



*Eveliina Lyytinen*

Postdoctoral researcher (Academy of Finland),  
"Action-oriented research on asylum seekers'  
deportability" (ARADE, 2018-2021)  
Migration Institute of Finland

## "Rebellious research" on deportability Combining *We see you's* core areas of academia, activism, and arts

I have been engaging in asylum and refugee research for the past decade or so. During my path as a researcher, I have been working on issues, such as labelling and categorization of forced migrants, questions of trust and mistrust among Congolese refugees in Uganda, the spatiality of urban refugee protection, and refugee background youth's integration in Finland. I strongly align with the key principle of not conducting academic research *on* refugees, unless the research is also inherently *for* and when desired also *with* refugees. Currently I am conducting research regarding asylum seekers' deportability in Finland. *We see you* is one of my project partners and we aim to co-conduct parts of this research together. Our ultimate aim is that through our joint volunteering, activist endeavors, and academic research we can co-produce knowledge for the benefit of the society – including deportees, asylum seekers, refugees, and people supporting them.

During the past years, the diversity and number of deportable people have been rapidly expanding in Finland. Deportability refers to situations in which people are living under the threat of being deported, even if the forced removal from the country never actually takes place or else it is enacted with a delay. The number of people living their everyday life undocumented and under deportability has been increasing largely due to the numerous restrictions in asylum policies and amendments in the immigration law that the Finnish government has implement-

ed. The government is thus producing precariousness and vulnerability when creating undocumented migrants and deportability. Asylum seekers' removal from Finland, and other EU-countries, has recently become a hotly debated issue in the society. Yet, research on deportation is still scarce in Finland, and there is an obvious need for more research to inform not only societal discussions and decision making, but also civic activism.

As a direct consequence of this recent drive to enhance the deportation machinery, Finnish society has experienced a spur of civic activism against deportations perceived as unjust. By creating different kinds of formal or informal networks, activists from different nationalities and of ages, genders, religious, ethnic and professional backgrounds have come together to take a stand on issues regarding deportation. Increasing numbers of asylum seekers have become activists themselves, aiming to support other asylum seekers and deportees. Activism includes, for instance, assisting asylum seekers and undocumented migrants in legal or practical terms, organising peaceful demonstrations to criticise deportation practices, and conducting various advocacy campaigns for political change.

Given the increasing number of unjust forced removals of the so-called rejected asylum seekers, a number of scholars in the field of migration and refugee studies, including myself, have begun to ask the question of to what extend is Finland breaching the inter-

national principle of *non-refoulement*. The prohibition of refoulement to a danger of persecution under international refugee law is applicable to any form of forcible removal, including deportation of asylum seekers. Not only researchers, but also other professionals, artists, activists and volunteers have begun increasingly to demand and act for more human asylum policies and practices. Thus, new initiatives where academia, activism, and arts are combined have emerged, one of those being *We see you* association. Likewise, many researchers in this field work in collaboration with artists and activists, and identify themselves broadly-speaking as scholar-activist.

As the existing deportation scholarship has largely focused on the structural analysis of deportation, critiques have recently emerged regarding the fact that deportation scholarship is in danger of losing its profound understanding of deportees' own agency in the matter. Hence, it is vital to study the bottom-up dynamics of deportation through multiple grassroots and local actors. I suggest that action-oriented research can help us in this aim of bringing deportable people and their communities back into the research. Furthermore, it can support us in problematizing the taken-for-granted labelling of migrants and to create positive change in situations of forced removals.

In line with *We see you's* approach, I combine academia, activism, and arts in this project (Action-oriented research on asylum seekers' deportability, ARADE, 2018-2021) by relying broadly speaking on the "rebellious research" approach. Rebellious research includes multiple different methodological traditions, but it commonly refers to research that encourages speaking out, enhances agency, and is essentially participatory. More detailed approaches can vary from seeing and listening in fresh ways, collaborating together to achieve practical aims, to commencing campaigns of resistance. All of this requires collaboration and solidarity between the different people taking part in the research project. The fundamental idea behind adopting a rebellious approach to research is to combine praxis and theory in order to have a positive impact for more human asylum and deportation policies, laws, and practices.

My strive to conduct a project on deportability and the related activism arise

from the asylum- and deportation-related injustices that I have seen and witnessed in particular over the past couple of years in Finland as I have been not only conducting research but also acting as a volunteer in different solidarity networks and communities. As a scholar in refugee studies, it is my privilege and responsibility to act for the better treatment of asylum seeker and refugees. I believe that not only activism and arts, but also academic research can explicitly signal the important message of "we see you".

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