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# SUPPORTING INTEGRATION WITH ONE'S OWN LANGUAGE

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A HANDBOOK FOR PROFESSIONALS



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## FOREWORD

This publication has been created to support the work of professionals in municipal basic services, and for anyone interested in supporting integration.

In municipalities, integration is professionally supported in several sectors. Municipalities decide on the implementation of their integration support services locally. Hence, the services and what they consist of vary by municipality. Municipalities and municipal employees play a central role in successful integration. Messages from both the municipal professionals and the municipal residents who are integrating have been heard in the creation of this publication.

Integration is a multilevel process which actualizes in interpersonal encounters and interaction. Best results are achieved when both the person who is integrating into Finland and the professional are supported. This publication introduces models for early integration which utilize the language skills of the people who are integrating. It also provides perspectives on interaction that supports integration for professionals across service sectors.

This publication has been produced as part of the joint Navigator project (2018–2021) of the Finnish Refugee Council, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Diaconia University of Applied Sciences. During the project, the Central Uusimaa municipalities' capacity to receive quota refugees and support their integration has been strengthened. Training for municipal employees and Civic Orientation trainers has been implemented within the project. It also entailed organizing Civic Orientation courses for municipal residents who are integrating, in their own language. The Navigator project has been funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

On behalf of the Navigator project, I want to warmly thank the donor as well as the experts on integration support who were involved in the preparation of this publication, the Navigator project's steering group members, the immigration coordinators of the Central Uusimaa municipalities, all the interviewed people who are integrating into Finland and experts, commenters as well as all who participated in the training courses and events.

Helsinki, 11 November 2020

**Simo Kohonen**

Chief of Mission, IOM Country Office in Finland

## UTILIZING LANGUAGE SKILLS FROM THE BEGINNING OF INTEGRATION

Immigration to Finland has increased and diversified through decades. Municipalities have an especially important role in promoting the integration of all municipal residents. **The competence of the professionals in municipalities' basic services play a key role in integration.** In the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration,<sup>1</sup> municipalities are assigned obligations related to promoting integration. A municipality is responsible for developing its employees' expertise and providing necessary services which also serve its residents who have migrated there and are integrating.<sup>2</sup>

Integration is a multilevel process whereby a person becomes a full member of the society, learns their rights and obligations and feels like they belong. Supporting integration counteracts marginalization and promotes good relations between population groups.

Early integration requires utilizing **the language skills of the person who has migrated to Finland**, right from the beginning of the integration process. In addition, **the interaction between the professionals and clients in basic services should support integration.**

A person can only integrate into a country which they know and understand. Having an overview of the society promotes the development of the civic skills necessary for living in Finland and forms a foundation for integration.

**One's own language is a resource for integration** and can be utilized in the initial phase of integration. This can be realized by organizing courses, assistance and counselling in different languages – to support the work of authorities – until one succeeds handling official matters in Finnish or Swedish. One's own language builds a bridge to the new home country: to its cultures, languages and the municipality. **Language is also an important tool for professionals and authorities.** That is why it is good to be aware of the kind of interaction one is constructing.

This publication focuses on the beginning of integration, from the viewpoint of an adult who is integrating and that of a professional in client work. First, the models to support integration by utilizing the language skills of the people who are integrating are introduced. These are Cultural Orientation and Civic Orientation. Then, to support the work of the professionals, public service interpreting and a language-aware approach to client work are discussed. Lastly, ways to promote integration in municipalities in a language-aware and holistic way are summarized.

<sup>1</sup> Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (2010/1386).

<sup>2</sup> Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, section 30.

## CULTURAL ORIENTATION INITIATES INTEGRATION

**Finland organizes Cultural Orientation training for its selected quota refugees prior to arriving in Finland.**<sup>1</sup> Cultural Orientation is a three- to four-day training course on the Finnish society, culture and language. To many, Cultural Orientation is the first look into a new life in Finland. Cultural Orientation supports early integration and reduces culture shock upon arriving in the new home country. Cultural Orientation has a positive impact on the life of quota refugees in Finland.

**Finland has been resettling quota refugees already for more than 40 years.**<sup>2</sup> In its quota policy, Finland particularly emphasizes the resettlement of the most vulnerable people. The Parliament decides the size of Finland's refugee quota annually. **1,050** people will be selected for resettlement to Finland within the quota in 2021. The process of resettlement of quota refugees to Finland and to the home municipality is orderly and as safe as possible. The Finnish authorities select the individuals to be resettled to Finland, and municipalities decide independently whether they will accept quota refugees.<sup>3</sup>

Aliens Act, section 90



### REFUGEE QUOTA

Under the refugee quota, Finland may admit for resettlement persons considered refugees by UNHCR or other aliens in need of international protection.

The refugee quota means admitting into the country, in accordance with the grounds confirmed in the Budget for each year, aliens who need international protection and are to be resettled.

<sup>1</sup> Cultural Orientation has been organized since 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of the Interior, 2019. Finland has resettled quota refugees since the 1970s.

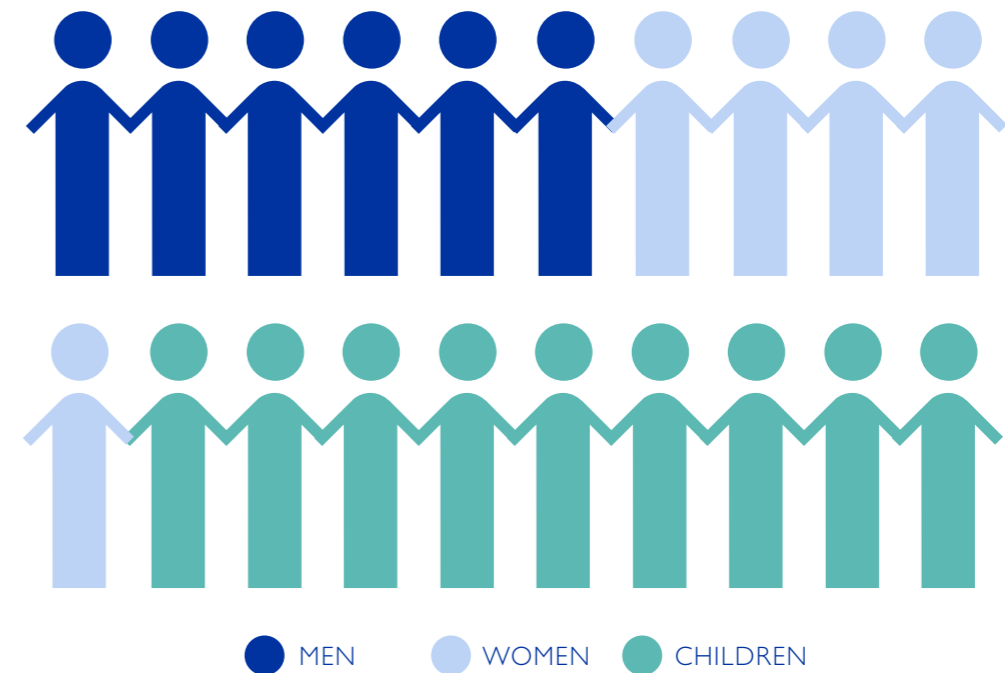
<sup>3</sup> See an infographic about a quota refugee's journey to a municipality: <https://finland.iom.int/publications>.

Language awareness is a key component of the implementation of Cultural Orientation. The Cultural Orientation trainers always either speak the participants' mother tongue or communicate through an interpreter. During the Finnish language lessons, Finnish is taught in Finnish. The Cultural Orientation trainers are integration specialists from the IOM Country Office in Finland and from Diaconia University of Applied Sciences. The interpreters are students of public service interpreting from Diaconia University of Applied Sciences or interpreters commissioned by local IOM offices.

Childcare workers hired by the local IOM office look after children under school age, so the adults can focus on the training itself. Activity-based learning featuring play and games are organized for children under the age of 12, along with age-appropriate Finnish language tuition. In addition, adolescents have a group of their

own, featuring content that has been tailored suitable for young people's experience level.

Cultural Orientation contains a section in which participants can ask questions and comment on any topics they want to. Topics of interest are then discussed in a gender-sensitive way, in separate groups for men and women, to encourage questions and comments. Questions related to marriage, sexual and reproductive health, employment opportunities and equality, among others, arouse a lot of interest. Accurate information helps to build a realistic understanding of the new home country and one's opportunities there.



Quota refugees usually arrive in Finland in the same year they have been selected, or the following year. In 2019, altogether 891 quota refugees arrived in Finland, 28 per cent of whom were adult men and 24 per cent adult women. Nearly half, namely 48 per cent, were children. (Finnish Immigration Service, 2020)

## CONFIDENCE IN ONESELF AND IN FINLAND

**Trust is the cornerstone of integration.** Reasons behind the displacement, such as war, conflict and persecution, have affected the sense of security of everyone arriving in Finland as a refugee. Trust in other people and in the society has suffered. Cultural Orientation is aimed at encouraging and motivating Finland-bound quota refugees to get to know their new home country's culture and continue learning independently. Providing information strengthens trust and confidence in one's own abilities to do well and build a good life in Finland.

During Cultural Orientation, the secular and diverse nature of the Finnish society is also brought up. Cultural Orientation prepares the participants for the personal, social and psychological process of integration. Life in a new country can also be frightening. People may have very little knowledge, incorrect knowledge or no knowledge at all about Finland. Uncertainty fuels needless fears and presumptions. Cultural Orientation reduces these by correcting misunderstandings and providing legitimate information verbally, in the participants' own language. Cultural Orientation succeeds best when it is implemented in an interactive way. The trainer answers questions, helps form realistic expectations and provides information in order to reduce the culture shock.

The website provides information in nine different languages: Burmese, Arabic, Kurdish, French, English, Swedish, Finnish, Swahili and Persian. The learning material has been structured into modules, so that one can also choose which modules to study.

Cultural Orientation also features a printed workbook. It is handed out to participants at the beginning of the Cultural Orientation training. The book is utilized to some extent during the lessons. It serves particularly the literate quota refugees, who are able to review the topics even after the training. The book also includes links to reliable sources of information accessible via a mobile connection. The printed book ensures access to information also to those quota refugees who lack Internet access or a sufficient level of digital literacy.

Cultural Orientation covers the same topics as the website and the book. The trainers elaborate on the topics and discuss them in a participatory way, and by utilizing for example pictures and videos as training materials.

Visit the  
website  
[mof.fi](https://mof.fi)

## THE MOVING TO FINLAND WEBSITE

The Moving to Finland website has been created to support Cultural Orientation. It provides quota refugees with basic information about traveling to Finland and about various services, education, employment and culture, in several different languages to support one in everyday life. Factual information guides one towards the beginning of the integration process and motivates independent learning. The website can also be used with a mobile device.



### DIMA SALIH

Cultural Orientation trainer  
(Arabic, English), MTh,  
IOM Country Office in Finland



During the Cultural Orientation training, participants have to absorb a lot of information in just a few days. Therefore, I illustrate the topics by using examples and stories. This helps the participants to understand and remember things. From a communications perspective, the trainer has a challenging role. It is important that the non-verbal communication supports the verbal message. I ask questions and reserve time for the participants' questions, of which there are plenty.

People often know that Finland is a country with a cold climate and a high level of education. People also know that there is peace in Finland and that Finland is a safe country, particularly for children. I am always proud of Finland when I get to speak about it during the Cultural Orientation training. Mainly the participants dream of an ordinary life: of work, school and family life.

There is no need to alter one's mindset totally, but some ways of thinking have to change. One's identity changes, and we prepare this change during Cultural Orientation. But I do always say that Finland appreciates your mother tongue and your culture – you do not need to abandon them. Integration is a process in which we combine the old with the new, but do not assimilate. You will not lose yourself even if you welcome the new.

When appropriate, I utilize my own background as a tool in the training. It can provide the participants with an encouraging and relatable example. I made it too – it is not always easy, but just keep persevering!"

HONEYMOON PHASE

SHOCK PHASE

REACTION PHASE

ADAPTATION PHASE

The phases of a culture shock. Each person experiences them at an individual pace, and the duration varies. This is often also referred to as the "psychological process of migration" or a "crisis process".<sup>1</sup>

1. See e.g. Bremer L. and A. Haavikko, 2018, 20. The Finnish Red Cross (2020) has also produced an integration timeline published in seven languages: <https://rednet.punainenristi.fi/kotoutumiskaari>.

### A SPARK FOR THE FINNISH LANGUAGE!

Most quota refugees resettle in a Finnish-speaking municipality. Therefore, the participants of Cultural Orientation are familiarized with the Finnish language through functional methods. Participants learn, for example, greetings and how to introduce themselves in Finnish. The status of Swedish as the other official language in Finland is also discussed in the training. Additionally, it is mentioned that Swedish-speaking municipalities may also resettle quota refugees, which means that some may integrate into Finland in Swedish.

#### Language skills are the key to integration.

Language entails and helps construct a view of the world, a way of seeing. The Finnish language also conveys a certain shared social landscape. Therefore, learning the language helps to understand Finland and Finns better. For example, the Finnish personal pronoun *hän* (the gender-neutral third-person singular pronoun which corresponds to both the English “he” and “she”) illustrates well the egalitarian Finnish view of people. Language is important for self-expression, obtaining information and creating networks. However, learning a language as an adult can take several years and requires motivation and hard work.

Quota refugees have very diverse educational backgrounds. Everyone cannot read or write, or know the Latin alphabet. Some have academic degrees and knowledge of several languages, also in the written form. The objective of the language section is to spark

an interest in studying the language rather than to pursue any particular level of learning. That is why everyone gets to learn a little bit of Finnish during the Cultural Orientation training. The participants are also encouraged to study independently and utilize the Moving to Finland book or website.

### CULTURAL ORIENTATION

During the last 25 years, IOM has organized Cultural Orientation training for over 500,000 quota refugees in over 70 countries across the world. The training courses are always tailored to suit the target group. Since 2001, the IOM Country Office in Finland has implemented Cultural Orientation training for more than 5,000 refugees.

In 2018–2021, the IOM Country Office in Finland implements Cultural Orientation together with Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak) and local IOM offices, in a project administered by the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) and funded by the European Union’s Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). The content of Cultural Orientation is developed under the supervision of Migri, in cooperation with Diak and the IOM Country Office in Finland.

### THE TOPICS OF CULTURAL ORIENTATION



The Cultural Orientation participants already know that they are going to Finland, but do not yet know which municipality they are moving to. They do not know what kind of a country Finland is and what kind of a life awaits them here. They wonder about many everyday issues: will they learn the language, find work, get new friends, what kind of food is available in Finland and what life will be like in the new home country.

Training skills are important in Cultural Orientation. It is good to liven up the teaching when possible, for example by utilizing other senses besides sight and hearing. When I speak about winter, we try on a padded winter coat and mittens to experience what it is like to wear them. I also offer samples of rye bread to try.

In addition to sharing or distributing information, it is also important in the Cultural Orientation training to create a good atmosphere, motivate the participants and inspire confidence and hope for a better future.

Children may have had their education interrupted in their country of origin. Instead of going to school, they may have worked to help the family make a living. The language used at school may also have differed from the home language of the child.

Interpreting is necessary in Cultural Orientation if the trainer does not speak the same language as the participants. The students of public service interpreting at Diak have been prepared for the task. I speak Finnish and the student interprets my speech to the participants, and vice versa. This way, the participants and I understand each other. In the beginning of integration, quota refugees have to communicate with officials through an interpreter, because they do not yet speak Finnish or Swedish. Interpreting affects the interactive situation. This way, the participants can experience communicating through an interpreter during the Cultural Orientation training.”



**KATJA PÄÄLYSAHO**  
 Cultural Orientation trainer,  
 Lecturer in Social Services, MSocSc,  
 Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak)

## CIVIC ORIENTATION

Civic Orientation is a comprehensive integration-supporting course **for all who have migrated to Finland**. Municipalities can organize Civic Orientation courses for their residents who are integrating. Civic Orientation is aimed particularly at the beginning phase of integration.

Civic Orientation provides comprehensive information on the Finnish society and promotes integration. The course is led by a competent Civic Orientation trainer, in a group setting and in the participants' **own language**. In practice, the course is taught either in the participants' mother tongue or in another language they are proficient in. Information is easier to internalize in one's own language. Civic Orientation provides a foundation for integration, which supports municipalities' professional assistance and counselling services.

Receiving information in one's own language enables gaining a more profound understanding of the society than would otherwise be possible in the beginning of integration. Information provided in one's own language does not lower the motivation to learn Finnish or Swedish – on the contrary. Understanding

the society and its cultures deepens the learning of a new language and encourages to use it.

Civic Orientation in one's own language has been developed in the Finnish Refugee Council and has been modelled after Sweden's statutory Samhällsorientering course.<sup>1</sup>

### LANGUAGE AND CIVIC SKILLS ARE THE BASIC PILLARS OF INTEGRATION

The necessary **language skills** and **civic skills** of the new home country are the two basic pillars of integration. In this context, civic skills refer to the skills, knowledge and understanding required to function as a member of the Finnish society. Civic skills are required in order for a person to feel like an active and full member of society, to know one's rights and to abide by common laws and practices. Shared civic skills promote social cohesion and unity.

In Finland, learning the Finnish or Swedish language is supported during the integration period.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Civic Orientation has been developed in the Finnish Refugee Council since 2016 with the support of the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

<sup>2</sup> The integration period (*kotoutumisaika*) is the individually-determined time period during which one's integration plan is valid. The integration period officially starts when the first integration plan is created. According to section 12 of the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, an integration plan must be created within three years from the issuing of the first residence permit. An individual is entitled to an integration plan for a maximum of three years from the creation of the first integration plan. For a justified reason, the integration period can be extended by a maximum of two years.

A person who is integrating and unemployed is required to register as a job seeker with the TE Services, provided that they are of working age and able to work. During one's integration period, one can be directed to integration training by the TE Services. Integration training provides, in addition to Finnish or Swedish lessons, working-life and civic skills. Often the training is provided in Finnish or Swedish, in other words, in a language one is still in the process of learning. Many can find it challenging to comprehend vast and abstract societal subject matters in a language they are still learning.

Learning a new language takes time. For an adult, it can take several years to learn a new language. It is, nonetheless, possible to reach a sufficient level to be able work in some jobs already during the integration period. However, a large proportion of adults do not reach the required level of Finnish or Swedish skills to enable them to independently deal with public authorities. Consequently, working with a public service interpreter may be necessary even after the integration period.

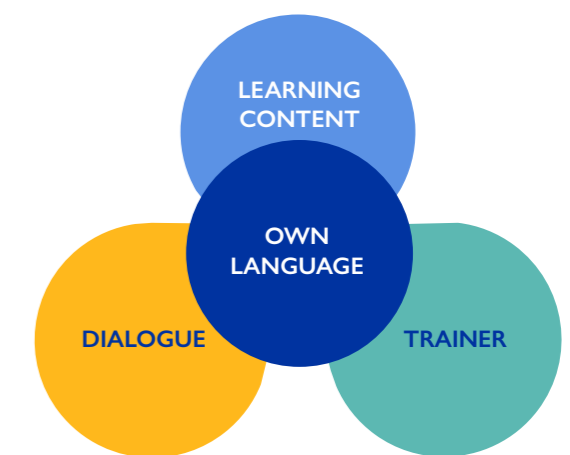
### EQUALITY AND UNITY

The civic skills necessary in the Finnish society can be strengthened by organizing Civic Orientation training for individuals who are integrating. This can be done in the participants' own language. During the training, one learns about Finland's history and development, how the welfare state is structured, and about everyone's rights and obligations. Knowledge about the history of and familiarity with the story of Finland form a strong foundation for a sense of belonging. Additionally, one learns to understand the Finnish culture, daily life and working life. Given that culture and language are always intertwined, civic skills also deepen the learning of a new language – and vice versa.

Knowledge and skills also affect perception, interaction and self-image. A comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the surrounding society helps one to make sense of the new language, cultural concepts and symbols, and to interpret verbal and non-verbal communication. The development of civic skills supports the adoption of the new language as a part of one's linguistic identity.

At an individual level, integration means a sense of belonging in communities and the Finnish society. Integration also concerns the developing relationship between an individual and the state – in other words, citizenship – which at a local level actualizes as being a municipal resident. Civic Orientation opens one's eyes to various activities to join in and opportunities for belonging. Civic Orientation improves the participants' understanding of human rights, democracy, constructive dialogue and of respecting diverse views in the Finnish society. This enhances, in part, good relations between population groups and supports the construction of a collective identity.

Civic Orientation supports agency. Understanding the functional principles and the institutions of the society enables one to act independently within its framework. Civic Orientation enables individuals to make informed choices through increased knowledge of different options and their consequences. In the process, people participating in the Civic Orientation training become aware of their rights and obligations, and will not remain dependent on the help of others. Hence, Civic Orientation enhances unity and equality in Finland and in municipalities.



Successful Civic Orientation requires:

1. A competent Civic Orientation trainer
2. A uniform training content
3. A dialogical training approach

The aim of the course content is to learn about the following aspects of the Finnish society:

- Its operation and structure
- Its values, laws and democratic principles
- The rights and obligations of the individual
- The practices of daily life



## EVERYONE MUST KNOW ABOUT THE LEGISLATION

The Finnish law is not available in the Dari language. Knowledge of the law is, however, essential for integration. Civic Orientation is an absolute necessity for integrating into Finland!

The information about Finland that is available online is often not accessible to people who are integrating. They do not have sufficient or any language skills in Finnish, Swedish or English, and may not have IT skills either. Correct information about the Finnish society, provided in one's own language and through discussion, helps prevent problems and benefits also individuals who lack reading and writing skills.

Civic Orientation is a cost-effective way to promote integration. When participants are taught in their own language, interpretation does not take up time and money.

## SUPPORTS EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

When it comes to employment and entrepreneurship, Civic Orientation is important. It is good to understand the framework conditions related to the labour law and the labour market as early as possible. In addition, pay- and tax-related issues are at the core of the Finnish welfare society – one must have accurate information about them. Entrepreneurship means very different things in different parts of the world. Many people who are integrating consider becoming entrepreneurs, without knowing about the requirements and legislative principles in Finland. Realistic information enables informed career choices.

I wish that everyone who has moved to Finland knew that a hundred years ago Finland was a developing country, had suffered from wars and was poor, but the Finnish people together decided to make Finland into one of the best countries in the world. And to this end, people worked together and extremely hard, setting aside differences, for Finland's sake. Building Finland continues to this day, and there is room for all in the future chapters of Finland's story!"



### AZIZA HOSSAINI

Civic Orientation trainer (Dari, Persian/Farsi), BBA, public service interpreter and translator

## CIVIC ORIENTATION ENHANCES TRUST TOWARDS AUTHORITIES

Trust in the surrounding society is a prerequisite for integration. Trust in the authorities cannot form if one does not know and understand the democratic principle of rule of law in Finland. Civic Orientation familiarizes participants with Finland comprehensively and covers Finland's development from an agrarian society into a welfare state. Furthermore, the significance of public authorities to citizens is explained. In the course, one learns, for example, that corruption in Finland is scarce and that everyone's protection under the law is guaranteed in the legislation.

During Civic Orientation, the authorities' role and significance and the public service system are clarified to the participants. This basic knowledge benefits many service sectors when people seek the right services at the right time. Civic Orientation promotes wellbeing and equality in the whole municipality when also the residents who are integrating trust and rely on the information and counselling provided by the authorities, rather than on information from informal channels. Thus, problems will not have time to escalate.

A person in the beginning of integration is often facing the unknown upon arrival in Finland. The language and customs are foreign, one's relatives may have stayed in the home country and daily life must be rebuilt. In the face of everything new, people may rely on familiar traditions and roles if they do not have early access to learn about the "Finnish ways". In the Civic Orientation training, the basic values, founding principles and history of the Finnish society are explained in the participants' own language. This way, everyone can become a part of Finland's story and journey of development. Civic Orientation encourages towards the possibility of change in one's life and identity. Democracy is strengthened when all people living in Finland abide by the same rules and can trust the society.

## GETTING STARTED IN ONE'S OWN LANGUAGE

One's mother tongue is safe and familiar when everything else around can be new and foreign.

Therefore, information provided in one's own language during Civic Orientation is conveyed with ease and promotes commitment to the Finnish society, particularly in the beginning of integration. Explaining the basic values, structures and meanings of the Finnish society is a central prerequisite for integration. This does not mean that each and every public service must be provided in every language possible. At the beginning phase of integration, however, orientation in one's own language is justified. This way everyone receives a realistic and comprehensive general view of the society, right from the start.

People make sense of the world and assign meaning to things, phenomena and events with the help of language. People's existing language skills can be utilized in the beginning of integration by providing training in their own language. The implementation of Civic Orientation in one's own language builds a bridge between the Finnish society and an individual who is integrating. In Civic Orientation, the individual gains access to Finland's history in their own language. Finland's history is a story of survival which inspires hope and invites everyone to fulfil their potential in this society. The story of Finland is indeed the strongest asset in integration.

## A COMPETENT CIVIC ORIENTATION TRAINER

The task of the Civic Orientation trainer is to familiarize the participants with the Finnish society and to support their integration into Finland. The participants form heterogenous groups when it comes to their level of education, nationality and abilities. This is challenging for the instructor but allows examining issues from many different points of view. At the same time, it is demonstrated that even difficult issues can be discussed freely and openly.

The trainer must know the Finnish society, share its central basic values and commit to the objectives of Civic Orientation. They must have sufficient knowledge of the language of tuition, in addition to Finnish. The trainer's task in Civic Orientation is pedagogically challenging and requires – along with appropriate attributes – skills and practice in applying the dialogical approach.





## CIVIC ORIENTATION IS INCLUSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY

It is not a problem if some Civic Orientation participants do not know how to read or write, because the teaching is based on dialogue, discussion and listening – assigning written homework is not necessary.

The course does not have a limited target group. It should be implemented as at least a 70-hour course. It can be organized as a fast-paced course, for example in a two-week period, or at a slower pace, such as having one lesson per week. The most important thing is that the participants can join the discussion and ask questions. Civic Orientation's objectives cannot be reached with lecture-based or informative one-way learning styles.

### PEOPLE WILL NOT LISTEN BEFORE THEY ARE HEARD

Trust stems from an atmosphere which allows to deeply focus on and understand a topic – here, the trainer is in an important role.

In an atmosphere of trust, it is also possible to voice incorrect impressions, and only this way it is possible to get to calmly discuss them.

Learning and understanding actualize through participation. This means that everyone should feel comfortable to comment and ask questions. Learning in a group enables reflection. Civic Orientation supports the entire society's social cohesion and promotes civil peace.

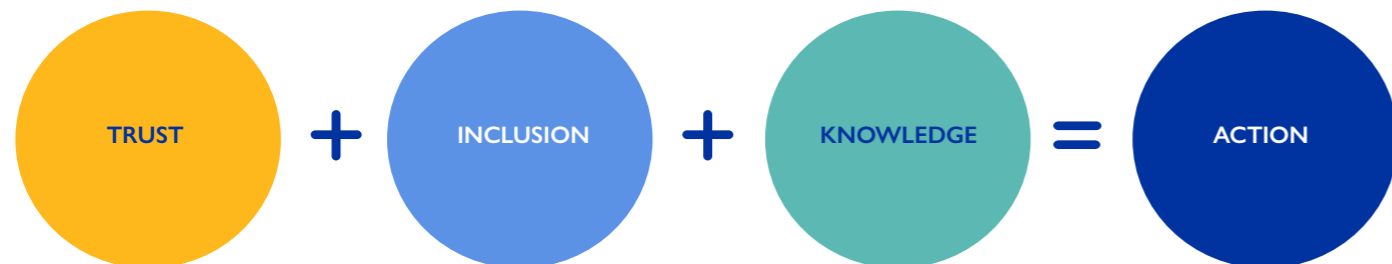
Through Civic Orientation, one learns to know and understand Finland. Only thus is social inclusion possible. Inclusion, on the other hand, is a prerequisite for knowledge to manifest as action."



### AMANI BAKRI

Head trainer of Civic Orientation, Finnish Refugee Council

Amani is responsible for training new Civic Orientation trainers – in Finnish – at the Finnish Refugee Council. She has also taught Civic Orientation in Arabic for people who are integrating into Finland.



## DIALOGICAL APPROACH – LEARNING TOGETHER

In Civic Orientation, the trainer elaborates on each topic at hand by evoking group discussion, in other words, with dialogue. As the training is based on a dialogical approach, it meets the participants where they are,<sup>1</sup> contrary to merely providing information. The trainer facilitates the participants' examination of their knowledge of, experiences concerning and meanings assigned to the topics under discussion. The trainer bridges the discussions, so that the participants gain an understanding of the Finnish culture and of how the society operates. The trainer can utilize various participatory methods as well as group assignments to support the learning. Guest speakers and visits also deepen the understanding of different themes.

The trainer facilitates the dialogue in the group, fostering an atmosphere of respecting diverse views. **Listening, asking questions and discussion increase trust but also promote shared learning and the acceptance of different views.**

Training based on a dialogical approach enables interaction among the participants, which permits them to safely examine their own views and beliefs, draw upon their life experiences and listen to each other – to learn together. **The dialogical approach is inclusive and supports equality.** When the teaching relies on discussion in the participants' own language, rather than on presentations and written material, it is accessible also to people with lower levels of literacy skills.

Particularly in the beginning of integration, people have a great need for information without the needed level of language skills to utilize online and other written material. Civic Orientation provides accurate and essential information in one's own language and prevents misinterpretations. When people have acquired a basic understanding, they are far less likely to end up victims of labour exploitation, for example.

Instead, they know that, if necessary, they can rely on help from authorities such as the police, without fear. The trainer bridges differences between different norm and value systems by utilizing the participants' opinions and experiences along with the dialogical approach. The trainer listens actively, engages the group and adapts the dialogue based on the group in question.<sup>2</sup> The content and topics of the course are the same for every group, however, the implementation and emphasis vary. Each group is different in its composition and dynamics. The trainer must have the competence to adapt the teaching to meet the participants' needs.

### CIVIC ORIENTATION TRAINERS

In order to guarantee high-quality Civic Orientation, the Finnish Refugee Council has been piloting the trainers' training. The trainers are familiarized with the learning content, objectives and practical implementation of Civic Orientation through theory and practice. They are given tools for facilitating good dialogue and for participatory teaching. The training also involves reflecting on one's own experiences, views and attitudes – and learning from others.

Educational institutions, civil society organizations and municipalities can hire Civic Orientation trainers to provide the training for the courses in Dari, Farsi, Amharic, Arabic, Kurdish and Tigrinya, among other languages.

More information: [yhateiskuntaorientaatio.fi](http://yhateiskuntaorientaatio.fi)

<sup>1</sup> Vesterlind, M and Winman, T. 2015, 170.

<sup>2</sup> Vesterlind, M and Winman, T. 2015, 171-173.

## FINLAND – CIVIC ORIENTATION TEXTBOOK

The learning content of the Civic Orientation course is based on the **Finland – Civic Orientation Textbook** developed by the Finnish Refugee Council. The textbook can be used by both the Civic Orientation trainer as well as the participants.<sup>1</sup> The textbook helps ensure that the implementation of the course is as consistent in quality as possible. The trainer also utilizes other teaching material in the training, such as materials by various authorities, as well as websites and videos.

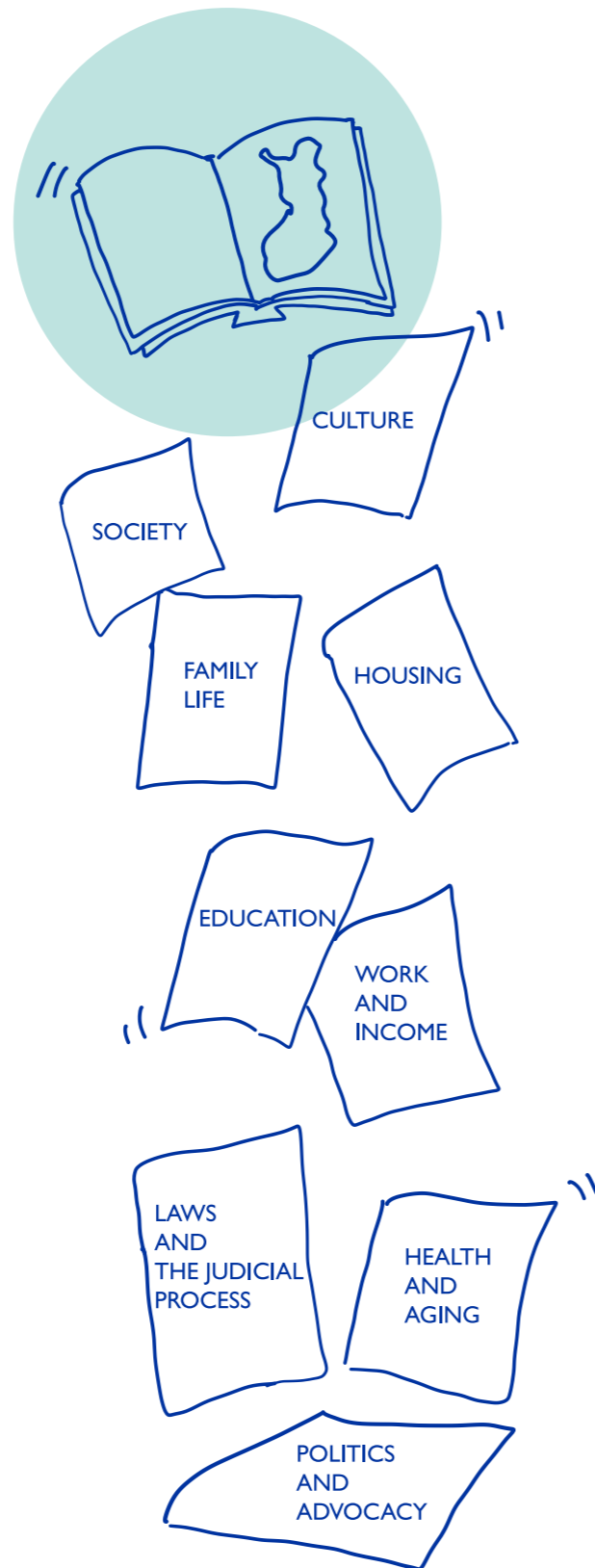
Knowledge increases one's sense of security and confidence to act in the society. Getting to know Finland's history is a central part of integration since history and its interpretation strongly affect the collective identity; language, culture and their development. In addition, history helps to better comprehend present-day realities and to understand what kind of hard work, compromises and democratic principles brought about the current welfare state.

The learning content of Civic Orientation also comprehensively covers issues related to health and equality, as well as information that promotes wellbeing and employment. In Civic Orientation, Finland's legislation and rule of law, and their significance in daily life, are explained. Civic Orientation supports everyone's inclusion in contributing to an equal and fair society.

The textbook provides a comprehensive picture of the content of the Civic Orientation courses. The courses should be at least 70 hours in duration to best support integration.

The textbook is free of charge and available to download in Finnish, Swedish, English, Dari, Somali, Arabic and French, among other languages, on the Civic Orientation website:

[yhteiskuntaorientaatio.fi](http://yhteiskuntaorientaatio.fi)



### PREVENTS PROBLEMS IN FAMILIES

My favorite topics in the Civic Orientation course are family life and everyone's rights and obligations. The Civic Orientation course enables discussions on difficult topics, such as child protection and honour-related violence, thus preventing them.

Civic Orientation also provides concrete advice and support, should families encounter challenging situations. Often people's fears clear away once they understand that in Finland, the authorities help families, and that is in everyone's best interest. A welfare society means that Finland is built upon common good.

The children are being brought up in a Finnish society, however, they often learn the language before their parents. Therefore, parents should be given information about the society in their own language. Parents can, for example, unknowingly demand too much from a child if they do not know how challenging the child's education is.

### PROMOTES INCLUSION AND EQUALITY

Not everyone knows about Finland's wars, for example. Knowledge of the country's history is important for integration. Civic Orientation is a path to Finland as a new home country. I recommend that Civic Orientation be organized for all those who have moved to Finland. Civic Orientation motivates to engage in social issues, for example, to vote and to understand Finnish democracy and the significance of human rights and equality."



### SIRWA FARIK

Civic Orientation trainer (Arabic, Kurdish), integration specialist

<sup>1</sup> The textbook has been modelled after the *Om Sverige* material of Sweden's *Samhällsorientering* course.

## ORGANIZING CIVIC ORIENTATION SUCCEEDS WITH COOPERATION

Civic Orientation contains basic information about the society. The provided information is applicable regardless of location. Therefore, Civic Orientation **can be utilized nationwide**. Civic Orientation can be organized as a part of various educational institutions' integration training and municipalities' integration services. It can also be organized jointly by more than one municipality. Organizing the course is possible when there are enough participants from the same language group, and the organization of the course has been agreed upon with key parties. In order for guardians of young children to be able to focus on learning, it is advisable to arrange childcare for the duration of the training for those who need it. It is important to communicate to the target group early on about participating in a Civic Orientation course, and the purpose and benefits of it. It is recommended that the course programme be given out to participants in their own language already before the start of the course.

Integration always requires a lot of work, motivation and perseverance from the person who is integrating. In Finland, those who are part of the workforce – that is, those who are clients of the TE Services – are entitled to services, which promote integration and employment, through their TE office. In practice, this often means access to integration training.<sup>1</sup>

The law, however, requires that municipalities also support integration.<sup>2</sup> Municipalities decide independently on the implementation of their integration support services. Municipal residents who are outside the workforce and not in integration training are reliant on the integration services provided by their municipality. People outside the workforce include **carers, pensioners and stay-at-home parents as well as people who are rehabilitating**, people with partial work ability or people with disabilities. The integration services vary by municipality because Finland does not have a nationwide model for integration support.<sup>3</sup>

Municipalities support integration according to the integration programmes they have created. The creation of the programmes is statutory.<sup>4</sup> Municipal integration programmes are based on the national integration programme.<sup>5</sup> The national integration programme expresses Finland's objectives for integration. The Government decides on the national development of integration and creates a national integration programme for four years at a time.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Integration training is mainly arranged as labour market training and is therefore available only to clients of the TE Services, in other words, to those who are part of the workforce. More information in e.g. Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020a. *Kotoutuja-asiakkaiden ohjaus ja palvelut TE-toimistossa*.

<sup>2</sup> Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration sections 6, 29 and 30.

<sup>3</sup> More information in e.g. Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020b. *Työvoiman ulkopuolella olevien maahanmuuttaja-asiakkaiden ohjaus ja palvelut kunnissa*.

<sup>4</sup> Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, sections 32 and 33.

<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing of this publication, the national integration programme 2020–2023 is being prepared.

<sup>6</sup> Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, section 34.

**Equality** is important for successful integration. In 2018, the OECD published a report exploring immigration to and integration in Finland. According to the report, special attention should be paid to the integration of women and children with an immigrant background in Finland.<sup>1</sup> A municipality can promote the integration of those municipal residents who are not clients of the TE Services, such as stay-at-home mothers, by organizing Civic Orientation for everyone. Also municipal or regional integration programmes can include Civic Orientation courses organized in languages spoken by residents who are integrating.

Cooperation between the TE Services, municipality, educational institution and a Civic Orientation trainer yields best results when organizing the course. A Civic Orientation course can be included in personal integration plans. It is good to take into consideration the daily lives of potential participants when planning the course schedule. Communication, knowing the clients and counselling skills are of pivotal importance.



<sup>1</sup> OECD, 2018.

## EXPERIENCES FROM LOHJA

In Lohja, Civic Orientation courses have been organized in Arabic and Tigrinya. The courses were organized as a collaboration between Hiiden Opisto, the Finnish Refugee Council, the Immigration Services of the City of Lohja, and the TE Services. Both the integration training and the Civic Orientation course can be recorded in personal integration plans at the TE Services, as was done in Lohja.

This way, Civic Orientation is obligatory and its content can be acknowledged in the integration training. Additionally, when organized by an educational institution, the course benefits from a professional setting created by the facilities and teaching equipment. The trainers of the courses for Lohja's residents were certified by the Finnish Refugee Council.



### CIVIC ORIENTATION SUPPORTS THE PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION SUPPORT IN MUNICIPALITIES

Civic Orientation helps to prevent situations from escalating into crises and, thus, also prevents extra costs.

Changing familiar customs and beliefs does not happen in a moment, but it is possible through discussion and asking questions, which Civic Orientation enables.

Civic Orientation supports the individual counselling provided by different services.

Social security is a multifaceted topic, and educating people on it takes up a lot of resources in a municipality. Civic Orientation provides a framework for the social security system, enabling the reception of more detailed information thereafter.

Everyone who has moved to Finland would benefit from Civic Orientation – regardless of age or the grounds of their residence permit.

Civic Orientation should be organized as obligatory.

From the perspective of the municipality, all topics discussed in Civic Orientation are relevant and important for successful integration.

Lohja intends to continue organizing Civic Orientation.”



### HEIKKI KERKKÄNEN

Immigration coordinator,  
City of Lohja



### JWAINA AND ABDULRAZZAK

#### FROM THE PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVE:

Jwaina (22) and her spouse Abdulrazzak (24) and his brother Ibrahim (26) were resettled to Finland as quota refugees. They are Syrian, with both Kurdish and Arabic as their mother tongues. They were assigned Lohja as their home municipality.

Jwaina, Abdulrazzak and Ibrahim participated in Cultural Orientation in Turkey prior to arrival in Finland.

**“Manners and health care were useful topics,”** say Jwaina and Abdulrazzak.

Finnish customs, such as silence and not exchanging greetings, did not offend them, since these were understood as regular features of the local culture and not discrimination. They also learnt words and greetings in the three-day training.

What were the first words you learned in Finnish?

**“Mitä kuuluu? Tervetuloa!”** (How are you? Welcome!) the trio replies smiling.

**“We knew beforehand that Finland is one of the best countries when it comes to education. This was also proved by the fact that in just a few days we had already learned to count to 20 in Finnish!”** they describe the benefits of Cultural Orientation.

Civic Orientation was organized in Lohja in Arabic. The trainer had completed the Finnish Refugee Council's training. Some of the participants had only recently arrived in Finland, whereas

others had already lived in Finland for longer.

**“The teacher was good, and since we spoke the same language it was easier to ask questions about things and time was not taken up by interpreting,”** states Ibrahim.

**“It was great to learn about Finnish legislation and the education system in Civic Orientation,”** they say.

Civic Orientation also discusses challenging topics, such as child protection and family life in general, as well as equality.

**“Children's rights are an important topic,”** states Jwaina.

Jwaina was able to finish year 8 and Abdulrazzak to complete primary education in Syria before they had to flee. Jwaina now dreams of university studies and social sciences. Abdulrazzak has considered a qualification in the field of electrical engineering. Ibrahim's secondary school studies were likewise interrupted, and he hopes to be able to continue his studies in the future. He wants to become an IT engineer.



### IBRAHIM

## PUBLIC SERVICE INTERPRETING – IN A SHARED LANGUAGE

Newly arrived migrants rarely know Finnish or Swedish. The authorities are legally obligated to arrange interpretation when they do not share a language with a client. Arranging interpretation is also required if the client's language skill level is not sufficient. The authorities always assess the need for interpretation, as well as for translation of necessary documents. Understanding each other provides legal protection to both the client and the authorities.<sup>1</sup> The right for interpretation is regulated by several laws.<sup>2</sup>

An official, professional interpreter, in other words, **a public service interpreter**, should be booked when conducting official matters. It is advisable to always book a public service interpreter who has been trained professionally.<sup>3</sup>

Public service interpreting encompasses the interpretation of the dialogue between a public official and a client, patient or group of clients. The conveying of the message and meaning, as the purpose of interpretation, is always tied to its context. Professional interpreting does not permit reshaping of the message, providing explanations, nor interpreting exactly word for word.

### THE ROLE OF A PUBLIC SERVICE INTERPRETER

The work of interpreters is guided by the professional code and ethical guidelines of the Finnish Association

of Translators and Interpreters.<sup>4</sup> The interpreter makes discussion possible between the official (who booked the interpreter) and the client. Public officials are experts in their field and subject matter, and interpreters are specialists in the languages they interpret. A public service interpreter is not a counsellor, an assistant or a cultural consultant, and does not weigh in on the conversation.

A public service interpreter will interpret everything that is said in the situation. Therefore, it is not possible to “pass by” the client. Also, the public service interpreter will speak from the viewpoint of each individual participating in the conversation. This means using first-person pronouns, speaking “as the person”. This way of interpreting emphasizes the involvement and agency of both the public official and the client, as well as the impartiality of the interpreter.

A public service interpreter cannot interpret if they are partial. This may be the case if the client is related to the interpreter or is someone close to them. A public service interpreter is always bound by confidentiality regarding the assignment and its parties. This is the case regardless of whether the information handled during the assignment is verbal or written.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Turtiainen, K. 2013, 194–195 and Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010), section 5.  
<sup>2</sup> Interpretation is mentioned in e.g. Administrative Procedure Act, section 26; Administrative Judicial Procedure Act, section 52; Language Act, sections 10 and 18; Non-discrimination Act, section 6; Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, section 7; Aliens Act, sections 10 and 203; Act on the Status and Rights of Patients, sections 3 and 5; Act on the Status and Rights of Social Welfare Clients, section 5; Criminal Investigation Act, section 37; Code of Judicial Procedure, section 2; Criminal Procedure Act, section 2; Legal Aid Act, section 4; and Act on the Reception of Persons Applying for International Protection and on the Identification of and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, sections 27 and 28.  
<sup>3</sup> The professional title of an interpreter is not protected in Finland, meaning that a person who has not been trained as an interpreter professionally can work as an interpreter.  
<sup>4</sup> The professional code for public service interpreters and court interpreters by the Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters (SKTL) can be found on the association's website: [www.sklt.fi](http://www.sklt.fi).  
<sup>5</sup> Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters, 2013.



A public service interpreter should always be used when handling official matters. I recommend using a trained professional.

The public officials (who also book the interpreters) provide counselling for their clients, whereas the public service interpreter conveys the message without interfering with its content. In other words, the interpreter only interprets. The responsibility for providing information and counselling stays entirely with the officials.

It is beneficial for the client to know that the interpreter is impartial and neutral.

The client's rights are always essential for interpreting.

Working with a public service interpreter is a professional skill. It is also part of authorities' responsibilities. Public service interpreting also provides security for public officials in their work.

Clients' confidence in public authorities and the society is improved by providing public service interpreting.

When booking remote interpreting, one should be aware of the fact that the interpreter is not able to benefit from any non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions or gestures. There is a need to verbalise and justify the situation, and to speak directly to one's client, as always.

The interpretation service provider should be given feedback if there have been problems caused by the interpreter.”



### AHMED CHERIFI

Teacher and instructor of interpretation, public service interpreter (Arabic, Finnish), interpreter (UAS)

## PUBLIC SERVICE INTERPRETING SUPPORTS AGENCY

Using a public service interpreter strengthens clients' agency in their own integration process and promotes inclusion in the society. Public service interpreting increases trust in authorities and the services they represent and, thus, in the society at large.

Even though a client might want an acquaintance to serve as an interpreter, authorities must always book a public service interpreter. This way, rights are protected and ethical treatment ensured. As a professional, the public service interpreter is bound by confidentiality. Using unofficial interpreters<sup>1</sup> when handling official matters renders the client vulnerable to financial and other forms of exploitation. Thus, public service interpreting improves the ability to identify and help victims of violence or human trafficking.

**The client's acquaintance, accompanying person or especially child must never be used as an interpreter. Using a child as an interpreter is detrimental to the child's development and the relationship between the child and the parent.<sup>2</sup>**

The use of a public service interpreter is important from the perspective of patient safety. It can help prevent misunderstandings, medical malpractice and various situations from escalating into crises. Public service interpreting can ensure that the client is being heard correctly concerning their personal matters and, thus, are able to make informed decisions regarding these. Working with a public service interpreter does not impede the effectiveness of therapy.<sup>3</sup> **In a foreign language, one says what one can, but in one's own language, one can say everything one wants to.**

## WORKING WITH A PUBLIC SERVICE INTERPRETER

In order to successfully work with a public service interpreter, it is worth knowing the practices related to booking an interpreter and the interpreting situation, as well as feedback. Many organizations have

guidelines on interpretation.<sup>4</sup> Given that organizations have often tendered interpretation services, it is good to first find out which service provider to use.

When working with clients or patients, **interpreting** either **in-person** or **remotely** is usually utilized. In-person interpreting means that the interpreter comes to the same location as the client and the professional, for example to the doctor's office, to the home visit, to Kela, or to the office of social services. Remote interpreting, over the phone or a video connection, allows interpreting from a distance while the client and the professional (who has booked the interpreter) are in same space. Alternatively, remote interpreting allows the client, the interpreter and the professional all to be in different locations. In case of emergencies, it is advisable to save the interpretation service providers' on-call numbers on one's phone.

### 1. BOOKING AN INTERPRETER

It is advisable to book the interpreter as early as possible. It is good to first ensure the availability of a public service interpreter before informing the client of the appointment. Upon booking, some preliminary information needs to be provided to ensure successful interpretation. One must always follow **data protection principles** in accordance with the data protection legislation when processing clients' personal information.

#### IMPORTANT INFORMATION WHEN BOOKING AN INTERPRETER:

1. The client's name
2. The language and possible dialect
3. Time and duration
4. Locality and method of interpreting
5. Topic and gender sensitivity
6. Other important factors to ensure successful interpretation

<sup>1</sup> In this context, unofficial interpreters refer to, for example, civilians who have not been booked through an interpretation service provider and who are not working as public service interpreters in the situation.

<sup>2</sup> Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2018, 129.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Guidelines are often found on municipalities' intranet sites, and instructions can also be requested from one's supervisor.

**The client's name** is given when booking an interpreter to ensure that the interpreter has the opportunity to declare themselves partial beforehand. Everyone benefits when partiality is noticed before the interpreting is supposed to start.

**The client's mother tongue** is clarified before booking an interpreter. The mother tongue of people who migrate to Finland is recorded at the Digital and Population Data Services Agency upon registering residency in Finland and in a municipality. The client's mother tongue cannot be predicted from their name or citizenship. For example, a citizen of Iraq can speak Turkmen instead of Arabic as their mother tongue. In principle, it is always best to confirm the correct mother tongue with the client, and to record it in the patient or client file along with the possible dialect. It is important to find out the language that the person speaks as their primary language, in other words, mother tongue. Many languages have a certain dialect which impacts understanding significantly. For example with Kurdish, the dialects include Sorani, Badini and Kurmanji, among others. Languages also have other differences which are good to account for. Arabic is different in Egypt, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Swahili is different in the Congo and in Kenya. Each person also understands their mother tongue in their own way across the dialect boundaries.

Upon booking, the **time and place** for interpretation must be stated. Therefore, one must also determine the **duration** of the interpretation appointment. An organized approach contributes towards successful interpretation. Communicating through an interpreter takes at least twice the time compared to discussing similar matters in the same language. Therefore, double the time should be reserved. In addition, the client's need for information and counselling should be taken into account. Particularly people in the beginning of integration are not familiar with the system of services or the operating principles of the society, or with their own rights and obligations. Similarly, if the client has challenges with their memory or mental health, or if there are other circumstances affecting the ability to understand information, more time should be reserved for interpreting as well. This

helps to ensure service **equity**.

**In-person or remote interpreting?** When booking an interpreter, it is important to assess whether the physical presence of the interpreter is necessary from the client's viewpoint. In-person interpreting is the better option if a child is visiting a school for the first time or a client has a therapy session. With regard to in-person interpreting, it is important to inform the interpreter about the location as precisely as possible. This way, booked time will not be used for searching for the right place. Descriptive information and instructions help in finding the correct location. Remote interpreting over the phone or a video connection is best suited for emergency situations. Occasionally, the patient or client can also find remote interpreting to provide comfortable distance to the situation. Remote interpreting is not ideally suited for interpreting conversations among many individuals or for in-depth conversations where non-verbal communication is important.

Specifying the **issue or topic** of the appointment in advance allows the interpreter to prepare. Often the appointment is reserved for a particular issue, although the professionals cannot know beforehand what the client will bring up. Given that the interpreter is an expert in communication, not in the topic of the appointment, it saves time and is beneficial if the interpreter prepares in advance. Therefore, informing the service provider about the theme or the topic of the appointment helps to appoint the most suitable interpreter. Gender sensitivity and possible requests of the client should be considered when booking an interpreter. Even though the interpreter and the official are professional and neutral, their gender may matter greatly for the client.

In remote interpreting, it must be taken into account that the interpreter cannot see the non-verbal communication of the parties or what is happening in the setting they are in.

## 2. INTERACTION DURING INTERPRETATION

Each person has their own cultural premises and framework which influence perception and expression. A professional should be aware of their own communication, cultural background and their effects on interaction. The professional should make sure that professional terminology has been explained correctly to their client or patient, and should therefore personally clarify what the terms mean. Explaining professional terminology allows the client to make informed decisions in their personal matters. It is easier for the client or patient to make decisions and commit to them when the options and the societal context are understood.

It is also worth being aware of the power structures in an interpreting situation. The interpreter is in a position of power based on the fact that they are the only one with access to all communication. The public official is in a position of power relative to the interpreter as the one who booked the service and relative to the client through their professional role. Typically, the official also has more knowledge about the topic than the client, including knowledge regarding the position and rights of the client or the patient. In addition, the official often has decision-making power over the client's affairs which, in turn, has consequences for the client's wellbeing and life. Therefore, sharing information is important and supports the clients' and patients' agency.

Public officials should also take into account that the clients may not have experience communicating through an interpreter, or they may have negative experiences of interpreters or authorities. The client may have arrived from a country where officials have acted arbitrarily or used violence. Prior experiences influence one's perception of the situation and one's interaction. It is important that the official (i.e. who has booked the interpreter) stays in control of the situation – although without limiting it too much. One needs to be aware of one's communication and stay in the professional role when working with an interpreter. Each encounter with a client is unique, and the same is true when working with an interpreter. It is also important to remember non-verbal communication

which should support the verbal message. Genuine interest, calmness, kindness and respect translate across all language barriers.

Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, section 5



### INTERPRETATION AND TRANSLATION

An authority shall arrange interpretation or translation in a matter if the immigrant does not possess any skills in Finnish or Swedish, which are the languages used before the authorities under the Language Act (423/2003) or if, on account of his/her disability or illness, he/she cannot make himself/herself understood in a matter referred to in this Act that may become pending at the initiative of an authority. Where possible, the authority shall also be responsible for arranging interpretation and translation in other matters concerning the rights and obligations of the immigrant.

## 3. AFTER THE INTERPRETATION

As the party that has booked the interpreter, public officials should ensure the client's legal protection also when there is something to criticize about the interpreting. Feedback about interpretation should be given to the service provider. It is a good idea to also ask the client for feedback about the interpreting, and take note of it where possible.

## CHECKLIST!

Especially if it is the first meeting, it is good to focus on building trust. One should be in a secure place where confidential personal information and matters can be discussed, and this is required during remote interpreting as well.

1. Look at the client, not the interpreter. Speak to the client as you would without the presence of the interpreter.
2. Introduce yourself and explain your role in the situation, preferably through practical examples, since your title might not say much about how you can help the client or what you do in practice.

3. Let the interpreter introduce themselves and let them explain their role. If the interpreter themselves does not explain their role, you can explain it briefly.

The interpreter's role in brief:

- 1) impartial 2) bound by confidentiality 3) interprets everything and 4) interprets in first person.

4. Communicating through an interpreter means speaking in turns, only one person at a time.<sup>1</sup>
5. Cover one topic at a time and wait until the interpreter has finished before continuing.
6. Use simple standard language, explain, justify and provide concrete examples. Explain the professional terminology, abbreviations, acronyms and meanings.
7. Advise the client, if necessary (for example, ask them to wait until the interpreter has finished interpreting).
8. Make sure that the interpreter leaves at the same time as the client. This way the client is not left with the impression that the official and the interpreter stay to discuss the client's matters behind their back after the appointment.

<sup>1</sup> This type of interpreting is called "consecutive interpreting".

## A LANGUAGE-AWARE APPROACH

Interaction is important because through it, interpersonal relationships are created and maintained. Interaction also enables information sharing. In addition, our identities and perceptions of ourselves, others and the world at large are built and shaped through social interaction. It is important that professionals apply a language-aware approach in the interaction with their clients. The language-aware approach supports integration.

Municipalities have a responsibility to provide counselling and assistance to support integration. **The expertise of professionals is essential.** This applies to everyone working in the basic services, education, or the leisure and culture sectors, as well as in civil society organizations. All professionals in their respective fields can promote integration in everyday meetings with clients.

Everyone who has moved to Finland possesses know-how, potential and language skills. The recently arrived, however, do not usually have knowledge of Finnish or Swedish. Moving to a new linguistic environment affects a person's ability to find information, express themselves and create networks. The professionals' **interpersonal, networking and communication**

**skills** are central factors in ensuring successful integration. It is therefore worthwhile to consider the significance of language and communication in integration.

Administrative Procedure Act, section 9



### REQUIREMENT OF APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

An authority shall use language that is clear, easy to understand and to the point.

The right of customers to use their own language in dealings with authorities is governed by separate provisions of the law and is subject to treaties binding on Finland.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LANGUAGES IN INTEGRATION

Language and language skills are important factors affecting inclusion and social networks. Language is used to communicate, convey messages and form meaning. Language helps to gain an in-depth understanding and to adopt new approaches. In addition to spoken language, or **verbal communication**, also **non-verbal communication or "body language"** is significant in interpersonal situations. Non-verbal communication can reveal more than what is being said out loud. Gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice, speed of speaking, intonation, silence, physical space and distance are important but often subliminal dimensions of communication. **Written instructions and application forms**, both online and on paper, constitute a significant proportion of the authorities' communications visible to the client. In the beginning of integration, the society's symbols and signs can be foreign. Authorities should also take note of the fact that all migrants have not had the opportunity to attend school as children and learn reading and writing in their mother tongue. They may also have hearing or visual impairments. To ensure linguistic equality, the services and the professional approach should support everyone's inclusion and the accessibility of information and services. Accessibility regarding digital services has been legislated separately in 2019.<sup>1</sup>

**Attitudes** related to languages entail valuations about the importance of a language. These attitudes and valuations can be unconscious. The professional's views on languages, language skills and language awareness influence how they view the client's mother tongue, way of speaking, developing language skills and communicating through a public service interpreter. **Language and identity** are inseparable. Dismissive attitudes towards the client's languages, communication or culture equate to dismissing their identity and human dignity. In addition, highlighting the norm of monolingualism can be othering.<sup>2</sup>

**Cultures affect language, and the way one expresses oneself and perceives others.** Cultures are both visible and invisible. Everyone becomes socialized to their cultures from childhood throughout their life. Everyone therefore has developed their own cultural "eyeglasses" through which they view the world. Cultures provide meanings, hence the same word can have a different meaning depending on how it is culturally construed. Cultures are socially constructed and malleable. An individual is influenced by several cultures, which means that cultures can be understood more broadly than as being solely based on one's nationality. For example, each occupational group has their professional work culture which guides them, and organizations have their own organizational cultures.

Language and culture are important parts of a person's identity, and through them, one's worldview and self-image also change in the integration process. Interaction which supports integration requires **a language-aware approach from the professional.**<sup>3</sup> Firstly, one must be aware of the **significance of language in integration.** Secondly, one must be conscious of the **existence of their own cultural perceptions.** When working with clients, the main focus is the culture that is being built between the client and the professional, in each interpersonal encounter.

Which languages do you hear in your daily life?

How does that influence your worldview?

<sup>1</sup> The Act on the Provision of Digital Services came into effect in 2019 and applies mainly to the public sector but also to some civil society organizations.

<sup>2</sup> In this context, "othering" refers to needlessly emphasizing or bringing up another person's perceived difference from the norm.

<sup>3</sup> Language awareness has been explored in the field of teaching and early childhood education, e.g. Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014. See also DivED project's resources on language- and culture-aware teaching: <http://dived.fi/> and Taru Lijja's (HAMK) text about language-aware counselling skills at Ohjaamo.



A language-aware approach means meeting the client in a holistic way, which supports the client's agency and inclusion. The language-aware approach is based on an idea of **shared expertise**. The professional contributes their specialist knowledge on the issue to the communication, and the client is the expert on their own life. At the core of the integration support effort is the person who is integrating, equipped with their individual assets, abilities, and all of their linguistic and cultural resources. The person themselves is the subject, not just an object of procedures.

A language-aware approach aims for **mutual understanding**. It requires a reciprocal process instead of one-way communication. A professional who applies a language-aware approach pays attention to language and is conscious of the influences of both their own and the client's languages and cultures in interactive situations. They are also aware of the **attitudes** pertaining to languages and cultures, which can lead to valuations concerning their importance. They are conscious of their own attitudes and are able to examine and alter them.

Language is used for building worldviews and prospects as well as for influencing other people. In some cases, languages also create a **position of privilege**. For example when dealing with authorities, language can be an instrument of power. It is good to be aware of

the type of language one uses, and how one names and categorizes people and things. The use of a public service interpreter ensures that the client or patient is able to communicate in matters concerning themselves.

The same word can have multiple different meanings. From a professional viewpoint, it is important to be conscious of the kind of language and terminology one uses, so that one can communicate in a way that is easy to understand. Explaining professional terminology is important in order to ensure that the client who is integrating receives the intended message. A public service interpreter interprets what is said. However, the professional should elaborate on what they mean in all situations. From the viewpoint of integration, cultural terms and everyday language, too, may require explanation. **The client has access to the interaction through shared meanings.**

A professional who has adopted a language-aware approach does not rely on a monolingual norm. Instead, they recognize and acknowledge the multilingual reality – and see themselves contributing to it as well. Language awareness can be seen as a life-long process. The goal is not to “achieve” a particular set of skills, but rather to develop one's knowledge, abilities and self-awareness.



The aim of a language-aware approach is shared expertise and understanding. Which components does a language-aware approach consist of in your profession?

## CLEAR LANGUAGE PROMOTES INTEGRATION

Clarity in communications promotes the inclusion of a client who is integrating. The Administrative Procedure Act requires authorities to use **language that is clear, easy to understand and to the point**.<sup>1</sup> Clear language is, however, different from easy language (*selkokieli*). It is worthwhile to familiarize oneself with easy language, because it increases the professional's language awareness and improves interaction in client meetings.

**Easy language** is a completely distinct form of language. Its content, vocabulary and structure are more readable and easier than in standard language. Easy language is intended for everyone who experiences difficulties in reading and understanding. There are 650,000–750,000 people in Finland who need easy language.<sup>2</sup> The point of easy language is to help people in receiving information, reading, expressing their own thoughts and participating. The use of easy language is related to **equality and accessibility**.<sup>3</sup>

Good implementations of easy-language communications are, for example, Kela's website in easy Finnish and YLE News in easy Finnish.

Every person has a right to information they can understand. It is a basic prerequisite for independent life and social engagement.<sup>4</sup> Clear language supports people's inclusion, independent life, managing everyday life, acquiring information and learning the language. Easy language and clear communication support one's integration into the Finnish society and help maintain the acquired language skills.

Particularly when an issue has significance from the perspectives of equality and inclusion, the importance of clear language is emphasized. The communications of the media, politicians and authorities are difficult for many to understand. This highlights accessibility of information, pertaining both to the channels of communication as well as the languages used.

Non-discrimination Act, section 8



### PROHIBITION OF DISCRIMINATION

No one may be discriminated against on the basis of age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity, trade union activity, family relationships, state of health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics. Discrimination is prohibited, regardless of whether it is based on a fact or assumption concerning the person him/herself or another.

In addition to direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, denial of reasonable accommodation as well as an instruction or order to discriminate constitute discrimination as referred to in this Act.

own language, spoken language, body language, mother tongue, professional language, visual language, dialect, slang, sign language, contact language, home language, administrative language...

<sup>1</sup> Administrative Procedure Act, section 9.

<sup>2</sup> 11–14 per cent of the population. Finnish Centre for Easy Language, 2019a.

<sup>3</sup> Finnish Centre for Easy Language, 2019b, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Finnish Centre for Easy Language, 2018.

Languages do not always have corresponding concepts. How would you explain these...

MATERNITY AND CHILD HEALTH CLINIC \* TAX CARD \* SAUNA SHIFT \* COHABITATION

BANK STATEMENT \* ASTIGMATISM \* COLLECTIVE LABOUR AGREEMENT \* LOGOPEDICS

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE \* HYGIENE PASSPORT \* NOTIFICATION OF CHANGE OF ADDRESS

KEY TO SHARED FACILITIES IN THE BUILDING \* MENTAL HEALTH \* DENTAL CALCULUS...?

What are the key concepts in your professional field?

There is a growing number of foreign-language speakers living in Finland, in other words, people whose mother tongue is registered as something other than Finnish, Swedish or Sámi. The size of the foreign-language speaking population has been estimated to double by 2040, even if immigration stayed at its current level. Besides immigration, the growth is explained by the younger age structure of the foreign-language speaking population.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of 2019, there were 412,000 foreign-language speakers living in Finland – that is, 7.5 per cent of the entire population. **Russian is the most common foreign language.** It is spoken as a mother tongue by over 82,000 people. The second most common language is **Estonian**, which is spoken by nearly 50,000 people. The next largest language groups are **Arabic, English** and **Somali**.<sup>2</sup>

It is noteworthy that in Finland each person is recorded as having one mother tongue.<sup>3</sup> Thus, bilingualism and multilingualism remain hidden in the statistics. For example, a person who has arrived in Finland as a child is registered in the same language group as the parents, even though children learn Finnish or Swedish in daycare and school. Foreign-language speakers, as a category, can therefore be misleading if the multilingual reality is ignored.

<sup>1</sup> Association of Finnish Municipalities, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Finland, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> At the moment, the registration of a person's mother tongue, as required by the Language Act, only allows the registration of one language.

## INTERACTION THAT SUPPORTS INTEGRATION<sup>1</sup>

1. Always book a public service interpreter when you do not speak the same language with your client.
2. Introduce yourself and your occupation because titles do not always reveal your professional duties or what kind of issues you can help with.
3. Be conscious of your own cultural “eyeglasses”.
4. Take the context into account. In other words, adapt your communication according to the situation.
5. Silence provides room to speak. Allow time for the client's comments.
6. Listen.
7. Speak in a clear yet natural manner and explain difficult words.
8. Pay attention to your non-verbal communication.
9. Ask if you do not understand or know something – do not presume.
10. Allow the client to ask questions. If you do not know something, say so.
11. Use pictures, checklists, videos, colours and infographics to support your message.
12. Repeat, and re-explain things using different words.
13. Provide written instructions, also in translated form.
14. Take into account the client's expertise on their own life.
15. Pursue dialogue-based interaction. Information is more readily absorbed through discussion rather than one-way communication.
16. Provide justifications. Only ask about matters pertaining to your tasks and explain what the information is needed for. This increases confidence and understanding.
17. Check using questions. “I want to make sure that I have been able to explain things to you in an understandable way. Could you repeat what we agreed?”

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the handbook *Käytä selkokieltä! Pikaopas selkokieliseen kommunikointiin*, Finnish Centre for Easy Language (2020): <https://selkokeskus.fi/selkokieli/materiaaleja/pikaopas-selkokieliseen-kommunikointiin/>.

## CULTURAL FACILITATION AS A FORM OF MULTILINGUAL COUNSELLING

Municipalities and projects can implement multilingual counselling in various ways to support integration. In some municipalities, multilingual counsellors have been hired in daycare centres and schools to support the teaching and educational work. Multilingual counselling is not an established title nationwide, and similar counselling can be offered in other service sectors under different titles.

In the Finnish Refugee Council's Linkki project, counsellors provide cultural facilitation at daycare centres and schools. In the Linkki project, cultural facilitation is a form of multilingual counselling which centers around the wellbeing of a child and support for parenthood. Cultural facilitation promotes mutual understanding and trust between parents and the professionals at the daycare centre or school. The professionals working at schools and daycare centres contact the counsellors when necessary.

In the Linkki project, cultural facilitation is a form of counselling where the multilingual counsellor is a participant in the interpersonal situations with the clients, parents, children and professionals, and by their side. A cultural facilitator is therefore not the same as a public service interpreter but is, rather, a counsellor. In addition to Finnish, they speak the client's (the parent's) language, and take part in the

conversation. They participate, engage and guide the clients and professionals towards equal dialogue. Cultural facilitation relies on a language-aware approach in which everyone is seen as an individual and not as a representative of their culture.

Cultural facilitation as a form of counselling strengthens professionalism through improved understanding and interaction. The objective is to enhance cooperation between a child's parents and the early childhood educators and teachers. Cultural facilitation aims to improve knowledge and skills, and particularly the child's or adolescent's wellbeing.

The objective is mutual understanding and trust.

Cultural facilitation is a form of counselling in which a multilingual counsellor participates in the interactive situation. They express their opinion, unlike a public service interpreter.



Parents who do not yet speak fluent Finnish or Swedish and who have children in daycare or school have a great need for information and counselling. They do not know what LEOPS or VASU mean or how to communicate through Wilma. In addition, they are not familiar with the service or education systems. They do not know what is expected of them by teachers and early childhood educators.

A multilingual counsellor who provides cultural facilitation is not the same as a public service interpreter. A counsellor is also not an expert by experience but an employed specialist. Personal experience of integration can help in counselling work, but it is not essential.

The counsellor initiates and strengthens the bond between the client and the professionals, and supports them in reaching mutual understanding. Cultural facilitation is not impartial. The counsellor supports the clients' parenthood. The best interest of the child is always central in cultural facilitation.

Cultural facilitation as a form of counselling encourages parents to stay in contact with and trust the daycare and school staff.

Cultural facilitation has an impact on the entire family's wellbeing and integration. It reduces worries and supports parenthood in the family. Clients learn that things can always be discussed and looked into together.

In the *Linkki* project, we also organize peer groups for parents in their own language. The topics include education and the parents' role, childhood development, Wilma, child protection, bullying in schools, sexual health and so on. We have also had the opportunity to provide counselling at a family centre once a week.

A counsellor providing cultural facilitation needs to have knowledge of the society and excellent interpersonal skills, courage and the ability to interact with people as well as to face challenging issues. They must see each person as an individual and have the ability to be present in various situations. There is no formal title or qualifications for a counsellor providing cultural facilitation, but a degree in the field of social welfare and health care is an asset. Proficiency in two or more languages is necessary."



### ALA SAEED

Counsellor in the Linkki project  
(Finnish, Arabic, Kurdish),  
Finnish Refugee Council

## BEGINNING INTEGRATION IN A MUNICIPALITY

Integration is both a personal and a local process. Locality is an important part of a person's identity. A person who is integrating is going through a complex process in which the new customs and everyday life challenge the person's established preconceptions. Often the community around them has changed or is missing completely. They must rebuild the foundation for their life all over again. Besides a home, integration also requires contacts – connecting with other people.

Municipalities are in a key role in integration and can significantly accelerate integration in an inclusive and holistic way. **All professionals in municipal basic services can promote integration in their work with clients.** Therefore, it is important to support the expertise of professionals and provide training.

In Finland, the TE Services provide integration training to job seekers<sup>1</sup> who are integrating. The municipality's role in supporting the integration of individuals who are not clients of the TE Services is therefore highlighted. Stay-at-home parents, carers and pensioners, as well as many people with disabilities and people who are rehabilitating, rely on municipalities' coordination and supply of integration services.<sup>2</sup> Their integration is important from the perspective of equality, but also when looking at the bigger picture. Every person's integration affects the people close to them. Particularly parents' integration has great significance for **the growth and development of their children.**

<sup>1</sup> Here, job seekers refers to individuals who, during their integration period, are part of the workforce. The integration period is often three years since the creation of the first integration plan, but can last up to five years. See the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, section 12.

<sup>2</sup> Having a disability does not equate to inability to work and, as a basic principle, an unemployed individual should register as a job seeker with the TE Services.

The municipalities' policies have great significance in promoting the social interactions of residents who are integrating. Besides enabling learning the language, a diverse social network helps in managing everyday life and promotes wellbeing and employment. A municipality can provide easily accessible communal facilities, activities and counselling to enable everyday interactions. **Cooperation with local civil society organizations** improves the effectiveness and accessibility of the efforts to support integration. Inclusive and accessible support for integration in municipalities promotes everyone's ability to contribute to the best of the society.

Professionals can save time when looking for information with the nationwide [kotoutumisentukena.fi](https://kotoutumisentukena.fi) online service where local actors can both announce and search for easily accessible activities to support integration.

Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, section 30



### DUTIES OF THE MUNICIPALITIES

Municipalities have overall and coordination responsibility for the development, planning and monitoring of integration at local level.

Municipalities shall ensure that the municipal services also suit the needs of the immigrants. Municipalities shall also ensure that the measures and services intended for the immigrants referred to in this Act are, in terms of their contents and scope, arranged in accordance with the demand for them in the municipality.

Municipalities shall ensure the development of the expertise of their own personnel as part of integration.

Measures and services intended for immigrants may also be arranged jointly by municipalities.

All municipal professionals support integration as experts in their field.

## A MUNICIPALITY'S CHECKLIST

1. Language awareness. An overarching understanding of the significance of language. Multilingualism is seen as a resource, and language skills are identified and acknowledged. Making use of language skills at schools, in early childhood education, maternity and child health clinics, and housing services, among others.
2. Providing Civic Orientation courses in the residents' own language for those who are integrating. Inquiries about the Civic Orientation trainers can be made to the Finnish Refugee Council: yhteiskuntaorientaatio.fi
3. Training for employees. All municipal employees across sectors support integration as experts in their field. Learning independently is possible through the PALOMA<sup>1</sup> and Opi kotoutumisesta<sup>2</sup> online training courses.
4. Guidelines for booking and working with public service interpreters promote the actualization of linguistic equality and help in preventing linguistic discrimination, misunderstandings, crises and medical malpractice.
5. Cooperation between the municipal services and civil society organizations improves the assistance and counselling available for individuals who are integrating. A person who is integrating can maintain and improve their language skills and network by attending language courses the organizations provide. Having social networks affects language learning and, therefore, communal leisure activities promote integration.
6. Easy language, accessible and multilingual communications across all sectors. Material in easy language motivates one to utilize Finnish- and Swedish-language sources of information. Accessibility of different communication channels and methods is worth taking into account. Clarifying written instructions and forms improves accessibility.

<sup>1</sup> PALOMA training, published by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare in 2019: <https://thl.fi/fi/web/maahanmuutto-ja-kulttuurinen-moninaisuus/tyon-tueksi/paloma-koulutus>

<sup>2</sup> Opi kotoutumisesta online training, published by the Kotona Suomessa project in 2020: [www.opikotoutumisesta.fi](http://www.opikotoutumisesta.fi)

## OTHER INTERESTING MATERIALS

The **kotoutaminen.fi** website is the most important nationwide website for integration support. It is maintained by the Centre of Expertise in Immigrant Integration which is part of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment.

**Key concepts** (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment): <https://kotoutaminen.fi/en/key-concepts>

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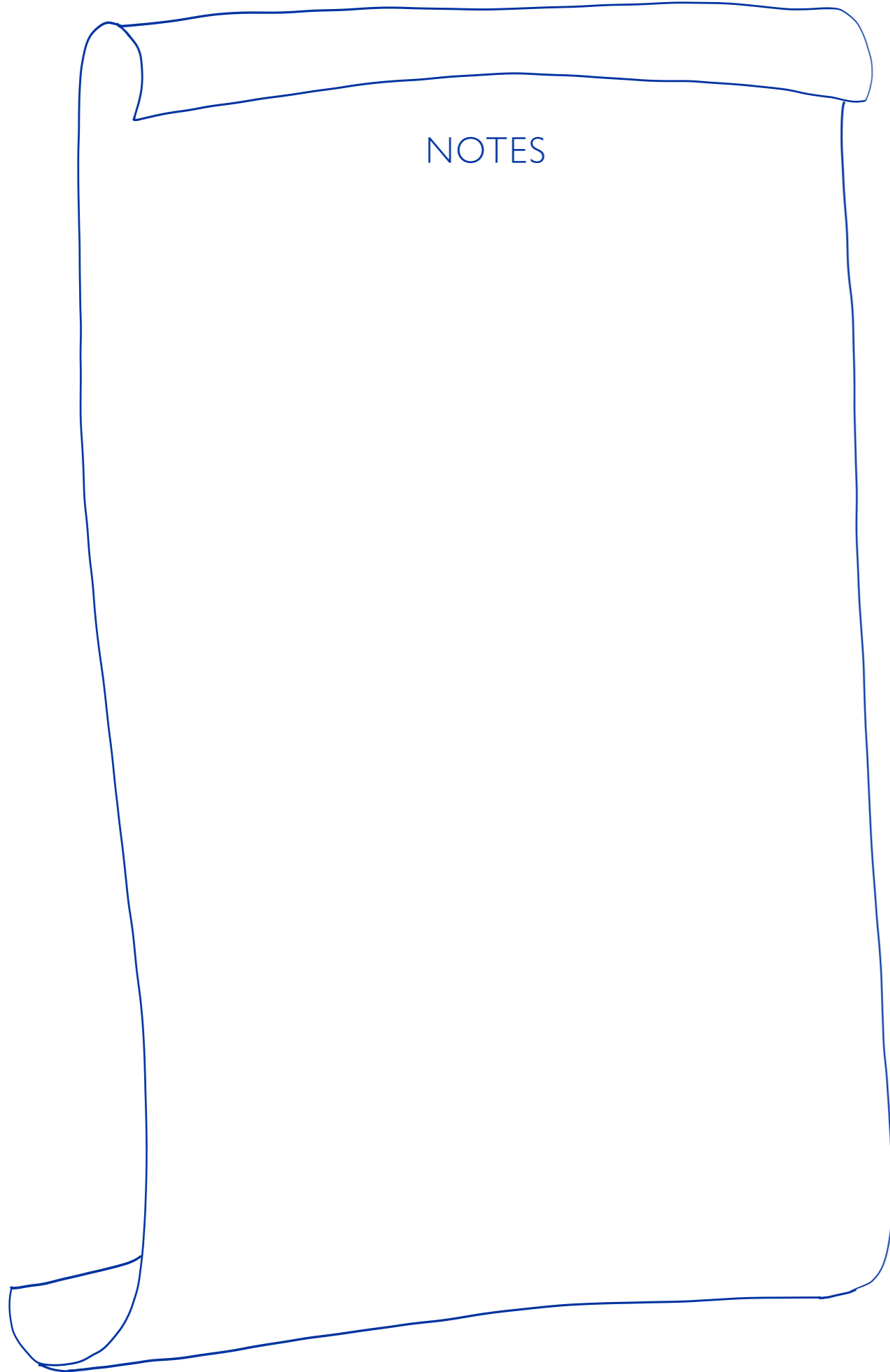
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NOTES



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