

Changing influx of asylum seekers – The Finnish response

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Changing Influx of Asylum Seekers 2014-2016: National report of Finland

- Synthesis Report: The changing influx of asylum seekers in 2014-2016: Member State responses – published in Sept 2018
- **Findings of the Finnish national contribution**
 - Legislative and policy changes
 - Cooperation at national level and international level
 - The national response to the influx
 - Law enforcement and border control
 - Reception services
 - Registration procedure
 - Asylum procedure
 - Good practices and challenges

The national context: Asylum seekers to Finland in 2014-2016

The number of asylum applications in Finland:

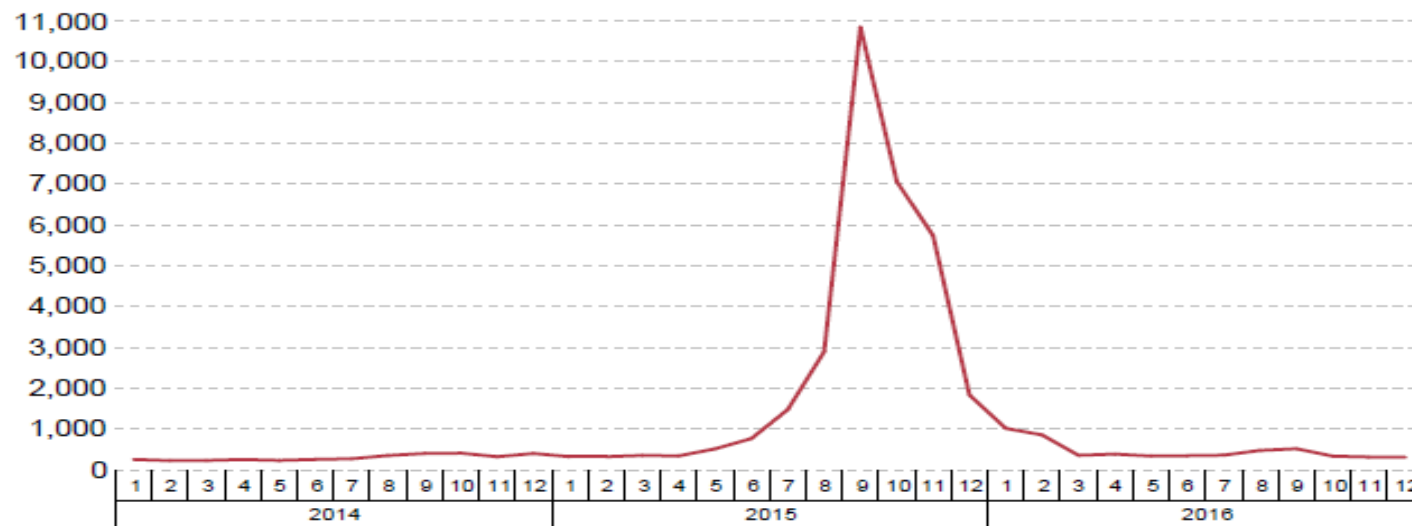
❖ 2014 → 3,651

❖ 2015 → 32,476

❖ 2016 → 5,651

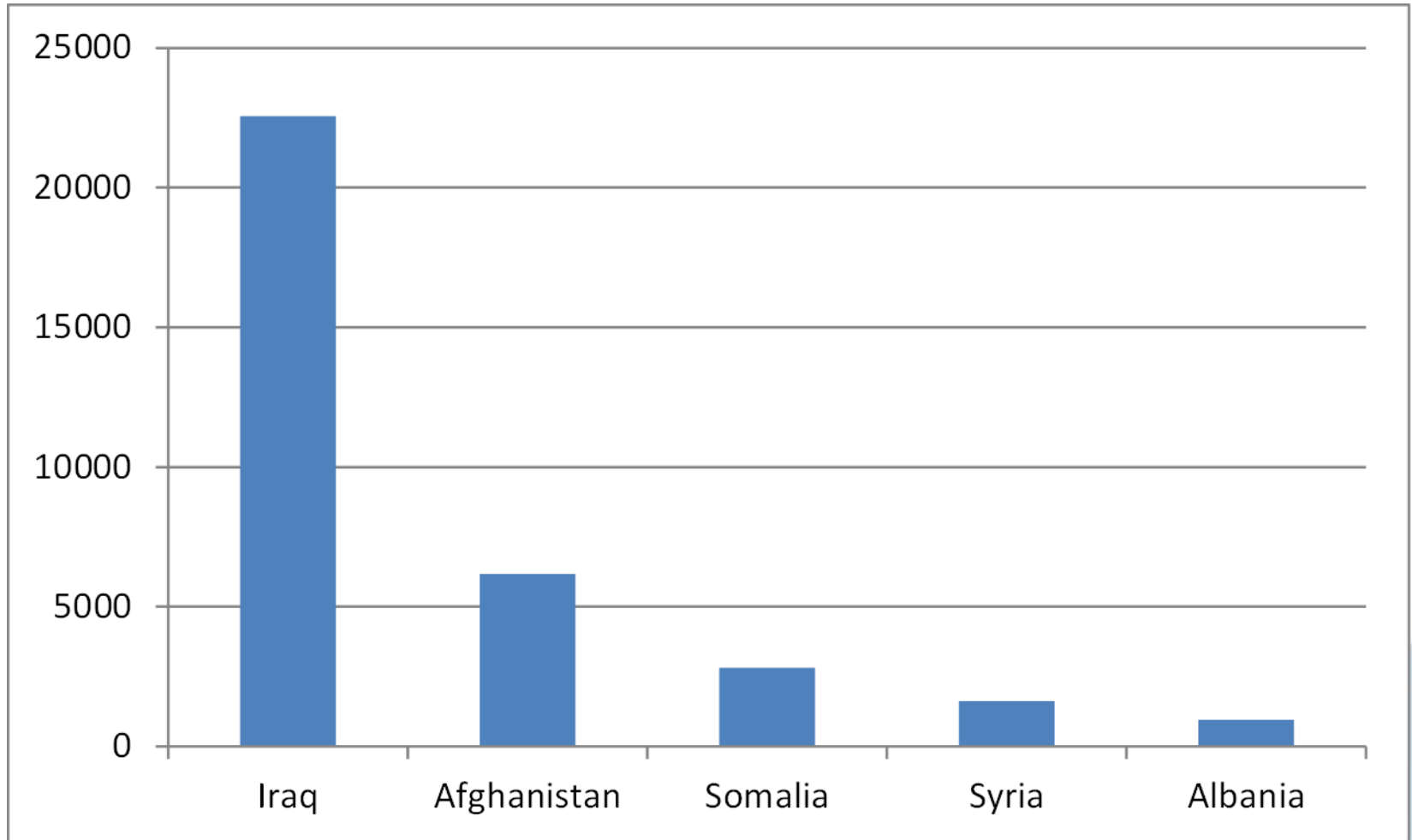
Monthly numbers of asylum applications in 2014-2016

Asylum seekers to Finland 2014-2016



Source: Finnish Immigration Service

Top 5 nationalities of asylum seekers in 2014-2016



The national context: Finland before the influx

- Even before the influx, there had been measures to improve the **efficiency of the asylum process**
- The **Government Programme** May 2015
 - managed migration, prevention of abuses
 - efficient asylum procedure and return
 - measures to enhance integration
- Legislation
 - Aliens Act § 133 : **Registering a large number of persons** entering the country simultaneously
 - Act on the Reception of Persons Applying for International Protection § 12: **Reception in a large-scale influx**; registration centre, contingency plans
- **Reception capacity** for circa 4,000 asylum seekers

What happened in autumn 2015?

- **Large-scale influx of migrants** mainly through **northern Sweden**
- Increase in numbers of asylum seekers **from Russia** through the northern border crossing points
- There was **not enough capacity** for
 - Accommodation and other reception services
 - Monitoring of foreign nationals
 - Registration of migrants entering the country
 - Asylum interviews
- The **regional contingency plans** did not meet the needs

The Finnish response: Policy and legislation

- **Government migration policies** published Sept 2015
- **Government action plan on asylum policy** Dec 2015
 - short-term aims: bring the influx of asylum seekers and costs of the asylum process under control
 - long-term aims: cost-effective and flexible reception capacity, efficient asylum and return processes, effective integration
- **Legislative changes**
 - removal of humanitarian protection as a national residence permit category (+ updating country guidelines Iraq/Afg/Som)
 - asylum seekers' right to State-funded legal aid restricted and appeal period shortened
 - family reunification of beneficiaries of international protection: sponsor needs to have secure means of support (ex. refugees)

Cooperation at national and international level

National level

- Operational cooperation group: Finnish Immigration Service, the police, the Finnish Border Guard and reception centres
- Ministry of the Interior's crisis management group
- The ministerial working group on migration
- Practical cooperation intensified between the authorities and the Finnish Red Cross
- Reception Unit cooperated with Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and National Institute for Health and Welfare.

International level

- Situation was discussed in EU-level & Nordic cooperation
- Finland participated in intra-EU relocation and operations of EASO & Frontex

Managing the influx of asylum seekers: Reducing pull-effect

- **Measures aiming to stem the influx**
 - International cooperation
 - Information campaign by Ministry for Foreign Affairs
 - Changing legislation
 - humanitarian protection removed
 - further requirements for family reunification
- **Difficult to evaluate** what impact these measures had
- The numbers diminished due to EU external/internal border control, especially **border controls** at Denmark-Sweden border
- The disillusionment of applicants: many **cancelled their applications** and returned home

Managing the influx of asylum seekers

- Intensified **monitoring of foreign nationals** at border areas and within the country (police/Border Guard)
 - manage irregular entry, direct migrants to register their asylum applications
 - Finland did not introduce internal Schengen border controls
- **Registration centre** established in Tornio
 - Majority of the applicants in 2015 crossed the land border between Sweden and Finland in Haparanda-Tornio
 - Registration of application before moving to reception center
 - Also asylum investigations conducted
 - Applicants directed at reception centres in an organised manner
 - The number of migrants entering and residing irregularly in Finland was kept under control

Managing the influx of asylum seekers

- **Reception capacity:** from 20 units to 227 units
 - Coordinated by Finnish Immigration Service (Migri)
 - Mainly managed by Finnish Red Cross, also private operators
 - All **applicants were accommodated** and provided with services
- **Situation centre** established at Migri
 - **coordinate** the asylum seekers' accommodation situation
 - compile up-to-date **statistics**
 - managing the capacity and transfers to reception centres
 - overview of the asylum process to relevant authorities

Managing the influx of asylum seekers: The asylum process

- **Recruitment efforts** at the Finnish Immigration Service
 - Asylum Unit: nearly 500 new officials
- **Organisational changes** within the asylum unit; new regional offices
- The whole asylum investigation process was transferred from the police and Border Guard to Migri
- Asylum interviews and decisions were developed and **streamlined**
- Electronic processing of applications, automation **developed**
- All **asylum applications processed** according to Aliens Act

Good practices and current challenges

- **Good practices:**
 - Measures of police and Border Guard: managing entry
 - Cooperation between registration centre & situation centre
 - Crisis management group / Ministry of the Interior
 - **Contingency plans** in place, practicing in advance
 - Registration centre operations within 48 hours
- **Current challenges**
 - Appeals process congested
 - Number of subsequent applications grown
 - Rejected asylum applicants who cannot be returned a new group of irregular migrants in Finland

Thank you!

Read the whole Finnish report at:

www.emn.fi/raportit/uusimmat_raportit

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