

AT HOME IN  
EUROPE

# SOMALIS

IN HELSINKI

Somalis in European Cities

# Somalis in Helsinki

At Home in Europe

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ISBN: 978-1-940983-02-8

Published by

OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

224 West 57th Street  
New York NY10019  
United States

For more information contact:

AT HOME IN EUROPE

OPEN SOCIETY INITIATIVE FOR EUROPE

Millbank Tower, 21-24 Millbank,  
London, SW1P 4QP,  
UK

Website

[www.opensocietyfoundations.org/projects/home-europe](http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/projects/home-europe)

*Layout by Q.E.D. Publishing*

*Printed in Hungary*

*Printed on CyclusOffset paper produced from 100% recycled fibres.*

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# Open Society Foundations Mission Statement

The Open Society Foundations work to build vibrant and tolerant societies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. Working with local communities in more than 100 countries, the Open Society Foundations support justice and human rights, freedom of expression, and access to public health and education.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This city report was prepared as part of a series of reports titled Somalis in European Cities. The series focuses on seven cities in Europe with a Somali origin population. The cities chosen, and within them specific neighbourhoods, are Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Leicester, London, Malmö, and Oslo.

The reports have been prepared by At Home in Europe, part of the Open Society Initiative for Europe, Open Society Foundations and in cooperation with local/national based experts. The *Somalis in Helsinki* report has been researched and drafted by the Department of Social Research, University of Helsinki, specifically the following individuals:

### Research Team in Helsinki

Marja Tiilikainen, PhD, Academy Research Fellow (Principal Researcher)

Abdirashid Ismail, D.Sc (econ.), Post-Doctoral Researcher (Researcher)

Elina Tuusa, MA student (Research Assistant)

Maryan Abdulkarim (Research Assistant and translator Somali to English)

Abdurasak Adam (Transcriber of Somali language interviews)

A steering group for the research was convened with a mandate to provide expert advice and input into all stages of the research and analysis.

### Steering Group

Anne Alitolppa-Niitamo, Family Federation of Finland

Abdi-Hakim Yasin Ararse, Islamic Society of Finland

Annika Forsander, Immigration Affairs, City of Helsinki

Sari Hammar, Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area (Socca)

Petri Hautaniemi, University of Helsinki & Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Abdirizak Hassan Mohamed, University of Jyväskylä

Mulki Al-Sharmani, University of Helsinki

We warmly thank the following organizations who allowed the research team to use their premises or otherwise facilitated in organizing the interviews: Badbaado, Finnish Somalia Network, Helsinki Islamic Centre, Islamic Rahma Centre, Islamic Society of Finland, Kanava Youth Association and Somali League of Finland.

On 16 September, 2013, the Open Society Foundations held a closed roundtable meeting in Helsinki in order to invite critique and commentary on the draft report. We are grateful to the many participants who generously offered their time and expertise. These included representatives of minority groups, civil society organisations, city officials, and relevant experts. We would also like to thank the team at the University of Helsinki for organising and hosting the roundtable meeting. Particular thanks are offered to Anne Alitolppa-Niitamo for her efficient role as the moderator on the day and to the researchers Camilla Haavisto and Tuula Joronen for their valuable comments on the draft report.

We would also like to acknowledge the invaluable support provided by Annika Forsander and her team, in particular Matleena Sierla and Olga Silfver at the Immigration Affairs, City of Helsinki throughout the research and the launch of the report.

At Home in Europe has final responsibility for the content of the report, including any errors or misrepresentations.

**Open Society Initiative For Europe Team (At Home in Europe)**

Nazia Hussain	<i>Director</i>
Hélène Irving	<i>Program Coordinator</i>
Klaus Dik Nielsen	<i>Advocacy Officer</i>
Andrea Gurubi Watterson	<i>Program Officer</i>
Csilla Tóth	<i>Program Assistant</i>
Tufyal Choudhury	<i>Sen. Policy Advisor</i>

## PREFACE

A central belief of the Open Society Foundations is that all people in an open society count equally and should enjoy equal opportunities. The Open Society Foundations work day-to-day with civil society organizations across Europe to respond to discrimination, prejudice and injustice; to understand the emergence of new and sometimes worrying political phenomena; to inform better practices in policing and security; to connect those seeking justice and equality with policymakers and institutions; to promote inclusion for Europe's minorities; to support a critical and informed discourse among nongovernmental actors; and to empower grassroots organizations to seek change for themselves, unique to their own local context.

At Home in Europe, part of the Open Society Initiative for Europe, Open Society Foundations, is a research and advocacy initiative which works to advance equality and social justice for groups excluded from the mainstream of civil, political, economic, and, cultural life in Western Europe. It places a high priority on local community and city level practices that mitigate discrimination and seek to ensure access to equal opportunities for all. At Home in Europe engages with policymakers, civil society organisations, and communities at the local, national and international level to improve the social inclusion of Europe's diverse minority and marginalised communities in different ways.

Minority communities – whether Muslim, migrant or Roma – continue to come under intense scrutiny in Europe today. This complex situation presents Europe with one its greatest challenges: how to ensure equal rights in an environment of rapidly expanding diversity. The Somali community is one such emerging minority group on whom a lack of precise data hampers the possibility of achieving meaningful integration.

People of Somali origin have lived in parts of Europe for many generations but in the past 15 years their numbers have increased. There are no accurate figures for the number of Somalis in Europe but on the whole, whilst small in absolute numbers, they are among one of the continent's largest refugee groups and a growing minority population. Europe's Somalis can be divided into three broad categories: people of Somali origin born in Europe, Somali refugees and asylum seekers (who came directly from Somalia or neighbouring countries largely as a result of conflict) and Somalis who migrated to a country in Europe from elsewhere in Europe, such as from Sweden to the UK for example. They are a diverse and vibrant community who suffer from negative and biased media representation and stereotyping. There is a limited understanding on the specific needs of this community and they are in the category of groups that experience significant inequalities in accessing education, employment, health, and housing with resulting poor outcomes. Somali community groups are very present in certain countries in Europe but their engagement with policymakers and in local and national bodies can be relatively limited.

The comparative research series ‘Somalis in European Cities’ examines city and municipal policies that have actively sought to understand Somali origin communities and their specific needs. The research aims to capture the everyday, lived experiences as well as the type and degree of engagement policymakers have initiated with their Somali and minority constituents. An underlying theme is how Somali communities have themselves actively participated in tackling discrimination and whether the needs of specific groups warrant individual policy approaches in overcoming barriers to equal opportunities.

The ‘Somalis in European Cities’ series contains seven individual city reports and an overview. The cities selected take into account the population size, diversity, and the local political context. They are: Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Leicester, London, Malmo, and Oslo. All seven city reports were prepared by teams of local experts on the basis of the same methodology to allow for comparative analysis. Each report includes detailed recommendations for improving the opportunities for full participation and inclusion of Somalis in wider society in the selected city. These recommendations will form the basis for At Home in Europe of the Open Society Initiative for Europe’s advocacy activities.

# Somalis in Helsinki

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Somalis in Helsinki* is part of a seven city research series, **Somalis in European Cities**, by At Home in Europe of the Open Society Foundations which examines the realities of people from Somali backgrounds in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Malmo, Leicester, London, and Oslo. In Helsinki, the research was conducted by the Department of Social Research, University of Helsinki.

This report highlights the experiences of Somalis living in Helsinki, focusing on five areas of local policy and the broader themes of identity, belonging and interaction. Through qualitative research methods, including interviews with key stakeholders at the city and national level and focus group discussions with Somali residents, conducted from the beginning of December 2012 through to the end of February 2013, this Open Society Foundations report incorporates diverse perspectives and provides recommendations for improving social inclusion and cohesion in this diversified Nordic city.

Although their absolute numbers have always been small, the arrival of Somali asylum seekers in the early 1990s was a significant event; it has been referred to as the “Somali shock”, Finland’s first experience accepting large groups of refugees.

**Population:** Finland’s population is relatively homogenous, with just under five per cent of inhabitants identified as having foreign origins. Immigrants are overwhelmingly centred in the capital, Helsinki, and its surrounding suburbs. People with Somali origins are the third-largest group of foreign origin in Finland, a total of 14,672 at the end of 2012.

**Policy context:** Responsibilities for the integration of migrants in Finland are split between national level authorities and municipalities. The city of Helsinki and its immigration division has developed city policies focusing on integration and cohesion, housing, employment and education.

**Identity and belonging:** Among the Open Society Foundations’ focus group participants, there was a clear consensus that there are strong negative attitudes about Somalis in Finland. This contributes to a persistent sense of difference and even exclusion from the wider society. At home in Helsinki, the participants noted, the high number of other Somalis helps build a sense of belonging and community. They described a range of interactions with Finns, usually respectful but restrained including a few successful community development initiatives which have helped to build up more sustained and meaningful contact between groups.

**Discrimination and harassment:** In findings from EU-MIDIS in 2009, the Fundamental Rights Agency’s European Minorities and Discrimination Survey, Somalis in Finland were among the immigrant and ethnic-minority groups that had most experienced discrimination; a national study, amongst others, found Somalis in Finland reported harassment and discrimination on the street, in shops, from the

police and elsewhere. These experiences increase the sense of isolation and insecurity, according to focus group participants.

**Education:** Diversity in schools is increasing; Somalis are among the largest immigrant groups, particularly in pre-schools and comprehensive schools. However, the numbers drop off sharply in later years, with very few Somali-speakers represented in higher education. While studies are limited, data suggest that Somali children's achievement lags behind that of other immigrant groups. This issue was reflected in the focus group discussions, where language was of particular concern: children of Somali-speaking parents may be placed in courses in Finnish as a second language, regardless of their abilities. Some participants felt that this can limit their educational opportunities. Focus group participants also reported racism and discrimination in schools.

**Employment:** Difficulties in the employment sector were one of the most significant concerns among the focus group participants. There was wide agreement that discrimination affects Somalis trying to find work in Finland, a finding supported by independent studies. Women face particular problems, and the training programmes that are available to them have not been especially effective. Failure to find employment was cited as a major obstacle to feeling integrated with Finnish society; while not having sufficient command of the language is a barrier to employment, having the requisite language skills is not sufficient to ensure appropriate work.

**Housing:** The tradition of mixed housing policies in Helsinki has produced good results regarding low segregation of migrant populations. However, as the Helsinki area becomes more diverse, segregation between neighbourhoods has also been on the rise. Strategies to maintain mixed housing have only been moderately successful, and with the experience of racist harassment or intimidation, many immigrants feel safer in areas where they form a larger group. Focus group participants reported a range of views on their housing situation, some feeling satisfied with the sense of community, quality of housing and availability of services, while others expressed concern about racist crime and isolation.

**Health and social protection:** Studies have found that, despite general reports of poor health indicators among Somali communities in Finland, Somalis are satisfied with their quality of life. The differences between the Finnish and Somali approaches to treatment were a source of concern for some focus group participants, as well as communication problems with medical staff, but overall the focus group participants regarded the quality of health care to be good. The use of mental health services among Somali immigrants is still quite low, despite the high proportion of traumatic experiences in this community.

**Policing and security:** Among participants in the focus group discussions, opinions were divided about overall security in the Helsinki area. While some praised the safe and well-policed atmosphere in their neighbourhoods, others cited racial profiling as a problem, and women especially noted a problem with harassment on the streets. Studies show that Somalis rarely report crimes to the authorities, and several focus

group discussions touched upon situations where the police did not address assault cases in an appropriate way.

**Participation and citizenship:** About 40 per cent of Somalis in Finland have acquired citizenship; as one focus group participant noted, “Having citizenship doesn’t often change anything; it’s the origin they look at” as far as the sense of integration in society. Efforts to draw immigrants into civic participation include tenant councils and Somali organisations. The success of these initiatives depends very much on the extent to which the Somali communities participate, according to the focus group discussion. There are a large number of Somali associations in Finland, many of which would benefit from capacity-building support and efforts to unite around common causes. Somali candidates have participated in local elections, and in November 2012, a Somali woman and long-time Helsinki city councillor was re-elected to the Helsinki municipality.

**Role of the media:** Media coverage of immigrant communities remains limited, and studies raise concerns that the representations of Somalis in the media tend to reproduce stereotypes and inhibit integration. Research has noted a focus on negative themes such as crime and conflict and a lack of immigrant voices in the mainstream press.

**Recommendations:** As one of the first and largest immigrant groups to arrive in Finland, Somalis have faced a number of challenges to integration. While the state and local governments have developed multifaceted policies to help migrants find their way in Finnish society, there are still obstacles, particularly in finding jobs and in the education sector. In addition, racial discrimination and harassment were considered major impediments to the integration process. Among the focus group participants, perceptions of daily life in Helsinki were quite varied, with some praising the quiet, secure environment and others struggling with isolation and unemployment. A small number of pilot initiatives to improve integration are on-going, and could be expanded to engage a greater number of participants. The civil society sector, although active, remains highly fragmented; a more unified approach could also help address some of the issues that affect Somali communities more generally. Differences in experiences as regards gender and generation were evident, but should also be studied further. Attention should, in particular, be given to the second generation of Finnish Somalis and ensure that they can feel they belong to the City of Helsinki and that they have the same opportunities to succeed as any other resident or Finnish citizen has.

1. The Finnish government, Helsinki city council and state provider agencies should raise awareness on the issue of belonging, the changing ethnic landscape of Finnish society and the multiplicity of identities that are emerging. For example, the City of Helsinki could convene a working group of public and private companies who design and produce publications, websites, advertising and other visual materials for the municipal government and other public bodies. The group should review current materials and agree guidelines and methods on how these can better represent the diverse

population of Helsinki and promote positive images of its minority communities.

2. The role of education and educational institutions is vital in offering opportunities to all in order to function as equal members of society and is a pre-condition for stability and social cohesion. Limited data suggests that Somalis are underachieving, especially in higher education. The Ministry of Education, the National Board of Education and the City of Helsinki should study the contextual and possible systemic causes and devise tailored solutions for all groups, where youngsters are under-represented in secondary education, such as Somalis, to reach post-secondary education and gain professional training or solid academic skills that enable them to continue in higher education such as universities. Educational guidance and counseling for students and other family members should come far before the 9th grade.
3. The Finnish government should give the situation of migrant groups that are facing specific challenges in the labour market, such as Somalis, specific attention in its planning and implementation strategies. Currently the Occupational Safety and Health Divisions of the Regional State Administrative Agency monitor compliance with the Non-Discrimination Act in employment issues. The task should be opened to another entity that could devise closer cooperation with immigrant communities, particularly with communities that face high rates of discrimination in the labour market, such as Somalis.

## METHODOLOGY

Several different research approaches were used to collect relevant data for this report, including a review of relevant research and policy literature, focus group interviews and interviews with stakeholders. The main body of data was collected in three months, from the beginning of December through to the end of February 2013.

A total of 28 key stakeholder interviews were conducted, including nine national government officials, seven community leaders, three city officials, three social workers, three civil society actors, two teachers and one journalist (see Annex 2). Each interview featured a set of semi-structured questions, except with the journalist and one of the teachers, where the discussions were mainly on specific themes and projects. In terms of gender, 11 out of these 26 interviewees were women. Some of the interviews were conducted in pairs. One of the interviews was conducted by phone, the rest were face-to-face interviews.

Focus group participants were recruited from two main areas. The first area was the eastern part of Helsinki, particularly the Itäkeskus (Itis) shopping centre and its neighbourhood. Itäkeskus is the largest shopping centre in Helsinki, and the presence of Somalis is more visible there than any other location in Finland. In the area surrounding Itäkeskus, there is a small centre, which hosts the largest number of Somali-owned businesses in the city and also one of the three main mosques for Somalis. In addition, one of the main Somali community organisations, the Somali League in Finland, is located in a nearby neighbourhood. Five of the 12 focus groups were conducted in this area.

The second area from which focus group participants were recruited is the city centre of Helsinki and its surroundings, including Pasila, which is one stop to the north by rail from the main railway station. Most of the main Somali community associations and two out of the three main mosques are in this area. A large number of Somalis in the city are either members or clients of these organisations and frequently visit their premises. Seven focus groups were conducted in Pasila and the city centre.

These areas were used only as means of recruiting participants; any Somali resident of the city was eligible to be included in the study. Focus group participants were chosen from Somalis living in the city of Helsinki in general, rather than the residents of a particular area of the city. Helsinki is quite a small city and Somalis are scattered in different parts.

Recruiting Somalis as participants of a survey or a focus group is an extremely challenging task and therefore, to recruit participants for the focus groups, consultations were held with seven main Somali organisations in Helsinki: four main community associations and three focal mosques. Three main organisations and three mosques provided their support in the recruitment process. Various mechanisms of recruiting participants were employed in order to ensure the focus groups were both diverse and representative.

All focus groups were conducted in Somali and lasted between one and two and a half hours. Each discussion was recorded, transcribed and translated into English. In total, 102 people participated in the 12 focus groups. About 40 per cent, 40 of the 102 participants, were women. Two women-only focus groups, one for young and the other for elderly women, were facilitated by a female research assistant. Overall, participants were between 18 and 74 years old. Table 1 illustrates the age distribution of the participants and shows that the number of participants over 55 was smaller than the other age ranges. However, this also reflects the actual age distribution among the Somali population in Helsinki as a whole, where there are very few of the older generation.

**Table 1. Participants' age**

Age range	Quantity	%
18–25	23	22.6
26–35	27	26.5
36–45	26	25.5
46–55	17	16,7
>55	9	8.8
Total	102	101

**Note:** Percentage may not add due to rounding

**Source:** Open Society Foundations

Table 2 shows the number of years the participants had been in Finland. About half of the focus group participants entered the country between 1990 and 1997. Another wave of Somali arrivals came soon after 2007, following the Ethiopian army's invasion of south-central Somalia. About 14 per cent of the participants did not provide information on the time spent in Finland.

**Table 2. Participants' years in Finland**

Years	Quantity	%
<5	13	12.7
6–10	19	18.6
11–15	8	7.8
16–20	30	29.4
20–23	18	17.7
NA	14	13.7
Total	102	99.9

Source: Open Society Foundations

As Table 3 illustrates, nearly 68 per cent of the participants were married and nearly 19 per cent were single; the rest, nearly 14 per cent, did not provide information on their marital status. They either did not feel comfortable talking about it or simply did not mention it and the researchers did not press for a response.

**Table 3. Participants' marital status**

Status	Quantity	%
Married	69	67.7
Single	19	18.6
n/a	14	13.7
Total	102	100

Note: n/a: not available

Source: Open Society Foundations

Table 4 lists participants' main activities. Just over 44 per cent of the participants were employed, 23.5 per cent were unemployed and nearly 10 per cent were students. The rest were stay-at-home mothers, pensioners (less than 5 per cent) or did not provide information on their employment status.

**Table 4. Participants' main activity**

Activity	Quantity	%
Employed	45	44.1
Unemployed	24	23.5
Student	10	9.8
n/a	23	22.6
Total	102	100

**Note:** n/a: not available

**Source:** Open Society Foundations

A specific set of questions was prepared for the discussions, for each of the eight thematic focus groups. One set of questions was discussed at all four of the gender- and age-specific focus groups. The whole methodology including the interview guides followed the general formula set up by At Home in Europe.

It should be noted that six out of the 12 focus groups were held on the premises of religious organisations, which may have had some impact on the responses received. For example, the number of women who wear the hijab may have been slightly higher among the respondents compared with the situation among the overall Somali population in Finland, and the women's experiences and responses regarding the attitudes towards them of the overall population or how they themselves experienced life in Finland, including phenomena such as public alcohol consumption, may have been influenced by their own religious position. However, in Helsinki religious centres are focal points for Somalis and therefore ideal places to recruit Somalis as study subjects.

Finally, the authors organised a roundtable discussion in September 2013 for community leaders, policymakers, researchers and other stakeholders in Helsinki to discuss, comment and contribute to the draft report before it was finalised.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report is a part of a comparative policy-oriented study focusing on seven cities in Europe with significant Somali populations, sponsored by At Home in Europe (AHiE) of the Open Society Foundations.

The principal aim of the report is to identify the challenges and successes in ensuring the integration of Somalis living in Helsinki, Finland, and to understand their experiences in major areas of their daily lives. It also examines the ways in which both national and municipal authorities counter current social, political and economic challenges and consider the needs of Somalis in key decision-making and policy planning. Based on the identified gaps and needs as well as good practices, the report will offer policy recommendations.

“Somalis” in this report refer to Finnish Somalis from a variety of backgrounds: some born in Finland, others in Somalia or elsewhere; some who have been in Finland for many years, others who arrived more recently. Therefore, the report does not set out to define who is a Somali, but rather to individuate Somalis and give space to different voices.

The report is divided into eight main thematic chapters and five supporting chapters. The main chapters cover the themes of identity, belonging and interaction; education; employment; housing; health and social protection; policing and security; participation and citizenship; and the role of the media. The main focus of these chapters is to document the everyday experiences of ordinary Somalis in Helsinki in these important areas of their lives. In addition to the introduction, conclusions and recommendations, there are also two introductory chapters on population and demographics and city policy.

## 2. POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

This chapter presents an overview of the demographic structure of Helsinki and Finland in relation to immigration and identifies links between the history of migration patterns in Finland, the politics of migration and the situation of Somalis in Helsinki.

### 2.1 Population Statistics

In December 2012, Finland's total population was 5,426,674 (including both Finnish citizens and foreign nationals). The national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish. Finland used to be part of Sweden until the early 19th century and Swedish was previously the language of the elite. Nowadays only a small proportion of native Finns speak Swedish as their mother tongue, and most Finns are practically bilingual with the exception of those on the west coast, near Turku, in Åland and in some parts of the southern countryside. Swedish-speaking Finns have, however, a strong status as a linguistic minority and have a right to use Swedish before administrative authorities, for example. The status of the Swedish-speaking minority is also an ongoing debate, especially because of the issue of bilingual schooling. Currently every Finn must learn the second national language at school, which may be either Finnish-speaking or Swedish-speaking. Furthermore, the knowledge of both national languages is required of municipal and government officials. Finland is ethnically quite homogenous; out of the total population 4,866,848 speak Finnish (90 per cent), and 290,977 (5.4 per cent) speak Swedish, 1,900 (0.03 per cent) speak Sami and 266,949 (4.5 per cent) speak some other language as their mother tongue.<sup>1</sup>

In 2012, 77 per cent of the population in Finland belonged to the Lutheran National Church. Although this membership percentage is high, the number of those actively participating is quite a bit lower. As many as 1,139,730 (20.1 per cent) have no religious affiliation.<sup>2</sup> The national church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, has a special role in state ceremonies and the right to collect a tax from its members in conjunction with governmental income taxation. The income is received from a tax that is collected on its behalf by the state.

The size of the immigrant population in Finland can be ascertained through records on background country, mother tongue or citizenship. A total of 279,616 (4.8 per cent)

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<sup>1</sup> Official Statistics of Finland, "Population Structure, Annual Review 2012", Table, Language according to age and sex by region 1987–2012, Statistics Finland, Helsinki, see [pxweb2.stat.fi/database/StanFin/vrm/vaerak/vaerak\\_en.asp](http://pxweb2.stat.fi/database/StanFin/vrm/vaerak/vaerak_en.asp) (accessed 3 November 2013) (hereafter, Official Statistics of Finland, "Population Structure, Annual Review 2012").

<sup>2</sup> Official Statistics of Finland, "Population Structure, Annual Review 2012", Appendix table 8, Religious affiliation of the population 2003–2012, at [stat.fi/til/vaerak/2012/01/vaerak\\_2012\\_01\\_2013-09-27\\_tau\\_008\\_en.html](http://stat.fi/til/vaerak/2012/01/vaerak_2012_01_2013-09-27_tau_008_en.html) (accessed September 2013).

people of foreign origin were registered in Finland in 2012, out of which 238,208 were first-generation immigrants and 41,408 belonged to the second generation born in Finland.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, foreign origin refers both to migrants who were born outside Finland and to the children whose parents were born abroad. Thus, the number also includes those who have acquired Finnish citizenship.

Finland has 230 municipalities, out of which 107 are cities.<sup>4</sup> The number of people of foreign origin was highest in the Swedish-speaking region of Åland (12.1 per cent), and second-highest in southern Finland, Uusimaa (9.6 per cent). When examined by municipality, in mainland Finland, the share of people with foreign origin was highest in Helsinki, (12.6 per cent) and in the other large cities of the metropolitan area: Vantaa, (12.3 per cent) and Espoo (11.4 per cent).<sup>5</sup> Thus, immigrants are notably centred near Helsinki.

The share of people of foreign origin is the highest among 25–34-year-olds (over 9 per cent). Immigrants in Finland are notably younger than the rest of the population: the average age among first-generation Finns with foreign origin was 37.7 years, among the second generation it was 11.8 years, and for the rest of the population it was 42 years.<sup>6</sup>

The largest groups of foreign origin in Finland are Russians (70,899, 25 per cent of all people of foreign origin), Estonians (36,036), Somalis (14,672) and Iraqis (10,795).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Official Statistics of Finland, “Population Structure, Annual Review 2012”.

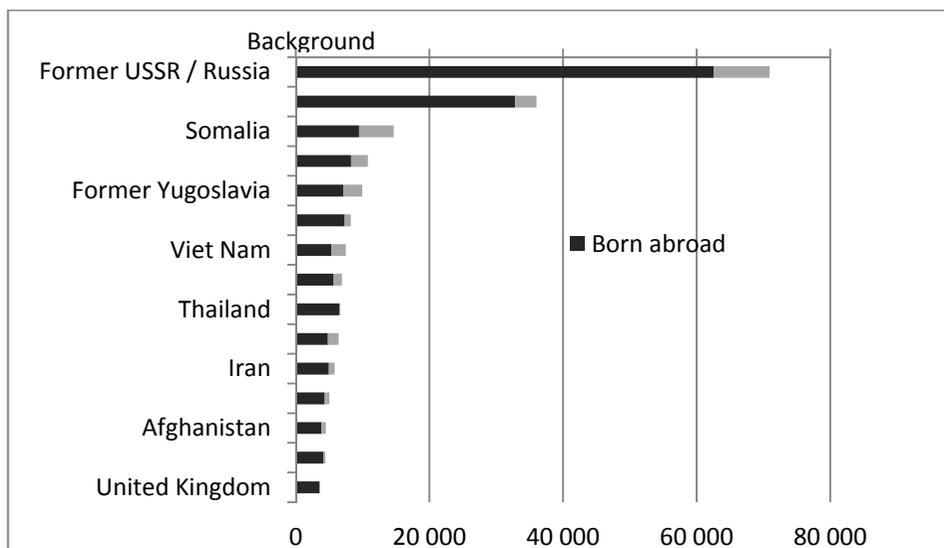
<sup>4</sup> See Local Finland, at [kunnat.net/fi/tietopankit/uutisia/2012/Sivut/Vuonna-2013-kuntia-on-320.aspx](http://kunnat.net/fi/tietopankit/uutisia/2012/Sivut/Vuonna-2013-kuntia-on-320.aspx) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Official Statistics of Finland, “Population Structure, Annual Review 2012”

<sup>6</sup> Official Statistics of Finland, “Population Structure, Annual Review 2012”

<sup>7</sup> Official Statistics of Finland, “Population Structure, Annual Review 2012”

**Figure 1. Largest groups of foreign origin among the Finnish population, 31 December 2012**



Source: Official Statistics, “Population Structure, Annual Review 2012”

## 2.2 Migration History and Settlement Patterns

Immigration in Finland is a new phenomenon, largely due to Finland’s geo-political situation, even if Finland’s traditional minorities, including Jews, Tatar Muslims, Roma and indigenous Sami people, have a long history in the country. Finland was an autonomous part of the Russian empire between 1809 and 1917. Following its independence in 1917, there were large numbers of Russians and refugees from Eastern Europe. However, compared with other Nordic countries, Finland has experienced limited global or European immigration.<sup>8</sup> Also, unlike in many other European countries, labour immigration to Finland has never been significant, and immigration has been accepted mostly on humanitarian grounds and has not been part of labour policy.<sup>9</sup> This, however, has been changing in recent years.

<sup>8</sup> J. Korkiasaari and I. Söderling, “Finnish emigration and immigration after World War II”, Migration institute, Turku, 2003, at [migrationinstitute.fi/articles/011\\_Korkiasaari\\_Soderling.pdf](http://migrationinstitute.fi/articles/011_Korkiasaari_Soderling.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013) (hereafter, Korkiasaari and Söderling, “Finnish emigration and immigration after World War II”).

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Labour, *Työelämäkysymykset ja haasteelliset ryhmät työllisyyspolitiikan näkökulmasta*, Työministeriö (Work life and challenging groups in labour politics), European Social Fund, Helsinki, Edita, 2002.

Finland was traditionally a country of emigration; in fact numerous Finns emigrated to North America in the early 20th century and to Sweden after the second world war. Until the 1980s, emigration figures were higher than those of immigration, but that began to shift from the 1980s onwards, with a few refugees, Ingrian Finns<sup>10</sup> moving back from the areas lost to the Soviet Union during the second world war and returnees from Sweden.<sup>11</sup> A turning point in the history of migration to Finland occurred in 1990 when President Mauno Koivisto eased the migration of Ingrian Finns to Finland by giving them returnee status. Moreover, in that same year asylum-seeker groups from Somalia started to enter Finland.

The foreign population living in Finland can be roughly categorised into four groups: people with Finnish roots; asylum seekers, refugees and their families; spouses of Finnish citizens; and temporary students and workers. Marriage has always been one of the main reasons for migrating to Finland, but the importance of family reunification, studies and work as a reason to migrate has been growing since the beginning of the 21st century.

The number of Muslims in Finland was estimated at around 60,000 in 2012, the majority comprising first-generation refugees and immigrants and their children. In addition, the Muslim population includes Finnish converts to Islam and a historical group of Tatar Muslims.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.3 Somali Population in Finland and Helsinki

Somalis were the first large refugee group in Finland that came as spontaneous asylum seekers in the beginning of the 1990s, causing what has been referred to as a “Somali shock”. Due to a general lack of awareness in Finnish society of how to accommodate a large immigrant group, the arrival of significant numbers of Somalis caused confusion and was not handled well.<sup>13</sup> Finland also suffered from a major economic recession at the time, which affected people’s attitudes towards foreigners. Furthermore, since their arrival Somalis in Finland have remained the largest group with a refugee background, originating from Africa and Muslim by religion. Therefore, they have received a lot of attention from media and policymakers as well as from the general population.

<sup>10</sup> Ingrian Finns originate in the Russian region of Ingria and still constitute the largest part of the Finnish population in Russia. In the forced population transfers before and after the second world war they were relocated to other parts of the Soviet Union.

<sup>11</sup> Seppo Paananen, “Maahanmuuttajien elinolot Suomessa” (The living conditions of immigrants in Finland), *Yhteiskuntapolitiikka* (Social Policy) 70 (4) (2005), pp. 460–462 (hereafter, Paananen, “Maahanmuuttajien elinolot Suomessa”).

<sup>12</sup> Tuomas Martikainen, “Finland”, in Jørgen S. Nielsen, Samim Akgönül, Ahmet Alibašić and Egdūnas Račius (eds), *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, Vol. 5, Leiden, Brill, 2013, 237–246.

<sup>13</sup> Paananen, “Maahanmuuttajien elinolot Suomessa”.

In 1990, out of the total Finnish population, 0.7 per cent was of foreign origin, out of which just 49 people were from Somalia.<sup>14</sup> In 1991 the number of Somalis had risen to 1,412, and from that point on the number has been slowly increasing from year to year. Most of the Somalis in the 1990s came to Finland as asylum seekers and were placed in reception centres throughout the country. Many were first dispersed to different municipalities nationwide, but later moved to Helsinki or to the greater metropolitan area (including Espoo and Vantaa). After the first years of the 1990s, the number of Somalis in Finland also increased through family reunifications and the birth of children.

Even though the challenges of integration and isolation of the Somali community have lessened since the 1990s, Somalis face many difficulties in Finnish society, such as feelings of loneliness, unemployment, family issues, longing for home, mental illness, concerns about safety and racism.<sup>15</sup> Finnish society's hidden cultural and institutional racism still greatly affects the Somali community, in spite of the number of authorities charged with the wellbeing of immigrants and the majority of Finns accepting newcomers and the responsibility to support all the people living in Finland.<sup>16</sup>

Out of the total population of Finland (5,426,674) in December 2012, 14,672 listed Somalia as their background country.<sup>17</sup> Out of these, 9,468 were first-generation immigrants and 5,204 belonged to the second generation, born in Finland. Somalis are a young population in Finland: 52 per cent (7,646) of the total Somali population are under 20 years old, 32 per cent (4,628) are 20–39 years old, 14 per cent (2,063) 40–59 years old and only 0.02 per cent (335) are over 60 years old. Out of the total 6,991 were women and 7,681 were men.

A notably large number of Somalis live in southern Finland (11,056). The proportion of young Somalis less than 30 years old has grown since the 1990s, both among first-generation immigrants and in particular the second generation born in Finland. The fertility rate among women with a Somali background in Finland has decreased since the 1990s, but is still relatively high (an average of 4.0 children per woman over her

<sup>14</sup> Official Statistics, "Population Structure, Annual Review 2012".

<sup>15</sup> Esa Aallas, "Somalis more than 20 years in Finland – ever discriminated against, now staying or returning?", in Tuomo Melasuo, Petter Nissinen and Outi Tomperi, *A Flying Finn. Finnish Civil Society Actors in the Global Sphere*, Tapri Net Series no. 5, Tampere Peace Research Institute (TAPRI), 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Many older Somalis may dream of moving back to Somalia one day, but the second generation has spent the biggest part of their lives in Finland.

<sup>17</sup> Official Statistics, "Population Structure, Annual Review 2012", table at [pxweb2.stat.fi/DiaLog/varval.asp?ma=045\\_vaerak\\_tau\\_200\\_en&ti=Background+country+and+origin+according+to+age+and+sex+by+region+1990+-+2012&path=../Database/StatFin/vrm/vaerak/&lang=1&multilang=en](http://pxweb2.stat.fi/DiaLog/varval.asp?ma=045_vaerak_tau_200_en&ti=Background+country+and+origin+according+to+age+and+sex+by+region+1990+-+2012&path=../Database/StatFin/vrm/vaerak/&lang=1&multilang=en) (accessed 3 November 2013), "Background country and origin according to age and sex by region 1990–2012".

lifetime) compared with women with Finnish origin (1.8 children per woman over her lifetime).<sup>18</sup> Cross-cultural marriages are rare among Finnish Somalis.

The population of Helsinki in 2012 was 595,384, out of which 6,843 people spoke Somali as their mother tongue (1.2 per cent), indicating that approximately half of the Somali population in Finland lives in Helsinki. Out of the population of Helsinki, 68,375 (11.5 per cent) spoke a foreign language as their mother tongue.<sup>19</sup>

In 2011, 28 per cent of people who spoke a foreign language as their mother tongue lived in the eastern part of Helsinki;<sup>20</sup> a third of Somalis also lived in Eastern Helsinki.

## 2.4 Issues of Citizenship and Access to Citizenship

The Finnish Nationality Act<sup>21</sup> defines who is a citizen and how citizenship is acquired. The Finnish Immigration Service makes decisions on whether people may acquire citizenship. There are several ways to acquire Finnish citizenship: by birth, on application and by declaration. Acquiring citizenship by application requires residency for at least six years or four years for refugees, and meeting the language requirements.

In 2011, 96 people of Somali background acquired citizenship, bringing the total to 5,278 who acquired citizenship between 1990 and 2011. In 1999 there was a large increase when 1,208 Somalis took Finnish citizenship.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Marja-Liisa Helminen, “Women with foreign background become mothers younger”, Official Statistics of Finland, 17 July 2013, at [tilastokeskus.fi/tup/vl2010/art\\_2013-06-04\\_001\\_en.html](http://tilastokeskus.fi/tup/vl2010/art_2013-06-04_001_en.html) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>19</sup> “Statistical Yearbook of Helsinki 2012”, at [www.hel.fi/hel2/tietokeskus/julkaisut/pdf/13\\_04\\_22\\_tvk12e\\_00.pdf](http://www.hel.fi/hel2/tietokeskus/julkaisut/pdf/13_04_22_tvk12e_00.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>20</sup> City of Helsinki Urban Facts, Statistics 2011:41, at [hel2.fi/tietokeskus/julkaisut/pdf/11\\_12\\_15\\_Tilastoja\\_41\\_Ranto.pdf](http://hel2.fi/tietokeskus/julkaisut/pdf/11_12_15_Tilastoja_41_Ranto.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Finlex 359/2003 Nationality Act, at [finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2004/20030359](http://finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2004/20030359) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Official Statistics of Finland, “Citizenships granted”, at [stat.fi/til/kans/index\\_en.html](http://stat.fi/til/kans/index_en.html) (accessed 3 November 2013).

### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

Local self-government is traditionally strong in Finland; municipalities have total self-government by law. There are now 230 municipalities, out of which 117 are cities. Some municipalities have joint authorities, but most have their own administrations. There is also inter-municipal cooperation outside joint municipal authorities and regional councils. The municipalities provide basic services, the most important being social services and health care with health centres providing primary health care,<sup>23</sup> education and culture, the environment and technical infrastructure. It should be noted that large-scale local-government reform now under way will considerably change the number and role of municipalities.

Regional administration includes two new regional state administrative bodies, six Regional State Administrative Agencies and 15 Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY centres).<sup>24</sup>

Education policy is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, which works with the National Board of Education. Schools are under the municipalities' authority; they are fairly independent but guided by the core curricula and the objectives laid down by legislation.<sup>25</sup>

The Ministry of Employment and the Economy is responsible for labour legislation.<sup>26</sup> Local offices help and support people in job seeking, and play an important role in the integration of immigrants (see section 3.2). ELY centres support the local employment and economic development offices and aim to improve the functioning of labour markets in a regional level.<sup>27</sup>

Kela, the social insurance institution of Finland, provides social security benefits.<sup>28</sup> Usually permanent residence in Finland entitles a person to social security benefits; when immigrating to Finland, Kela makes the decision whether a person is entitled to Finnish social security. Housing policy is under the Ministry of Environment, and housing allowances are determined according to legislation.

Internal security along with the immigration policy and legislation on immigration and citizenship is under the Ministry of the Interior. Under the Ministry, the key

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<sup>23</sup> See [suomi.fi/suomifi/english/services\\_by\\_topic/health\\_and\\_nutrition/health/health\\_care\\_services/index.html](http://suomi.fi/suomifi/english/services_by_topic/health_and_nutrition/health/health_care_services/index.html) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>24</sup> See [suomi.fi/suomifi/english/state\\_and\\_municipalities/regional\\_administration/index.html](http://suomi.fi/suomifi/english/state_and_municipalities/regional_administration/index.html) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>25</sup> For a description of the educational system, see [oph.fi/download/124284\\_Education\\_system\\_of\\_Finland.pdf](http://oph.fi/download/124284_Education_system_of_Finland.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>26</sup> See [tem.fi/index.phtml?l=en&s=2304](http://tem.fi/index.phtml?l=en&s=2304) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>27</sup> See [www.ely-keskus.fi/web/ely-en/business-and-industry](http://www.ely-keskus.fi/web/ely-en/business-and-industry) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>28</sup> See [kela.fi/in/internet/english.nsf](http://kela.fi/in/internet/english.nsf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

authorities are the police, the rescue services, the Border Guard and the Emergency Response Centre Administration, which relays the information they receive to the appropriate authorities.<sup>29</sup>

### 3.1 City Administrative Structures

The City of Helsinki's highest decision-making body is the City Council, with 85 members selected following municipal elections every four years;<sup>30</sup> the current council was elected at the end of October 2012. Its responsibilities include the definition of city strategies, including integration and immigration, the bases of service fees and the organisation of the city administration.

Helsinki, like every other municipality, is one electoral district. Seats are allocated according to party-list proportional representation. As of June 2013, the City Council seats were divided among the following parties: National Coalition Party (26 seats); Greens of Finland (21 seats); and Social Democratic Party (16 seats), with the other 22 seats divided among the six minor parties.

The City Council elects the 15 members of the City Board for a two-year term from the members of the City Council. The board directs the city administration and has various other responsibilities. The three major parties had the majority of the seats as of June 2013.

Part of the powers vested in Helsinki municipality have been transferred to different boards and committees, political bodies elected by the City Council for four years at a time,<sup>31</sup> including the Advisory Board for Immigration and Integration (see section 3.3), whose representation is therefore political.<sup>32</sup>

### 3.2 National Policy on Immigration and Integration

A number of public authorities in central government and the municipalities deal with the integration of immigrants, to help immigrants understand their rights and duties in Finnish society.<sup>33</sup> A strong emphasis falls on integration training, language education and employability.

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<sup>29</sup> See [www.intermin.fi/en/security](http://www.intermin.fi/en/security) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>30</sup> See [www.hel.fi/static/mirror/www.hel.fi/hki/helsinki/en/city+government/decision-making/city+council/index.html](http://www.hel.fi/static/mirror/www.hel.fi/hki/helsinki/en/city+government/decision-making/city+council/index.html) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>31</sup> See [www.hel.fi/static/mirror/www.hel.fi/hki/helsinki/en/city+government/decision-making/city+board/index.html](http://www.hel.fi/static/mirror/www.hel.fi/hki/helsinki/en/city+government/decision-making/city+board/index.html) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>32</sup> See [www.hel.fi/hki/heke/en/Immigration/Advisory+board+for+immigration+and+integration+matters](http://www.hel.fi/hki/heke/en/Immigration/Advisory+board+for+immigration+and+integration+matters) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>33</sup> See [www.intermin.fi/en/migration/integration](http://www.intermin.fi/en/migration/integration) (accessed 3 November 2013).

Nationally, the first Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers was introduced in 1999,<sup>34</sup> superseded by the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration in 2010.<sup>35</sup> The Act 2010<sup>36</sup> states that the government must set guidelines for integration in its programmes for a four-year period.

The government's guidelines for 2012–2015 place importance on the participation of immigrants in all sectors of society.<sup>37</sup> The most important concerns are the employability of immigrants and immigrant families, children, young people and women. The key features of the guidelines include enhancing the community and family's role in integration, increasing the employment rate of immigrants, improving language education, and focusing on women and children. The programme also includes a system to evaluate the integration measures, taking account of the living conditions and experiences of immigrants and the public service system vis-à-vis the services. Necessary measures should be identified and implemented at the national, regional and local levels.

In the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, integration is defined as an interaction between society and the immigrant, and the intention of the Act is to provide immigrants with the necessary knowledge and skills in society and for employment, while enhancing the possibilities of maintaining their own culture and language. Each immigrant is given essential information, advice and guidance upon registration, and after an initial assessment, an individual integration plan consisting of an agreement on integration training is drawn up, for example including language courses, on-the-job training or other activities that encourage integration.

The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for immigration policy and drafting legislation on immigration and citizenship.<sup>38</sup> The Immigration Service operates under the Ministry of the Interior and is responsible for citizenship applications, residence permits, applications for asylum and the reception centres. However, integration problems are under the responsibility of the Ministry for Employment and Economy.

The immigration units of the centres for economic development, transport and the environment (ELY centres) carry out tasks related to immigration and integration. PAs part of the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, in 2011 a project called

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<sup>34</sup> Finlex 493/1999 Act on the Integration of Immigrants and the Reception of Asylum Seekers, see [www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1999/en19990493.pdf](http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1999/en19990493.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Finlex 1386/2010 Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, in Finnish at [finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2010/20101386](http://finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2010/20101386) (accessed 3 November 2013) (hereafter, Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Government integration programme, in Finnish, at [tem.fi/files/33350/Valtion\\_kotouttamisohjelma\\_vuosille\\_2012-2015\\_1.6.2012\\_2.pdf](http://tem.fi/files/33350/Valtion_kotouttamisohjelma_vuosille_2012-2015_1.6.2012_2.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>38</sup> See: [intermin.fi/en/migration/immigration\\_administration](http://intermin.fi/en/migration/immigration_administration) (accessed 3 November 2013).

Participative Integration in Finland was launched, to find new ways to implement integration training and language education.

The 2010 Act stated that municipalities must have their own integration programmes, also for four-year periods at a time and approved by the City Council. Municipalities provide services for immigrants, and decide individually, for example, whether or not to receive the quota of refugees,<sup>39</sup> and many of them have developed programmes defining the principles for the integration of immigrants.

### 3.3 City Policy on Immigration and Integration

The Immigration Division, which is part of the city's Personnel Centre, was established in 2007, and supports and guides the operations of the city's administrative departments dealing with immigrants' integration and the promotion of equality.<sup>40</sup> Helsinki's immigration policy is established in the strategy approved by the City Council, and discussed in the Advisory Board on Immigration and Integration, in meetings with immigrant organisations and in an expert network of the city's specialists in the field.<sup>41</sup>

The Advisory Board on Immigration and Integration had the following tasks in 2011–2012:

1. To enhance the city's immigration and immigrant services
2. To promote equality in the city's administrative and operational practices
3. To monitor the implementation of the Strategy Programme in matters related to the mandate of the Advisory Board.<sup>42</sup>

The strategy paper "Diversity and immigration"<sup>43</sup> outlines policies and projects related to immigration, immigrants and ethnic diversity in the City of Helsinki's Strategic Programme for 2009–2012. This paper sets out a series of overarching goals and specific projects to be implemented. The first policy, concerning international mobility and the attraction of foreign entrepreneurs, includes two projects: the development of

<sup>39</sup> Under the refugee quota of 750 persons per year, Finland accepts persons whom the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has designated as refugees or other foreigners who are in need of international protection for resettlement.

<sup>40</sup> See [www.hel.fi/hki/heke/en/Immigration](http://www.hel.fi/hki/heke/en/Immigration) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>41</sup> See [www.hel.fi/hki/Heke/en/Immigration/Strategic+agendas](http://www.hel.fi/hki/Heke/en/Immigration/Strategic+agendas) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>42</sup> See [www.hel.fi/hki/heke/en/Immigration/Advisory+board+for+immigration+and+integration+matters](http://www.hel.fi/hki/heke/en/Immigration/Advisory+board+for+immigration+and+integration+matters) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>43</sup> Implementation Plan of the City of Helsinki Strategic Programme, outlines related to immigration, immigrants and ethnic diversity, 2009, at [www.hel.fi/wps/wcm/connect/bec87f00420b5c12ae52ffa2e161bc01/monimuotoisuus+ja+maahanmuutto\\_fontit+upotettu\\_englanti.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=bec87f00420b5c12ae52ffa2e161bc01](http://www.hel.fi/wps/wcm/connect/bec87f00420b5c12ae52ffa2e161bc01/monimuotoisuus+ja+maahanmuutto_fontit+upotettu_englanti.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=bec87f00420b5c12ae52ffa2e161bc01) (accessed 3 November 2013).

guidance and counselling services, and the development of the common employment area of Tallinn and Helsinki. Under the second policy, urban structure and housing, the city aims to strengthen participation and community cohesion in suburban areas and ensure the equality of immigrant inhabitants in housing. The third policy focuses on employment, competence and income. A comprehensive early counselling system for immigrants, organised in cooperation with the employment administration, is planned under this measure, along with the development of adult Finnish- and Swedish-language instruction. Finally, the policy on family, growth and the second generation includes a project on preventing drop-outs from school among children and young people with immigrant backgrounds and offers support in the transition from comprehensive school to secondary education.

## 4. IDENTITY AND BELONGING

This chapter discusses the identity constructions and perceptions of belonging by Somalis in Helsinki. It explores how Somalis feel about their neighbourhood and city, including their sense of belonging and the positive and negative aspects of their neighbourhood and city. It notes the places and spaces in which interactions take place with people from the same and different ethnic and religious groups as themselves, and looks at the interactions more closely.

The identity and belonging of Finnish Somalis is strongly affected by the negative attitudes of Finnish society towards them. During the recession of the 1990s, attitudes towards immigrants were notably hostile, and even though these attitudes have shifted towards the positive, of all immigrant groups the attitudes towards Somalis are the worst, even worse than those towards Roma.<sup>44</sup> One focus group participant described the situation of Somalis in Helsinki:

These people we live with, it would be good if they stopped using the phrase “*maassa maan tavalla*” (when in Rome), meaning that the person should give up their religion and everything and obey the law and live according to the land’s ways, truth is that everyone wants to work and live well. A person should be appreciated for their humanity and not just look at their headscarves or their religion and not be discriminated against, and protect human rights.

### 4.1 Identity

Finnish society has long been fairly homogenous and has only recently started becoming more multifaceted. When discussing the identity of Finnish Somalis, the core question is what it actually means to be a Finn in Finnish society, and how it is changing. The identity of Finnish Somalis is a mixture of local, cultural, ethnic, religious and clan-based components interacting with the Finnish society where they are located. According to the focus group participants, family relations and Islam constitute the base of identity for many Somalis. Religious identity is ingrained in daily habits and regarded as a choice cultivating their origin and maintaining their difference from the Finns.<sup>45</sup> Focus group participants generally referred to themselves as Somalis and not as Finns. The participants highlighted the cultural difference between the Finns and the Somalis, and spoke of the Finns as “them” and of themselves as “us”. An elderly woman said:

<sup>44</sup> Magdaleena Jaakkola, “Maahanmuutto ja etniset asenteet Suomalaisten suhtautuminen maahanmuuttajiin 1987–1999” (Immigration and ethnic attitudes. Finns’ attitudes towards immigrants 1987–1999), Labour Policy Study Series (*Työpoliittinen tutkimus*) no. 213, Ministry of Labour, Helsinki, 1999.

<sup>45</sup> Maarit Marjeta, *Äidit ja tyttäret kahdessa kulttuurissa. Somalialaisnaiset, perhe ja muutos* (Mothers and daughters in two cultures. Somali women, family and change), Joensuu University Press, 2001.

We live in this society and with these people but we don't feel that we are equal with them, because we don't have the same culture, we don't dress the same, and we don't speak the same language. So I feel like I am a guest, who is here with them but is different from them. When I see how they dress and how they operate, we are different, we are not the same.

Focus group participants also felt that the Finns saw them as foreigners, and hence they could not think of themselves as Finnish, as one young male participant added:

Even though I have Finnish citizenship, I am very shy to say that I am Finnish because I know that they do not want to see me as a Finn and that they will ask me about my origins anyway, so I start with my origin then if they ask me do I have Finnish citizenship I tell them "yes".

Nevertheless, when asked whether they considered themselves part of the Finnish society, one young woman stated: "Yes, I have a Finnish passport, so I am a Finn."

The question of youth is vital when discussing the identities and feelings of belonging of Somalis and also the future of the changing ethnic landscape of Finnish society. The youth especially have hybrid identities: they may identify with various subcultures and form their own individual mixture of different ethnic and cultural identities. This is also their way of struggling with the fairly homogenous ethnic picture of Finnish society.<sup>46</sup> The second generation may also feel excluded both by Finnish society and those in Somalia because of their own transnational sense of belonging and lack of a more rooted cultural understanding.<sup>47</sup> The younger generation's changing identity was also discussed with the Somali community activists interviewed: there seems to be a growing concern among the Somali community that the young Somalis will lose their Somali identity.<sup>48</sup> For example, Saido Mohamed<sup>49</sup> articulated her concerns that young people believe they are Finns but neither the older generation of the Somali community nor mainstream Finnish society considers them Finns.

An older male participant in the identity and belonging focus group said:

The younger people are closer to becoming (Finns). Even now when you ask them who they are, they tell you they are Finnish instead of saying we are Somalis. "I don't know Somalia and I don't have any image of it," they tell you.

<sup>46</sup> Lotta Haikkola, "Monipaikkainen nuoruus. Toinen sukupolvi, transnationaalisuus ja identiteetit" (Multiplaced youth. Second generation, transnationalism and identities), Publications of the Department of Social Research (*Sosiaalitieteiden laitoksen julkaisuja*), University of Helsinki, 2012, p. 15 (hereafter, Haikkola, "Monipaikkainen nuoruus").

<sup>47</sup> Petri Hautaniemi, "Transnational life course, human development and diverse landscapes of opportunities among young Somali men", *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 20 (1) (2011), pp. 11–27.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Mukhtar Abib, social supervisor, Department of Social Services and Health Care, City of Helsinki, 28 December 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Saido Mohamed, chair, Finnish Somalia Network, 6 February 2013.

A young male focus group participant described the perplexing reality of young Somalis in Helsinki:

Here they see me as a Somali but when I go to Somalia they say I am a Finn and they call you "*Finlandey*". Here the Finnish won't welcome you and in Somalia the Somalis won't welcome you. You do not belong to either side.

## 4.2 Belonging

The sense of belonging was thoroughly discussed in the focus groups. Participants of focus groups lived in different parts of Helsinki: northern Helsinki (Oulunkylä, Käpylä), north-eastern Helsinki (Malmi, Puistola, Pihlajisto), western Helsinki (Malminkartano, Pukinmäki, Pikku-Huopalahti), eastern Helsinki (Vuosaari, Kontula, Myllypuro), central Helsinki (Pasila) and the south (Lauttasaari). The different neighbourhoods in Helsinki were generally described as rather good places to live in, some with fewer problems and some with slightly bigger problems.

Many described their neighbourhoods as calm places where it is possible to live a quiet, ordinary life, as this male participant depicted:

There is a mosque in Malmi. The Muslims can pray in the mosque and they are a very tight community who are aware of each other. It has not been a difficult neighbourhood in the time that I have lived here; I can't talk about the time before that. Regarding health care, there is a hospital there.

A young woman described her neighbourhood very positively:

I live in Vuosaari, what is good about Vuosaari is that many Somalis live there, there are many shops and a health-care centre and social services are good, although there are a lot of Somalis and the problems of the immigrants are many but the positive features are many. What is good about Helsinki is that it's the capital and when compared with other towns, more things can be found in Helsinki than in other places. You have Somalis here, the mosques, you can find anything, it is a very good place, and I can say that Helsinki is the best in Finland.

Most participants concluded that Helsinki felt like their city because they had been there so long and had become accustomed to living there. Most felt they belonged to their own neighbourhood and city, but very few thought they belonged to Finnish society. The greater number of immigrants in Helsinki compared with other Finnish cities was also mentioned as an important aspect of belonging: the participants felt more at home when they saw other Somalis and had access to cultural goods and services. A young man explained:

There are a lot of Somalis in Helsinki, it's possible that others view it as negative aspect that these people are many in number in this city but for a Somali it means having people who share (their) colour of skin, language and people they

discuss with and it feels good. In the other towns, people feel lonely and so, and the people view immigrants as strange and there is a lot of discrimination (in other towns).

Another older woman participant had a certain feeling of belonging due to the shared reality with the people near them:

I feel this country. Although with the public we have a different culture and religion, but they are people we live amongst, whether we have difficulties with them or ease. Our children attend the same schools with their children and we work with them, all and all we are mingling with each other.

Positive aspects about the neighbourhoods raised in focus groups were good educational opportunities, short distances, good transport, facilities, infrastructure, safety, cleanliness and calmness. Participants thought that Finland is a peaceful place to live where there are no major problems, and many preferred Helsinki to other Finnish cities. An old man said:

It's a safe country, and the police are very active. I think that places like this are few in the world if they even exist. We must relate what we have seen. When I was studying, twice my wallet fell off on the chair I was sitting on, both times I collected my wallet from the place and it contained everything, nothing was taken. This is not something very usual in the world, and for that I will give thanks.

Another participant, a young woman, described Helsinki as a place where people help each other and facilities are near:

I have received a good education in the schools in Helsinki. When I was new in town, I'd find my Muslim brothers and sisters who would help me, I would go to the places where the Somalis are and where they help people. I think the good feature is that you find many people who are willing to help you and you get a good education. The place where I now live in is near Herttoniemi, the shops are not close but there is a hospital near us. There are many good things for which I would choose Helsinki.

Negative aspects raised in focus groups concerned housing agencies, the small size of apartments, the cost of living, dogs, limited employment opportunities, difficulties with the neighbours, and open racism and discrimination. Racism was considered a particular problem. This echoes the findings of the EU-MIDIS survey, in which a third of Somalis living in the metropolitan area of Helsinki said they had been victims of a racist crime or act and half of the Somalis had experienced racism or discrimination.<sup>50</sup> Another young woman said:

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<sup>50</sup> European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS), "Technical report: Methodology, Sampling and Fieldwork", EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2009, at [fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu-midis\\_technical\\_report.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu-midis_technical_report.pdf) (accessed May 2013).

What is negative about Helsinki is for example the people. If there are many Somalis in one neighbourhood, their discrimination increases. If you are seen someone often, they dislike you more. In Vuosaari they nicknamed the area “Mogadishu”, there are a lot of Somalis there so they view you in a negative way, they curse at you, and they put you down. So people are self-confident in what they are, when someone who is worse than you, an alcoholic or drug abuser curses at you they are below you. There are a lot of immigrants in Vuosaari; people in this country don’t like immigrants, so it’s not good that they are many in the same place.

Even though Helsinki was generally considered a fairly safe, calm and comfortable place to live, many participants felt strong attachments to Somalia and hoped to return there some day. Many described the connection with relatives in Somalia with longing. Only a few said that they would stay in Finland if returning to Somalia were possible. Many older female participants, like the following speaker, felt that they did not really have a place here but were left all alone in their apartments with their children:

Since I have lived here in Finland, I have not once allowed myself to consider myself part of my neighbourhood. This is because I miss my country. I live here, I am well here and I have security here, yet I have this feeling that I want to leave this place, this feeling that this land is not my land, that I am an outsider here, really, we are outsiders in this country.

However, younger focus group participants felt stronger attachments to Finland and doubted they could manage or want to live somewhere else. A young man explained:

I came to this country when I was little, whatever I know, I have learned in this country. When I think of what I have learned and if I could apply it in another country, it feels very difficult. I feel like I can’t apply it anywhere else if I don’t make an extra effort. So I don’t think I am going anywhere else any time soon.

Furthermore, the young generation and the generation in between, which arrived in Finland as teenagers in 1990s, have a kind of liminal way of belonging. They have been growing up in the Finnish ethos of integration, surrounded by Finnish values, but are still seen as Somalis in Finnish society and therefore it is difficult for them to fully belong.<sup>51</sup> They also might be creating their own kind of belonging, which has less to do with Finnish society itself but more to do with peers or global subcultures, local and global relations that cross ethnic boundaries. In a way, regardless of their identity struggles, in a constantly globalising world they may feel they belong to Finnish society as much as, but differently, from their ethnically Finnish friends.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> See also Anne Alitolppa-Niitamo, “Liminalities: Expanding and constraining the options of Somali youth in the Helsinki Metropolitan area”. In *Yearbook of Population Research in Finland* 37, Population Research Institute (Väestöntutkimuslaitos), Helsinki, 2001, pp. 237–246.

<sup>52</sup> Haikkola, “Monipaikkainen nuoruus”.

Nevertheless, the younger focus group participants also had difficulties in feeling fully part of society: for example, even though as young men they used to play with Finns as children, some young male participants felt that later the different culture separated the Finns and the Somalis:

When we first came to this country and studied here, we did not busy ourselves with such questions. We realised that racism existed later on, when we were older. That's when we learned that there is racism and there are places that are bad and black people were discriminated against because of the colour of their skin and even beaten up. That was the first time. My initial thought was that I was just like everybody else and nothing separated me from the others and that anything they could do, I could do also. You understand when you grow older.

What most affected participants' sense of not belonging to Finland was the negative attitudes they encountered in Finnish society and the fact that they felt discriminated against everywhere: in education, employment, and social and health care. Many related how they were constantly asked where they were from, and when they would be going back. They did not feel welcomed by Finnish society and stated that this was one of the biggest obstacles to integration. Participants also felt that regardless of what they did, they would never be accepted as full members of Finnish society. An older man explained:

It's not an easy thing to feel that (being part of the Finnish society). We lack the things that would create that feeling. When a person feels that they are part of the neighbourhood they live in, they shouldn't feel that they are different from others, they have to be welcomed. We have mentioned before that we have many problems and until we overcome them we won't feel like we are part of this society.

Nevertheless, participants stated that in order to become part of the society, Somalis cannot turn against Finnish society but they must actively pursue education and employment, regardless of the obstacles and racism. The participants also had many positive stories in which officials, their neighbours or even strangers in the street helped them. For example a young woman related:

I feel that I am part of my neighbourhood, because when we run into each other in the elevators or outside we recognise the other people who live in the same building, both those who live above me and below me. My upstairs neighbours ring the doorbell when they need something and ask for what they need, and I go to them, we greet each other. I do feel we are neighbours.

An old man noted that it might feel like nobody accepts the Somalis, but actually the proportion of those who accept them is much larger than what the experience suggests:

If they didn't accept us, we wouldn't be here. If it were just 1 per cent we would not be sitting here today, we'd be running from here. So in my view, 80 per cent (accept us).

### 4.3 Interaction

According to the focus groups, most Somalis interact mainly among themselves and rarely with the Finns. The relations are better with other immigrants. Some referred to good connections with their neighbours, but more often these relations were described as somewhat problematic. A young woman described:

With the Finns, the ones with whom we have understanding, we greet each other, if I need help from them I ask them and the good ones help. These people are very closed and they are not used to us and we don't have a common culture, they have not been raised to ask or offer help, so you only see single individuals who share common understanding of these things. With the immigrants we have connections, Somalis are their own chapter, we share ethnicity and other immigrants, black from Africa for example, I have two neighbours who are from Africa and they are closer to me than the white people and I am closer to them.

Nevertheless, many participants hoped to have better relations with the Finnish, for example to learn the language and to become part of society. Many also had congenial relations with their neighbours that they described in a positive light. An old man said:

All my neighbours know me and they greet me and we talk with each other. Even the elderly men like to talk with me when outside. It is necessity that has brought us here, to live among people who have a culture different from ours and religion different from ours, we must abandon the strict adherence to our own culture, and I don't mean religion here, we must be very patient. There are good people here and also bad people. I believe that if we are patient with them, we will get results. There are many opportunities if we look for them, there are also difficulties but they can be managed.

Another male participant in the same focus group added:

Now the area where I live, it feels like the place where I used to live in my country. The man who rents the parking space next to mine knows a lot about the weather conditions, so he warns me and gives me tips. If he knows it's going to be very cold, or snowy, and I have not set up my car, he does it for me. If he gets to the parking area before me, he clears my car as he clears his car (of snow and ice). It does happen that people do not talk to each other, but when you become members of the same housing cooperative that's when you get to know people.

Moreover, participants thought carefully about the reasons for the difficulties faced when interacting with the Finns. One of the biggest issues raised in the focus groups was religion; it was felt that the Finns cannot understand a culture that is based on religion, since it is foreign to them. Religious differences surface in daily habits: many mentioned that going to the sauna, swimming in municipal swimming halls where both sexes are together, drinking alcohol and eating pork are some of the small everyday aspects of Finnish culture that prevent Somalis from fully participating due to

their religion. Even though they might be invited to different gatherings, the differences between the Finnish and Somali cultures hindered them from connecting well with each other. There were also incidents in school and at work where they were denied the possibility to pray when their faith required. An elderly man said:

Now when you speak about the Finnish people and their social culture it's easiest if you take part in, sauna and the thing they eat (sausage) and if you participate in that, you will understand each other very well, if you participate in the Finnish parties where they drink it's a place ... it's not a place you can stay. If you are black, in the end they turn on you, I have been there, when I was younger, there are weird places you go to, they turn on you, men who were weaker than you physically, seem stronger and they try you, they hold you by the shoulder and say "What's up little nigger", so I remember, and it's not good to go alone, I have seen it. If you want mutual understanding, you have to do with them what they want and for us, our religion doesn't permit it so we can't transgress, to undress and go to sauna with a can of beer. Every building has a day each week, when the sauna is open for everyone, one day is for the women and one for men and every man who lives in the building goes there, who is going there with them? And that is where they talk with each other.

Another participant, a young woman related an incident about being refused the right to pray at school:

The most stressful thing for us occurred while we were attending a school. We went to make the ablution for prayer, and when we returned we were told "Every day you leave in the middle of the class and you waste 20 minutes, that's it, no more praying." When she didn't allow us to pray in the place where we previously prayed, we just took out our jackets and spread them on the floor in front of the space and started praying. The worst kind of discrimination is when your religion is discriminated against and you are not allowed to pray, it's very saddening.

Another issue raised was the introversion and quietness of the Finns, which were very foreign to Somalis, who were used to a very social and lively life. It was found intolerable or surprising that the Finns do not always greet their neighbours or help them with daily tasks, or that people do not talk to each other on the street, do not look one another in the eyes, but just keep to themselves. It was also suggested that this hampers Somalis in learning the Finnish language.

An elderly female participant described interaction with the Finns:

You can meet them at workplaces, or in an office or such but they are very quiet other than that and closed and don't interact much with other people. This is why there are only a few who socialise with them. At best, our neighbours might greet us when they see us outside and say "Hey," and other neighbours will just walk past you, there's really no socialising.

Furthermore, the habit of keeping dogs as pets and showing them kindness and providing special places caused real disgust and amazement in the participants. A young woman complained:

The dogs travel in the same buses and metro and they are everywhere, when we walk on the streets they are pooping and pissing and the filthy substances are everywhere. That bothers me; it's one of the worst things. On the bus stops they come near you all wet, or in the bus and you try to keep your clothes away from them, that is the worst thing.

When talking about their interaction with the Finns, participants described many incidents that took place in shops and were racist: some were falsely accused of theft or were viewed with suspicion and followed by the store security guards. They described their own ways of coping with this also, for example, the following elderly man:

We are foreigners here. This thing about the guards, it's not new to us. When we were younger, we used to have fun with it. We'd welcome them to follow us and make them busy like that. Sometimes, our only reason to go into a store would be to bother the guard and then leave. All is because there might once have been a Somali who stole something from there.

There was, nonetheless, much discussion of positive interaction with Finnish people, too. The workplace and schools were identified as the best places to talk to Finnish people and befriend them. At workplaces, talking during coffee breaks is a common way to interact. Among Somalis, the places for interaction were portrayed as slightly wider. Young Somali men explained that they play sports a lot with other young Somali men in their neighbourhoods, or meet at the mosque for example. There are also particular shops and cafés where Somalis meet after work. A young man described:

The only thing that can connect you with a Finn is the workplace, if you have a coffee with them during the break and talk with them. In other places we don't interact. We may meet Somalis in different places and have a coffee together or play football together or meet at the mosque, but the Finnish people, we only meet them at workplaces or at school.

All in all, living in Helsinki could be summarised by this female participant's thoughts:

When you compare the problems and the positive aspects, the positive aspects are greater, because the teachers are good, the neighbours are respectful and when you go out to the stores, except for a few people, they are respectful towards you. There are also bad people, and with them, I haven't seen bigger problems than badmouthing.

One interviewee, a community development worker, gave an example of a positive experience in the development of relations between Somalis and Finns. In 2012, the Somali League in Finland, an umbrella organisation for Somalis, moved its premises into an old neighbourhood in eastern Helsinki, where they faced prejudice and

reservations from the local Finnish residents. This community development worker started cooperating with the Somali League in initiating neighbourhood programmes in the area and organising weekly open-door events for the residents of the area in the Somali League premises. She encouraged people to attend the events and provided coffee and some Somali snacks. The community development worker believes that this interaction was very positive and residents developed good relations with the Somali League. In 2012, the community development worker asked two project workers in the Somali League, one a native Finn and the other with a Somali background, to visit and talk to the members of the senior women's club in the area and provide information about the Somali League. The community development worker also contacted the club and according to her, initially the members of the women's club were hesitant about the proposed visit of the Somali League, but nevertheless agreed to a two-hour meeting during which the project workers introduced their organisation and its work. The response from those attending the meeting was muted but not negative. In 2013, another meeting was organised in the same senior women's club. It provided an opportunity to have a discussion about immigration. When asked about their views on immigrants, their response was positive. "They are so nice. Nothing is wrong with them." The community development worker concluded, "So I can see that also old people can learn and change their mind if they see people and talk together. I really see that their attitude was changing."<sup>53</sup>

#### 4.4 Discrimination and harassment

According to a survey conducted in 27 EU countries, Somalis in Finland were among the 10 immigrant and ethnic-minority groups that had experienced the most discrimination: 47 per cent of them reported incidents of discrimination over a period of 12 months. Somalis in Finland were followed by Somalis in Denmark (46 per cent). Previous studies in Finland have shown that attitudes in Finland towards Somalis (as well as Russians and Arabs) are predominantly negative and these attitudes also seem to stay quite unchanged.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Soile Atacocugu, community development worker in the City of Helsinki, Helsinki, 29 January 2013.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, K. Pohjanpää, S. Paananen and M. Nieminen, *Maahanmuuttajien elinolot. Venäläisten, virolaisten, somalialaisten ja vietnamilaisten elämää Suomessa 2002* (The living conditions of immigrants: the life of Russians, Estonians, Somalis and Vietnamese in Finland in 2002), Tilastokeskus (Statistics Finland), Helsinki, 2003; R. Perhoniemi and I. Jasinskaja-Lahti, *Maahanmuuttajien kotoutuminen pääkaupunkiseudulla. Seurantatutkimus vuosilta 1997–2004* (Integration of immigrants in the capital region. Follow-up research from the years 1997–2004), City of Helsinki Urban Facts, Helsinki, 2006; Magdaleena Jaakkola, *Maahanmuuttajat suomalaisten näkökulmasta. Asennemuutokset 1987–2007* (Immigrants from a Finnish point of view. Attitude changes over 1987–2007), City of Helsinki Urban Facts, Helsinki, 2009.

A study conducted by the Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare<sup>55</sup> found that one in five respondents in all the studied groups (Somalis, Russians, Kurds) had encountered name-calling and verbal abuse in their everyday life in Finland. In general, experience of discrimination was more common among those who had resided in Finland longer and among people who had moved to Finland at a younger age than among persons who had entered the country recently or at an older age. All the groups experienced discrimination and unjust treatment mostly on the street: of the Somali women as many as 36 per cent reported having experienced discrimination on the street. Other places and situations where Somalis reported having faced discrimination included the police (15.5 per cent); in shops (11.8 per cent); at educational institutions (11.3 per cent); in health care (9.2 per cent); when searching for an apartment (8.2 per cent); at a social welfare office (6.9 per cent); and at Kela, the social insurance institution (4.2 per cent). All in all, Somalis complained about discrimination less than Russians and Kurds, who were also surveyed<sup>56</sup> (see also *Chapter 9*).

In the focus groups, discrimination experienced on the streets in particular often came up. A young woman related:

I have also experienced discrimination, now that I have become a mother, I push my baby pram and hear a lot more curse words than before. "Look, it's a Somali walking there," they will say. When I get off the metro they push me. In Kela the elderly people are the worst. When you are with a baby they look at you in negative way. "These people only know how to make babies," the negative features are many, and I can't list them all.

Another young woman recalled how a man had stopped her on her way from a mosque and said, "Remove the niqab, they have banned it in France, so you have to remove it." In addition to verbal abuse, hostile looks and buses that do not stop for them at bus stops even though the drivers saw them, participants recalled incidents in which people set their dogs on them, rang the doorbell at night when they were sleeping, or physically attacked them.<sup>57</sup>

A man was worried that discrimination would become more prevalent also in offices and institutions:

<sup>55</sup> Anu Castaneda S. Rask, P. Koponen, M. Mölsä and S. Koskinen (eds), *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi. Tutkimus venäläis-, suomalais- ja kurditaustaisista Suomessa* (Migrant health and wellbeing. A study of persons of Russian, Somali and Kurdish origin in Finland), National Institute for Health and Welfare, Helsinki (hereafter, Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*).

<sup>56</sup> Simo Mannila, Anu E. Castaneda and Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti, "Syrjintäkokemukset" (Experiences of discrimination), in Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*, pp. 229–238.

<sup>57</sup> For experiences of discrimination in the daily life of Somali mothers, see Marja Tiilikainen, *Arjen islam. Somalinaisten elämää Suomessa* (Everyday Islam. Life of Somali women in Finland), Vastapaino, Tampere, 2003.

In this country people are racist. Before the racism was on the streets and now I worry, is it moving to the schools, health-care centres such as doctors and teachers? Racism has already gone to some offices and workplaces. The racism that was on the streets before is now in the unemployment offices and in some schools, there are signs of it. I have experience in working in the offices, I have worked in the unemployment office and I know what is going on there. So I am worried, will those problems spread to the schools and the health-care units?

Discrimination saddened and angered the interviewees, caused a sense of fear and insecurity, and made them worry not only for themselves, but for other family members, especially for the future of their children. Unemployment and unequal treatment in the labour market were also mentioned as increasing the risks of suffering mental health problems.

Discrimination and harassment experienced on the streets add to the sense of isolation and loneliness. The dispersal of family members is a common experience for Somalis in the diaspora. Relatives and neighbours were part of the supportive social network back home. An elderly man answered the question about what he felt was missing from his life in Finland:

I feel it is something you can see when you go outside, people are hanging onto their phones. What we have here is cutting the family ties. Human beings need someone to face the illnesses with them, someone to celebrate when something good happens, and life contains many things. So, good neighbours I had, and the relatives, I do miss them a lot.

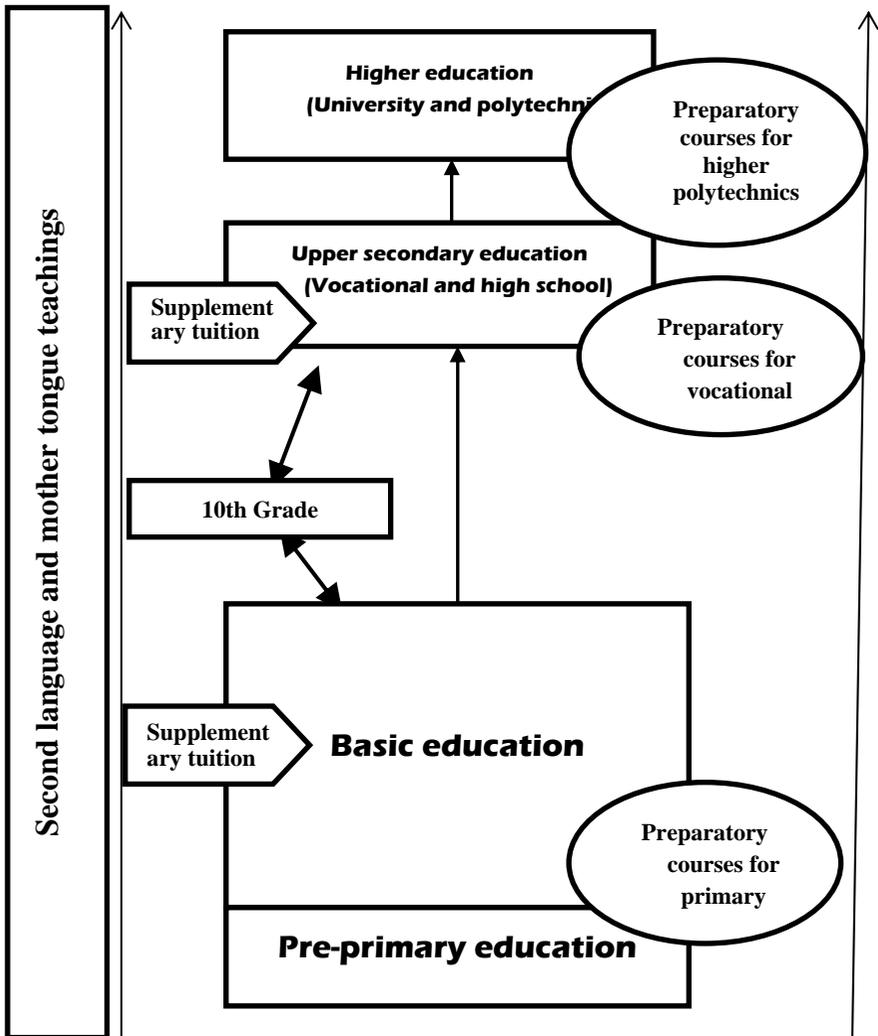
## 5. EDUCATION

The role of education in the integration process is vital and beneficial to healthy economic development and a precondition for sustainable stability and social cohesion. Therefore, in Finland the objective of education for immigrants is to provide them with opportunities to function as equal members of Finnish society. The educational institutions are expected to prepare immigrants to integrate. This chapter looks at how the educational system supports the integration of immigrants and describes the present position of Somali students in the educational system as a whole and in schools. The focus is on the formal schooling of children and young adults.

### 5.1 The Educational System

Figure 2 illustrates the formal educational system. The system comprises nine years of compulsory basic education (*peruskoulu*), upper-secondary education and higher education. After compulsory basic education, students may if necessary attend one additional year of basic education, or 10th grade, before they proceed to upper-secondary education, which includes regular high schools and vocational education. The higher-education system comprises general universities and universities of applied sciences.

Figure 2. The educational system



Source: Sari Pöyhönen, Mirja Tarnanen, Eeva-Maija Vehviläinen, Aija Virtanen and Lenita Pihlaja, *Osallisenä Suomessa. Kehittämissuunnitelma maahanmuuttajien kotoutumisen edistämiseksi* (Participative integration in Finland. A development plan to promote migrants' integration in Finnish society), Jyväskylä, University of Jyväskylä and Finnish Cultural Foundation, 2010

The efficient Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system is part of social services and a supporting factor for the success of the educational system in the country. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health mainly organises and funds the

ECEC. Formal schooling begins at age seven, but all children living permanently in Finland have the right to participate in voluntary pre-primary education during the year preceding compulsory schooling; nearly all six-year-olds attend for this one-year. The purpose of the pre-primary, primary and upper-secondary education is “to guarantee basic educational security for all, irrespective of their place of residence, language and economic standing”.<sup>58</sup>

A number of authorities, state bodies and autonomous institutions control the educational system, particularly the Ministry of Education, the National Board of Education, local authorities and the schools themselves. National institutions are responsible for laying out general objectives, legislation, subject instructions and the national core curriculum. Local authorities, mainly the municipalities, are responsible for the practical arrangements of schooling and for devising local curricula based on the national curriculum. Schools themselves may customise their own curriculum in line with the national core curriculum and the local curriculum. There are obligatory internal and external evaluation mechanisms in which every educational services provider is expected to participate.<sup>59</sup>

## 5.2 Immigrants and the Educational System

Following both the Basic Education Act (628/1998) and the Integration Act, the National Board of Education develops various national core curricula preparing immigrants to integrate into Finnish society. The National Core Curriculum for Instruction Preparing Immigrants for Basic Education 2009 aims to support immigrant children’s balanced development and integration into Finnish society and to provide them with the necessary skills to enable them to attend a basic education establishment. The main focus of this programme is to prepare those pupils of immigrant backgrounds whose Finnish- or Swedish-language skills and/or other abilities are not sufficient to study in a pre-primary or basic education group.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Liisa Heinämäki, “Early Childhood Education in Finland”, Occasional Paper no. 39, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, Potsdam, 2008, at [fnf.org.ph/downloadables/Childhood%20Education%20in%20Finland.pdf](http://fnf.org.ph/downloadables/Childhood%20Education%20in%20Finland.pdf) (accessed October 2013).

<sup>59</sup> S. Kupiainen, T. Hautamäki and T. Karjalainen, “The Finnish Education System and PISA”, Helsinki University, 2009, at [www.pisa2006.helsinki.fi/files/The\\_Finnish\\_education\\_system\\_and\\_PISA.pdf](http://www.pisa2006.helsinki.fi/files/The_Finnish_education_system_and_PISA.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013) hereafter, Kupiainen et al., “The Finnish Education System and PISA”).

<sup>60</sup> National Board of Education, “National Core Curriculum for Instruction Preparing Immigrants for Basic Education 2009”, Helsinki, 2009, at [oph.fi/download/138886\\_national\\_core\\_curriculum\\_for\\_instruction\\_preparing\\_for\\_basic\\_education\\_2009.pdf](http://oph.fi/download/138886_national_core_curriculum_for_instruction_preparing_for_basic_education_2009.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

For adult immigrants, the National Core Curriculum for Literacy Training for Adult Migrants 2012<sup>61</sup> and the National Core Curriculum for Integration Training for Adult Migrants 2012<sup>62</sup> direct that illiterate adult migrants should learn basic oral and written Finnish- or Swedish-language skills and that all immigrants should receive labour market integration training. Furthermore, migrants should receive information about their rights and responsibilities in Finnish society and its labour market. These adult integration trainings are funded and organised by Employment and Economic Development Offices (*Työ- ja elinkeinotoimisto*, TE Offices) as part of labour market training. Normally, the Employment and Economic Development Office and the local authority prepare individual integration plans for immigrants. The integration training focuses on the language and culture of Finland, and may form part of the individual integration plan. The purpose of the training is to ensure that immigrants in Finland find their place in social, academic and working life.

All education up to and including university education, is provided free of charge to secure equality for all. In addition, in basic education, school meals, materials, school transport and student welfare are also provided free. Students at general upper-secondary schools and vocational institutions are offered a free daily meal. There are some specialised schools such as private international schools that charge tuition fees. Accessibility to better education is secured for all children, regardless of their social or ethnic background. In addition, Finland has had consistently high PISA ratings over the years, and the quality of the educational system is highly regarded internationally. The government, in order to make Finland the most competent country in the world by 2020, aims to place Finland “among the OECD top countries in major comparison of young people’s and adults’ learning outcomes, in the number of school dropouts and in the relative number of higher education graduates among young and older adults”.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, immigrant students seem to share in that success; for instance, a PISA survey of 2006 showed that immigrant children scored as much as 50 points higher than the average immigrant children in OECD countries.<sup>64</sup> However, it has also been argued that the PISA success is largely the result of a small and homogenous

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<sup>61</sup> National Board of Education, “National Core Curriculum for Literacy Training for Adult Migrants 2012”, Helsinki, 2012, at [oph.fi/download/140756\\_national\\_core\\_curriculum\\_for\\_literacy\\_training\\_for\\_adult\\_immigrants\\_2012.pdf](http://oph.fi/download/140756_national_core_curriculum_for_literacy_training_for_adult_immigrants_2012.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>62</sup> National Board of Education, “National Core Curriculum for Integration Training for Adult Migrants 2012”, Helsinki, 2012, at [oph.fi/download/140755\\_national\\_core\\_curriculum\\_for\\_integration\\_training\\_for\\_adult\\_immigrants\\_2012.pdf](http://oph.fi/download/140755_national_core_curriculum_for_integration_training_for_adult_immigrants_2012.pdf) (accessed October 2013).

<sup>63</sup> Kupiainen et al., “The Finnish Education System and PISA”.

<sup>64</sup> *Niina Viitanen and Mari Peltonen*, “Children with immigrant backgrounds do not explain PISA success”, at [helsinki.fi/news/archive/2-2008/15-16-16-06](http://helsinki.fi/news/archive/2-2008/15-16-16-06) (accessed 3 November 2013).

population, and the situation is likely to change because of the increasing diversity caused by migration.<sup>65</sup>

Subsidies are available to support schools with a disproportionately high number of children with special needs, for example, immigrant children who have lived in Finland for less than four years are given extra funds of up to €1,000 per child per year. Special support is provided for pupils of immigrant backgrounds whose Finnish- or Swedish-language skills and/or other abilities are not sufficient to study in a pre-primary or basic education group. Comprehensive school is compulsory for children between the ages of 7 and 17 living permanently in Finland regardless of migrant status. All immigrants are given an opportunity to study a national language, Finnish or Swedish, while at the same time they are supported in studying their own native languages and maintaining their cultural identity. Where there is demand from at least three students, schools have an obligation to provide instruction in the mother tongue. Religious education, for example in Islam, is organised by schools. In addition, literacy training is also arranged for those in need. Training is available to adult immigrants to promote employment and provide opportunities to preserve professional skills acquired before they came to Finland.

Dropping out of comprehensive school is a rare phenomenon, and in general upper-secondary education, the situation is good as well. For instance, only about 0.5 per cent of the general population and 1.5 per cent of the foreign-language speaking population failed to receive the comprehensive school certificate during 1996–2006. The transition from basic compulsory education to voluntary upper-secondary education is critical, but in general, the number of students who complete compulsory education but who fail to continue their studies immediately is small, less than 10 per cent in most years. Of those who continue, about 3 per cent go on to the voluntary 10th grade, over 50 per cent go into general upper secondary schools and around 40 per cent take places in vocational schools.<sup>66</sup>

However, the situation of children with an immigrant background is not the same as that of the native-language speakers. The Ministry of Education recognises that “fewer young immigrants go on to study in the upper secondary school than the mainstream

<sup>65</sup> Johann C. Fuhrmann and Norbert Beckmann-Dierkes, “Finland’s PISA success: Myth and transferability”, KAS International Reports 7/2011, pp. 6–21, at [kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_23322-544-2-30.pdf](http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_23322-544-2-30.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>66</sup> Statistics Finland, “Oppilaitostilastot 2006” (Statistics on Educational Institutions 2006), Helsinki, Statistics Finland, 2007, at [www.stat.fi/til/kjarj/2006/kjarj\\_2006\\_07-02-23\\_tie\\_001.html](http://www.stat.fi/til/kjarj/2006/kjarj_2006_07-02-23_tie_001.html) (accessed 3 November 2013). See also E. Kilpi, “The education of children of immigrants in Finland”, DPhil thesis, Oxford University, UK, 2010 (hereafter, Kilpi, “The education of children of immigrants in Finland”).

population and therefore they are also underrepresented in higher education”.<sup>67</sup> As Table 5 illustrates, in Helsinki the number of comprehensive school leavers with an immigrant background who fail to secure further education is around three times that of their Finnish- or Swedish-speaking counterparts. In 2010, for instance, less than 15 per cent of native-language speakers were not successful in obtaining high school positions in the routine spring application. The corresponding figure among children with migrant backgrounds was about 45 per cent.

**Table 5. First-round secondary-education applicants in Helsinki area, 2008–2010**

		Applied	Admitted	%
2010	Total	9,352	7,700	82.3
2009	Total	8,705	7,476	85.9
2008	Total	7,975	7,158	89.8
2010	Finnish + Swedish	8,481	7,218	85.1
2009	Finnish + Swedish	7,967	7,063	88.7
2008	Finnish + Swedish	7,381	6,805	92.2
2010	Foreign language	871	482	55.3
2009	Foreign language	738	413	56.0
2008	Foreign language	594	353	59.4

**Source:** Marianne Teräs, Emilia Niemi, David Stein and Matleena Välinoro, “Muunkieliset nuoret siirtymävaiheessa peruskoulusta toiselle asteelle Helsingissä” (Foreign-language speaking youth as they move from comprehensive school to secondary education in Helsinki), Helsingin kaupungin maahanmuutto-osasto (City of Helsinki Department of Immigration), 2010

### 5.3 Somali Children in Helsinki

In Helsinki there were about 4,780 immigrant pupils in the comprehensive schools during the school year 2006–2007. Somalis were the second-largest group after Russian-speaking children. However, both in pre-school education and comprehensive schools, Somali children represented the largest immigrant group. However, as Table 6

<sup>67</sup> Ministry of Education and Culture, “Education and Research 2011–2016, a development plan”, Reports of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland, 2012, at [www.minedu.fi/OPM/Julkaisut/2012/liitteet/okm01.pdf?lang=fi](http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Julkaisut/2012/liitteet/okm01.pdf?lang=fi) (accessed 3 November 2013) (hereafter, Ministry of Education and Culture, “Education and Research 2011–2016”).

shows, the situation of Somalis in compulsory education is a concern. Somalis are about 10 per cent of the immigrant population in general secondary schools. Native Somali speakers make up only about 7 per cent of those in vocational training, 2 per cent of the immigrant students in the polytechnics, and no single Somali speaker is reported in university education in the region.<sup>68</sup> However, it should be noted that the number of Somali students has rapidly increased recently in upper-secondary general education.

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<sup>68</sup> According to contacts with the University of Helsinki, however, currently there are around 10 Somali-speaking students and six Somali nationals currently studying at the University of Helsinki.

**Table 6. Post-compulsory schooling in Greater Helsinki area by students' mother tongue**

Educational sector	Students' residential area		
	Mother language	Greater Helsinki area	Helsinki
<b>Total general secondary-school students</b>		33,794	16,838
Finnish		29,375	14,188
Swedish		2,371	1,253
Language other than Finnish or Swedish		2,048	1,397
Somali		213	156
<b>Total vocational-school students</b>		<b>63,310</b>	<b>32,614</b>
Finnish		55,363	27,779
Swedish		2,305	1,557
Language other than Finnish or Swedish		5,642	3,278
Somali		403	253
<b>Total polytechnics students</b>		<b>35,173</b>	<b>21,466</b>
Finnish		29,444	17,389
Swedish		2,182	2,002
Language other than Finnish or Swedish		3,547	2,075
Somali		71	41
<b>Total university students</b>		<b>59,070</b>	<b>45,900</b>
Finnish		50,315	39,158
Swedish		4,477	3,732
Language other than Finnish or Swedish		4,278	3,010
Somali		0	0

Source: City of Helsinki, City of Helsinki Urban Facts, information received by email on 14 March 2013

To date, research on the education of immigrants is very limited; however, the existing literature confirms the initial picture presented by the general statistical data. Some studies detail the difficulties faced by Somali students in Helsinki, while other studies have found that Somali children in Finland have the lowest level of educational

achievement compared with other immigrant children. Studies that looked at whether immigrant students in Helsinki continued to upper-secondary education or dropped out found that Somali students were the most likely to drop out compared with other immigrant groups, and that only around a third of Somali students continued to general upper-secondary schools.<sup>69</sup>

#### 5.4 Children's Education and Concerns of the Somali Community

A number of issues were raised in both the stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions. First, the situation of youngsters and the future of Somali children in Finland is a main concern for the community; Sari Hammar, the secretary of the Somali Affairs Expert Group, noted that the situation of the youngsters is what the community in general, and the expert group in particular, have been talking about. "Every item we are taking up to discuss ends with the question of youth and their situation and how to improve that situation, so I think it is a common concern."<sup>70</sup>

**Table 7. Young people outside the labour force and full-time education in the Greater Helsinki area by mother language (%), 2010**

Language	Total	Women	Men
Finnish	3.7	2.5	4.9
Russian	10.3	7.8	13.4
Estonian	15.6	11.6	19.7
Kurdish	29.3	16.4	37.3
Somali	31.2	24.1	37.9

**Source:** Pekka Myrskylä, "Maahanmuutto ja nuorten syrjäytymisriskit pääkaupunkiseudulla" (Migration and risks for youth marginalisation in the greater Helsinki area), *Kvartti*, Helsingin kaupungin tietokeskuksen neljännesvuosijulkaisu (Quarterly, City of Helsinki Urban Facts Magazine) 2012: 2, pp. 14–22

Three specific issues relating to the younger generation were raised in the focus groups, with education at the centre of the concerns. Somali boys have had a hard time accessing educational opportunities and have difficulties entering the labour market. Table 7 illustrates that almost 38 per cent of young Somali men aged 15–29 in the greater Helsinki area are "outsiders", as they are not studying or working. The respective proportion of young Somali women is, although lower than that of the young Somali men, higher when compared with other language groups. This shows

<sup>69</sup> Kilpi, "The education of children of immigrants in Finland".

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Sari Hammar, development coordinator, Centre of Excellence in Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area (Socca), Helsinki, 10 December 2013.

why the situation of the second generation of Somalis in Helsinki is particularly worrying. Third, the Somali community, particularly the parental generation, expressed concerns about young people and their connection with the Somali language, culture and religion, and the fear that youngsters may lose this identity. Somalis regard it as a priority to improve the inclusion of youngsters both in the labour market and in research. One father explained,

The other things that worry me include the future of the children, in education and work. The biggest concern that we have is such because we see that our children are not getting education like we would want them to. The reason might be difficulties they encounter in the places where they study, or where they live and what comes from the young people in their neighbourhoods. It seems the biggest problems Somalis have regard education, about 80 per cent.<sup>71</sup>

Somalis identified the main educational problem faced by the children was the lack of educational opportunities after comprehensive school, particularly high school. One focus group participant elaborated:

Many people have gone to school in Helsinki and yet only few have proceeded to higher education, where is the problem, is it the system or the parents? ... The reasons are many; the Somali in comprehensive school might not receive enough support from his school. The problem might also be the parents who are unable to support their child, the Finnish language which is a difficult language, the schools that are not prepared and putting the Somali child in different position than the Finnish child, even though the child should receive more support because he is studying in a language that is not his mother tongue. No one is interested in them entering high school, if (the authorities) wanted Somali children to proceed to high school, they would support them a lot more in the schools and in language, there is no policy that dictates that Somali children should be enabled to go to high school. It feels like they just want them in lower-level jobs.<sup>72</sup>

The issue of courses for Finnish as a second language (S2) was raised several times. In principal, S2 is intended for students whose skills in Finnish are not at the level of a native speaker in all areas of the language, no matter whether they are children of native Finnish parents or children with immigrant backgrounds. In addition, S2 is an integral part of the Finnish and literature curriculum. Therefore, it is not a form of remedial teaching or special education. Hence, students whose native language is not Finnish or Swedish are placed in S2,<sup>73</sup> with the aim that the student learns the broadest possible skills in the Finnish language. Here a student is expected to be able to study all subjects in the basic education curriculum and continue their school career afterwards.

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<sup>71</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on housing, 17 January 2013.

<sup>72</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on education, 22 January 2013.

<sup>73</sup> These pupils could alternatively study Swedish as a second language.

However, according to National Board of Education, the basic education law does not make S2 teaching compulsory. There are three options in the curriculum. Students may take part in the Finnish as a mother tongue course alone and not take any S2 courses; 25 per cent of the students with immigrant backgrounds belong to this category. Students may take both Finnish as mother tongue and S2 classes: 63 per cent of the students fall into this category. A third possibility is that a student takes only the S2 course; only about 12 per cent of students belong to this category.

Students' whose skills in Finnish reach the level of a native speaker in all areas of the language can be removed or exempted from the S2 lessons. Schools are responsible for the evaluation process. In the certificates, in principle, students who take S2 lessons are assessed according to the criteria for Finnish as a second language and their certificates are marked S2 in the place of the Finnish and literature subject. Schools contact and cooperate with parents in order to exempt or remove a student from S2 courses. However, in a brief inquiry made by the authors of this report after respondents raised the issue of S2 lessons, almost every parent contacted was not aware of this option and reported that their children, no matter whether they were taking S2 lessons or not, had S2 rather than Finnish as first language on their certificates.<sup>74</sup>

This subject raised concerns among Somalis, because children with immigrant backgrounds are instructed to take part in these courses, even if they were born in Finland. This separates these children from their fellow children with non-immigrant backgrounds with whom they had attended the early years of preschool, even in a situation where there is no significant difference in language skills. It is suggested that this may cause children to miss opportunities that formally require the native level of language skills. In addition, it was noted that this might facilitate discriminatory behaviour against children with immigrant background and for some, S2 "is a tacit discriminatory mechanism". One focus group participant noted that his children were admitted into the S2 courses but he had a chance to speak to the school administrators about the course and told them that his children did not need it. He said that finally, one of his children was admitted to study Finnish as a mother tongue, but he was told by the school administration, "Listen, you seem like someone who is influential in the community, so don't talk about this."<sup>75</sup>

According to researchers, to divide the subject of Finnish and literature into Finnish as a first language and Finnish as second language in schools is quite a problem and it is not always clear which student will belong to S2 and which to Finnish as first language. According to Heini Lehtonen from the University of Helsinki, although many students

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<sup>74</sup> National Board of Education, "Suomen sanoin – monin tavoin. Suomi toisena kielenä perusopetuksessa" (Finnish words – in many ways. Finnish as second language in basic education), 2008, at [oph.fi/download/46542\\_maahanmuuttajataustaiset\\_opiskelijat\\_lukiokoulutuksessa.pdf](http://oph.fi/download/46542_maahanmuuttajataustaiset_opiskelijat_lukiokoulutuksessa.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>75</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on education, 22 January 2013.

with immigrant backgrounds need extra Finnish language lessons, the majority of students with immigrant backgrounds in comprehensive schools are bilingual and some of them do not even understand why they are in S2 classes. Lehtonen recalled stories of students with a full command of the Finnish language attending S2 classes.<sup>76</sup>

In fact, for many Somalis born in Finland, Finnish is the language they are most comfortable and familiar with. A Somali father in the focus group on education said:

The problem, however, is that the children who are born here, and start kindergarten at the age of two and whose strongest language is the language of this country; still you see that they put them into S2 in the schools, why is that? They say, “He doesn’t know the language very well, his first language was Somali”. When you look at the reality, most of our children speak the language of this country as their strongest language, if they are among each other, even in their homes they might speak Finnish with their mothers and fathers, but what they consider is that this language is not their mother tongue. His mother tongue is Somali, and he and the one who just arrived from Somalia are treated the same way.

Eight out of ten participants of the focus group on education said that children born in Finland do not need S2. One participant said it is needed only by a few and for the remaining one “as a lesson, it’s an extra that helps, but they don’t need to have it on their certificate”.<sup>77</sup> However, at the Open Society Foundations roundtable it was noted that some students prefer to participate in the S2 classes, even if they are given an opportunity to take the Finnish as a mother tongue course, simply because S2 is easier and they may get relatively better grades.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, discrimination against Somali students was raised as an important factor in Somali children’s failure both school achievement and in pursuing higher education. Somali parents feel that their children are discriminated against and mentally abused in schools. A father in the focus group on education noted:

There is a lot of racism in the schools in this country, the teachers are not all the same. Some are more open with their discrimination than others, they try to put the children down and mentally abuse them. When the teacher asks a question in the class they don’t allow the immigrant child to answer until the Finnish child has answered, they always ignore them.

A mother in the focus group on security agreed; she had noticed that a teacher argued with a child of Finnish descent who had received lower marks than his classmate with a Somali background, saying, “How is it possible that an immigrant child receives these

<sup>76</sup> Ann-Mari Huhtanen, “V Niin Kuin Vanhentunut” (O for Old-fashioned), *Yliopisto-lehti* (University journal) 4 (2013), pp. 18–25.

<sup>77</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on education, 22 January 2013.

<sup>78</sup> Open Society Foundations roundtable, Helsinki, 16 September 2013.

grades and you can't?" The mother asked herself, "How will that child continue his education?"

Parents feel that teachers have low aspirations and expectations of the children. A Somali father in a focus group of elderly men noted:

We have difficulties in a school in Myllypuro, when the children receive 9 (points in the exam) they (teachers) give them 2 or 3, if they complain they have to re-do the course. They hinder the kids from work, because you only get work if you have a good certificate from school. Nobody will give work to a kid who doesn't have a good certificate.

This same Somali father also noted that Somali children faced stereotypes based on religion in the schools:

Another thing is the education of Somali children who are visibly Muslims ... My children were told, "Do your parents force you to fast and pray? The youth don't fast." "No, we fast on our own, nobody forces us". Education is made very difficult for the children and then they won't be able to further study or find employment and they will have mental problems.

A mother in the focus group on elderly women noted that their Somali children had early experiences of discrimination in employment already while they were at school:

The children, when they are in high school or upper secondary school they apply for work during the school holidays, they apply for hundreds with no result and they feel they are being excluded because of the colour of their skin or their names. Some of the youth will tell you that when they give their names to possible employers, they are not selected. And their peers all get jobs.

Another mother in the focus group on policing and security noted the impact of the attitude on identity and belonging:

I would say that children need help in things such as education, that children who are born here wouldn't face so much discrimination so that they would have sense of citizenship. We can accept that we have immigrated here but our children should have a sense of belonging in this country.

## **5.5 New Initiative: Programmes Preparing Immigrant Students for High School**

In 2010, the government started implementing a three-year project called Participatory Integration in Finland to study new models of integration training. The objective of the project was to develop new models of integration training so as to improve the preconditions for integration. It targeted three main paths of integration: adult immigrants seeking employment; adult immigrants with special needs; and children

and young people. The results of the project will be released later in 2013.<sup>79</sup> One of its pilot projects, a training programme preparing immigrant students for high school, called the Luva, has been undertaken at Vuosaari High School in eastern Helsinki, where about 12 per cent of the students are non-native Finns. The project picks up following the completion of nine years of basic education and is aimed at students who have completed their comprehensive school education but have not been admitted to an upper-secondary school or vocational establishment. This two school-year<sup>80</sup> pilot project is a trial version of the school 10th grade, and allows students to improve their grades and strengthen their written Finnish to ensure they can get an upper-secondary education.

According to the Luva manager, Katja Mannerström, the idea originated with the Minister of Education, Henna Virkkunen. Mannerström believes that, possibly due to the reports and statistical data demonstrating that very few immigrant children advance to the general upper-secondary school compared with their Finnish- and Swedish-speaking counterparts, and that immigrants also drop out from the upper-secondary school more often, Virkkunen realised that there should be a strategy to address this shortcoming.

The programme took 11 students with immigrant backgrounds in the 2011–2012 school year. Nine of them got high-school places.<sup>81</sup> Another student had good enough points to apply for high-school education but she preferred to enrol in vocational education. The remaining one was unable to secure any educational place. In the second round, the programme recruited 15 students.<sup>82</sup> In this group, 14 of them applied to high school and 13 of them had good chances of placement in high school although one was not as likely to get a place. The remaining student applied for vocational school.

Students in the programme receive Finnish-language instruction and help with improving their grades in the first half of the year; later they are eligible to take high-school courses. However, according to Mannerström, the main focus is mentoring. She herself, as a social psychologist, provides counselling for the students. They are taught study skills, how Finnish society and politics work, and how to cope with difficulties, including racism and how to handle it better. The parents often lack the tacit knowledge that Finnish parents take for granted; most Finnish parents are able to

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<sup>79</sup> Partners of this project are the Ministries of the Interior, of Employment and the Economy, of Education and Culture, the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities. See [jyu.fi/hum/laitokset/solki/ajankohtaista/osallisenasuomessa/osallisenasuomessa.pdf](http://jyu.fi/hum/laitokset/solki/ajankohtaista/osallisenasuomessa/osallisenasuomessa.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>80</sup> 2011-2012 & 2012-2013.

<sup>81</sup> In fact, two of them were admitted into prestigious high schools.

<sup>82</sup> A 16th student who is already in high school joins some of the programmes to improve his Finnish-language skills.

simply answer many of the questions their children will have to establish their career path, such as the educational requirements. Immigrant parents have a different kind of social capital, but most of them face difficulties in this kind of situation. Mannerström said, “The (immigrant) parents don’t really know anything about this... how to apply, when to apply, where should you apply, where you can get in. There are a lot of questions that the parents ask me.”<sup>83</sup> For example, Mannerström recalled that one of her first group of students, before coming to the programme, applied to the prestigious Sibelius Music School. She had good grades but was unaware that she should list back-up choices on her application and for that reason her high-school application was not successful. After attending the Luva she applied for and secured her place at the Sibelius Music School. Four Somali children were admitted into the two programmes, two in the first Luva programme and two in the second. One secured an upper-secondary education placement and of the latter two only one had a good chance to gain a place in high school.<sup>84</sup>

Mannerström believes that her Luva project and other lobbying activities had an impact on the government’s decision to ensure that immigrant students would have a better chance to complete their high-school education. The government included a programme in its 2011–2016 plan preparing immigrant youths for upper-secondary school, “that immigrants and people with immigrant backgrounds participate in education in the same ratio as the mainstream population”, and with a view to improving immigrants’ capacity to study at upper-secondary school, provisions for preparatory education for immigrants will be included in legislation”. The duration of this programme is one year, and it will start at the beginning of 2014.<sup>85</sup>

At the Open Society Foundations roundtable, the importance of early counselling for immigrant students and their parents, particularly Somali students, in primary education was raised. Participants encouraged other family members such as older sisters and relatives to be involved in school meetings with parents, as “We need to understand that it’s not just about the mom and dad, but different people should be allowed to come to the meetings and discussions held in the schools – they’re not allowed to do that now.”<sup>86</sup>

<sup>83</sup> See Egan Richardson, “Immigrant ‘tenth grade’ helps kids make it to lukio”, *yle*, 4 May 2012, at [yle.fi/uutiset/immigrant\\_tenth\\_grade\\_helps\\_kids\\_make\\_it\\_to\\_lukio/6082195](http://yle.fi/uutiset/immigrant_tenth_grade_helps_kids_make_it_to_lukio/6082195) (accessed 4 November 2013).

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Katja Mannerström, Helsinki, 17 April 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Ministry of Education and Culture, “Education and Research 2011–2016”.

<sup>86</sup> Open Society Foundations roundtable, Helsinki, 16 September 2013.

## 6. EMPLOYMENT

Employment is at the heart of integration. According to the Minister of Labour, Lauri Ihalainen, “For immigrants, work is one of the keys to sound integration. If the doors to working life do not open, integration often halts halfway.”<sup>87</sup> A recent paper entitled *The Centrality of Employment in Immigrant Integration in Europe* emphasised labour as the most important factor in the process of integration. After reviewing the contemporary debate about immigration and integration in Europe, the paper rejects the notion that cultural differences and the way authorities handle them are the main causes of integration failures in Europe. “The problem is not a result of culture; it is rooted in employment and income. The failure of European immigration policies has been their inability to ensure that immigrants acquire and retain work.”<sup>88</sup> In a similar vein, Annika Forsander argues that “the labour market defines the terms of inclusion, of ‘real Finnishness’”.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, for migrants to contribute fully, they need to be effectively integrated into the labour market. Moreover, employment affects the wellbeing of immigrants and their families, and work has its own instrumental value and provides social validity. This chapter, after summarising the situation of immigrants in the Finnish labour market, looks at the role of employment in the integration of Somalis, as well as the causes and consequences of labour market discrimination against Somalis.

### 6.1 Immigrants and the Labour Market

In 2011, with a total population of slightly over 5.4 million, Finland had a workforce of about 2.5 million and an unemployment rate of 7.8 per cent. The service sector, including the health and social sectors, dominates the labour market, followed by industry and the wholesale and retail sectors. Together these sectors provide jobs for almost 60 per cent of the total labour force. In addition, although long-term economic uncertainty is hampering the growth of the market in general, the service sector is generating more employment than other sectors.

There are a number of factors, such as structural unemployment, a high proportion of employees in fixed-term contracts, and significant regional differences in labour supply and demand, that obstruct the efficiency of the labour market. However, as Finland has one of the fastest-growing ageing populations in Europe, there is concern that the

<sup>87</sup> See [www.tem.fi/?89509\\_m=106918&l=en&ts=2467](http://www.tem.fi/?89509_m=106918&l=en&ts=2467) (accessed February 2013).

<sup>88</sup> R. Hansen, *The Centrality of Employment in Immigrant Integration in Europe*, Migration Policy Institute, Washington, DC, 2012).

<sup>89</sup> Annika Forsander, “Integration through the Nordic welfare state – Does work make you into a real Finn?”, in H. Blomberg, A. Forsander, C. Kroll, P. Salmenhaara and M. Sipilä (eds), *Sameness and Diversity. The Nordic Welfare State Model and the Integration of Immigrants on the Labour Market*, Research Institute Swedish School of Social Science, University of Helsinki, 2008, pp. 71–81 (hereafter, Forsander, “Integration through the Nordic welfare state”).

workforce is rapidly decreasing. The government has considered a number of measures to boost the labour supply. Immigration is understood as an important factor in solving the labour supply shortage caused by the ageing population; however, for the positive results of immigration to materialise, net immigration must increase considerably and migrants' labour market participation must improve substantially.<sup>90</sup>

Nonetheless, the uneasy situation of immigrants in the labour market, particularly in the 1990s, has been well documented. For instance, studying the situation of immigrants in the Finnish labour market and the way in which the position of immigrants in the labour market developed during the 1990s led Annika Forsander to her conclusion about "the merciless logic of becoming Finnish".<sup>91</sup>

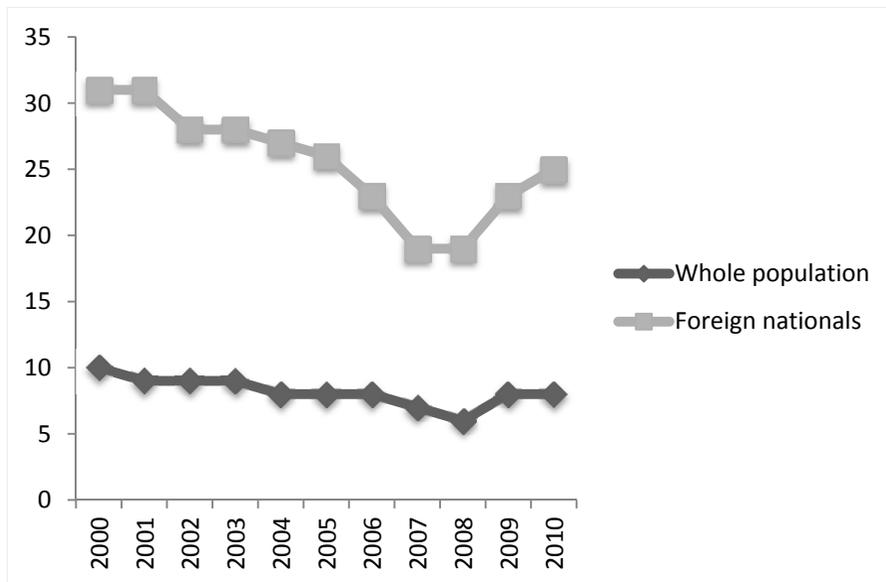
As Table 8 illustrates, the labour market participation of immigrants is uneven. The unemployment level of immigrants is significantly higher than the native population's. Furthermore, the unemployment rate for migrants with refugee backgrounds is particularly high. As Figure 3 shows, apart from the year 2003, the unemployment level of immigrants was always more than three times higher than the unemployment rate of Finnish nationals. Furthermore, the unemployment rate differs significantly between different groups. Among Somalis and other immigrants with refugee backgrounds, unemployment is consistently high, while immigrants from Western countries face roughly similar unemployment rates as native Finns.

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<sup>90</sup> Suvi Turja, "Finland", in Anna Platonova and Giuliana Urso (eds), *Migration, Employment and Labour Market Integration Policies in the European Union, Part 1: Migration and the Labour Markets in the European Union (2000–2009)*, International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 2010, pp. 105–115.

<sup>91</sup> Forsander, "Integration through the Nordic welfare state".

**Figure 3. Unemployment rates among foreign nationals and the whole population (%), 2000–2010**



Source: Statistics Finland, Ministry of Employment and the Economy<sup>92</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Ministry of the Interior, Annual Report on Immigration 2010, Finnish Immigration Services, 2011. [http://www.migri.fi/download/16939\\_maahanmuuton\\_vuosikatsaus\\_eng\\_netti\\_1\\_.pdf](http://www.migri.fi/download/16939_maahanmuuton_vuosikatsaus_eng_netti_1_.pdf)

**Table 8. Unemployment rate of third-country nationals by country of origin, 2009**

Country	%
Iraq	71.2
Afghanistan	67.1
Sudan	63.1
Somalia	59.7
Iran	54.9
United States	13.7
China	12.6
India	11.9
Japan	11.6
Canada	7.6

Source: Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2009<sup>93</sup>

**Table 9. Foreign-language residents by main type of activity, 2009**

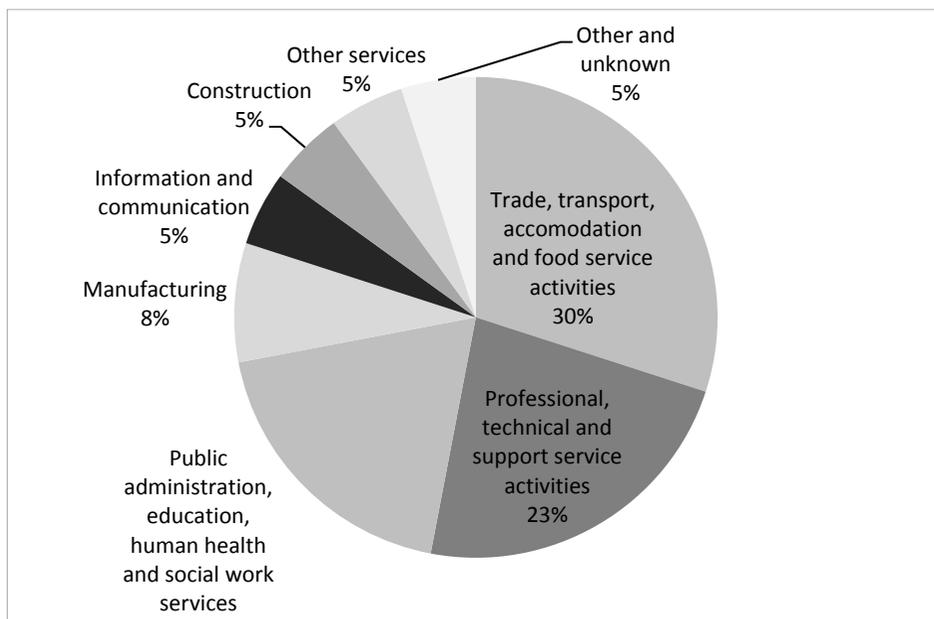
	Helsinki	Helsinki Metropolitan area	Helsinki Region	Rest of Finland
Labour force	29,467	50,287	54,912	50,421
Employed	23,407	40,316	44,116	36,659
Unemployed	6,060	9,971	10,796	13,762
Employment rate (people aged 15–64 years), %	51.9	54.8	55.1	49.3
Unemployment rate, %	20.6	19.8	19.7	27.3

Source: City of Helsinki Urban Facts (2012), Foreigners in Helsinki 2011, Statistics 6

<sup>93</sup> See Suvi Turja, “Finland”, in Anna Platonova and Giuliana Urso (eds), *Migration, Employment and Labour Market Integration Policies in the European Union*, Part 1: Migration and the Labour Markets in the European Union (2000-2009), International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Geneva, 2010, pp. 105–115.

In Helsinki, the unemployment rate of native-language speakers was 7 per cent in 2009, while as Table 9 shows, the unemployment rate among foreign-language speakers was almost 21 per cent. In addition, their unemployment rate increased by almost five percentage points since the previous year. However, the table also illustrates that the employment situation among foreign-language residents in Helsinki was better than the rest of Finland.<sup>94</sup>

**Figure 4. Foreign-background labour force in Helsinki by industry, 2008**



Source: City of Helsinki Urban Facts (2012), Foreigners in Helsinki 2011, Statistics 6

Regarding the distribution of occupations, the service sector dominates the employment of immigrants as it does the general population. In 2008, 30 per cent of employed immigrants worked in trade, transport, accommodation and food service activities, while 23 per cent worked in professional, technical and support service activities, and 19 per cent worked in the public administration, education, human health and social work sectors. Together, these three sectors employed over 70 per cent of the immigrants in Finland.<sup>95</sup> Somali men typically work in the transport and storage

<sup>94</sup> City of Helsinki Urban Facts, Foreigners in Helsinki 2011, at [www.hel.fi/hel2/tietokeskus/julkaisut/pdf/12\\_02\\_16\\_Tilasto\\_en\\_6\\_Selander.pdf](http://www.hel.fi/hel2/tietokeskus/julkaisut/pdf/12_02_16_Tilasto_en_6_Selander.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>95</sup> City of Helsinki Urban Facts, Foreigners in Helsinki 2011, Statistics 6, 2012.

sectors, whereas Somali women are often employed in health and social services. Both men and women also work in technical and support service activities.

Table 10 compares the employment situation of the Somalis with that of the Russians and Estonians, the largest migrant groups in Finland, and the Kurdish speakers, another group with a refugee background. The table illustrates that the rate of employed people, in particular among the Somali women, is very low. The level of self-employment of the Somalis as entrepreneurs is extremely low as well. As noted before, a large number of Somalis in Finland are children and students who are not included in the workforce. Also, a large number – about 41 per cent and 29 per cent of Somali women and men respectively in 2011 – are not part of the workforce for other reasons. Among the women, the main reason probably is that they prefer to stay at home and take care of their children, but among the men the reasons for being outside the workforce are not quite clear and should be studied further.

**Table 10. Main non-national language speakers by type of activity (%), 2011**

	Employed <sup>96</sup>		Unemployment rate		Entrepreneurs <sup>97</sup>		Outside labour force <sup>98</sup>		Children/Students	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	0–14 years old	Students
Russian	46.5	51.8	26.9	22.1	5.9	7.8	16.3	13.9	15.0	12.8
Estonian	66.5	68.3	10.6	9.8	6.1	7.3	12.9	15.4	16.0	6.8
Kurdish	26.4	35.3	44.9	41.2	2.2	11.0	26.9	18.6	22.6	18.4
Somali	13.0	24.7	60.5	46.0	0.0	0.5	41.2	29.0	37.4	22.2

**Source:** Statistics Finland, compiled from the statistical databases on Population/Employment, 4 October 2013<sup>99</sup>

In mid-2008, the Minister of Migration and European Affairs, Astrid Thors, appointed a team led by Pentti Arajärvi to study employment obstacles and inactivity traps facing immigrants. In his report, Arajärvi found a number of impediments in the immigrants' process of integrating into the labour market and. Table 11 summarises them.

<sup>96</sup> Percentage of those of working age.

<sup>97</sup> Percentage of those of working age.

<sup>98</sup> Those outside labour force for some other reason than studies, retirement, military service or being children.

<sup>99</sup> Statistics Finland, Table: Population by language, main type of activity, occupational status, sex and year 2000-2011, at 193.166.171.75/Database/StatFin/Vrm/tyokay/tyokay\_en.asp (accessed 3 November 2013).

A number of studies focusing on factors that positively correlate with immigrants' employment found that immigrants' employment opportunities strongly depend on economic fluctuations: immigrants have better chances of finding jobs during an economic upswing and vice versa.<sup>100</sup>

Immigrants' (lack of) resources are also found to be detrimental to their process of employment. It has been emphasised that sufficient command of Finnish (or Swedish) is the basic precondition for employment, and that to meet the requirements of working life, up-to-date training is among the key requirements. In order to find a job in line with professional skills, the attitudes and cultural and social readiness needed in Finnish working life have a central role. Social ties and networks are also important instruments for immigrants to access the labour market.<sup>101</sup>

The research literature has also focused on the demand side of the labour market. Negative or unfavourable attitudes towards foreigners were found to be major obstacles to employment for immigrants. For instance, it has been identified that labour-market gatekeepers intentionally obstruct immigrants at the outer periphery of the labour market at the stage of first enquiries; employers lack trust in immigrant workers; discrimination, both direct and indirect, is a prime factor in the process.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>100</sup> A. Forsander and A. Alitolppa-Niitamo, "Maahanmuuttajien työllistyminen ja työhallinto. Keitä, miten ja minne?" (Migrant employment and employment administration. Who, how and where?), *Työhallinnon julkaisu* (Ministry of Labour Publications) 242, Ministry of Labour, Helsinki, 2000 (hereafter, Forsander and Alitolppa-Niitamo "Maahanmuuttajien työllistyminen ja työhallinto").

<sup>101</sup> A. Forsander and A. Alitolppa-Niitamo, "Maahanmuuttajien työllistyminen ja työhallinto"; E. Heikkilä, "Labour Market Participation of Immigrants in Finland and its Regions", paper presented at the European Social Science History Conference, Glasgow, Scotland, UK, 11–14 April 2012; A. Akhlaq, *Getting a Job in Finland. The Social Networks of Immigrants from the Indian Subcontinent in the Helsinki Metropolitan Labour Market*, University of Helsinki, 2005.

<sup>102</sup> M.-L. Trux, "Diversity Under the Northern Star", in A. Forsander (ed.), *Immigration and Economy in Globalization Process: The Case of Finland*, Sitra Reports Series 20, Vantaa, Sitra, 2002, pp. 175–226.; K. Valtonen, "Cracking Monopoly: Immigrants and Employment in Finland", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27 (3) (2001) (hereafter, Valtonen, "Cracking Monopoly"); Forsander and Alitolppa-Niitamo "Maahanmuuttajien työllistyminen ja työhallinto"; A. Forsander, *Luottamuksen ehdot. Maahanmuuttajat 1990 luvun suomalaisilla työmarkkinoilla*, (Conditions of trust. Immigrants in the 1990s Finnish labour market), Population Research Institute, Family Federation, Helsinki, 2002; S. Paananen, *Suomalaisuuden armoilla: Ulkomaalaisten työnhakijoiden luokittelu* (At the mercy of Finnishness: classification of foreign labour market recruits), Tilastokeskus, (Statistics Finland), Helsinki, 1999; T. Joronen, "Työ on kahden kauppa – maahanmuuttajien työmarkkina-aseman ongelmia" (Job is a deal for two – problems in migrants' labour market position), Seppo Paananen (ed.) *Maahanmuuttajien elämää Suomessa* (Life of immigrants in Finland), Tilastokeskus (Statistics Finland), Helsinki, 2005, pp. 59–82. (hereafter, Paananen, *Maahanmuuttajien elämää Suomessa*).

**Table 11. Employment obstacles and inactivity traps for immigrants in the Finnish labour market**

Obstacles to immigrants' employment	Economic factors	Social factors	Linguistic factors	Educational factors	Prejudice factors
General obstacles	Employment situation (field/area)	Incentive and bureaucratic traps			
Obstacles caused by immigrants' situations	Long-time unemployment	Lack of knowledge of Finnish culture, society and working life	Inadequate language skills (Finnish and Swedish)	Lack of basic education or inadequate professional skills	
Obstacles caused by the employers, working conditions or the work community	Orientation costs of migrant employees		Excessive language proficiency requirements	Doubt about professional skills	Employers' attitudes and fear for fellow workers' or customers' attitudes
Obstacles caused by public services	Authorities' lack of resources	Lack of clarity regarding authorities' distribution of responsibilities	Inefficiency in the language teaching services	Lack of information by the authorities	Authorities' attitudes

**Source:** Sisäasiainministeriö (Ministry of the Interior), Maahanmuuttajien työllistyminen ja kannustinloukut (Immigrant employment and inactivity traps), Sisäasiainministeriön julkaisuja (Ministry of the Interior publications), 2/2009

## 6.2 Somalis and the Labour Market: Discrimination as the Rule

The Open Society Foundations data suggest that although all the factors discussed in the literature affect Somalis' employment prospects, negative attitudes and discrimination against Somalis are the prime determinants. According to Annika Forsander, the City of Helsinki's director of immigration affairs:

I think that in Finland compared to England, Canada, I don't know about other Nordic countries, but Somalis are suffering a lot from discrimination in the labour market. If you look at the educational level, and I've looked at those very carefully, in my previous research, there are so many Somalis who have done their secondary or even university education in Finland, excellent capabilities, lots of youngsters coming into the labour market, still their position is slow, I mean there has to be an element of xenophobia here.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Annika Forsander, director, City of Helsinki Immigration Affairs, Helsinki, 4 December 2012.

A number of studies support this conclusion. As Table 12 illustrates, a 2001 study found that among immigrant groups applying for jobs in Finland, Somalis experienced the most discrimination due to their ethnic background. Eighty-one per cent of the Somalis interviewed reported that they were discriminated against in the recruitment process, while the proportion among all immigrant groups was 50 per cent. Another study found that in 2002 Somalis were the most discriminated group in the recruitment process in the labour market. In this study, 72 per cent of Somalis perceived recruitment discrimination in the labour market. The 2009 Eurobarometer survey showed that 72 per cent of respondents considered that discrimination based on ethnicity was widespread in Finland.<sup>104</sup> Again, although the figure is much less compared with the findings of the previous studies, Somalis appear to be the most affected ethnic group; 41 per cent of Somalis claim that they encountered discrimination when applying for jobs in the past five years.

**Table 12. Immigrants who perceived discrimination at work due to foreign origin (%), 1997 and 2001**

	All groups		Russians		Estonians		Ingrian Finns		Somalis		Vietnamese	
	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001
Recruitment	46	50	45	51	40	35	34	46	44	81	41	49
Advancement	25	24	17	27	18	20	20	18	27	41	28	18
Termination	9	6	5	4	6	5	10	3	12	21	1	5
Bullying	33	31	26	30	22	27	33	29	23	43	28	27

**Sources:** I. Jasinskaja-Lahti, K. Liebkind and T. Vesala, *Rasismi ja syrjintä Suomessa. Maahanmuuttajien kokemukset* (Racism and discrimination in Finland. The experiences of immigrants), Gaudeamus, Helsinki, 2002; I. Jasinskaja-Lahti and K. Liebkind, *Maahanmuuttajien sopeutuminen pääkaupunkiseudulla Sosiaalipsykologinen näkökulma* (The integration of immigrants in the greater Helsinki area. Social psychological approach), 7, Helsingin kaupungin tietokeskuksen tutkimuksia (City of Helsinki Urban Studies), 1997

One male focus group participant expressed his experience as follows:

I myself saw an ad for a job and called. (The employer) told me to call the unemployment office and then they could hire me for a year. So I spoke with the man and made an appointment for 8 a.m. I went there an hour early and the man arrived while I was there. He took the papers. After a while a Finnish man came there and went into the man's office while I waited. After some time they

<sup>104</sup> European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS). "Main Results Report", European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009. At [fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/663-FRA-2011\\_EU\\_MIDIS\\_EN.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/663-FRA-2011_EU_MIDIS_EN.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

came out, and the man told me to go home and he would call me. He never called. Later I contacted him and asked what happened? The secretary asked me over to her desk and told me that the position had been filled. I wondered if the man who came after me that morning had gotten the position from under my nose (the participants laughed). I did not get angry; I told myself that the Finnish person had more right to the job.<sup>105</sup>

A young woman bluntly noted:

When I compare the process of applying for a job, if there are two applicants and one is Virtanen<sup>106</sup> and the other one Mohamed, the Finns know they will hire the Virtanen and not the Mohamed even though they don't know either.<sup>107</sup>

Another man went further, comparing the labour market discrimination in Finland with the clan nepotism of Somalia's patrimonial system.

I see it as wrong to compare myself to the Finnish. Is it that there was no discrimination in our country, because there was, even jobs were given based on clan. The classes have names and the first thing you will be asked is your clan, if we are truthful, and it's the same here and it's nothing new.<sup>108</sup>

In addition to recruitment discrimination, workplace discrimination was also noted as another phenomenon operating against Somali workers in Finland.<sup>109</sup>

Another area of discrimination is the promotion process. A young man related:

I used to work for ... for two years; a Finnish man came there and worked for 3 months. The manager was a woman and she asked me "Can you work overtime?" I said yes and did the overtime work well. The man who was there for 3 months got a permanent job and my contract was ended after the two years. I asked her why she gave the man a permanent job, when I had been there longer. She evaded me. I was the better worker and I had training in electronics, he didn't have a degree and I had worked longer even for other companies.

These statements draw attention to the relationship between employment and belonging. Another respondent felt that professionally appropriate employment opportunities are not open to Somalis who have been educated in Finland, including young people who were born in the country, and the only available employment options available for them are non-professional services such as taxi driving. In his view this affects their sense of citizenship "because, employment is the most important feature demonstrating one's citizenship status". Employment makes people feel

<sup>105</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on employment, 6 February 2013.

<sup>106</sup> Virtanen is a typical Finnish surname.

<sup>107</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on employment, 6 February 2013.

<sup>108</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on employment, 6 February 2013.

<sup>109</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on employment, 6 February 2013.

connected and creates a sense of belonging to the country, because it facilitates cooperation between people and integration. Otherwise people feel excluded and lacking membership in the society.<sup>110</sup>

This supports the conclusion that in Finland a role in the labour market as a paid worker determines membership in society. Being unemployed produces an experience of social exclusion and alienation from society. In the focus group of young women, when asked whether they felt that they were part of the Finnish society, two out of the six respondents said they did not. One young woman said that she had a sense of belonging to society because she holds Finnish nationality and passport, “so I am a Finn”. The remaining three agreed that they felt they belonged to Finnish society and their common justification was, “I feel that I am member of the society because I am a taxpayer, I have studied in this country and I work in this country – that makes me feel that I am part of this society.”<sup>111</sup>

Somali women face more challenges in the labour market than men. Like men they face high levels of discrimination in seeking employment, but unlike men they are more likely to be laid off after they are hired. A Somali female professional expressed her anxiety by saying:

I have been looking for a job for a long time and I only started working a while ago. For almost a year I was going back and forth. Now that I look back and think of the situation, I realise it was due to prejudice why I kept getting sent around, because of my ethnicity. I have a certificate just like those who found employment ... There were several places that gave me a job for few months and then threw me out, but finally, people are different in faith, now I work. I believe that your ethnicity will cause you some difficulty and that you are not equal to those who were here before you. And regardless of how active you are they might still just look at you and then send you back... I think that people receive their rights according to how they are respected and trusted, I have seen many immigrant workers in different places, and when I look at myself I realise that Somalis have a burden.<sup>112</sup>

The way women dress was considered to be one of the major obstacles in their access to the labour market. Another female participant in the same focus group, wearing the hijab, said:

They (employers) didn't look at what does this person do, how active he or she is, what kind of certificate does he or she have, they just look at the image they have, (they think) with this person you can get this and this and with this person you can't get anything. That might be their reason for hiring someone for a

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Abdinasir Mohamed, representative, Islamic Society of Finland, Helsinki, 8 February 2013.

<sup>111</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group with young women, 24 February 2013.

<sup>112</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on citizenship and participation 17 April 2013.

permanent position and giving you only a temporary position and then asking you to leave when the contract is done. And women are not even in this, if they see active young women who are involved in everything with them they will hire them. You are a person who looks like this (showing her hijab), you can have any certificate you want but you can't compete with them, that is how I see it. You become discouraged, this country accepted you as a Muslim how can you stay here and not have employment ... I used to work with a Finnish woman before who said, "Your work is good, very excellent, how you do it is good, the only problem you have is your outfit that you constantly (put together), when you could easily decrease the amount of clothes you wear, you would be more active and you find employment easily."<sup>113</sup>

Somali community activists suggested that Somali women are placed on a cycle of training programmes that never lead to actual employment. The issue was also raised in the focus group discussions. A female participant expressed her hope that:

Somalis would not be seen as people who just sit around, that the Finnish community would open up, that we could have employment for example. Often what happens is that they give you work practice placement, you finish it and then someone else starts practice placement there and then later get employment there, but that you won't get hired. So it's very difficult to find employment where your religion is respected and acknowledged that there are certain tasks you can't do so you can work with the people.<sup>114</sup>

### 6.3 Causes of Discrimination against Somalis and its Impact on Other Factors

Colour and religion are basic types of discrimination and most experiences relate to those two attributes. However, the case of Somalis in Finland is quite special. Neither Muslims nor other Africans in Finland face discrimination comparable with that faced by the Somalis. Therefore, there must be some other attribute which might be relevant to the singularity of the case of the Somalis in Finland. An interviewee articulated a perspective as follows:

And, the start, maybe it was in the very beginning, there was a lot of talk about this Somali shock, as it was, Somalis being the first large Muslim group, (the) first little bit larger African group, and the first larger refugee group that came to Finland. And, it was in the middle of the deepest recession, in the beginning of the 1990s. So the scapegoating started at that time, and still now there is lots of it, I rarely go, but you can't avoid it, the net is full of it.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on citizenship and participation, 17 April 2013.

<sup>114</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on security, 14 February 2013.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with Annika Forsander, director, City of Helsinki Immigration Affairs, Helsinki, 4 December 2012.

The attitudes of the Finnish-majority population towards Somalis undermine the efficacy of the qualifications for the employment of immigrants. There is a consensus that education matters for employment, no matter the background. Employers value a Finnish education more than that of any other country and a degree attained in Finland offers better chances for employment than a degree attained elsewhere. However, studies have found that Somalis, especially Somali men, who have studied in Finland have not essentially improved their position in the labour market.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, according to Tuula Joronen, a researcher from the City of Helsinki, in Finland an Estonian for example who attained only comprehensive education from Estonia has a chance of finding better employment than a Somali with Finnish vocational training or upper secondary education.<sup>117</sup>

The following quote is from a study by Kathleen Valtonen, where a young man employed as a teaching aide for Somali children narrated his experiences:

I graduated as a technician from ... vocational college in ... After this I got into a prep course for apprenticeships ... This course lasted two weeks. Everyone had to find himself a practice placement (internship) in a firm. We had to send out our letters of introduction, explaining about ourselves, what kind of person was applying and so on. I sent 25 letters to different firms, with information about myself, my educational qualifications and hobbies. One month later I followed up the letters. I called the firms, requesting only a practice placement, they would pay me nothing, I was interested in the work and would only be there for three months without a salary. If after that they were interested, I could be there under an apprenticeship agreement, in which my salary would be paid mostly by the Employment Office. Of all these, not even one asked me in to an interview. I did not even get to be interviewed. The reason they gave was inadequate language skill. How would they know that my language skill was not good? They explained that this was evident from the letter, but before I sent out my letter, my Finnish language teacher had checked it. After that, well ... I felt really awful ... Many of us Somalis ... we have no opportunity.<sup>118</sup>

Open Society Foundations's data reveal similar stories and anxieties. As the previous quotation expresses, in addition to education, language qualifications have done very little for Somalis.

All immigrants have, to some extent, a problem with language, but that is not a real big thing. I think that is the more politically correct thing to talk about. If you don't want to hire someone you would say they do not know the language,

<sup>116</sup> Paananen, *Maahanmuuttajien elämää Suomessa*.

<sup>117</sup> Tuula Joronen, "Työ on kahden kauppa – maahanmuuttajien työmarkkina-aseman ongelmia" (Job is a deal for two – problems in the migrants' labour market position), in Paananen, *Maahanmuuttajien elämää Suomessa*, pp. 59–82.

<sup>118</sup> Valtonen, "Cracking Monopoly", 2001, p. 431.

you don't say they have the wrong colour, you understand that you cannot say that even if you think so. You would say he did not speak or she did not speak fluently enough. So if you look at the data or you try get what is the main problem for getting into the labour market it will be the language and I am highly sceptical about that. I do not think it is the language, I do think the language is a politically correct answer to those who interview you. It is not the right reason.<sup>119</sup>

Kristina Stenman, Director of Migration Department, Ministry of Employment and the Economy, agrees that a non-Finnish mother tongue is used as a mechanism for exclusion in the labour market and therefore operates to disadvantage Somalis.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Interview with Georg Henrik Wrede, director, Youth Division, Ministry of Education and Culture, Helsinki, 3 January 2013.

<sup>120</sup> Open Society Foundations meeting with Kristina Stenman, director, Migration Department, Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Helsinki, 21 March 2013.

## 7. HOUSING

The old assumption “where you live affects your life chances” is perhaps always valid. On the one hand, there is a strong correlation between the area in which individuals live and their wellbeing. It is also apparent that the area in which someone lives can be a strong predictor of social class, health condition, family structure, likely lifespan and so on. According to a recent study, “where you live can limit or assist your life chances from cradle to grave”.<sup>121</sup> On the other hand, housing plays a central role in people’s everyday lives and the lifestyle choices available to them. For immigrants, housing can be a key aspect in the integration process and a central indicator of integration status.

### 7.1 Segregation: a New Evil in the Making

At the government policy level it is quite obvious that the role of housing in the process of social integration has been recognised since independence, and the authorities have used housing strategies to prevent immigrants or other specific groups from being segregated from the rest of society since the 1970s. Significant geographic differences never became visible, thanks to the Nordic welfare state system, full employment policies and successful progressive taxation.<sup>122</sup> Governments have pursued housing policies that attempt to mix various types of housing, and studies show that there are no slums and there is a low degree of segregation by ethnic origin.<sup>123</sup> In addition, the quality of dwellings is good and residents are mainly satisfied with their living environment.<sup>124</sup>

The tenure mix strategy, a housing policy that seeks to integrate populations with different socio-economic backgrounds, ethnic profiles, income, household size and other criteria in order to avoid social segregation, has been implemented in Helsinki. In

<sup>121</sup> B. Thomas and D. Dorling, *Identity in Britain: A cradle-to-grave atlas*, The Policy Press, Bristol, 2007.

<sup>122</sup> For a good presentation of the historical evolution of urban aspects in Helsinki and the role of housing in the socio-economic integration of its residents, see M. Vaattovaara and M. Kortteinen, “Beyond polarisation versus professionalisation? A case study of the development of the Helsinki Region”, *Urban Studies* 40 (11) (2003), pp. 2127–2145 (hereafter, Vaattovaara and Kortteinen, “Beyond polarisation”).

<sup>123</sup> Simo Mannila, “Nordic immigration policy and the new emphasis on labour immigration – the case of Finland as compared to Sweden and Norway”, in Simo Mannila, Vera Messing, Hans-Peter van den Broek and Zsuzsanna Vidra, *Immigrants and ethnic minorities: European country cases and debates*, THL Report 41/2010, pp. 18–38; Vaattovaara and Kortteinen, “Beyond polarisation”).

<sup>124</sup> M. Kortteinen, M. Elovainio and M. Vaattovaara, “Asuinolot ja niiden kehitys Helsingin kunnallisissa vuokrataloissa” (Housing conditions and their development in rented council houses in Helsinki), *Yhteiskuntapolitiikka* (Social Policy) 71 (2006), pp. 3–13; E. Korhonen and J. Takala, *Asumisviihtyvyyden Helsingin kaupungin vuokra – ja asumisoikeustaloissa 2005* (Housing satisfaction in the city of Helsinki’s rented and right of occupancy dwellings 2005), Helsinki, City of Helsinki Urban Facts, 2006.

building new residences authorities enforced tenure quotas based on area, and to diversify homogeneous housing stock in some older residential districts of the city, urban renewal programmes have also been implemented. When allocating council houses, authorities have distributed less well-off households among the more prosperous segments of the population. The main purpose of the policy was to prevent segregation from developing and to enhance and preserve heterogeneous and socially and economically balanced neighbourhoods.

However, this success has weakened somewhat since the early 1990s and distinctions between the different parts of Helsinki have emerged with the various economic trends. It became apparent in the 1990s that the pattern of both incoming and internal migration in the region showed that the eastern and north-eastern parts were undesirable areas for the well-educated, who sought to settle in the western part of the region, and the eastern area gradually became poorer and developed higher unemployment rates. Small pockets of poverty have emerged mainly in eastern and north-eastern parts of the city.<sup>125</sup>

According to a study by Vaattovaara and Kortteinen, three distinct areas have emerged in the region: the “hot” areas inhabited by the elite in the western part of the region, “grey zones” with a higher concentration of the working-class and “black holes” where the residents are largely without work.<sup>126</sup>

From the early 2000s, in addition to the socio-economic divide, ethnic residential segregation became visible and further worsened the divide between the eastern and north-eastern as opposed to the north, north-western and southern neighbourhoods of Helsinki. Due to the availability of low-income rental apartments, the former areas took in a large number of immigrants. Selective migration dynamics have also contributed to the growing gap: to avoid multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, the Finnish-born population started migrating towards residential neighbourhoods with a lower percentage of people with immigrant backgrounds, while the immigrant population was moving towards neighbourhoods where the percentage of foreign-language speakers is relatively high.<sup>127</sup>

As noted in Chapter 2, the majority of the immigrants are concentrated in the Helsinki metropolitan area, where about 11 per cent of residents are non-native speakers. In Helsinki, the eastern and north-eastern parts attracted the highest concentration and

<sup>125</sup> Impoverishment is defined here as the areas in which the growth of unemployment and living on basic assistance have been faster than the average and in which the end result is at least twice the average.

<sup>126</sup> Vaattovaara and Kortteinen, “Beyond polarisation”.

<sup>127</sup> K. Vilkkama, “Yhteinen kaupunki, eriytyvät kaupunginosat? Kantaväestön ja maahanmuuttajataustaisten asukkaiden alueellinen eriytyminen ja muuttoliike pääkaupunkiseudulla” (Shared city or divided neighbourhoods? Residential segregation and selective migration of the native and immigrant populations in the Helsinki Metropolitan area), Academic dissertation. City of Helsinki Urban Facts, Helsinki, 2011.

consequently, a new form of ethnic segregation along the lines of socio-economic exclusion is now visible. However, in contrast to the full-scale immigrant-dense neighbourhoods that are common in the urban areas of neighbouring Nordic cities, the Helsinki metropolitan area has been described “as a fine-scale mosaic of multi-ethnic pockets”.<sup>128</sup>

In Helsinki the number of foreign-language speakers is expected to double by 2030; in other words, over 19 per cent of Helsinki’s residents are expected to have a foreign mother tongue. Over 15 percent, or about a quarter of a million people, of Helsinki metropolitan area residents will be non-native language speakers. Thus, the current trend of geographic distribution in Helsinki and in the region may create unsustainable socio-economic inequalities and problematic ethnic segregation if not addressed properly.

Another serious problem is the issue of homelessness. As Table 13 illustrates, the number of homeless people increased by 3.6 per cent in 2012. Over 52 per cent of those who happen to be homeless in Finland live in Helsinki. The number of immigrants in the category of homelessness is growing fast in Finland and particularly in Helsinki. As the table shows, the situation of youth, women and families is worrisome. The share of homeless Somalis is also increasing.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> S. Yousfi and K. Vilkkama, “Regional settlement patterns and migration dynamics among immigrants in Finland”, in R. Andersson, H. Dhalmann, E. Holmqvist, T.M. Kauppinen, L. Magnusson Turner, H. Skifter Andersen, S. Søholt, M. Vaattovaara, K. Vilkkama, T. Wessel and S. Yousfi, *Immigration, housing and segregation in the Nordic welfare states*, Department of Geosciences and Geography C2, University of Helsinki, 2010, pp. 240–262.

<sup>129</sup> Open Society Foundations roundtable, Helsinki, 16 September 2013.

**Table 13. Main homeless groups in Finland and Helsinki, 2011 and 2012**

	2011	2012	Change (%)
<b>Total homeless individuals in Finland</b>	<b>7,572</b>	<b>7,847</b>	<b>3.6</b>
Women	1,578	1,893	20.0
Under 25 years old	1,409	2,049	45.4
Immigrants	1,020	1,550	52.0
<b>Total homeless families in Finland</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>5.4</b>
Immigrants	166	211	27.1
<b>Total homeless individuals in Helsinki</b>	<b>3,400</b>	<b>4,100</b>	<b>20.6</b>
Women	850	1,150	35.3
Under 25 years old	570	1,100	93.0
Immigrants	750	1,150	53.3
<b>Total homeless families in Helsinki</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>36.4</b>
Immigrants	140	175	25.0

Source: Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland, "Asunnottomat" (Homeless people) 2012, Report 1/2013<sup>130</sup>

## 7.2 City Policy

Although immigrants are free to reside where they wish, state policies explicitly aim to prevent ethnic-minority residential segregation and promote geographic assimilation. In 1997 the government drafted a framework policy on immigration and refugee reception in which it advised the municipalities to prevent residential segregation and directed that, when allocating social housing, municipalities should avoid the formation of ethnic enclaves and promote ethnically mixed neighbourhoods.<sup>131</sup> In response, all the major cities have incorporated these government guidelines into their local integration programmes mainly through municipal housing policies.

In Helsinki, two main policies, tenure mixing and social mixing policies, were utilised to create a harmonious society and maintain social cohesion for decades, and in the early 1990s immigrant housing issues were incorporated into these diversity policies. An integration policy memorandum from the city council reads that "council dwellings are to be allocated to immigrants evenly from different parts of the city, if possible, so

<sup>130</sup> See [ara.fi/fi-FI/ARAtietopankki/ARAN\\_selvitykset](http://ara.fi/fi-FI/ARAtietopankki/ARAN_selvitykset) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>131</sup> Government resolution on the government's immigration and refugees political programme in 1997, accepted at the General meeting of the Parliament 16 October 1997.

the emergence of areas with an exceptionally large immigrant population could be avoided".<sup>132</sup> Practical difficulties may arise from two main factors, however. First, as the memorandum itself concludes, "council housing allocation procedures cannot prevent segregation sufficiently, because council dwellings are unevenly distributed and most vacancies appear in the neighbourhoods which already house many immigrants", so the availability of council dwellings in some areas of the city was an obstacle to the effective prevention of segregation. Second, immigrants have some tendency to prefer to live in a neighbourhood where there is ethnic diversity because of benefits such as decreased racial harassment.<sup>133</sup>

### 7.3 Perceptions of the Dwellings

Immigrant households are, in general, larger than the average native Finnish households. Proportions of single households among native-born and immigrant populations were 51 per cent and 34 per cent respectively in 2008. Among Somalis the rate was even higher. As Table 14 illustrates, Somalis occupied 1,139 dwellings in Helsinki including 4,855 persons, an average of 4.26 persons per dwelling compared with 2.44 persons per dwellings and 1.81 persons per dwellings respectively of all immigrant groups and the native-born population. This larger family size affects the housing situation of the Somalis. In Helsinki metropolitan area only 3 per cent of all rental apartments have five or more rooms, while 61 per cent of Somalis live in a household with over five members or more and 29 per cent of them live in a household with over six members. As a result, some 80 per cent of Somalis in Helsinki live in crowded housing conditions compared with only 9 per cent of Finns and 25 per cent of the immigrant population.

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<sup>132</sup> H. Dhalmann and K. Vilkkama, "Housing policy and the ethnic mix in Helsinki, Finland: perceptions of city officials and Somali immigrants", *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 24 (4) (2009), pp. 423–439 (hereafter, Dhalmann and Vilkkama, "Housing policy and the ethnic mix in Helsinki").

<sup>133</sup> Dhalmann and Vilkkama, "Housing policy and the ethnic mix in Helsinki". See also Helsingin ulkomaalaispolitiikka – Perusteet ja käytäntö (City of Helsinki's immigrant policy – Foundations and practice), Helsingin kaupunginkanslian julkaisusarja (Publication series of the City Office of Helsinki), A12, 1991. Helsinki; Helsingin ulkomaalaispolitiikka (City of Helsinki's immigrant policy). Helsingin kaupunginkanslian julkaisusarja (Publication series of the City Office of Helsinki) A 10/1995. Helsinki.

**Table 14. Dwelling households by mother tongue in Helsinki, 2008**

Dwelling	Households	Persons
Mother tongue Finnish or Swedish	278,351	503,207
Foreign mother tongue total	20,239	49,312
Russian	5,406	11,563
Estonian	2,782	5,666
Somali	1,139	4,855

Source: City of Helsinki Urban Facts, Foreigners in Helsinki 2011, Statistics 6, 2012

Two types of housing tenure dominate the housing sector in Helsinki. The share of the rental sector is about half of the entire housing stock, where 23 per cent is private rented housing and 22 per cent is social rented housing; a majority of these social rented dwellings or council housing is owned by the city of Helsinki, and the rest is owned by non-profit housing companies.

Somalis are exceptionally dependent on the social rental sector due to its affordability and reliability. For example, in 2003 some 70 per cent of Somalis in Helsinki lived in council housing, predominantly flats; only 1 per cent of them lived in owner-occupied housing. And because of the large size of their families and their income levels, and perhaps a lack of information on other options, Somalis rely on the city-administered housing sector when searching for dwelling.<sup>134</sup>

In Finland the quality of housing, including council housing, is good and most Somalis are satisfied with it. A previous study showed that the biggest issue regarding housing for Somalis is that the housing supply available to them does not correspond to their needs as large families. One of the stakeholder interviewees explained:

Let me tell you the case of my family as an example, we are a nine-member family and during the last ten years we lived in a two bedroom apartment and during that ten years my application was in the housing department in the city. I sleep in the living room and the rest sleep in the two bedrooms. How rational it could be to expect from children growing up within that situation, who are unable to find a space do their homework, to properly integrate into the society! But I am also aware that there are cases that are much worse than ours.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>134</sup> M. Lankinen, *Sosiaalisen vuokra-asumisen asema kaupunkikentässä* (Social rental housing status of the city field), City of Helsinki, Helsinki, 2006. See also Dhalmann and Vilkkama, "Housing policy and the ethnic mix in Helsinki".

<sup>135</sup> Interview with Abdulkadir Mohamed, Imam, Islamic Al-Rahma Centre, Helsinki, 19 December 2013.

This issue was also raised in the focus groups. For instance, one of the participants in the group of older men explained the situation of a Somali family in his neighbourhood, Myllypuro: a family of 11 lives in a single-bedroom apartment with one bathroom and consequently the children are usually late getting to school.<sup>136</sup>

Discriminatory treatment is prohibited in the housing market. This includes discrimination in the selection of tenants for municipal or private<sup>137</sup> rental housing. Municipalities have a duty to monitor the selection of tenants for state-subsidised rental housing to ensure there is no unlawful discrimination. The municipalities together with the housing authority are expected to handle problems with accessing housing. Furthermore, the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland deals with complaints of misconduct, including complaints of discrimination in the selection of tenants, against the housing authorities and municipalities. The Ombudsman for Minorities provides guidance to ethnic minorities on housing issues and may also request the National Discrimination Tribunal to intervene in case of discrimination based on ethnic background.<sup>138</sup>

In Helsinki, Somalis consider discrimination in the housing market to be a major problem, particularly in the residency application process. One young participant in the focus group on housing expressed his feelings as follows:

It used to be in the 90s when Somalis first arrived that people come up to you and badmouth you or fight with you but now it has moved to the offices, whether it's education or housing or work, they take your application, smile at you and then put your paper in the trash.<sup>139</sup>

In addition, in the focus group interviews participants complained about dealing with housing offices, both social housing and private companies, over repairing facilities. A female participant illustrated her experiences:

If there's something in the apartment that needs fixing, and we call (the housing office) and tell them that there's something that needs to be fixed in the apartment, nobody listens or pays attention to it. I once contacted them about a problem in the toilet that needed to be fixed, they came and saw it, I showed them everything, they said "we will send someone there", it was last summer and now the summer is soon again, they have done nothing about it. Finally the children called and yelled at them, told them that there's no lock in the toilet

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<sup>136</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group with older men, 19 February 2013.

<sup>137</sup> This applies to the companies and estate agencies; however, the Non-Discrimination Act applies to a certain extent also to housing rentals by private individuals.

<sup>138</sup> See [vahemmistovoaltuutettu.fi/en/ethnic\\_discrimination/questions\\_and\\_answers/housing](http://vahemmistovoaltuutettu.fi/en/ethnic_discrimination/questions_and_answers/housing) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>139</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on housing, 17 January 2013.

and we enter when it's occupied and we pay rent so why are you not fixing it? So the biggest problem we have is the housing office.<sup>140</sup>

Furthermore, the roundtable participants pointed out that the housing allocation system in Helsinki is not transparent, the waiting lists are not numbered and applicants do not know who gets an apartment and why. It was further asserted that in some other Nordic countries migrants know and understand the system, whereas in Helsinki it is more difficult: the applicants just have a telephone number and they do not get answers.<sup>141</sup>

#### 7.4 Perceptions of the Local Area

Immigrant housing was not a major issue in the Integration Act, although the government bill for the Act had emphasised two major integration aspects. On the one hand, when developing residential areas it should be ensured that “regions are differentiated and inequities avoided” and, on the other hand, sufficiently large ethnic-minority communities should be formed within different municipalities. The bill also instructed local authorities to “include housing aspects in their integration programmes.”<sup>142</sup>

Under this policy, the government dispersed incoming immigrants into different areas; for instance, in the period between 1991 and 2001 Finland received 20,000 refugees and distributed them into 135 different municipalities. Helsinki was the largest recipient of these refugees. However, voluntary internal migration has reversed the major objective of establishing “adequately large and functional ethnic minority groups within individual municipalities”.

While Somalis were initially sent to municipalities all around the country including Helsinki, secondary voluntary internal migration brought most of Somalis into the Helsinki metropolitan area, particularly the city of Helsinki itself. In 2011, of the 14,045 Somali-speaking people living in Finland, over 75 per cent were in the Helsinki metropolitan area and over 46 per cent in Helsinki.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, one-third of the Somali residents in Helsinki lived in eastern districts of the city. Somalis moved to these areas for a number of reasons including employment and educational opportunities, the desire to live near relatives and friends, and access to community and cultural facilities and services. Also larger rental apartments are available in the neighbourhoods where many Somalis reside. In the focus groups, participants listed these as advantages Helsinki has over other cities in Finland. People mentioned how important Helsinki is for them as immigrants. A male focus group participant noted:

<sup>140</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group with older women, 21 February 2013.

<sup>141</sup> Open Society Foundations roundtable, Helsinki, 16 September 2013.

<sup>142</sup> Ministry of Labour, Government Report on Implementation of the Integration Act, Government report 5/2002, Publication of Labour Administration 317.

<sup>143</sup> City of Helsinki Urban Facts (2012), Foreigners in Helsinki 2011, Statistics 6.

In other towns the immigrants might not have security, they might not find a job, what brings us here is seeking to be closer to other Somalis and opportunities to find employment, that's why people come here.<sup>144</sup>

In her study on the housing situation of Somalis, Hanna Dhalmann found that, contrary to the common assumption, Somalis never intended to form an ethnic enclave; they expressed their concerns about the current situation and feared foreseeable negative consequences of the trend continuing. They also wished to live among the native Finns. Her Somali respondents emphasised a number of advantages in integrated neighbourhoods.<sup>145</sup> However, according to the government report,

encounters between immigrants and Finns in residential areas are not always smooth. Rather many immigrants have experienced disturbances and violent attacks from their neighbours. Disturbance of domestic peace and security is the third most common form of racist criminal behaviour in Finland.<sup>146</sup>

As noted, Somalis are a target for soaring occurrences of racism and accordingly, when choosing their place of residence they try to maximise the safety of their family. In her study Dhalmann interviewed Somali residents in Helsinki and one of her respondents, a Somali father, said:

There is racism (also in our present place of residence). It was a bit of a surprise, because my children were on the yard yesterday when a group of Finnish small children under 10 years old came and they used the word *neekeri* (nigger). And before that, when we moved to this place, some of the residents voiced that same word to us and threw stones at the balcony. It seems that this is not a good place to live ... If this kind of racism continues I, perhaps, could think of moving from this place.<sup>147</sup>

In the focus group on housing, racial harassment was raised again and again. One of the participants noted her daughter came to her house one day and left her child's pushchair at the entrance on the ground floor because she wanted to leave soon. The pushchair was covered with faeces and vomit.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on housing, 17 January 2013.

<sup>145</sup> Hanna Dhalmann, "Yhden uhka, toisen toive? Somalien ja venäläisten asumistoiveet etnisen segregatiiokehityksen valossa?" (Threat for one, wish for the other? Residential preferences and patterns of Somali and Russian immigrants in the Helsinki Metropolitan area), Department of Geosciences and Geography A10. Doctoral thesis in urban geography, 2011, at [helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/25901](http://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/25901) (accessed 3 November 2013) (hereafter, Dhalmann, "Yhden uhka, toisen toive?").

<sup>146</sup> Ministry of Labour, *Government Report on Implementation of the Integration Act*, Government report no. 5 of 2002, Publication of Labour Administration 317.

<sup>147</sup> Dhalmann, "Yhden uhka, toisen toive?".

<sup>148</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on housing, 17 January 2013.

Another study<sup>149</sup> found that, contrary to the local authorities' assumption,<sup>150</sup> many Somalis believe that they are discriminated against in the housing allocations and that local authorities assign them only to certain areas and housing estates that are less desirable to the Finns. And a social worker was quoted saying that:

In many housing estates, where our customers (Somali families) live, there aren't many normal Finnish families: working, nice kids, mum and dad. There are Finnish families with multiple problems, whose aggression and bad feelings are directed at immigrant families ... Children are attacked ... A gun was pointed at a child. Drug needles are thrown on to the balconies.<sup>151</sup>

However, no one has mentioned that it is better to concentrate people in a particular area of the city. Nevertheless, some interviewees associate some districts such as Myllypuro and Kontula with problems. A young woman reported, "There are many good features about Helsinki, I live in Kontula currently, I think it's the worst neighbourhood in Helsinki." Another young woman related her experience of physical violence in her neighbourhood, Myllypuro. Seven men attacked her, her grandmother and aunt, "they set a dog on us and spat at us and poured alcohol on us, they beat us up," and she added that her grandmother was elderly and had recently had surgery. Residents of these districts also noted that they face problems in the public service provision sector, especially the health services and doctors.<sup>152</sup> Others also noted other problems: "The bad features are many in my neighbourhood Kontula, like the youth, it's a place full of bad youth ... in Kontula you will find all that is bad in abundance."<sup>153</sup>

Others were quite pleased with their neighbourhood: "There is also a mosque in Malmi. ... The people who live there don't have any trouble with living there, it's a quiet neighbourhood. There is a club next to the mosque for example, and they play music in the evenings. I remember one Ramadan, they played music at the club and they were drinking alcohol in front of it but they didn't cause us any harm. The people who live there do not bother the immigrants."<sup>154</sup>

## 7.5 New Initiatives

In 2009 the City Council endorsed the Strategy Programme for 2009–2012. The programme presents the city's focal objectives, developing targets and measures, and it intended to improve the services, resident information services and civic activities, and

<sup>149</sup> Dhalmann and Vilkkama, "Housing policy and the ethnic mix in Helsinki".

<sup>150</sup> Local authorities assume that Somalis are segregating themselves from the native Finns or intend to form ethnic clusters.

<sup>151</sup> Dhalmann and Vilkkama, "Housing policy and the ethnic mix in Helsinki".

<sup>152</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on housing, 17 January 2013.

<sup>153</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group with young women, 24 February 2013.

<sup>154</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group with young men, 14 February 2013.

to increase the involvement of people with an immigrant background in residential areas with a high proportion of immigrant residents. In addition, the programme sought to prepare an action plan for more even distribution of people with immigrant backgrounds in different districts of the city and different types of housing.

With the aim of promoting the integration of immigrants, several projects were planned. One top project was “strengthening participation and community cohesion in suburban areas” and another was “equality of immigrant inhabitants in housing”. A number of activities, from education and employment to social cohesion in neighbourhoods, were carried out as part of this programme in different parts of the city. However, the impacts of these activities are still to be evaluated and assessed.

## 8. HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

This chapter discusses the health status and wellbeing of Somalis in Helsinki, and their experiences in using health care services.

### 8.1 Health Status and Wellbeing

Recently, the National Institute for Health and Welfare conducted extensive research on the health and wellbeing of three migrant groups in Finland: Russians, Somalis and Kurds. The data were collected through both interviews and health examinations; 1,000 people between the ages of 18 and 64 from each migrant group, living in Helsinki or five other municipalities, were invited to participate. The survey included 510 Somalis, 169 Somalis from Helsinki among them.<sup>155</sup> This research is the most extensive research on migrant health conducted in Finland so far and therefore provides an up-to-date and useful window into immigrants' health and experiences of health care.

According to the research, people of Somali origin were most satisfied with their quality of life and their coping with day-to-day activities. Somali men, in particular, estimated their health to be excellent.<sup>156</sup> However, in the tests of physical function, Somalis performed the worst. For example, 39 per cent of the Somali women and 11 per cent of the men had difficulties in walking up and down stairs (several floors).<sup>157</sup> Among the groups covered in the survey, diabetes was the most common among the Somalis; in particular Somali women suffered from diabetes and obesity. Very few of the Somalis reported eating fresh fruit or vegetables daily. Moreover, compared with the overall population in the study municipalities, both the Somali and Kurdish migrants exercised less. The Somalis in the study hardly smoked at all. In general, the results show gender difference regarding health status and wellbeing, as Somali women seem to have poorer health compared with Somali men. In addition, health status as well as the use of health services among the Somali respondents was strongly associated with the level of education: the better educated experienced their health as the best.<sup>158</sup>

The Somali women in the study had given birth to an average of 4.5 children. Reported abortions among Somali women were rare because they are not regarded as religiously acceptable, but spontaneous miscarriages were most common among them.

<sup>155</sup> Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*.

<sup>156</sup> Seppo Koskinen, Anu E Castaneda, Natalia Solovieva and Tiina Laatikainen, "Koettu terveys" (Experienced health), in Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*, pp. 64–66.

<sup>157</sup> Shadia Rask, Päivi Sainio, Sari Stenholm, Mariitta Vaara and Tuula Hurnasti, "Fyysinen toimintakyky ja liikkumisen apuvälineet" (Physical functional performance and assistive devices), in Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*, pp. 183–190.

<sup>158</sup> Seppo Koskinen, Anu E Castaneda, Päivi Koponen and Sadia Rask, "Koulutustaso ja asuinalue" (Level of education and residential area), in Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*, p. 286.

According to the study, the use of reliable contraceptive methods was lowest among the Somali women: less than 12 per cent of the Somali women under 55 used contraception.<sup>159</sup> The reluctance to use contraception by Somali women and men both has been reported also in other studies.<sup>160</sup>

About 70 per cent of the Somali women participating in the study had been circumcised, with over 16 per cent of the circumcised women reporting problems because of the procedure.<sup>161</sup> However, the survey did not inquire into the kind of operation that had been performed and where it had taken place. In Finland, there have been no prosecutions for cases of female circumcision in the country. The oldest project campaigning against female circumcision in Finland, KokoNainen, has been running since 2002 at the Finnish League for Human Rights.<sup>162</sup> In 2012, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health published a national Action Plan against female circumcision in Finland.<sup>163</sup>

Surprisingly, male circumcision has been a much more controversial issue than female circumcision. The Jewish community and a long-established Tatar Muslim community in Finland are able to privately fund male circumcisions in their own communities, but the larger Muslim migrant community, lacking the funds for their own private arrangements, has asked for this service from the public health sector. In 2004, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health released a working group report, where they recommended that non-medical male circumcisions would be conducted under public health care. Moreover, separate legislation on the issue was suggested.<sup>164</sup> However, the situation has not been resolved and for the past 10 years it has been very difficult to

<sup>159</sup> Päivikki Koponen, Reija Klemetti, Heljä-Marja Surcel, Mulki Mölsä, Mika Gissler and Anneli Weiste-Paakkanen, "Raskauden ehkäisy, raskaudet, synnytykset ja imetys" (Contraception, pregnancies, deliveries and breast-feeding), in Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*, pp. 134–137.

<sup>160</sup> See, e.g. Filio Degni, L. Koivusilta and A. Ojanlatva, "Attitudes towards and perceptions about contraceptive use among married refugee women of Somali descent living in Finland", *European Journal of Contraceptive Reproductive Health Care* 11 (2006), pp. 190–196; Filio Degni, C. Mazengo, T. Vaskilampi and B. Essén, "Religious beliefs prevailing among Somali men living in Finland regarding the use of the condom by men and that of other forms of contraception by women", *European Journal of Contraceptive Reproductive Health Care* 13 (2008), pp. 298–303.

<sup>161</sup> Päivikki Koponen and Mulki Mölsä, "Naisten ympärileikkaus" (Female circumcision), in Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*, pp. 142–143.

<sup>162</sup> See [ihmisoiikeusliitto.fi/index.php/toiminta/kokonainen](http://ihmisoiikeusliitto.fi/index.php/toiminta/kokonainen) (accessed February 2013).

<sup>163</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, "Action Plan for the prevention of circumcision of girls and women 2012–2016 (FGM)", at [stm.fi/en/publications/publication/-/\\_julkaisu/1822114#en](http://stm.fi/en/publications/publication/-/_julkaisu/1822114#en) (accessed February 2013).

<sup>164</sup> Kristina Stenman, "Poikien ympärileikkaus. Selvitys kansainvälisistä ja kotimaisista käytännöistä" (Circumcision of boys. A study on international and Finnish practices), *Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriön monisteita* (Handouts from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health) 2004: 3, Helsinki, at [stm.fi/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?folderId=28707&name=DLFE-3699.pdf](http://stm.fi/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=28707&name=DLFE-3699.pdf) (accessed October 2013).

perform non-medical male circumcisions in Finland at all, as medical doctors generally oppose doing them even at private clinics and refer to a child's rights. Families who can afford it travel abroad, often to a Muslim country, to have the operation done, and kitchen-table operations have taken place, sometimes with unfortunate complications and resulting judicial proceedings.

According to the Migrant Health and Wellbeing study, 57 per cent of Somalis have experienced a traumatic event (often war, or seeing violent death or injury) before their arrival in Finland. Somali women reported traumatic events more often than men.<sup>165</sup> However, compared with other two studied migrant groups, Somalis had a more positive view of their health and they also regarded their quality of life better. Moreover, the prevalence of serious depressive and anxiety symptoms and disorders did not differ from the prevalence among the overall population. These results have partly been explained by a large, supportive social community.<sup>166</sup>

The climate in Finland is also a challenge, particularly for elderly Somalis who often dislike and are afraid of going outside in winter because of the cold weather and icy roads. A participant in the focus group for older women described the situation:

At this age, (in Somalia) we would not be locked in our homes, we would go out to the world, we would work and achieve something. But today (in Finland) we are between our homes and the snow ... I have lost my body function here, my body aches and I can't handle all the snow. Seeing the snow shocks me every time. Allah willing, when my country is safe again, I will move out of Finland.

Like the previous speaker, many Somali women complain about vague pains and other symptoms that they feel Finnish doctors cannot diagnose.<sup>167</sup> In particular in the focus group for older women, the importance of a telephone as a "shelter from loneliness" and tool for maintaining family ties was raised. A woman explained:

We keep in touch with them very well, every Euro I get I will use to get credit for my telephone to call and greet my relatives and kin. We don't have our relatives close by, so this just shows how much we miss them in our lives. How much we miss our country, as we are always thinking of relatives and kin. I have been speaking with them all yesterday and today also, they shelter me from loneliness.

Another woman continued:

<sup>165</sup> Anu E. Castaneda, Carla Schubert, Riikka Lehtisalo, Antti Pakaslahti, Tapio Halla, Mulki Mölsä and Jaana Suvisaari, "Traumakokemukset" (Trauma experiences), in Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*, pp. 151–155.

<sup>166</sup> Simo Mannila, Anu E. Castaneda and Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti, "Syrjintäkokemukset" (Experiences of discrimination) in Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*, pp. 229–238.

<sup>167</sup> See, e.g. M. Tiilikainen, *Arjen islam. Somalinaisten elämää Suomessa* (Everyday Islam. Life of Somali women in Finland), Vastapaino, Tampere, 2003 (hereafter, Tiilikainen, *Arjen islam*).

We keep in touch with them, because really, there is no one else in this country for us to keep in touch with. Instead of our family, we have Finns nearby who say “*Vittu*” (swearword in Finnish) when they see us.

According to another woman in the same focus group, if she did not keep in touch with her relatives either by phone or email, she “won’t have peace of mind”. Another woman explained why the telephone was so crucial for her and her family:

The telephone brings us closeness that we don’t have here. We keep in touch with each other regardless of where we are, in Africa, Asia and Europe. If I don’t speak on the phone tonight, I will tomorrow, we don’t do much else. We can’t walk to them nor see them.

## 8.2 Experiences with Health and Social Services

Finland is a welfare state that provides residents with extensive public services, including good-quality public health care. There are three different health-care systems – municipal health care, private health care and occupational health care – which differ in terms of the services they provide, user fees and waiting times. The public financing mechanisms for the various health-care systems also differ. The municipal health-care system, funded by taxation, is the most widely used in Finland. Another public financing mechanism is the National Health Insurance (NHI), which is based on compulsory insurance fees. For example, outpatient drugs, private health care and occupational health care are partly funded by NHI.<sup>168</sup>

Municipal health centres and hospitals provide consultations and care to all, but some co-payment is required. The user fees cover approximately 7 per cent of municipal health-care expenditure. In addition, outpatients pay about one-third of the costs of prescribed drugs. Both the municipal health care and outpatient drug charges have annual ceilings, but they are higher than in other Nordic countries. However, if an individual’s or family’s income is not enough to cover the user fees, social assistance is available.<sup>169</sup>

Legally admitted migrants are entitled to and are expected to use the same health services as native Finns; physical and mental health care is mainly sought through the primary care system of the municipality. Cultural diversity is increasingly recognised in the health-care system as well as in the training of health-care professionals, but no special actions or policies have been created to improve general health-care services for migrants generally.

<sup>168</sup> Lauri Vuorenkoski, Philipa Mladovsky and Elias Mossialos, “Finland: Health system review”, *Health Systems in Transition* 10 (4) (2008), pp. 1–168, at [euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/80692/E91937.pdf](http://euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/80692/E91937.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013) (hereafter, Vuorenkoski et al., “Finland: Health system review”).

<sup>169</sup> Vuorenkoski et al., “Finland: Health system review”.

In general, participants in the focus groups were happy with the health-care services in Finland and in Helsinki in particular. Indeed, health care is frequently mentioned as one of the most appreciated dimensions of life in Finland, as a man explained:

I would say that, having seen other countries, culture-wise and religion-wise, there is no place that is better than Finland. Health care, roads, cleanness, water ... in other places they might even have mice in the houses.

The participants believed that they have equal access to services compared with native Finnish people. However, a common practice where pharmacies suggest to their clients a cheaper alternative medicine to the medicine prescribed by the doctor, raised suspicions. On one hand it was understood that the practice did not apply only to migrants, but on the other hand, as many Somalis in Finland are unemployed they felt that due to financial reasons they were forced to accept cheaper medication. A man explained:

When I see the Finnish people and the Somali people, I don't think there is a difference in health care. There is a problem that concerns those who do not work, both Finns and immigrants, they are careful when they prescribe medicine for them as the bill goes to the municipality, and the municipality wants to save money. That's why Finnish people use private doctors.

Another man said that people who live on social assistance are forced to accept cheaper alternatives in medication. This causes problems, if a patient does not believe that the medicine works: "Part of the sickness is that you don't believe the medicine you are taking will help you."

However, it was also believed that an individual medical doctor had power to influence the decisions made. A woman reported:

The health care in this country is good, *Masha Allah*. I have had surgery in this country and I am still receiving treatment. I currently use nutrition that costs €1,200 a month, and the social office pays for it ... If the paper from social office demands that the prescription medicine should be changed for a cheaper one, then they change, but if the doctor writes on the prescription that it shouldn't be changed, then they don't change it. Really, health care is excellent here.<sup>170</sup>

According to the Migrant Health and Wellbeing study, Somalis in Finland tend to use a health centre physician's services and a significant proportion of these visits are emergency visits. The use of private doctors is much less common among the migrants in general than among the Finnish population overall. Both Somali and Kurdish women visited a medical doctor more frequently than the general population.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>170</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on health and social protection, 7 February 2013.

<sup>171</sup> Päivikki Koponen, Hannamaria Kuusio, Ilmo Keskimäki and Mulki Mölsä, "Avosairaanhoidon palvelujen käyttö" (Use of non-institutional health care services), in Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*, p. 254.

However, both groups participated less frequently than the Russians or overall Finnish population for general health checks. For example, only one-third of all the Somali women had a Pap screening; 23 per cent used mammography; in the past 5 years 26 per cent had undergone a gynaecological examination. The respective rates for the general population are: 88.5 per cent for Pap screenings; 45 per cent for mammography and 87 per cent for gynaecological examinations.<sup>172</sup> Some reasons for the low take-up rates among Somali women may be lack of familiarity with these kind of examinations as well as the lack of preventive health care at large in Somalia.

Some of the focus group participants believed that the best treatment was available at the biggest hospitals owned by the government, referring to hospitals such as the Helsinki University Central Hospital. Some of the concerns that the participants expressed about health care were long waiting times before getting an appointment with a doctor or a dentist, the reluctance of general practitioners to refer a patient to further examinations or a hospital, and communication problems. A man said:

There are people who don't know the language, they get sick and get an appointment, and they may be very sick and the appointment is 20 days later or something and they can't wait that long. He can't handle it and he might not have anyone to help him. For people like that, it would be good that they would get appointment with the doctors sooner, like in five days or in a week. I would say have mercy for those people and don't delay their appointments for a month because they will only get sicker.

A man who participated in the focus group for older men related how he had experienced pains and a persistent cough and had repeatedly been sent for laboratory tests:

I went to the doctor and said I have this sickness for seven months and here you can see now what is causing it. She sent me to ultrasound only then; did she not have knowledge of the ultrasound before? That was a difficulty I experienced. The ultrasound showed that there was a massive growth with my gland from my upper body to my throat, so they sent me to Maria Hospital (for surgery).

Marja Tiilikainen and Mulki Mölsä have also described delayed diagnosis among some Somali patients: referral to further examinations may be delayed if (Somali) patients have difficulties in expressing their symptoms due to language skills, or if they have already been labelled as a psychosomatic case. Furthermore, vague symptoms may cover serious illnesses such as tuberculosis or tropical diseases that are rare in Finland.

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<sup>172</sup> Päivikki Koponen, Hannamaria Kuusio, Mulki Mölsä and Ilmo Keskimäki, "Terveystarkastukset ja seulontatutkimukset" (Health checks and screenings), in Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*, pp. 247–248.

Sometimes a reason for prolonged symptoms may simply be a lack of vitamin D, which may easily be treated.<sup>173</sup>

Communication problems that the participants in focus groups described were partly linked to lack of knowledge regarding the Finnish system and society; the lack of common language with health care personnel; and cultural ways of expressing and understanding illnesses. In Finland, the first generation of Somalis have also adopted new illness labels such as allergies or lactose intolerance to explain symptoms that previously might have been connected to, for example, evil eye.<sup>174</sup> A man commented on what are the factors that may cause problems in health care encounters in Helsinki:

I think the cause is the fact that people don't understand the system, the time is limited for a Somali person and they don't know where the pain is. The appointment for the doctor may be 20 or 30 minutes and it's not enough for Somalis who don't know how to describe their pain. It may be that they go there and say, "All last night I was being pierced with an arrow head", and the doctor does not know what to make of it.

Another man explained:

The problem might be that the person doesn't understand the language and there is no translator, so how can he or she convey the condition to a doctor. If the pain is in the liver, but they don't know what is liver (in Finnish), so the problem is lack of understanding.<sup>175</sup>

Findings from the Migrant Health and Wellbeing study concerning communication problems faced by the Somalis in the Finnish service system are revealing. Among the Somalis studied, 6.8 per cent could not read well or at all, and 19.2 per cent could not understand the official languages of Finland, Finnish or Swedish, sufficiently. Somali women were at a particular disadvantage as 11.8 per cent had difficulty reading and 29 per cent had language barriers. In addition, 24.5 per cent of the Somali women reported that they experienced difficulties when they had to visit offices and take care of daily affairs. Moreover, 28.3 per cent of the Somali women reported that they could not use the internet; the corresponding rate among the men was 2.5 percent.<sup>176</sup> Therefore, in addition to literacy and language skills, the level of computer literacy

<sup>173</sup> Marja Tiilikainen and Mulki Mölsä, "Potilaana somalialainen maahanmuuttaja" (A Somali migrant as a patient), in Antti Pakaslahti and Matti Huttunen (eds.), *Kulttuurit ja lääketiede* (Cultures and medicine), Helsinki, Duodecim, 2010, pp. 305–320.

<sup>174</sup> Mulki Mölsä, Karin. H. Hjelde and Marja Tiilikainen, "Changing mental distress conceptions and practices among Somalis in Finland", in *Transculti Psychiatry* 47:290 (2010).

<sup>175</sup> Interestingly, the quotation reveals that direct translation would not necessarily solve the communication problem: In the Somali cultural anatomy, the heart and abdominal region, in particular liver (*beer* in Somali), are regarded as a seat for emotions. Hence, for example, *beer xanuun* does not literally mean liver pain, but emotional distress.

<sup>176</sup> Seppo Koskinen, Päivi Sainio and Shadia Rask, "Sosiaalinen toimintakyky" (Social functioning), in Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*, pp. 201–205.

needs to be considered, as communication with offices and authorities increasingly happens online.

A number of international studies have documented high levels of mental health problems and low levels of service use among Somali refugees.<sup>177</sup> Somalis with mental illnesses have also been found to prefer physical care to psychiatric services.<sup>178</sup> A study suggested that immigrants in Finland in general were found to use mental health services much less frequently than the population of Finnish origin.<sup>179</sup>

The Migrant Health and Wellbeing study found that the actual use of mental health services among the studied groups did not correspond to the need for services. For Somalis, this meant that even though the prevalence of mental health problems was the same as among the overall population, they used the mental health services significantly less: over the previous 12 months less than 2 per cent of the Somali population had used mental health services, whereas among the general population almost 10 per cent had used them.<sup>180</sup>

Reasons for the underuse of mental health services are varied: cultural and religious understandings of illness that differ from conventional Western medications and therapies; mistrust and lack of knowledge about available health services in resettlement countries; and a lack of cultural sensitivity and knowledge on the part of the health-care personnel. In some cases, people with mental distress seek familiar trusted treatment in the Horn of Africa.<sup>181</sup>

<sup>177</sup> See, for example, E. Silveira and S. Ebrahim, "Social determinants of psychiatric morbidity and wellbeing in immigrant elders and whites in East London", *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 13 (11) (1998), pp. 801–812; P. McCrone, K. Bhui, T. Craig, S. Mohamud, N. Warfa, S. Stansfeld, G. Thornicroft and S. Curtis, "Mental Health Needs, Service Use and Costs among Somali Refugees in the UK", *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 111 (5) (2005), pp. 351–357.

<sup>178</sup> K. Bhui, A. Abdi, M. Abdi, S. Pereira, M. Dualeh, D. Robertson, et al., "Traumatic events, migration characteristics and psychiatric symptoms among Somali refugees: Preliminary communication", *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 38 (2003), pp. 35–43.; Tiilikainen, *Arjen islam*.

<sup>179</sup> M. Gissler, M. Malin and P. Matveinen, *Terveystenhuollon palvelut ja sosiaalihuollon laitospalvelut* (Health care services and the services of social care institutions), Stakes, Helsinki, 2006.

<sup>180</sup> Anu E Castaneda, Riikka Lehtisalo, Carla Schubert, Tapio Halla, Antti Pakaslahti, Mulki Mölsä and Jaana Suvisaari, "Mielenterveyspalvelut" (Mental health services), in Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*, pp. 157–160.

<sup>181</sup> M. Mölsä and M. Tiilikainen, *Potilaana somali – auttaako kulttuurinen tieto lääkärin työssä?* (Somali patient – will cultural knowledge help your doctor work?), *Duodecim* 123 (2007), pp. 451–456; M. Mölsä, K.H. Hjelde and M. Tiilikainen, "Changing mental distress conceptions and practices among Somalis in Finland", *Transcult Psychiatry* 47 (2010), pp. 276–300; Marja Tiilikainen, "Failed Diaspora: Experiences of Dhaqan Celis and Mentally Ill Returnees in Somaliland", *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 20 (1) (2011), pp. 71–89; M. Tiilikainen and P.H. Koehn, "Transforming the Boundaries of Health Care: Insights From Somali Migrants", *Medical Anthropology* 30 (5) (2011), pp. 1–27.

## 9. POLICING AND SECURITY

This chapter addresses the experiences of Somalis with security and safety, law, criminal justice and policing. It will also cover recent national policies in this area.

### 9.1 Sense of Security and Safety

Finland is among the safest countries in the world. For instance, according to a recent report, Finland is one of the 10 safest countries, even safer than Sweden and Norway.<sup>182</sup> The security goal of the government is to make Finland the safest country in Europe.<sup>183</sup> The Internal Security Programme, which is a government resolution, defines internal security as: “a state of society where everyone can enjoy the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the rule of law without fear or insecurity caused by crime, disorder, accidents, or indeed any national or international phenomena”.<sup>184</sup>

In general, participants in the focus groups felt that Helsinki is a safe city with a low crime rate. The first generation, which often has first-hand experience from the war in Somalia, appreciated the peace and stability of the society. A participant in a focus group for older men said:

What I have experienced here and what they are good at is security. It's a safe country and the police are very active. I think that places like this are few in the world if they even exist. We must relate what we have seen. When I was studying, twice my wallet fell off on the chair I was sitting on, both times I collected my wallet from the place and it contained everything, nothing was taken. This is not something usual in the world, and for that I will give thanks.

Another older man explained:

Security is very good here. Once I was waiting for the bus in my neighbourhood and while I was waiting, I counted seven police vehicles pass me from different directions, and they were not chasing anyone, this is a sign that they are monitoring the area and protecting. Every five minutes a police car passes, security didn't just happen, it was organised. If someone wants to commit a crime, they know they will be caught in the middle of the activity. Other thing is that citizens take responsibility and are encouraged to report any violation they see ... The neighbourhood is also very clean.

<sup>182</sup> See [riskmap.aon.co.uk/Terrorism\\_Risk\\_Map.aspx](http://riskmap.aon.co.uk/Terrorism_Risk_Map.aspx) (accessed June 2013).

<sup>183</sup> Ministry of the Interior, “*A Safer Tomorrow. Internal Security Programme*”, Ministry of the Interior publications 40/2012, Helsinki, 2012, at [intermin.fi/download/37324\\_STOeng\\_64s\\_web\\_eng.pdf](http://intermin.fi/download/37324_STOeng_64s_web_eng.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013) (hereafter, Ministry of the Interior, “*A Safer Tomorrow*”); Ministry of the Interior, *Safety first – Internal Security Programme*, Government plenary session 8 May 2008, Ministry of the Interior publications, 25/2008, Helsinki, 2008 (hereafter Ministry of the Interior, *Safety first*).

<sup>184</sup> Ministry of the Interior, “*A Safer Tomorrow*”, p. 8.

In the quotation above, the visible presence of the police was seen as a factor that increased security in the neighbourhood. In general, the focus group participants seemed to trust the police and they did not report, for example, frequently being stopped by the police and asked for an identity card. According to Petri Hautaniemi, however, young Somali boys whom he studied 10 years ago reported that they were often stopped by the police around the railway station in the city centre or when they were running to catch the last bus. It was argued that this was due to racial profiling and criminalisation, which particularly face young men of colour.<sup>185</sup>

The main concern regarding security was fear of harassment on the streets, mainly caused by drunk or openly racist people. A participant in the focus group for young women recalled her experiences: “When I leave work in the evening I would go home afraid, because there were many drunk people, and people who yell after you when they see you in a headscarf.”

Another young woman agreed:

Helsinki is not a safe place and soon it'll be like our country, all the time you are afraid ... You have to watch out for alcohol and bottles and drunk people falling on you, being scared of those people falling on you is really bad and when you are waiting for the bus drivers, specially the Finnish ones treating you badly.

However, not all the participants shared these views. A man in the focus group on security and policing explained:

It seems that the part about security is the best part. I work, and I often leave my home at five or very late, so the point of security is the best one. When we look at the justice in this country, the security is same. Finland is better than other European countries in the sense that if someone harms you, they will be caught in the same situation. There is no need to fear attack from someone, Finland is very good when it comes to security, you can go out whenever you want.

The sense of security appears to be gendered experience: women and men seem to have somewhat different experiences regarding moving outside home, in public space. Mothers in particular also expressed concerns for their children who spend time away from home with their peers. A mother complained:

The bad features are many in my neighbourhood Kontula.<sup>186</sup> Like the youth, it's a place full of bad youth ... Even if your child is good, when he takes the metro one stop here or there he sees them and they are in groups. I haven't seen discrimination. I have only been badmouthed once or twice, but in Kontula you will find all that is bad in abundance.

<sup>185</sup> Petri Hautaniemi, *Pojat! Somalipoikien kiistanalainen nuoruus Suomessa* (Lads! Contested childhood of Somali youngsters in Finland), Nuorisotutkimusseura (Finnish Youth Research Network), Helsinki, 2004.

<sup>186</sup> A neighbourhood in Eastern Helsinki.

## 9.2 Experiences with Law, Criminal Justice and Policing

The role of the public administration authorities and their relationship with immigrants are central in the process of integration. According to an earlier study, in the mid-1990s in the Helsinki area there was considerable mistrust and dissatisfaction among the major immigrant groups of public authorities.<sup>187</sup> Another study found that the attitudes of the security forces, particularly the police and border guards, towards immigrants was very negative compared with other public administration authorities. For instance, about one-third of the police officers interviewed characterised their relationship with immigrant clients as negative.<sup>188</sup>

International studies have identified four types of police behaviour that offend minority communities: selective enforcement of the law; lack of courtesy in routine contacts; selective or excessive use of force; and providing low levels of service for the minority community.<sup>189</sup> A series of studies by Stephen Egharevba<sup>190</sup> in Turku, Finland, illustrate that all these behaviours are observable in the relationship between the police and immigrants, particularly African immigrants,<sup>191</sup> and concluded that:

police behaviour in Finland tends to portray immigrants as aliens that have swamped the Finnish culture, in such a way that these conducts are reinforced

<sup>187</sup> Survey carried out by I. Jasinskaja-Lahti and K. Liebkind, *Maahanmuuttajien sopeutuminen pääkaupunkiseudulla* (The integration of immigrants in the greater Helsinki area), City of Helsinki Urban Studies, Helsinki, 1997.

<sup>188</sup> P. Pitkänen and S. Kouki, "Meeting foreign culture: A survey of the attitude of Finnish authorities towards immigrants and immigration", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28 (1) (2002), pp. 103–118.

<sup>189</sup> R. Sigler and I. Johnson, "Reporting violent acts to the police: A difference by race", *Policing, An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management* 25 (2), 2002, pp. 274–293.

<sup>190</sup> See for instance, S. Egharevba, "Rethinking the concept of prejudice: immigrants' knowledge-based analysis in Finland", *Journal of the Sociology of Law* 32 (2004), pp. 191–221; S. Egharevba, "An investigation into the experiences of African immigrant relations with the police in Finland", *International Journal of Police Science and Management* 7(1) 2005, pp. 44–46; S. Egharevba and L. Hannikainen, "Exploring police relations with the immigrants minority in the context of racism and discrimination: A view from Turku, Finland", *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies* 1 (2) (2005), pp. 93–136; S. Egharevba, "Do African immigrants in Turku experience more racist harassment in Finland? A victim-oriented-approach", *International Review of Victimology* 13 (2006), pp. 71–79; S. Egharevba, "African immigrants' perception of police in Finland: Is it based on the discourse of race or culture?", *International journal of the Sociology of Law* 34 (2006), pp. 42–46; S. Egharevba and J. White, "Are Finnish Police Racists? A Critical Analysis of Police Cadets' Attitudes towards African Immigrants in Finland", *Journal of Police Science and Management* 9 (1) (2007), pp. 14–35 (hereafter, Egharevba and White, "Are Finnish Police Racists?").

<sup>191</sup> Somalis are, by any count, the largest immigrant group with an African background in Turku. See K. Salminen, "Turun maahanmuuton kuva" (Profile of immigration in the city of Turku), Kaupunkitutkimus- ja tietoyksikkö, Turun kaupunki, Tutkimuskatsauksia (Urban Research and Information Unit, the City of Turku, Research Surveys) 5/2012.

through their stereotyping by suspecting immigrants' every move as target of policing or even viewed with disdain.<sup>192</sup>

One possible reason is that the professional culture of police work may give rise to racism and prejudice among police officers. According to Egharevba,

This is because generally members of the ethnic minorities are perceived by the police to be among the most threatening to law and order in the society. For these reasons, according to this formulation, ethnic minorities need to be policed more in order to avert or subdue this threat or danger. ... These are familiar phenomena and practices that are quite visible even among the police in Finland.<sup>193</sup>

The attitude of the police officers may also be in some ways a manifestation of mainstream society's attitude towards minority groups.<sup>194</sup> This kind of societal impact is not specific to the police but affects other authorities and sectors as well.

However, in the Open Society Foundations roundtable<sup>195</sup> it was pointed out that the police have also developed their practices to better access migrant communities and to have grassroots dialogue with them. Multi-professional groups where a police officer works with social workers and nurses to help migrant families have achieved good results. So far, police recruits from minorities are low in Finland. Among the Somali community, the police force is not necessarily seen as a viable career option.<sup>196</sup>

According to the Migrant Health and Wellbeing study, 15.3 per cent of the Somalis in Finland have experienced discrimination on the part of the police (10.6 per cent of women and 19.6 per cent of men). This is lower than the Kurdish group (25.1 per cent), but higher than the third group studied, Russians (7.3 per cent).<sup>197</sup>

According to previous studies, Somalis in Finland do not tend to report being victims of criminal offences. Different factors explain this observation: first-generation Somalis silently endure discriminatory acts because they downplay them in comparison with the violence experienced in Somalia; they do not know how and where to report; or they do not trust police and the legal system, sometimes due to previous experiences of

<sup>192</sup> S. Egharevba, "Understanding the Racial Nature of Police and Immigrant Relations in Finland: The Case of Africans in Turku", University of Turku Publications, Turku, 2011.

<sup>193</sup> Egharevba and White, "Are Finnish Police Racists?"

<sup>194</sup> Egharevba and White, "Are Finnish Police Racists?"

<sup>195</sup> Open Society Foundations roundtable, Helsinki, 16 September 2013.

<sup>196</sup> Reportedly there is one police officer with Somali origins in Finland, but it was not possible to confirm this information.

<sup>197</sup> Anu Castaneda et al., *Maahanmuuttajien terveys ja hyvinvointi*, p. 234.

the corrupt authorities in Somalia.<sup>198</sup> In the Finnish penal code racist crimes are not mentioned, but only racist motives for crime. Therefore, there is a need to identify the motivation in prosecuting a crime.

According to the Open Society Foundations findings, the relationship between Somalis and the police in Helsinki is not full of distrust and misunderstanding. Moreover, the participants in the focus groups had mixed experiences with the police and criminal justice. In general, the participants seemed to agree that the law and justice also protect migrants living in Finland, but that problems do exist on an individual level. A man in the focus group on security and policing said:

The general law in this country that guides the police is a good law, but the interpretation of the law often depends on the person you encounter and how they behave. Some of them practise law in a good manner and some of them allow their personal views, if they are racists for example, to guide them and that influences how they treat you.

Focus group participants shared both positive and negative experiences; one more positive example of the Finnish legal system came from a woman who was caught between the bus doors with a baby pram, when the driver deliberately closed the doors while she was getting off the bus:

I wrote the information from the register plate and reported the incident to the police who told me that they will be in contact with me. Truth be told, they did well that day, they charged the man in a just manner. ... They asked me, what are my demands from him, I said I want this man to face trial and to explain why he did what he did, they said ok. So we went to trial and he was asked ... I won the argument. They said, he claims you did not push the button, and I told the court that I did push the button. If I had not pushed the button, and it was a mistake, then why did he not simply apologise when I went to him to ask? And when the incident happened, he did not come to help me. So, then he received a fine and he was suspended from his work for a while.

A negative example, illustrating a low level of service provision for Somalis by the police, was about a mother who sent her 14-year-old daughter to buy some groceries while she waited in a car with a small child. When she returned, the mother noticed she had received too little money back. The mother sent her back to ask for the correct change. In the store they refused to correct the situation and the head of the staff started to yell at the girl, "You monkeys get out of here." She continued the story:

<sup>198</sup> M. Tiilikainen and M. M. Abdi, "Somalialaisväestö ja poliisi yhteistyössä" (Collaboration between Somali population and the police) in Arno Tanner (ed.), *Poliisi ja maahanmuuttajat – kohiti kotoutumista edistävää vuorovaikutusta* (Police and immigrants – towards interaction that enhances integration), Poliisiammattikorkeakoulu (Police College of Finland), Tampere, 2008, pp. 101–118.

The police came, and we expected them to do what is just, to look at the receipt and take care of the matter, but instead they said, "There's nothing we can do, you have to report the crime." The man at the store had threatened saying, "My brother is a police officer." We went to the police station and made a report of the crime. When the police sent a letter, we went to our local meeting point that has workers to help us with different things. They contacted the police to ask about the matter and the police said, "Because this involves a young child and also her mother, and the case is not very simple, the man who handles this cannot be reached by telephone, but you can write to him." And so we wrote to him and he replied immediately saying, "That case has been closed." ... So what is that? It is racism. The woman at the meeting point said, "We can't do anything about it, because it's racist." The man in the shop already knew he had support and that's why he pushes people and harms them. So nobody will argue that this country is not racist.

A young woman related an incident where she and two of her female relatives had faced physical violence on the street from a group of men. She complained: "The police have not done anything, the court has not done anything, and we haven't received an answer from them."

Focus group participants also expressed concern about the practice of selective enforcement of the law. A man reported:

I was told that not long time ago, my neighbour was attacked by a (Finnish) man who carried a large piece of wood as a weapon ... When the police were on their way, the people told the man that they'd called the police and he should get rid of the weapon. So he hid the weapon in his car. The police then came, the neighbours convinced them that the Finnish man had been attacked even though he was the one who attacked. The police tried to arrest the Somali man but a man yelled from an apartment telling them, "It didn't happen like that, the Finnish man came looking for a fight and he attacked first and he had a weapon, you can check his car for the weapon." The police checked the car and when they found the weapon, understood that the Finnish man was the guilty party. They told the man to go home and told the other man to go to his home as well, they didn't do anything. So it does depend on the attitude of the person who is practising the law, if they are good people, if not, then they will not help you even if you are being wronged, they rather try to hide it. And if they find the least bit of guilt in you, they take you away.

Excessive use of force by police was also mentioned during the interviews. A community activist noted that once near their premises, seven skinhead youngsters attacked four of their members and after a while the police came to the crime scene, while the attackers were still there and some of the victims were bleeding. Rather than arresting the offenders, the police officer simply stood by doing nothing. Later on one of the victims went to the police station to report the crime. However, according to the community activist, he was again victimised by the police who fingerprinted and

photographed him as if he were the offender. The man believed that as his fingerprints were recorded on the police database, his citizenship application process was delayed. “It was an unfortunate situation.”

### 9.3 National Security Policies

The internal security objective set out by the Government Programme of 22 June 2011 was “to make Finland the safest country in Europe, one in which people feel that they live in a fair and equal society regardless of how they identify themselves.”<sup>199</sup>

To ensure that the objective would be attained, the third Internal Security Programme, “A Safer Tomorrow”, was published in 2012. Previous internal security programmes had been published in 2004 and 2008. The Internal Security Programme is a government resolution, a version of which is implemented during each government’s term of office. This current Internal Security Programme describes the situation and challenges in everyday security and contains 64 proposed measures, mainly preventative ones. The measures address issues such as increasing people’s sense of security; improving the safety and security at educational institutions and in public spaces; reducing violence at work, and serious violence and its threat; improving the safety of young people and reducing sexual harassment of children and adolescents; improving business security; and improving crime victim services.<sup>200</sup>

One of the defined aims is to improve the actual and perceived security of people of immigrant origin and enhance their confidence in the authorities, through measures such as the launch of a campaign for lowering the threshold for reporting racist crime, in collaboration with immigrant organisations; a survey will be conducted among people of immigrant origin to gain information on how their sense of security has developed and on crimes committed against them that are not reported to the police; and simpler language will be used in public security communications to ensure the availability of security services. People with a poor command of Finnish or Swedish must be better taken into account in official communications dealing with security.<sup>201</sup>

A need to prevent violent acts arising from extremist ideologies is briefly mentioned at the end of the current Internal Security Programme, including school shootings, which are seen to be motivated by misanthropy.<sup>202</sup> Driven by EU counter-terrorism policies, Finland has also started to develop strategies to combat violent radicalisation and extremism, even though, Finland has been almost entirely free of political violence of either international or domestic origin since the Second World War.

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<sup>199</sup> Ministry of the Interior, “A Safer Tomorrow”, p. 10.

<sup>200</sup> Ministry of the Interior, “A Safer Tomorrow”.

<sup>201</sup> Ministry of the Interior, “A Safer Tomorrow”, pp. 29–30.

<sup>202</sup> Ministry of the Interior, “A Safer Tomorrow”, pp. 55–56.

A separate Action Plan for Preventing Violent Extremism was published in 2012, aiming to identify and prevent violent acts aimed at promoting extremist ideas or ideologies. Regarding the Muslims in Finland, the Action Plan states:

The Muslim community in Finland is heterogenic and mainly moderate. Violent, radical Islamic views are not connected with communities in Finland, but are problematic at individual level. There are clear indications of attempts made in Finland to support Islamist-motivated terrorist activities in the individuals' countries of origin, or in a conflict zone. It is also suspected that radical Islamic individuals residing in Finland have participated in fighting carried out by terrorist groups, or in weapons training in crisis zones. People with fighting experience and combat training can generally be considered more susceptible to committing acts of violence.

Examples from Sweden and Denmark show that the situation can take a crucial turn for the worse as the result of a single triggering event. Denmark and Sweden have been targets of Islamist hate propaganda for years, since their newspapers published cartoons that were perceived as derogatory. In terms of violent extremism and the terrorist threat, it would be a cause for concern if Finland were profiled as a so-called enemy state in international, violence-instigating radical Islamic propaganda. This might also radicalise individuals and increase their willingness to take violent or even terrorist action.<sup>203</sup>

The Action Plan on Preventing Extremism notes that the first investigation of suspected terrorist offences in Finland started in September 2011.<sup>204</sup> The nationality of the suspects is not mentioned. However, it has been in the media that the suspects are Finnish Somalis, who may have been involved with funding and recruitment for al-Shabaab. The Finnish Security Intelligence Service (SUPO) has recently widened its counterterrorism activities by sending a liaison officer to Nairobi, Kenya. Somalia is regarded by SUPO as one of the conflict areas which may cause concern also for Finland's safety, such as through returning fighters.<sup>205</sup>

Tarja Mankkinen, who has been chair of the expert group that prepared the Action Plan, said in an interview:

People dealing with immigration policy don't want to discuss the issue of safety. But they are very much linked. Security and safety are the same word in Finnish.

<sup>203</sup> Ministry of the Interior, "Towards a Cohesive Society. Action Plan to Prevent Violent Extremism", Ministry of the Interior Publications, Helsinki, 28/2012, p. 17, at [intermin.fi/download/36330\\_332012.pdf](http://intermin.fi/download/36330_332012.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013) (hereafter Ministry of the Interior, "Towards a Cohesive Society").

<sup>204</sup> Ministry of the Interior, "Towards a Cohesive Society", p. 17.

<sup>205</sup> Finnish Security Intelligence Service (SUPO), "Annual Report 2012", at [poliisi.fi/poliisi/supo60/home.nsf/files/3A8F83D40BFB6A3FC2257B1D00480FB0/\\$file/2012\\_Supo-ENG\\_web.pdf](http://poliisi.fi/poliisi/supo60/home.nsf/files/3A8F83D40BFB6A3FC2257B1D00480FB0/$file/2012_Supo-ENG_web.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

Many people want to talk about the positive issues, but not about racism, discrimination, violence against immigrants, actual safety issues. But if you don't deal with these issues, you don't get good results with the integration policy.<sup>206</sup>

In the focus group discussions, the possible impact of national security policies was not addressed. Only one participant in the focus group for young men mentioned this, probably referring to border controls:

There's a lot of racial profiling, whether you have the Finnish passport or not they will always ask you, "Where were you born", he won't ask you, "Are you Finnish?" He doesn't want to acknowledge you as a Finn, he will point out that you are Somali.

It may be concluded that in Finland violent extremism and related security measures have so far been negligible concerns compared with the marginalization and discrimination experienced by many migrant groups. In the Safer Tomorrow Programme, Somalis have been particularly mentioned as a group that most likely encounters racist crime and violence.<sup>207</sup>

A recent report published by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) provides three recommendations to the Finnish authorities that require priority implementation: expanding the Ombudsman for Minorities' field of activity and resources to combat discrimination on grounds of colour, language, religion or "race"; extending the scope of the National Discrimination Tribunal's mandate in immigration matters and multiple discrimination; and improving the monitoring of racist acts, in particular concerning their follow-up by the judiciary and the police. The implementation of the recommendations will be monitored by ECRI in 2015.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Interview with Tarja Mankkinen, Director of the International Security Secretariat, Ministry of the Interior, 15 January 2013.

<sup>207</sup> Ministry of the Interior, "A Safer Tomorrow", p. 25.

<sup>208</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) "Report on Finland" (fourth monitoring cycle), Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 9 July 2013, at [coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Finland/FIN-CbC-IV-2013-019-ENG.pdf](http://coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Finland/FIN-CbC-IV-2013-019-ENG.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

## 10. PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP

This chapter looks at what citizenship entails in Finland and how Somalis define the importance of citizenship. It also looks at the local and national participation of Somalis in civil society and in decision-making and the role of Somali associations. Finally, the chapter will discuss the political participation and voting of Somalis.

### 10.1 Citizenship

As explained above (see section 2.3), adults can acquire citizenship once they have lived in Finland without interruption for a sufficient length of time, can support themselves, and have met the integrity and language requirements.<sup>209</sup> In total, 5,278 Somalis acquired citizenship during the years 1990–2011,<sup>210</sup> which was around 40 per cent of the total Finnish Somali population (13,930) in 2011.

When asked to describe a person who is originally from Somalia but who has acquired Finnish citizenship, focus group participants discussed the numerous difficulties Somalis faced in education and employment regardless of their citizenship status. As Finnish citizens, Somalis theoretically possess the same rights as native-born Finns, but the execution of these rights seemed different. They felt that acquiring Finnish citizenship did not make a significant difference in how well Somalis could participate in Finnish society. A male focus group participant said:

I think that the Somali person who has Finnish nationality has the right to all the same things as the Finnish person, except for some small exceptions. It depends on the person, for example in education they are allowed if they study here or elsewhere and they are equal in work also. It is possible that because of their background they are not trusted the same way as someone who is born here.

Another participant added, “Having citizenship doesn’t often change anything; it’s the origin they look at.”

Eva Biaudet, the Ombudsman for Minorities, pointed out that those with foreign passports face numerous difficulties in bureaucratic everyday matters when identity must be verified.<sup>211</sup> Furthermore, even though citizenship abolishes these problems and brings a certain equality in terms of travelling and opening bank accounts, according to the focus group it did not change the fact that immigrants are at a disadvantage compared with people native to Finland, who know their way in society. Citizenship

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<sup>209</sup> Finlex 359/2003 Nationality Act, in Finnish at [finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2004/20030359](http://finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2004/20030359) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>210</sup> Official Statistics of Finland, “Citizenships granted”, at [stat.fi/til/kans/index\\_en.html](http://stat.fi/til/kans/index_en.html) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>211</sup> Interview with Eva Biaudet, Ombudsman for Minorities, Helsinki, 8 January 2013.

did not increase the chances of finding work, according to the focus group participants. An elderly woman clarified:

I don't see a big difference between a Finnish person and someone who has the citizenship, in regard to justice, but when it comes to finding work, the problem is our language difficulties. We came to this country as adults and it's possible that they will place the Finnish person ahead of us. This is because the Finnish person always has better language skills and better knowledge of the society. You are not native to this country, that is why, other than that it seems that people are equal in receiving fair treatment.

Participants, however, also argued that immigrants themselves should take a more active role in obtaining their rights. A man said:

But in regard to their rights, they may not understand them or make an effort to get them. The person should understand that they also have rights as citizens and not remain in the immigrant box. They should lift themselves, even if the society is not organised and encouraging people.

When asked which values would make a Somali into a Finnish citizen, participants listed learning the language, acquiring a profession through education and finding employment as the most important practical issues. Participating in the society in various ways was considered of great importance. Furthermore, participants highlighted the importance of acquiring knowledge of Finnish society, which was, in the end, considered a more significant participatory factor than actual citizenship. According to a male focus group participant:

The person should try to adapt to what is positive about a society, whatever your religion hinders you from is not what is positive, but rather work, education and other things that contribute to your participation in the country. For example if you have an opportunity to participate in politics, to be an individual and independent and not a parasite. To become a taxpayer to participate in all those things, that is how you can feel like you are a citizen.

The individual should seek knowledge and enter through that key the way of the country and adapt that is the only way he can feel it and feel welcomed, but to stay in his spot, he won't become a Finn simply by being in Finland.

## **10.2 Local Participation Mechanisms and Involvement in Policymaking**

Both stakeholders and focus group participants were asked about local and national mechanisms that involve Somalis in decision-making. Swedish-speaking Finns and Sami people have a system of representative institutions, known as assemblies, that give them a say in policymaking processes. In addition, the Roma and Russian-speaking population have relatively strong organisations. However, there is no established system for Somalis so far. Therefore, authorities rely on general mechanisms to hear the voice

of the Somali community. The director of the Youth Division at the Ministry of Education and Culture, Georg Henrik Wrede, explained it in this way:

We have the general system to any policymaking that we try to be an open administration. For example, if you look at our ministry, when we are making amendments to laws or making new policies, youth policy programmes or whatever, we have an open method of designing them and we try to get as many views from different groups as possible.<sup>212</sup>

A senior planning officer at the Ministry of Education and Culture, Mikko Cortés Téllez, added, “We have meetings with the Somali organisations very often as part of the state subsidy process. We hear their views and priorities and we try to answer as well as we can to those needs which they express themselves.”<sup>213</sup>

There are consultative bodies and advisory boards like the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (Etno). Etno is a broad-based expert body set up by the government with the aim of promoting interaction between Finland's ethnic minorities and the authorities, NGOs and the political parties in Parliament, equally at national, regional and local levels, and providing the ministries with immigration policy expertise in the interests of furthering an ethnically equal and diversified society.<sup>214</sup> Likewise, at the local level, Somalis are heard through their representatives and organisations among other immigrant groups, according to Annika Forsander, director of Immigration Affairs of the City of Helsinki:

We organise forums for immigrant NGOs three times a year and there are always different issues on city policymaking which are discussed. It is in a very early phase of the decision-making, so that we can talk about for example, housing, security, library collections. Decision-makers come over in a very early phase of when they are preparing the special policies, and they discuss with NGOs and we collect very carefully the opinions that the NGOs gather.<sup>215</sup>

Saido Mohamed, a Somali community activist and the chair of the Finnish Somalia Network, recalled her experiences on local participation mechanisms:

There are some mechanisms, but to make these mechanisms more fruitful depends on how active the members of the community are. I am personally consulted on a number of issues and I was not giving my personal view per se, but before I give my view I normally consult the members of the community.

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<sup>212</sup> Interview with Georg Henrik Wrede, director, Youth Division, Ministry of Education and Culture, Helsinki, 3 January 2013.

<sup>213</sup> Interview with Mikko Cortés Téllez, Senior Planning Officer, Department for Cultural, Sport and Youth Policy, Ministry of Education and Culture, Helsinki, 3 January 2013.

<sup>214</sup> See [www.intermin.fi/en/etno](http://www.intermin.fi/en/etno) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>215</sup> Interview with Annika Forsander, director, City of Helsinki Immigration Affairs, Helsinki, 4 December 2012.

For instance, I was consulted in drafting the Integration Act. So community organisations and informed individuals employed by the authorities and politicians are asked their view.<sup>216</sup>

When asked about the opportunities to give their opinions, the focus group participants recalled that sometimes they were asked their opinions by forms sent by post, but did not know whether these answers had been used and, thus, were rather suspicious about their effectiveness. An elderly woman said:

Before there used to be forms that they sent to our homes, like the housing office, for us to fill out and give our opinions and grade them, and also the health-care services. But we have not seen anyone who would come to us specifically and ask for our views. I haven't seen the forms either in few years, a Somali man used to translate them and sign them.

When asked whether they think the decision-makers in Helsinki make efforts to include the Somalis in decision-making, participants demanded more influential ways for Somalis to be involved. This is in line with what Tarja Mankkinen, director of the Internal Security Secretariat in the Ministry of the Interior, said:

In integration issues there are several groups, for example Etno, but even though some Somalis attend the discussions, their needs are not necessarily discussed. It is also not easy to find neutral, good representation in a decision-making body from the Somali community.

Focus group participants suggested that policymakers should organise meetings where the most Somalis are, for example in mosques, in order for Somalis to be heard and to influence the development of policies. It was agreed that especially those willing to work for a better future should receive greater attention. A female focus group participant noted:

These times are better, because before many things happened that the Somalis were unaware of. The governing entities such as the city of Helsinki should help the people who want to move forward and be like everyone else, they should assist them and support them, that would set an example for others and they would follow them. It seems that if a few people do something wrong, they end up in the newspapers and that is not good. Here in Finland the Finns are not all the same, and same goes for the Somalis.

Arshe Said, chairman of the Somali League in Finland, said:

There are opportunities but these opportunities are lost mainly due to the inefficiency of Somali organisations that are expected to make use of it. Therefore, Somalis have very little impact on the decision-making process and the decisions are mainly based on inaccurate information. There should be a

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<sup>216</sup> Interview with Saido Mohamed, chair, Finnish Somalia Network, 6 February 2013.

method to match the real needs of the Somali community, the aim of the policymakers and the available resources.<sup>217</sup>

One female focus group participant also had experiences with local policymakers and the resources available for the work:

One year ago we had a meeting at the city hall where the mayor was present. We met with him, the mayor, and he seemed like a nice person who is active and likes immigrants. We spoke with people who work there and they told us about what they do there and why they are there. There were a lot of immigrants there, Somalis, Arabs and other groups. When we enquired about what they do, I gathered that their task is to assist people in the city in different affairs, such as talking to the police; they don't do anything bigger than that. There were educated young people there, translators but they did exactly the same thing as we do in the neighbourhoods, we didn't see anything else though I was expecting greater things from them.

Sari Hammar,<sup>218</sup> secretary of the first Somali Affairs Expert Group,<sup>219</sup> said that the future of Somali community was “to continue the discussions we have been having with the expert group and involve more people with this question and make it wider. Spread knowledge and information to Somalis and the Finnish society and make us know each other better.”

Tenant councils were discussed in the focus group as one way to participate in the local community that should be better utilised by Somalis. These councils were, however, considered difficult to reach for Somalis because they did not feel welcomed by the Finnish people. A male focus group participant commented:

We do get opportunities but I don't think we take advantage of them as we should. You have the same rights as the Finnish person who lives in your building. You have signed the same contract that gives you the same rights and if you break the rules the law is the same for him and for you. Among the rights is participation in the tenant council, for which members are elected once a year. That is a valuable opportunity but we do not benefit from it as we should, we are weak in that regard. We try not to be absent from there, and we have a really good collaboration with the people we live with, we participate in the meetings and in the decision-making.

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<sup>217</sup> Interview with Arshe Said, chairman of the Somali League in Finland, 6 January 2013.

<sup>218</sup> Interview with Sari Hammar, Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area SOCCA), 10 December 2012.

<sup>219</sup> The Somali Affairs Expert Group was administered by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy. SOCCA, the Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Helsinki metropolitan area, did the secretarial work as an assignment from the ministry.

Nonetheless, at least one male focus group participant had positive experiences about Somali participation in tenant councils:

I said to (my neighbour), let us find out about their meeting. The day we attended the meeting, they were selecting members to the council, so I raised my hand and suggested that (the neighbour) be selected as a member. They respected my suggestion and said, "We need to have an immigrant on the council and he is more fitting than the other candidate", so he was elected for the council.

Said A. Mohamed was elected as a member of the tenant council in his neighbourhood in western Helsinki two years in a row. But even before he joined the council, as a father with children, he used to participate in annual meetings of the residents. The composition of the council is a chairman, secretary and three members. They meet once every two months.

In our neighbourhood there is a family with a number of youngsters who came from Somalia more recently. These youngsters used to cause problems in their building as they do not follow housing rules. Their case was discussed in the council's meeting and after discussions, I was asked to try to solve this problem and I accepted this task. I tried to solve it in a Somali way and the Somali way of doing things worked this time. A second task for me was to deal with conflicts between children in the yard. Here Somali kids were mainly causing these conflicts. Again the Somali way worked well. After that the council delegated immigrant affairs in the neighbourhood to me. Another advantage of my membership in the council is that I convince Somali residents in the area to participate in neighbourhood meetings by calling them and explaining the agenda of the meeting to them. I also translate notices and other relevant information into Somali. To me it was a right decision to participate and one of the gains of my presence was that it reduced the tension between Somalis and other residents.<sup>220</sup>

In 2009 a group of individuals, both native Finns and Somalis, initiated informal get-togethers, called the Wednesday Club, with the aim of promoting dialogue with authorities and, according to Maija Kajava, one of the founders of the club, one of the outcomes that grew up from these meetings was the Somali Affairs Expert Group.<sup>221</sup>

This was set up in 2011 by the Ministry of Interior. It comprised 16 representatives from relevant national institutions, local authorities and NGOs. The objective was to promote the integration of Somalis and the interaction and equality of different population groups, and to prevent discrimination. Their tasks were to:

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<sup>220</sup> Interview with Said Mohamed, member of a tenant council of a neighbourhood in western Helsinki, 5 July 2013.

<sup>221</sup> Interview with Maija Kajava, Secretary of Somali Forum for Progress, also the former Secretary of Finland-Somalia Association 1987–1993, 1997–2008, Helsinki, 7 February 2013.

1. Collect information about the situation of Somali communities in Finland.
2. Prepare a concrete action plan based on the information collected, to support the communities' integration.
3. Disseminate information. The group was expected to follow the preparations of strategies that would affect the integration process of the community and was given an opportunity to make proposals on the integration and employment of the community to the relevant authorities and organisations.

The expert group's term was about 20 months and ended in December 2012. A final report was published in June 2013. In the report the group proposed that the work of the expert group should be continued and the authorities and the organisations should provide opportunities for dialogue to the Somali community. Furthermore, according to the expert group, the Somali community is the best expert on its own situation and should be able to ensure that its voice is heard and, further, to improve its situation.<sup>222</sup>

For most of the experts who commented, the initiative and objectives of the group were good. For instance, Maija Kajava noted that the group had a “very good mandate and the term of reference well written”, but added that after its term ended, “I don't know if they are really worth much.”<sup>223</sup> According to Mukhtar Abib, Social Supervisor at the Department of Social Services and Health Care, City of Helsinki, the idea was very good and the aim of the individuals who facilitated the establishment of the expert group was that the right information from the Somali community should reach public authorities. But the process of formation, particularly the selection of the Somali members, was not in line with the aims of the initiative. He noted that he suggested to the authorities it would be better for the community to be given an opportunity to select its representatives instead of having the authorities select them.<sup>224</sup>

However, Somalis also shared responsibility for the group's performance. Zahra Abdulla, a long-time councillor at the City of Helsinki, noted, “I never witnessed Somalis making a unified decision! Everyone speaks on his or her behalf ... anyone who tries to speak for Somalis attracts huge criticism from the Somalis themselves ... Finnish authorities could not be blamed for our lack of cohesion.”<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> S. Hammar, *Raportti somaliasiain asiantuntijaryhmän työskentelystä 18.4.2011–31.12.2012* (Report on the work of the Somali Affairs Expert Group 18 April 2011–31 December 2012), TEM reports 21/2013, 25 June 2013, at [tem.fi/files/37056/TEMrap\\_21\\_2013\\_26062013.pdf](http://tem.fi/files/37056/TEMrap_21_2013_26062013.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>223</sup> Interview with Maija Kajava, Secretary of Somali Forum for Progress, also the former Secretary of Finland-Somalia Association 1987–1993, 1997–2008, Helsinki, 7 February 2013.

<sup>224</sup> Interview with Mukhtar Abib, social supervisor, Department of Social Services and Health Care, City of Helsinki, 28 December 2012.

<sup>225</sup> Interview with Zahra Abdulla, Helsinki City Councillor, Helsinki, 28 February 2013.

### 10.3 Associations

Finland, as other Nordic countries, has a large number of voluntary associations, regulated by the Associations Act,<sup>226</sup> and the state institutions and the public sector encourage participation in them.<sup>227</sup> This has contributed towards Somalis and other immigrants being very active in founding associations, in addition to fulfilling a need to link up with representatives of their own ethnic groups in response to the feeling of exclusion from Finnish society.

According to Päivi Pirkkalainen,<sup>228</sup> there are about 100 Somali associations in Finland, of which approximately 50 are fully operational. Membership numbers vary from about 30 to about 200–300 or even 900. These associations concentrate on development work in Somalia or on supporting the Somali community in Finland: for example, language training (Finnish and Somali), sports activities, arranging multicultural events and youth work. These associations are either self-funded by membership fees or receive project funding from the Finnish authorities. Cooperation with other Somali associations in Finland concentrating on development work in Somalia takes place mainly in the framework of the Finnish Somalia Network,<sup>229</sup> established in 2004. Several member organisations of the network have received funding from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs for development projects in Somalia. The Somali League<sup>230</sup> was established in 1996 to act as an umbrella organisation for all Somalis in Finland. One influential association for young Somalis is Kanava Youth,<sup>231</sup> which supports Somali children and young people and seeks to influence decision-makers to promote the wellbeing of the youth.

According to Marja Tiilikainen and Abdirizak Hassan Mohamed,

Somali NGOs in Finland struggle with the same issues as any other association: the number of active members is small, voluntary work is difficult due to family and income related obligations and worries, and the funding of associations is insecure. In addition, Somali NGOs face other challenges, which may explain why they remain relatively weak as civil society actors in Finland: short history

<sup>226</sup> Finnish Associations Act 503/1989. <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1989/19890503>

<sup>227</sup> Päivi Pirkkalainen, “Finland-based Somali diaspora associations and their involvement in co-development”, in T.L. Weiss, *Migration for Development in the Horn of Africa: Health Expertise from the Somali Diaspora in Finland*, International Organisation for Migration, Helsinki, 2009, pp. 74–90, at [publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/MIDA\\_Health\\_book.pdf#page=74](http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/MIDA_Health_book.pdf#page=74) (accessed 3 November 2013) (hereafter, Pirkkalainen, “Finland-based Somali diaspora associations and their involvement in co-development”).

<sup>228</sup> Pirkkalainen, “Finland-based Somali diaspora associations and their involvement in co-development”.

<sup>229</sup> See [somaliverkosto.fi/in-english](http://somaliverkosto.fi/in-english) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>230</sup> See [somaliliitto.fi](http://somaliliitto.fi) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>231</sup> See [kanavary.fi/in-english](http://kanavary.fi/in-english) (accessed October 2013).

and experience of NGOs in Somalia; lack of skills and capacity; unrealistic expectations regarding income or job security that an NGO could provide – once it becomes clear that an NGO does not provide them, but demands a lot of voluntary work, the motivation decreases; clan and political divides within the community, resulting to many small associations, mistrust and lack of co-operation; and the life in the diaspora itself which entails commitments, compelling relations and interests both in the receiving country and the country of origin.<sup>232</sup>

A lot of microlevel work by city officials and social workers is done through local Somali associations.<sup>233</sup> Seija Välimäki-Adie and Soile Atacocugu, city officials from eastern Helsinki, related how they work frequently with local Somali associations with renovations, applications, fighting racism and developing the neighbourhood.<sup>234</sup> They also suggested, however, that the traditional Finnish approach to associations is introduced to Somalis in a way that creates high expectations of what can be achieved, when in reality years of voluntary work are needed before succeeding.

A key issue raised by some Somali civil society organisations was the need for support in developing the capacity of the migrant organisations. In particular, it was argued that funding is currently spread widely across civil society and so grants are small-scale with limited impact. Consequently, they argued that there is a need for more effectively focused funding, perhaps on thematic areas.

When asked about the representative associations and organisations, the focus group participants pointed out that regardless of the great number of Somali organisations in Finland, they were, on the contrary, rather poor representatives of the Somali community. Participants believed that Somali organisations would be more successful if the Somali community and its organisations were more strongly united behind the same cause. A male focus group participant said:

There are no organisations that can be described as representatives of the Somalis or forwarding the need of the Somalis. Somaliliitto (Somali League) is the closest I think, in doing anything for the Somalis and their issues, but all the rest of the hundreds of organisations that are spoken about, in this country there is a law that any 2 or 3 people can register an organisation so they only convey their own needs and 100 per cent of them are related to self-employment ... The ones that work in the country (Somalia) are the same, you know the

<sup>232</sup> Marja Tiilikainen with Abdirizak Hassan Mohamed, “Civil Society in the Making. Challenges of the Somali Diaspora Organisations”, *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 3 (1) (2013), p. 46.

<sup>233</sup> Sanna Saksela, “Maahanmuuttajayhdistysten ja viranomaisten välinen yhteistyö” (Collaboration between immigrant associations and officials), in Tuula Joronen (ed.), *Maahanmuuttajien elinolot pääkaupunkiseudulla* (Living conditions of immigrants in the Helsinki Metropolitan area), City of Helsinki Urban Facts, Helsinki, 2005.

<sup>234</sup> Interview with Seija Välimäki-Adie and Soile Atacocugu, community development workers, Helsinki City, 29 January 2013.

shameful things *Helsingin Sanomat* (a national newspaper) wrote about them, they are the organisations that have existed for more than ten years and worked in towns in Somalia. Even though they work there, their mismanagement, errors in budget and shame were laid out in the newspaper. Even those who worked as individuals didn't do their work well, never mind doing something for Somalis.

A female participant added:

There are many organisations in this country but they can only benefit the people when they are united. When they achieve a centre that unites them then they can do something for the people. Personally, I have not seen an organisation that helps the people, or people saying that they are going to an organisation for help. They carry the Somali name as title, but they don't represent me.

In focus group discussions, several speakers raised a need for the Somali community to advocate more strongly for the issues that are important for the community. To be able to do that, it was felt there was a need for more educated and well-established Somali professionals who can react to, for example, one-sided and stigmatising media representation, as well as help a more united community to step forward. A woman complained:

We have lived here more than 20 years ... but we lack people of knowledge, journalists, lawyers. We don't have people who argue for our rights, even if we are dead, no one will speak for us, and if we live no one can speak for us. Be it an NGO, or community group, or a lawyer ... we as a community have a problem, because we don't have lawyers to defend our rights. We don't have professionals who can advise us on our problems; men or women who can do something about the issues. We have problems in schools, we have problems everywhere. That's why the Finns treat us like this, we are like dead prey that doesn't have anyone standing up for their rights.

A man added:

I would like our community to be closer, and sense the problems we face and work together in overcoming them. That people would plan how they could be successful in the country where they live ... I believe that would enable us to reach our goals. We shouldn't consider our stay here a transit stay, we should plan how we can be part of this society and as a community to have a sense of direction, so we can tackle the injustice that we encounter.

Some of the participants referred to "shame" that had been attributed to Finnish Somalis, through negative public labelling. Positive role models are needed to counter the negative image, as a male focus group participant explained:

How do we proceed so that our children and our future and our living here together could be good? The language is difficult, but there are young educated

people, they should be on the television, so that there would be something encouraging for our Somali people. There are not even debates regarding the culture and the habits or even debates regarding how we should live together. In other countries they have TV programmes for immigrants, where the immigrants discuss themselves and people watch it, people should be motivated. It seems that such a thing could help ... to prevent some of the problems facing our community. Media requires experts, and unity from us.

There were 74 registered Islamic communities and associations in 2007 and around 40 Islamic congregations.<sup>235</sup> In contrast to the role of organisations, religious communities such as mosques were considered a functional way for Somalis to organise among themselves and to help people with their concerns. A female focus group participant analysed the role of mosques:

Mosque and organisations are not the same; the mosque knows the issues of the Muslims. When you have problems, the Muslims, especially the Somalis, the entity that deals with the problems is the mosque. Also, mosques give lectures in which they tell us about living with others, the good manners and such things. The mosque is more important than the organisations, so I think that the mosques do a lot of work. And the people see that they do a lot of work.

There are many things that the organisations should be doing, for the youth and people they represent, to help them in their places of gathering, assist them in integrating into this country and working and such, and the mosque does this, I think, such as organising lectures for young people and telling them about how they can live with these people. There are many things that the Somali organisations don't do and the mosque does, I think.

However, according to a representative of the Helsinki Islamic Centre, Abdirazak S. Mohamed, Islamic centres can be the best channel to provide links between authorities and the Somali community. However, in his experience Finnish authorities consistently ignore this potential, and instead appear to prefer to deal with single individuals who may lack credibility within the community or who have little access to the larger community.<sup>236</sup> In addition, according to the community activists, the Finnish state does not provide funding for religious organisations, particularly the Islamic centres, and it is not ready for cooperation or partnerships with religious organisations. The Islamic centres provide a large range of services, such as conciliation, arbitration, counselling and homework activities. It was suggested that better use can

<sup>235</sup> T. Martikainen, "Muslimit suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa" (Muslims in Finnish society), in T. Martikainen, T. Sakaranaho and M. Juntunen (eds), *Islam Suomessa. Muslimit arjessa, mediassa ja yhteiskunnassa* (Islam in Finland. Muslims in the everyday life, media and society), SKS, Helsinki, 2008.

<sup>236</sup> Interview with Abdirazak S. Mohamed, board member, Helsinki Islam Centre, Helsinki, 17 January 2013.

be made of Islamic centres in advice and service delivery.<sup>237</sup> However, the main Somali mosques in Helsinki belong to the Islamic Council of Finland, which receives funding from the government. The council was founded in 2006 to advance collaboration between different Muslim organisations and to act as a discussion forum for Muslims and the state authorities. Also, it aims to prevent the development of both Islamic and anti-Islamic extremism in Finland.<sup>238</sup>

#### 10.4 Political Participation and Voting

Only Finnish citizens who have reached the age of 18 are entitled to vote in presidential and parliamentary elections.<sup>239</sup> In European elections the right to vote is reserved for Finnish citizens and citizens of other Member States of the EU residing in Finland.<sup>240</sup> However, in municipal elections the voting right expands to all adult permanent residents in the municipality who have lived in Finland for at least two years.<sup>241</sup>

In the municipal elections in November 2012 in Helsinki, only 17 per cent of foreign nationals who were eligible to vote exercised their right,<sup>242</sup> compared with a general voter turnout of 57.4 percent. Earlier in the year, with the help of the EU fund, Moniheli, a local NGO, conducted the iCount project with the aim of raising awareness among immigrants about municipal elections that were to be held and encouraging them to vote. The project's main target groups were the non-Finnish, non-EU, non-refugee citizens. During the second half of the year, to reach its objectives, the project sent field volunteers to various immigrant communities, organised events and utilised various mainstream and social media outlets. The impact of the activities of iCount on the turnout of immigrant voters is to be studied.<sup>243</sup> In the focus group discussion, participants agreed that Somalis vote too rarely. They felt that Somalis are aware of their right to vote but do not use this opportunity. A female focus group participant shared her experience:

<sup>237</sup> Open Society Foundations meeting with community leaders in Helsinki, 21 March 2013.

<sup>238</sup> See [sine.fi](http://sine.fi) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>239</sup> See [vaalit.fi/15495.htm](http://vaalit.fi/15495.htm) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>240</sup> See [vaalit.fi/45668.htm](http://vaalit.fi/45668.htm) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>241</sup> See [vaalit.fi/15525.htm](http://vaalit.fi/15525.htm) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>242</sup> Official Statistics of Finland, "Municipal elections", at [tilastokeskus.fi/til/kvaa/2012/kvaa\\_2012\\_2013-03-14\\_tie\\_001\\_en.html](http://tilastokeskus.fi/til/kvaa/2012/kvaa_2012_2013-03-14_tie_001_en.html) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>243</sup> Peter Holley, "Immigrant identity and integration in Finland: Some preliminary remarks on 2012 Municipal elections and activities of the iCount Project", the iCount Project Closing Seminar, Helsinki, 29 November 2012, at [icount.fi/en/2012/12/icount-projekti-saatiin-kunnialla-paatokseen](http://icount.fi/en/2012/12/icount-projekti-saatiin-kunnialla-paatokseen) (accessed 3 November 2013); see also [icount.fi/en/icount-project/background](http://icount.fi/en/icount-project/background) (accessed 3 November 2013).

I have seen people who explained to me, usually people who give away cards and are supporting (a candidate) tell you that if you have lived in the country for three years or four years you can vote. People are sent papers of their right to vote; usually they are the ones who have the citizenship. I have voted twice in the municipal elections. The opportunities exist but people do not use them.

There were 10 Somali-background candidates in the municipal elections in Helsinki in November 2012, of which one Somali woman from the Green party, a long-term councillor with the City Council, was re-elected. Furthermore, she was the only Somali candidate who has been close to being elected to the parliament. Only three out of the 85 members of the City Council are of immigrant background, all of them Muslim women.<sup>244</sup> In the focus group, participants concluded that it would benefit the community if the votes concentrated on one or a few influential Somali candidates. A male focus group participant commented:

Regarding this other issue of voting in the municipal elections that are about the municipality and its development, we are very weak in that. I myself have only voted once or twice during the 14 years I have lived here and others are like me I think.

Before there wasn't much information available on elections, but now there is. In other European countries and other places, they have noticed that it has an influence, and now they have realised whether they can vote or not, in the municipal elections and in the parliamentary elections. We Somalis have little interest for it though. Or the interest of the Somalis regarding the elections is not very strong, because the effort is always prioritised, if they supported one candidate they might be able to help him forward, whether it's for the city council or higher position. Many Somalis live in this area but they lack common interest, their effort is divided and as long as that is the case, they won't amount to much.

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<sup>244</sup> See [www.hel.fi/hki/Helsinki/fi/P\\_\\_t\\_ksenteko+ja+hallinto/P\\_\\_t\\_ksenteko/Kaupunginvaltuusto/Valtuuston+j\\_senet](http://www.hel.fi/hki/Helsinki/fi/P__t_ksenteko+ja+hallinto/P__t_ksenteko/Kaupunginvaltuusto/Valtuuston+j_senet) (accessed 3 November 2013).

## 11. THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

Integration is a two-way process, and its success or failure depends on the attitudes and behaviours of both host society and immigrant community. The latter's adaptation and learning processes are vital to the success of integration, but the openness and learning processes of the host community are also crucial. The role of the media is essential in the immigration and integration process due to the imperative mediating role it has in influencing public opinion. Public knowledge of immigration is fragmentary and the media are the sole or main source of information. In Europe, especially Finland,

many, if not most, native citizens ... have no or little daily interaction with immigrants, information about immigration and ethnic minorities is largely based on information from the mass media, or from informal everyday conversations that are in turn based on information from the media.<sup>245</sup>

Unfortunately, some media, intentionally or unintentionally, use their power to obstruct integration mainly by reproducing racism and by conveying an image of intergroup conflict. According to Teun A. van Dijk, media have their own "power domain in the power structure and actively contribute to the legitimation" of a group's dominance in the society. "Its news-making routines, its choice of topics, quotation patterns, semantic and stylistic strategies are an inherent part of its autonomous, symbolic role in the ideological system of social reproduction."<sup>246</sup>

In 2008 Finland was the third-highest country in the world for newspaper consumption, with 483 copies per 1,000 inhabitants, where 76 per cent of the population older than 10 read a daily newspaper or afternoon paper. Two media companies, Sanoma News and Alma Media, control 56 per cent of the daily newspaper circulation. There are seven national dailies. *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Ilta-Sanomat* and *Iltalehhti* are the largest daily papers and *Hufvudstadsbladet* is the largest Swedish-language daily tabloid. After newspapers, the second biggest category in print media includes magazines and periodicals.

There are five national radio channels, four of them the public service stations of YLE (the public service company) and one commercial. There are three major operators in terrestrial and cable television broadcasting: YLE, MTV Media and Nelonen Media (a part of Sanoma Entertainment), with Channel Four and Sport channel. Except YLE, all these channels are owned by commercial TV companies. The use of information and communications technology is also widespread in Finland. In 2008 there were 2.1 million internet connections, where 394 per 1,000 inhabitants were internet users and 72 per cent of households had a fast broadband connection. In addition, a single

<sup>245</sup> N. Farrington, D. Kilvington, J. Price and A. Saeed, *Race, Racism and Sports Journalism*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2012.

<sup>246</sup> Teun A. van Dijk, *Elite Discourse and Racism*, Sage, London, 1993.

agency, the Finnish News Agency (STT) produces a real-time and comprehensive news service for media.<sup>247</sup>

This chapter focuses on the perceptions of the presentations of Somalis in the Finnish media, particularly the current affairs and news coverage, and the negative effects of the media coverage on Somalis.

### 11.1 Media Coverage of Somalis

During the last two decades a few scholars have addressed the issues of immigration and media in Finland.

In the early 1990s, when the first Somali refugees came to Finland, there was a harsh media reaction that affected public response to them. This led the journalist Esa Aallas to write his well-known *Somalishokki* (The Somali Shock), in which he explored the Finnish media reaction to the arrival of the Somali refugees. Most of the stakeholders interviewed agreed that the situation has improved since then. However, they also felt that the situation is still fragile.

Research found that in the 1990s there was no evidence that the news and current affairs sections of mainstream daily newspapers and television programmes produced materials inciting racial conflicts. However, explicit racism was present in letters to the editors and online journalism. As Karina Horsti has noted, some popular magazines of the so-called yellow press produced “overtly xenophobic materials”, but these are relatively under-researched.<sup>248</sup>

However, most stakeholder interviewees and almost all of the media focus group participants believed that media representation of Somalis is a problem and is irresponsible. Sari Hammar noted:

I have been thinking a lot on what is the task of the media? Because sometimes it seems that certain media want to be very responsible for what they are writing! And ok this is very good story in newspaper! And the next day they change their point of view and it is also once again horrible to read ... Sometimes you feel that it is just money what is in the background, no matter what you write. It is just to get some people to read it or buy your paper or whatever!<sup>249</sup>

<sup>247</sup> J. Jyrkiäinen, “Media Landscapes: Finland”, European Journalism Centre, 2010, at [ejc.net/media\\_landscapes/finland#link\\_391](http://ejc.net/media_landscapes/finland#link_391) (accessed 3 November 2013).

<sup>248</sup> This subsection draws heavily on Karina Horsti, “Finland”, in Jessika ter Wal (ed.), *Racism and Cultural Diversity in the Mass Media*, Vienna, European Research Centre of Migration and Ethnic Relations (ERCOMER), 2002 (hereafter, Horsti, “Finland”).

<sup>249</sup> Interview with Sari Hammar, development coordinator, Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area (SOCCA), Helsinki, 10 December 2012.

A community activist expressed his frustration by saying: “Media is against us, I believe that the (Somali) community believes that.”<sup>250</sup> Discussions in the Open Society Foundations focus group on media also indicated widespread distrust of the media’s objectivity. For instance, a young Somali man noted:

I personally believe that they relate only the negative things. Because even though Somalis are the largest Muslim population in Finland, we are also the most hated group after the Roma people. When they want to talk about something, even though they see many good people in the community, but when they see one Somali who does something bad they cast the blame on all Somalis. Every time you read the newspaper you see a black person who does something bad, when you look closer you see it’s a Somali. They don’t mention how many Somalis work, or how many Somali benefit the society, they only talk about the negative things.<sup>251</sup>

A main finding in the literature is that the Finnish media present Somalis as a problem and this, in one way or another, is a reaffirmation of the majority perspective that considers Somalis “as a symbol for undesirable refugees”.<sup>252</sup> Studying the ethnic-minority groups that have been mentioned in two main newspapers, Susanna Vehmas<sup>253</sup> found that Roma from eastern Europe and Somalis were the two large groups that attracted major attention from the media. Roma were mainly associated with social problems, whereas Somalis were mostly mentioned in connection with crime and conflict.

The Open Society Foundations field data support this argument: Rather than giving the whole picture, the Finnish media tend to represent Somalis mainly as a problem. For instance, Arshe Said, chairman of the Somali League in Finland pointed out that positive stories of Somalis are unfairly underrepresented in the Finnish media. He stated that the only news item that presented the positive side of the Somalis produced by the Finnish media he could recall was a series of articles published by *Helsingin Sanomat* in 2011, which presented small businesses owned by Somalis and other immigrants in Hämeentie in central Helsinki and showed that immigrants are doing a great job and making a positive contribution to the nation at large.

Thus, there are also positive examples of media coverage of the Somalis in Finland. Another positive development is the emergence of journalists with Somali

<sup>250</sup> Interview with Abdulkadir Mohamed, Islamic Rahma Centre in Finland, Helsinki, 19 December 2012.

<sup>251</sup> Open Society Foundations focus group on media, 19 February 2013.

<sup>252</sup> J. Herkman, “Muukalaisvihan hedelmät. Media, rasistinen diskurssi ja identiteetti” (Grapes of xenophobia. Media, racist discourse, and identity), *Kulttuuritutkimus* 13 (1) (1996), pp. 28–36 (hereafter, Herkman, “Muukalaisvihan hedelmät”).

<sup>253</sup> S. Vehmas, “Maahanmuuttokirjoittelu sanomalehdissä” (Finnish newspaper discussions on immigrants), in Mari Maasilta (ed.), *Maahanmuutto, media ja eduskuntavaalit* (Immigration, media and the election of the Finnish parliament), Tampere, Tampere University, 2012.

backgrounds, as well as film-makers, actors, writers and speakers on TV or radio shows. They are still few in number, but as visible voices and faces their impact on mainstream Finnish audience is likely to be important. Among the examples are the Somali-Finnish journalist Wali Hashi, a young screenwriter, Khadar Ahmed, and the young female film-maker and columnist Naima Mohamud.<sup>254</sup>

There are a number of ways in which media reporting can contribute to the negative stereotyping of Somalis. First, there is the framing of headlines in ways that recontextualise events; there are examples where the headline is a complete deviation from reality. For instance, in October 1995, a group of 40–50 skinheads attacked a group of 20 Somali men who were playing football in Kontula suburb in eastern Helsinki. The National News Agency (STT) published its report under the headline: “A Somali fight turned out to be expensive for taxpayers”. An alternative, more factual statement, according to one analyst,<sup>255</sup> would have been: “A skinhead attack turned out to be expensive for taxpayers”. At the time, many newspapers carried STT’s headline.<sup>256</sup> The practical experiences of some respondents support that conclusion, for instance:

Some time ago, I participated in a media program and the producers chose to entitle the programme “*Koraani käskee ja Musse tottelee*” (Koran orders and Musse obeys). I said to her I am not a machine ... and told her I don't wish be part of a programme with that title. So even when the content is acceptable for you, the next game is to play with the title and for many readers, including myself, the title is enough for many articles, no need to read the contents.<sup>257</sup>

A second strategy is the contextual exploitation of the manner in which the event is published. A Somali man killed a Finnish teenager in 1995. A local newspaper published a photo of the victim’s family in mourning with a large headline that read, “A young Somali arrested for the Aitovuori killing”. Herkman described this as a provocative racist attitude.<sup>258</sup>

The Helsinki city planning office formed a development plan for an area called Länsiranta in Meri-Rastila.<sup>259</sup> One afternoon two planners from the city of Helsinki had a meeting with the Somali community in the area, where there was also an interpreter. This was one of a number of meetings held in order to consult the local

<sup>254</sup> Open Society Foundations roundtable, Helsinki, 16 September 2013.

<sup>255</sup> O. Ylönen, “Skinien hyökkäys somalitappeluksi” (Skinhead attack transformed into Somali fight), *Journalismikritiikin vuosikirja 2000. Tiedotustutkimus* (Yearbook of Journalism Critique 2000, Information Research), *Finnish Journal of Communication Research* 23 (1) (2000), pp. 18–19.

<sup>256</sup> Horsti, “Finland”.

<sup>257</sup> Interview with Mohamoud Musse, Executive Director, Kanava Youth Association, Helsinki, 28 December 2012.

<sup>258</sup> Herkman, “Muukalaisvihan hedelmät”.

<sup>259</sup> Meri-Rastila is a suburb in eastern Helsinki.

community and ensure the plans took their needs into account. However, a journalist who attended the meeting started directing questions to the Somali women. The women felt the questions were offensive and did not want to answer some of them. The interpreter, however, did provide answers to the questions. Later on the journalist wrote an article in a local newspaper entitled “Somali group paints new Meri-Rastila: Big apartments and own barbecues” (*Somaliryhmä maalailee uutta Meri-Rastilaa: Isoja asuntoja ja oma grilli*).<sup>260</sup> A report by the Finnish Environment Institute noted that within three days from the date the article was published, some 300 comments were published on the newspaper’s internet pages and the rest (comprising about 85 percent), were not published because of their excessive racism.<sup>261</sup>

The media reproduce damaging stereotypes by generalising a negative attitude or a crime committed by a single individual as an offence committed by Somalis. For example, when two schoolboys were accused of raping a teenage Finnish girl, *Iltalehti* magazine published the story, but without referring to the boys’ Somali origins. This raised a heated debate in the media; for some the magazine’s actions were viewed as irresponsible behaviour. *Suomen Kuvalehti* magazine explored this in a piece entitled “If a Somali is a guilty of a crime, is it mandatory to reveal his or her ethnic background in order to report news?”<sup>262</sup> Furthermore, media reports often represent immigrant problems as Somali problems and Somalis are placed at the centre of the reportage of these problems. In many cases, the Somalis are named in the headline or identified in photograph(s).<sup>263</sup> The issue of labelling as a generalisation of negative attitudes was frequently mentioned during stakeholder interviews. However, another side of the equation was also mentioned:

I think one question is that if for example a crime is committed and the offender is not in a way an ethnic Finn, should (the ethnic background) be mentioned? So this is a question that is always difficult and it could deal with labelling but on the other hand the offenders who have a Finnish background, their names are even said in certain cases ... This is an important question because people who

<sup>260</sup> Interview with Seija Välimäki-Adie and Soile Atacocugu, community development workers, Helsinki City, 29 January 2013.

<sup>261</sup> Leikkilä Jaana, Faehnle Maija and Lyytimäki Jari (eds), “Maahanmuuttajat kaupunkiluontoa koskevassa suunnittelussa. Kohti interkulttuurista kaupunkia” (Immigrants in the design of urban wildlife. Towards intercultural city), *Suomen ympäristökeskuksen raportteja* (Reports of the Finnish Environment Institute) 12/2011, Finnish Environment Institute, Helsinki, 2011.

<sup>262</sup> Suomen Kuvalehti, “Jos somali syyllistyy rikokseen, pitääkö hänen etninen taustansa kertoa uutisessa?” (If a Somali is guilty of an offence, should the ethnic background be told in the story?), at [suomenkuvalehti.fi/jutut/kotimaa/jos-somali-syyllistyy-rikokseen-pitaako-hanen-etninen-taustansa-kertoa-uutisessa](http://suomenkuvalehti.fi/jutut/kotimaa/jos-somali-syyllistyy-rikokseen-pitaako-hanen-etninen-taustansa-kertoa-uutisessa) (accessed 3 November 2013).

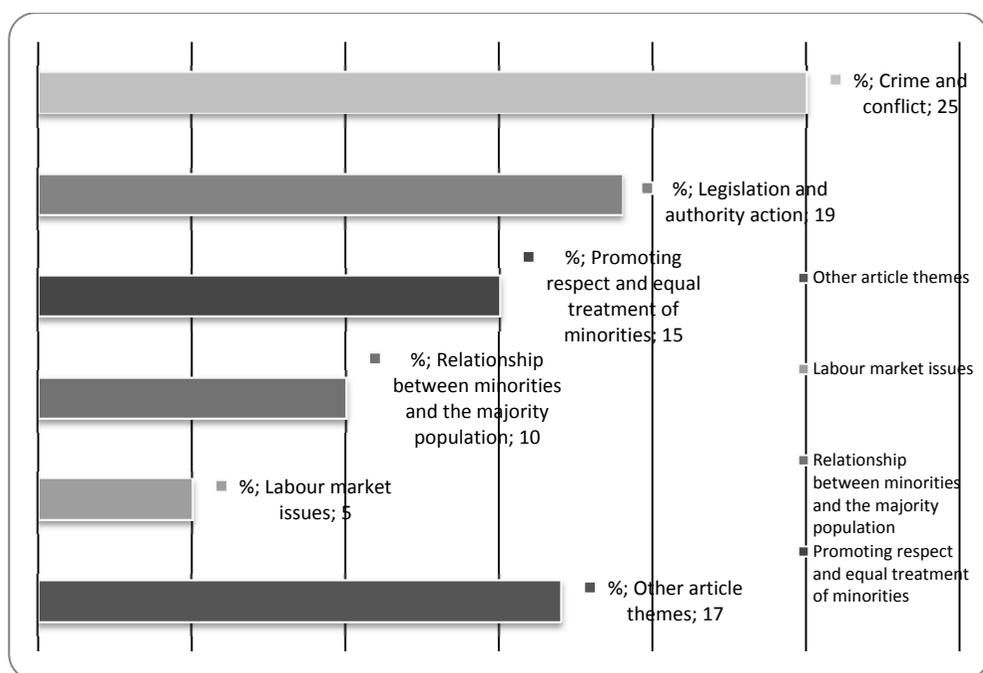
<sup>263</sup> P. Raittila (ed.), *Etnisyys ja rasismi journalismissa* (Ethnicity and racism in journalism), University of Tampere, Tampere, 2002. See also P. Raittila and T. Kutilainen, “Rasismi ja etnisyyden Suomen sanomalehdissä syksyllä 1999” (Racism and ethnicity in Finnish newspapers in autumn 1999), University of Tampere, Tampere, 2000.

don't know the exact statistics might have a different kind of picture about the situation.<sup>264</sup>

An interviewee with a Somali background noted:

Media stresses only the negative side. What is needed is for the media to be neutral, it is OK that the negative side of the Somali community is mentioned and that is fine with me, because every community has its negative sides. But it is essential that media presents also the positive side of the Somalis. It is not fare to concentrate on the negative side alone.<sup>265</sup>

**Figure 5. Themes in the representation of immigrants in Finnish media (N=1,222) (%), 1999–2007**



Source: C. Haavisto, *Conditionally One of "Us": A Study of Print Media, Minorities and Positioning Practices*, Helsinki, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, 2011

In addition, most of the researchers emphasised that there was “an obvious bias in the selection of sources”.<sup>266</sup> Research on Finnish media and immigration in the 1990s

<sup>264</sup> Interview with Tarja Mankkinen, director, Internal Security Secretariat, Ministry of the Interior, Helsinki, 15 January 2013.

<sup>265</sup> Interview with Abdinasir Mohamed, representative, Islamic Society of Finland, Helsinki, 8 February 2013.

<sup>266</sup> Horsti, “Finland”.

found that public authorities were the main sources of information on minorities for journalists. Consequently, researchers have criticised the Finnish media for excluding ethnic-minority voices in various subtle ways. The media rely on the majority population for airing immigrant issues and, as Pentti Raittila<sup>267</sup> emphasised, minority groups are considered second speakers.<sup>268</sup> More recent studies support that argument: for instance, Camilla Haavisto,<sup>269</sup> studying two Swedish-language morning newspapers, found that in the periods between 2001 and 2005, authority representatives were the main speakers in over 40 per cent of all articles on immigrants, while immigrants, ethnic minorities and/or foreigners themselves were the main speakers in only 15 per cent of all articles. This is in line with the findings of previous studies.<sup>270</sup>

Furthermore, certain topics dominate the representation of immigrants in Finnish media reporting. Figure 5 summarises the dominant topics on immigrant issues. In many ways, most studies agree with this conclusion.<sup>271</sup> According to Mukhtar Abib,

The Finnish media, when it comes to the question of Somalis, is single-minded. Somalis are either victims suffering somewhere or are robbers, thieves or a threat to the country, and that is a wrong picture, I would say.<sup>272</sup>

It was argued that the Finnish media report two types of Somalis. Successful Somalis are shown as exceptional cases; the rest of the community is categorised as a problem.<sup>273</sup> Arno Tanner puts this plainly:

Somalis are still marginalised in this sense (media reporting). On the one hand we talk about Somalis as victims, as a group having problems ... they are seen as a collective in a negative fashion with negative bias ... But fortunately you have, say five, ten, fifteen which directly jumped to the elite so to say, but the average man of the street as part of the Finnish society talking about the price of milk when interviewed, that is totally lacking, the whole middle way is lacking, the

<sup>267</sup> P. Raittila, "Etniset aiheet, vähemmistöt ja niiden suhteet suomalaisessa journalismissa vuonna 2000" (Ethnic topics, minorities and their relationships in Finnish journalism in 2000), in P. Raittila, *Etnisyys ja rasismi journalismissa* (Ethnicity and racism in journalism), University of Tampere, Tampere, 2002.

<sup>268</sup> A "second speaker" is one whose opinions are voiced through a third who does not belong to that particular group.

<sup>269</sup> C. Haavisto, *Conditionally One of "Us": A Study of Print Media, Minorities and Positioning Practices*, Helsinki, Helsinki University Print, Helsinki, 2011 (hereafter, Haavisto, *Conditionally One of "Us"*).

<sup>270</sup> Horsti, "Finland".

<sup>271</sup> Horsti, "Finland".

<sup>272</sup> Interview with Mukhtar Abib, social supervisor, Department of Social Services and Health Care, City of Helsinki, 19 December 2012.

<sup>273</sup> Interview with Mukhtar Abib, social supervisor, Department of Social Services and Health Care, City of Helsinki, 29 January 2013.

normal Somali ... I haven't seen it. Yes, Matti Virtanen, Matti Korhonen and Abdullahi and they are part of the normal Finnish society, saying their feelings, living their good normal life. This is not reported ... Yes, these kinds of Somalis as part of the Finnish society bringing output, paying taxes ... These are insufficiently covered.<sup>274</sup>

The limited range of themes in which immigrant voices are heard is another problem connected with media reporting on immigrants. In other words, immigrants are quoted mainly in the so-called soft topics rather than hard news. For instance, one author has noted that immigrants who are given a chance speak mainly in human-interest stories concerning non-topical issues.<sup>275</sup>

Emphasising the negative impact of the Finnish media reporting on minorities in general and referring to the most influential newspaper in Finland, Sari Pietikäinen<sup>276</sup> wrote:

The *Helsingin Sanomat* news representations of ethnic minorities are characterised by polarisation and anticipation of a change, most likely for the worse. Regardless of whether it was accomplished by the topics covered or comments made, the news typically emphasised the majority perspective, and contributed to the construction of ethnic minorities as *Them* as compared with the Finns as *Us*. The Finns were characteristically represented as actors, decision-makers, masters of events – even though they at times suffered from the troubles brought on by the changing ethnic situation. Ethnic minorities were typically represented as faceless, nameless masses coming – uninvited – and causing trouble. In short, the ethnic majority was represented with the power to act and control, the ethnic minorities as lacking power, position and names. News representations like these contribute to the fragmentation of society and set up barriers between various ethnic groups. Rather than constructing a sense of community and belonging, *HS* news representations contribute to ethnic differentiation... The frozenness of ethnic representations in the news implies that the otherness of ethnic minorities may be deeply embedded both in journalistic practices and in the societies in which they are functioning.

## 11.2 Perceptions of Somali representation in the Finnish media

Following the arrival of the first Somali refugees in the early 1990s, President Mauno Koivisto invited the government to talk about the Somali problem, and although the

<sup>274</sup> Interview with Arno Tanner, researcher, Finnish Immigration Service, Helsinki, 25 January 2013.

<sup>275</sup> Haavisto, *Conditionally One of "Us"*.

<sup>276</sup> S. Pietikäinen, "Representations of Ethnicity in Journalism. Multiculturalist Transitions on the Pages of a Finnish Daily", *Nordicom Review 2* (2005), pp. 71–81.

number was quite modest it was still an issue.<sup>277</sup> Since then, the Somali problem has been part of the political landscape in Finland, most visibly in the latter half of the 2000s, when the populist True Finns party made the presence of Somalis in Finland a central theme of its political debate. According to Haavisto, politicising the minority and immigration issues has intensified since 2007.<sup>278</sup> Initially the alternative media, particularly the internet, was the main vehicle for the critics of the immigrants to articulate their claims and convey their message. However, since the rise of the True Finns, even the mainstream media has been engaged in these claims. “Many of these claims are clearly more humiliating than respecting of ethnic minorities and immigrants.”<sup>279</sup> Many respondents to the Open Society Foundations research raised the relationship between the rise of the True Finns and the media portrayals of the Somalis.

One interesting question that I don't have the answer to is the rise of the National Populist party, the True Finns, and what role the media as such has played in that rise, because the political parties and political movements today are total dependents on media exposure. You cannot be a politician without media exposure and the question arises is the media doing a good job or a bad job? Do we have the media and the politicians that we deserve? ... In the political language in the media, the immigration-critical concept and the idea that you could be immigration-critical without being racist have been a problematic thing because it is sometimes very hard to see the difference between immigration-critical and racist views. But it is politically correct to be immigration-critical, whereas racism is not, and where the line is drawn is still negotiated in the media, in journalism and in political discussions. If you listen to the ordinary people in the metro or on the bus you would probably catch them saying a lot of racist stuff that they themselves would classify as just immigration-critical and that the whole concept of immigration-critical has been a very good innovation for those who would like to have a racist discussion going on.<sup>280</sup>

For some respondents, the role of the media in the rise of the True Finns is quite obvious. By presenting the Somalis as a negative factor in the society, the Finnish media encouraged much of their audience to support the agenda of the True Finns, with the hope that the latter would get rid of the Somali problem in Finland.<sup>281</sup>

<sup>277</sup> Interview with Annika Forsander, director, Immigration Affairs, City of Helsinki, Helsinki, 4 December 2012.

<sup>278</sup> Haavisto, *Conditionally One of “Us”*.

<sup>279</sup> Haavisto, *Conditionally One of “Us”*.

<sup>280</sup> Interview with Georg Henrik Wrede, director, Youth Division, Ministry of Education and Culture, Helsinki, 3 January 2013.

<sup>281</sup> Interview with Abdinasir Mohamed, representative, Islamic Society of Finland, Helsinki, 8 February 2013.

Although mainstream media reporting on Somalis has greatly improved compared with the fairly overt bias in the 1990s, the Finnish media could be considered an obstacle to integration. The following remarks from stakeholder interviews narrate examples illustrating how the Finnish community reacted after one TV programme on Somalis. The programme was released by YLE, the main public television network in Finland, in November 2012. The main message of the programme was that a major Somali community organisation misappropriated public funds. According to one informed observer:

I felt sorry, because the point of view was so narrow, but the people who were watching it don't think that, so they take it as a true thing.

A community activist noted:

It seems the marketing strategy of many Finnish media outlets depends on elevating some issues, because they understand that the society reflects what they see in the media. Some days ago the media released a programme that gave a bad picture of the Somalis. People watched it on this premises, I was not here that evening, but some of the our youth members watched it and soon after the programme finished, some of them went to the neighbouring gas station for coffee and the people in the gas station offended the youngsters, because of the programme. Look at the reaction here! There was not even half an hour between the programme and a racially motivated act.<sup>282</sup>

Another noted:

After the MOT program was aired, one man shouted at us, 'Bin-Ladenin porukka' (Bin Laden's team), as we were walking near the train station.<sup>283</sup>

According to a social worker,

Two days after the MOT program was released by TV three weeks ago, I was invited to a meeting in which we discussed an event where a 13-year-old schoolboy accused a 14-year-old Somali schoolmate by saying, "You Somalis are thieves," and the other reacted harshly by kicking his colleague. So the consequence for Somalis is instantaneous.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Interview with Mohamoud Musse, Executive Director, Kanava Youth Association, Helsinki, 28 December 2012.

<sup>283</sup> Interview with Abdulkadir M. Abdi, Vice-Chair, Finnish Somalia Network, Helsinki, 19 December 2012.

<sup>284</sup> Interview with Mukhtar Abib, social supervisor, Department of Social Services and Health Care, City of Helsinki, 19 December 2012.

## 12. CONCLUSIONS

The principal aim of this study was to identify the challenges and successes involved in ensuring the integration of Somalis living in Helsinki, and to understand their experiences and concerns in major areas of their daily lives. Participants of eight thematic focus groups, in total 70 participants, were asked the following question:

Suppose that the mayor of Helsinki gave you a one-minute chance to advise him on the issue of the Somalis in Helsinki, what would you say to him?

The responses were mixed, but three outstanding issues emerged from the responses. First, acknowledging the harsh reality for Somalis in the labour market, respondents put a heavy emphasis on employment. A total of 22 respondents took up the issue; for example, a young man replied:

I would say that finding work should be easier and people should be equal. Or you shouldn't say that this person is Finnish and this person is Somali and on paper you are the same. The person who is Somali by nationality and the one who's Finnish by nationality, only their names are different. They went to the same schools and have similar certificates. So instead of looking at the names, there should be equality.

This is not surprising since both this research and previous studies confirm that Somalis face significant challenges in the labour market. Somalis, compared with many other groups with migrant backgrounds in the country, are in a disadvantaged position in terms of professional skills, command of the Finnish language and other requirements of working life. However, that is only part of the history. Attitudes of the Finnish majority population towards Somalis are regarded as a serious impediment to the labour market entry of the Somalis. Yet, at the same time integration in the labour market is seen as a key to overall integration in Finnish society. Moreover, satisfactory employment is considered a determinant in the sense of identity and belonging to the society and the country, and also enhances the overall wellbeing of the individual and the family. It also should be noted that a significant number of the Somali-speaking population is not factored into the workforce, because they are children, students, or for other reasons (e.g. mothers who prefer to stay at home and take care of their children).

Second, after employment, the respondents raised the issue of education. Education was seen as instrumental for successful integration, with children's education given particular attention. For 20 out of the 70 respondents education was a top priority for the mayor to deal with. A young male participant in the focus group on housing said:

The young people who grew up in this country are the people who will represent us in the future, so they should not take the path of the previous youth. He (the mayor) should put effort into the youth. Most young people live in Helsinki, they should get education; if the person doesn't get educated they become

marginalised from the society in every way, but if they have education they will have a good life.

The situation of young people and the future of the Somali children in Finland is a serious concern for the community and education was at the centre of the concern. School underachievement and dropping out are major problems for Somalis in Helsinki. In particular Somali boys face problems at school, in post-secondary education and in entering the labour market. Finland is internationally known for its high PISA rating. However, this world-famous schooling system must also support the achievement of the increasingly multicultural students.

Third, the respondents addressed the mayor's engagement with the Somali community. Thirteen of those asked the question raised the relationship between the mayor and the Somali community and residents of the City of Helsinki. Some suggested that the mayor should have trustworthy Somali advisers to consult over the affairs of the Somali community. Others proposed that the mayor should engage directly with the Somali community by regularly visiting the entities that Somalis trust and interact with the community. A man in the focus group on identity and belonging put his concerns in this way:

I would advise (the mayor) to come to the places where Somalis sit and see how they are and what their needs are.

Another man in the focus group on education added: "Children are told about the teeth of the hyena and they are scared of them, so don't let people tell you about the Somalis, rather contact them directly in order to know the true condition of things." The participants raised a need to rethink ways in which to reach out to the Somali communities and engage them better in dialogue with city officials.

Another area that deserves serious attention from policymakers is identity and belonging. Although a significant number of the respondents felt that they were part of their neighbourhood and that Helsinki is their favourite city of residence, only a very small proportion of respondents felt a sense of belonging to Finland. There are various reasons for that, but the most frequently repeated ones involved the experience of discrimination by mainstream Finnish society and feelings of inequality about the distribution of and access to resources. A young man noted:

Yes, the foundation for life is to be able to get what you want. For example, if you have studied here from elementary school until high school, but when you try to get into university, people of your age are put ahead of you, without having better grades than you, or better wisdom, then you do feel something is missing from you. If you are a citizen and another citizen is put ahead of you, then your citizenship is only half. For example, when there are jobs open and they tell you they will call you but never do, you feel that you don't have much here, it affects your mind. For example, the education you have does not benefit

you here in the labour market; you have to take your education to other countries.

In Helsinki the number of foreign-language speakers is expected to double by 2030, in other words, over 19 per cent of Helsinki's residents are expected to have a foreign mother tongue. The tradition of mixed housing policies in Helsinki has produced good results as far as limiting the segregation of migrant populations. However, the current trend of geographic distribution in Helsinki and in the region may create unbearable socioeconomic inequalities and awkward ethnic segregation if not addressed properly. In Helsinki, the quality of housing, including council housing, is good and most Somalis are satisfied with it, but Somalis consider discrimination in the housing sector to be a problem. In addition, people complained about their relationship with the offices of both social housing and private companies. Some neighbourhoods are associated with problems, including sporadic physical harassment and regular badmouthing. However, the biggest issue for Somalis is that the housing available to them does not correspond to the needs of large families.

Supporting the previous research on the role of the Finnish media vis-a-vis immigrants, most interview respondents and almost all of the media focus group participants believed that media representation of the Somalis is problematic. The Finnish media typically presents Somalis as a problem, by framing headlines in a way that recontextualises the events; by exploiting the manner in which the event is published; and by generalising a negative attitude or a crime committed by a single individual. In addition, there is an obvious bias in the selection of sources and themes. Although mainstream media reporting on Somalis has improved since the 1990s, the media are considered an obstacle to integration by unfairly presenting Somalis as a problem in Finland. Indeed, the term "Somali" itself carries negative connotations in the public discourse and this has a bad effect on youngsters and adults living Helsinki and the country as a whole.

There are no local or national mechanisms that involve Somalis in decision-making. Nevertheless, there is a number of general or minority institutions that Somalis could use more effectively to be heard as residents, citizens and so on. Several Somali representatives are active in political parties and some of them have been elected to different city councils in Finland. In Helsinki, a Somali woman has been elected to the city council five times. An interesting example is the Finnish Somalia Network, which has brought together several Somali and Finnish associations under one umbrella. The network and its member organisations have successfully engaged the government with development in Somalia; several associations have been granted funding by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs for projects in Somalia. Finnish local and national authorities also approach Somali civic organisations, in particular the Somali League, and certain individuals for consultations. The focus group participants pointed out, however, that regardless of the large number of Somali organisations in Finland, they were rather poor representatives of the Somali community at large. These views may be

seen to reflect the diversity of the Somali community as well as the need to improve the capacity, management and resources of civil society associations.

Previous studies have shown that despite earlier traumatic events in Somalia or discrimination faced in Finland, Somalis are mostly satisfied with their quality of life and coping with day-to-day activities. In general, however, Somali women have poorer health than Somali men. It has been noted both in Finland and internationally that Somalis very seldom use mental health services. Previous studies have also shown that in particular among the first generation of Somali women, illiteracy as well as a lack of knowledge of how to use the internet should be taken into account. The ability to use a computer is particularly important in Finland, where services are increasingly managed electronically.

In general, participants in the focus groups were happy with the health-care services in Finland and in Helsinki in particular. Indeed, health care was probably the most appreciated dimension of life in Finland. In addition, the study participants believed that they had equal access to services with native Finnish people. However, concerns about long waiting times before getting an appointment with a doctor or a dentist, a general practitioner's reluctance to refer a patient to further examinations or a hospital, a practice of proposing cheaper medicine at a pharmacy than that which was originally prescribed by a doctor, language and communication problems and cases of delayed diagnosis were raised in focus groups.

As regards general personal satisfaction, harassment experienced particularly on the street and in their neighbourhoods, loneliness and isolation, unemployment, dispersal of the families and wintertime in Finland were mentioned as factors with a negative impact on the wellbeing of the Somalis. Social ties and communication with relatives across borders by telephone and the internet were important for the maintenance and creation of protective social networks. However, in general the focus group participants appreciated the safety of Finnish society and regarded Helsinki as a secure and clean city. Despite some expressions of mistrust towards authorities, for example the police, there also seemed to be a good amount of trust in the Finnish legal system and equal treatment for all.

The findings of the study reveal some of the challenges, opportunities and successes that Finnish Somalis have faced in the City of Helsinki. Differences in experience as regards gender and generation are evident, but should also be studied further. Attention should be paid to the second generation of Finnish Somalis to ensure that they can feel they belong to the City of Helsinki and that they have the same opportunities to succeed as any other resident or Finnish citizen.

## 13. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 13.1 Identity and Belonging

1. Employees working for the City of Helsinki, community workers and NGOs working with immigrant integration should advance grassroots interaction by organising community events and meetings to bring together residents from mixed backgrounds in order to decrease mutual prejudices.
2. The City of Helsinki should convene a working group of companies that design and produce publications, websites, advertising and other visual materials for the municipal government and other public bodies. The group should review current materials and agree guidelines on how these can better represent the diverse population of Helsinki and promote positive images of minority communities. The City of Helsinki, educational institutions and major employers should reinforce positive images of immigrant groups, for example Somalis, with visual and media representation. Open Society Foundations could partner the City of Helsinki in this issue.
3. The City of Helsinki, ministries and other public institutions should increase efforts to recruit Somali and other minority professionals to create positive role models for youth as well as reverse current ethnic stereotypes in Finland.
4. The Ombudsman for Minorities should collaborate with mosques and major community organisations in order to inform and educate Somalis and other relevant groups on discrimination and racism, their rights and channels for reporting.
5. City and state authorities should raise awareness of the issue of belonging and of how to take into consideration multiple identities and the changing ethnic landscape of Finnish society.
6. The City of Helsinki should fund research and initiatives focused on the hybrid identities of young people.

### 13.2 Education

7. The Ministry of Education, the National Board of Education and the City of Helsinki should study the contextual and possible systemic causes and devise tailored solutions for all groups where youngsters are underrepresented in secondary education, such as Somalis, to reach post-secondary education and gain professional training or solid academic skills that enable them to continue in higher education such as universities. The inaccessibility of available educational opportunities after comprehensive school, was identified as a major educational problem faced by Somali young people in Helsinki.

8. The Ministry of Education should study the *Luva* and *Mava* programmes for potential replication of these preparatory programmes for continuation after comprehensive school. *Mava* (Maahanmuuttajien ammatilliseen peruskoulutukseen valmistava koulutus) is a training programme preparing adult immigrants for vocational education and by 2014 there will be a programme preparing immigrant students for high school (general upper secondary education), *Luva* (Lukioon valmistava koulutus maahanmuuttajille). Both *Luva* and *Mava* are good programmes that could be models for the educational improvement of students with immigrant backgrounds. Similar educational supporting programmes for improved high school achievement and preparatory programmes for continuation at higher education would be valuable.
9. Authorities and schools should revise their practices and consider removing Finnish as the second language from the certificates of children born in Finland to immigrant parents and who speak Finnish well.
10. The decisions on who will take the S2 course should not be based on criteria such as name, race, nationality, family background and bi- or multi-linguality. Instead, Finnish-language levels should be tested every school year and then the decision should be made with the parents whether the child should take the Finnish as native-language course or Finnish as second language (S2) (or both). Students whose native language is not Finnish or Swedish are placed in S2, in order to learn the broadest possible skills in the Finnish language. Many students with immigrant backgrounds need extra Finnish language lessons.
11. The Ministry of Education, the National Board of Education and the City of Helsinki should consider strategies to improve the teaching of the specific Finnish-language skills that are likely to be missing from Finland-born children with an immigrant background as early as kindergarten and basic school. Other skills such as studying skills should also be improved in the earliest stages of the educational system. The strategy of testing all the kids' linguistic capacity at the age of four is good. This is to check neurolinguistic capacity, including the mother tongue. If the child is otherwise doing well, but not mastering Finnish, a place in a kindergarten is offered, a kind of pre-preschool, in order to get enough Finnish-language skills before proper school starts.
12. Schools, the Ministry of Education and the Department of Education at the city level should provide regular counselling to pupils far before 9th grade. The counselling needs to involve the wider family, not just parents. Furthermore, educating parents and raising their awareness about the educational system including the importance of pre-primary education is needed.
13. Community organisations, day-care nurseries and the educational departments of Helsinki City Council should conduct an awareness campaign. The Somali

community should study the experience of the Russian community, which lobbied for support and activities. One concrete step would be the appointment of a Somali representative who could consult with the local government.

14. Educational institutions should establish partnerships with faith organisations, such as Somali-run mosques, and other community organisations. Such partnerships would be effective in creating a better mutual understanding between families and educational institutions. Parents could also get more information about the school curriculum, support and educational and career options for their children.

### 13.3 Employment

15. Currently the Occupational Safety and Health Divisions of Regional State Administrative Agencies monitor compliance with the Non-Discrimination Act in employment issues. The task should be given to another more efficient entity that could devise closer cooperation with immigrant communities, particularly with communities that face a high rate of discrimination in the labour market, such as the Somalis.
16. The government should give the situation of the migrant groups that are facing specific challenges, such as Somalis, specific attention in its planning and implementation strategies, including in meeting its ambitious goal of halving unemployment among immigrants within the current government term, 2012–2015.
17. The government should encourage the replication of agreements such as that between itself, the cities of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, entrepreneurs in the capital region and the Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce regarding training and employment opportunities that are fundamental to the integration of immigrants and that are to be improved in the capital region in 2013–2015. The aim of this new type of cooperation is to bring immigrants more rapidly into integration training, work trials or other labour-market services. This and similar initiatives should cater for the needs and qualifications of young people and develop strategies to match them with existing labour market opportunities, which is also strongly supported by the youth guarantee, “nuorisotakuu” as part of the current government programme.
18. Major Somali organisations and mosques in Helsinki should consider engaging more forcefully in combating discrimination by cooperating with both local and national policymakers and anti-discrimination organisations. These organisations should also engage in raising anti-discrimination awareness, and inform the community about possibilities and places to report cases of discrimination.

19. Further research is needed on the reasons why so many Somali women and men stay outside the workforce and what kind of measures would be needed to support and encourage their activity in the labour market: Statistical figures show that quite a large number of the Somali-speaking population are outside the labour force (excluding children, students, people in military service or those who have retired).

#### 13.4 Housing

20. Due to the tradition of mixed housing policies, there is little ethnic segregation in Helsinki compared with many other cities in Europe. So far there is fairly even distribution of housing allocations, and the promotion of this good practice could be recommended to other cities in Europe.
21. Targeted actions by the Housing Division of the City of Helsinki Real Estate Department that aim to strengthen the position of the disadvantaged groups, particularly visible minorities such as Somalis, in the housing market should complement the policies aiming to avoid ethnic segregation. As the Helsinki area becomes more diverse, segregation between neighbourhoods has also been on the rise.
22. The city authorities should develop proper policies and strategies to deal with the inadequate supply of affordable housing for larger families.
23. The housing allocation system in Helsinki needs to be more transparent with more information about the basis for decisions and the place people have in the queue. Currently it is not transparent, the waiting lists are not numbered and applicants do not know who gets an apartment and why.
24. The city authorities should engage with badly affected communities such as Somalis to address concerns about harassment in their neighbourhoods. Likewise, the families should be encouraged to participate in the events organised in their neighbourhoods and houses, for example the days when residents of the house jointly clean up and maintain the yard. These kinds of events would be good opportunities for mutual positive social interaction.

#### 13.5 Health and Social Protection

25. Health planners, educators and service providers should take up the question of mental health and how mental distress is understood and treated in Finland among Somalis and other immigrants. Collaboration with Somali and other migrant organisations and religious experts is highly recommended.
26. Directors and supervisors at health- and social-care institutions should ensure that staff should receive training on how to improve access to and communication with increasingly multicultural, sometimes illiterate clientele.

In particular among the first-generation women there may be illiterate people who need oral guidance and interpreter services. Special attention needs to be given to elderly people with immigrant backgrounds on how they will manage in a high-tech society, where personal service is becoming rare.

27. Health centres and hospitals should be encouraged to employ Somali and other foreign-language speaking staff in the services, which would significantly ease the communication problems. Also native Finnish employees should be trained in working with multicultural encounters at workplaces.
28. Somali women, along with other migrant (Muslim) women, should be provided with more holistic health promotion including information on sports, exercise and diet. In addition, women-only exercise classes and swimming-pool hours should be provided more extensively.
29. Health-service providers should closely collaborate with the social sector in order to understand patients' and their families' holistic needs. Social problems such as discrimination and harassment, loneliness and the sense of isolation should be addressed, in addition to specific physical symptoms and complaints. Gender and age should also be considered when planning services and activities.

### **13.6 Policing and Security**

30. Police should create trust and collaboration with the Somali community by informal and formal joint events. It is important to create a good collaborative network before any problems occur.
31. Ethnic-minority groups, Somali youngsters for instance, should be encouraged and informed about opportunities to apply to the police college. Furthermore, Finnish Somalis should also be supported in getting into the rescue forces.
32. Police should make sure that visible ethnic-minority groups as alleged victims of crime or possible offenders are treated professionally and equally with any client. Also anti-discriminatory and cultural sensitivity training should be included in police training.
33. The reporting of racist-motivated and hate crimes among the Somali community has to be encouraged by providing the community with the relevant information and increasing their trust on the legal system. The police need to be accountable for what happens after reporting.

### **13.7 Participation and Citizenship**

34. Representatives of authorities and public institutions should approach ethnic and religious communities and community organisations including faith organisations, particularly Somali, by visiting neighbourhoods where many

migrants live, and by organising collaborative and even informal events to increase mutual trust.

35. City housing units should organise meetings where tenants with immigrant backgrounds and their key community representatives will receive information on practical questions related to housing and the neighbourhood, the importance of participating in the common events and ways to enhance good neighbourhood relationships. Mosques should also encourage and inform their members and clients to participate more actively.

### 13.8 Media

36. The Finnish media should develop a code of conduct for offering ethically consistent, balanced and fair coverage when reporting on ethnic minorities, particularly Somalis, to serve the national interest. Covering the positive contributions by the Somali community to the welfare system could be an example of the coverage that could challenge the prevailing stereotypes and promote inclusion.
37. Both media personnel and politicians from the traditional political parties should consider speaking out in a responsible manner against hate speech that is increasing hostility and discrimination against minority groups.
38. The Finnish-Somali community should encourage media professionalism among the members of the community. Finnish-Somali organisations should also consider effective media training for their staff and representatives in order to successfully promote their positive work and initiatives across media and to make more efficient use of possibilities offered by the media. To do so they should seek cooperation with the mainstream national media.

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## ANNEX 2. LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

Name	Title	Organisation
(Anonymous)	Teacher	School in Helsinki
Abdi, Abdulkadir M.	Vice-Chair	Finnish Somalia Network
Abib, Mukhtar	Social supervisor	Department of Social Services and Health Care, City of Helsinki
Abdulla, Zahra	Councillor	City of Helsinki
Ali, Hassan A.	Chair	Somaliland Association of Finland
Alitolppa-Niitamo, Anne	Manager	Multicultural Affairs, Family Federation of Finland
Atacocugu, Soile	Community development worker	Unit for Regional Work, City of Helsinki Department of Social Services and Health Care
Biaudet, Eva	Ombudsman for Minorities	Office of the Ombudsman for Minorities
Cortés Téllez, Mikko	Senior Advisor	Department for Cultural, Sport and Youth Policy, Ministry of Education and Culture
Forsander, Annika	Director	Immigration Affairs, City of Helsinki
Ewwaraye, Ari	Senior inspector	Ministry of the Interior
Hammar, Sari	Development coordinator	Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area (SOCCA)
Hashi, Wali	Freelance journalist	
Kajava, Maija	Secretary	Finland-Somalia Association 1987–1993, 1997–2008, Somali Forum for Progress Finland, 2010–present
Keskitalo, Päivi	Senior officer	Office of the Ombudsman for Minorities
Mankkinen, Tarja	Director	Internal Security Secretariat, Ministry of the Interior
Mannerström, Katja	Teacher	Vuosaari High School
Mohamed, Abdinasir	Representative	Islamic Society of Finland
Mohamed, Abdirazak S.	Representative	Helsinki Islamic Centre
Mohamed, Abdulkadir	Imam	Islamic Rahma Centre

ANNEX 2. LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

Mohamed, Saido	Advisor & Chair	Finnish League for Human Rights & Finnish Somalia Network
Musse, Mohamud	Executive Director	Kanava Youth Association
Santaharju, Riku	Researcher	Finnish Immigration Service
Said, Arshe	Chair	Somali League of Finland
Stenman, Kristina	Director	Migration Department, Ministry of Employment and the Economy
Tanner, Arno	Researcher	Finnish Immigration Service
Välimäki-Adie, Seija	Community development worker	Unit for Regional Work, Department of Social Services and Health Care, City of Helsinki
Wrede, Georg Henrik	Director	Youth Division, Ministry of Education and Culture

Minority communities – whether Muslim, migrant or Roma – continue to come under intense scrutiny in Europe today. This complex situation presents Europe with one its greatest challenges: how to ensure equal rights in an environment of rapidly expanding diversity.

At Home in Europe, part of the Open Society Initiative for Europe, Open Society Foundations, is a research and advocacy initiative which works to advance equality and social justice for minority and marginalised groups excluded from the mainstream of civil, political, economic, and, cultural life in Western Europe.

Muslims in EU Cities was the project's first comparative research series which examined the position of Muslims in 11 cities in the European Union. Somalis in European cities follows from the findings emerging from the Muslims in EU Cities reports and offers the experiences and challenges faced by Somalis across seven cities in Europe. The research aims to capture the everyday, lived experiences as well as the type and degree of engagement policymakers have initiated with their Somali and minority constituents.