



IOM FINLAND
25 YEARS

International Organization for Migration
The UN Migration Agency

MAAHANMUUTTOVIRASTO

MIGRATIONSVERKET

FINNISH IMMIGRATION SERVICE

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*Keynote speech by Ms. Jaana Vuorio, Director General, Finnish Immigration Service:
The partnership of IOM and the of Finnish Immigration Service over decades*

Dear Participants, dear colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I would like to thank the IOM Helsinki Office for inviting me to this important event celebrating the IOM's 25 -year presence in Finland and to discuss the future challenges of migration, one of them being how to further develop the dialogue of migrants and the Finnish people. Organizations working in the field of migration such as the IOM obviously play an indispensable role in these efforts, as do migrant organizations and public institutions through their responsibility to provide accurate information as background media and thus inform and guide the public debate.
- I'm very honored to have been asked to give one of the keynote speeches in this important seminar. I hope this seminar and its discussions will contribute to the open dialogue on migration challenges in the public space.
- Dear participants, the cooperation of IOM and the Finnish authorities goes back a long way and its scope has been accordingly wide, from organizing the travel arrangements of quota refugees even before the opening of IOM office in Finland in 1993 to cooperation on country of origin information and, most recently, assisted voluntary return, which has perhaps been in the past years the most visible mode of cooperation.
- Meanwhile, and before going to the history of cooperation between IOM and the Finnish Immigration Service, I think it is good to recall the crucial role the IOM as organization has played, and continues to play, in the efforts to make migration safe, regular and orderly at the global level. IOM's activities and operations are an indispensable element in the international community's efforts to manage migration, although they do not necessarily receive adequate attention in the mainstream media. IOM's efforts in regard of repatriation of stranded migrants in countries of transit [for example in Libya] are just one example of IOM's work which directly affects the development of potential migration flows towards Europe.
- Ladies and gentlemen, if you allow, I will in my presentation go through the history of cooperation between IOM and Finnish immigration administration in its various forms. As I mentioned, this



cooperation has already a long tradition and IOM's activities can be said to have formed a part and parcel of the successful implementation of Finland's migration policy objectives and initiatives.

- I'd like to start with the cooperation related to resettling of refugees from third countries. Resettlement has been one of the main pillars of Finland's asylum policy as Finland has received quota refugees already since the 1970s. The size of the quota has with time increased and at some point stabilized to 750 persons per year. You may recall that decisions to raise the quota temporarily have been made by the Finnish Government, to accommodate the increased resettlement needs deriving from migration crises in and around Europe, such as the Balkan conflict and Syrian crisis.
- In parallel of Finland's national resettlement efforts, resettling of refugees from third countries has in the recent years become an increasingly important instrument in the EU's asylum policy as part of European efforts to promote legal and safe avenues to international protection. Finland's objective has already for long been that as many countries as possible would start to resettle refugees. Finland has itself been actively promoting the use of resettlement at the political level in EU fora as well as at the operational level, by sharing its own national good practices within the EU.
- As I mentioned before, cooperation between the Finnish authorities and IOM on resettlement goes back a long way and has through these years continued relatively steadily regardless of the evolution in the competencies of Finnish immigration authorities. You may recall that the overall responsibility of selecting the refugees to be resettled was transferred to the Finnish Immigration Service in 2008 in connection with the changes made the Ministry of Employment. However, it's worthy of noting that the main strands of the cooperation, namely assistance in the practicalities related to resettlement and in providing cultural orientation for the refugees have indeed existed already before this transfer of responsibility. In my opinion, this long-standing tradition of good working relations and their continuation throughout years is the best possible evidence of the recognition of the IOM's solid expertise by the Finnish authorities.
- Dear participants, I am glad to have the possibility to say that the overall cooperation by IOM and its Helsinki office with the Finnish Immigration Service has been and is excellent. Also in particular around the theme of resettlement. I consider that this stems from the high level of professionalism in the office, from making regular use of standard procedures and maintaining regular contacts. It goes without saying that we also highly appreciate the always friendly and flexible personnel of the Helsinki Office.



- The current field of cooperation between the Finnish Immigration Service and IOM on resettlement is based on a framework agreement on IOM's services. Through this agreement, IOM carries out "Fitness to travel" health checks and transportation services for the refugees resettling into Finland. According to the agreement, also other services may be provided as agreed by the parties.
- Ladies and gentlemen, in resettling refugees the objective of the Finnish Immigration Service is to enable their swift arrival to Finland. The refugees arrive from different kinds of circumstances, some from very far and from conditions of prolonged hardship in the refugee camps. Some may suffer from difficult illnesses and the process often includes surprising situations, like even births, deaths, decisions to stay in the country of residence. These kind of ad hoc changes may manifest as sudden changes in the travel plans before arrival to Finland. I can say that from our point of view, IOM has always reacted to these situations swiftly and with a professional attitude.
- Along with travel arrangements, cultural orientation training of quota refugees has been an important form of cooperation between Finland and IOM. Cultural orientation is a central part of resettlement process. The Finnish Immigration Service started to develop and implement this cooperation in the summer 2013, but it may be recalled that the cooperation on cultural orientation has taken place already between IOM and the Ministry of Employment. In fact, IOM has carried out such cultural orientation trainings in request of the Finnish Government relatively systematically from 2001 onwards. These trainings have been an important element in the successful implementation of Finland's resettlement efforts. The refugees themselves and municipalities on the other hand have both expressed their satisfaction with this procedure, as it has clearly contributed to better and faster integration compared with other immigrants who have not benefitted from this training.
- Cooperation on cultural orientation trainings with the IOM in its current form was initiated in 2016. In the current AMIF-project [which continues at least until the end of December 2018, financing has been applied until 2021] Migri is the responsible organization and IOM the implementing partner. The project promotes the refugees abilities to integrate by providing them with pre-arrival information on Finnish society and the Finnish language, including with information provided in the websites www.culturalorientation.fi and www.movingtofinland.fi which have been put together by the FIS and Diaconia University of Applied Sciences.



- In our experience, IOM has through its large organization and good experience been able to meet the objectives set by the Finnish Immigration Service in the project. We thus look forward to continuing this cooperation with IOM and hopefully EU funding will be continue to be available for these important activities.
- Dear participants, trafficking in human beings has unfortunately consolidated itself as the one of the greatest and most urgent challenges for international community and for the management of migration. It is also a very complex and difficult issue to address, being often transnational by nature and elusive in the sense of the well-known difficulties related to the identification of the victims and thus ensuring proper support to them. Due to the nature of the phenomenon it has become clear that joint efforts between countries, governments, international organizations and the civil society are essential to effectively combat the phenomenon. In my opinion, commendable work has been done by Finland over the years to establish and develop its institutional capacity for preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings, including by the Finnish Immigration Service and through cooperation and projects with IOM.
- As you know, in Finland the assistance system for the victims of trafficking is under the umbrella of the Finnish Immigration Service and administered by Joutseno reception center, but it should be recognized that also many NGO's /civil society organizations provide assistance to the victims of trafficking in Finland and thus play an important role.
- In Finland the assistance system for the victims of trafficking has already for many years cooperated closely with the IOM in combating human trafficking and it has considered this cooperation very fruitful. The scope of this cooperation has been wide and included awareness-raising campaigns, trainings on prevention and identification of work-based exploitation trainings for cruise ship companies and for embassies' staff as well as the assisted voluntary safe return of victims of trafficking. I believe that awareness raising is one of the most important elements in the efforts to prevent and combat trafficking, and for this reason I'd like to mention the campaigns "Ihmiskauppa ei ole satua" -kampanjassa (<http://ihmiskauppaeiolesatua.fi>) and "Paljonko ihminen maksaa" (<http://iom.fi/en/paljonko-ihminen-maksaa>). Awareness-raising will be continued also in the forthcoming joint events in the summer at the Suomi-Areena and with the Finnish Refugee Council.
- Also, as one recent example of cooperation between IOM and the system for assistance, I could mention the participation in the activities and planning of HOIKU-project. This two-year project (2017-2018) aims to support the early identification of the victims and their guidance to services



within health care and social work and to build the capacity of these sectors to respond to the special health care and social support needs of victims of trafficking.

- Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to move on to discussing a few words about IOM's important role in facilitating the return of persons who do not have residence right. Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) aims to better enable the orderly, humane and cost-effective return and reintegration of migrants who are unable or unwilling to remain in host countries and who wish to return voluntarily to their countries of origin. The importance of voluntary return and its priority over attempts to return a person by force has been recognized also at the EU level and more and more countries are taking advantage of this option and IOM's expertise in this field. IOM provides globally pre-departure, transportation and post-arrival assistance related to voluntary return and reintegration. AVRR support can cover the costs of return travel and financial support for reintegration.
- A clear and effective AVRR system means savings in the reception system and in the costs of removal from country [enforced by the Finnish police.] Ensuring the sustainability of the return is also a paramount concern.
- Assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programs have been funded by the EU Return Fund and the Finnish Immigration Service and implemented by the IOM Helsinki since 2010. The first project was implemented between 2010 and 2012 and it facilitated the return for 858 persons. AVRR-activities continued in this form until June 2015 and the activities and cooperation formed the basis for the current AVRR system which was established with the amendment of the Act on the Reception of Asylum Seekers on 1. July 2015. I'd like to stress the IOM's work and pioneering role in establishing the current Finnish AVRR-system, where assisted voluntary return is a legislation-based reception service. In the current framework IOM acts as the service provider for travel arrangements and reintegration support.
- The current AVRR Finland project is funded by the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) and the assistance provided by IOM Finland includes travel arrangements and expenses from the person's current location to the final destination, and possible reintegration assistance such as cash or in-kind assistance.



- In 2016, IOM Finland assisted 2116 voluntary returnees from Finland. Last year 1422 people returned through the assisted voluntary return program. The largest return destinations last year have been Iraq, Albania, and Afghanistan.
- The positive results of the AVRR programs have formed the basis for establishing a permanent framework for AVRR in Finland. Dear participants, let me again underline that IOM's assistance and support in this endeavor has been, and continues to be crucial. IOM's role as service provider in AVRR highly is appreciated highly by the the Finnish Immigration Service. The cooperation is flexible by nature and of high quality and takes into account the special needs of returnees who may be in a vulnerable position such as unaccompanied minors, victims of human trafficking or other returnees with special medical needs.
- Dear participants, I'd like to highlight that raising awareness of the possibility and support available to return voluntarily is one of the current priorities in Finland and the role of Finnish Immigration Service in this endeavor. The Finnish Immigration System has thus far addressed this issue inter alia through a project called VAPA 2 in which return counselling in reception centres has been substantially increased by recruiting 13 counsellors to the centres. Awareness-raising and information campaigns will be a central activity also in the future in the framework of the 2 year joint AUDA-project. This is a joint project by the FIS, the Crisis Management Centre and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project's target countries are Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. Dear ladies and gentlemen, I mentioned before the importance of ensuring the sustainability of the returns and I would like to take note of that the AUDA project indeed includes this kind of an element of follow-up of the returns through a survey and this will be carried out by IOM. So, again, this project has offered a possibility for mutually benefitting cooperation between Migri and IOM.
- Respectable participants, one fundamental benefit of voluntary return programmes over forced return is that they offer a possibility for a dignified and humane return. I would like to particularly appreciate and commend the invaluable role of IOM's skilled, dedicated and friendly personnel in this regard. This applies also to the counselling on AVRR and the persistent work by individual and IOM counsellors related to advising potential returnees.
- The wide scope of cooperation activities between the Finnish Immigration Service and the IOM and have included also country of origin research. The Country Information Service of our office has had several successful projects with IOM as partner, for instance the Kosovo Information Project and the COIF (Country of Origin for Finnish Immigration Service) projects I, II and III, the lat-



ter being relatively large project with several countries of origin where the IOM Helsinki Office worked together with local IOM offices on questions on agreed themes like health and also provided reports on certain countries. Again, cooperation around both of these projects was fruitful and the Finnish Immigration Service was very much satisfied with the quality of the information provided by the IOM offices, which in part substituted for the need to carry out fact-finding missions or use of other local sources.

- Ladies and gentlemen, the close partnership of IOM in Finland and the of Finnish Immigration Service has developed and evolved over decades to cover a wide ranging scope of activities and functions which are considered of high importance for the implementation of Finnish migration policy priorities. The partnership has been mutually beneficial and successful. It has yielded tangible results in the form of improved cultural pre-orientation of refugees coming to Finland to the development of the national system of assisted voluntary return and reintegration and increased voluntary returns as well as improved skills and awareness to identify victims of human trafficking. Joint efforts have also taken place to ensure specific country of origin information with the help of IOM's presence and expertise on the ground. I feel that these themes continue to be among the central challenges of migration and I'm convinced that there exists also in future a need to further develop and deepen the cooperation between migration authorities and organizations on these issues and other emerging future challenges.