

National Report

Finland

Work Package (WP) 1	Methodological Framework: Data Collection and Needs Assessment
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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to give an overview about the situation of asylum seekers and refugees with disabilities in Finland. We have asylum seekers and refugees with disabilities in Finland, but it feels like they have hard to find and there is no data about them. If you read newspaper or other reports, it's hard to find information about their situation. Overall, Finland receives circa 1000 quota refugees annually, but there is no material about that in the local media.

In this report, as a methodological approach we have used following resources:

- general material, such as books
- research studies
- statements
- email conversations
- material which has been found online
- conversations with experts who are working in this field

We held stwo focus groups for experts and interviewed two quota refugees with disabilities. Also there were an online-questionnaire.

Here are the results of all this material above.

2. Analysis

2.1 Asylum seekers and refugees with disabilities in Finland

Barely any research data exists of disabled asylum seekers and refugees in Finland. Even statistics of their numbers are non-existent. According to Statistics Finland, there were around 360 000 persons with foreign background in Finland in 2016 (www.stat.fi)¹. When calculating the numbers of disabled people in any population, the following percentages are used: 1% severely disabled, 5% moderately disabled, and 10% mildly disabled. If this formula is applied to the number of persons with foreign background, there may be an estimated 3 600 severely disabled asylum seekers and refugees and up to 50 000 migrants with some type of impairment in Finland. These numbers do not include paperless migrants who fall outside of any services and are often in the most vulnerable position²

Finland receives circa 1 000 quota refugees annually. These refugees are people who have had to flee from their home countries or countries of permanent residence, and cannot stay in the country

¹ Statistics Finland available at: <http://www.stat.fi>

² <https://thl.fi/fi/web/vammaispalvelujen-kasikirja/itsenaisen-elaman-tuki/vammaisen-maahanmuuttaja>

where they have fled to. Further criteria dictate that they must have been defined as refugees by the United Nations Refugee Agency UNHCR³. Usually, quota refugees have been chosen from a UN camp and are injured people with impairments or mental health problems⁴.

2.2 Integration for Everyone

In this segment, integration measures are first presented in general, and then from the point of view of disabled immigrants.

The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration aims to ensure that immigrants receive education that provides them with the knowledge and skills they need to function in society and the labour market. Furthermore, it promotes support in maintaining immigrants' own languages and cultures. The Act also includes definitions of social reinforcement, which aims to improve each immigrant's ways of life as well as prevent marginalization. With the Act, authorities aim to guarantee multi-sectoral cooperation. The purpose of the Act is to ensure that immigrants with special support needs can receive enhanced integration measures because of reduced functional capacity due to impairment or other reasons. The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration was drawn to ensure that an immigrant gets basic education on the Finnish society and information of his or her own rights and duties in society and working life. Proper guidance and instruction in these matters is guaranteed in the Act⁵. This Act does not apply to Finnish citizens, but to people who have a residence permit, registration of right of residence, or a residence card⁶.

The first step of integration is an initial assessment carried out with the migrant. In this stage, the authorities assess the person's readiness for employment, education and other integration services, as well as his or her needs for language training and other measures that promote integration. The next step is drawing an integration plan. The first integration plan must be made within three years of when the person has received his or her first residence permit or residence card. The plan covers a period of one year at the most, but this period may be extended by two years if it can be justified due to the immigrant's disability, for example. Each immigrant has an individual plan which focuses on the services and measures that will support in obtaining sufficient (Finnish or Swedish) language skills as well as other skills and knowledge that enable the person to function in society and working life. The purpose of the plan is to enable the immigrant to become an equal participant in society. Immigration plans may also include special services and support for individuals who need them⁷

³ <http://migri.fi/kiintiopakolaiset>

⁴ <https://intermin.fi/maahanmutto/turvapaikanhakijat-ja-pakolaiset/kiintiopakolaiset>

⁵ <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2010/20101386#L1>

⁶ <http://kotouttaminen.fi/laki-kotoutumisen-edistamisesta>

⁷ <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2010/20101386#L1>

2.3. Disabled Immigrants and Integration

A disabled person has equal rights to integration, but those rights are not always met. In 2013, Kokkonen and Oikarinen⁸ published a survey that focused on disabled immigrants and the ways in which they are acknowledged when planning integration training. According to the survey, people with special support needs are not taken into consideration in integration training, and individual integration measures cannot be carried out due to a lack of resources. In addition, the measures in which the initial assessments are carried out have not been developed sufficiently. A disabled person has often been denied access to labour market training, because it is easy to assume that he or she could or should not be employed. Accessible integration training and sufficient support measures call for more opportunities; for example, waiting periods for language training have ranged from one to twenty years.⁹

Finland signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007 and ratified it in 2015. “The purpose of the present Convention is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.”¹⁰ According to Article 24 of the CRPD, a people with disabilities have the right to education, while Article 27 states that they have the right to work. According to Articles 29–30, people with disabilities have the right to participate actively in society. The Convention also guarantees that people with disabilities have the right to integration¹¹. Finland breaks the Convention if participation in integration training is prevented or executed inappropriately.

Disabled immigrants have the right to services, but they are easily left marginalized, because they fall in between immigration services and services for the disabled. Support and application processes are often difficult and complicated. Disabled immigrants are not aware of their possibilities, because they have not been presented with options. They may not know how to study, because they have never had the opportunity to do so in their home countries. They cannot focus on studies while waiting for a decision on whether or not they can stay in the country. In addition, they may have waited for years to attend immigration training, or they have participated in training without sufficient support services, and therefore their learning has been limited. (Kokkonen & Oikarinen)¹²

⁸ Kokkonen, M., & Oikarinen, T. (2012). *Kotoutumista kaikille. Vammaiset maahanmuuttajat ja kotoutumiskoulutus. Vammaisten maahanmuuttajien tukikeskus Hilma. Vammaisfoorumi ry. Helsinki.*

⁹ Kokkonen, M., & Oikarinen, T. (2012). *Kotoutumista kaikille. Vammaiset maahanmuuttajat ja kotoutumiskoulutus. Vammaisten maahanmuuttajien tukikeskus Hilma. Vammaisfoorumi ry. Helsinki.*

¹⁰ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

¹¹ <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/sopimukset/sopsteksti/2016/20160027#idp451484432>

¹²

3. Focus groups

We held two focus groups for experts who are working with asylum seekers and refugees with disability. We also interviewed two refugees with disability. Here are the results from these groups.

3.1 Focus groups with experts

At the first focus group participated three people. The first expert is working as a social counsellor from Eastern Finland. The second expert is working as a customer's coordinator in the respite care. Last one is working as a coordinator in the center of migrants with disability.

At the second focus group participated workers from the immigrant services. There were 16 workers on the spot and we have only little time, because they have so much work to do. There were social workers, social counsellors, instructors. They all have some experience working with people with disability or with families who have children with a disability.

First topic was what kind of positives and negatives examples they have. Many experts said that sometimes expectations are very high when a person with a disability or a family who has a child with a disability arrive to Finland. Sometimes they expect healing or services which do not exist. This produces frustration and sadness. Sometimes asylum seeker or refugee think that he or she have come to a paradise. When the authorities tell about new countries, they should tell realistic things, for example what possibilities actually is on offer in Finland. One expert told that if you have good interaction with asylum seekers or refugees, you don't have any difficulties to working with them. When people have some kind of physical restraint, it could be useful, if someone has been thinking what kind of services or service plan they would need. The other expert told a positive example, the customer family has learned to use their services (respite care) because they have had a long custom. She also told a negative example that many families have a big barrier to use their services.

Experts also told that asylum seekers and refugees with disabilities have to wait decisions of benefits, this could take a long time, which ends up in more frustration. It's also difficult to access Finnish language courses. Sometimes you must wait for one year or even more and it is too long time. Health services are very challenging for people with disabilities. It's difficult to reserve an appointment and it takes a long time to get medical statements. If you need a diagnosis, it is quite a difficult path. Health services don't always use an interpreter, so your appointment maybe has been wasted.

A positive thing is that sometimes people with disabilities find some strengths to fight their rights and services.

The second topic was about training and info materials. Everyone admitted that there is a need for training asylum seekers and refugees with disabilities, especially when they arrive to the recipient country. They need information and training about their rights, benefits, services and how to apply all this. This training should be right away when they arrive. They should be told how society works in Finland and we need to talk about the perception of disability and health and also what differences those have between your new country and your home country.

Experts were united that there should be also training for educating or training locals, employers, workers and so on. Every client has the right to be heard, and workers must keep in mind that it is important to use an interpreter. Workers need to also know what kind of rights, services and support exist and how to seek them. Especially outside of the social and voluntary organizations. Everyone should have a good attitude on how to work with people. If you have the right attitude, you do not need any training.

Many experts said that there aren't enough materials to use with asylum seekers and refugees. Usually the materials have been translated in Finnish, Swedish, English or Russian, but unfortunately there are not enough materials for example in Arabic. It's also challenging when customers don't know how to read or write or they have difficulties with eyesight and they don't know how to read braille. The expert who was working in the center of migrants with disability, told that they have made own materials and translated them several languages. Everyone can download them from our websites, but they also have some paper versions and they spread them at expos and events.

3.2 Quota refugees with disabilities' interviews

We interviewed two refugees with disabilities. Originally there would have been three, but one person was not reached. Both interviewees had come to Finland from Syria because of the war. They both are quota refugees and the authorities had made the decision which country they will come, so they didn't have any chance to influence which country they will arrive.

Both have got some services, but not enough. For example, one person needs personal assistant every moment, but he has assistant only from 8am to 12pm, so night time he doesn't have any help and he can't move without help. Disability services have offered him a place from group home, but he doesn't want to move there. They both admitted that it's a quite difficult to apply services in Finland and they don't know what benefits and services they can apply. For example, one of them told that whatever he is asking, it takes 8 months to get the decision. He has been waiting a new aid now six months and its long time to wait. This current aid broke all his clothes. Also it's not easy to see a doctor, he has to wait 3 month for that appointment.

Both told that they have been asking about their rights and services, but either they didn't understand that information or the authorities haven't work according the law. One of them told that he has noticed that all workers have their own "laws". They don't "read" the law, they just interpret the law that way that they want. One of them studied Finnish for 16 months, after that he

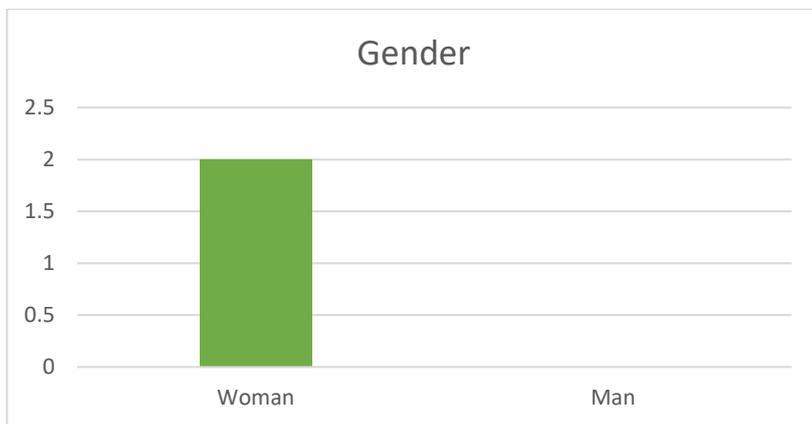
has just sit in his home 2,5 years. The other one studied Finnish about 8 months, but nothing else after that.

4. Online-Questionnaire

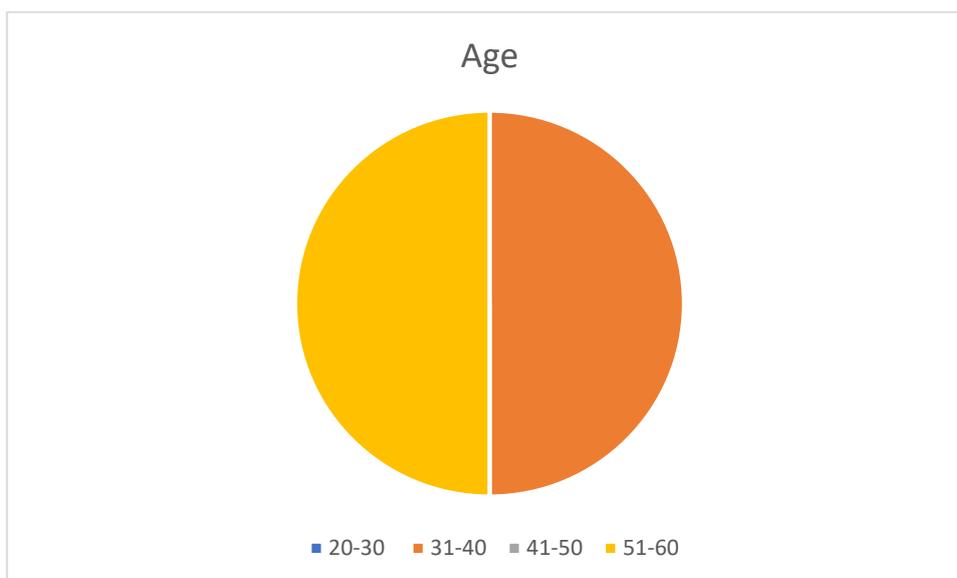
There were also online-questionnaire for experts who are working with asylum seekers and refugees with disabilities. The main point was to get more information about the current situation in Finland. Unfortunately, we got just two answers. The questionnaire was sent to many experts, but they said that there were too many questions and they don't have enough time to fill the survey. It was very sorry to hear.

Here are the results which are based these two answers.

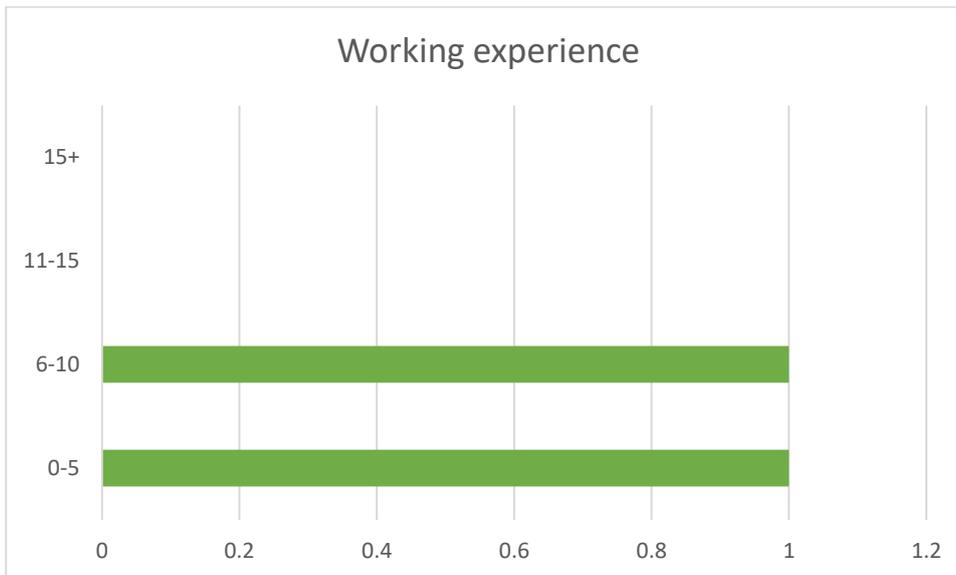
Both experts who participated this survey were females.



Their age distribution can be seen in the following chart.

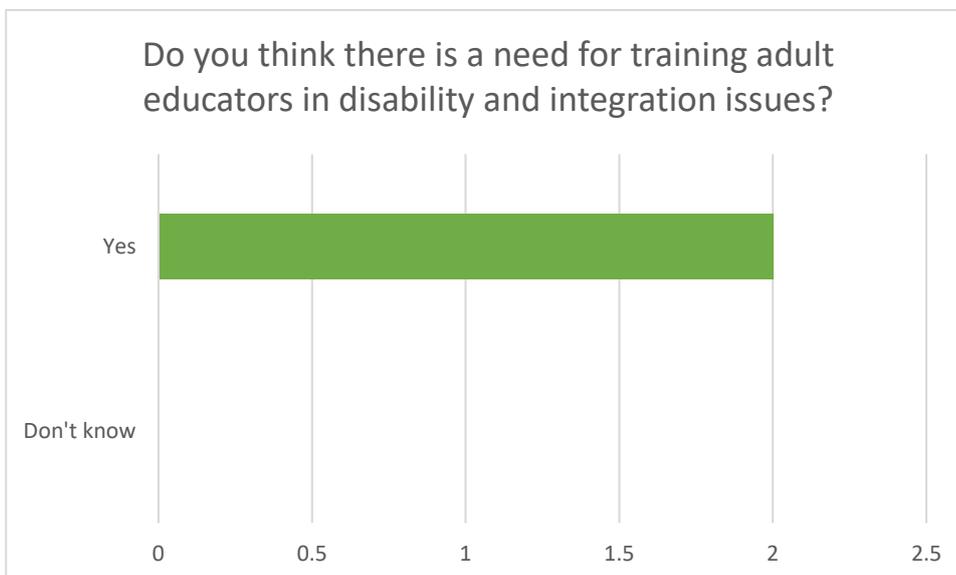


Their working experience can be seen in the following chart.



One of them know some already existing initiatives. She knows that migrants with disabilities has the same rights than other people with disability. Challenges are very personalized as other people with disability.

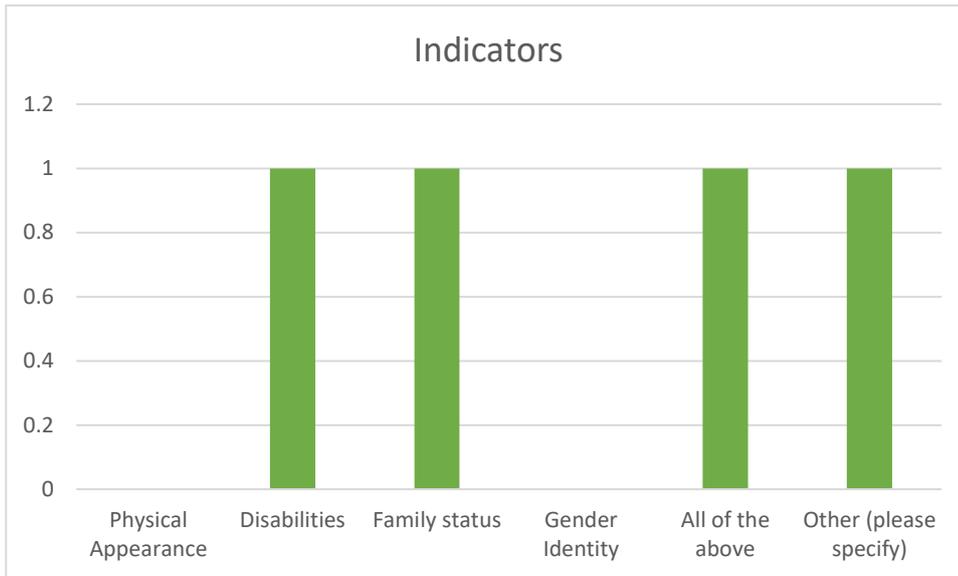
They both agreed that there is need for training adult educators in disability and integration issues.



Training subjects were the following:

- Increasing awareness, building accessible environment and attitudes, telling people about how big our service network is.
- Benefits and how to apply them.

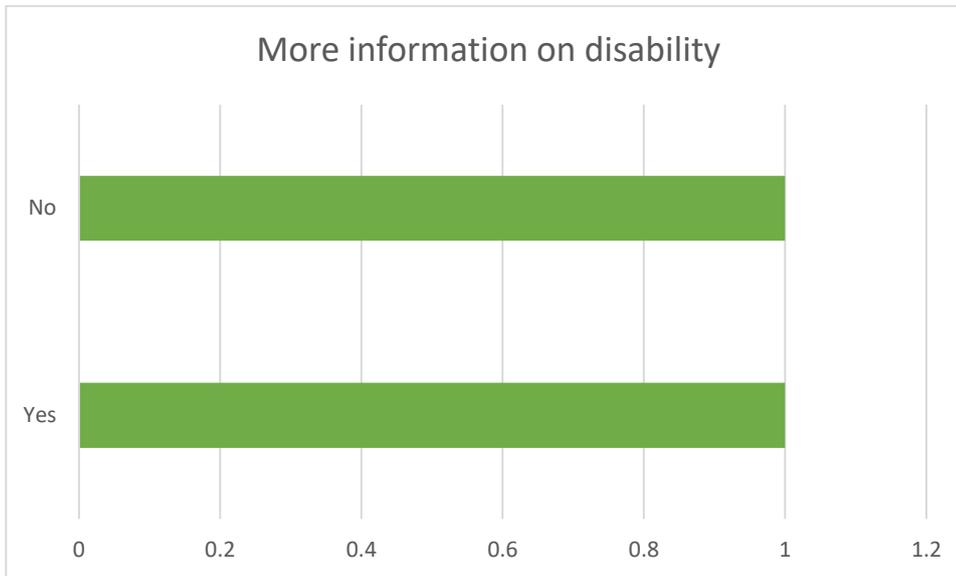
One question was which indicators would you think, will help you identify and assess migrants with disability. Other was that the expert feels that they need more information about what kind of needs asylum seekers and refugees with disability have.



Asked about their current knowledge about assessing and identifying migrants with disability.

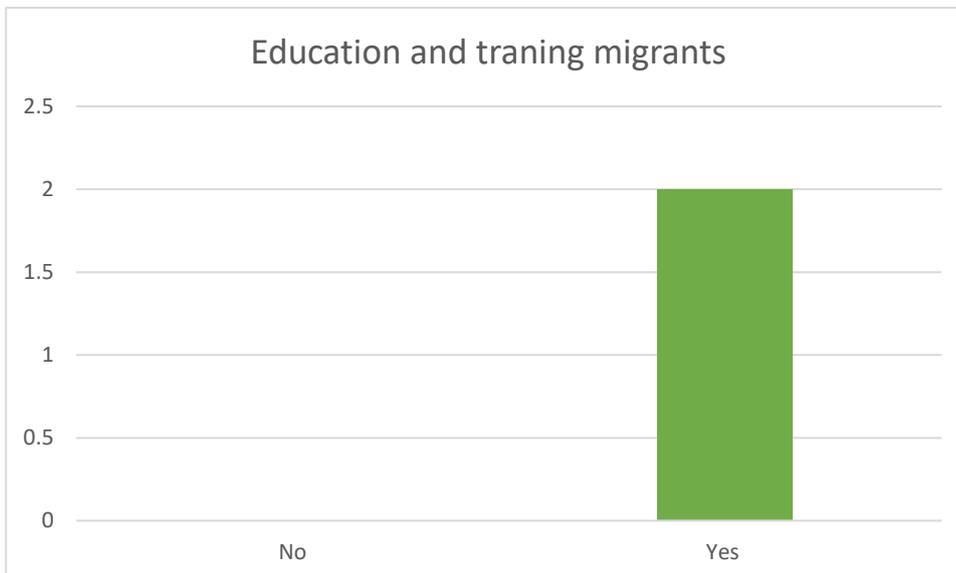


One of the participant needed more information on disability, other one doesn't.



Both participants experienced that there is need for training migrants. Asked about reasons why there is a need for training, the following answers were given:

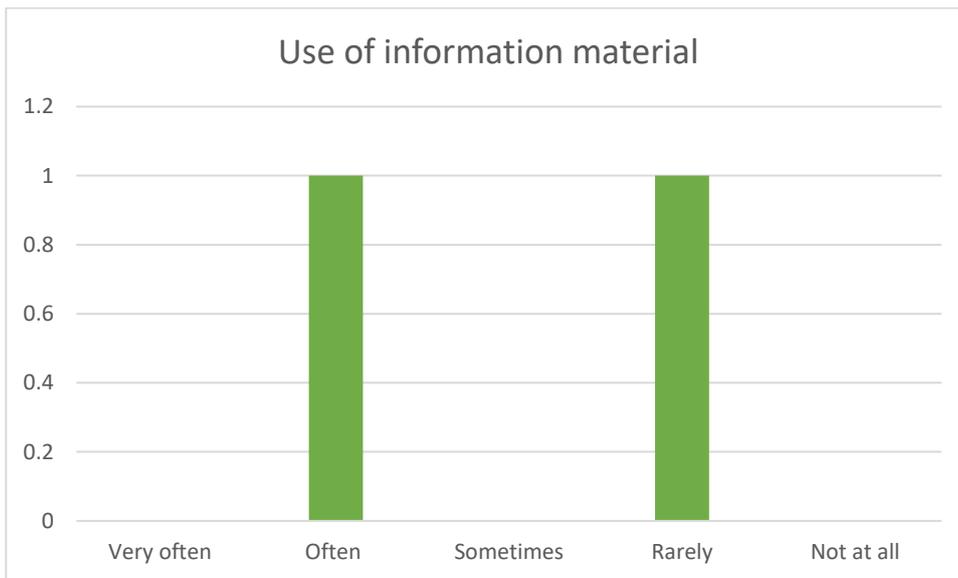
- They should know more about how to apply our services and how to get services. They should be encourage to face other people.
- We must give them information about laws.



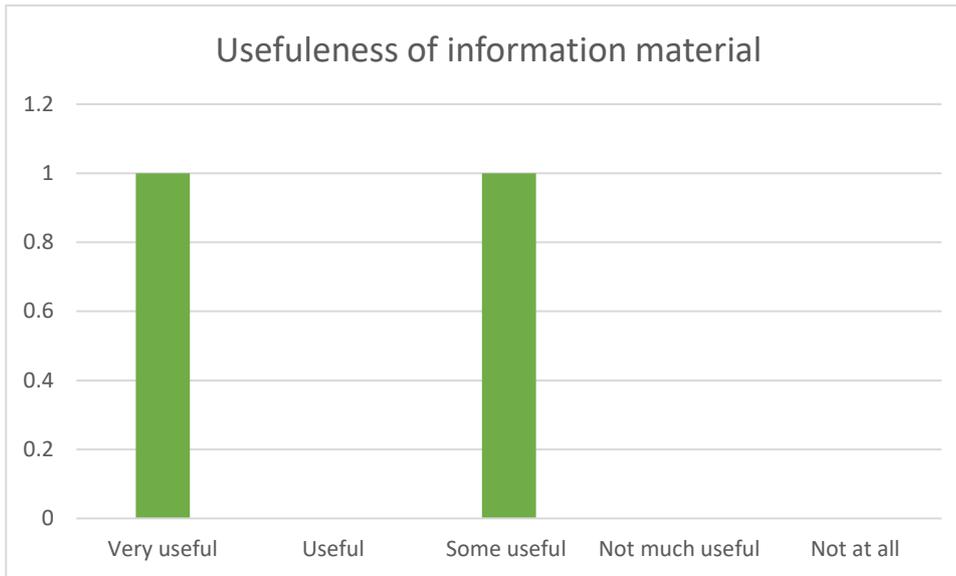
The next question was about the key action areas of assistance for migrants with disabilities. In the open answer one experts needed more information about personalized service solutions.



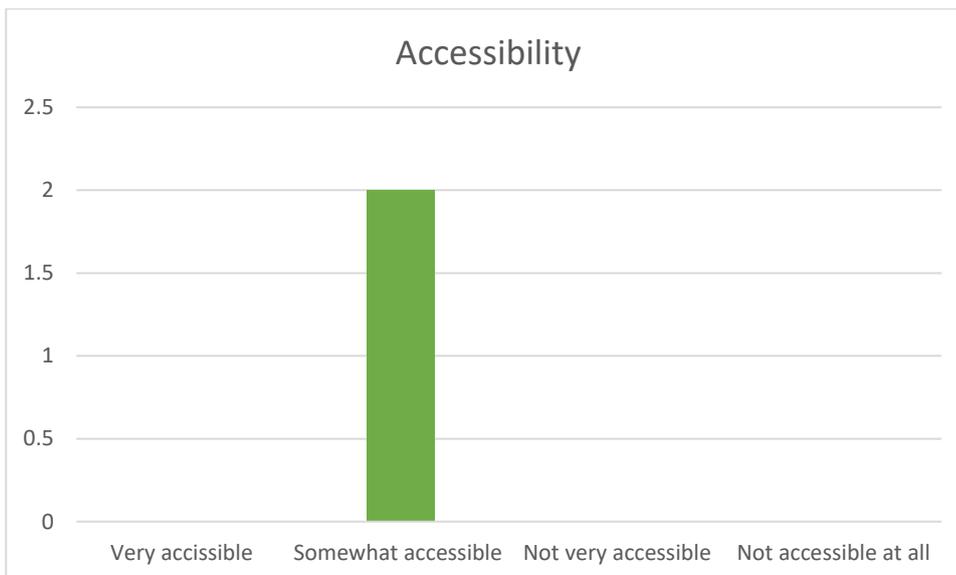
Asked about how often they use any kind of information material for migrants with disabilities.



One participant experience material very useful and another some useful.



They feel like information material were somewhat accessible.



Participants were asked to mention good practices that they consider to be important. They listed these practices:

- Individuals solutions about services, ACC-tool.
- Cooperation with different kind of actors, for example different authorities from municipalities, 3rd sector (organizations etc)

The last question was about the needs assessment tool and what they think must be included in such a tool. The other expert didn't know any but other answered that somekind of tool which help us to ask what kind of services person would need and what matters are most important. Our hope is that the tool could be easy to use and read.

5. Recommendations

In Finland, we must discuss more about refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities. We must think more carefully how they can integration to our society even better. Now there is barriers for their good life.

We should think more carefully for example these thinks

- How asylum seekers and refugees with disabilities can participate different kind of trainings (especially language courses) and they don't have to wait years.
- We know that people with disabilities don't have much opportunities to work in Finland, but should we arrange some kind of job to refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities, so they can integrate even better to our society?
- We also know that our service system is a quite difficult even Finnish people. There is a lot of bureaucracy and you have to apply your benefits and services again and again. How could we train even better asylum seekers and refugees with disabilities and their families, that they know our system and can handle it?

We know that there are many experts who are working in this field and they are doing excellent job, especially in the immigrants services. But when people leave that services, it feels like they don't get enough support. How could we make this process even better?

There is a lot to do in this field, but important is that we have awakened in this situation in Finland.

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