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**Finnish  
Emigration and Immigration  
after World War II**

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# Finnish Emigration and Immigration after World War II

## Introduction

A crucial period in the development of Finnish society has been the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation since World War II. While paying the war debt to the Soviet Union Finland was obliged to expand its industrial sector enormously. Economic growth was considered the fastest in Scandinavia. This, however, brought with it great societal changes. Internal migration, and emigration to an even greater extent, caused many social, cultural and economic problems.

In Central Europe people have only recently achieved comprehensive rights to freedom of movement. In the Nordic countries - Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden - a common labour market, a passport union and the agreement on non-discrimination and far-reaching social rights for people migrating from one Nordic country to another have been in place for four decades.

Since the establishment of the Common Nordic Labour Market in 1954, more than one million Nordic citizens have availed themselves of the opportunity to move freely in the Nordic region. A noteworthy feature of most of the inter-Nordic movements has been a high proportion of migrants returning to their country of origin. Moreover, since the early 1980s, the migratory flows between the Nordic countries have been comparatively small and have tended to balance out. Likewise, the migratory movements between the Nordic countries and other Western European countries have been rather small.

The only major exception to the balanced inter-country migration flows inside the Nordic region has been the substantial outflow of Finns to Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, as many as two-thirds of the inter-Nordic migrants since 1954 have been Finnish emigrants to and Finnish returnees from Sweden (see e.g. Fischer & Straubhaar 1996; Statistics Finland).

Historically, Finland has mainly been a country of net emigration. The turning point came in the 1980s when emigration reached its lowest post-war level, whereas immigration was very high. Until the end of the decade, however, most of the immigrants were Finnish returnees.

In comparison with the rest of Scandinavia, Finland has until quite recently been an isolated spot, virtually untouched by either global or European migrations. The situation, however, is clearly changing, partly as the result of pressures within the Baltic countries and Russia. In the 1990s, most of the immigrants have been persons of foreign origin. Consequently, the number of foreign citizens living in Finland today is higher than ever.

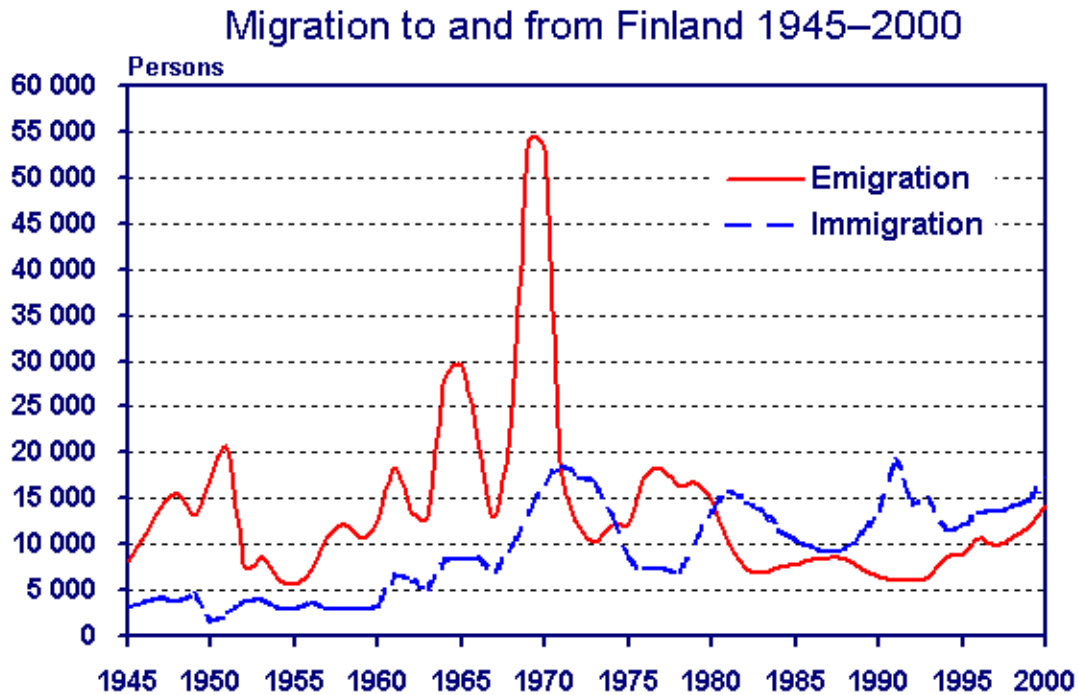
## Emigration

### Destinations and the individual motives for emigration

During the last one hundred years, more than one million Finns have moved abroad, nearly 500,000 of them before and about 730,000 after World War II. Before the war, the majority of the emigrants moved to North America and, after the war, about 75 per cent went to Sweden. Approximately half of them have returned. Emigration has generally followed economic development in target countries to the extent that during booms it has increased, and during recessions it has correspondingly decreased (Korkiasaari 1992 and 1993).

| <b>Table 1. Emigration from Finland in 1860-1999</b> |                  |                  |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| <b>Destination</b>                                   | <b>1860-1944</b> | <b>1945-1999</b> |
| Sweden   | (45,000)         | 535,000          |
| Other Europe   | (55,000)         | 125,000          |
| United States  | 300,000          | 18,000           |
| Canada   | 70,000           | 23,000           |
| Latin America  | 1,000            | 5,000            |
| Asia   | 500              | 6,000            |
| Africa   | 1,000            | 4,000            |
| Oceania  | 3,500            | 20,000           |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>476,000</b>   | <b>736,000</b>   |

Migration to Sweden - and formerly to North America - can most clearly be described as 'labour migration', especially in the 1960s and 1970s, since most of the movers were seeking jobs to earn a basic livelihood. Unemployment in Finland and better salaries in Sweden were the dominant motives for migration. In the 1980s this migration due to the economic reasons decreased noticeably. The main reasons for this were depression and structural changes in the Swedish economy as well as the narrowing of the differences between the Finnish and Swedish economies and standards of living. Therefore, today the motives for moving to Sweden are primarily non-economic or "personal" as they have long been in emigration to other European countries.



Source: Statistics Finland; Figure: Jouni Korkiasaari, Institute of Migration 2001

Only about 27 per cent of Finnish post-war emigrants have moved to countries other than Sweden. The majority of these emigrants have been women, especially as far as migration to Western and Southern Europe is concerned. These migrants have tended to be older and to have higher educational qualifications than migrants to Sweden (see statistics pages). Also the motives of migration have been quite different. In the 1980s, marriage was the most important individual motive for migration to countries outside Scandinavia. This was the reason for migration of more than half of the women, whereas fixed-period working projects, career advancement and desire for experimentation and variety were the reasons for the migration of the men. (Korkiasaari 1992)

According to Finnish statistics, the main target countries of emigration in 1980-98 were Sweden, in total 78,500 Finnish citizens, Norway 8,500, Germany 7,300, United States 6,300, Great Britain 4,700, Spain 4,500, Denmark 4,200, Australia 2,200 and Switzerland 2,000. The numbers of returning citizens from these countries were respectively: Sweden 100,600, Norway 5,700, Germany 4,200, United States 3,800, Denmark 3,500, Great Britain 2,400, Spain 2,400, Australia 1,400 and Switzerland 1200 (Statistics Finland 1980-99). After Finland joined the European Union, the emigration of the highly educated has increased during the last few years, especially to Central European countries. (See statistics pages)

In the beginning of the 1990s there were approx. 780,000 first- and second-generation Finns living abroad. More than 440,000 of them were living in Sweden and 220,000 in North America. If we include the third and fourth generations, there are at least 1.3 million expatriate Finns, 700,000 of them living in the United States, 100,000 in Canada and about 400,000 in Sweden (especially in the US the number may be considerably higher). It has been estimated that without emigration, the current population of Finland might be 6-7 million instead of the actual 5 million (Korkiasaari 1993). (See Figure 3)

## Reasons for emigration

In the 1950s and 1960s disparities in economic structures, income levels, social security systems etc. were great within the Nordic countries. The level of economic development in particular was much lower in Finland than in the other Scandinavian countries. However, it was not until the mid-1960s that the first major migration wave emerged, from Finland to Sweden in 1964-65. It was followed by a much stronger wave in 1968-70, taking around 100,000 Finns to Sweden, and causing the population of Finland to decline in 1969-70. Some of the underlying factors then were abrupt structural changes in the economy (rapid industrialisation and the decline of agriculture), the arrival of the post-war baby boom generation into the labour and housing markets, and widespread unemployment in Finland. At the same time there was a great demand for unskilled labour in Sweden. Moreover, moving was very easy, since there were no legal barriers to mobility as a result of the Nordic Common Labour Market. This was also facilitated by the fact that geographic, social, cultural and linguistic hindrances were relatively minor. In the 1980s the welfare gap between Sweden and Finland diminished, and returning Finns outnumbered the emigrants (See e.g. Majava 1977 and 1992; Korkiasaari 1985a and 1985b).

The case of Finland case illustrates that although wide differences in welfare and employment opportunities are a precondition for emigration, they are not a sufficient condition: the decisive factor is the demand for labour in the receiving country. The Nordic example also shows that migration and mass migration in particular depends largely on a country's level of development. As people only emigrate en masse when forced to do so by economic necessity, the probability of mass migration declines as economic well-being increases in the country of origin. The only time there was extensive migration within the Nordic countries was during the phase of massive industrialisation in Finland in the 1960s, when migration helped soften the blows of the development process (Majava 1992; Korkiasaari 1985a).

The establishment and completion of the Nordic Common Labour Market removed obstacles to mobility and encouraged return migration and even, in some cases, a second emigration. The risks and costs involved in migration were reduced. In turn, intra-Nordic migration became relatively more short-term than other international migration, and Nordic migrants were less concerned about assimilation into the host society and into the fastest possible social integration than some other immigrant groups; presumably because Nordic migrants did not have to sever their ties to their home countries (Fischer & Straubhaar 1996).

Emigrants to Sweden were and still are clearly younger on average than the population as a whole and more of them are male than female. To a somewhat lesser degree this applies also to other emigrants. While in earlier migration flows from Finland to Sweden migrants were relatively poorly educated and engaged in unskilled manual jobs, today's movers are typically better educated and more often 'white-collar workers'. In this respect they have started to resemble emigrants to Central Europe (Korkiasaari 1992; Fischer & Straubhaar 1996, Söderling 1996).

Unlike in earlier times, the migrant of today is well-educated and often plans on staying only a limited period abroad. Most of them move in order to improve their proficiency in other languages, for career development, for new experiences of life, or as a result of

personal relationships. Such motives have surpassed the motive of migrating to make a basic livelihood (Korkiasaari 1992).

New developments in emigration have caused discussion and some preliminary research of the problem of the 'brain drain' (Kultalahti 1994; Heikkilä 1995, Söderling 1996). It has been pointed out, however, that the emigration of a well-educated population should not be seen as a negative phenomenon only. On the contrary, for a small and rapidly internationalising country like Finland, these migrants can be an invaluable resource when returning with know-how and expertise in international business and foreign cultures. Besides, many of these people are working abroad in the service of Finnish companies or in governmental duties. On the other hand, due to their intellectual and material resources these people do not usually have any noteworthy adjustment problems in new environments.

As the process of integration in Europe advances and opportunities for studying and working abroad improve, interest in leaving Finland for Europe increases. However present estimates indicate that mass emigration along past lines is unlikely. The opposite is more likely, for with people coming here in spite of the ongoing recession, Finland appears to be changing into a receiving country. (Nylund-Oja et al. 1995)

## Immigration

### Some historical remarks

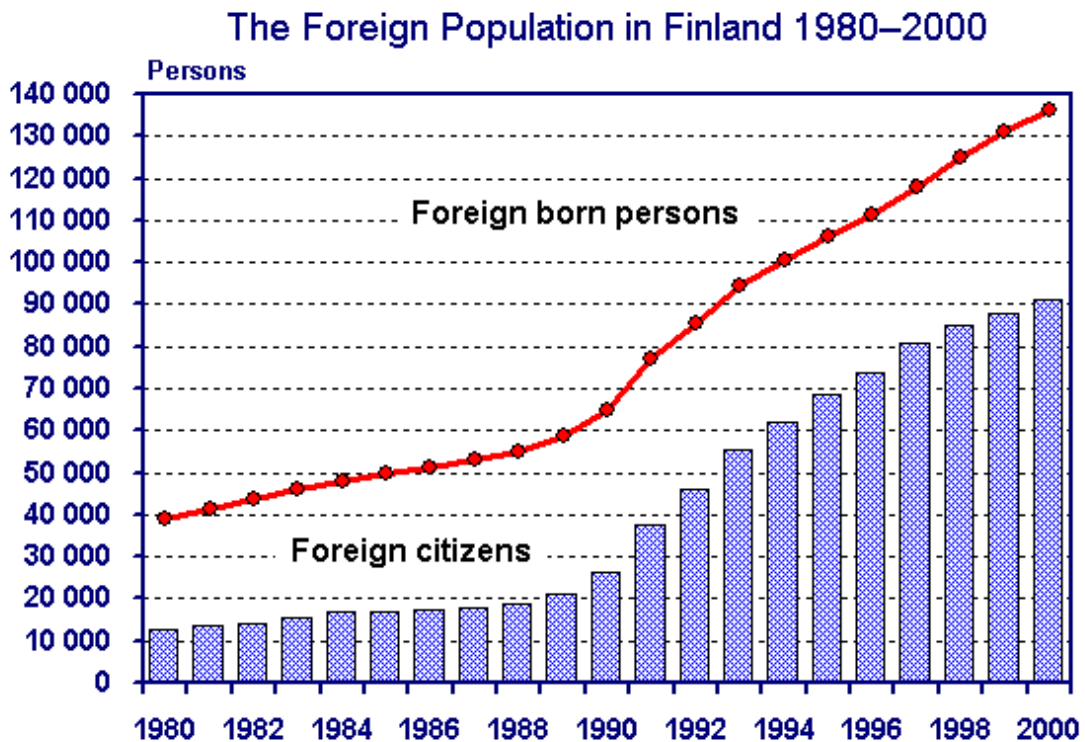
Between 1809-1917 Finland was an autonomous part of the Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. During this period tens of thousands of Russians, mainly soldiers, merchants, civil servants and tourists, lived in Finland as permanent or temporary residents. In particular, the Russian troops stationed in Finland considerably increased the number of Russians in Finland. In peace time they amounted to roughly 10,000; in times of war or civil unrest their number was naturally higher. Some of the Russian soldiers and marines decided, upon retirement, to remain in Finland (Nylund-Oja et al. 1995).

When Finland established its independence in 1917, there were about 6,000 Russians in Finland. After World War I and the Russian revolution the number of refugees from Eastern Europe in Finland was more than 33,000, half of whom were Russians. From 1922 onwards the number of immigrants decreased as many of the former Russian soldiers moved to the émigré Russian colonies in Paris, Brussels and Berlin. In the late 1930s the Russian community in Finland consisted of about 15,000 persons (Nylund-Oja et al. 1995).

From World War II up to the early 1970s Finland was a rather closed society and did not attract immigrants. Therefore, the number of foreign citizens coming to Finland was insignificant and they tended to stay for a short period only. The major reasons for immigration were studying, temporary work projects and marriage to a Finn.

## Immigration in the 1990s

Until the end of the 1980s, some 85 % of the immigrants coming to Finland were return migrants (mostly from Sweden). In the 1990s, however, more than half of the immigrants have been persons of foreign origin. In 1980 the number of foreign citizens residing in Finland was about 13,000, but exceeded 87,500 in 1999. Respectively, the number of foreign-born persons increased from 39,000 to about 130,000. These numbers include refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants as well as return migrants and their children with foreign citizenship. The total number of foreign citizens in Finland is still very small: about 1.5 per cent out of five million inhabitants, a lower percentage than in any other country in Europe. (Statistics Finland 1980-99; see statistics pages)



The reasons for increased immigration were partly international and partly domestic in origin. The collapse of the 'socialist' countries, civil war in the former Yugoslavia as well as the developments in Asia and Africa causing refugee problems may be taken as the major causes for migration of foreigners to Finland. A shortage of domestic labour at the end of the 1980s also had some effect on immigration, but because of the recession, it was very short-lived.

During recent years, the number of immigrants from the former Soviet and the Asian and African countries has increased rapidly. Citizens of the former Soviet Union form the largest single nationality group in Finland today, Swedes being the second largest (Statistics Finland 1996). In fact, many of the people in both groups are of Finnish origin. Russian Finns (also known as Ingrian Finns) are descendants of the Finns who in the 17th century settled in the lands around the present day St. Petersburg (when it was a part of the Kingdom of Sweden).

According to the 1926 census there were about 135,000 Ingrians living in the Soviet Union. By the Second World War some 50,000 had succumbed to Soviet power. During World War II tens of thousands of Ingrians came to Finland, only to be repatriated to the Soviet Union in 1945. They were not allowed, however, to return to their areas of origin.

Mauno Koivisto, President of Finland, brought up in April 1990 the issue of the Ingrians, calling them returnees with the same domiciliary rights as 'actual' returnees (the great majority of the returnees were emigrants from the 1960s). President Koivisto's statement started a movement that brought over 10,000 Ingrians to Finland within a couple of years. A similar 'return migration' of ethnic groups is also common in Germany (see Hall & White 1995, 147-152).

### **Refugees and asylum seekers**

The arrival of refugees in Finland from remote countries dates back to the 1970s when the country accepted the first one hundred refugees from Chile in 1973. Between 1973 and 1977 a total of 182 refugees came to Finland from Latin America, the majority of whom have since returned home or moved to another country. In 1979 Finland accepted the first Vietnamese 'boat people'. They were all placed within the vicinity of Helsinki. The next group of over a hundred arrived in 1983. Since 1986 Finland has regularly accepted a specific number of refugees according to an annual quota - about 500-1,000 people depending on the refugee situation in Europe. There are, however, far fewer refugees (12,000) in Finland today than there were directly after the Russian Revolution in 1917, when approximately 33,500 of them, mainly Russians, East-Karelians, and Ingrians, came to Finland. (Nylund-Oja et al. 1995; Basic Facts 1995; see statistics pages)

Since the mid-1980s the number of asylum seekers has soared in the Nordic countries. They have been most numerous in Sweden, amounting to about 233,000 persons in 1989-95. In Denmark the number was around 55,000, in Norway 36,000 and in Finland 12,500. The first 'spontaneous' asylum seekers arrived in Finland in 1990 (see Söderling 1993). After that the amount of asylum seekers increased rapidly, but during 1995 it dropped considerably - the reason being stricter control at the eastern border and by the redefinition Russia and Estonia as 'secure countries of origin' (Sopemi 1995).

Foreigners in Finland speak some 150 different languages. Women account for roughly half of the total, but the ratio varies ethnically: the majority of Africans and Southern and Western Europeans are men, whereas the majority of Russians, Estonians, former Soviet citizens, Filipinos and Thais are women (Statistics Finland 1996, see statistics pages).



| <b>Table 2: Foreign citizens in Finland by country of origin, Dec. 31, 1997.</b>           |               |               |               |                 |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| <b>Country of origin</b>   | <b>Men</b>    | <b>Women</b>  | <b>Total</b>  | <b>Males, %</b> |
| Russia   | 5 500         | 8 800         | 14 300        | 38.7            |
| Former Soviet Union  | 1 900         | 2 800         | 4 700         | 40.8            |
| Estonia  | 3 950         | 5 750         | 9 700         | 40.6            |
| Sweden   | 4 100         | 3 400         | 7 500         | 54.9            |
| Somalia  | 2 850         | 2350          | 5 200         | 54.7            |
| Yugoslavia   | 1 450         | 1 050         | 2 500         | 57.4            |
| Iraq   | 1 400         | 1 000         | 2 400         | 57.2            |
| Vietnam  | 1 050         | 1 150         | 2 200         | 47.8            |
| Germany  | 1 200         | 700           | 1 900         | 63,5            |
| Great Britain  | 1 400         | 500           | 1 900         | 73.2            |
| United States  | 1 050         | 850           | 1 900         | 55.6            |
| Iran   | 1 000         | 700           | 1 700         | 58.7            |
| Turkey   | 1 300         | 400           | 1 700         | 77.6            |
| China  | 800           | 800           | 1 600         | 51.0            |
| Bosnia-Herzegovina   | 700           | 700           | 1 400         | 51.1            |
| Thailand   | 150           | 850           | 1 000         | 14.0            |
| Other countries  | 11 200        | 7 700         | 19 000        | 59.3            |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>41 100</b> | <b>39 400</b> | <b>80 600</b> | <b>51.0</b>     |
| <b>Source:</b> Statistics Finland 1997; for more detailed statistics: see statistics pages |               |               |               |                 |

The foreign population living in Finland (1997/1998) can be divided into four main groups that partly overlap:

- People with Finnish roots (about 25,000 people). The majority of them are Swedish citizens in Finland, being former emigrants and their children (having emigrated in the 1960s and 1970s), and Russian Finns/Ingrians;
- Spouses of Finnish citizens (about 22,000; see Statistics Finland, Population 1997:14);
- Refugees. The total number of asylum seekers and refugees with resident permits is about 15,000 (17 % of the total number of foreign citizens in Finland);
- Labour migrants, temporary workers, media representatives, intracompany transferees, employees of multinational companies, exchange visitors (visiting scholars, students, trainees), family members (dependents) and others (estimated figure: 20,000-25,000). The number of actual labour migrants in Finland is small. Usually they live in Finland for a specified time only, often as employees of a multinational company.

Marriage has been one of the principal reasons for migrating to Finland. Approximately 2,000 aliens marry a Finn every year. In 1996 over 22,000 aliens married to a Finn residing in the country (part of them are of Finnish origin, however; e.g. returnees from Sweden and Ingrian Finns). Common-law marriages increase the number to over 30,000.

Up to now there has been no systematic recruitment of foreigners into the Finnish labour market. For those who are not married to Finns or who are not of Finnish origin, work permits have only been issued restrictively. Most of them work under a work permit issued for a fixed period. (Jaakkola 1991; Population 1994:3; 1996:6; 1997:14)

The majority of resident aliens are of working age, however. Their rate of unemployment has been higher than that of Finns since the 1980s. Today the total unemployment rate in Finland is one of the highest in the Western Europe. The high rate is related to a major economic recession in Finland. The unemployment problem does not seem to be disappearing very quickly and the integration of immigrants will suffer as a result (Similä 1996; Population 1994:3 and 1996:6).

British, North American, Japanese, ex-Soviet, and Western and Eastern Europeans had the highest socio-economic status in the 1980s. They were the most likely to be found in the primary labour market, where pay, promotion, influence and tenure are optimal. Southern Europeans, South Asians and Africans were more often to be found in the secondary labour market, where pay, socio-economic status and housing conditions are inferior.

The most common occupations among foreigners were at that time language teaching and music. Although they only account for a low percentage of the employed foreigners, among certain nationalities the figure is quite high. Language teachers are often British or French, and musicians Eastern Europeans. Germans and the Swiss were most likely to be found in managerial posts in business and commerce, while Southern Europeans, Africans and South Asians, notably the Vietnamese, were more often working in industry or low-paid service occupations (Jaakkola 1991; Nylund-Oja et al. 1995; Population 1994:3 and 1996:6).

Regionally immigrants have concentrated in big cities. Half of the alien population in Finland resides in Uusimaa, mostly in the metropolitan area.

## **Present trends and future possibilities**

Despite record high unemployment in Finland in recent years, emigration has been very low. In former decades such a situation has caused heavy emigration. The main explanation for the reverse being true is that unemployment rates are high in almost every country to which Finns could move. Thus, there is a lot of "push" in Finland but very little "pull" in potential target countries. This, of course, very effectively prevents emigration. Today, emigration is a realistic alternative mainly to highly skilled and educated people, and even for them it is often only temporary. Also in the foreseeable future the

demand for labour is likely to stay low and unemployment high. For this reason, emigration cannot significantly increase in the coming years.

Motives for emigration are likely to continue to be "personal" and "goal-oriented", i.e. motivated by studies, marriage abroad, career advancement, desire for adventure, etc. Large-scale labour migration for economic reasons such as unemployment or a better livelihood, i.e. "forced" migration, is unlikely. There may, however, be demand for labour in certain specific occupations like nursing and the construction building industry where some Finns may find a job abroad. All this, of course, applies to emigrants from other countries as well.

With some temporary exceptions, labour migration across national boundaries has so far been fairly limited within the countries of the European Union. There seems to be a consensus among the experts that the ongoing European integration is unlikely to give rise to any considerable migratory movements between the member countries in the future, either. From a Finn's viewpoint, for example, it is doubtful whether, as a rule, the benefits to be reaped 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 seeking work/employment (See e.g. Fischer & Straubhaar 1996).

So far the political reshaping of Europe has exerted a rather limited impact on population movements in Finland and other Nordic countries. Since the late 1980s, the strongest migratory pressure has been felt from the Third World, in the form of refugees and asylum seekers. However, possible adverse developments in Eastern Europe could change the situation at a short notice.

The extent of Finnish immigration and emigration in the 1990s depends mainly on domestic and international economic development, European integration, the course of events in Eastern Europe, and the problems of the developing countries possibly reaching an acute stage. The migration of Finnish citizens depends mainly on the economic situation. At this very moment there are emigration pressures which cannot, however, be discharged because of economic recession in the target countries. When the recession decreases, there will be an increase in the amount of temporary, mainly educated labour going abroad in search of work. In view of the present situation, the mass emigration of former times will not be possible.

It is quite likely that although labour immigration will be minimal in the future, other types of immigrants including those entering Finland for family reunification will be arriving continuously. Hence, the composition of the immigrant population will change in terms of national origin, motives for arrival, etc. Thus, also Finland will host a considerable number of resident aliens in the future. Therefore, social and cultural problems relating to ethnic minorities will become more acute and diverse.

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- **Suomalaiset maailmalla** (Suomen siirtolaisuus kautta aikain)
- **Maastamuuttomaasta maahanmuuttomaaksi** (Suomen siirtolaisuus 1980- ja 1990-luvulla)
- **Suomalaisten maastamuutto 1980- ja 1990-luvulla**

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