

# SUPPORT CENTRE 'HILMA' AND DISABLED IMMIGRANTS IN FINLAND

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***Hilma***  
vammainen maahanmuuttajien tukikeskus

# Hilma – The Support Centre for Disabled Immigrants

- Originated in 2002 as a project of the Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities
- Since 2006 operates under Finnish Disability Forum
- Funded by Finnish Slot Machine Association (RAY)
- Two employees
- Serves all language and disability groups
- Office in Itäkeskus, Helsinki



**VAMMAISFOORUMI**

Vammaisjärjestöjen yhteinen ääni

# Our objectives

- **To promote the integration and independent life** of immigrants with disability or a long-term illness in Finland
- **To advance the realisation of the rights and equal treatment** of disabled immigrants in the work of NGOs, authorities and other service providers
- **To increase awareness** of minorities and multiple minorities and thus prevent discrimination



# What we do

- **Client work:** guidance and help with access to social services, peer support and course activities
- **Training and communication:** information on the situation of disabled immigrants in Finland; website, newsletter, publications, seminars, training
- **Networking and advocacy work:** statements and opinions (through FDF), project cooperation, participation in multiple NGO networks



# Disabled immigrants in Finland



- Quota refugees
  - Asylum-seekers
  - Foreign workers/students and their children
  - Persons with disability caused by accident at work
  - Second generation immigrants
  - Paperless migrants
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- Rough estimate on the number: 1,960 – 19,600 persons
  - "Minority within a minority" → special needs and challenges
  - N.B. The right to services and benefits varies depending on the immigration status (e.g. asylum-seekers vs. quota refugees)

# Clients of Hilma

- Time in Finland approximately 2 months – well over a decade
- Situations vary a lot



## **General concerns:**

- Access to social services and benefits
- Applying for services and appealing decisions
- Access to rehabilitation, disability aids and equipment
- Informal care and available support mechanisms
- Accommodation and income
- Social networks, recreational activities

# Clients of Hilma

- **System-wide challenges (e.g.):**
  - extensive but scattered services, bureaucracy
  - not enough cross-sectoral cooperation
  - prejudices, negative attitudes?
- **More specific challenges (e.g.):**
  - finding suitable accommodation
  - learning the Finnish language
  - access to work / studies / other meaningful activity



# We all want to feel included

**Integration:** reciprocal development of immigrant and society, not "teaching immigrants to behave themselves"



Integration is about finding one's place in life, having the sense of belonging and inclusion and building a best possible life in the new home country without losing one's roots.

Persons with disabilities and their family members have an equal right to successful integration.



# Integration measures and services

**Integration also means** measures and services provided by authorities and other stakeholders to advance and support integration.



- **New law on integration in 2011**
  - Initial assessment: ‘a promise of future services’
  - Individual integration plan, integration training, integration assistance (3-5 years)
  - Municipality, Kela, Employment and Economic Development Office (TE Office)
- **Integration is employment-orientated**
  - Is a disabled immigrant dismissed as ‘non-employable’?

# Possible challenges to integration

- Person's own views, expectations and experiences; the circumstances of migration
- Prejudice, negative attitudes in society
- Challenges in communication, mutual distrust
- Deficient attention to the situation of the whole family, changes in the internal dynamics of the family
- Inappropriate integration measures (e.g. inaccessible language course), difficulties in access to work
- Fragmented and complicated service system
- Lack of social contacts, loneliness
- Multiple minority, multiple challenges?



# How to support the integration process

- Accessible information on services, rights and responsibilities; ensuring access to services
- Special support measures available if needed
- Respect for self-determination
- Focus on strengths and possibilities
- Individual approach – *one size fits no-one*
- Active inclusion
- Strengthening positive attitudes in society, preventing discrimination
- Time, time, more time...



# Positive experiences

- Clients overcoming the sense of helplessness: help and support is available (→ How can I myself improve my situation?)
- Finding the first 'stepping stone' to integration and increased quality of life
- New social networks e.g. through contacts to disability organisations
- Empowerment through the realisation that a disabled person can live a full life in Finland



Thank you!  
Comments/ questions?



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