



# Participation Paradox: Asylum Seekers' Everyday Participation in Finland

MARTTA MYLLYLÄ 

MERVI PANTTI 

ANTTI KIVIJÄRVI 

\*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article

## RESEARCH

**HUP** HELSINKI  
UNIVERSITY  
PRESS

## ABSTRACT

Asylum seekers are separated from the receiving society by the legislation, marginalising societal discourses and institutional practices of the reception system. By engaging in previous studies on how asylum seekers exert agency within the limits of existing power relations and structural constraints, we examine asylum seekers' *everyday participation* in reception centres and the local community. We uncover the *participation paradox*, in which conflicting discourses, policies and practices simultaneously restrict and expect asylum seekers' participation. Drawing on qualitative interviews with a diverse group of asylum seekers, we analyse their narratives about engagement in local life and institutions. The study shows mundane, small-scale participation, performed by individuals or small groups that is focused on improving immediate living conditions and enhancing opportunities in local communities, thereby escaping the liminal conditions of their life and the stigma of an asylum seeker.

## CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

**Martta Myllylä**

University of Helsinki,  
Helsinki, Finland

[martta.myllyla@helsinki.fi](mailto:martta.myllyla@helsinki.fi)

## KEYWORDS:

Asylum seekers; Everyday participation; Participation paradox; Reception centres; Qualitative interviews

## TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Myllylä, M, Pantti, M and Kivijärvi, A. 2025. Participation Paradox: Asylum Seekers' Everyday Participation in Finland. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 15(2): 2, pp. 1–18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.686>

A significant body of research has examined the restrictive policies, reception practices and discourses that exclude asylum seekers from participating in the social and political lives of their receiving countries (Campesi 2015; Fontanari 2015; Goldring and Landolt 2013). Nevertheless, previous research has examined asylum seekers' participation and agency, mainly in the context of political rights and activism (e.g. Hajer & Bröer 2020; Johnson 2015; Näre 2020; Pellander & Horsti 2018). However, asylum seekers rarely have the resources to engage in collective acts of resistance and protest (Kallio et al. 2020).

Other forms of agency that asylum seekers are able to exert in their precarious situation have increasingly been studied (e.g. Fresia & Von Känel 2016; Ghorashi et al. 2018; Kallio et al. 2020; Robleda 2020). These studies show how asylum seekers find ways to engage in meaningful social activities and establish social relations within local communities. This brings us to the concept of *everyday participation* (Ebrey 2016; Miles & Gibson 2016), which shifts the attention from collective political mobilisation to a wide variety of small-scale participatory acts at the local level. Such a perspective helps us better understand the impact of immigration policies on the everyday lives of asylum seekers and their ability to mitigate structural marginalisation.

In Finland, asylum seekers' participation unfolds within paradoxical conditions characterised by conflicting norms and expectations. Based on national legislation, asylum seekers' participation is required in the form of study and work activities offered by reception centres (Reception Act 746/2011). However, when asylum seekers seek access to educational institutions and employment outside the reception centres, they encounter significant barriers. While the governmental discourse and views of local authorities indicate a desire to rapidly integrate asylum seekers (Finnish Government 2019: 139; Haverinen 2018), such integration is poorly supported both in legislation and in the institutional practices of reception centres (Kivijärvi & Myllylä 2022). Moreover, in everyday encounters, asylum seekers face contradictory requirements: to wait patiently while being active and willing to integrate (Petäjäniemi et al. 2021). Finally, while the expectation of participation increases with more time spent in the receiving country, protracted waiting tends to result in withdrawals from social relations (e.g. Zill et al. 2020).

In this study, we explore the everyday participation of asylum seekers in Finland to understand the explicit and subtle ways in which they exert agency in a socially and politically constrained context. We add to existing literature by examining various forms of everyday participation among asylum seekers in diverse contexts, both within and beyond reception centres. Furthermore, we explore the intricate dynamics of participation and disengagement, as well as that of adjustment and resistance, as asylum seekers navigate amidst the conflicting expectations.

In what follows, we first discuss the notions of everyday participation and participation paradox to illustrate their complex and contradictory nature. We then describe the context of our study – Finnish policies and practices of asylum reception – and present our data. The analysis illustrates mundane participation within reception centres and proceeds towards participation in local communities and institutions. We show that asylum seekers' everyday participation is shaped by marginalising circumstances as well as their social and cultural resources, including the networks they have been able to build.

The waiting time has often been described as a passive period during which residents in reception centres experience a lack of autonomy and prospects (Brekke 2004; Kreichauf 2018; Rotter 2016). In Finland, this ‘forced inactivity’ (Haverinen 2018) is compounded by the remote locations of reception facilities and a lack of access to public services (Alho 2021). Thus, we start from the premise that asylum seekers’ agency is limited by their status, which hinders their entrance to arenas like the labour market and education system and restricts their political engagement (Fernandes 2015). While current research on migrant waiting often focuses on the struggle to achieve recognition and rights (e.g. Ataç 2016; Hajer & Bröer 2020; Johnson 2015; Näre 2020), the literature also shows that there are other ways to be visible and heard through meaningful everyday social engagements (e.g. Brun 2015; Rotter 2016). In this article, we engage in an emerging discussion that emphasises these more mundane instances of agency, through which asylum seekers seek to gain control over their lives during the asylum procedure (e.g. Ghorashi et al. 2018; Kallio et al. 2020; Miellet 2021; Robleda 2020).

The literature on mundane forms of asylum seekers’ agency acknowledges the constraints on their political activism and focuses on alternative forms of agency that can help asylum seekers to cope with uncertainty and uphold a dignified identity despite their subordinate status. Research has shown subtle expressions of agency, including resisting practices, such as intentional disengagement (Kallio et al. 2020) and resisting reception centre practices (Maculan 2022), and creative practices, such as building social connections (Ramachandran & Vathi 2022) and creating daily routines within reception centres (Robleda 2020). In some studies, agency is extended to cognitive and emotional dimensions, such as sustaining hope and dreams (Ghorashi et al. 2018; Robleda 2020) and negotiating one’s identity considering the stigmatised label of asylum seeker (Petäjänieniemi et al. 2021).

Agency is a broad concept, encompassing asylum seekers’ dreams, plans, emotions or micro-level demonstrations of political agency (Ghorashi et al. 2018). The concept of participation offers a more specific perspective for analysing the lives of asylum seekers. We use the concept to emphasise that asylum seekers are not separated from the surrounding society but leave their mark on communities and institutions. Participation refers to activity or action directed towards other people, communities and institutions. Participation is always relational, as it occurs in everyday interactions. It involves being part of a specific community and taking part in its social practices, with the possibility of influencing them (Bruselius-Jensen et al. 2021; Kiilakoski et al. 2020; Kreichauf 2021). Thus, participation represents an alternative to the notions of inclusion and integration, which are typically evaluated from above, with immigrants being the target of public policies (e.g. Masoud et al. 2021).

The concept of participation typically implies a process of empowerment and the ability to improve one’s life situation (Kiilakoski et al. 2020). However, in the context of seeking asylum, participation is not always empowering. Participation may not be a deliberate choice by asylum seekers but rather required by reception authorities (Haverinen 2018; Petäjänieniemi et al. 2021; Valenta & Berg 2010). In Finland, asylum seekers are obliged to participate in certain activities, including language tuition, lessons on Finnish society and maintenance work within a reception centre, to prevent a reduction in their reception benefits. While these activities are intended to enhance integration, they can fall short in promoting inclusion and, instead, turn into a tool

of control (Kivijärvi & Myllylä 2022). Some reception centres offer voluntary activities, such as sport and discussion clubs. The combination of activities that are required or facilitated by reception authorities and those that are self-organised adds to the complexity of the concept of everyday participation.

Klarenbeek and Weide (2020) argue that there is a *participation paradox* in European discourses on migration: the participation of immigrants is required to promote ‘good citizenship’, but participation is at the same time restricted and ‘feared’. Building on Klarenbeek and Weide’s (2020) notion of conflicting characteristics in European migration discourses, we develop the concept from the micro-level perspectives of asylum seekers. We highlight that asylum seekers’ participation is influenced by discourses and institutional practices that associate certain types of behaviour with being a productive member of society, or a ‘good asylum seeker’ (Petäjänieniemi et al. 2021). Asylum seekers may internalise the participation discourse and may perceive participation as influencing their asylum decisions and improving their chances of obtaining legal residence in the country. Indeed, in other parts of Europe, asylum seekers’ activity and productivity during protracted asylum processes have become a tool enabling the receiving society to select the most suitable applicants when granting non-EU-harmonised protection statuses (Vianelli et al. 2022). The paradox of participation is also evident in the attitudes, practices and objectives of reception authorities. Previous research in Finland has shown that while some authorities support asylum seekers’ participation and belonging to the local community as a key goal of reception practices, others approach reception centres as ‘depositories’ for fulfilling the basic needs of asylum seekers (Haverinen 2018).

## THE FINNISH RECEPTION SYSTEM

As a member of the European Union, Finland should adjust its reception system according to the Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33). Despite the Directive, there is considerable inter-country variation, for instance, in housing arrangements and asylum seekers’ access to public services, education and the labour market (AIDA 2023). The Finnish model is characterised by a relatively low number of asylum seekers due to Finland’s location in northernmost Europe. Asylum seekers mainly inhabit state-funded *reception centres*, with few having access to private accommodation. Unlike other European countries, emergency shelters, hotspots and closed detention facilities are uncommon.

All asylum seekers live under the jurisdiction of one reception centre, which provides them with services stipulated by Finnish law, such as accommodation, a reception allowance, basic social and health services, interpretation services and assistance with so-called voluntary return. Reception centres are run by various operators, including the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri), non-governmental organisations, municipalities and private companies. The main provider of reception services has been the Finnish Red Cross, which maintained about half the reception centres during our fieldwork. There are differences in reception centres, mostly related to variations in geographical location and the services provided.

Asylum claims in Finland are processed by Migri. In the case of a negative decision, the applicant has the right to appeal the decision to the Administrative Court, to request an appeal to the Supreme Administrative Court and, finally, if they can express new grounds for asylum, to submit a new asylum application. An increase in the number

of applications in 2015 led to legislative changes, such as restrictions related to legal aid, as well as changes in administrative practices, including a shift to more restrictive interpretations by immigration officers (Vanto et al. 2022). Poor-quality decisions and a decline in positive decision rates led to appeals and protracted legal processes. Consequently, many asylum seekers have been waiting for a decision for years. This protracted waiting has been detrimental to their well-being, thus impacting their capacity for participation.

Asylum seekers' precarious legal status limits their access to welfare services, education and employment. They are excluded, for instance, from integration training and comprehensive healthcare. Children from 6 to 18 years of age are entitled to comprehensive schooling, but after that, educational institutions decide whether they will accept asylum seekers as students, and higher education institutions charge tuition fees for students outside EU/ETA countries. Early childhood education is not prescribed by law, and only a few municipalities provide it. Like many other European countries, Finland imposes an employment time ban on asylum seekers: to obtain permission to work, they must wait either 3 or 6 months (depending on the recognised validity of their personal identification documents) after entering the country or filing a new asylum application (Aliens Act 2004).

Limited rights discussed above can be seen as key elements of the European 'politics of discomfort', which results in uncertainty and anxiety among asylum seekers (Zill et al. 2021). In Finland and elsewhere, the legal barriers hindering asylum seekers' participation are intertwined with the public discourses on risk and illegality (Pettersson & Augoustinos 2021; Seppälä 2022) and structural racism and hierarchisation in the labour market and education (Ahmad 2020; Könönen 2014). Moreover, confining practices of the reception system, such as peripheral locations of reception centres and asylum seekers' transfers from one centre to another, limit asylum seekers' opportunities for participation. This spatial confinement overlaps with reception centres' inclination to prioritise controlling measures rather than inclusion in their service provision and communication practices (Kivijärvi & Myllylä 2022). However, these exclusionary structures are often challenged by solidarity mobilisations supporting asylum seekers' aspirations for inclusion (Merikoski 2023) and media narratives working to humanise asylum seekers (Pantti & Ojala 2019).

## RESEARCH MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in 2019 and involved semi-structured interviews with current (26) and former (2) asylum seekers. We used purposive sampling, aiming to represent the diversity as well as the majority populations of asylum seekers in Finland. We targeted the two main sub-groups of adult asylum seekers in Finland: young single men and parents with small children. At the time of the interviews, approximately half of the people applying for asylum were 18 to 35 years old, and 70% were men, while families constituted another significant category (Migri 2019). To produce the data, we cooperated with seven reception centres located in various regions across Finland. The centres had different profiles: one was a so-called transit centre, one was inhabited by mental health patients, some provided only institutional housing, and some also had detached apartments. We asked reception centre workers to distribute the multilingual research invitation to all asylum seekers fitting the profile and encourage those in highly marginalised situations to participate. These professionals were carefully instructed to accept declinations and not put any

pressure on those who seem hesitant. The interviews were conducted in the two most widely spoken languages among asylum seekers in 2019 – Arabic and Farsi/Dari in addition to English and Finnish.

We interviewed 17 young adult single men and 11 parents of small children (seven mothers and four fathers). The interviewees were mainly Afghans (13) and Iraqis (11), and four had origins in Western or Northern Africa or in the Middle East. Their national backgrounds were generally representative of the overall composition of asylum seekers in Finland in 2019 (Migri 2019). We have guaranteed participants' anonymity by allocating them pseudonyms that were carefully selected to indicate participants' ethno-linguistic backgrounds.

We were able to recruit asylum seekers from diverse social backgrounds, and, therefore, our data allows for a comprehensive understanding of asylum seekers' everyday participation. Some interviewees were well-educated and English-speaking, but most of them possessed limited lingual and social resources: they were illiterate or lacked skills in Finnish or English and had few ties to the local Finnish people. As is common among asylum seekers, some participants suffered from poor mental health (e.g. Porter & Haslam 2005) at the time of the interview, and some were victims of human trafficking. Finally, participants' legal statuses were diverse. Most interviewees had been in Finland for over 3 years, had already received at least one negative asylum decision, and were in the subsequent phases of their application process. A few were still waiting for an initial decision, and two had recently received residence permits.

Despite not being able to renounce the power dynamics related to researcher-asylum seeker interaction, we aimed to be as sensitive as possible to the marginal position of our interviewees.<sup>1</sup> To distinguish ourselves from asylum interrogations, we did not use interpreters but trained and lingually competent research assistants.<sup>2</sup> We secured informed consent by taking time to discuss the principles of research participation and stressing its voluntary nature before each interview. While conducting the interviews, we reminded the interviewees of their right to withdraw and respected their preferences regarding the interview themes. After negotiating consent, some asylum seekers decided to decline, while most of them clearly expressed their willingness to participate. After the interviews, we asked the interviewees about their experience of participating in the interview and whether they needed to process the discussed issues further. Interviews occurred on the sites preferred by interviewees, mostly in reception centre premises or at public places such as libraries or in their apartments if they lived outside the reception centre. The semi-structured interviews lasted from 50 to 125 minutes and included questions on the everyday lives of asylum seekers, their experiences of reception services, local communities and institutions, as well as their personal trajectories and social relations.

The starting point of our analysis was inductive reasoning. We did not use any predetermined conceptual categories when reading the anonymised interview transcripts. Rather, we were broadly interested in asylum seekers' possibilities to act despite their marginal position. In the first phase of the analysis, we coded data excerpts that involved accounts of action according to the sites in which they took place: reception centre, public space, labour market, educational institutions or

---

<sup>1</sup> The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee in the Humanities and Social and Behavioural Sciences of the University of Helsinki.

<sup>2</sup> Pargol Miraftebi and Fairuz Muthana worked as research assistants in the project.

some other context. In the second phase, we examined the kinds of activities the interviewees engaged in, the barriers they faced, and how they dealt with those barriers. Further, we focused on the aims and meanings of their actions and started to formulate our understanding of everyday participation as a series of acts intended to make life bearable in reception centres and connect with exterior communities.

## **FINDINGS: ASYLUM SEEKERS' EVERYDAY PARTICIPATION**

We identified two contexts of everyday participation from asylum seekers' accounts of their lives in Finland: (a) seeking to improve one's current situation in their immediate surroundings in reception centres and (b) promoting one's position in the surrounding communities.

### **IMPROVING IMMEDIATE CIRCUMSTANCES**

Apart from merely taking part in the activities provided by the reception centres, asylum seekers attempted to participate in improving their situations within the centres in several ways. Such attempts were frequently made through discussions with the staff, including requests to improve the available services and upgrade surrounding facilities (e.g. changes in room arrangements and bus tickets). In some cases, these attempts were successful, typically due to asylum seekers' ability to find a benevolent reception centre worker, illustrating the differing attitudes of personnel towards participation.

Sometimes, when we need help with something we go and tell [a worker].  
He is very good. He gets things done. If you want something, he goes  
and gets it for you. For example, the screws in the closet had come loose.  
We all knew that if we went and told [another worker], he wouldn't do  
anything. (Shirin, mother)

Most often, participation was based on individual endeavours or on the efforts of roommates or small groups. Descriptions of more collective mobilisations were rare in our data. In the quotation above, the pronoun 'we' referred to friends of the interviewee sharing the same first language and a newcomer position in her current centre.

Consequently, even though asylum seekers constitute a highly heterogeneous group divided by political, ethnic, cultural and class-based differences and sometimes even quarrels, the respondents had found at least small peer groups that increased their leverage and sometimes provided a sense of cohesion as well. The following quote from a mother who had entered Finland just a few months ago with her child, highlights how she had tried to influence the reception centre service provision while creating a wider sense of community among her peers:

We suggested that the women would organise a little party, but they said  
that everyone should go to their own rooms and just be quiet, so others  
won't complain. [...] It would be good to learn about, for example, if my  
roommate is from a different country, so what's her culture like. You could  
at least talk, empty your mind, just being around people makes you happy.  
[...]. Everyone could also bring food from their own room [...] so the centre

wouldn't have to spend any money. They would just have to cooperate.  
(Shirin, mother)

These types of community-oriented acts arose mainly from the asylum seekers' own efforts, although their attempts were rarely supported by the centres. This finding illustrates the paradoxical context of participation, where participating in mandatory study and work activities is encouraged more than self-imposed activities aiming to improve surrounding conditions and building communities.

A similar paradox was evident in those accounts, which included descriptions of specific efforts to improve service provision in reception centres. For example, a young man who had witnessed rejections to his asylum applications depicts how he and his friends had persistently but unsuccessfully tried to improve the service provision in a reception centre:

Yes, we complained a lot about this issue [unsuitable food]. Actually, once a week we would hand in a paper that was full of signatures saying that something needs to change. The petition was addressed to the centre's boss. (Salim, young man)

Furthermore, Salim explained that they had collectively approached Migri, bypassing the reception centre staff, to ask for the possibility to cook their own food, but the request did not lead to any changes. The outcome was unsuccessful also in relation to their wishes to be given information in their own (Dari) language: 'After several negative answers, the asylum seekers stopped trying to change things' (Salim, young man). The experience of having their wishes disregarded tended to discourage and eventually dissolve asylum seekers' collective actions. To some extent, peer and communal support compensated for the deficiencies of reception services as they turned to peers for support and help in matters such as translation and childcare (Näre et al. 2022).

## INTENTIONAL DISENGAGEMENTS

Some asylum seekers did not participate in any activities provided in reception centres. For some, participation was made impossible: for example, single parents could not participate in study activities because they needed to take care of their children. Asylum seekers are excluded from the Finnish system of universal childcare services, and childcare was rarely available in the reception centres. Some did not participate because of their decreased mental well-being.

However, there were also interviewees for whom non-participation was an active choice, representing 'agentic passivity' (Kallio et al. 2020). According to Kallio et al. (2020), non-participation is used to resist institutional practices. For instance, some interviewees were not motivated to participate in compulsory study activities because of the perceived low quality of teaching, the low number of classes, and disregard of the broad variety of learners. Forced participation in organised activities was opposed by small acts of resistance within the limits of the system, which sanctions non-participation by cutting reception benefits:

Some people play with their phones [during the lessons]; others might come for the first hour and then not come for the rest. So, we just show up.  
(Shirin, mother)

Many participants who distanced themselves from the activities and communities in reception centres aspired to participate in society outside the reception centre instead, corresponding with their hopes to be part of mainstream communities and institutions and live a more 'normal' life (see also Robleda 2020). For some, conscious withdrawal from participation was related not only to distancing themselves from reception services and the status of an asylum seeker but also to their disappointment with Finnish asylum policies in general. As their stay in Finland grew longer, some interviewees started to participate less and imagine a future outside of Finland. Salim, for instance, had lost motivation to participate after negative asylum decisions:

I am just waiting [...] [for the second] negative decision [...]. After that I can leave Finland and go to another European country like France or Germany [...]. So, after knowing this it is very difficult to motivate yourself to learn Finnish. Why would I learn a language that isn't spoken anywhere? (Salim, young man)

The interviewees' accounts of their participation often differed considerably depending on the duration of the asylum process. An increased number of disappointments led to withdrawals from social interactions. This was the case with a young man who had been in Finland for 4 years and was afraid of being deported to Afghanistan, where he had never lived. He stressed that he was not interested in any kind of participation, stating that he slept during the day and played with his phone or watched movies at night: 'I just try to kill time for it to be morning again, so I can sleep again' (Ayan, young man).

## FINDING PATHS TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The orientation towards building life outside the reception centre manifests as attempts to enter local communities, educational institutes and the labour market. For some interviewees, other asylum seekers constituted an important peer group, and shared experiences had created strong bonds between them. In contrast, young men and those with tertiary education often refrained from social life in reception centres and tried to connect with other communities and institutions:

I don't have much interaction with asylum seekers [...] I don't know much about them. The ones that I have met here, because I'm the only new person here, so many of them, they have been here for a long time. All they do is complain, complain, complain. So, yeah, I don't need anything like that in my life. [...] I want to be with someone that will take me forward. (Ike, young man)

This quote reflects a strong tendency to disengage oneself from the asylum seeker category as well as an emphasis on the future life. Young men especially yearned for social contacts in local leisure spaces, including cafes, pubs and parks. For example, two young male interviewees described their preferred sites as 'multicultural' (Sami, a young man) and said they aimed to 'mingle with people of different nationalities' (Milad, a young man). Multi-ethnic networks, as well as relatives and friends outside the reception system, offered empathy and immediate support, for instance, with childcare and translation, but they also provided information and job opportunities and, thus, opened future possibilities. However, the interviewees' contacts with people with a residence permit sometimes led to ambivalent feelings. While they were links

to society outside the restricted life in reception centres, they made the interviewees' own deprived position as asylum seekers palpable.

Engaging with local residents was a central aspiration of many interviewees. Contact with local people was often made through partners, mutual friends or volunteers visiting reception centres. However, many did not have easy access to local communities due to demarcations between asylum seekers and local populations or institutional and material barriers, such as the remote location of the centre and rare or expensive public transportation services. To connect with locals, the participants used various tactics, ranging from casual chatting in public spaces to seeking more regular contact through organised group activities.

I was in a library and asked someone, saying 'I am new to this country, I have been here for a few months, and there was a staff member who advised me to sign up for this [a discussion group]. [...] I have been going there every week for a month. They speak about how things are in Finland, so I am trying to understand more and get acquainted with the culture. (Milad, young man)

There is another place called a 'day centre' where retired women spend time. There are retired men and women. My daughter went there and said, 'My mother doesn't speak Finnish, but she would like to come and sit here. Is she allowed to come here and speak with you or just to come and listen to people speak whenever she is free?' They said that I'm allowed to go. I go there, and we sit and talk and have coffee and tea. (Aaisha, mother)

As indicated by these comments from a young man and a single mother of four children, both of whom had stayed in reception centres for over 4 years, a central motivation for interaction with local people was to learn the Finnish language and to understand Finnish culture. These two aims were mentioned in most interviews and were seen as crucial to becoming a part of Finnish society. Moreover, interactions with local people, both personally and through civil society organisations, provided information and advice, for instance, related to education or work opportunities, helping the respondents to advance in life.

In [the city], there was also a place where you could go and play pool, and if you wanted, they could arrange a job for you. [...] Sometimes I go there [to church] with some friends, but I'm not a Christian so it's different. But yes, sometimes I go for the information that they provide. (Salim, young man)

Receiving assistance from acquaintances, such as transportation or accommodation in regular apartments, helped the interviewees live like 'normal people' and distance themselves from the material scarcity of reception centres and the stigmatised category of asylum seekers. Moreover, interactions with local people provided a sense of belonging and dignity through reciprocity. One young man described cooking dinner for local volunteers who were fixing his friend's bike:

After that, I invited them to come inside; [I said] 'it's cold outside, it's not good, so I can make some tea'. So, we sat down, I made some tea and then asked whether they would eat dinner. [...] Everything, rice, chicken and things like that. They said that they would pay for the dinner. I said

that I'm Afghan, it's not in my tradition to accept money for dinner, this isn't a restaurant. I'm an immigrant, so I just made this for us to eat together, get to know each other. (Ali, young man)

Reciprocity was not restricted to individual relationships, as the interviewees contributed to the common good through volunteer work. On these occasions, such as baking for a charity event, the asylum seeker was not the party benefiting but rather the one helping people in need.

While many interviewees were still trying to create contacts with communities outside the reception centres, some already had personal bonds with local people. Some had a Finnish partner, and one participant, Yar, who had arrived in Finland as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking minor, had been living in a Finnish family since his arrival and described being part of the family, whose mother he addressed as 'mum'. This shows that asylum seekers are not always only 'on their way' to becoming part of local communities; they can already be a part of them. Overall, multi-ethnic and local networking helped people distance themselves from the imposed margins by creating a sense of a 'normal' life. It often served longer-term goals, such as obtaining information and advice, (language) skills and (cultural) knowledge, as well as work and study opportunities that the participants found crucial to settling in and feeling included.

## AIMING TOWARDS EDUCATION AND WORK

Educational and economic activities were the two most frequently recurring types of participation mentioned in the interviews. The good reputation of the Finnish education system was acknowledged, and many of the interviewees aspired to study or have their children to do so. In Finland, asylum-seeking children (6–18 years) are entitled to the same basic education as everybody else. However, adults were often disappointed with their inability to participate in language courses or qualifying studies. There were many barriers to education, ranging from a lack of financial resources to a lack of accessible information on available opportunities.

Some participants had managed to enrol in educational institutions, but it required considerable effort. The participants described that they had asked for help from trusted personnel in reception centres, looked for information from channels not available in the centres, and approached teachers and councillors to improve their understanding of the Finnish education system. Having social connections was important, which was evident in the case of a young man who was pursuing a profession in Finnish. With the support provided by his network, he resisted the passive role of merely waiting that was offered to him.

When I went to [a vocational school], I had to pay for the computer and other school supplies, like notebooks, pens, work clothes and shoes. [...] Social services didn't help me. I said that's okay, it doesn't matter. They said that I don't need to go to school; they said that they cannot help. [...] I borrowed money from my Finnish friends and workers at the centre. I told them the situation, and I told them how much everything would cost. I tried to find a summer job, but it didn't work out, but they helped me, and I have now paid back the money. (Khalil, young man)

Studying was important for enabling meaningful activities to fill the otherwise empty days, but it also led to increased feelings of self-worth and hope about the future. Importantly, it provided new social contacts and potential paths to the labour market. Moreover, some interviewees, including Khalil, viewed access to paid employment through studies as a strategy for pursuing a work-based residence permit and prolonging one's stay in Finland in the event of a negative asylum decision. He explained his longer-term plan:

I'm stressed that they won't give me asylum and that I will get the third and fourth negative decision [...] but I still try to progress. For example, I'm going to school. I still have one and a half years left, and then I might be able to get a job, and then through a job get asylum. (Khalil, young man)

Finding paid work was what asylum seekers most desired, as also shown by previous studies (Leppäkorpi 2021; Seppälä et al. 2020). However, legislative constraints, such as being banned from employment for either 3 or 6 months after entering the country and forfeiting the right to work for a similar period after every new asylum application, limited the employment opportunities of asylum seekers. As with education, the reception centres rarely encouraged asylum seekers to find paid work. Some were engaged in volunteer work and on-the-job training organised as part of some reception centres' work activities. While these activities (e.g. working in a flea market, library or care sector) were important as they improved the participants' language skills and provided them with an opportunity to leave the centre and search for other opportunities, they rarely led to paid work.

I work twice a week with elderly people at an old people's home, but they do not give any salary other than a bus card to get there and back [...] I suggested it [a work contract] here at the centre, but they refused it. [...] They would not let me sign a work contract with them and earn money. (Tarek, father)

This experience of a single father seeking asylum with his school-age daughter indicates the discrepancies in the objectives of participation: while unpaid work is often provided as a rehabilitative activity to create meaningful activities, many asylum seekers aim for work that would provide income. As reception centres did little to enhance wage employment, some interviewees took collective action to promote the cause of other asylum seekers.

To enter the Finnish job market, there is a lot of bureaucracy in terms of getting all sorts of certificates. To work in the food industry, then you must have a hygiene pass; you must have some sort of language skills training. [...] Reception centres do not help in that. We translated the whole hygiene coursebook voluntarily, both in Arabic and Persian. [...] So, we had to do it ourselves and distribute it, and we put it online so anyone can use it. But when you ask the reception centre, they have the service in Finnish and English, but it's not enough. (Nasim, young man)

This quote from an educated and English-speaking young man, who had been involved in pro-migration activism illustrates the highly laborious efforts required to promote employment opportunities for all asylum seekers. Helping other asylum seekers to meet the requirements related to Finnish labour legislation is an apparent form of collective solidarity.

However, searching for a job was usually an individual effort. Typically, job opportunities were found through personal networks and ethnic minority communities. This often meant working in small businesses and for acquaintances instead of established and regulated enterprises. Finding jobs and keeping them demanded short-term contracts, irregular hours and low wages because, due to their precarious legal status, asylum seekers' bargaining power is minuscule (Könönen 2014). The interviews included accounts of exploitation but also acts of resistance, such as leaving a job with mistreatment and obtaining work that better met their rights. Eventually, some of the interviewees were able to find paid work in fields like agriculture, construction and the service sector, in places including restaurants, barbers and car repair shops or as cleaners. Overall, the interviewees were keen to be independent of state benefits, echoing the political discourse on deservingness and expressing a desire to be contributing 'good citizens' (Petäjäniemi et al. 2021).

My wife and I wish to be able to work instead of receiving money from the government. Each month when we receive it, it feels difficult to accept it. I wish I could work with my wife so that we would be able to pay the rent, electricity and water. (Mustafa, father)

While financial independence is undoubtedly a matter of dignity, it also relates to racist discourses portraying humanitarian migrants as an economic burden for the welfare state. Asylum seekers might navigate such discriminatory representations by adopting the demands of being productive and active even while waiting (Vianelli et al. 2022). Given the poor facilities in reception centres and the inadequacy of the reception allowance compared to living costs, earnings not only enable fulfilling material needs but also manage the stigma of an asylum seeker. As Leppäkorpi (2021: 146) argues, asylum seekers' participation should not be romanticised as acts of resistance but considered as an aspiration for a normal life: 'If you have a job, you will buy clothes, you can have nice free-time activities, and many other things.' (Salim, young man)

Asylum seekers' participation in both education and employment is often scarce, partly because the main function of the legislation and reception system is to control asylum seekers instead of promoting their societal participation. Consequently, for the interviewees, attempts to collectively facilitate access to employment and finding temporary study or job opportunities meant resisting the institutional position of asylum seekers as passive individuals patiently waiting for their fate. At the same time, education and work participation align with simultaneous but different expectations: the ideal of a productive member of the community, earning the right to stay and to be included. Many interviewees rejected the asylum-seeker identity and aimed for more desirable identities, such as that of a 'regular person'. However, these identities require great effort and are fragile – losing the right to work, being transferred to another locality, or revealing one's status as an asylum seeker status would call them into question.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have used the concept of everyday participation to understand the diversity of asylum seekers' actions in paradoxical circumstances. As we have shown, they must navigate between participation and nonparticipation in the context of restrictive legislation and reception centre practices. By providing a detailed analysis of a

diverse group of asylum seekers, including those from highly deprived backgrounds, our study shows acts of participation aiming both to make life in reception centres tolerable and to build a life in Finland despite their limited rights and access to local communities.

Looking beyond collective political participation aiming to change repressive (inter)national structures, the concept of everyday participation allowed us to consider mundane and local forms of participation, aiming to promote asylum seekers' sense of control and self-worth and future opportunities. Everyday participation is rarely about explicit resistance to change the repressive system governing asylum seekers' lives. For the most part, in addition to trying to make minor adjustments to the reception centre practices, asylum seekers aim to disassociate themselves from the stigmatised identity of an asylum-seeker and pursue more desirable identities with more comprehensive rights. Our study shows that asylum seekers' everyday participation is motivated by a willingness to escape the repressive conditions associated with temporariness, limited rights, stigmas and distances from local communities. However, these mundane forms of participation can be viewed as political since they have the potential to challenge the roles that are imposed on asylum seekers – at least at the micro-levels of everyday life (Kallio et al. 2020; Robleda 2020).

The aim of improving one's immediate surroundings focused on making life tolerable while waiting by achieving minor modifications to the existing service provision or by building feelings of community amid uncertainty. Particularly for asylum seekers who had limited access to communities outside the reception centre, this type of participation worked to increase their feeling of control over their lives (see also Robleda 2020). Conversely, some actively chose to withdraw from the activities and social networks available to them. For some of them, this intentional non-participation meant disengagement from the reception centre and the status of asylum seeker while reaching towards local communities and institutions. Thus, disengagement does not necessarily equal passivity but can be an act of resistance, and engagement can involve both compliance with existing norms and exterior expectations as well as challenging the institutional order.

Participation outside reception centres was designed to enhance opportunities in Finnish society, promote feelings of self-worth, and acquire a 'normal' life (Leppäkorpi 2021). In addition to offering social networks and financial resources, such participation also worked to demonstrate their motivation for social engagement and cultural adaptation and, thus, their deservedness of a more established status in Finland. Asylum seekers' engagement in local life and institutions was not supported by the reception system that assumes passivity and vulnerability but was rather reflecting societal discourses according to which one needs to be productive and willing to integrate (Petäjäniemi et al. 2021; Vianelli et al. 2022).

## FUNDING INFORMATION

This research has been supported by the RAISD-project (Reshaping Attention and Inclusion Strategies for Distinctively Vulnerable People among the Forcibly Displaced, 2019–2022) funded by the European Commission's Horizon2020 program (grant number 822688), the Strategic Research Council (SRC) established within the Academy of Finland (grant number 352557), the Finnish Cultural Foundation (grant number 00210750) and Kone Foundation (grant number 202203298).

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Myllylä et al.  
*Nordic Journal of  
Migration Research*  
DOI: 10.33134/njmr.686

15

## AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

**Martta Myllylä**  [orcid.org/0000-0002-1975-3905](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1975-3905)

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

**Mervi Pantti**  [orcid.org/0000-0001-9332-1556](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9332-1556)

Faculty of Political Science, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

**Antti Kivijärvi**  [orcid.org/0000-0003-3931-4069](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3931-4069)

The Finnish Youth Research Society, Helsinki, Finland

## REFERENCES

- Ahmad, A.** 2020. 'When the name matters: An experimental investigation of ethnic discrimination in the Finnish labor market', *Sociological Inquiry*, 90(3), pp. 468–496. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12276>
- AIDA.** 2023. *Country reports on asylum in 23 countries*. Available at: <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/> [Last accessed 22 June 2023].
- Alho, R.** 2021. 'Finland: Integration of asylum seekers and refugees in a tightened policy framework', in B. Galgóczi (eds.). *Between and Between: Integrating Refugees into the EU Labour Market*. Brussels: European Trade Union Institute, pp. 83–107.
- Aliens Act.** 2004. *Aliens Act 301/2004. Translation from Finnish*. Available at: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2004/en20040301.pdf> [Last accessed 14 March 2023].
- Ataç, I.** 2016. 'Refugee protest camp Vienna': Making citizens through locations of the protest movement', *Citizenship Studies*, 20(5), pp. 629–646. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315186726>
- Brekke, J.-P.** 2004. *While we are waiting: Uncertainty and empowerment among asylum-seekers in Sweden*. Oslo: Institute for Social Research. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/11250/177553> [Last accessed 14 March 2023].
- Brun, C.** 2015. 'Active waiting and changing hopes: Toward a time perspective on protracted displacement', *Social Analysis*, pp. 59(1), 19–37. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2015.590102>
- Bruselius-Jensen, M., Pitti, I. and Tisdall, E.K.M.** (eds). 2021. *Young people's participation: Revisiting youth and inequalities in Europe*. Bristol University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781447345411.001.0001>
- Campesi, G.** 2015. 'Humanitarian confinement: An ethnography of reception centres for asylum seekers at Europe's southern border', *International Journal of Migration and Border Studies*, 1(4), pp. 398–418. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJMB.2015.070785>
- Ebrey, J.** 2016. 'The mundane and insignificant, the ordinary and the extraordinary: Understanding everyday participation and theories of everyday life', *Cultural Trends*, 25(3), pp. 158–168. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2016.1204044>
- Fernandes, A.G.** 2015. '(Dis)empowering new immigrants and refugees through their participation in introduction programs in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway', *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 13(3), pp. 245–264. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2015.1045054>

- Finnish Government.** 2019. *Inclusive and competent Finland – A socially, economically and ecologically sustainable society. Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government* 2019. <https://julkaisut/valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/161935>.
- Fontanari, E.** 2015. 'Confined to the threshold: The experiences of asylum seekers in Germany', *City*, 19(5), pp. 715–726. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2015.1071112>
- Fresia, M. and Von Känel, A.** 2016. 'Beyond space of exception? Reflections on the camp through the prism of refugee schools', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 29(2), pp. 250–272. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fev016>
- Ghorashi, H., de Boer, M. and ten Holder, F.** 2018. 'Unexpected agency on the threshold: Asylum seekers narrating from an asylum seeker centre', *Current Sociology*, 66(3), pp. 373–391. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392117703766>
- Goldring, L. and Landolt, P.** 2013. *Producing and negotiating non-citizenship: Precarious legal status in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442663862>
- Hajer, M. and Bröer, C.** 2020. 'We are here! Claim-making and claim-placing of undocumented migrants in Amsterdam', *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*, 7(4), pp. 431–451. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23254823.2020.1774911>
- Haverinen, V.-S.** 2018. 'Pakotetusta toimettomuudesta: Turvapaikanhakijoiden Kotoutuminen Vastaanotto toiminnan Osana', *Janus: Sosiaalipoliittikan ja Sosiaalityön Tutkimuksen Aikakauslehti*, 26(4), pp. 309–325. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.30668/janus.76386>
- Johnson, H.** 2015. 'These fine lines: Locating noncitizenship in political protest in Europe', *Citizenship Studies*, 19(8), pp. 951–965. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/sub.2009.25>
- Kallio, K.P., Meier, I. and Häkli, J.** 2020. 'Radical hope in asylum seeking: Political agency beyond linear temporality', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(17), pp. 4006–4022. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1764344>
- Kiilakoski, T., Kaukko, M., Huttunen, R. and Heikkinen, H.** 2020. 'Philosophical and youth-studies perspectives on the participation imperative', in T. Strand (eds.). *Rethinking Ethical-Political Education*. Cham: Springer, pp. 29–43. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-49524-4\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-49524-4_3)
- Kivijärvi, A. and Myllylä, M.** 2022. 'Layered confinement in reception centers – A study of asylum seekers' experiences in Finland', *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2022.2132341>
- Klarenbeek, L.M. and Weide, M.** 2020. 'The participation paradox: Demand for and fear of immigrant participation', *Critical Policy Studies*, 14(2), pp. 214–232. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2019.1569540>
- Könönen, J.** 2014. *Tilapäinen elämä, joustava työ: Rajat maahanmuuton ja työvoiman prekarisaation mekanismina*. Unpublished thesis (PhD), University of Eastern Finland. Available at: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-61-1661-7> [Last accessed 14 March 2023].
- Kreichauf, R.** 2018. 'From forced migration to forced arrival: The campization of refugee accommodation in European cities', *Comparative Migration Studies* 6(1), pp. 1–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-017-0069-8>
- Kreichauf, R.** 2021. 'Detention as social space: Waiting, social relations, and mundane resistance of asylum seekers in detention', *Critical Sociology*, 47(4–5), pp. 745–762. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920520977644>

- Leppäkorpi, M.** 2021. In search of a normal Life: An ethnography of migrant irregularity in Northern Europe. Doctoral thesis, University of Eastern Finland. Available at: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-61-4436-8> [Last accessed 14 March 2023].
- Maculan, A.** 2022. 'Asylum seekers, power relations, and everyday resistance practices: An ethnographic study', *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 23(2), pp. 431–447. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-021-00856-8>
- Masoud, A., Holm, G. and Brunila, K.** 2021. 'Becoming integrateable: Hidden realities of integration policies and training in Finland', *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 25(1), pp. 52–65. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1678725>
- Merikoski, P.** 2023. Contentious hospitality: Solidarity and affective proximity in the home accommodation of asylum seekers in Finland. Doctoral thesis, University of Helsinki. Available at: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-51-9264-6> [Last accessed 26 June 2023].
- Miellet, S.** 2021. 'From refugee to resident in the digital age: Refugees' strategies for navigating in and negotiating beyond uncertainty during reception and settlement in the Netherlands', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 34(4), pp. 3629–3646. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feab063>
- Migri.** 2019. *Statistics on applications concerning international protection*. Finnish Immigration Service. Available at: <https://tilastot.migri.fi/index.html#applications/23330?l=en&start=588&end=599> [Last accessed 14 March 2023].
- Miles, A. and Gibson, L.** 2016. 'Everyday participation and cultural value', *Cultural Trends*, 25(3), pp. 151–157. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2016.1204043>
- Näre, L.** 2020. "Finland kills with a pen": Asylum seekers' protest against bureaucratic violence as politics of human rights', *Citizenship Studies*, 24(8), pp. 979–993. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2020.1769559>
- Näre, L., Bendixsen, S. and Maury, O.** 2022. 'Creating a future while waiting for a residence permit: Temporary and irregular migrants in informal social infrastructures', *European Journal of Social Work*, 27(1), pp. 138–150. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2022.2135092>
- Pantti, M. and Ojala, M.** 2019. 'Caught between sympathy and suspicion: Journalistic perceptions and practices of telling asylum seekers' personal stories', *Media, Culture & Society*, 41(8), pp. 1031–1047. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443718756177>
- Pellander, S. and Horsti, K.** 2018. 'Visibility in mediated borderscapes: The hunger strike of asylum seekers as an embodiment of border violence', *Political Geography*, 66, pp. 161–170. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2017.01.005>
- Petäjäniemi, M., Lanas, M. and Kaukko, M.** 2021. 'How to be a 'good asylum seeker'? The subjectification of young men seeking asylum', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 11(3), pp. 284–300. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.389>
- Pettersson, K. and Augoustinos, M.** 2021. 'Elite political discourse on refugees and asylum seekers: The language of social exclusion', in C. Tileagă, M. Augoustinos and K. Durrheim (eds.). *The Routledge International Handbook of Discrimination, Prejudice and Stereotyping*. Routledge International Handbooks. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 261–272. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429274558-18>
- Porter, M. and Haslam, N.** 2005. 'Predisplacement and postdisplacement factors associated with mental health of refugees and internally displaced persons: A meta-analysis', *JAMA*, 294(5), pp. 602–612. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.294.5.602>

- Ramachandran, N. and Vathi, Z.** 2022. 'Agency in waiting? Everyday tactics of asylum seekers and refugees in Glasgow', *European Journal of Social Work*, 25(6), pp. 1104–1116. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2022.2117135>
- Reception Act 746/2011.** Act on the Reception of Persons Applying for International Protection and on the Identification of and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings. Available at: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2011/20110746?search%5Btype%5D=pika&search%5Bpika%5D=laki%20vastaanotosta> [Last accessed 7 December 2023].
- Reception Conditions Directive.** 2013/33. Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 Laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection. Available at: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2013/33/oj> [Last accessed 25 October 2022].
- Robleda, W.Z.** 2020. 'Re-inventing everyday-life in the asylum centre: Everyday tactics among women seeking asylum in Norway', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 10(2), pp. 82–95. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.251>
- Rotter, R.** 2016. 'Waiting in the asylum determination process: Just an empty Interlude?', *Time & Society*, 25(1), pp. 80–101. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X15613654>
- Seppälä, T.** 2022. "“No One Is Illegal” As a reverse discourse against deportability", *Global Society*, 36(3), pp. 391–408. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2022.2052023>
- Seppälä, T., Nykänen, T., Koikkalainen, S., Mikkonen, E. and Rainio, M.** 2020. 'In-between space/time: Affective exceptionality during the 'refugee crisis' in Northern Finland', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 10(1), pp. 87–105. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2478/njmr-2019-0029>
- Valenta, M. and Berg, B.** 2010. 'User involvement and empowerment among asylum seekers in Norwegian reception centres', *European Journal of Social Work*, 13(4), pp. 483–501. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691451003603406>
- Vanto, J., Saarikkomäki, E., Alvesalo-Kuusi, A., Lepinkäinen, N., Pirjatanniemi, E. and Lavapuro, J.** 2022. 'Collectivized discretion: Seeking explanations for decreased asylum recognition rates in Finland after Europe's 2015 'refugee crisis'', *International Migration Review*, 56(3), pp. 754–779. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183211044096>
- Vianelli, L., Gill, N. and Hoellerer, N.** 2022. 'Waiting as probation: Selecting self-disciplining asylum seekers', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48(5), pp. 1013–1032. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2021.1926942>
- Zill, M., Van Liempt, I. and Spierings, B.** 2021. 'Living in a 'free jail': Asylum seekers' and local residents' experiences of discomfort with asylum seeker accommodation', *Political Geography*, 91, p. 102487. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102487>
- Zill, M., Van Liempt, I., Spierings, B. and Hooimeijer, P.** 2020. 'Uneven geographies of asylum accommodation: Conceptualizing the impact of spatial, material, and institutional differences on (un)familiarity between asylum seekers and local residents', *Migration Studies*, 8(4), pp. 491–509. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mny049>

Myllylä et al.  
*Nordic Journal of  
 Migration Research*  
 DOI: 10.33134/njmr.686

#### TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Myllylä, M., Pantti, M. and Kivijärvi, A. 2025. Participation Paradox: Asylum Seekers' Everyday Participation in Finland. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 15(2): 2, pp. 1–18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.686>

**Submitted:** 14 March 2023

**Accepted:** 02 April 2024

**Published:** 26 November 2024

#### COPYRIGHT:

© 2025 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons NonCommercial-NoDerivatives Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits unrestricted distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited, the material is not used for commercial purposes and is not altered in any way. See <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

*Nordic Journal of Migration Research* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Helsinki University Press.