

Finland: Young Asylum Seekers in Finnish Folk High Schools (Nutukka)

Type of provider

Folk high schools offer adult education and liberal adult education in Finnish, Swedish and English. There are around 90 folk high schools in Finland, with more than 70 schools and 80 campuses belonging to the Finnish Folk High School Association. Most folk high schools had worked with migrants before the Nutukka programme; some specialise in integration.

Objectives

The Nutukka programme, developed by the Finnish Folk High School Association, provided unaccompanied asylum seekers with supported housing and education. The Nutukka programme first ran in 2005, then in 2008-2009. In 2015-2016, 20 folk high schools with around 600 youths participated in the programme. After the programme, the youths continued with basic education for adults, liberal education and preparatory education for vocational training or upper secondary school.

Assessment approaches

Learning by doing and daily activities. Studying with different groups and interaction with locals. Feedback from the participants.

Target Group

For 16- to 17-year-old unaccompanied asylum seekers. In practice, most unaccompanied asylum seekers are young men. Includes special groups, such as asylum seekers with disabilities.

Potential transferability/ scalability

Network of educational institutions needed: schools that are able to accept asylum seekers as students and provide accommodation and meals (boarding schools or other housing). Ministries involved in the financing. Lack of ongoing financing an issue? However, a model for the programme now exists.

Summaries or Basic elements of analysis

Preventing marginalisation of unaccompanied asylum seekers with supported studies and housing. Integration through studying, living and interacting with other students at folk high schools and locals. Finding something they are good at encourages the youths to additional studies and to working on their language skills. The existing Nutukka model can be used or developed further.

Introduction in keywords

- Young Asylum Seekers in Finnish Folk High Schools (Nutukka)
- Finland
- integration through studying, living and interacting with Finnish students and locals
- everyday activities
- unaccompanied asylum seekers

5 areas descriptive text

Organisation and Description of the tool(s) (which skills are assessed)

Folk high schools provide general education for adults, often for one academic year. This is primarily liberal adult education. Different programmes have different requirements, but generally, students have completed comprehensive school or upper secondary school. Additionally, some schools offer vocational education or basic or upper secondary school for adults. There are also shorter summer courses.

Around 90 folk high schools are located around the country, with over 70 schools and 80 campuses belonging to the Finnish Folk High School Association. The largest schools have hundreds of students. Most schools offer education in Finnish, some in Swedish or English. A number of folk high schools were founded on religious principles, while others have ties to trade unions or political parties. Many schools have no political or religious affiliation. Some have a multicultural profile, specialising in integration. There are also schools specifically for students with disabilities.

Folk high schools are boarding schools, providing their students with accommodation and meals. The Nutukka programme housed unaccompanied asylum seekers at folk high schools, offering them supported studies and housing for an academic year (30-38 weeks). At the end of the programme, feedback was collected and individual study plans were made for the youths.

Implementation (how the tool is used, how the assessors are trained, how often it is used)

Living together and studying in smaller groups strengthens a sense of community. A safe environment for studies while growing up, taking on more responsibilities and becoming an independent adult is important for any youth. It is especially important for unaccompanied asylum seekers without their families, to prevent marginalisation. Liberal adult education also emphasises inclusiveness in general. Tytti Pansar, a development director from the Finnish Folk High School Association, speaks of “two-way learning” and “two-way integration”, with Finnish and immigrant students learning from each other. This is also the case with students with disabilities. Folk high schools offer education to adult immigrants on a similar basis – integration through studying alongside different groups. It is important that folk high schools serve people from various backgrounds, and that immigrant students interact with Finnish students and locals.

According to Heidi Luukkainen, abilities are best displayed in practical, everyday situations. Luukkainen has a double role as a project planner for the Finnish Folk High School Association, specialising in immigrant education, and working at the Evangelical Folk High School of Kitee. When the Nutukka youths prepared meals in the weekends, it immediately became obvious who had a talent for cooking, because they gravitated towards those activities. Another student, who was able to sew, got a sewing machine and ended up tailoring clothes for the other students. On the other hand, if you sit down with someone and ask them what they can do, you may only get blank stares.

Nutukka was first tested in 2005, with another run during 2008-2009. In 2015, when more than 3,000 unaccompanied minors sought asylum in Finland, the programme could start with little advance notice. Twenty folk high schools and around six hundred youths participated in the 2015-2016 programme, with similar activities organised at another five schools. Most of the schools had worked with migrants before.

Description of the target groups

The target group for Nutukka was 16- to 17-year-old unaccompanied asylum seekers. As the majority of unaccompanied asylum seekers are young men, over 95% of the participants in the programme were male, most of them from Afghanistan, Somalia or Iraq. The majority (70%) had attended school for six years or less, while 14% had not attended school in their home country at all. A small minority had received some form of vocational or upper secondary education. An equally small number of the youths had primary illiteracy, never having learnt to read. Moreover, 23% were functionally illiterate, and had to begin their studies by learning the Latin alphabet. There are also other groups within the target group, such as immigrants without a traditional language. That is, deaf immigrants who have never learnt the local language or sign language, and communicate in some other way.

Although the Nutukka project offers a comprehensive and successful model of integration, one of the weak points ties to the initial lack of a common language. If the students face other challenges than, say, illiteracy or language difficulties, it can take time before those issues become known. Folk high schools are also educational establishments, and are thus unable to accommodate people who are too traumatised to study or function in a group.

Policy context

The Nutukka programme has been developed by the Finnish Folk High School Association and financed by the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Education and Culture. The earlier runs proved useful in 2015, as there was an available model for how to proceed, and no units needed to be established or dismantled for the programme. The network of folk high schools had the capacity to accept the youths as students and provide accommodation. The Nutukka model can be developed further. However, there is no ongoing financing.

Around half of the Nutukka youths participated in some form of work experience as part of the programme. As the youths are minors, this places some limits on their work. Luukkainen, who is also an owner of a company that has employed former Nutukka participants, points out that entrepreneurs need more support in general to hire immigrants. It is a question of money and practicalities, rather than attitudes. Finding a job is an important step and has a positive impact on the youths.

Impact for assessees

It is vital, Luukkainen emphasises, that students find something they are good at, even just one thing. It motivates them to study on and study other things, improving their language skills in order to be able to develop their competences. Within the programme, the participants' language skills reached, on average, the CEFR level A1.3, with a quarter of the participants managing level A2. Some even reached an intermediate B-level. There is also a popular cultural week, which allows students to demonstrate their talents by performing in Finnish.

The youths found friends and hobbies at the schools or around them. Based on feedback from the youths, an overwhelming majority felt safe in Finland and at the folk high schools, and believed they could study and work in the country. Many had some idea of what they wanted to do in the future. For most youths in the programme, study plans were then made. These included basic education for adults, immigration training through liberal education or preparatory education for vocational training or upper secondary school.

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