

**COUNTRY
CHAPTER**

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FINLAND

BY THE GOVERNMENT OF FINLAND



Finland Overview

Resettlement Programme since: 1985	Selection Missions: Yes	Dossier Submissions: 100 urgent/emergency
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Resettlement Admission Targets for 2014:

Admission Targets for UNHCR Submissions :	1050
Total Resettlement Admission Target:	1050

Regional Allocations for 2014:

Africa	150
Asia and Pacific:	
Middle East and North Africa	800
Europe:	
Americas:	

Sub-quota Features:

Designated Sub-quota/Acceptance for:	2014 Description, Additional Comments:
Emergency resettlement procedures	100 dossier places for urgent/emergency cases
Medical cases	No specific number of places, but approximately 10-15% of the annual quota
Women-at-risk cases	
Unaccompanied children	
Family reunion (within the programme)	

1. Resettlement Policy

1.1 Description of Finland's Resettlement Policy

The Finnish Government has received refugees proposed by UNHCR since 1979. The annual resettlement programme was established in 1985. Since 2001 the refugee quota (the annual resettlement programme), has been 750 individuals. In 2013, the Government made a decision to increase the quota by additional 300 persons for the year 2014.

The **Finnish Aliens Act** (entered into force on 1 May 2004) defines the refugee quota as well as the requirements and procedures for admitting aliens to Finland under the quota.

The **Minister of the Interior** decides on the allocation of the refugee quota after consultation with the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Employment and the Economy**. **Parliament** makes the final decision on the annual quota and the resources for admitting resettled refugees to Finland when the State budget is approved.

The **Finnish Immigration Service** is the operational authority implementing the decision on the annual resettlement programme/the refugee quota. The Finnish Immigration Service carries out selection missions, decides on the cases submitted and makes travel arrangements for the individuals accepted for resettlement. At local level, municipalities are responsible for the reception and integration of quota refugees.

The first **Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers** entered into force in 1999. The renewed Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration entered into force on 1 September 2011. The new Act entails increases to governmental compensations for municipalities which receive refugees. The reason for this is to encourage more

municipalities to receive, or resettle, refugees. During 2010–2014, additional funding from the European Refugee Fund has also been allocated to increase the compensation to municipalities. The largest refugee groups admitted to Finland since 2001 have been Iraqis, Afghans, Congolese, Myanmarese, Iranians and Syrians. Building larger communities of a particular nationality at local level is considered beneficial, which is why Finland still wishes to find continuity in its resettlement activities.

In Finland, the State plays an active role in encouraging immigrants, including refugees, to integrate in their new home country. Integration is implemented through individual integration plans for immigrants and integration programmes for resettling municipalities. The refugees are entitled to an integration plan for the first three years, in special cases up to five years, during which they acquire knowledge and skills needed in Finnish society. Finland also provides the refugees in the resettlement programme with a cultural orientation training course already prior to their arrival in Finland.

Finland emphasises the need of strategic resettlement schemes and programmes. At the moment, Finland participates in the strategic resettlement project in Iran (Afghan refugees) in cooperation with a number of other resettlement countries. Finland also stresses the need to implement the Joint EU Resettlement Scheme — including the need to get more EU states to participate in the global resettlement work in cooperation with UNHCR.

2. Criteria for Recognition of Refugee Status Eligibility and Asylum

Under the Aliens Act (301/2004), an alien residing in the country is granted asylum if the requirements laid down in section 87 of the Aliens Act are met. The wording of this section is virtually identical to the definition in the 1951 Convention, omitting the territorial and temporal limitations. An alien residing in Finland is granted asylum if, owing to well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of ethnic origin, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, he or she resides outside his or her country of origin or habitual residence and if, owing to such fear, he or she is unwilling to avail him or herself of the protection of the said country.

Under section 106 of the Aliens Act, refugee status is also granted to an alien who has been admitted to Finland for resettlement under the refugee quota on the basis of refugee status. Refugees admitted to Finland under the refugee quota based on the UNHCR proposal are all granted Convention status. For this reason, Finland expects those that are proposed by UNHCR to have a strong need of protection against the country of origin. With regards to people other than those whom UNHCR has proposed, it is possible, on the basis of individual consideration, to grant these people a residence permit based on the need for protection, instead of granting them Convention/refugee status. Furthermore, under section 106 of the Aliens Act, refugee status is granted to family members of aliens who have been granted refugee status, if these family members have been issued with a residence permit on the basis of family ties and if they are considered as refugees (see section 14 of this chapter).

3. Criteria for Resettlement

3.1 Refugee Resettlement Eligibility Criteria

The requirements for admitting aliens for resettlement under the refugee quota are laid down in section 92 of the Aliens Act.

The first requirement is the alien's need for international protection with regard to his or her home country. The same factors in determining the need for international protection should be taken into account as within the asylum procedure.

The second requirement is the alien's need for resettlement with regard to the country where he or she is residing. The need for resettlement is apparent if the person is threatened with return to his or her country of origin or with arbitrary arrest or imprisonment in the first country of asylum. Survivors of violence and torture and people in need of resettlement for medical

reasons are also persons in need of resettlement. Women, particularly single women and single parents, often find themselves in a more vulnerable position than other alien groups in the country of asylum owing to the lack of social and ethnic networks.

When considering resettlement, attention is also paid to the need for reunification of families and to the special needs of children, adolescents and elderly refugees. Resettlement may also be considered for refugees who are not in need of resettlement for reasons of immediate protection but who find it difficult to establish themselves in their country of asylum in a manner appropriate to their cultural, social, religious or educational background. In such cases, a further requirement for resettlement is, however, that there are places available in the quota that are not needed for those in need of immediate resettlement.

The third requirement is that the requirements for admitting and integrating the refugee into the country have been assessed.

The fourth requirement is that there are no obstacles to issuing a residence permit under section 36 of the Aliens Act. Under the said section, a residence permit may be refused if the alien is considered a danger to public order, security or health or to Finland's international relations.

4. Resettlement Allocations/Processing Priorities

Under section 91 of the Aliens Act, the Ministry of Interior, in cooperation with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, prepares a proposal on the territorial and/or refugee group allocation of the refugee quota. UNHCR's proposal to Finland and the discussion conducted with UNHCR form the basis for the preparations.

The decision on the allocation of the refugee quota is made at ministerial level. A ministerial group adopts the principles guiding the filling of the quota, and the minister responsible for migration the specific allocation of the annual quota. The decision identifies the groups of refugees eligible for resettlement and states the areas from where refugees are to be admitted to Finland and the number of refugees to be admitted from each area.

Parliament makes the final decision on the annual refugee quota and the resources for admitting resettled refugees to Finland when the State budget is approved.

5. Submission and Processing via Dossier Selection

As an exception to the normal procedure, in emergency and urgent cases aliens are admitted to Finland without a personal interview on the basis of a written document by UNHCR. In recent years, these cases have accounted for 100 persons of the total annual quota. See section 7 on emergency cases. Dossier selection in other than emergency and urgent cases is possible but has traditionally not been used.

6. Submissions and Processing via In-country Selection

6.1 Preparations

The procedure is initiated on the basis of documents submitted by UNHCR. Officials of the Finnish Immigration Service and the security authorities, as well as integration experts, make a pre-selection in Finland. Already at this stage, comprehensive and reliable information relating to the need for resettlement, information on all family members and on the refugee's integration potential should be available.

Selection missions are prepared and carried out in close cooperation with UNHCR. Finland prefers that all UNHCR's submissions should consist of 20% more refugees than the coming intake in order to ensure sufficient scope for selection and to avoid no-shows. All documentation, i.e. Resettlement Registration Forms (RRFs) and all possible supplementary documentation, should be provided by UNHCR and made available at least one month before the planned date of departure from Finland of the selection mission.

6.2 Case Documentation

UNHCR sends all documentation (RRFs) to the Finnish Immigration Service, which forwards copies of the documents to the security authorities and integration experts. Officials of these bodies review the documentation. When necessary, health care services are consulted on medical needs and possibilities of treatment with regard to persons with medical needs and persons with disabilities.

6.3 Decision-making Process

During selection missions, applicants are interviewed by officials of the Finnish Immigration Service, integration experts usually from municipalities and administrative districts, and, if necessary, officials of the security authorities. After selection interviews, the members of the selection mission prepare a tentative list of those who will probably be admitted to Finland. At the end of the selection mission, the list is given to the competent UNHCR field office.

After obtaining a statement from the security authorities, the Finnish Immigration Service makes a decision on the issue of a residence permit to an alien to be admitted to Finland under the refugee quota. UNHCR, the Ministry of the Interior and the Finnish diplomatic mission concerned are informed of the decision.

A decision on the issue of a residence permit to an alien to be admitted to Finland under the refugee quota may not be appealed. As a rule, a case that has been rejected once will not be re-examined. Re-examination will only be possible if new, significant information on the refugee's background or circumstances can be presented or if considerable deterioration has taken place regarding his or her health.

6.5 Processing Time

The Finnish Immigration Service normally decides on quota cases within two months after the selection mission.

7. Emergency Cases/Urgent Cases

In emergency and urgent cases, refugees can be admitted to Finland without a personal interview on the basis of a written document by UNHCR. In recent years, these cases have accounted for 100 persons of the total annual quota.

UNHCR sends emergency resettlement submissions to the Finnish Immigration Service. When it is a question of a medical emergency case, the Finnish Immigration Service consults, if necessary, with a physician to establish the treatment possibilities in Finland, and resettles the refugee in a municipality that can offer the necessary treatment.

The Finnish Immigration Service, as in all cases, decides on the issue of a residence permit to an alien to be admitted to Finland under the refugee quota. It may request a statement from the security authorities. A copy of the decision is sent to UNHCR and to the Finnish diplomatic mission concerned. Travelling arrangements are made in cooperation with IOM.

Decisions on emergency cases are normally made within 5 working days and urgent cases as quickly as possible.

8. Special Categories/Special Needs

Finland has no separate quotas for special categories but they are included in the normal refugee quota. Finland can also admit unaccompanied minors and women in need of special protection (women at risk). Quota refugees who fall under the special categories are given appropriate support during integration.

When the refugees already residing in Finland appeal for their relatives to be accepted on some special grounds, the relatives are always advised to contact the respective UNHCR office in the country of their residence and ask if their case could be submitted to Finland by UNHCR. Finland does not ask for these cases but the submission should always come from UNHCR.

Refugees with Medical Needs

It is essential to obtain as accurate and up-to-date medical statements as possible in order to be able to estimate whether these cases can be treated in Finland within reasonable time limits while taking account of the best interest of the refugee.

Survivors of Violence and Torture

The UNHCR RRFs should be as explicit as possible in describing the mental health needs of the refugee arising from experiences of violence or torture in order to make the preparations for his/her referral to appropriate services as early as possible.

The municipal mental health care services are at the disposal of the refugees, and the SOS Crisis Centre and the Centre for Torture Survivors in Finland, together with the regional and local mental health care officials, provide special services that are accessible to the refugees. The health care system provides the medical treatment and rehabilitation needed in case of physical traumas caused by violence and torture.

Women at Risk

Single women and single mothers are resettled in municipalities where they already have possible connections, or they are placed in other municipalities where they can get support from other women. Women's possibilities to participate in integration training and to acquire language skills are supported by organising suitable day care for their children.

There are also special on-going projects at municipal and regional levels to improve the integration possibilities and support for women-at-risk cases.

Children

As a rule, the children resettled in Finland have entered the country either with their parents or with other relatives. Under the refugee quota, Finland has received only a few minors without accompanying parents.

At the initial stage of their resettlement, unaccompanied minors have been placed in family community homes.

Elderly

Most of the elderly arriving in Finland under the refugee quota come to the country as part of larger family units, a fact that makes it easier for them to adapt to the new environment. However, their language skills often remain insufficient for active contacts with society outside their families. The elderly refugees are not entitled to receive a pension immediately after their arrival since the pension is dependent on the period of stay in the country. However, they can receive integration allowance or the corresponding social assistance from the municipalities that receive them. Integration measures adapted to the needs of elderly persons are organised by municipalities and NGOs.

9. Medical Requirements

The information about the health status of refugees and the specific health care services they need should be as up-to-date as possible in order to facilitate the processing of their cases and the preparation of their reception at municipal level. No general medical control is necessary prior to admittance.

10. Orientation (pre-departure)

Since 2001, Finland has been arranging three-day cultural orientation courses for the refugees who have been accepted in Finland before their departure. Currently, the Finnish Immigration Service, together with its implementing partner, is arranging three-day comprehensive pre-departure cultural orientation courses in most locations that Finland resettles refugees from. Finland is sending a training team consisting of professional teachers, interpreters and a course coordinator to these locations. All the refugees accepted for resettlement in Finland are invited to participate in the course. During the orientation course, refugees receive basic information on Finland, its society and culture, and they are provided with intensive language lessons in the Finnish language. They also receive information on how to prepare themselves before moving to Finland, what to do before the travel, what happens during the travel and after arriving at the receiving municipalities in Finland. They also receive information on the various services, employment and study opportunities, health and social services, the daily life in the municipality where they are going to live and lots of other useful practical information. In addition, the Finnish Immigration Service is preparing a website aimed at refugees, providing orientation information in several languages.

11. Travel

Once the Finnish Immigration Service has decided on the residence permits, it informs UNHCR and the respective Finnish diplomatic mission of the municipalities in which the refugees are resettled and the timetable in which the municipalities are prepared to receive them. IOM makes the practical travel arrangements and invoices later for the flights. IOM Helsinki is asked to book the flights to the final destination of the refugees. The Finnish Red Cross receives the refugees at the airport and is informed of the timetables by IOM. Finland introduced biometric residence permit cards at the beginning of 2012. The respective Finnish diplomatic missions hand over the residence permit cards.

12. Status on Arrival and the Path to Citizenship

12.1 Immigration Status on Arrival

Refugees as defined by UNHCR who are admitted to Finland under the refugee quota are granted refugee status.

A family member of a refugee is normally issued the same status. However, if the situation of a family member is not comparable to the situation of the refugee (he or she may, for example, have another nationality), refugee status may not be granted. An alien admitted to Finland under the refugee quota may be issued with a permanent residence permit after four years of arrival in Finland.

12.2 Changes in Status and Requirements for Citizenship

Changes in residence permits are possible in situations specified in the Aliens Act, if the ground for residence changes.

For refugees, citizenship may be granted on application after four years' residence in the country.

According to section 108 of the Aliens Act, the refugee status can be cancelled, if:

- 1) the applicant has, when applying for international protection, knowingly given false information which has affected the outcome of the decision;
- 2) the applicant has, when applying for international protection, concealed a fact that would have affected the outcome of the decision; or

- 3) the applicant should have been refused asylum under section 87(2-4)¹ or a residence permit under section 88(2)² of the Aliens Act.

The provisions on the application of the cessation clause are laid down in section 107 of the Aliens Act. Refugee status will be withdrawn, if the person:

- 1) voluntarily re-avails him or herself of the protection of the country of his or her nationality;
- 2) having lost his or her nationality, voluntarily re-acquires it;
- 3) acquires a new nationality and is able to enjoy the protection of the country of his or her new nationality; or
- 4) voluntarily re-establishes him or herself in the country which he or she left or outside which he or she remained owing to fear of persecution; or evidently no longer stands in need of protection as the circumstances which caused him or her to be a refugee no longer exist.

The Finnish Immigration Service makes decisions on the cessation of refugee status. In those very rare cases where it has been stated that refugee status has ceased, the person concerned has been allowed to stay in Finland with a different residence permit, because of the existing ties to Finland. Under the Aliens Act, it is possible to deport, for example, an alien who is found to be guilty of a serious crime and whose refugee status has ceased. Cases like this are rare. All cases are examined and decided individually, and all the details that have appeared in a case are weighed in their entirety.

13. Domestic Settlement and Community Services

13.1 Actors

In collaboration with the regional administration, the Ministry of Employment and the Economy settles the selected refugees in the municipalities that have made a reception decision. Various government branches collaborate at municipal level in organising the practical reception, and various voluntary organisations serving both nationals and immigrants take part in the initial reception in the municipalities. The state-run local employment and economic development offices play an important role in the provision of resettlement services.

¹ According to section 87(2-4) of the Aliens Act:

- (2) Asylum is not granted to aliens if they have committed, or if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that they have committed:
 - 1) a crime against peace, war crime or crime against humanity as defined by international agreements concerning such crimes;
 - 2) a serious non-political crime outside Finland before entering Finland as refugees; or
 - 3) an act which violates the aims and principles of the United Nations.
- (3) Asylum is not granted to persons who are eligible for protection or help from bodies or offices of the United Nations other than the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Once such protection or help has ceased without final regulation of the status of the person in accordance with the valid resolutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, the person is entitled to refugee status. If the person has voluntarily relinquished the protection mentioned above by leaving the safe area for reasons other than those related to a need for protection, his or her right of residence is examined under this Act.
- (4) Aliens are refused asylum if the competent authorities in the country where they have settled have granted them the rights and obligations attached to the citizenship of this country.

² According to section 88(2) of the Aliens Act:

- (2) An alien is not issued with a residence permit on the basis of subsidiary protection if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that he or she has committed:
 - 1) a crime against peace, war crime or crime against humanity as defined by international agreements concerning such crimes;
 - 2) an aggravated crime; or
 - 3) an act which violates the aims and principles of the United Nations.

13.2 Housing

In the municipalities, refugees settle directly in the dwellings assigned to them, normally rented apartments in apartment buildings. Large family units are housed in various apartments in one building or in individual houses.

13.3 Health

Refugees can use the regular health care services. The regular municipal health and mental health care services are at the disposal of the refugees, and the SOS Crisis Centre and the Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims along with the regional and local mental health care provide special services for them.

13.4 Reception

On his/her arrival in Finland, the refugee will be directly settled in the municipality. The refugee will undergo an entrance interview whereby his/her integration potential and individual needs will also be discussed. Together with the authorities, the refugee will elaborate on his/her personal integration plans.

These plans take into account the situation of the refugee concerned and his/her individual and family needs. This is particularly important for refugees representing special categories, such as women at risk or the elderly.

The refugee's social and health situation as well as the respective reception requirements will be reviewed on that occasion too.

13.5 Integration Plan

The purpose of the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration is to promote equal opportunities for immigrants, including refugees. Each immigrant draws up an individual integration plan in collaboration with the authorities of the resettling municipality. The plan is usually prepared by the employment and economic development office in cooperation with the municipal authorities. Immigrants are encouraged and supported by various measures to integrate into their new home country. The integration plan period is at the most 3 years, but can in special cases be up to 5 years. During this time, immigrants have the opportunity to study Finnish or Swedish, to complement their professional skills and to acquire the types of knowledge and skills needed in Finland. While the immigrant carries out the integration plan and does not receive a salary, the subsistence is guaranteed by means of an integration allowance, which is equivalent to either subsistence allowance or unemployment allowance.

Language Training

For adults, integration training includes acquiring the language and other skills needed for further employment. There are special literacy courses for persons in need of literacy education.

Children of school age, i.e. 7–16-year-olds, are provided with preparatory instruction in a group of their own. The aim is for children to first learn the language and school attendance according to the Finnish system, after which they can switch to ordinary classes corresponding to their level. The language training in the first year gives the refugees the language skills needed in everyday life.

Education and Vocational Training

The refugees are entitled to integration training, which includes language and civic skill studies, as well as vocational guidance and employment training. The individual integration plan takes particular account of the education and vocational training that the refugee has acquired in his/her homeland and of the need for supplementary training in order to find work in Finland. Refugees often have to study in order to acquire a new profession.

The opportunities to study are very good in Finland, but studying requires good language skills, and that is why the language studies at the initial stage are of great importance.

After the immigration training, refugees have the opportunity to receive vocational training suited to their personal abilities. There is a clear need for long-term vocational training organised especially for immigrants.

Employment

The general employment situation in Finland is fairly good. However, the unemployment rate of foreign nationals has steadily been approximately threefold compared to the whole population, i.e. around 25%. However, many innovative projects, e.g. through the European Refugee Fund and the European Social Fund, have been initiated to promote employment.

14. Family Reunification of Refugees

14.1 Policy concerning Family Reunification of Refugees

Under section 114 of the Aliens Act (301/2004), a residence permit is issued on the basis of a family tie to a family member of a refugee who is residing in Finland or who has been issued with a residence permit to move to Finland, unless there are reasons relating to public order, security or public health that prevent this. Issuing a residence permit does not require that the alien have secure means of support if the family was formed before the sponsor entered Finland. In cases where issues relating to public order, security or public health come up, a decision on a residence permit is made taking account of all the relevant circumstances relating to the matter.

Under section 115 of the Aliens Act (301/2004), a residence permit is issued to other relatives of a refugee, if refusing a residence permit would be unreasonable because the persons concerned intend to resume their close family life in Finland or because the relative is fully dependent on the sponsor living in Finland. If the applicant is considered a danger to public order, security or health or Finland's international relations, an overall consideration is carried out as provided in section 114(2) of the Aliens Act (301/2004). Issuing a residence permit does not require that the alien have secure means of support.

14.2 Criteria for Family Reunification

Under the Finnish Aliens Act (301/2004), the following persons are eligible for family reunification in Finland:

- Spouses;
- Unmarried couples who have cohabited within the same household for at least two years (or have a child in their joint custody –or there is some other weighty reason for it) and live in a marriage-like relationship;
- Same-sex couples if the partnership is nationally registered;
- Same-sex couples who have cohabited within the same household for at least two years and live in a marriage-like relationship (or have a child in their joint custody or if there is some other weighty reason for it);
- Unmarried children under 18 years of age (when guardianship is established);
- Unmarried foster children under 18 years of age who can submit evidence that their parents or guardians are deceased or missing and that present guardianship was established before the arrival of the sponsor in Finland;
- Guardians of a minor who is residing in Finland;
- Other relatives (than above mentioned family members) may also be eligible for family reunification if the sponsor already residing in Finland is a refugee. This requires, however, that refusing a residence permit would be unreasonable because the persons concerned intend to resume their close family life in Finland or because the relative is fully dependent on the sponsor living in Finland.

14.3 Allocations for Family Reunification

Family reunification cases as described in section 14(2) of the Aliens Act (301/2004) are not included in the resettlement quota.

14.4 Case Documentation and Verification of Relationships

The applicant must present adequate evidence of his or her identity and family connection. The Finnish Immigration Service decides what kind of evidence may be regarded as adequate. Parties may be heard orally and statements of social and health care officials may be requested. Parties may be given an opportunity to verify the family tie through a DNA test sponsored by the Finnish State.

14.5 Processing and Decision-making

The procedure for applying for a residence permit on the basis of a family tie is laid down in sections 62–65 of the Aliens Act. A family member residing abroad may lodge an application for a residence permit on the basis of a family tie at a Finnish diplomatic mission.

The Finnish Immigration Service decides on the issue of a residence permit on the basis of a family tie to a family member of a refugee. Parties are given an opportunity to be heard before the decision is made.

Parties may be heard orally by the police, the Finnish diplomatic mission or the Finnish Immigration Service. Statements of social or health care officials may be requested before the decision is made. Once the Finnish Immigration Service has issued a residence permit on the basis of a family tie, the Finnish Red Cross contacts IOM for travel arrangements and organises the reception of arriving family members in collaboration with the receiving municipality.

15. References/Resources

Finnish Ministry of the Interior:

http://www.intermin.fi/en/migration/refugees_and_asylum_seekers

Finnish Immigration Service: www.migri.fi

Aliens Act: <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2004/en20040301.pdf>

Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy

http://www.tem.fi/en/work/integration_of_immigrants