural society is a fact. Encounters of different cultures demand a great deal from our authorities and our population. Migrational movements are large-scale phenomena, but at the same time they affect individuals who have to take momentous decisions about their future, decisions that may take them, sometimes against their will, to an unknown country to start up their lives again.

Tolerance is not enough. We need actively to **fight racism and discrimination**. We need actively to **promote equal treatment, equality and multiculturalism**. These are key-words if Finland wants successfully to pursue a policy of increased immigration and integration of the new Finns. Finland needs an active policy of integration to be able to shoulder the responsibilities and exploit the opportunities inherent in such a situation. The SFP regards greater freedom of movement for individuals as a dimension of globalization.

The SFP has a strong tradition of working for tolerance, humane values and minority rights and therefore takes an active interest in the integration and well-being of immigrants. Immigration into Finland has for several decades been modest in comparison with the other Nordic countries. During the twenty-first century other political parties, too, have come to realize that a more active and humane immigration policy is simply a must – something that The SFP has been advocating for a long time. Finland needs a new integration policy that includes and welcomes new Finns in Finnish society. It is time to stop casting suspicion on immigrants and to stop excluding them.

The granting of asylum and the reception of quota refugees, on the one hand, and increased immigration of labour, on the other, are by no means contradictory phenomena. The SFP works for a general humane view of refugees and asylum seekers.

The SFP considers respect for the human being and respect for the immigrant a fundamental principle.

The immigrant meets Finnish authorities

The SFP wants permit-issuing authorities to function efficiently and well. An immigrant will feel worried and insecure while in Finland if, for example, the applications of members of his family are not dealt with quickly. In the case of labour immigration it is important both for the employee and the employer that an application for residence permit is dealt with in a speedy and customer-friendly way. No one benefits from a long drawn-out application process. The authorities should not become a bottleneck that holds up immigration. They must be prepared to give advice and to take quick decisions. The SFP believes that the immigration authorities need to become more efficient. The SFP also wants to ensure that the authorities at all times respect the rights of immigrants.

Residence permits and asylum applications are dealt with partly by the Immigration Office and partly by the Police. The Police and the Border Guard Authority both have legal rights to deport and to turn away immigrants. These authorities have the task of ensuring that cases are dealt with fairly and according to the norms that Finland has subscribed to. The most central obligation is the ban on repatriating refugees, which is written into our constitution. No one may be sent to an area where they run the risk of torture or inhuman treatment. The Migration Office, the Border Guard Authority and the Police are all under an obligation to ensure that Finland upholds the ban on repatriating refugees and respects human rights. This has not always happened. The European Court of Human Rights has convicted Finland of violating the prohibition on repatriating refugees and the Committee of the European Council Against Torture has criticized the procedures used for refusal of entry.

Anyone who is deported or refused entry should be given the opportunity to prepare themselves and deal with their personal affairs before departure. Especially in cases where asylum seekers have had their applications rejected, the police have sometimes allowed their endeavour to execute the order to take precedence over the asylum seekers' right to prepare themselves. The fact that the role of the police is limited to the execution of the order does not mean that they are allowed to neglect the rights of asylum seekers. The possibility that the applicant may return of his own free will without police intervention after a decision has been made to deport him or refuse him entry must be considered and prioritized. There is today no system of following up deportations and refusals of entry that reveal whether the procedure has been correct.

If an asylum seeker's application is rejected in one of the so-called accelerated procedures there is the risk that he or she is turned away before a court of law has had a chance to come to a decision. This may happen if the home country of the asylum seeker is regarded as a so-called safe country of origin (safe country). Finland has no lists of safe countries of origin, but each case is decided individually. The concept itself is questionable. The SFP believes that no one country can always be assumed to be safe for all its citizens.

Quota refugees have received refugee status from the refugee agency of the United Nations, the UNHCR. They can neither return to their home countries nor stay where they are, but must be given a new home in a third country. Finland's refugee quota, which is fixed annually in the general budget, has for a long time been seven hundred and fifty persons. It is time to raise it.

In order for Finland's refugee policy to work it is necessary that the quota refugees who arrive in Finland and the asylum seekers who are granted residence permits are allocated to specific municipalities – their own home municipalities. Today quota refugees who have been allocated to Finland have to wait in refugee camps in difficult conditions and asylum seekers who have been given residence permits have to wait in reception centres, because there are not enough places for them in the municipalities.

The SFP therefore considers that

- voluntary return must be prioritized over removal under police escort
- a system should be devised for the monitoring of refusals of entry and deportations
- the application process for residence permits should be quick and smooth
- when asylum decisions are made, special attention should be paid to the individual's legal rights
- the refugee quota should be raised to one thousand persons per year (from the present seven hundred and fifty) and that authorities should ensure that it is filled
- SFP elected representatives should urge the municipalities to accept refugees
- the authorities responsible for immigration affairs should be given instruction and training in multiculturalism and human rights

Integration is reciprocal

It is justified that immigrants, after maximally three years' residence in Finland, should be given a chance to see their immigration as a permanent solution. At the same time it is very important that they are able to live with their families or start a family, because isolation from other family members leads to a sense of rootlessness and alienation. The SFP stresses the importance of a clear regulatory framework for the immigrants' stay, in which security and respect for family ties should be guiding principles.

Refugees and other persons granted other forms of international protection in Finland have the right to family reunification. Those who have other forms of residence permits, for example those who come to Finland after having found a job here, have the right to bring their families with them if they can support them. This so-called income requirement is considered to be fulfilled if the immigrant's monthly net earnings amount to 900 € per adult and 450 € per child. This is considerably more than a Finnish family is considered to need to support itself without state benefits. In other words, more is demanded of immigrants than of Finns.

Associations play an important role in the integration process and even more so if they work in both directions, as in Swedish-Somalian and Swedish-Russian associations. Immigrants participate in association activities together with Finns, which increases their understanding

of each other's cultures and ways of functioning. Associations should be given a clear-cut role in the common effort to achieve successful integration, which always starts at the grass roots.

In order to create involvement instead of rootlessness, space should be made for everybody to be politically engaged and socially active on an equal basis. If immigrants are seen and heard in political organs, they can have an impact on their own daily lives, which increases their sense of belonging. Finland belongs to all its residents. The SFP is committed to involving and providing more opportunities for interested immigrants to engage in politics.

Immigrants should participate in the integration process right from the start and be able to influence its planning. Immigrants know best what it is like to be an immigrant in Finland.

All communication between people is a give-and-take process. The SFP is working for open and effective communication between all people regardless of origin.

Greater diversity in society makes it more important for us to realize what we have in common, and therefore to make available more positive information about our common aspirations, which in its turn helps to create a cohesive, multicultural society.

Currently there is a huge lack of information for and about immigrants in Finland. Guidance and information reduce the fear of the unknown and can create a sense of togetherness. We create mutual respect between people by utilizing the competence that immigrants have and by bringing out the positive aspects of immigration. The role of the media in the change in attitude is particularly important. One way of reducing the fear deriving from ignorance is to present and spread, to residents as well as to civil servants, information about new immigrant groups coming into a municipality. In order to improve the preparedness of the immigrants as well as of the residents, the municipalities and the state, immigrant information packages should be produced and distributed also in the immigrants' own language.

Immigrants are not the only ones to be integrated. Finns, too, have to be integrated with immigrants. The unknown is often frightening. A positive development of multiculturalism in Finland can be achieved by the dissemination of information. Similarities should be emphasized in preference to dissimilarities. Information packages should be put together and distributed to institutions such as day nurseries, schools, hospitals and local authorities. Integration plans should always be made individually in consultation with the immigrant. The plans should be checked and reviewed after three years.

The SFP therefore believes that

- more support should be given to associations and voluntary organizations for integration work
- the SFP's aim in the election should be to field more candidates with immigrant backgrounds in each constituency
- immigrants should have a chance to participate in the making of the integration policy
- information packages should be produced and distributed to residents, officials and immigrants

- education in multiculturalism should be provided for municipal officials and civil servants
- the immigrant income requirement should be set at the same level as the requirement for a Finnish family
- individual integration plans should be reviewed after three years

Citizenship

Issues relating to Finnish citizenship are important for a well-functioning and successful integration policy. Becoming a Finnish citizen can be an important step in the overall integration process, involving influence and participation, rights and obligations.

The possibility of obtaining Finnish citizenship should be explained early to immigrants and refugees, preferably in a step-by-step process which makes it understandable and simple for active individuals to set themselves the goal of becoming citizens of Finland. The information about how to become a citizen and which rights and obligations that involves should be given early in the reception phase, and preferably in the incomer's own language.

Many immigrants and some refugees have no ambition to become Finnish citizens. However, citizenship entails unique rights and opportunities that all residents in Finland should be aware of.

An application for citizenship represents the will of the applicant to commit himself/herself to the country in which he/she lives. From the point of view of society this will is a positive sign. For this reason, there needs to be a balance in the requirements set for citizenship. The requirements exist to guarantee that the applicant seriously wishes to commit himself to his new home country. However, if the requirements are too high, they counteract their own purpose. Nor should it be made too difficult to prove that you meet the requirements. A continuous critical review of the requirements is therefore justified. Here it is primarily the requirements for length of stay in Finland and a command of either of the two national languages that need to be submitted to continuous critical scrutiny. A practical problem is that there are not enough opportunities for immigrants to prove their linguistic proficiency.

The SFP therefore considers that

- it is time to appoint a commission to review the need for adjustment in the citizenship legislation
- information and material relating to citizenship should be produced in several relevant languages. The material, in addition to information about the process that leads to citizenship, should also contain information about the rights and obligations of Finnish citizens

Immigrants need jobs; jobs need immigrants

Every adult has the right to work and thus to be able to support himself and his family, if he has one. Ethnic diversity at the work place includes, according to the law, equal rights and opportunities in terms of work, employment conditions and personal development of skills regardless of ethnicity.

Many immigrants who come to Finland are well educated. In order to be able to work within their specific professional areas, they should be given the opportunity to have their degrees and qualifications tested and be offered additional training, if necessary. Not to use the professional skills of immigrants is a waste of resources. There are already for some occupations, such as the medical profession, systems available for complementary training in Finland. A system should be established for the complementation of training at various levels in all occupations. In an increasingly open global labour market, a system should be negotiated for the comparative assessment of examinations and work experience. This system should be based on an agreement between sender and receiver countries.

A considerable group of people of foreign extraction in Finland are unemployed. This is the case mainly in the metropolitan area and in the major cities. Unemployment is higher in certain nationalities. This group consists mainly of people with a refugee background or of foreign spouses of Finns.

There is a need for a change in attitude among employers to correct this unsatisfactory state of affairs.

The SFP wants to promote equal treatment for people with foreign backgrounds on the labour market.

Many foreigners feel that they are in a vicious circle. Employers demand a good knowledge of Swedish or Finnish. Immigrants need language courses as well as practical experience of speaking the language, but because they are unemployed, they do not have enough chances to use the language.

The government's immigrant policy programme from the autumn of 2006 is a sound basis and should be put into practice. The programme is based on the principle that all immigrants' chances of receiving equal and non-discriminatory treatment in society should be improved and that the development of pluralistic and multicultural work communities should be promoted and that the supervision of the working conditions of foreign workers should be made easier.

According to the present Aliens Act, immigrants in permanent employment are given continuous permits and only those who are in temporary employment are given temporary residence permits. Nevertheless, in practice most residence permits today are temporary, so-called B-permits. The limited rights connected with temporary residence permits cause problems for the employees. This applies to the right to domicile, education and healthcare. The permits issued to employees should be devised in such a way that they give the employee enough rights and opportunities to integrate into Finnish society.

Finland is facing a labour shortage. We can already see how the retirement of big age groups is affecting the employment situation in certain sectors, with the result that companies have started recruiting foreign workers. Our problem is one of matching workers with the work

available. Despite unemployment, there is a parallel shortage of labour. If it were possible for a potential employee to seek employment in Finland while on a visa in Finland, it would be much easier for employers and employees to find each other.

A guidance system should be devised for immigrants who come to Finland to work. The purpose of such a guidance system is to engage all sectors of society that are involved in or affected by immigration and to create an effective mechanism to address the social challenges that arise. A first step is an arrival package in the employee's native language to help him or her understand the Finnish labour market.

The SFP therefore considers that

- a residence permit should give the employee and his or her family sufficient rights to enable them to integrate into Finnish society
- it should be possible to seek employment in Finland while staying here on a visa
- it should be made possible to obtain a residence permit while staying in Finland
- a guidance system should be built up which includes an arrival package
- the control of employment conditions for immigrants should be improved
- a system for the complementation of previous training should be established
- the recognition system for foreign degrees should be improved
- a better network of contacts (cooperation) between recipient and donor countries should be established
- a change in attitude among employers should be achieved through reward systems and campaigns
- the state should take into use a formalized competence analysis, so that the immigrant can be integrated and be given work at the right level of competence

Education – forward in life

Ability to communicate in the language(s) of the host country is a prerequisite for successful integration. Five aspects of language teaching for immigrants are important:

- Preparatory teaching of and in Swedish
- Teaching of Swedish as a second language
- Mother tongue teaching
- Support teaching

- The immigrant must also in practice be given the right to choose the integration language, Finnish or Swedish

There are different resources for the different sections.

The Finland-Swedish problem in integration policy is that immigrants are channelled into Finnish society and the system is built around Finnish. Immigrants are exempted from learning Swedish in Finnish schools.

Swedish teaching is a self-evident aim for the SFP. The SFP also believes that all students should be guaranteed mother tongue teaching.

We need more resources in education to cope with increased immigration and serious efforts must be made by the educational authorities and organizations.

Respect for all religions must be promoted through the dissemination of information. The challenge here is how to implement a programme of mother tongue teaching and religious knowledge if language teachers and religious knowledge teachers are difficult to find. One solution could be a pool of teachers (compare the common immigrant service already available) to remedy the shortage of teachers. The SFP is working for the recognition of, and respect for, the students' own identity at school.

The SFP wants to see more foreign students at the universities. There is too little academic teaching in English.

The teaching material in Swedish for immigrants in Finland is often inadequate and material from Sweden does not necessarily work well in a Finland-Swedish context. It is therefore necessary to produce teaching material based on the Finland-Swedish context.

The equality of the two national languages means that Swedish should be a real alternative for immigrants. A choice is available in many bilingual communities, but Finnish is often offered as the only alternative. Despite this, eight percent of immigrants report Swedish as their main language. The SFP continues to emphasize that refugees and immigrants should have the option of learning Finnish or Swedish.

The SFP therefore considers that

- pools of language teachers should be established
- Finland-Swedish educational materials for immigrants should be produced

Housing policy – diversity in housing

It is natural that those who come from another country choose to settle near people with whom they feel an affinity. The problem is ghettoization, that is to say, immigrants get stuck in socially deprived suburbs because they have no access to alternative, favourable types of housing and neighbourhoods. The goal should be everybody should have a choice where and how they live, whether as tenants, tenant-owners, or owner-occupiers.

Tenant-ownership housing is a social alternative where the tenant pays fifteen percent of the value of the dwelling plus a monthly charge for permanent residential rights. In addition, the inhabitants have the right to participate in the decision-making of the company, which increases the sense of participation. With more housing tenant-ownership companies there will be a better mix of people from different backgrounds, of both Finns and new Finns. This leads to new encounters between people, which results in better integration.

There is an acute shortage of housing in the metropolitan area where more than half of all immigrants live. There are, in Finland, just over thirty thousand tenant-ownership dwellings with approximately one hundred thousand inhabitants. The building of houses must be speeded up and, particularly in the metropolitan region, tenant-ownership housing should be given priority over rented housing. Overcoming the housing shortage and the provision of other types of housing than rented accommodation are important prerequisites for a successful struggle against segregation and ghettoization.

The acquisition of a tenant-ownership dwelling requires a fairly sound personal economy. We need to create forms of credit that meet the needs of immigrants who wish to invest in a tenant-ownership dwelling. The state should be prepared to provide a partial guarantee for such loan arrangements. In addition, authorities and private credit institutions should develop advisory services on types of housing and loan arrangements for immigrants.

The SFP therefore considers that

- rented housing owned by municipalities should be transformed into tenant-ownership companies in agreement with the residents
- residential areas should include a variety of houses
- authorities and private credit institutions should develop advisory services on housing for immigrants

Free movement in Europe – also for immigrants?

Migration is a concern for the whole EU. Since 1999, the EU has competence in asylum and migration issues. Minimum standards for asylum rules have been introduced in the EU, but full harmonization has not yet been reached.

For European countries, including Finland, the reception of refugees is an important humanitarian commitment. Asylum policy is an important indicator of the credibility and authenticity of the EU's human rights policy. In addition, a responsible human rights policy can in the future be an important argument for an immigrant's decision to move to Europe. The SFP presupposes that the EU retains and supports the asylum institution and maintains high human rights standards in the harmonization of its asylum rules.

A central argument for the introduction of ever stricter border controls has been the governments' wish to solve the problem of illegal immigration and trafficking. Unfortunately, in practice these measures strike hard against those who seek protection in Europe. The legitimate struggle against the exploitation of people's economic distress or immediate danger must be anchored in human rights and the protection of refugees.

Immigrants with residence permits in EU member countries have only limited possibilities of using the freedom of movement for labour. The rights of immigrants to seek employment throughout the EU should be extended.

It is still within each the competence of each EU member country to decide how much immigration they need. From the Finnish point of view it is important that the work-related immigration can satisfy the demand for labour. Quotas fixed at the European level would undermine this clear basis for Finnish immigration policy.

The SFP therefore considers that

- Finland should set an example with its policy, which would help to establish in the EU a refugee and asylum policy that observes human rights
- measures taken against illegal immigration should be scrutinized more critically than today, so that actions taken by governments do not create further markets for trafficking and smuggling
- no quotas for immigration should be introduced

Conclusion

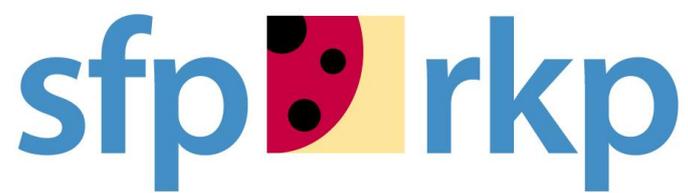
Social peace, democracy, a clean environment, good social services and a well-functioning public administration are the characteristics of Finnish society which immigrants value and which allow us to compete for labour. Even so, immigration and a more multicultural population are a major challenge for society, and therefore it is important that immigration takes place in a way that allows society to cope with these challenges successfully.

The municipalities have a major responsibility for the success of integration. It is therefore necessary for the municipalities to adjust their organization to the needs of a multicultural society.

The municipalities must be more ready than today to accept responsibility for the reception of refugees.

In order that immigrants should have a real chance in their new homeland they must be allowed to feel that they participate in society. A strong and well-defined legal position is an important element. The Finnish Constitution, which in principle acknowledges equal rights for all residents of Finland, is a good basis for Finland and a good example for Europe. Discrimination and unfair working conditions are also a breeding ground for suspicion and fear of unfair competition by the domestic labour force. **The SFP believes that respect for the rights of immigrants and freedom from discrimination is a fundamental question for the integration of immigrants but also for the acceptance of immigration by the whole population.**

The SFP is optimistic about Finland's chances of receiving more immigrants and about its chances of contributing to the creation of a long-term, sustainable immigration policy for the European Union. The SFP wants to make the benefits of our society more accessible to the immigrants who have chosen to settle in Finland.



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