

Three times higher unemployment rates among immigrants in Finland

Elli Heikkilä



The relative position of persons in the labour market is a central indicator of the social status of immigrants and ethnic groups and employment is, thus, the foundation for successful integration for immigrants. Both in Finland and in other industrialized countries, it is more difficult for immigrants to find work than for the native population, and the result is that the former often have many times higher unemployment rates than the latter.

The employment rate for immigrants has improved with the economic upturn in Finland. For example, during the deep economic downturn in 1994 the unemployment rate for foreigners was 53 per cent whereas it was 17 per cent for the total population, in other words, it was three times higher for the former. The corresponding unemployment rates in 2006, which represented much more of a balanced economic cycle, were 24 per cent for foreigners and 8 per cent for the total population. In 2010, during the recent weak economic cycle, the unemployment rate for foreigners has been almost 29 per cent, whereas for the total population it has been 8 per cent. Thus, the current unemployment rate for foreigners is still three times higher than for Finns and, nowadays, the unemployment rate has even increased somewhat among foreigners compared to the total population of Finland. There were, in total, 56 000 foreign job-seekers in Finland in 2010, of which the main part, 47 800 persons, had been unemployed during 2010. The job-seekers represented 180 nationalities.

Refugees, such as those from Somalia and Iraq, have faced difficulties in finding even a first job: their situation has not essentially improved during the different economic cycles, and is worse than for immigrants in general. Immigrants are sometimes ready to take a job which does not correspond to their level of education just to get the first step in the labour market and, through it, to integrate into the society.

Education is a very important tool and it empowers immigrants. Language education and language learning through, for example, so-called non-stop language education and through hobbies like sawing groups, food preparation groups and sports, are some of those tools. Further education to get qualifications updated in order to meet host country standards is important, and in this way society benefits from different kinds of professionals and their human resources in the labour markets.

Finland will need immigrants to compensate for the labour deficit due to the baby-boomer generation leaving the workforce in the next years. Finland needs immigrants for a variety of sectors, and competes for them with other ageing societies. It is essential to remember, too, that Finland also has immigrant labour reserves as discussed above, that is to say, unemployed persons and also those outside the labour force already living in the country. In terms of the age structure of the population, the share of persons aged 20–44 is clearly greater among foreign citizens than among Finnish citizens. The immigrants are, thus, of a favourable working age.

Sources:

- Heikkilä, Elli & Maria Pikkarainen (2008): Väestön ja työvoiman kansainvälistyminen nyt ja tulevaisuudessa. Siirtolaisuusinstituutti, Siirtolaisuustutkimuksia A 30. 219 p. Available: http://www.migrationinstitute.fi/pdf/Siirtolaisuustutkimuksia_A30_ESR.pdf
- Kervinen, Elina (2011): Ensimmäisinä ulos, viimeisinä sisään – maahanmuuttajien työttömyys kasvaa. Taloussanomien 5.9.2011. <http://www.taloussanomien.fi/uutiset/2011/09/05/ensimmaisina-ulos-viimeisina-sisaan--maahanmuuttajien-tyottomyys-kasvaa/201112432/12>
- Sopemi (2011): International Migration Outlook 2011. OECD. 451 p.