

MirreM Data Collection – Country Context

FINLAND

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Date: 11 October 2023

Instructions:

Reflecting on your deskwork and fieldwork, please provide a brief snapshot (1 – 3 pages in total) of the overall picture of irregular migration data in your country. For each question, please address stocks, flows and indicators (or indicate N/A).

Questions:

1. *What is your overall assessment of the quality of irregular migration data in your country?*

The quality of contemporary data on irregular migration in Finland varies. There is a lack of systematic longitudinal data on the number of migrants present, and the data on migration flows is only partially covered.

Finland, as the northernmost EU country, is predominantly surrounded by the sea and has a tightly controlled eastern border with Russia, making illegal entry into the country challenging. Even in the case of legal entry, such as seeking asylum, and attempting to stay in the country after an asylum request is rejected, the conditions are difficult. Additionally, the harsh winters with several months of sub-zero temperatures necessitate proper housing, which limits the possibilities for unauthorized stay in the country. Moreover, the majority of municipalities have a foreign-background population of less than two percent, making it challenging for undocumented migrants, whether from the EU or non-EU, to go unnoticed in Finland. Furthermore, Finland has implemented robust administrative measures to combat the informal economy, further restricting informal work opportunities for undocumented migrants.

Until 2015, there were very few undocumented migrants in Finland, and no official statistics or evidence-based estimates of their numbers were available. Even after 2015, when tens of thousands of asylum seekers arrived in Finland, with more than 30,000 of them being rejected, it remains exceedingly difficult to obtain systematic data on the presence of undocumented migrants. The overall stock of undocumented migrants is perhaps less than 10,000 individuals, of which visa-overstayers make a slight majority, rejected asylum seekers a third, and the remaining are various cases including those arrived without legal consent. Of all these, less than 1,000 are non-deportable, i.e. their country of origin do not agree to receive them or the security situation in their country of origin prevents the implementation of their deportation or implementing the refusal of entry.

Concerning the flows of undocumented migrants, authorities do register the arrivals of the foreign-background population. However, the largest group of undocumented migrants in

Finland consists of rejected asylum seekers, followed by visa overstayers, and those who enter the country without the authorities' consent.

2. How is irregular migration data generally used in policy making?

National -level estimates of undocumented migrant populations and migration flows are utilized to address significant policy matters, primarily focusing on national security and the provision of healthcare and social services to the extent deemed essential. The local responsibility for offering education, healthcare, and social support to undocumented migrants is also a concern within municipalities. While some larger cities may resort to their own estimations to gauge the presence of undocumented migrants within their jurisdiction, systematic methodologies and longitudinal analyses are generally lacking. Nevertheless, in the majority of Finland's 300+ municipalities, the number of undocumented migrants is exceedingly low, often fewer than ten individuals, and in many instances, fewer than five.

3. How did you go about the data collection process?

Data regarding the foreign background population, encompassing arrivals, asylum requests, decisions on living permissions, and data from border and police authorities regarding individuals detained for deportation from Finland, is accessible annually through the Statistics Finland and the Finland Migration Service (Migri) databases. Nevertheless, these sources do not include data or estimations concerning the overall number of undocumented migrants in Finland, individuals who managed to enter the country without legal consent, or those who have overstayed their visas.

In 2019, we conducted an in-depth study of undocumented migrant populations in Finland, serving as the foundation for all estimations related to this group. (see: Jauhiainen, Jussi S. & Tedeschi, Miriam (2021). *Undocumented Migrants and their Everyday Lives. The Case of Finland*. IMISCOE Series. Springer. Berlin). However, it's worth noting that the years 2020 and 2021 were exceptional due to various mobility restrictions to and from Finland. Again, the security changes in Afghanistan and Iraq has meant that rise of non-deportable persons have grown in Finland, reaching perhaps up to 1000 persons. However, very recently Iraq started to take some rejected asylum seekers from Finland that was not the case in the past years.

4. Were there any specific difficulties you experienced during this process? How did you address them?

The data on migration flows were available to the extent they were recorded in statistical databases. However, when it comes to data on the stock of undocumented migrants, this information was largely absent, with only a handful of estimations provided by authorities, organizations, or experts from 2020 to 2023. These estimations generally indicated a total number ranging from 1,000 to 10,000, with the higher end of this range encompassing visa overstayers. Unfortunately, no detailed explanation was provided regarding the methodology or sources used to derive these estimates.

5. *What were the main gaps in the evidence base (i.e., unmet user needs) that emerged during your data collection process?*

As previously noted, there are no systematically conducted longitudinal analyses available for the assessment of both the stocks and flows of undocumented migrants in Finland.

6. *Were there any meetings with producers or users of irregular migration estimates and indicators that you were unable to secure, but sense that endeavouring to do so in future may be worthwhile? If so, please provide contact information for this person/entity and explain why you think such detail would be helpful.*

Only a limited number of organizations or experts have attempted to estimate the exact numbers for stocks and flows of undocumented migrants. However, when approached for clarification, each of them hesitated to provide precise information on the methodologies used to arrive at their respective estimations.

7. *Please point to an example of good practice estimating irregular migration and/or making use of estimates of irregular migration in policy-making that you came across. Why did you select this example?*

In Finland, there is generally a lack of established best practices for estimating irregular migration stocks and flows. However, in the late 2010s, we undertook a rigorous and exhaustive field study that allowed us to generate relatively precise figures. This comprehensive study involved various activities, such as contacting each of the 300+ municipalities in Finland and consulting with the individuals in these municipalities who possessed the most knowledge about the stocks and flows, seeking estimations for the current period and the preceding two years.

Furthermore, we conducted interviews with experts from various sectors, including law enforcement, healthcare, education, and relevant non-governmental organizations. Additionally, we engaged in over 60 days of field observation over several months among undocumented migrants, engaging in discussions with them on this very subject (see: Jauhiainen, Jussi S. & Tedeschi, Miriam (2021). *Undocumented Migrants and their Everyday Lives. The Case of Finland*. IMISCOE Series. Springer. Berlin.) To replicate such study would be useful each 5–10 years.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

I got some additional and new (2022 data) information that confirms my estimations - the information derives from the police, the border guards and the Finnish Migration Service

In 2022, Finland detected 1,190 (in 2021 1,090 individuals) who had stayed in the country in violation of entry regulations. This is the official information. However, a substantial portion of these illegal stays came to light during the permit process rather than through active monitoring by authorities. Many cases categorized as unauthorized stays involve minor infractions, such as brief lapses in permits, which are uncovered during document or permit updates.

The numbers sent to the Eurostat and those produced in Finland do not match as the police uses use different categories in Finland. For the national statistics, the police collects data that includes also asylum seekers who did not request asylum at the border but did that slightly later in the police station, for example. In addition, in the numbers that the police provides in Finland refer to cases and not to individuals, i.e. one person can be counted several times is that person is caught several times during one year. Also, if a group is caught, the that counts as one case.

Furthermore, in 2022, Finland identified 300 third-country nationals who were working without the required work permit. They might be included in the numbers of those without right to remain in the country.

In 2022, the number of new clients entering the Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking due to being identified as potential victims of trafficking in human beings was 367. They might be included in the numbers of those without right to remain in the country.

In 2022, the Finnish Immigration Service made a total of 2 790 refusal of entry decisions and the Police made 328 such decisions. The Finnish Border Guard refused or prohibited entry to 4 192 persons (in 2021, 3 181). Over 95% of cases regarded travel restrictions of Russians. The prohibition of entry decisions in 2022 was higher (3 609) than the number of refusal of entry decisions (583), thew latter regards rejected asylum seekers, usually.

In 2022 was made 1306 deportation decisions of which 95% regarded unauthorized stay in Finland, and the majority regarded former asylum seekers. In 2022, the number of people in voluntary return was 130 and those escorted by the authorities was 285.

I mean, there is some detailed information, and some is correct, other is not but the numbers are just tiny fragments in the overall picture of the EU. So far... as there is now some surge of asylum seekers coming through Russia. The national authorities decided to fully close (temporarily, for 3 months now) the main and most used border stations between Finland and Russia.