

Summary

Magdalena Jaakkola (2005) *The Attitudes of Finns towards Immigrants in 1987-2003*. Labour Policy Studies 286. Ministry of Labour, Helsinki.

On an international scale, Finland has few immigrants. Finland has traditionally been a land of emigration that people have left to find jobs abroad. After the Second World War (1945-1990) over one half million Finns moved to Sweden to find employment, housing or a higher standard of living. Only less than one half have returned. It was not until the beginning of the 1980s that more people have been moving to Finland than have left it: Even then a large proportion of the immigrants were Swedish-Finnish return migrants.

In 2003 there were 107,000 (2 % of the population) foreign citizens and 160,000 persons who had been born abroad (3 % of the population) living in Finland. About 40 percent of them are originally from the former Soviet Union: Most are Russian (25,000) or Estonian (14,000) citizens. About 25,000 persons who have migrated from the former Soviet Union have an ethnically Finnish return migrant background or are members of a return migrant's family, who were granted the right to repatriation to Finland in 1990. Finland has granted residence permits to 23,500 refugees. The largest refugee groups were born in the former Yugoslavia (5,400) and in Somalia (4,700). Because Finland has been a labour-releasing country, it has not yet recruited foreign workers. With the large age groups born after the Second World War soon coming to retirement age, it has been predicted that Finland will have a labour shortage already in the near future.

The attitudes of Finns towards the immigration of foreigners have been studied since the 1980s. In 1987 the first Finnish attitude survey was carried out, using corresponding studies made in Sweden as models and comparisons. Since then the development of attitudes has been studied about every five years: in 1993, 1998 and 2003. In 1987-1998 about 1,000 persons were personally interviewed and in 2003 more than 1,500 persons. As one third of all immigrants live in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, special data was gathered there in 1993, 1998 and 2003. The interviews were carried out by TNS Gallup Ltd. The studies have been funded by the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Ministry of the Interior, City of Helsinki Urban Facts and the Rehabilitation Foundation.

During the period 1987-2003 when the attitude surveys were carried out, Finnish society has changed: Finland's foreign population has increased six-fold and its ethnic structure is more diversified. Economic cycles have also varied: in the early 1990s Finland plunged into a recession and massive unemployment. At the time of the first attitude survey

(1987), Finland's unemployment rate was five percent. By the recession year of 1993 – when the next attitude survey was carried out – the unemployment rate had climbed all the way to 19 percent. When the economy revived after the recession, the employment situation improved. By the time of the 2003 attitude survey, unemployment had declined by half to nine percent. These changes in society have had an impact on the attitudes of Finns towards the immigration of foreigners.

The research results showed that the attitudes of Finns towards the immigration of foreigners who come for different reasons and from different countries have become more favourable after the recession (1993). In 1993-2003 attitudes towards foreign labour changed the most: the proportion of negative attitudes decreased from 61 percent to 38 percent and the proportion with favourable attitudes – those wanting “much more or somewhat more“ foreign labour – doubled to 30 percent. In 2003 attitudes towards accepting foreign labour were more favourable than in 1998 and in 1987, when there were only 18,000 foreign citizens in Finland, the economy was booming and when a labour shortage was previously being predicted. (Figure 1)

The immigrant's occupation had an effect on people's attitudes. In 2003 one half of Finns were of the opinion that Finland should accept more “skilled” foreigners than it does now, for example, experts and scientists, students and language teachers. Over one third wanted an increasing number of foreign entrepreneurs to come to Finland. Attitudes towards these groups were more favourable than towards foreign job-seekers (as a general term). Attitudes towards foreign athletes, restaurant owners and musicians were more reserved.

The majority of the respondents' attitudes were at least rather favourable towards immigrants working as doctors, teachers, child care workers, social workers, employment agency officials and police. The preference, however, was for immigrants to be employed in the “typical immigrant occupations” found in many countries, meaning as cleaners and taxi drivers. People would also more readily accept immigrants as co-workers than as supervisors. Attitudes towards immigrants being employed in most of the above-mentioned occupations were more favourable in 2003 than in 1993. The questions did not mention any specific nationalities.

In 1993-2003 negative attitudes towards refugees have also decreased. In 2003 one out of every five Finns was of the opinion that Finland should accept many/or somewhat more refugees than it does now and almost one half considered the current practice appropriate. One out of three respondents was of the opinion that Finland should accept fewer refugees than now (Figure 2). The reason for being a refugee also had an impact on attitudes: attitudes towards people who had fled from war or from environmental catastrophes and people starving in develop-

ing countries were markedly more favourable than towards people who were being persecuted for political or religious reasons or because of race.

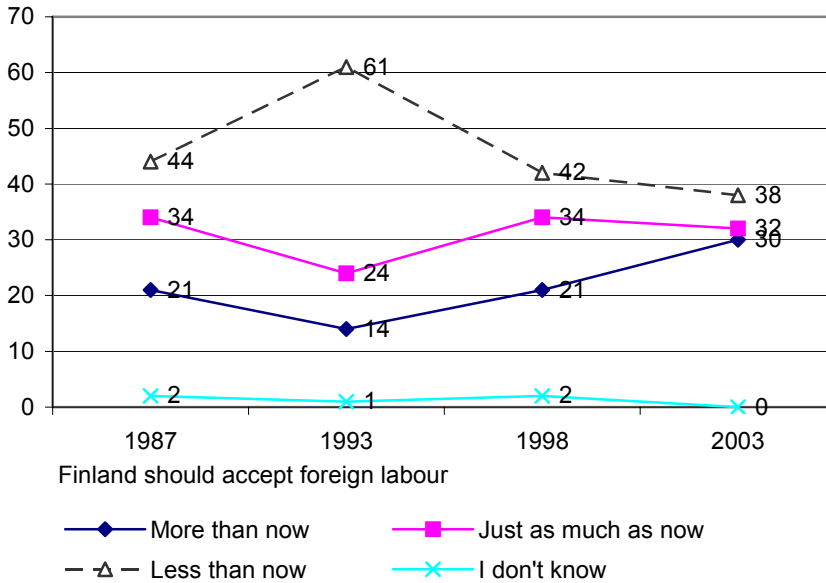


Figure 1. Attitudes towards foreign labour in 1987-2003 (%)

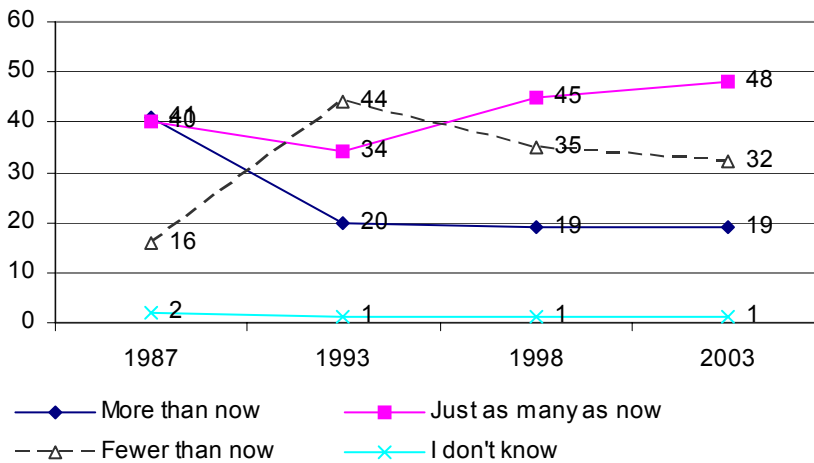


Figure 2. Attitudes towards accepting refugees 1987-2003 (%)
 ("Finland should accept many more/somewhat more refugees...")

In 2003 40 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that Finland should accept more people who have fled from war than it does now and one in three felt that Finland should accept more people who have fled from environmental catastrophes and people starving in developing countries. More than one fourth (28 %) felt that Finland should accept people persecuted for political or religious reasons or because of race and one in five had a favourable attitude toward accepting refugees in general.

Attitudes towards the immigration of almost all (24) of the nationalities mentioned in the studies were more positive in 2003 than in the recession year of 1993 (Figure 3). Attitudes towards different nationalities continue to differ, however. During all the survey periods Finnish attitudes towards people from the Nordic countries, who are culturally closer to Finns and whose standard of living is closer, and towards people coming from Anglo-Saxon countries were more favourable than towards the immigration of people who are visibly and culturally different from the native population, who come from countries with a lower standard of living and that are faraway. Attitudes towards the immigration of different nationalities were explained partly by the same factors as attitudes towards foreign workers and accepting refugees.

Attitudes towards Finns and Estonians, kindred people, coming from the former Soviet Union continued to be more favourable than attitudes towards Russians, but attitudes towards Russians and towards visibly different immigrants were also much more positive in 2003 than in the recession year of 1993. It is especially significant that the most negative attitudes had also decreased markedly in 2003 compared to 1993.

In 2003 there was more emphasis than before on the positive consequences of immigration: a more diversified cultural life, an increase in language skills, tolerance, joy of living and foreign trade and a revitalized economy. Only a little over one fourth believed that Finnish culture would be threatened by increased immigration. The majority continued to fear the spread of drugs, aids, crime and unrest as a result of immigration.

A positive development in attitudes has spread throughout the entire society. In 1993-2003 favourable attitudes toward foreign labour and different nationalities increased and negative attitudes towards refugees decreased in all gender, age and educational groups and among supporters of all political parties. Most often at the vanguard of this positive development were women, people with higher education, the Greens, people living in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, people who are well-travelled and people who were personally acquainted with immigrants. In 2003, for example, 58 percent of the highly educated, but only one in five (21 %) of those with a basic education, felt that Finland should accept more foreign jobseekers than it does now. Young people and work-

ing-aged men had a more negative attitude toward accepting foreign workers than did the others.

Men were in favour of selective migration on the basis of education more often than women. They also wanted more foreign entrepreneurs and other people with special skills to come to Finland more often than women did. The attitudes of women towards refugees and towards nationalities visibly different from Finns were more favourable than those of men. The attitudes of young (15-17-year-old) boys towards immigrants were especially negative. One boy out of every four considered himself racist and at least partially supported the anti-foreigner activities of the skinheads. Pensioners agreed even more often with the old racist attitude statements. Pensioners were not conscious of this racism, however, for they considered themselves racist more seldom than the others.

A high level of education explained positive attitudes towards immigrants the most during all the survey periods. There were also differences between occupational groups. The attitudes of managers/upper white-collar employees and students towards accepting foreign labour and refugees were more positive than average, while the attitudes of farmers and the unemployed were more negative than the others. The attitudes of entrepreneurs towards foreign entrepreneurs were more polarized than the others: more than one third were in favour and one third opposed.

In the Helsinki Metropolitan Area attitudes towards foreign workers and refugees were more positive than in the smaller cities and the rural areas during all the survey periods. In 2003 already almost one half (43 %) of the respondents living in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area felt that more foreign jobseekers should be accepted than now and only one fifth felt that fewer than now should be accepted. More than one third approved of the current practice.

Political ideology also had an impact on attitudes. Supporters of the Green League of Finland and of the largest right-wing party, the National Coalition Party, had more positive attitudes towards accepting foreign workers than did the others. About half of them felt that Finland should accept more foreign jobseekers than it now does. The Greens and supporters of the Left Alliance, on the other hand, felt more often that Finland should accept more refugees than it does now.

Experiencing socioeconomic threat explained – according to the conflict theory/ethnic competition theory– the reserved attitudes people with little education and the weakest position on the job market have towards immigrants during all the survey periods. The more the respondents saw immigrants as threatening the employment and social security of the native population, the more negative were their attitudes towards accepting foreign workers and refugees. During the recession and massive unemployment (1993) people were afraid that immigrants would

compete with the native population for jobs and social benefits more often than before (1987) or after the recession (1998 and 2003). The people most afraid of competition on the job market and for social benefits were those whose social position was the weakest: workers, the unemployed and pensioners. People with more education do not experience as much socioeconomic threat, because they are more often employed in fields demanding language skills and local further training, fields where it is harder for immigrants to find employment.

The results also supported the contact theory. The more personal contacts the respondents had with immigrants, the more positive were their attitudes toward immigrants coming to Finland for different reasons and from different countries. Contacts with immigrants explain positive attitudes toward different nationalities even more than one's education and one's occupation. They were less afraid of competition from immigrants for jobs and social benefits and were less worried than the others about the spread of drugs, aids and crime as a result of the immigration of foreigners to Finland.

In contrast, attitudes towards the language rights and political rights of immigrants remained the same. In 2003 the majority (84 %) of the respondents were completely or partly of the opinion that immigrants should maintain their native language and teach it to their children. Well over half (57 %) were at least partly of the opinion that Finland should arrange instruction in their native language for foreigners, if they so desire. Almost one half (44 %) were in favour of granting foreign citizens the right to vote in municipal elections – a right they already have, if they have lived in Finland for at least four years. One in three would also give foreign citizens the right to vote in parliamentary elections after they have lived in Finland for a few years. One out of four (27 %) would also grant them the right to run for parliament. Women, those with the most education and those with the most personal contacts with immigrants had more positive attitudes than the others towards the political rights of foreigners.

The fact that the Finnish attitude climate is becoming more favourable will most likely make it easier for foreigners to immigrate to Finland and enjoy life here. This is especially important now when Finland is under the threat of a labour shortage. In the Council of State's Future Report (2004) the goal set for active immigration policy is increased work-based immigration. The attitude surveys showed that favourable attitudes have increased more towards foreign labour than towards immigrants moving to Finland for other reasons.