

Summary

Getting integrated in the city – a comprehensive picture of residents with a foreign background in Helsinki in 2020

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In early 2020, Helsinki had slightly more than one hundred thousand residents who had a foreign background. Their share of the city's entire population approached twenty per cent. In recent years, population growth in Helsinki has largely been based on international migration. Of those residents who have a foreign background, four-fifths have been born outside Finland. Thus, the second generation – those born in Finland to parents born abroad – make up one-fifth of those with a foreign background in Helsinki.

By integration we mean finding your place and participating in society and your local community, feeling included and having a sense of belonging. It also means that the principle of equality is put into practice. Promotion of integration is regulated by law in Finland, and municipalities, too, provide many kinds of integration services to both newcomers and those immigrants who have already stayed in the country for longer. In recent years, international debate on integration has strongly emphasised that integration takes place at, above all, local level.

Integration involves lengthy processes in many different fields of life and society. Its success depends on – besides the authorities and service producers – the whole-of-society engagement. In Finland, integration is also seen as reciprocal, two-way development. Successful integration requires efforts from immigrants but also adaptation and new solutions from the Finnish society and the City of Helsinki.

The picture of immigrant integration and of the life situation of residents belonging to the second generation shows both good news and causes for worry. Helsinki's foreign-background population is very diverse. For almost anything that can be said about them the opposite can also be said. In the light of statistics, a large proportion do well in most fields of life. Indeed, much positive development has taken place in pace with, for example, the duration of stay in Finland.

Nonetheless, Helsinki resembles other similar cities in the world in the sense that some immigrants and their children have difficulties in finding their place in society – most visibly so in entering the job market. Particularly among those with a refugee background, but also with many of those migrating for family reasons, belonging to the labour force is less common and unemployment more common. Low economic activity has negative consequences for the immigrants and their families, as also for the City of Helsinki and Finnish society. Having a job not corresponding to one's qualifications is worryingly common among immigrants.

Finding a job often works as an entrance to successful integration in other arenas of life, too. But not always. In some cases, immigrants have to have their life in order in other senses before even trying to find a job. The total picture is more complicated than often imagined. Many immigrants who go to work may have problems with the social, cultural and identity-related bit of integration. At the same time, some of those who are unemployed or outside working life may have learned Finnish or Swedish quite well, and have a large social network and a close relationship to Helsinki and Finland.

Those especially who have moved to Finland from other EU member states do not always have an interest in acquiring Finnish citizenship. Although most public services are at the disposal of other than Finnish nationals, participation in decision-making tends to be limited among foreign nationals. This said, a positive trend can be seen at local elections in terms of both voting and running as a candidate. At the latest elections, particularly Helsinki Somalis were active participants. But as a rule, those with a foreign background are clearly under-represented in politics.

A large proportion of those residents in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area who have a foreign background feel they are part of the Finnish society, and their trust in authorities and social institutions is, as a rule, strong. But to many, identifying with the Finnish culture and nationality is more difficult. Even among those born in Finland, some do not feel they are Finnish. To many, it is easier to feel affinity with their own background country or ethnic-cultural community. Some of them feel outsiders to many groups and communities. Those, in particular, who do not come from Western countries, often lack the kind of social ties that reach all the way to those with a Finnish background.

Compared with the rest of the population, those with a foreign background often live in crowded homes. Many can't afford buying a home of their own, and those in particular who belong to refugee groups often live in social rented housing. A growing proportion of the homeless in Helsinki have been born abroad. Ethnic-cultural differentiation between neighbourhoods has continued – while at the same time the consequences of international migration can be observed in a growing number of neighbourhoods. In Helsinki, segregation is moderate in comparison with other corresponding Scandinavian cities.

Of those with a foreign background born in Finland, a large proportion are still children or adolescents. In countries and cities with a longer history of immigration it is a known fact that residents belonging to the second generation often have more problems at school and with achieving a degree, or with finding a job, than do the rest of the population. There are signs of such difficulties, other social problems and, for example, racism and discrimination in Helsinki, too.

For quite some time, the City of Helsinki has actively supported immigrants' integration. The Education Sector's Immigration Development Plan drawn up in 2017 lifted also those measures addressing the second gener-

ation to a new level. In promoting integration the City's own measures are important, as is cooperation with citizens' organisations, associations and the business community. Migration to Helsinki is most likely to continue, and the proportion of residents with a foreign background is set to grow rapidly in, especially, younger age groups.

According to the newest population forecast for the Helsinki Region, the foreign-background proportion of the population would have more than doubled by 2035. Their number would have reached 437,000 by then, and they would make up one-quarter of the region's entire population. Of all residents with a foreign background in the region, Helsinki's share would be about 45 per cent. The proportion of those with a foreign mother tongue in the city's population growth would be 83 per cent, corresponding to around 100,000. Today, a large proportion of Helsinki's immigrant population consists of people with a European background, but by 2035, those with a mother tongue from or background in Africa, the Middle East or the rest of Asia, would have increased very substantially in numbers.

Thus, fifteen years from now, the number of ethnicities, mother tongues and religions will most probably be higher than today in Helsinki. Many immigrants will have lived in Finland for decades, others having come to Finland only recently. Many children of immigrants are already young adults in the process of finishing their studies and entering working life. New minority groups have come about, and many of them have managed to consolidate the collective activities of their communities.

This development entails new challenges for Helsinki, but it also gives many opportunities. Through the roots and networks of those people moving here the city becomes increasingly strongly linked to the rest of the world. The rest of the world will be present in Helsinki city life, and this can be useful in many ways in science, culture and business. Through these wide networks, new knowledge reaches Helsinki fast.

At the same time, however, increasing pluralism makes it necessary for Helsinki, the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and Finland as a whole to learn what it takes to live side by side in conditions of ethnic and cultural diversity. Shared rules are needed for how to live peacefully together and act efficiently while also respecting the freedom and cultural rights of the individual. Public services will have to consider how best to safeguard the accessibility of services and the equal treatment of all.

Also, there are obvious risks for demographic and local segregation. Stratified deprivation is hard to get rid of if it has rooted itself in the structures of society. The trend within the labour market is that people with low education and weak language skills have increasing difficulties to find work. Therefore, sufficient attention and resources must be allocated for counselling, guidance and education for immigrants.

There is widespread consensus that the success in life of the descendants of immigrants is the crucial test for national and local integration policies. Helsinki is facing this trial only now, and the next ten-fifteen years will show how Finland, the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and the City of Helsinki have succeeded in their mission. We have every reason to follow the situation carefully, seek good practices and explore solutions that work. It is also important to intervene without delay in negative trends and take the appropriate measures when needed.