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Going home

Practical advise for a returnee



European Refugee Fund

VOLUNTARY, SAFE AND DIGNIFIED REPATRIATION

Have you ever thought about returning to your old home? Every refugee is entitled to return and every refugee should have an opportunity to exercise this right.

Finland supports refugee repatriation according to the recommendations of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration IOM. These recommendations require refugee repatriation to be voluntary, safe and dignified.

You are the one who decides on whether or not to return no public authority can make this decision for you. Your decision to return must be based on accurate and current information about the security situation in your homeland. You should also find out just how your return would affect the right of you and your family to live in Finland.

This brochure will guide you in the early stages of considering repatriation. It pro-

vides general hints on matters that are worth thinking about and investigating if you choose to return. There is a saying in Finland that well planned is half done. Successful repatriation requires careful consideration and weighing up of various options. While you can never have too much information, knowledge alone is not enough without courage and determination. And of course after careful consideration you may be even more convinced that your best strategy is to stay in Finland.

Details of the refugee repatriation scheme are available from your local authority refugee worker, from other public authorities and from other returnees. To complement the Brochure a video, entitled "Going Home" has also been produced. The video can be lent by the IOM Helsinki office and is available in Albanian, Bosnian, English, Kurdish, Finnish and Russian languages.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR REPATRIATION ASSISTANCE?

You may be eligible for repatriation assistance **if you are covered by the refugee reception scheme and have not become a Finnish citizen.**

When applying for assistance you must be able to provide **the precise address in your homeland** to which you will move. If, for some reason, you cannot



return to your former home, then you must provide details of any temporary accommodation arrangements (e.g. a temporary shelter or collective centre).

Your travel documents must be in order. This means that you must have a valid passport or other travel document approved by the authorities in your homeland. If you arrange your return journey yourself, then you must also state your travel itinerary and apply for any necessary transit visas. If, instead, you choose to use the services of the International Organisation for Migration IOM, then you will be assisted where necessary in arranging your travel documents.

It is also a condition of receiving repatriation assistance that you have **put your affairs in order in Finland.** This

means, for example, that you should not be involved in any pending criminal or other legal proceedings. Similarly, in case of divorce all child custody issues must be settled to the satisfaction of all parties involved before you leave.

Your repatriation will be assisted only if you move **voluntarily and safely.** Finland only supports the repatriation of refugees to regions that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR has classified as safe. You should also consider the safety of your return from the personal perspective of yourself and your family. Will your ethnic background or political sympathies, your social position or your refugee status jeopardise your personal safety when you return to your homeland

WHAT EXPENSES ARE COVERED BY REPATRIATION ASSISTANCE?

The Finnish State will support you financially if you wish to return permanently to your homeland or to the country from which you came to Finland. This support is called repatriation assistance [*paluumuuttoavustus*], and is granted by the local authority social worker responsible for refugee affairs. No repatriation assistance can be granted for temporary visits to your homeland.

Repatriation assistance may be granted to cover the **travelling expenses to your homeland by the cheapest form of transport**. You may arrange the journey yourself or ask your local authority social worker or the International Organisation for Migration IOM for help in arranging your travel

Extraordinary removal expenses are not covered by repatriation assistance. You may take with you as much luggage

as the transport company allows at no extra charge. In certain cases, however, you may be compensated **for transporting to your homeland appliances that are essential for your health**. If you are disabled, then you may also be compensated for the costs of arranging for an escort to accompany you on the journey.

A special cash grant is paid to support you **in resettling in your homeland**. If you move alone, then this grant may not exceed the sum payable in basic subsistence allowance [*toimeentulotuen perusosa*] for a period of two months. A repatriated family may be granted a maximum of four months basic subsistence allowance. This sum will generally be paid to you in Finland just before you leave. You can receive repatriation assistance only once.

TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

You must arrange your passport or other travel documents well in advance. In other respects you may agree on the travel arrangements with your local social worker.

The International Organisation for

Migration IOM can provide services for your journey home. To apply for this assistance you should ask your local social worker to help you complete the IOM voluntary return form, in which you provide a formal declaration that you are returning to your homeland voluntarily.

The social worker will send the completed form and copies of your travel documents to the office of the IOM in Helsinki, which will then take care of your travel arrangements. If you do not have the necessary travel documents, then the IOM will help you to get them. The IOM will also take care of further communications with your future domicile. Should you so wish, the IOM staff will help you during embarkation check-in in Finland, in transit countries or on arrival in your homeland. If you have any worries about the effects of travelling on your health, then an escort may be arranged to accompany you on the journey.

If you choose **to arrange the journey yourself**, then in addition to other travel arrangements you must apply for any transit visas that you may need on your chosen route. If you intend to take with you more than the maximum passenger luggage allowance, then you must arrange your own freight transport and pay the costs of this. Your local authority may require you to provide a written statement that you are moving to your homeland voluntarily and that you are aware of other aspects of your repatriation. You must likewise notify your social worker of your intended travel itinerary

HOW SHOULD I PREPARE MYSELF MENTALLY FOR REPATRIATION?

It may be that you once had to leave your homeland in a great hurry and that you remember very little of your departure. Perhaps for this reason it may be worthwhile now taking the time to consider carefully what Finland has meant to you. What kind of person have you become during your years in Finland? What kind of family have you become? What do you think you might miss about Finland when you have returned to your homeland? Questions like this are worth settling in your mind.

It may be that farewells are largely symbolic to you as an adult, while your children will probably view them in much more concrete terms. Saying a clear "goodbye" to friends and familiar places



can help a child to draw a distinction between the old and the new. Your child is not necessarily returning to a homeland, but moving to a quite new environment.

It is also important that before you leave Finland you consider the main changes that have occurred in yourself, in your attitudes and in the social system of your homeland. Prepare yourself for the time when you set foot on your native soil: how will you react to the familiar smells, sounds and sights with the accompanying memory of the fears, pain and stress that caused you to leave in the first place? It is quite natural for such a return to stir up confused and conflicting feelings. On the one hand you may be pleased to be able to meet relatives and friends again after many years. On the other hand, however, you may be intimidated by the changes that have occurred

WHAT PRACTICAL PREPARATIONS SHOULD I MAKE FOR RETURNING TO MY HOMELAND?

If **your old home** has been destroyed or has been occupied by someone else, then before you leave Finland you may take steps to find a new dwelling or to reclaim your old one.

It will not be easy for you **to find a job** in your homeland while you are in Finland. However, you can explore various options in advance. Your chances of finding work will be better if you have

in your surroundings, in other people and above all in yourself. You may feel like an outsider because you are unable to share in the common experiences of those who remained in your homeland during wartime. You may also find that others fail to understand your experiences in Finland. People may envy you because they imagine that you led an easy and affluent life in Finland. At worst you may be treated as a deserter.

Adapting to a new life takes time and there are no short cuts. You will have an advantage, however, if you and your family can prepare for the ups and downs of resettling in your homeland before you leave Finland. Sooner or later everyday life will return to normal and you will strike a balance between the old and the new.

educated yourself while in Finland and completed on-the-job training. If, on the other hand, you are thinking of setting up a business, then before you leave Finland you can investigate various forms of finance for securing start-up capital and equipment. Whatever you do, it will be important to get all of your educational and employment certificates translated into the official language of your homeland.



If you have **children of school age**, then you should prepare them for repatriation well in advance. It is important to involve your children in planning your return from the very beginning. This will help them to appreciate that this is also a matter of importance in their own lives. A move to completely new surroundings can be difficult for children at first, particularly if they were born and grew up in Finland. The Finnish school system, for example, may differ considerably from the corresponding system in your homeland. Your children will find it easier to adapt because they will be able to manage in their native language. It is also a good idea to time your return so that your children have time to get

to know their new surroundings before school begins. It is also important to get their school certificates and curriculum in various subjects translated into the language used for such materials in your homeland.

If you intend to take a motor vehicle or other machinery to your homeland, then you should investigate the **customs regulations and duties payable** in your homeland well in advance. If you are taking a family pet, then you should also find out about the required vaccinations and health certificates. You can prepare for this by getting the necessary documents translated into the appropriate language.

It is also worthwhile finding out in advance how the **health care system** operates in your homeland especially if you need continual care or medication for an illness or disability of your own or of a member of your family. Before you move you can also ask a doctor in Finland whether it is possible to prescribe medicines to cover your initial needs. You may also agree with your local health centre on any necessary vaccinations for yourself and your family. It is a good idea to request copies of all documents concerning yourself and your family held by any maternity and child welfare counselling centres, health centres, hospitals, dental surgeries etc. that you may have attended, and to get these translated into the language used for such documents in your homeland.

The **security situation** in your homeland will also have a major impact on your decision to go back. Safety is a relative matter, however. Part of your homeland may be classified as safe by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR and part may not. Similarly your homeland may be safe for some groups of people but not for you.

THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN LEAVING FINLAND

Remember to give **notice to quit** your rented apartment according to your rental agreement. The most common period of notice in Finland is one month,

On the other hand you may have personal reasons to fear for the safety of yourself and your family. It is also possible that in the wake of armed conflict your homeland is strewn with anti-personnel landmines making the environment unsafe for farmers and adventurous children. There are also problems arising from criminal activity in societies recovering from war, where there is a general atmosphere of violence and lawlessness. These are all matters that you should investigate in detail, preferably consulting people with current knowledge of local conditions.

Before you leave Finland it is worthwhile finding out about **international and local aid organisations** operating in your homeland and about any support and reconstruction programmes that these organisations provide for returnees. It is good to bear in mind, however, that the need of a person who has already received repatriation assistance from Finland is not likely to be considered a priority. Information on various aid organisations is available through the Internet and from other sources.

reckoned from the last day of the calendar month. This means that if you give one month's notice to quit on 1 November, then the tenancy (and the obligation

to pay rent) will end on 31 December.

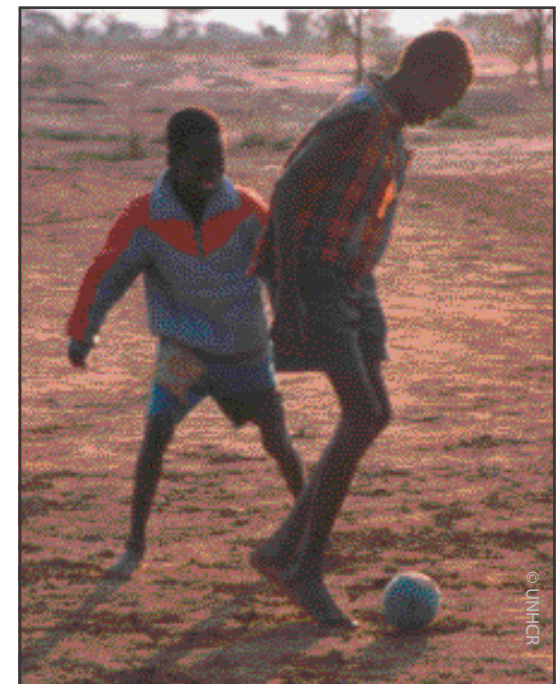
You must advise your **school or place of training** of your departure well in advance. At the same time you can request copies of any certificates showing the courses and studies that you have completed and any educational qualifications that you have earned, together with accounts of the curriculum followed, so that you can get these translated into the language commonly used for such documents in your homeland. Authorities and employers in your homeland will use these materials to assess and approve your qualifications. The same considerations apply to the school and educational certificates of your children.

If you are **working** and repatriation means that you must quit your job, then find out how much notice of termination of employment you must give to your employer and act accordingly. Remember to ask for a certificate of employment when you leave. This will include a description of the duties that you performed for the employer. You should get this certificate and any earlier employment certificates translated so that they can be used in your homeland.

Find out from the authorities in your homeland **what documents need to be translated officially and legally authenticated** for them to be acceptable in your homeland. Such documents may include certificates of birth and marriage, employment and education, medical certificates, deeds of sale and other

legal documents. You can get these documents legally authenticated by your local notary public [*julkinen notaari*]. In certain cases this authentication must be further verified by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs [*ulkoasiainministeriö*] and the nearest diplomatic mission of your homeland.

You must file a **statutory notice of moving** [*muuttoilmoitus*] in writing no sooner than one week before you leave and no later than one week after this. Notice of moving may be made either for a permanent or temporary move. It is worth asking the diplomatic mission of your homeland to advise you on the documents that you will need to bring with you from Finland in order to be registered in your homeland. Forms for



giving notice of moving are available at your local administrative office [*mais-traatti*], the post office and offices of the Social Insurance Institution [*Kela*]. For further details check the website of the Population Register Centre www.vaestorekisterikeskus.fi. (only in Finnish)

It is a good idea to close your **bank account** if you will no longer need it after you leave. This means that you must return your bank card. You should also pay off any outstanding **loans** before leaving Finland or make other arrangements with the lender on how they will be paid.

You must also notify the Finnish **tax authorities** of your new address. If you have received wages in Finland, then you will have to complete a tax return [*veroilmotus*] for the whole year. At the same time you can agree with the tax authorities on the arrangements for payment of any outstanding tax or for receiving any tax refund. A tax refund can also be paid to you after you have left Finland. As your earnings for only part of the year will be less than the estimated total annual earnings used to calculate the tax that you have already paid, it is quite likely that you will be eligible for a tax refund for the year when you leave Finland.

You may make an agreement with the **Post Office** to forward any first and second class mail to you at your address in your homeland. This service is free of charge for one month. After this you

must pay for forwarding of mail by making a written agreement with the Post Office. For further details consult the Post Office website at www.posti.fi.

Before you leave Finland remember to **stop any newspaper subscriptions** and to **terminate any agreement on electricity, telephone and Internet services**. If you do this in sufficiently good time, then you will be able to pay any outstanding charges without delay penalties.

If you also terminate your **television licence and insurance policy** in good time, then you will be able to claim a refund on any unused time that you have paid for. For further details of television licence refunds consult the TV Fee Administration website at www.tv-maksu.fi

You should also notify your move to any public services that you use regularly, such as the **local health centre** [*terveyskeskus*], **maternity and child maternity and child welfare counselling centre** [*äitiys- ja lastenneuvola*], **child care facility** [*lasten päivähöitopaikka*], **employment office** [*työvoimatoimisto*], **Social Insurance Institution** [*Kela*] and **public library** [*kirjasto*] and of course you should advise all of your friends and acquaintances in Finland.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I WANT TO COME BACK TO FINLAND?

The purpose of repatriation assistance is to support your permanent settlement in your homeland. No assistance will be granted if the social worker has doubts about the seriousness of your motivation to remain in your homeland. Under no circumstances can you be assisted financially if your original intention is merely to find out about conditions in your homeland.

When you move away from Finland you must send an **emigration notice** [*maastamuttoilmoitus*] to the authorities. If you notify the authorities that you are moving to your former homeland **permanently**, then your Finnish residence permit will expire.

If, on the other hand, you indicate that your departure from Finland is **temporary**, then you will be registered as temporarily abroad and will retain your domicile in Finland. A temporary notice of moving will thus not affect your residence permit, and while it remains valid you can return to Finland whenever you wish. Your residence permit will, however, have to be stamped in your passport or other travel document. With a permanent residence permit you may reside outside of Finland for a continu-

ous period of no more than two years, after which your residence permit will expire. However, this two-year period may be extended on request, provided that the application is filed before the permit expires. The application should state your precise time of return to Finland and the reason for requesting the extension, for example an anticipated job or course of study, or a family member in Finland. The application may be filed at a Finnish diplomatic mission abroad, but will be decided by the Directorate of Immigration [*Ulkomaalaisvirasto*] in Finland.

If, after moving to your homeland and before your residence permit expires, you decide to return to Finland, then you should bear in mind that **as a returnee to Finland you will no longer be eligible for special services provided for refugees by local authorities in Finland. You will therefore have to arrange various matters for yourself, such as a place to live and places in schools and childcare facilities for your children. You will also have to find your own educational and employment opportunities, and will no longer be eligible for future repatriation assistance.**

ADDRESSES

International Organisation for Migration
IOM Regional Office for Baltic and Nordic States
tel. (09) 68 41 150
www.iom.fi

Ministry of Labour: immigration and work permit affairs
tel. (09) 16 006
www.mol.fi

Directorate of Immigration [*Ulkomaalaisvirasto*]
tel. (09) 47 65 500
www.uvi.fi

Your own local authority and regional Employment and
Economic Development Centre [*TE-Keskus*]
www.te-keskus.fi

Refugee Advice Centre [*Pakolaisneuvonta ry.*]
tel. (09) 25 19 000
www.pakolaisneuvonta.fi

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR
www.unhcr.ch

International Organisation for Migration IOM
www.iom.int

International Federation of Red Cross
and Red Crescent Societies
www.ifrc.org

International Committee of the Red Cross
www.icrc.org/eng

