



## Regular Article

# The integration experiences of older Finnish re-migrants: ‘Embraced by the Swedes ... but Finland is my home country’

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## ABSTRACT

Why older people re-migrate is topic of interest in relation to both integration and return experiences. Despite an overall research interest for the older re-migrants, the oldest age groups (65 or older) are more sparsely studied. In this study, the case of older re-migrants are the Finns. Finland and Sweden are neighbouring countries and Sweden has for decades been a host society for labour migrants. Thus, Finnish people are a large body of immigrants to Sweden who often re-migrate to Finland, and they therefore offer an interesting group for studying questions of integration and re-migration. Our study explored and described how older Finns experienced integration while living in Sweden, as well as reasons for their re-migrating. Inductive qualitative content analysis was used to analyse data from 28 life-story interviews. Factors strengthening integration as well as counteracting integration were personal, social or economic. The same factors could be reasons for re-migrating. Some of them had re-migrated despite having enjoyed life and social relations in the host country. Others seemed to be “pure” labour migrants who were not in all aspects socially integrated. At least for those migrants the mission in the host society seemed to be completed when becoming a pensioner. However, not all of them had wished to return but felt they were forced to. Nor did all of them experience return as positive. It is important for policy makers to take all these factors into consideration when designing integration policies.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Finnish immigrants in Sweden

Sweden has a long history of labour immigration from Finland. In the years 1945–1999, over half a million Finns moved to Sweden (Korkiasaari 2000; Korkiasaari & Söderling 2003). According to Monti (2020), Finland was the top country of origin among immigrants in Sweden 1971–1980, and second 1981–1985.

Immigration to Sweden was at its peak in the 1960s and 1970s, bringing a work force to Sweden not only from Finland but also from Turkey and various countries in the former Yugoslavia. This period could be described as ‘the golden age’ for immigrants in Sweden, at least from the point of view of living conditions (Kulla, Ekman, & Sarvimäki, 2010). The Finns and their descendants still make up Sweden’s largest group having immigrant background. In 2017, the number of persons born in Finland but living in Sweden was 150,877 (SCB 2018). If their children are included, the number increases to roughly half a million

(Junila & Westin 2006). Since Finland is an officially bilingual country, where almost six percent of the population speaks Swedish as their mother tongue (‘Finland-Swedes’), some of the Finnish immigrants in Sweden are originally Swedish-speaking (SCB 2018).

About 300,000 of the Finns who moved to Sweden after World War II returned to Finland by 1999 (Korkiasaari 2000; Korkiasaari & Söderling 2003). Grönlund (1995) indicates that these Finnish re-migrants had economic as well as personal reasons for moving back.

Our study focused on Finnish migrants who moved back to Finland as pensioners; how they experienced their time in Sweden and their decision to move back to Finland.

### 1.2. Return migration

Research on return migration has gained momentum in recent years (Cela 2017; Cela & Bettin 2018; Gherghina & Plopeanu 2020; Monti 2020; Sampaio, 2018) as migration experts and politicians evaluate its impact on both receiving and sending countries (Cobb-Clark & Stillman

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2013; de Coulon & Wolff 2010). Previous studies indicate that there are often three main options available for elderly migrants when it comes to where to stay after they have retired (Bolzman et al., 2007; de Coulon & Wolff 2010). These are the option of staying in the host country, go back to country of origin or adopt a hybrid of these two options where they move between host and country of origin.

Reasons behind migrants' decisions to re-migrate is an emerging research area (Cela 2017; Monti 2020; Stark 2019; Warnes & Williams 2006). Previous studies have shown that the decision to re-migrate, is not taken randomly but is guided by a myriad of factors. These factors include, i.e., health status and problems, presence of adult children and grandchildren, availability of health care system in the country of origin, age at immigration, educational status, emotional attachment to country of origin, regular visit to country of origin, degree of integration in the host country, experiencing racism and discrimination in the host country, cost of travelling between country of origin and host country, financial situation, and failure in the host country (Bolzman et al., 2007; Chen et al., 2022; Carling & Pettersen 2014; de Coulon & Wolff 2010; Gerghina & Plopeanu 2020; Guzmán Elizalde 2022; Percival 2013; Sampaio, 2018; Stark 2019).

According to Cobb-Clark and Stillman (2013) researchers often rely on immigrants' reported intentions to migrate as opposed to studying their actual migration. As de Coulon and Wolff, (2010) observed, this approach can give a skewed understanding, as motivation for re-migration can change over time, why the actual act of re-migration may be different from the earlier intentions. Gerghina and Plopeanu (2020) argued in turn that return intentions are a good measure of actual return migration. Furthermore, research on older migrants who re-migrated have received less attention in the past (Bastia et al., 2022; Chistou 2013; Hunter, 2011; Guzmán Elizalde 2022; Horn 2017; Warnes and Williams 2006) and there are calls for more focus on research on older migrants.

In order to understand the contextual and individual underlying factors behind migrants' decisions to re-migrate, it is important to find out how they experienced their stay in the host country by studying their integration experiences.

### 1.3. Integration

Integration according to International Organization for Migration (IOM) is *“the two-way process of mutual adaptation between migrants and the societies in which they live, whereby migrants are incorporated into the social, economic, cultural and political life of the receiving community It entails a set of joint responsibilities for migrants and communities, and incorporates other related notions such as social inclusion and social cohesion”* (IOM nd). Bosswick and Heckmann's (2006) concept of social integration embraces much of the definition by IOM. According to Bosswick and Heckmann (2006), social integration is the inclusion and acceptance of immigrants into core institutions, relationships, and positions of a host society. Bosswick and Heckmann's (2006) four dimensions of social integration are intertwined and together lead to successful integration of immigrants. Structural integration denotes the acquisition of rights and access to position and status in the core institutions of the host society, such as the labour market. Cultural integration concerns the changes that occur in an individual's cognition, behaviour, and attitudes during the integration process. Interactive integration signifies the acceptance and inclusion of immigrants in primary relationships and social networks of the host society, such as marriage and membership of voluntary organizations. Finally, identificational integration concerns inclusion in a new society on a subjective level, indicated by feelings of belonging to, and identification with, groups in the host society – particularly with respect to ethnic, regional, local, and/or national identification(s).

### 1.4. Rationale and aim of the study

Finnish migrants are of interest when studying integration and re-

migration for several reasons. First, these migrant Finns are a large group, both as immigrants to Sweden and re-migrants to Finland. Second, Finland and Sweden are neighbouring countries with many cultural similarities, which makes it interesting to study integration in relation to more similar cultures. While it may be assumed that, due to the cultural similarities, including being able to speak both Swedish and Finnish, many Finns who migrated to Sweden, would find it easier to integrate. Thus, it would be interesting to have empirical data on how the Finnish re-migrants experienced their time in Sweden, and what motivated them to move back to Finland. To our knowledge, other than Grönlund's (1995) study, the experiences of Finnish re-migrants have largely not been studied. Furthermore, as stated earlier on in the introduction, there are few studies on older re-migrants actual re-migration as opposed to return intentions.

With these gaps in the literature on integration and re-migration in mind, the aim of our study is to contribute to the knowledge about integration and re-migration in relation to neighbouring countries with cultural similarities.

Our research questions are: How did older Finnish re-migrants experience integration while living in Sweden? And what were their reasons for re-migrating?

## 2. Methods

Participants were recruited from a larger sample of 265 re-migrants who had answered a questionnaire about their life in Finland before moving to Sweden and their life in Sweden before re-migrating to Finland. The sample was provided by the Finnish Population Register Centre. Sampling criteria were gender, age, education, previous occupation and residential area. Of these 265, the number of informants who spoke Swedish as their mother tongue was 48, and the remaining 217 were Finnish speakers. Letters (with stamped addressed envelopes for reply) were sent to those who had answered the questionnaire inviting them to participate in the interview study. Since the number of Swedish speakers who returned written consent was 14, the same number of Finnish speakers were selected for this study. The Finnish speakers were selected as a convenience sample representing different geographical areas. The number of men and women were matched so that each language group comprised nine women and five men. The participants were thereafter contacted mainly by phone.

The interviewees were 65–85 years of age. All were first-generation immigrants. Most participants had emigrated to Sweden between the 1950s and the 1970s. The Swedish speakers came from areas in the western part of Finland, where the Swedish-speaking minority originally settled. The Finnish speakers came from different parts of Finland. Most participants had low-level vocational education, and most had a Finnish spouse. A few participants had higher education or further education. A few had a Swedish spouse, and/or Swedish nationality.

We used a qualitative research design based on life story interviews (Atkinson 1998), covering the participants' lives from childhood onwards. The average time that these participants spent in Sweden was 30 years, and they re-migrated at the age of 65 or more. The participants had re-migrated to Finland in the 1990s. The participants had returned to Finland between two to twelve years ago, at the time of the interviews.

The interviews lasted from an hour and a half to almost 6 h and took place in the participants' homes. Due to the depth of the topic, some interviews were carried out in two parts, depending on the participant's choice. Special attention was paid to participants' needs for breaks and adequate time. Therefore, the duration of the interviews varied: the longest single interview was 4 h 30 min, and the shortest 1 h 20 min. The subsequent interview (for two-part interviews) was generally carried out within a week, depending on the researcher's travel options. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The first author, whose mother tongue is Swedish, interviewed the Swedish-speaking participants, while a native Finnish speaking researcher interviewed

the Finnish-speaking participants. The purpose of the study was not to compare the two groups, so all interview material was treated as comprising a single pool. For this study, the topics of specific interest were: reasons for moving to Sweden, living in Sweden, and returning to Finland. Guided interview questions were: tell me about how it was to arrive in Sweden, how the work was, how social life was, how your spare time was spent, how social contacts were maintained, and how the decision to return to Finland was made.

Data were analysed using inductive qualitative thematic content analysis inspired by [Elo and Kyngäs \(2008\)](#) and [Graneheim and Lundman \(2004\)](#). First, passages and sentences relating to integration, and reasons for re-migrating, were extracted and condensed to units. Second, similarities and differences in condensed units were organized and coded. The codes were grouped and organised into emerging sub-themes, depending on their manifest or latent content. In the third stage, the emerging themes were organized and, finally, grouped into overarching themes.

### 2.1. Ethics and consent

The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Karolinska Institute at Huddinge Hospital (Dnr 206/00). The Helsinki Declaration has been respected, focusing on informed consent and confidentiality ([WMA 2013](#)). Given the age of participants, a decision was taken not to burden them by sending transcripts and findings for validation.

## 3. Results

The results were organized under three overarching themes factors strengthening integration, factors counteracting integration, and reasons for re-migrating ([Fig. 1](#)). Each overarching theme has several subthemes which are illuminated with quotations. The participants are identified by mother tongue F=Finnish or S=Swedish, gender (M, F), and number (1–14).

### 3.1. Factors strengthening integration

#### 3.1.1. Having own resources for integration and ways of coping

Some of the factors that strengthened integration had to do with migrants themselves – that is, their resources for integration and strategies for coping. These resources included prior knowledge of the host

society, a positive attitude towards the host society, and belonging to a desirable ethnic group (that is, Finnish). Coping mechanisms included emotional distancing from the country of origin and strong attachment to the host society. In relation to prior knowledge of the host society, one participant said: ‘Sweden was [part of] my home country – since my childhood I have been influenced by Swedish society and culture.’ (S-W10). Another participant said: ‘I knew Sweden better than Finland. It was like coming home.’ (S-W12). Some of the older migrants had prior knowledge about Sweden because they had been ‘war-children’ – that is, they had been sent to Sweden during World War II. One former war-child stated: ‘I enjoyed free language courses, being with other Finns and Swedes, I felt comfortable and wished to stay. Anyway, I’ve forgotten about any problems.’ (F-W10). Hence, moving to Sweden after the war was a natural decision.

Most of the participants had moved to Sweden as adults, for work reasons. Language skills in both Swedish and Finnish helped with integration in daily life. One participant stated: ‘I am aware of my language and would never speak Sweden-Swedish. I keep my own Swedish language. However, I learnt Finnish at work and was recruited as an interpreter for the Finnish-speaking workers by the Swedish management.’ (S-W5). Participants also recounted the experience of belonging to a desirable ethnic group that easily gained employment, Finns being considered to be good workers. Occasionally, bilingual competence enhanced employment, as illuminated by one participant who said: ‘They wanted a Finn speaking Swedish.’ (S-M2). Another participant added: ‘It was easy to learn Swedish for me, I was encouraged by the Swedes.’ (F-W2). Being adaptable, young, and strong enhanced feelings of integration. ‘We were young, strong and work oriented, ready to move mountains.’ (S-W8) Another participant said: ‘I adapt easily and enjoyed being with the Swedes and they with me. They were all friendly.’ (S-M11). Being integrated in working- and social life seemed to be associated with personal strengths and experiences.

Emotional distancing from the country of origin, with the sense of being estranged from the original culture with no feeling of homesickness, also enhanced integration in the host society. One participant explained: ‘I did not miss my home country, because I felt estranged from Finland already when living there.’ (F-W7). For that participant, Sweden seemed a better choice from the very start. Another participant said: ‘I felt at home in Sweden, I adapted. If my wife were to pass away, I would return to my daughter in Sweden.’ (F-M6). Integration experiences seemed to be connected to feeling at home in the host society.

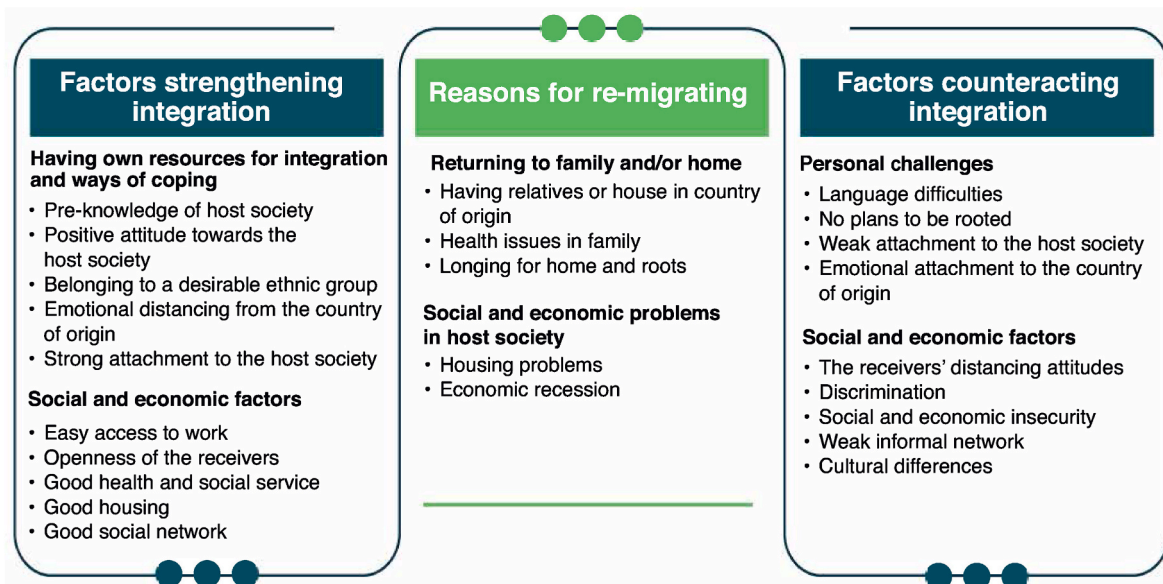


Fig. 1. Factors strengthening and counteracting integration in Sweden and reasons for re-migration to Finland.

Becoming integrated was sometimes described as a learning process, whereby the participants gradually developed a strong attachment to the host society. This meant feeling at home and longing to go back to the host society when away. One participant said: 'At first, I did not feel at home, but after ten years Sweden was home. When I visited Finland for vacations, I already longed to go back to Sweden.' (F-W9). Another participant added: 'I learned to live there and gained a sense of [it being my] home country. I hold the Swedish nationality. It was my home country.' (F-M3). Some of the participants felt they left their home country when visiting or returning to the country of origin.

### 3.1.2. Social and economic factors (in host society)

Other strengthening factors had more to do with the social and economic attributes of the host society and the receivers' [their hosts'] attitudes. Sweden and the Swedes were experienced in favourable terms, as illustrated by this participant's view: 'It was easier to live in Sweden, easier with social contacts and societal services. The people were polite and did not have visible prejudices towards other nationalities. They did not stare at you as they do here.' (S-W5). The host society was perceived as kind, supportive, and open. One participant enjoyed the physical contact: 'the Swedes were really nice. They always hugged you when you met them.' (S-W13). Another participant appreciated the support they received: 'They were always helpful and showed understanding.' (F-W7). Sweden was seen as a country of possibilities, with a freer and more open social climate, described by one participant as follows: 'The Swedes are positive towards strangers, [I] never experienced any kind of discrimination, everyone is treated the same. Everybody greets you.' (S-W8). Some of the re-migrants thus seemed to be well integrated into social life.

Experiencing economic security also strengthened integration. A feeling of security was experienced through easy access to work, good health services, housing, and social security. One participant recounted that 'time flew, and I enjoyed life. I went to work the very first week [...] I felt safe, got a salary.' (F-W2). Another participant stated: 'They even take good care of you in hospital, where good food is served. They are helpful and friendly.' (F-M6). The housing and social security were appreciated, as shown in the following excerpt: 'We got a very good apartment and a good economy. When I was widowed, I received my husband's insurance money.' (F-W9). The work possibilities and job satisfaction were positive, as illustrated by this participant: 'In Sweden, working conditions were better, [with a] good salary and working hours. I was embraced with open arms by the Swedes.' (S-W7). Another participant, who worked at a boarding school, said: 'It was enjoyable working with other Finnish girls.' (F-W5). Good working conditions seemed to be highly appreciated and of importance for staying in host society.

Having a family and belonging to an informal social network in the host society were valued. Only a few participants had moved to Sweden at an older age. Family could be a reason to move to Sweden, as explained by this participant: 'When our daughter moved to Sweden, we came after. We made many friends and had a convenient apartment with a balcony.' (F-W7). Participation in formal associations was also appreciated.

## 3.2. Factors counteracting integration

### 3.2.1. Personal challenges

Integration was counteracted by migrants' own personal challenges, such as language difficulties and general feelings of 'homelessness'. Some participants did not experience language challenges to the same extent, due to contact with other Finns or with people of other nationalities. Some participants had challenges with local dialects, despite being Swedish speakers. One participant said: 'I did not always understand the Stockholm Swedish' (S-W7). However, there were participants with difficulties learning Swedish: 'I was completely languageless. On Mondays, it got easier, but over the weekend, I started to cry; I felt I

didn't learn anything.' (F-W9).

Participants also described feelings of homelessness. Feelings of homelessness were partly ascribed to lack of language skills: 'I could not afford a language course and did not feel at home at all.' (F-M13). One participant explained: 'I did not feel at home in Sweden, nor do I feel at home here [Finland], always longing for Karelia, that is my home of origin'. [Parts of Finnish Karelia were ceded to the Soviet Union during the second world war]. (F-M12). The question of returning home could be difficult if there was no home of origin to return to.

Some migrants had no plans to be rooted in the host society and they did not see their future as being in Sweden. One participant said: 'I never planned to stay; I am here for work.' (F-W10). Some of the participants had from the very beginning decided to return when they retired, as related by a participant with Finnish identity: 'I never had plans to stay and age in Sweden. I felt like a Finn.' (F-W11). Weak attachment to the host society could be due to lack of a permanent home or sense of family, and the counterbalancing attachment to and identification with the country of origin could be strong. One of the participants said: 'I felt patriotism with the memories of my father and the war.' (F-M1). This feeling manifested as lack of interest in applying for Swedish citizenship – or, as one participant put it: 'The Swedes asked me to apply for Swedish citizenship, but I don't want to become Swedish, I shall return. Well, it took me twenty years.' (S-W1). Since there were plans to return, integration may have become more difficult.

### 3.2.2. Social and economic factors (in host society)

Integration was also counteracted by social factors in the host society such as discrimination, being devalued, bullied, and encountering racism or jealousy. To be devalued was described as exclusion from friendship with Swedish colleagues: 'Outside work you were not accepted as a friend, on Fridays they all went together after work, I felt worthless.' (S-M2). Experiences of racism and/or jealousy produced unpleasant living conditions: 'Once, on a Saturday, when I had cleaned the window, the young people came and threw water and sand on it. It was a sort of racism or jealousy.' (F-W8). Feelings of fear also occurred: 'The young people kicked my shopping bags, one guy told me to keep quiet, he knew I was a Finn.' A participant who had a low-status job and lacked language skills experienced discrimination, saying: 'I was met as a second-class citizen.' (F-W9). Social and economic insecurity influenced life in Sweden for some participants. There could be occasional housing problems, unemployment, or poor work conditions, and a weak informal social network could increase these insecurities. One participant would have preferred to live in Sweden but could not, saying: 'We felt at home, and would have stayed, but because of economic challenges we had to return [to Finland].' (F-W7). Sometimes the older Finns felt they were forced to return.

Cultural differences arose as a result of different food customs and meeting people with a different sense of humour. Food was different in part compared with Finland, which had more influences from the kitchens of the East. Regarding misunderstandings due to humour, one participant explained: 'They didn't understand my sense of humour. I told them I was creative, and they did not like it.' (F-W4). The cultural differences, however, seemed to be scarce.

## 3.3. Reasons for re-migrating

### 3.3.1. Returning to family and/or home

Reasons for moving back to Finland related to having family and relatives in Finland and to health problems in the family. One participant returned because his wife was there: 'My wife was from Finland; she had always lived there. We decided to stay instead of flying back and forth all the time.' (F-M3). Having a sick family member was also a reason for re-migrating: 'Mother got sick, I decided to return home. I had a feeling of being at home.' (F-M1). Another participant said: 'I have my children and grandchildren in Finland; they were on their own because of sickness in the family. I said, let's try Finland again.' (S-W4). The

social contacts seemed to strengthen re-migration decisions.

### 3.3.2. Social and economic problems in host society

Other reasons for re-migrating included problems with housing, and the participant's personal economic circumstances. One participant pointed out: 'My daughter's apartment was sold, otherwise I might have stayed, but I had to move. And the noisy surroundings made me restless. Anyway, Finland is my home country, I will stay.' (F-W7). A participant who had moved twice to Sweden said: 'this time in the Nineties there was an economic recession, and we had to move to an apartment with social housing tenants, it was impossible to live there indeed.' (S-W4). Furthermore, having a house or an apartment in Finland was a reason to return. Sometimes the older Finns valued it as a better option to return.

### 3.3.3. Longing for home and roots

Finland is experienced as homeland – or, as stated by one participant: 'I longed for my home country all the time.' (F-M12). Longing to get back to one's roots, for the home country's soil, could affect the decision to re-migrate. One participant said: 'it was better to get back to my roots. I would prefer to be buried in Finland and not in a foreign country.' (F-W5). Old age seemed to confirm return decisions.

Returning home and to one's roots in later life, however, was not always easy, as illustrated by a participant who said: 'I don't like it here, the customs were better in Sweden.' (S-M9). Another participant longed to go back to Sweden: 'It was hard to leave Sweden, friends and associations. Sweden gave me so much.' (S-W14). Despite the decision to return, longing for Sweden may remain. However, one participant concluded: 'I was given a richer life [by the experience of migration]' (S-W7).

## 4. Discussion

This study explores and describes how older Finnish re-migrants experienced integration while living in Sweden as well as their reasons for re-migrating. We focused on older re-migrants who left their home country, Finland, at a time when Finns were sought-after labour migrants, after World War II. At that time, the host country, Sweden, imported workers (Björklund 2011; Grönlund 1995; Korkiasaari, 2000). We were also interested to find out whether retirement was the reason to re-migrate, as the participants were retirees. However, the factors strengthening or counteracting integration proved to be complex – mainly personal, social and economic.

When it comes to participants' experiences of integration in Sweden, strengthening factors were the migrants' own resources for integration as well as the existence of opportunities in the host society, such as access to the labour market, housing system, and informal social networks, supporting structural integration (Bosswick & Heckmann 2006). Belonging to a desirable ethnic group may have further strengthened integration (Korkiasaari, 2000). Work in turn led to social and economic security in the host society and was a pathway to informal social networks as well. As such, several factors supported integration, and might therefore have strengthened integration among migrants with cultural knowledge and language competence. Prior knowledge of the host country may have contributed to participants experiencing the host society as open. Only minor cultural differences between the countries arose, mostly in favour of the host society. Thus, cultural and linguistic similarities between the countries may have further strengthened integration, compared with immigrants to host countries/societies that are less familiar to them. Having been a war-child in Sweden during World War II seemed to benefit participants' cultural familiarity and language skills.

However, according to Björklund (2011), Finns who immigrated managed with almost no skills, or only basic skills, in Swedish. In this study some of the older re-migrants did not mention language challenges, while others did. However, language as such did not guarantee social integration, as both language groups exemplified in this study.

Although having bicultural competence was seen as an advantage for employment (as postulated by Bosswick and Heckmann 2006), social integration at work sites was not guaranteed. Social integration was more complicated than having language skills.

Further findings showed discrepancies within the integration experiences of labour migrants. It is important, therefore, to discuss the results in relation to the conditions in the home country during the period of migration. Namely, Björklund (2011) emphasised that not all Finnish immigrants wished to leave their home country for work. Some of them were pushed to do so by the risk of unemployment. On the other hand, becoming a labour migrant was a common pull factor for leaving the home country at times when Sweden was importing workers from Finland and other countries. Thus, the immigrants were not necessarily expected to stay and, if they did, only for a short period of time. Whether this was experienced at work among the older Finnish re-migrants, this study did not clearly show. However, some interviewees mentioned that they only left for work and were determined to return.

Many Finnish immigrants from the 1960s to the 1980s were unskilled labourers, and were recruited for hard work in factories, which may have counteracted integration in Sweden (Björklund 2011; Klinthäll 2013). In this study, however, most of the older re-migrants were educated. But clearly, dissatisfaction with work, social integration and discrimination were experienced by some interviewees.

Several factors had negative impacts on experiences of integration. Factors that counteracted integration included re-migrants' prior attitudes, if they had no plans to become rooted in the host society. This might have long-term impacts on, for instance, integration program success. In fact, the pull factors for re-migration may have developed during the stay in the host country. Most of the re-migrants moved to Sweden purely for work. As labour migrants, most of the participants were successfully employed – hence structurally integrated – but some did not feel integrated in terms of what Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) describe as cultural integration and identificational integration. However, getting work easily seemed not necessarily to enhance integration, due to other factors such as social and economic insecurity and weak informal networks in the host society. Others mentioned, as factors counteracting integration, the receivers' distancing attitude and being discriminated against. This is in line with Bayram et al. (2009), who found that perceived discrimination toward Turkish immigrants in Sweden could be a reason for poor integration.

Our results did not clearly show interactive integration (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). The interviewees' primary relationships (marriage, friendship, social activities) mostly seem to have involved other Finnish immigrants. This is in line with previous studies, where Finns in Sweden were mainly in contact with other Finns (Björklund 2011; Korkiasaari, 2000). However, contact with Swedes and other nationalities was also mentioned. The importance of social networks vs. weak informal networks was mentioned, impacting integration experiences.

It is surprising, to some extent, that social and economic factors were "push and pull" factors for integration or re-migration among the older Finnish re-migrants. The reasons for immigration were social and economic, and the reasons given for re-migration were social and economic problems in the host society, such as housing problems and economic recession. These results support Grönlund's (1995) study, which also showed that there are both economic and personal reasons for re-migration.

A clear personal reason was weak attachment to the host society, due to strong feelings for the country of origin or feeling generally 'homeless'. Some of the re-migrants felt strong emotional attachment to their country of origin – they were longing to get back to their roots, the home country's soil, and Finland was that homeland. This was also the case in Virtanen's study (2014), where the Finns longed for their home country and felt homesick. Klok et al. (2017) emphasize that retirement may intersect with homesickness for a place. This can be seen in our study, where the participants were retired re-migrants. According to Wessendorf (2007), a wish to migrate to "one's roots" can be the final decision

to return, which some of the older Finns in our study confirmed. However, Björklund (2011) claims that the importance of Finnish roots may diminish the longer the time spent in the host country. The participants in this study had stayed in the host society for an average of 30 years, which is rather a long time. Thus, returning to one's roots seems to have been a strong factor, since it had survived over the years.

Other factors pulled the older Finnish re-migrants to their home country, such as family and housing in Finland, although social relationships did not guarantee successful return to the country of origin. Kulla, Ekman, & Sarvimäki, 2010 found that older re-migrants' declining health was an obstacle to keeping relationships active. Moving back, however, was not always an easy decision and life back in Finland could be unpredictable.

Hence, among the interviewees in this study, push and pull factors can be seen as a "double-edged sword" in terms of integration experiences. The results clearly show, for instance, that unemployment in the home country, as opposed to seeking a better future, a new start, or an adventure, were two different starting points for integration experiences (Björklund 2011; Korkiasaari, 2000). The older Finnish re-migrants may have had the opportunity for better living conditions in Sweden, and many felt included in Swedish society, yet they still re-migrated. This is supported by Sampaio, 2018, for example, who argues that satisfactory social integration in the host country does not necessarily prevent re-migration. The findings are in line with Bosswick and Heckmann's (2006) categorization of social integration, where immigrants can be integrated in relation to one category but not integrated for another. An example of this is given by Valenta (2008), who found that immigrants could be well integrated into the labour market without being socially integrated. Bayram et al. (2009) state that the Turkish immigrants whom they studied in Sweden did not use all the opportunities available to them as migrants, which may also be the case among the older re-migrants in our study.

As shown, several factors influenced the older Finns' decision to return, illustrating the complexity of integration and re-migration, not least at the personal level. Social and economic factors proved to be push and pull factors among older Finnish re-migrants. Retirement was only one factor. To conclude, for the older Finns in this study re-migration was an option, but one which not all migrants may have.

## 5. Strengths and limitations of the study

The participants in this study comprised both Swedish and Finnish speaking migrants and the data were collected from life story interviews, generating rich and varied material. Data analysis was carried out independently by two researchers (G.K. and A.S.) and read and approved by a third researcher outside the project (L.A.). This may improve the trustworthiness of qualitative analysis (Graneheim et al., 2017; Graneheim & Lundman 2004).

One limitation of this study relates to the time perspective. At the time of the interviews, the participants had already moved back from Sweden; they talked about their life in Sweden in retrospect. Time and their present life situation might colour their memories. If the interviews had been conducted while participants were still living in Sweden, the research findings might have been different.

Finland and Sweden are neighbouring countries with close historical and cultural bonds. The results of this study are not necessarily transferable to other older migrant groups elsewhere. Migrants moving from a distant country with a different culture may experience integration differently, and moving back might not always be an easy option as it usually is between Sweden and Finland. However, the results may be transferable to studies with older re-migrants returning "home" to Finland from other parts of the world.

## 6. Conclusion

The overarching lesson learned from the older Finnish re-migrants in

this study is that integration is a complex phenomenon. In order to support migrants, both strengthening and counteracting factors must be recognized and addressed. The migrants' own resources and emotional distancing and attachment are valuable assets, but the host society needs to provide an open atmosphere as well as social and economic security. We recommend that further studies focus on how other groups of migrants' experience integration and how older re-migrants integrate after moving back to their country of origin. Such studies may contribute to policy on how integration might best be planned for the re-migrant groups in question.

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## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Gunilla Kulla:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Lily Appoh:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Anneli Sarvimäki:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

## Declaration of competing interest

None.

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