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## RELIGION AND IMMIGRANT OCCUPATIONAL ATTAINMENT ACROSS SOCIAL INTEGRATION CONTEXTS IN FINLAND

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### Abstract

This article focuses on expanding the existing knowledge on contextual social integration of immigrants based on religion and occupational attainment. Drawing on the theory of social exchange, it identifies that immigrant religion in Finland serves as a marker of ethnic structures and social identity for minority groups of groups. Religion is the main social identity that provides an institutional belongingness that provides access to tangible resources. These claims are supported by a systematic literature review of prior scholarly work that have investigated the area of religion, migration, and social integration. Using empirical data obtained from interviews conducted on selected number of immigrants living in Helsinki, Finland, this article analyzes the effects of religion across social integration contexts in relation to immigrant occupational attainment. Analysis of the interviews find out to a limited extent that in immigrant religious circles social integration is enhanced and there are high chances of connection to occupational opportunities. Similarly, there is an association of discrimination in structural social integration in case of immigrant strong religious expressions. By contrast, this article found out that in case of matching immigrant and natives' religious practice religious participation and attendance seems to be positively associated with occupational attainment.

**Keywords:** Social Integration, Occupational Attainment, Religion, Immigrant, Migration

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### 1. Introduction

Currently in the contemporary European civilizations, there is a general increase in migration debates that have propagated public interest in migration policies and basically the issue of immigrant settlement (Fratantuono, 2019; Zhuang, 2021). With the growing rate of international migration, Europe is on the receivership of migration with most of its visitors coming from Africa (Guan, 2023). Finland is no exception for currently the country has markedly high number of immigrants originating from Africa (Anniste *et al.* 2017). In that regard, the topic of immigrant integration is currently a major public concern, particularly in Finland. This is because, in order for a diverse community made up of immigrants from various cultural backgrounds to coexist harmoniously, both natives and immigrants must find a common ground (Croucher *et al.* 2021).

Integration has been used in different contexts and generally it gives a broad impression that makes the term applicable in many perspectives (Connor, 2009). Most scholars in other disciplines such as business and economics have markedly used the term to infer different

meanings (Liu and Guo, 2021). Nonetheless, on a general scale, the term is used to infer harmony, cohesiveness and peaceful (Rishworth *et al.* 2022). Social integration in its entirety as illustrated is a diverse concept that cannot be assumed at its general impression and for that reason this study picks a more specific meaning so as to capture religious perspective of immigrants and how they affect the social dimension of the host country (Burgess, 2011). The understanding of social integration in this study and the differences created in the usage of the term in other contexts proves that even within the field of study there can be variations in the meaning of a term depending on the context (Parr, 2018). Similarly, in sociology the meaning of social integration varies greatly and sociologists do not have a specific definition that has been agreed on (Ahmed and Veronis, 2017). This leaves out the meaning to be inferred by the context of its usage.

In the section that proceeds, this study shall endeavor to present a brief overview of various understandings of the term integration and as well outline the specific definition applicable in this study. Besides, the study provides an overview of literature review about the usage of the term social integration in other scholarly works so as to find out the understanding of other scholars and to know the extent to which scholars have attributed the concept in terms of meaning and context.

When immigrants have obtained employment, mastered the local language, and are able to freely associate socially with locals without encountering any cultural hurdles, integration is considered to have fully occurred (Kiptiah, 2023). In order for this to occur, immigrants must be well-versed in the communication methods and cultural norms of the receiving country and even complete some educational requirements in the host countries (Archer, 2022). By establishing a unified social structure into which immigrants will naturally fit if they fulfill the requirements of gathering the means of communication and adjusting to the culture and traditions of the receiving country, this is intended to eliminate any differences between immigrants and natives (Jung *et al.* 2022). The immigrants in this study strive to cross the barriers of integration and through comprehending the scope of social integration as presented herein it can be easy to for the immigrants to connect with the Finnish social sphere.

Integration and immigration has been a concept widely covered by scholars within the field of sociology (Xie *et al.* 2022). The concept of integration is depicted in a wide range of academic works from various sociologists not as a single event but rather as a process, a relationship, and occasionally even a phenomenon that involves interaction between various facets of human life with the goal of locating a neutral ground (Jung *et al.* 2022). The notion created from this understanding creates an umbrella like definition that is broad enough to accommodate all aspects of integration in a sociological sense (Kutovaya, 2022).

Down on that line of thought, the constituents of integration can be imagined and exploring the idea brings one to a vague understanding of social integration (May, 2023). Therefore, social integration can be said to be a process through which individuals or constituents of a given society find a way to relate to one another amicably within that society (Chernysh, 2022). To further explore that idea, integration can be more sophisticatedly defined as connection of common ties, interchanges or reciprocity of cultural practices between constituents of a society (Sivak *et al.* 2022). In the theory of modernity, society is illustrated with a twofold concept that brings together action and system theory (Li, 2023). Consequently, system integration, much similar to social integration, aligns to these paradigms. Plotnikova (2022) postulates that for one to comprehend social integration, we have to take cognisance of the fact that instruments of social integration constitutes orientations of individuals and their preferred societal orders of morals and values.

More often, ideally because the concept of integration can be expressed from different angles, it is taken by many scholars as a process of making strong the bond between relationships that exist in a given society (Johnson and Goldman, 2022). Similarly, from another perspective integration is viewed as a process through which new constituents are introduced into a society through societal systems and institutions (Kuppens and van den Broek, 2022). In line with that notion, in some instances social integration has been taken to mean involvement in social activities that connect people and creates relationships within a society (Ngai, 2022). Kutovaya (2022) approaches the understanding of integration in a two way concept whereby he articulates

that first impression of integration has to be understood from the cultural aspect. Here, he basically argues that integration is a product of the merging of cultures over time, a development of similar sense of political positions and a decrease in barriers, legal or social, that hinder interaction. His second definition wraps it plainly by saying the absence of disintegration should be construed to mean integration and he points less to socio-political stability and the general societal (Guan, 2023).

Integration from another perspective is described as a process that happens over time and that involves many aspects that affect immigrants and natives of the receiver country (Archer, 2022). More specifically, from the perspective of the immigrant settlement in the receiver society, integration is understood to be a sociological system in which new entities are introduced into an already existing social system in such a way that the resultant of the interaction does not affect the system but makes it to function more amicably (Kiptiah, 2023). So far, almost all definitions of integration leave an impression of it being and undertaking of both the incoming visitors and the natives of the receiver society (May, 2023).

In this sense therefore, the concept of social integration of immigrants into the Finnish society presented in this study is basically taken to be the mutual relationship of individuals. This relationship involves both the immigrants and the Finnish natives. In this construct, changes within the society are propagated by the host society but in the process, it also becomes subject to the changes by undergoing transformation (Hannafi and Marouani, 2022). The European Union has of recent past drafted a good number of policies concerning the understanding and the process of social integration (Fenger *et al.* 2013). These policies apply accordingly to all immigrants but they give a mixed perception towards the African immigrants. There are also other international bodies like the United Nations that have also elaborated on the concept of integration and addressed various problems that affect immigrants in host societies (Hossain, 2011). In light of this inquiry, it is notable that a lot of scholarly work has been dedicated to studying migration and the process of immigrants' social integration. However, there is still less that has been talked in relation to African immigrants, especially when narrowed down to a category of East Africans that have settled in the country of Finland. This study fills this literature gap by providing findings that can be used to make informed decisions involving migration of the study subjects to the country of Finland and in policy making.

## 2. Review of scholarship

In the contemporary era, international migration has become a worldwide spectacle with increased numbers of people moving from their places of birth to settle in different countries or regions (Thi, 2018). This kind of movement and settlement brings about changes in the host society that affects both natives and immigrants (Li *et al.* 2021). The move by most governments of receiving countries to introduce policies regulating immigration raised public awareness around the concept of immigration to an extent of generating interests that pushed the general public to understand the structure of immigration (Uslu, 2022). This normalized the use of the terms such as multiculturalism, integration, bilingualism, etc. amongst the members of the public (Hossain, 2011). The beginning to view immigrants through the same lens as natives of the receiver society is what has prompted sociological scholars to investigate more about social integration of immigrants.

The process of migration involves a lot of procedures that are complex and tedious (Barreto *et al.* 2022). A review of literature in that line of study suggests that when individuals settle in new societies they experience culture shock which triggers them to isolate from the host society as they try to adapt and integrate (Mago, 2020). The most difficult part of the migration process does not lie at the start point from the country of origin. It is when immigrants arrive in their host countries and face difficulties to enter into a system where there exist values that are completely different to what they hold unto (Liao and Baddeley, 2022). Secondly, language barrier breaks the communication between them and the natives hence leaving them out for as long as they take to learn the language (Sarsour, 2022).

Lu *et al.* (2022) define social integration as an attempt through which individuals that do not belong to a certain group try to gain entry into the group and become members of that group.

They further illustrate that the only way for social integration to flourish in a given group is if the bonds of attraction remain strong and play as uniting factors. Nonetheless, even with the bonds of attraction remaining strong, a focus has to be directed on individual interests and preferences since they are prone to change over time (Fontefrancesco and Mendonce, 2022). Ahmed and Veronis (2017) argue that the introduction of integration policies in many European countries influenced historical changes and this resulted in changes in national policies concerning immigration. The consequence of immigration and social integration brought about multiculturalism in which the host communities were diversified (Guan, 2023). These days still there remains a challenge to solve problems associated with social integration of immigrants even with the drafting of regulatory migration policies (Medica, 2019). Thus, immigration and social integration of immigrants continue to pose a challenge for most European countries that are major destinations of immigrants, becoming a problem to established national pattern of nationhood.

Reviewing literature more deeply about social integration, this study found out many studies were conducted primarily to investigate integration policies and immigration regulations set by migrant receiver countries and the effects of those policies in different societies (Karatas, 2022; Fenger *et al.* 2013) It was worth noting that in most of the findings, the policies implemented by different host countries to a great extent were determined by specific national history with immigrants and as well as contributions of immigrants towards the economy of the host country (Koido, 2022). In most of the studies, there is a general consensus in regard to the conditions set up by host country governments for immigrants (Oliveira Martins and Strange, 2019). There is a recommendation for change of attitudes towards immigrants and a public sensitization to accept immigrants as part of the broad community (Chernysh, 2022). Some other studies suggest an improvement to policies that allow immigrant access of government services so as to balance between working and the wellbeing of immigrants (Archer, 2022). This will boost social integration and immigrants will be able to quickly adapt into the new society through learning their cultural ways and language (May, 2023). Other studies have found that host governments have stringent policies concerning employment of the immigrants and a general recommendation is suggested across the board for the host governments to create programs that will aid immigrants in finding employment whenever they settle in host countries (Xie *et al.* 2022). Similarly, a considerable effort has also been put on the welfare of youth and women immigrants for they seem to be less privileged in many societies (Chernysh, 2022).

Suarez-Orozco *et al.* (2020) in their study articulate that in order for integration to be successful it has to undergo acculturation, placement, interaction and identification. Additionally, they define acculturation which can also be seen as socialization to be a means through which individuals get an understanding of cultural values and standards necessary to freely associate with members of a given society. Kuppens and van den Broek (2022) find out that the success of social integration is highly dependent on the people that we are emotionally connected to. It has been found that social integration creates an atmosphere of interaction whereby immigrants find it easy to navigate through host societies and be involved in different aspects of social activities within the mainstream society (Sivak *et al.* 2022). Immigrants initially form in-group relationships with other immigrants when they settle in new societies, but once attempts are made to enter host societies and interact with locals, the process of adaptation is launched, and an orientation towards the new society is accomplished (Jung *et al.* 2022). On the other hand, in some circumstances, the host society fails to extend a warm welcome, causing them to withdraw from social and institutional activities (Ngai, 2022). Social integration becomes difficult in these circumstances because there are social strata where various social identities are developed and maintained (Uslu, 2022).

Access to basic government services in equal opportunities with natives increases the level of trust and positive attitude towards the host governments and further provides a suitable environment for the flourishing of social integration (Kutovaya, 2022). Social integration has been linked to improved individual outcomes in more recent research (Liao and Baddeley, 2022). Compared to random encounters, interactions involving neighbors, coworkers, and others with common interests are simpler and occur more quickly (Zhuang, 2021). Within the wide scope of sociological studies, some scholars have exclusively dealt with social integration based on religion (Connor, 2009; Alanezi and Sherkat, 2008; Cadge and Howard Ecklund, 2007). In a study

about the role of religion in the social integration of Greek immigrants in the United States, Moskos *et al.* (2017) discover that participation in religious activities, such as going to church, tends to improve social interaction between immigrants and natives. (Mago, 2020) adds that through fostering a climate that is conducive to interaction, the flexibility of religious regulations regarding membership fosters variety and enhances integration. Mago agrees with Hannafi and Marouani (2022), who also contend that greater involvement in religious activities improves the likelihood of the formation of new networks, which validates and promotes social integration.

### 3. Methodology

Interviews will be used in this project to obtain data. Each portion of the semi-structured interviews will present a theme of distinct ideas. According to scholarly literature, interviews that are conducted using a semi-structured format are less invasive, adopt a neutral perspective, and create a setting for in-depth, two-way discussion (Cohen and Crabtree, 2008). The interviews took place in Helsinki from the beginning of February until the end of May 2022. Semi-structured interviews, which are conducted using a qualitative research methodology, are crucial to the data collection process because they allow for two-way communication, which not only enables a researcher to obtain first-hand information but also offers a breakdown of ideas that gives a researcher a vivid understanding of the respondents' perspectives on the subject matter (Cropley, 2015). This study chose this approach in consideration of the power of semi-structured interviews, which will make it possible to gather accurate information from East African immigrants regarding their perceptions and experiences from their point of view. Additionally, because the interviews are semi-structured, the interviewer has the chance to explore topics of interest by controlling the response and seeking clarification when necessary.

### 4. General perception of immigrants in Finland

Contrary to its neighbors in the Nordic region, Finland's national culture and people have not always been uniform. By January 2023, the country of Finland had 5,566,812 residents (Finland, 2023). Even though the majority of people in Finland are of Finnish descent, various minority groups have historically been integrated into the broader Finnish population without necessarily immigrating (Anniste *et al.* 2017). The largest minority group in Finland is the Swedish-speaking people, who make up about 5.4 percent of the country's overall population (Jartti *et al.* 2002). Given that Swedish is the second official language in Finland, this population is accorded a wide range of rights. In addition to this group, there is another little indigenous group in Finland, the Sami, which makes up 2.3% of the country's population (Croucher *et al.* 2021). Finland has historically been a nation with a high rate of emigration. Following Sweden's economic superiority over Finland, a significant portion of the Finnish population relocated to Sweden (Korpela *et al.* 2018). The condition persisted until the beginning of the first immigrant communities in late 1990. These newly arrived immigrant groups included Ingrian immigrants from Russia and Somalian refugees. However, it is believed that the year 1980 marked the first time that immigration into Finland outnumbered outflow (Kaasalainen and Huuhka, 2016).

Finland has increasingly become a destination for migrants since this initial spike in immigration rates that exceeded those of emigration (Anniste *et al.* 2017). Migration patterns in Finland show that African nations are currently increasing in the number of immigrants entering the country (Croucher *et al.* 2021). A sizable portion of the immigrants entering Finland have done so for employment-related reasons, closely followed by those moving there for educational reasons. With the exception of a few instances where immigrants were compelled by circumstances to reside in rural areas, immigrants have, nevertheless, primarily settled in Finland's urban centers (Kaasalainen and Huuhka, 2016). The degree to which Finns are willing to integrate immigrants into their society has had a significant impact on this pattern of settlement. The typical Finnish person has an impression of a community that is largely culturally conservative (Mussino *et al.* 2019). As a result, the Finnish people have developed strong social markers that are challenging for immigrant populations to break through. For it is nearly impossible for outsiders to live within and even assimilate into a community that holds highly to its cultural

perception and appears hostile to new contacts (Kaasalainen and Huuhka, 2016). The following are snippets from interviews:

*You should be aware of the school system in Finland at the time I moved there, as my objective was to study there. I have been living there for the past ten years. Finland was one of many options I considered when I wanted to pursue computer science courses. Finland has a solid reputation as a top academic location. After finishing my first degree, I found work, and two years later, after gaining work experience, I applied for and was accepted to a master's program. I completed the program and have been working ever since (Muturi).*

*In order to further my education, I relocated to Finland from my native country. I discovered that schooling in Finland was more economical and less expensive than in my home country. Only the wealthy flourish at home, while people like me are completely unimportant. Consequently, as soon as I received my nursing degree and began working, I got married here (Kamage).*

*I have spent the previous 28 years residing in Finland. I relocated to Finland to further my education. My parents suggested me to look for a place to study abroad because it was very difficult for me to get into universities at home. One of my friends mentioned Finland because it offered free education at the time. In contrast to today, when polytechnics have become universities of applied sciences, bachelor's degrees were once awarded by polytechnics. Anyway, I obtained a sociology degree, found employment, subsequently got married, and moved here (Upendo).*

With the exception of cities and municipalities that have recently welcomed immigrants, the majority of Finland is inhabited by Finns, making these areas multicultural (Korpela *et al.* 2018). No-immigrant settlement areas appear to show less interest in immigrant communities and are less hospitable to newcomers. When new immigrants arrive in Finland, the number of existing immigrants in the area will undoubtedly influence where they choose to settle. This has maintained the pattern of immigrants gradually settling in already-immigrant communities while avoiding settling in places where there are no other immigrants (Anniste *et al.* 2017).

The acceptance of immigrants by the natives of the host society is a prerequisite for the subsequent integration of immigrants into any host society (Plotnikova, 2022). Social integration is nearly impossible to achieve if immigrants are regarded with hostility and contempt. The Helsinki region is home to the bulk of the African immigrants in Finland, likely as a result of the region's diversity. Since there is a mix of cultures and since there is virtually daily interaction between the natives and the immigrants, settlement and integration are at least easier in multicultural zones than in those that are culturally homogeneous (Jartti *et al.* 2002). The reasoning behind this group of immigrants' settlement and integration patterns in Finland has been their notion that they might not be welcome in some other locations where there are few or no other immigrants (Croucher *et al.* 2021). However, there are no documented instances of discrimination against immigrants in Finland's sparsely immigrant-populated districts. However, the prevailing perception is that these areas are likely to expose immigrants to protracted periods of social exclusion prior to their social integration into the Finnish social sphere (Korpela *et al.* 2018).

Even when the correct conditions favorably affect integration patterns, there are typically a number of elements that influence immigrant integration into the Finnish social sphere. First, it is extremely difficult for immigrants to communicate with Finns due to the language barrier (Ryazantsev and Gadzhimuradova, 2021). Since there are other options, such as integrating with other immigrants in the first place, the necessity to learn the language is reduced when immigrants move to places where other immigrants have already settled. This has an impact on how long it takes newcomers to fully grasp Finnish culture and helps to speed up the process of social integration between immigrants and native Finns. The idea that immigrants are acceptable has an impact on integration patterns and facilitates social integration, among other things. Given that Finland is a country dominated by people of the white race, the majority of African immigrants are

vulnerable to the inherent dread of encountering racial discrimination there (Saarela and Finnas, 2009). These anxieties compel them to associate with other African immigrants, where they settle and start internal social cycles before opening up to Finns. This further demonstrates why the majority of African immigrants are concentrated in the Helsinki region, where the region is known for its multiculturalism due to its diverse population (Saarela and Finnas, 2009).

*I will answer in the affirmative and completely be of the opinion that religion is the major influence in all aspects of my life. As a foreigner, I often get curious as to what I might enter into whenever associating with new people who have different views of looking at issues more so religion. My interaction is often limited and I can boldly declare that most Finns that I know and talk to are the ones we share religious views with. Through them I have although been introduced to others who are nonreligious but I can declare here that we cannot have anything common to discuss with the other friends who are nonreligious. It has been said that when you go to Rome do as the Romans, but this issue of religion dictates what actually you are going to accept into being your daily practice (Wanjiku).*

*...to me religion is mainly about belief and faith beyond material things and objects. It is faith in God, faith of hope, faith in life structures and belief in the principles of humanity. Religion is a constituent of my life that I cannot do without. It gives hope to the extent that I am assured of where I am going and where I have come from as well as who I am supposed to live with. Here in Finland I have always tried to occasionally befriend Finns but it has been hard because I lack a starting point, unless one is religious. I have therefore resorted to be drawn into surrounding myself with people who believe in the same God as me. If for instance a certain area is mostly occupied by people who are not of my religion I often find the temptation to avoid the area. I rather live in a religious friendly neighborhood (Mwai).*

Most immigrants first establish themselves in neighborhoods populated by other immigrants due to cultural differences and communication barriers before entering Finnish society (Mussino *et al.* 2019). Other elements, such as the unpredictability of customs and cultural preferences, contribute to the idea that immigrants are not welcome in some areas of the country, leading them to follow a particular protocol for settling in and integrating. This thought cannot be altered in any particular way. Both the perspective of the immigrants and the perspective of the locals seem to be natural. However, immigrants have a stronger advantage over natives in terms of feeling accepted.

The degree of the newcomers' feeling of acceptability can also be determined by how warmly the native Finns welcome the immigrants. Free exchanges during social gatherings and generous attitudes can influence patterns of settlement and integration since these factors significantly affect how newcomers see the native culture. Since this idea of feeling acceptable has a strong social component, social procedures can be used to resolve it. But because it depends on individual attitude changes, a social element like whether locals of host countries accept immigration cannot be directly controlled by legislation (Ryazantsev and Gadzhimuradova, 2021).

Both immigrants and natives must be in a position of neutral acceptance, where they can both accept changes to their daily routines, in order to improve immigrant integration throughout the nation of Finland. More than locals, immigrants find comfort in this possibility since their absence from their home country makes it easier for them to adjust to a change in routine. On the other hand, residents of the recipient nation somewhat prefer that their way of life be the main cultural path that is pursued. Dissonance is what causes social divisions, and rigidity in either divide or compromise intensifies the differences and causes each person to be attracted to others who are similar to them naturally.

## **5. Immigrant occupational attainment**

The duration of stay of immigrants in Finland is determined by the availability of jobs once they settle in Finland. The prospect of finding a job in Finland is not high as compared to other Nordic

countries (Liu *et al.* 2019). When immigrants arrive, the pressure to integrate into the host society as quick as possible drives them to check for areas where they can easily connect with the people living there. Some factors such as language or even culture pushes them to identify with people of similar descriptions so as to get to understand the social sphere in a quick span of time. All this is done in the interest of securing employment as soon as possible upon arrival (Barreto *et al.* 2022). There are a lot of factors that affect immigrant integration into the Finnish labor market and they can be both barriers or enablers. Finland, as compared to other European countries has a relatively small number of immigrants but this does not however imply that the integration of the immigrants into the labor market in Finland is successful (Jartti *et al.* 2002). Unemployment amongst immigrants is relatively high and is tied with nationality of immigrants. Immigrants from North America and Europe in particular have high chances of securing employment in Finland more than their counterparts from Africa and some parts of Asian continent together with the Middle East (Korpela *et al.* 2018). This poses a challenge for the integration of immigrants who are citizens of non-EU countries.

Accessing the Finish labor market by the immigrants is a process that needs a lot of documentation and time to complete (Kaasalainen and Huuhka, 2016). There are various actors involved that greatly influence the process of the immigrant integration into the labor market in Finland. Amongst these actors include government agencies, nationality of migrants, cities and municipalities and many others (Anniste *et al.* 2017). The Finnish government policies and government officials play a relatively more emphasized role. This is achieved through the fact that for immigrants to reside and work in Finland they need signed documentation from Finnish authorities that will give them the legal mandate to work in the country. This seems to give the impression that immigrants are integrated into the Finnish labor market by external factors other than themselves automatically integrating into the society (Croucher *et al.* 2021). Besides meeting all the required conditions for the immigrants to stay and work in Finland, it doesn't end there. Immigrants are then supposed to follow regulations for eligibility to work in Finland. These are amongst the regulations set by the EU which at large gives priority to EU citizens on any available employment opportunity (Fenger *et al.* 2013). Similarly, immigrants face challenges of integration into the Finnish labor market through lack of recognition of migrants' skills. This is because, immigrants are generally thought to be lacking in skills as compared to their counterparts from North America or the EU (Sarsour, 2022). Securing a professional employment position in Finland based on the immigrant home country qualifications becomes a very difficult process. Most Finnish employers consider non-EU qualifications as below average or even incompatible with the Finnish qualifications and system of working out things (Sivak *et al.* 2022).

On a general evaluation, immigrants that lack language skills, mainly Finnish or Swedish and English face a big barrier of employment integration in Finland. This is because Finnish and Swedish are the only official languages in Finland. However, in cosmopolitan areas like the city of Helsinki English language can be used as a third language of communication. Any lack of these three languages' skills will require that an immigrant learn them as the first step of integrating into the Finnish labor market (Jartti *et al.* 2002). Labor market integration for the immigrants faces another minor challenge of culture difference. Although this challenge is acknowledged by most immigrants working in Finland it is not highly problematized. It is commonly approached through preparing the immigrants to learn the Finnish work culture. Some of the immigrants working in Finland have held stereotypical remarks that see Finns as being quiet and determined but once they learn and appreciate the culture differences, they become easily integrated into the Finnish labor market (Saarela and Finnas, 2009).

Upon arrival in Finland, immigrants tend to settle close to their fellow immigrants as they can easily integrate into the immigrant community. This cuts them off the local community and limits their connections. Lack of connections has therefore become one of the problems that face the immigrants in the process of integrating into the Finnish labor market. Due to the difficulties in learning the Finnish language skills and the culture differences, most immigrants lack close ties with native Finns. This creates a big challenge since it leads to social segregations in which groups in a society see each other as rivals (Croucher *et al.* 2021). Generally, in rare occasions are opinions of migrants taken serious in matters relating to employment. The voices of the immigrants in Finland are only heard in relation to their experiences in working in Finland. When



it comes to major factors, ideas and discussions are mainly based on the Finnish national discourse which does not necessarily factor in the interests of the immigrants.

## 6. Finnish social policy

Historically, social policies have not been a major concern for immigrant settlement as other immigration policies were. Generally, immigrants were never much affected by social policies of their host countries (Suarez-Orozco *et al.* 2020). With the advancement of humanitarianism and the need to protect the citizenry, most European countries have adopted social policies that are central to the day to day lives of the people living within their territories (Fenger *et al.* 2013). These policies existed in categories, especially according to different social divisions within a country. Lately, there has been harmonization of the policies to address social needs in equal measures to all citizens. Finland is amongst the earliest countries in Europe to have developed a universal model of social protection (Jartti *et al.* 2002). This was influenced by the essence of the Finnish government to protect her citizens. This universal model of social policy was intended to create solidarity and eliminate regional disparities that divided the Finns into urban and rural dwellers. However, with the coming in of immigrants as Finland started becoming an immigrant receiver country created another disparity between immigrants and natives in the labor force (Mussino *et al.* 2019). These disparities over time have conditioned a need to develop a system with flat-rate benefits and basic security to all people living within the Finnish territories.

Immigrants' settlement in Finland is influenced by the social policy in place. This is majorly seen so owing to the fact that most immigrants settling in Finland have done so for the purpose of employment (Anniste *et al.* 2017). Employment and the job market are parameters that are factored in during the social policy formulation process. For most immigrants in Finland, the willingness to live in Finland is partly determined by their employment status (Jartti *et al.* 2002). Most of them weigh their income with the cost of living which highly influences places of their settlement within the country. Apparently, the cost of living in Finland varies from region to region and this determines the settlement patterns of the immigrants once they arrive in Finland (Korpela *et al.* 2018).

*...When I arrived here in Finland I was so much surprised because I met a Christian environment that I did not expect. I had read some history about Finland before I came here and I knew pretty well that Finland was a Christian country. I am from a Lutheran Church and I thought I would feel home much faster than a Muslim but reality is that it is very far from the truth. I found myself in the same integration predicament just as Muslims do. Mind you, the information that I got estimated Lutherans to be over 90% of the total population of Finnish people and so I thought that I was privileged to be in such a country. I dare to say that the Church has failed to integrate the Christian immigrants into their society. Their churches practice exclusiveness. It is no wonder why they accept all kinds of liberal approach to the institution of family, for example, man to man or woman to woman relationship which is against our Christian faith. Their religion is subject to change and any time it can be manipulated to suite the global trends in humanity. That itself excludes fellow Christians from other countries (Odinga).*

*...Being a Christian that is true and sincere to the teachings of my religion, I have always tried to live and practice what is expected of me according to the Bible. Societies like Finland, where we live, most of the people are getting secular and are losing their belief in God even though they had a Christian upbringing. This therefore shapes direction to which a good number of issues are determined. For example, homosexuality is not allowed both in the Bible and in African cultures but in the Finnish society it has been embraced so much, affecting foreigners because we cannot open up to natives having in mind such remarkable cultural differences (Mogaka).*

The prospect of losing a job and being stranded without a strong social protection policy also makes immigrants want to settle close to the people they can easily relate to and seek help from. The Finnish social policy is designed to respond to specific social risks, including

unemployment, old age and disability. However, this policy affects immigrants since in the application of the residence permit, the applicant must show proof of financial capabilities to an extent of not requiring financial social assistance (Ryazantsev and Gadzhimuradova, 2021). Besides, immigrants applying for the Finnish residence permit are supposed to support themselves through employment. These immigration policies necessitate the need to attain financial stability for immigrants before even starting to earn from employment in Finland. Given the high rate of social interdependence in African immigrant countries, immigrants from these countries prefer settling around fellow immigrants who they can easily depend on for social support before establishing their grounds in Finland (Adogame, 2013). The Finnish social policy does not largely address the immigrant social status, compelling immigrants to work from the basis of the provisions of the policy. Similarly, an immigrant's stay in Finland and the legal status for enjoying the benefits of the provisions of the social policy depends on whether the immigrant's home country has an agreement on social security with Finland. European Union or even Nordic immigrants are more bound to enjoy the benefits of the social policy more than non- EU citizens can (Anniste *et al.* 2017). Besides, the Finnish social security system is residency based, which makes the process hard for immigrants settling in Finland for the first time. Part of the benefits are employment based, which again creates limitations for immigrants who do not enter into employment immediately upon arrival (Kaasalainen and Huuhka, 2016).

The subject scope for social security benefits in Finland is extensive but on the contrary financial benefits of the social policy is relatively low for immigrants as compared to natives. Natives can qualify for social security benefits even in the state of unemployment, which gives them the advantage of settling at a desirable employment opportunity and as well a desirable residence (Mussino *et al.* 2019). On the other hand, immigrants require employment before they are entitled to benefits of social security programs. These requirements limit their choice of work and in the same way they do not enjoy the advantage of choosing their residence. The desperation to be employed and earn a living since they are not entitled to social security benefits without employment forces the immigrants to compromise and settle in places where there is a high possibility of getting a job as opposed to settling in their desired places (Kaasalainen and Huuhka, 2016). Generally, settlement and integration of immigrants in Finland follows a lot of social traits like the ability to be able to freely communicate with your neighbors. Social policies is another factor that is not extensively explored since it cuts across the entire constituents of a country; natives and immigrants inclusive (Jartti *et al.* 2002). In most European countries, immigrants migrate from their home countries to the host countries in search of employment. Countries with better employment opportunities keep attracting immigrants. Of more concern is the social policy which regulates the benefits of residency or employment in countries of residence. Integration of immigrants is therefore to some extent determined by the social policies in place in their host countries (Ahmed and Veronis, 2017).

## 7. Conclusion

Religion as revealed in this research, plays a less role on how Eastern African protestant immigrants integrate in their new home. Taking personal interviews, the study endeavored to give a clear picture of immigrants on how they find their situation while becoming socially included into the Finnish society. Despite the fact that the researcher is a Christian immigrant furthermore a priest, it was not all that easy to address this subject. In many ways this is an attempt to show the sort of reality that lays between the Eastern African protestant Christian immigrants during their social integration in Finnish society.

As illustrated earlier in this study, the study of religion and migration from a sociological perspective has not been greatly done and this explains the limited literature available for reference. However, in the studies that have managed to capture an aspect of religion in migration processes shows that the religion of an individual influences a lot of decision across the entire process of migration. Out of these findings, it is clearly reflected that little or no known studies have focused on African immigrants population to Finland. It could be probably because of the fact that Finland has not been a major immigrant destination especially for immigrants from Africa (Croucher *et al.* 2021). However, these statics do not stand anymore as there has been an influx

of African immigrants into Finland. This has changed migration patterns and there is currently a significant impact of religion on migration and social integration of immigrants as well.

Major findings from this study revealed that for the process of social integration to occur immigrants need to first connect with fellow immigrants so as to get an understanding of the host society's social structure from the perspective of an immigrant. This means that upon arrival immigrants relied on fellow immigrants in order to understand the Finnish social sphere. In Finland, immigrants even had congregations mostly attended by immigrants that conduct religious services mainly in English. Such structures provide an opportunity to orientate new arrivals into the Finnish religious system. This also stresses the importance of support offered by immigrants to the new arrivals of immigrants as being paramount for the settlement of immigrants in Finland.

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