Alternative futures of second-generation immigrants on the Finnish labour market in 2020

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Abstract

Most of the second-generation immigrants in Finland are still rather young, but they will begin to enter the labour market in larger numbers within the next ten years. Thus it is interesting to consider their possible futures on the labour market in advance. This article focuses on the factors influencing the labour market performance of second-generation immigrants in Finland, and on the pathways to alternative possible futures.

The data for this study was mainly gathered by means of a futures workshop, a qualitative method of studying the future. It was supplemented by a questionnaire and interviews, and in total there were 13 informants.

According to the workshop participants the factors which most influence the labour market opportunities of second-generation immigrants are social networks, attitudes, structural obstacles, level of education, language skills, personality, appearance, and family. The scenarios created on the basis of the findings of the workshop and the questionnaire portray alternative futures, and show that positive as well as negative developments are possible.

The overall tone of the findings was quite optimistic, and there seemed to be a belief in equal opportunities. This is in contrast with findings in other European countries, and it would be useful to address possible problems before they become engrained.

As a result of higher volume of migration, the number of second-generation immigrants, i.e. children of immi-

grants, has been increasing all over the world, including Finland. Their acculturation is recognised as having a significant impact on multiculturalism in the receiving society. Performance on the labour market is often considered as an indicator of broader acculturation.

In this article second-generation immigrant is defined as a person whose both parents are foreign-born and who has either been born in Finland or who has immigrated here in primary school age or earlier. This definition corresponds with that of Portes and Rumbaut (2001, 23), and also has similarities with the general Finnish usage of the term, which refers to persons with immigrant background (Alitolppa-Niitamo 2004, 50). However, it should be noted that different definitions of second-generation immigrants are used in the literature.
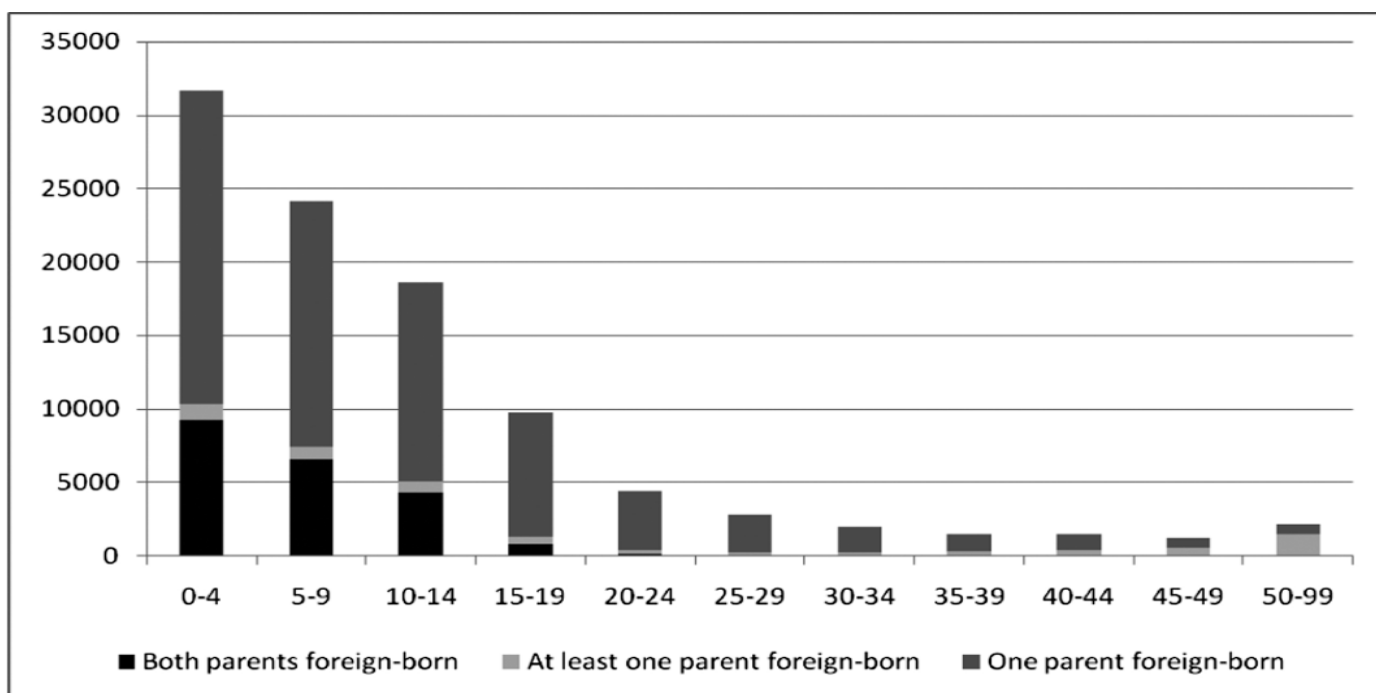
This article is based on my master's thesis (Second-generation immigrants on the Finnish labour market in 2020 – Alternative futures). In my thesis I sought the most important factors influencing the labour market opportunities of second-generation immigrants in Finland, explored the alternative possible futures and pathways to those futures, and analysed the results in the light of theories and findings of previous studies. In this article the focus is on the factors influencing labour market opportunities and on the pathways to alternative futures.

Second-generation immigrants in Finland

Similarly to many other countries, Finland has also experienced a rise in the number of immigrants, and a large majority of them are in the age group 25–44 (Martikainen 2008, 49). This age structure makes it very likely that they will set up families in Finland, which in time will lead to an increase in the size of the second generation.

Figure 1: People born in Finland with at least one foreign-born parent, according to age, in December 2007 (Statistics Finland 2008).

At the moment the second generation in Finland is rather small and varied in terms of their parents' origin. As can be seen from figure 1, second-generation immigrants in Finland tend to be very young. The peak of the Finland-born second-generation is in the age group 0–4, and similar tendency can be seen even if those people with one Finnish parent are included. Thus the labour market status of second-generation immigrants is to a large extent an issue for the future.

In terms of numbers, in December 2007 there were 21,429 people who had been born in Finland whose both parents were foreign-born. It is possible to add young immigrants to this figure and arrive at an estimate for the number of second-generation immigrants in Finland. By combining data from Martikainen (2008, 49), and Statistics Finland (2008 and 2009b) it is possible to state that the maximum size of the second-generation in Finland is 66,401. This number includes some people who have immigrated at the age of 13 or 14, and possibly also some immigrants with Finnish parents. On the basis of this data it appears feasible to assume that the current population of second-generation immigrants in Finland numbers approximately 60,000.

If children with immigrant background are classified according to their native tongue Russians, So-malis, and Estonians emerge as the largest groups. The number of children whose native tongue is Russian is almost twice the number of Somali-speakers (Kartovaara 2007, 23). When the whole population, not just children, is analysed, Russians and Estonians emerge as the largest groups, followed by English-speakers, Swedes, and Somalis (Statistics Finland 2009a). This would seem to suggest that the largest second-generation groups in Finland will probably be Russians, Estonians, and Somalis, although their precise shares are at present unknown.

Studies concerning second-generation immigrants in selected European countries

Immigrant youth in Finland have been studied to an extent, but there is rather limited information available on their performance in education, or on the labour market. The latter is to be expected, when the age structure of the second generation is taken into account. Second-generation immigrants and their performance on the labour market and in education have been studied to a greater extent in many other European countries. In a review of studies done in Sweden, France, Germany, and the UK four significant points emerged.

Firstly, second-generation immigrants faced some inequalities in all these countries. The case countries differ both in terms of immigration policy and in terms of the type of welfare state. The persistence of inequalities despite these differences would seem to signify that these factors do not determine the outcomes for second-generation immigrants. Secondly, second-generation immigrants often underperform in education, but much of this gap can be explained by their parents' socioeconomic position (see for example Kristen and Granato 2007). Thirdly, those studies which analysed labour market performance tend to show that second-generation immigrants are more similar to natives than their parents are, but that they still face some disadvantages not explained by differences in education (e.g. Hammarstedt 2009). Finally, in the studies that addressed the question, there were differences between second-generation immigrants from different backgrounds.

These results give some indication of what the situation of second-generation immigrants in Finland might be at the moment and in the future. However, there are some pitfalls in comparing Finland with these countries. One significant issue is that the number of immigrants and second-generation immigrants in Finland is still very low in comparison to these case countries. On the one hand assimilation, for example in the labour market, might be easier when there are only small numbers of persons with immigrant background, but on the other hand larger minority groups might increase the level of tolerance in a society. Another interesting issue is the long history of Swedish-speaking, Sami, and Roma minorities in Finland. The development of strategies to deal with these groups might have prepared Finland for immigrants. Thus the conclusions from other countries will probably not be fully applicable to Finland.

Methodology

The main data gathering method of this qualitative study was a futures workshop, which was supplemented by a qualitative questionnaire and interviews.

The most time-consuming part of the research process was the selection of the informants, who included both the workshop participants and the interviewees. I needed informants who were second-generation immigrants with some work experience, researchers studying immigration, or people working with immigrants. In order to find the participants I used a combination of direct contacts, contacting organisations, and snowballing, i.e. asking for suggestions of others who might be interested in participating. Over the course of two months I sent out a total of 83 invitations, and managed to get 10 participants for the workshop and three interviewees. The informants come from the three groups I wanted to include, but for example second-generation immigrants on the margins of society were not represented.

The workshop participants included two second-generation immigrants, one of Iranian background and one of Russian background. Both of them had come to Finland as young children. Three researchers participated in the workshop, and they specialise either in immigrant youth or in immigrants on the labour market. Three participants work with immigrants, either full-time or in addition to their main job, and one of them actually assists immigrants looking for work. The last two participants belonged to a mixed category, i.e. they do some research on immigrants and work with immigrant issues to some extent, but do not fall squarely in either group. The gender distribution among the participants was skewed towards women, as seven out of the 10 participants were women. The age distribution was rather wide, although the majority of people were in their twenties or thirties. The interviewees comprised one researcher on migration and labour markets, and two first-generation immigrants working with immigrants or immigration issues.

Before the workshop I sent the participants a questionnaire designed to gather information about the current situation of second-generation immigrants on the labour market. This qualitative questionnaire gave starting points to the discussion in the futures workshop and also left more time for thinking about the future.

The main method of data gathering in this study, the futures workshop, is a qualitative method of studying the future. It enables the participation of a wide range of stakeholders and offers many of the benefits of focus groups, such as the emergence of new ideas through open discussion. In the development of the futures workshop I took the guidelines set by Jungk and Müllert (1987) as a starting point. According to them, at first the problems related to the topic of the work-

shop are identified. The participants then brainstorm to create both solutions to the problems and alternative futures. The solutions explain the end state, what the situation is when the problems have been resolved, and can also be called visions. After brainstorming the visions and the futures are then assessed in terms of how interesting and realistic they are. Some of the visions are then discussed further and developed into strategies, plans of how to achieve the solution. The results of the process are generally published at the end.

The major modification I made was to remove the problem focus of the original approach, because very little is known about the labour market position of second-generation immigrants and I did not want to make unfounded assumptions. I also made the workshop a little more structured to allow for discussion of more factors in a limited time.

The futures workshop was organised in August 2009 in Helsinki. It began with short introductions of the participants, after which the main part of the workshop began. I had plotted the results of the questionnaire on a mind map, and I began by briefly presenting them to the group. The mind map was then filled with factors which might influence the labour market performance of second-generation immigrants. The next stage was narrowing down the range of variables to eight, manageable key ones. This was done by voting, each participant having eight votes which they could divide up or concentrate on their favourites. The selected variables were plotted on a futures table which was projected on the wall. The participants then filled in the table with different possible future states for each variable. As the last stage of the workshop the participants created alternative futures by selecting one state for each variable so that that together these formed a coherent future.

I was also interested in finding out how we could get from the present to those three different futures. In order to provide some idea of this, I created scenarios, i.e. descriptions of pathways to the future, to explain how they could be reached. Scenarios are one of the most commonly used tools in futures studies, as they are helpful in highlighting important crossroads and decisions that need to be taken. I got the end points for the scenarios from the results of the workshop, and the starting points from the results of the questionnaire, when possible. If the replies to the questionnaire had not covered a particular variable, I used data from the

workshop or from previous studies in Finland. I then filled in the middle stages of the development to describe the developments to 2020, and to form a logical pathway where the important choices and actions were clearly portrayed.

The interviews were used mainly to supplement the other data and to provide a broader picture, and their results are not included in this article.

Factors influencing the labour market performance of second-generation immigrants

The discussion in the workshop covered a wide variety of topics, but eventually these were narrowed down to the eight most important variables influencing the labour market opportunities of second-generation immigrants in Finland. According to the workshop participants these are social networks, attitudes, structural obstacles, level of education, language skills, personality, appearance, and family. 'Attitudes' refers to the attitudes of the population as a whole towards immigrants. 'Structural obstacles' represents factors such as language requirements for certain jobs. 'Family' is mainly thought to signify the role the family has in supporting the children in, for example education, and does not refer to the socioeconomic background. The meaning of the other variables should be clear.

One noteworthy issue is that the majority of these variables are those which influence the labour market performance of everyone, not just second-generation immigrants. Social networks, level of education, language skills, personality, and family background influence the labour market performance of all people to some extent. Even appearance impacts labour market possibilities for most people, although its role might be greater for people whose appearance is different from that of the majority of people. The variables which mostly influence the labour market possibilities of persons with immigrant background are attitudes and structural obstacles. This emphasis on factors which influence the labour market performance of most people could mean that the opportunities of second-generation immigrants are perceived to be equal to those of native Finns. Alternatively the emphasis might be due to the difficulty of focusing only on second-generation immigrants.

It is difficult to make definite claims on the basis of a qualitative study, and thus these factors should be taken only as an indication of potentially important factors. However, it is interesting to note that they correspond to an extent with theories on labour markets, such as Granovetter (1974) which emphasise the importance of social networks in finding work, as well as to findings of earlier studies on second-generation immigrants in Europe.

Scenarios

In developing the alternative futures into scenarios, one general assumption was that recovery from the current economic downturn would take time. This assumption was based on the experiences of the recession of the early 1990s which had long-term repercussions, and on the more global nature of this downturn, which might make recovery even more uncertain. The recovery might not, and hopefully will not, last until 2020, but it will probably influence the future path of the Finnish society.

The three scenarios represent the continuation of current trends, positive, and negative developments, as defined by the participants of the workshop. They are only some alternatives, and the real outcome will depend on our actions, but nevertheless these scenarios should highlight some possible outcomes of decisions between now and 2020. If more than three scenarios had been created, they would have shown a wider range of alternatives, and thus could have highlighted important features which might now have been ignored.

Scenario 1: A step towards multicultural Finland

The rate of immigration continues to increase and as a result Finland becomes more multicultural, although to a limited extent. Immigrants find employment more easily than at present because they are no longer perceived so differently from native Finns as they are today. This leads to the broadening of immigrants' social networks, which in their turn make finding work easier both for first- and for second-generation immigrants. In 2020 work-related networks have a central role when in comes to second-generation immigrants finding work. Second-generation immigrants also benefit from the much wider recognition of their good skills in Finnish.

An efficient campaign is organised against the anti-immigrant sentiments, and this campaign does not remain at the level of mere talk about tolerance. As a result anti-immigrant attitudes move more and more to the margins of society. In 2020 Finnish society exhibits both tolerance and attitudes according to which foreigners should adapt to the Finnish culture. Some employers still have doubts about hiring persons with immigrant background, and this resistance has been influenced also by the worsening economic situation. In addition to these issues, as multiculturalism increases, second-generation immigrants have to think about their identities and about their position in between two cultures in more depth. These developments result in the continuing importance of appearance in recruitment and make living in between two cultures a challenge also in 2020.

Even though there are several improvements, there are also negative developments. The government attempts to battle the economic crisis with actions designed to increase the rate of employment. These actions target the population as a whole, and there are no attempts to remove the structural obstacles faced by persons with immigrant background. Resources to combat falling out of the education system are not available due to economic constraints. As a result some second-generation immigrants perform well in education, but others fall outside the educational system. Even the positive attitudes of immigrant families do not help, since many of them are unable to find clear information about the Finnish educational system. Thus in 2020 the structural obstacles remain similar to those of today: the second generation has a fragmented level of education, and immigrant families are unfamiliar with the educational system.

In sum, the labour market opportunities of second-generation immigrants are somewhat better in 2020 because they can utilise wider social networks and language skills are not an obstacle to finding work. Nevertheless they face more structural obstacles and prejudices than the native Finns do, and this leads to weaker opportunities than those of natives but better than those of first-generation immigrants.

Scenario 2: Finland as a multicultural hotspot

The rate of immigration increases at a considerably faster pace than is the case at present and thus Finland becomes even more multicultural. Increased immigration and a challenging economic situation occur simultaneously, and this leads to ever more people searching for work and study opportunities abroad, and to increases in migration from Finland. In 2020 the role of transborder networks on the labour market is thus significantly greater than at present. The increasing level of immigration also leads to more contacts between native Finns and people with immigrant background. These successful encounters lead to better recognition of opportunities offered by immigrants. Therefore in 2020 multiculturalism is valued both in itself and because of the economic opportunities, such as beauty parlours offering exotic treatments, it offers.

Greater numbers of persons with immigrant background are seen in the Finnish media, for example as reporters, which makes ethnic diversity more of an everyday occurrence. Second-generation immigrants also begin to increasingly recognise the benefits they may gain through their knowledge of two cultures. This applies on the labour market, but also in the society in a wider sense. In 2020 the experiences of second-generation immigrants of living in between two cultures are an asset on the labour market. This increases their self-confidence, and the importance of appearance in recruiting is much smaller than today.

The public sector begins to acknowledge the fact that the Finnish society cannot afford to waste labour resources, and starts to develop measures to make it easier for persons with immigrant background to enter the labour market. The educational sector begins to develop effective means to prevent marginalisation of all students. At the same time the popularity of vocational training continues to rise. The fact that immigrant families may lack knowledge of the Finnish educational system is recognised and clear information packages about it are developed for them. As a result in 2020 second-generation immigrants continue their education either in institutes of higher education or in vocational schools. Their families still support the fast gaining of vocational qualifications, as these are thought to offer better opportunities on the labour market.

In terms of the labour market it is accepted that in order to recover from the recession, the labour force must be fully utilised. Thus plans to abolish structural obstacles begin to emerge. One suggestion is the removal of the requirement of Swedish skills for public offices. These actions are successful. In 2020 the labour market allows for multiculturalism to much greater extent than at present, and for example the requirements concerning Swedish skills have been abolished.

Overall the labour market opportunities of second-generation immigrants are much better in 2020 than at present. They face no more obstacles than the native Finnish youth because they have a similar level of education and equally wide social networks. They are also better able to utilise their cultural background, which improves their labour market opportunities in an increasingly international Finland.

Scenario 3: Anti-immigrant Finland

Finland is hit heavily by the global recession, while immigration continues to increase. At the same time immigrants are subject to considerable negative publicity in the media. The combination of these events leads to rising anti-immigrant attitudes and immigrants face more and more prejudices in their everyday life. In 2020 the Finnish society only values Finnish mainstream culture, which means that the society is mono- not multicultural. The government responds to the will of the people and focuses measures to increase employment rate on native Finns. This is achieved for example by setting up standards for language skills. Thus by 2020 more structural obstacles have been created on the labour market. These hinder second-generation immigrants as they try to find employment.

Persons with immigrant background are laid off much more frequently than the natives. As a result they fall out of work-related networks and their social networks become narrower in other ways as well. Multiculturalism is not valued and people, even native Finns, whose appearance is in some way unusual, face many barriers in recruitment. Second-generation immigrants encounter problems in education both in the form of attitudes and for example in interviews taken as part of entrance exams. The growing immigrant population is concentrated in specific residential areas, and because

of the hostile attitudes they face immigrant families tend to rely even more on each other.

In 2020 these developments have led to a labour market situation where the immigrant economy operates separately from the wider labour market. In the general market the companies have strict requirements concerning the appearance of employees, who must fit in with the company image. In the immigrant economy the situation is very different. Among the immigrant population the level of earnings has a central role because the Finnish social support system has been altered significantly as a consequence of the recession. In the immigrant economy the importance of immigrant networks in finding work is significant. Traditional skills are highly valued and second-generation immigrants tend to get their education through apprenticeship contracts. In the immigrant economy the minority languages have a key role, and for example the importance of skills in Russian is great. Traditional values, such as the central role of the family, are dominant also in other fields of community life.

In 2020 the labour market position of second-generation immigrants is considerably weaker than at present. They face hostile attitudes and considerably more structural obstacles than the natives do. They have employment opportunities within the ethnic economy, but finding work in the general market is difficult.

Conclusions

On a general level the findings of my research show a marked tendency for optimism. The labour market opportunities of second-generation immigrants at present were thought to be similar to those of native Finns, even if they might face some additional challenges, and there was faith in their future opportunities.

The workshop participants thought that the future labour market opportunities would mainly be influenced by factors which impact the labour market performance of everyone. This can be seen as connected to the optimistic tendency, and appears to signal a belief in equality. As the scenarios show, equal opportunities could be achieved in the future.

It is, however, useful to refer back to studies done in other European countries. In all the case countries second-generation immigrants have failed to reach

equal status on the labour market. In particular the connection between parents' socioeconomic status and the educational performance of children can lead to persistence of inequalities in further immigrant generations. This might be the case also in Finland, and thus it is useful to be alert to possible inequalities, so that they can be counteracted in advance.

The scenarios portray some alternative futures, and display possible results of different courses of action. If the possibilities of second-generation immigrants in Finland are really influenced by similar factors as native Finns, equality and successful multiculturalism can be achieved. However, it would appear sensible to study, for example, the educational performance of second-generation immigrants, in order to address possible inequalities before they become engrained.

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Apurahat – Stipendier – Grants 2010

Siirtolaisuusinstituutin 12.5.2010 rahastoistaan myöntämät apurahat.
Migrationsinstitutets stipendier för 2010 har utdelats den 12. maj 2010.
Grants for promoting and supporting Finnish emigration research have
been granted in May 12, 2010.

Niilo ja Helen M. Alhon rahasto, yhteensä 6000 €:

- **Hakkarainen-Hayasaki Niina:** "Japanissa pysyvästi asuvien suomalaisten työurat". 750 €.
- **Kanniainen Antti:** "Kansanedustajien mielipiteet maahanmuutosta uhkana ja mahdollisuutena". 750 €.
- **Koikkalainen Saara:** "Virtual fields: how to study a scattered migrant population online". 800 €.
- **Lammervo Tiina:** "Biocultural competence in the context of remigration". 1000 €.
- **Muhonen Anu:** "The Roles and Functions of English within the Multilingual Sweden Finnish Youth Radio Context". 800 €.
- **Tähjä Katja:** "Euroopan paperittomat siirtolaiset". 1000 €.
- **Virtala Irene:** "Ruotsinsuomalaiset eläkeläiset". 900 €.

Kaarle Hjalmar Lehtisen rahasto, yhteensä 6000 €:

- **Alanen Arnold:** "Wood, Stone and Earth, Finnish Buildings and Cultural Landscapes in North America". 1000 €.
- **Babicz Mateusz:** "Limiting the welcome. Polish and Finnish immigration to The Unites States in the years 1919-1925". 800 €.
- **Pitkänen Milla:** "Muistelmia amerikansuomalaisista kodeista". 800 €
- **Pitkänen Silja:** "Hiski Salomaan elämänkerta". 1200 €.
- **Saxberg Kelly:** "The Big Finn Hall" –ohjelman filmatisointi. 1000 €.
- **Suomen Siirtolaisuusmuseon tukiyhdistys:** "Suomen Siirtolaisuusmuseon Maailman Raitin kehittäminen Kalajärvellä Seinäjoen Peräseinäjoella". 1200 €.