

# Motivations and expectations of Italians planning to move to Finland



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*The Italian community in Finland is relatively small compared to other larger Italian communities abroad. Despite the quantitatively restricted dimensions, there are multiple reasons to study the phenomenon. First of all, the two countries represent the geographical extremes of the European Union as well as two very different realities in terms of historical, cultural and social background. These two member states of the EU in fact are very different in terms of multiculturalism / multiethnicity and for their role in the European unification process. Studying the migration flows between the two countries is therefore important not only to understand the bilateral relationship between Finland and Italy but it can also offer a more general perspective on how the European integration process is actually proceeding. This essay examines the decision-making process of Italians planning to move to Finland through a semantic analysis of the posts (or web messages) sent to the message board of web newsmagazine La Rondine by Italians looking for a relocation in Finland. The collection and analysis of the semantic universe provide the list of motivators at the basis of Finland as chosen destination and an outlook on how Finland is perceived by Italians. As a conclusion of the semantic analysis on the source material, a map on the opportunities and threats that Italians attribute to Finland, will be drawn.*

Key Words: emigration, immigration, Italy, Finland, expectations.

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The phenomenon of Italian emigration to Finland is still largely unexplored. De Anna has examined the historic migrations (De Anna 1995; 1996; 2011) and Di Toro Mammarella (2008a; 2008b) the more recent flows but the motivations at the basis of Italian emigration to Finland remain almost completely unknown. This essay examines the decision-making process of Italians planning to move to Finland through a semantic analysis of the posts (web messages) sent to the message board of web newsmagazine La Rondine by Italians looking for a relocation in Finland. The collection and analysis of the semantic universe provide the list of motivators at the basis of Finland as chosen destination and an outlook on how Finland is perceived by Italians. I have chosen to apply a semantic analysis as it is the most indicated method in fully understanding the motivations at the basis of the intent of migrating (Guerra 2011a; 2011b; 2011c). The quantitative data used in this essay has been taken from the Italian Ministry of Interior's Register Office of Italian Residents Abroad (AIRE). These figures refer to Italian citizens that have spontaneously declared to their Municipal Population Register Centre their intention to reside abroad for a period longer than 12 months (AIRE 2012). These figures differ from those provided by Statistics Finland, since they measure the intention, not the effective length of stay. The numerical differences in the statistics of two countries are a very common phenomenon and often due to different systems in calculating the number of migrants. They also represent an interpretative challenge to every researcher of cross-country migrations (Guerra 2001, 47–53; Guerra 2008, 69).

## Finland and Italy: multiculturalism, multiethnicity and Europeism

Italy has been a multicultural and multiethnic reality for centuries before becoming an unified and independent nation state as late as the 1860's. The Italian Peninsula, for its position at the Mediterranean sea, has always been in the centre of wide migratory flows. From the famous case of the so called Magna Graecia, when the coastal areas of Southern Italy were extensively colonized by Greek settlers who began arriving in the 8th century B.C. bringing their Hellenic civilization, to the so called Barbaric Invasions or the Arab invasions of Sicily to the much more recent Austro-Hungarian rule of Northern Italy just to name a few. During the Roman Empire the Edict of Caracalla, issued in 212 by the Roman Emperor Caracalla, declared that all free men in the Roman Empire were to be given full Roman citizenship. Constantine the Great, Roman Emperor from 306 to 337, was born in Niš, in present-day Serbia – an area which is still outside of the European Community. During the Fascist rule, the leading Italian theorist of racial doctrine Julius Evola rejected the very idea of biological racism and theorized a doctrine of spiritual racism since he considered the existence of an Italian biological race an “absurd idea” (Evola 2001, 92; Pisanty 2006, 123–133; Germinario 2009, 99–109). Multiculturalism and multiethnicity can undoubtedly be considered permanent and fundamental characteristics of modern-day Italy (Guerra 2008, 68–77). According to press reports, during the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 some 25,000 North-African refugees arrived in Italy (Duvell 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; Kersten 2011). During this massive immigration phenomenon Italy and France agreed on a joint policy with the intent to put pressure on the EU and eventually label the exodus of these North African refugees as an emergency-situation (Allen 2011; Kersten 2011). Also the President of the Italian Republic Giorgio Napolitano highlighted the necessity of a common commitment of all EU countries in facing such emergencies (Libero 2011). Due to its geographic position Italy is still facing permanent difficulties most of all in controlling maritime borders. Also the issue of illegal immigration has been object of sharp tensions at national, EU and international levels. Italians have felt left

alone from the EU-community in the struggle of handling illegal immigration, as if illegal immigration was only a national and not a pan-european problem (Nascimbene 2008; The Economist 2011).

While Italy has been experimenting the *melting pot* society for 3,000 years, Finland, on the other hand, has been quite a closed society until the early 1970s (Koivukangas 2003, 4; Korkiasaari & Söderling 2003, 6). Finland has never experienced great flows of labour migration and with a small foreign population it has been quite a homogeneous society until the 1990s (Koivukangas 2003, 4). Still nowadays Finland seems to comprise an anomaly regarding its strong economy, but the absence of a high percentage of immigrant workers. With one of the strongest and most competitive economies in the world, it is surprising to see that in 2006 only 1,5 % of the Finnish labour force is of foreign origin (Capjon 2006, 13–14) and today there are about 80,000 foreign workers representing the 3 % of the total labour force. Since the mid-1980s the number of asylum seekers has increased in Nordic countries. They have been most numerous in Sweden, amounting to some 233,000 persons in 1989–95. In Denmark the number was around 55,000, in Norway 36,000 and in Finland 12,500 (Korkiasaari & Söderling 2003, 8). During recent years citizens of the former Soviet Union form the largest single nationality group in Finland today, Swedes being the second largest. In fact, many of the people in both groups are of Finnish origin (Korkiasaari & Söderling 2003, 8). Nowadays most of the immigrants in Finland come from other European countries: Finland is getting the highest immigration flows from the EU-15 and the second highest from EU-10-countries (Heikkilä & Pikkarainen 2008–2009, 32).

In terms of the composition of the immigration flows in Italy and Finland, the main difference consists in the fact that while Italy is highly exposed to immigration flows from the African continent with high rates of illegal immigration, Finland receives mainly European citizens. This is a crucial factor in terms of the immigrants' possibilities of integration into the receiving society. One of the most controversial cultural issues concerning cross-continental immigration relates to the women's rights and the very concept of family (like in the case of polygamy, banned in Europe while a completely normal cus-

tom in some African countries, for instance in Senegal) (Guerra 2001, 27–28).

There are also some great differences when looking at the two countries from the perspective of emigration. 26.7 million Italians emigrated abroad from 1876 to 1987, 14.2 million to European and 12.5 million to extra-European countries and, just to quote a famous example, more than 50 % of the current population of Argentina has Italian origins (Bacchetta & Cagiano De Azevedo 1990, 49; Guerra 2001, 49). If during the last hundred years more than one million Finns have emigrated abroad – nearly 500,000 of them before and some 730,000 after World War II – the great majority (73 %) of Finnish post-war emigration has been to Sweden (Korkiasaari & Söderling 2003, 3–4; Heikkilä & Pikkarainen 2008–2009, 31–32). If we consider that until the end of the 1980s, about 85 % of the immigrants coming to Finland were return migrants (mostly from Sweden) (Korkiasaari & Söderling 2003, 10) we can affirm that Finnish emigration is mainly a cross-border and temporary phenomenon.

Another feature that distinguishes the two countries is related to the different roles of Italy and Finland in European geopolitics. During the Cold War, while Finland was trying to balance between the Western world and USSR (Jussila, Hentilä & Nevakivi 2004, 237–288), Italy, on the other hand (albeit with the largest Communist Party in Europe), was one of the founding members of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1957 and of the European Economic Community (EEC). Finland joined the EU only in 1995, 6 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The differences in the historical role in the European unification process determine how the concepts of immigration and emigration are defined in the two countries. The Italians of today prevalently do not consider the flows between the countries of the European Union as emigration/immigration. Cesare Ghilardelli from Piacenza, an employee at the Italian cultural Institute in Stuttgart declares: “for us Italians, the emigrant is someone forced to move far from his home-country and seek for new opportunities, because of poverty or otherwise difficult condition. Nowadays, inside the EU, we cannot talk about emigration, but of mobility. Europe is a common house and Stuttgart is nearer to Piacenza than Naples” (PiacentiniNelMondo

2011). This point of view is aligned with King’s considerations about the new forms of European migration: as nation states become less important within the boundaries of the EU, the distinction between internal and international migration becomes blurred and less defined in the European context (King 2002, 92). From a Finn’s viewpoint it is doubtful whether, as a rule, the benefits to be gained by migrating within the EU area would be greater than those to be gained in the Scandinavian countries. Likewise, the Nordic countries are not seen as offering irresistible attractions to EU nationals looking for an employment (Korkiasaari & Söderling 2003, 11). But Finland still seems to have a certain appeal – at least for Italians. But is Finland ready to receive these “immigrants”?

### The presence of Italians in Finland

The first traces of Italian emigrants in Finland are datable in the period following the Protestant Reformation during which some Italians followed to Turku the princess Catherine the Jagiellonian of Poland (1526–1583), bride to-be of the Duke of Finland and future King of Sweden John III Vasa. Catherine’s mother was Italian, the rich and famous Bona Sforza (De Anna 2011; Guerra 2011a, 306). With the arrival of Catherine to the court of Turku a strong Italian influence livens up the city and a new period, called “Turku’s Renaissance”, begins. During this period Italian fashion and cuisine were introduced to the court of Turku (Possevino 1876, 37). The presence of Italians in the court of Catherine has been documented and we know the names of some of them, for instance Paolo Ferrari, the intermediary to the Pope, a musician named Giovanni, the cup-bearer Antonius Palma and the cook and sommelier Nicola Caldarolo. Other documented Italian presences in Finland were those of some highly specialized professionals: the architect Giovanni Battista de Pari directed the completion work of the Käkisalme fortress in 1586; the military experts of defense Bartolomeo Perato and Giovanni Battista Bresellesi resided in Finland in 1581; Antonio Rossetti, construction manager in Viborg, Savonlinna and Käkisalme in 1591, and the contract soldier Lorenzo Cagnoli in 1580 (De Anna 2011). Even if the

Table 1. Number of Italians in Finland.

| Year | Number of Italians in Finland | Males | % M  | Females | % F  |
|------|-------------------------------|-------|------|---------|------|
| 2007 | 1,775                         | 1,084 | 61 % | 691     | 39 % |
| 2008 | 1,948                         | 1,199 | 62 % | 749     | 38 % |
| 2009 | 2,140                         | 1,324 | 62 % | 816     | 38 % |
| 2010 | 2,323                         | 1,423 | 61 % | 900     | 39 % |
| 2011 | 2,447                         | 1,494 | 61 % | 953     | 39 % |

AIRE data 2011.

Table 2. The civil status of Italians living in Finland in 2010.

|           |       |
|-----------|-------|
| Unmarried | 1,547 |
| Married   | 608   |
| Divorced  | 80    |
| Widows    | 18    |

AIRE–Civil Status of Italians in Finland 2010.

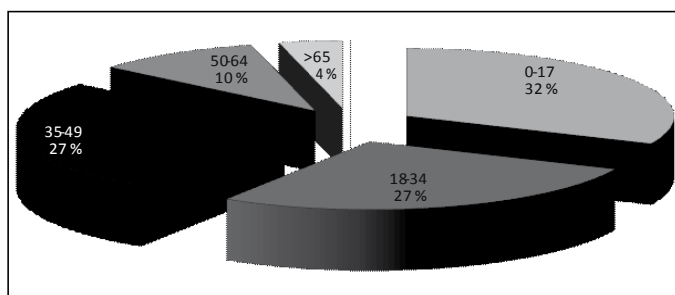


Chart 1. The age distribution of Italians living in Finland in 2010. (AIRE data).

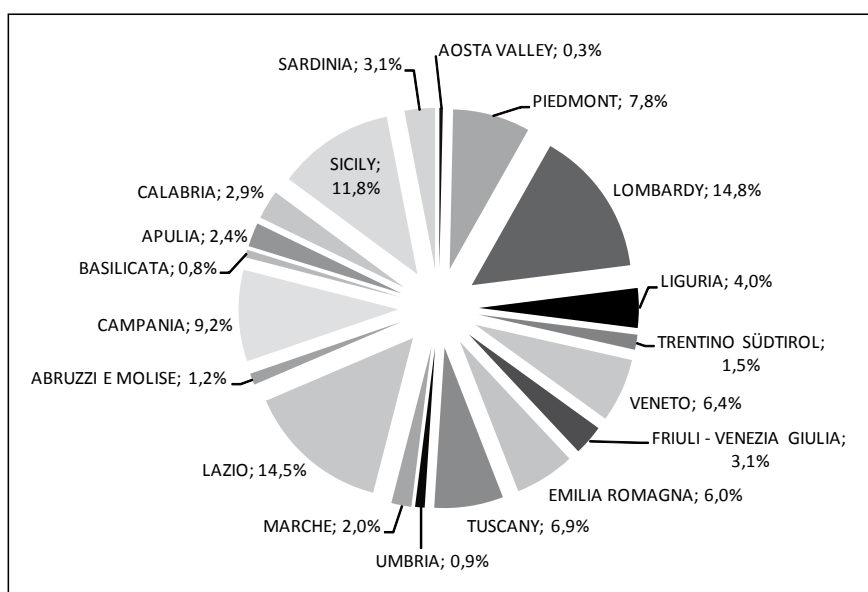


Chart 2. Regional Distribution of Italians in Finland 2010. (AIRE data).

presence of Italians in Finland has long traditions, there are not many studies on the subject probably due to the small dimension of the community.

According to the AIRE's figures in 2011 there were 2,447 Italians in Finland, of which 41,2 % female and 58,8 % male and with a CAGR (2007–2011) of 8,36 %. The Italian presence in Finland is slowly growing with a significative prevalence of males.

The AIRE data illustrating the civil status of Italians living in Finland in 2010 evidence a strong prevalence of unmarried persons (69 %).

The age distribution of Italians living in Finland in 2010 (AIRE data) shows the high prevalence of persons in working age. Italian migrants move to Finland in search of job opportunities or for professional reasons and the percentage of migrants in pension age is very low. The high percentage of unmarried emigrants in working age seems to suggest that the migration from Italy to Finland takes course in a crucial moment in the migrants' family and career development.

From table 1 and chart 1 we can assume that Italian emigration in Finland is mostly made of working age persons, prevalently males, looking for a job opportunity. The 32 % of migrants in the age group 0–17 also shows the presence of family migrations in which it is the entire family unit to migrate.

The regional provenance of Italians in Finland in 2010 (AIRE) evidences no significant geographical predominance between North (Lombardy), Centre (Lazio and Tuscany) and South (Sicily and Campania) Italy.

### Key motivations of Italian emigration to Finland

In two previous articles on the phenomenon of the Italian emigration in Finland (Guerra 2011a; 2011b) I have analysed the key motivations at the basis of the process of decision-making of Italians *intending to migrate* in Finland. Quite expectedly, the main migration-typologies were represented by the so called love migration and student migration, both important and ever growing categories among



sentation of text by frequency), the words “work” and “Finnish” result as the most used in the message board. The appearance of the word “work” is quite obvious but the word “Finnish”, mainly meaning the language, not the population, indicates how the language is perceived as the main barrier for finding a job in Finland. Going more in depth in the analysis and looking at the cluster analysis (based on co-occurrence analysis), 4 thematic areas emerged and put together they form the discursive space represented in the graph (Chart 3.).

The first thematic area of “Languages and competencies – *Lingua e competenze*” clusterizes the headwords of the posts of the Italians looking for a permanent job in Finland and those planning a student exchange-experience. Quite predictably many of the persons writing to the message board with the intent to possibly move to Finland make a brief presentation on their language and professional skills and experience. The linguistic competencies seem rather good in an Italian perspective and almost everybody claims to speak English and/or French. There is also a minority of Italians who claim to be able to speak German and/or Swedish. Students do not think of their inability to communicate in Finnish as a limit, since the knowledge of English is considered sufficient for studying in Finnish universities. However, those looking for a permanent job often argue that in their opinion and following their fiancées advice: “it’s difficult to get a job in Finland without knowing the local language even if you speak a good English”. This feature correlates with another thematic area identified with the cluster analysis, the “Working perspectives imagined by Italians – *Prospettive lavorative immaginate*”. As a consequence of not speaking Finnish, Italians are willing to accept jobs that are underpaid or below their degree of education. It seems as though for Italians wanting to move to Finland, love is more important than self-realisation. Another consequence of not speaking Finnish induces some to think of starting their own business as an easier option to a subordinate job. In the message board some even actually start to establish contacts and look for partners for a business venture. All the persons writing in the board describe themselves as willing to start to study Finnish as soon as possible.

The third thematic area is represented by the cluster called “Desire of Finland – *Desiderio di Finlandia*”. The keywords used to describe Finland as a destination are grouped in the cluster “Desire of Finland” which provides a more detailed description of the motivators at the basis of love and student migration. The desire to move to Finland for study depends mainly on four variables: the established brand of Finland as a country with a high standard of university education; the efficiency of Finnish university bureaucracy in comparison with the Italian system; the possibility to follow courses and give exams in English; the possibility to get a “simple but well paid” temporary job to cover the costs of the studies. Some of the persons willing to move to Finland to study have already had an experience in a Finnish university and therefore are willing to come back. Those looking for a job in Finland often have a Finnish fiancée and have previously visited the country more than once during their relationship. If love is the motive to moving to Finland it has also been the reason for visiting the country and making one’s opinion on the Finnish society. Finland is perceived as a welfare state endowed with a strong social cohesion, an efficient public administration, a low rate of criminality and corruption and an uncontaminated nature. These are the key-factors at the basis of the idea of migrating to Finland. In the absolute majority of cases Finland is not chosen spontaneously among other possible destinations but it becomes an option once other motives (love, study) have first brought the person to get to know and visit the country. Quite interestingly, Finland does not appeal in the same way to all Italians. For the Northern-Italians used to a high standard of social and economic wellbeing the Finnish attraction is represented mostly by the lack of criminality and the beautiful nature while for Southern-Italians Finland is perceived more as a place where to “escape” from a difficult everyday reality.

The fourth thematic area emerged in the analysis is represented by the answers and suggestions sent by the editor of the message board or by other readers already living in Finland (*Consigli dal web*). The suggestions are mainly technical. The most frequent suggestion being the advice to write one’s Curriculum Vitae in a more detailed way since Finnish labour market is highly specialized while the

Italian labour market appreciates multitasking and professional flexibility. But there are also some suggestions on how to integrate in the Finnish society. If many put in evidence how easy everyday life can be in Finland since the majority of Finns speak good English and the society is well-organized, there are also some advices on how to cope with possible difficulties. A Swiss woman living in Finland for many years, warns the readers of the message board to be aware of the apparent openness of the Finnish society: “if you’re blond you’re ok, otherwise they might call you *mustalainen*”.

An Italian moving to Finland should also be careful when offered a job since also Finns have learned to use illegal workers with no regular contract or national insurance contributions. Also, somebody mentions the fact that degrees taken abroad are sometimes underrated in the Finnish labour market.

## Conclusions

Love and student migrations are the foremost typologies in which migration from Italy to Finland can be categorized, but also cultural, social and political factors influence the decision-making process. The Finnish welfare system, together with the perception of a society characterised by a prominent social cohesion and a low presence of corruption and criminality, have an important role in terms of the appeal of Finland on Italians. The Finnish public administration and civil service are perceived as highly effective and if compared to the Italian bureaucratization they can easily become a reason for considering Finland as a destination. Other reasons for looking appreciatively to Finland are represented by Finnish sustainable urban development and environmental protection. Italy is strongly urbanized and has a high population density compared to Finland and the Scandinavian state is therefore perceived by Italians as a destination where you

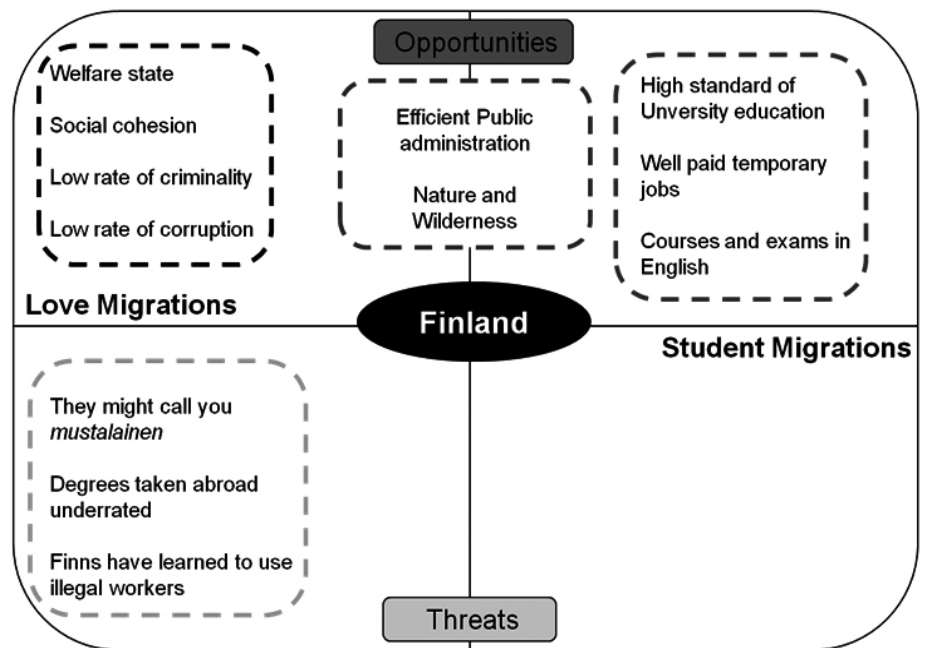


Chart 4. Opportunities & Threats scheme.

can live in contact with nature and wilderness. The decision-making process of Italian love and student migration in Finland can be represented in the following Opportunities & Threats scheme.

Italians do not consider moving to Finland as emigration but as a European “relocation”: “moving to Finland is not real emigration because we are all part of Europe”. Italy has been characterized by large flows of long-distance emigration and immigration throughout the ages. Italy has also played a key role in the European unification process from its beginning and therefore moving to Finland is nowadays considered as part of the European integration process, not “real” migration. Having a Finnish partner is also considered as a natural consequence of the European integration process and consequently, moving to Finland seems to be considered as a regional relocation in a “second home country”, not emigration.

In this essay I have examined the motivations at the basis of the decision-making of Italians *intending* to migrate to Finland but as we have seen, there are a few challenges in the integration process and it would be very useful, in the nearest future, to also take a deeper look on how Italians have actually integrated and how the early perception of Finland has eventually changed.

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## Instituutin henkilöstö tutuksi

### Krista Mielismäki, Tietopalveluassistentti

Aloitin Siirtolaisuusinstituutissa 26.3.2012 tietopalveluassistenttina. Olen aiemmin toiminut kirjanpitäjänä ja sitä ennen it-suunnittelijana. Viimeisin koulutukseni on tietojenkäsittelyn tradenomi multimediatuotannon suuntautumisohjelmassa. Sitä ennen aikoinaan suoritin datanomin ja markkinointimerkonomien tutkinnot. Lisäksi olen käynyt erilaisia kursseja ja lyhytkoulutuksia, viimeisimpänä kirjanpitoon ja palkanlaskentaan valmistavaa koulutusta.

Perheeseeni kuuluu avomies ja hänen 15-vuotias poikansa sekä kaksi koiraa, eli novascotiannoutaja Netta 11 v. ja borderterrieri Turo 6 kk.

Harrastuksiini kuuluu mm. luonto, liikunta ja lukeminen. Avomieheni innostamana olen päässyt kiinni vaeltamisesta. Olemme kolonneet kansallis- ja luonnonpuistoja, viimeisimpänä viime kesänä Lemmenjoki. Tänä kesänä suuntaamme itään Kolin suunnalle. Puolitoista vuotta sitten huiputimme maailman kolmanneksi korkeimman (3 718 m) tulivuoren El Teiden Teneriffalla. Ei, emme käyttäneet köysirataa, sillä olisi kyllä päässyt kätevästi melkein huipulle.

Lukemiseni keskittyy myös paljon juuri luontoon, terveelliseen ruokavalioon ja liikuntaan, mutta myös moniin muihin aihepiireihin. Kevällä ja kesällä vapaa-aika kuluu aina mahdollisuuksien mukaan mökillä. Siellä riittää puutarhatöitä ja nikkarointia.

Olen tyytyväinen tästä tietopalveluassistentin tehtävästä Siirtolaisuusinstituutissa. Toivon pystyväni täyttämään odotukset ja toivon, että minuun on helppoa ottaa yhteyttä aina tarvittaessa.

