



“I Live in Agony”: the Everyday Insecurity of Rejected Somali Asylum-seekers in Finland

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Abstract

Finland, like other countries in Europe, has recently implemented restrictive asylum policies intended to deter asylum-seekers. This article uses the concept of everyday insecurity to study the effects of these policies on the lives of rejected asylum-seekers from Somalia in Finland. Material for this article is primarily drawn from in-depth individual interviews with people whose asylum claims have been rejected by the Finnish authorities. It is also informed by participatory observations and informal discussions with community leaders and activists. The article argues that new restrictive asylum policies create everyday insecurity for rejected asylum-seekers in several ways, including by denying them access to entitlements. These policies also cause rejected asylum-seekers to feel powerless when dealing with actors such as politicians, bureaucrats, employers, lawyers, social workers, health service providers, and their peers. They may also feel unable to help themselves or their loved ones. These policies also subject rejected asylum-seekers to extreme forms of exploitation in the labor market and other domains.

Keywords Rejected asylum-seekers · Everyday insecurity · Asylum policy · Finland · Europe · Somali

Introduction

A sense of hopelessness generated by the harsh political, economic, and demographic realities in some regions of the Global South has driven people to flee to Europe in large numbers in recent years. Most of these people are fleeing human rights violations generated by conflicts and repressive regimes in the Middle East and Africa. Of those who crossed the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe in 2015, for example, 84% were from Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, or Somalia (Human Rights Watch, 2016). However, for many, hopelessness has prevailed again in

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Table 1 Negative Finnish asylum decisions by applicant nationality

Nationality	2015		2016		2015–2016
	Total decisions	%Negative	Total decisions	%Negative	%Change in negative decisions
Afghan	293	59	4,963	62	5
Iraqi	1,165	44	13,312	78	77
Somali	655	26	1,530	68	162
Syrian	173	23	1,211	8	-65

Expired applications are not included. Adapted from *Statistics: Asylum applications: Decisions 12/2014–11/2018* by the Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.-a (<https://tilastot.migri.fi/index.html#decisions/23330/49?l=en&start=540&end=587>). Copyright by the Finnish Immigration Service

Europe. In August 2019, *The Guardian* reported that nearly one million asylum-seekers were “living in limbo” in Europe (Tondo, 2019). This figure started to skyrocket after 2015 with the so-called migration crisis and reached its peak in 2016 (Connor, 2017b). At the same time, the average recognition rate for asylum-seekers at the EU level declined from 52% in 2015 to 37% in 2018.

In some countries, the state response to greater numbers of migrants was swift and drastic. As shown in Table 1, the rate of negative decisions for asylum-seekers from Somalia in Finland increased from 26 to 68% in 1 year, the largest increase in negative decisions of any of the main groups of asylum-seekers in Finland. However, this was not the case for all asylum-seeking groups. Due to the nature of the conflict in Syria, Syrian asylum applicants were prioritized by host countries and received an exceptionally high share of the positive asylum decisions in Europe (Connor, 2017a). As Table 1 illustrates, from 2015 to 2016, the rate of negative decisions for asylum-seekers from Syria in Finland decreased from 23% to just 8%.

Research has shown that the new, restrictive immigration policies have resulted in the creation of a new group of irregular migrants in Finland (Mehtonen, 2019), as an increasing number of asylum-seekers have had their applications rejected without a corresponding increase in voluntary returns (Proportion, 2016). A large majority of rejected asylum-seekers opt to stay in the country without legal status; many commence a long process of successive appeals and new residence permit applications (Könönen, 2018).

According to Nils Muižnieks (2016), the Council of Europe’s commissioner for human rights, rejected asylum-seekers in Europe “tend to live in substandard conditions, completely excluded from society, lacking residence permits, and the means to meet basic needs such as shelter, food, health, or education. In essence, they are deprived of any opportunity to live in dignity.” Thus, there is an urgent need to scrutinize the situation of asylum-seekers in Europe whose applications have been rejected.

In 2020, the number of people in Finland with foreign background was slightly over 8%, with Somalis (22,534) the third-largest group, after Estonians (50,590) and Iraqis (25,439) (Statistics Finland, n.d.). Somalis started to arrive in Finland in large

numbers in the early 1990s, after civil war engulfed Somalia. At the time, Finland was in the midst of a deep recession, and Somali asylum-seekers attracted a lot of negative public attention. For instance, research findings show that Somalis faced unparalleled discrimination in many aspects of their everyday life in the country (OSF, 2013). Since then, several studies on the Finnish-Somali community have been published, including Bjork (2017).

In the first decade of the 2000s, a few hundred new asylum-seekers from Somalia arrived in Finland each year. The years 2008 and 2009 were exceptions, however, with 1181 and 1180 new arrivals, respectively, as war in southern Somalia in 2007 led to significant displacement in the country. The Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) is responsible for implementing Finnish immigration policy, maintaining the reception system, and decision-making in matters related to immigration, asylum, refugee status, and citizenship (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.-d). Migri responded positively to the increased number of Somali arrivals, giving a higher percentage of asylum applicants a permit on humanitarian grounds. In fact, in 2009 and 2010, Migri granted humanitarian protection to a relatively significant number of Asylum-seekers from Somalia, and between 2007 and 2010 they were the largest group to receive positive decisions (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.-c). However, the political climate of the country was different in 2015–2016, when a significant number of unexpected Somali asylum-seekers arrived and increasing numbers of asylum claims were rejected (see Table 1).

In general, Somalis in Finland face many everyday challenges (Sotkasiira & Haverinen, 2016), including harsh realities in the labor market, a high school dropout rate, poor educational achievement, identity crises, and a lack of belonging (Ismail, 2019; OSF, 2013). The few studies on rejected asylum-seekers from Somalia primarily deal with performing security and agency in the absence of the state (Innes, 2014; Missbach & Cameron, 2022) or the impact of access to entitlements, such as health services and employment, on migrants' well-being (Lamkaddem et al., 2015).¹ The impact of restrictive asylum policies on everyday security has received little attention in this meager literature.

Nevertheless, as spelled out in the next two sections, there is a growing literature on the impact of these post-2015 restrictive policies on the everyday life of rejected asylum-seekers (such as Parker, 2017; Schenner et al., 2019; Waite et al., 2015; Wyss, 2019). However, the structure of causality of the impact of these policies on the lives of rejected asylum-seekers is less studied. In addition, little is known about the everyday life of rejected asylum-seekers in Finland (there are notable exceptions, including Pirjatanniemi et al., 2021).

By filling these gaps, this article aims to examine the impact of tightened asylum policies in Finland by focusing on the experiences of rejected Somali asylum-seekers. I scrutinize the everyday lives of these vulnerable migrants, who are one of the four largest asylum-seeker and refugee groups to arrive in Finland during the human displacement crisis of 2015–2016 and the most frequently rejected group in the Finnish asylum determination process, paying special attention to the different

¹ This author is not aware of any literature focusing on Somali rejected asylum-seekers in Finland.

dimensions of the impact of tightened policies and how these dimensions are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

Next, I present the analytical concepts of everyday insecurity and the structure of vulnerability before providing a summary of the relevant policy context. I then present my research method and data. Finally, I offer an empirical analysis of everyday insecurity among rejected asylum-seekers.

A Conceptual Framework: Everyday Insecurity of Rejected Asylum-seekers

To examine the everyday life of rejected asylum-seekers, I employ the concept of *everyday insecurity*. Since the so-called migration crisis of 2015, the securitization and politicization of refugees and asylum-seekers, which presents them as an existential threat and appeals to national security to justify the use of extraordinary measures, have intensified in public discourses in Europe to legitimize increasingly restrictive migration and asylum policies (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018). Finland has been no exception, with asylum-seekers perceived as a threat in Finnish security discourses and legislative amendments (Palander & Pellander, 2019). Recently, Stevens and Vaughan-Williams (2016) and Crawford and Hutchinson (2016) have systematically brought the notion of everyday life into the theorization of security. For Crawford and Hutchinson (2016, pp. 1187–1188), “emphasizing the ‘everyday’ ... directs attention to the ways in which security projects ... affect how people live [and] how they come to understand and engage with the security practices that impact upon their lives.” In this way, security studies reveals the role of ordinary people, including rejected asylum-seekers, in security processes.

In this article, following Crawford and Hutchinson (2016), I understand everyday security as lived realities resulting from securitizing moves by the state that reflect how individuals interpret, experience, adapt to, and resist security projects, as well as how they attempt to create their own security in everyday life. The concept of everyday security is beneficial because it emphasizes the role of the state in the creation of insecurity. Indeed, through their migration and welfare policies, states produce and enforce destitution (Waite et al., 2015). In this way, the experiences and practices of vulnerable actors can be aligned with the actions and policies of the state. In addition, everyday insecurity is a broader concept than many other terms used in the literature, such as vulnerability, destitution, marginalization, exclusion, and precarity, and can act as a general term that encompasses all of these concepts. Though these concepts are firmly theorized, the review below illustrates how these terms are, in many cases, used to focus on particular aspects of everyday insecurity faced by irregular immigrants. For instance, precarity is often used to characterize the challenges faced by vulnerable migrants in the labor market. This article also intends to contribute to the research on everyday security by empirically studying the impact of restrictive asylum policies on the everyday life of rejected asylum-seekers.

In studying vulnerability to hunger and famine, Michael Watts and Hans Bohle (Watts & Bohle, 1993) found three distinctive processes that determine the causality of vulnerability and which, when brought together, constitute “the space of

vulnerability." These processes are vulnerability as an entitlement problem, vulnerability as powerlessness, and vulnerability through exploitation (Watts & Bohle, 1993). Stewart (2005) has shown that this conceptual framework can be used to study asylum-seekers' vulnerability. Here, I take everyday insecurity as an umbrella concept, covering the vulnerabilities, destitution, and precarities faced by rejected asylum-seekers. Previous research has revealed some of the challenges of everyday life for rejected asylum-seekers. For example, receiving a negative decision on one's asylum application can be associated with serious psychological and emotional insecurities (Weissbrodt, 2008). Rejection also generates a lack of entitlements, extreme vulnerability (Blitz & Otero-Iglesias, 2011), and chronic exploitation (Waite et al., 2015). Research findings also suggest that the insecurities faced by rejected asylum-seekers are associated with imposed powerlessness and barriers to accessing protection and services. In contrast, access to entitlements such as work and health care increases well-being (Lamkaddem et al., 2015).

In surveying the literature on irregular immigrants, of which research on rejected asylum-seekers constitutes a large part, these three broad approaches to everyday insecurity are apparent. The first can be characterized as the *lack-of-entitlement perspective* (e.g., Bloch & Schuster, 2002; Cholewinski, 1998; Parker, 2017; Sales, 2002; Schenner et al., 2019; Sigona & Hughes, 2012; Waite et al., 2015). Particularly, after the so-called migration crisis in 2015, restrictive policies limiting access to legal residence, public services, and welfare benefits were instituted to deter asylum-seekers (for more on these policies, see the "Policy Context" section below). From the lack-of-entitlement perspective, the primary challenge faced by irregular immigrants is that states deny them access to the sources of everyday security, such as employment and social security. In this literature, *destitution*, *marginalization*, and *exclusion* are often used to characterize the impact of this denial of entitlement.

The *powerlessness perspective* (e.g., Blitz & Otero-Iglesias, 2011; Bohmer & Shuman, 2008; Dreby, 2015; Sigona & Hughes, 2012) highlights the powerlessness rejected asylum-seekers feel. One example of the power relations that affect asylum-seekers is the role of politicians and authorities in controlling the public discourses and policy formulations that portray asylum-seekers as undeserving (Bloch & Schuster, 2002). Another example is their vulnerability in the application process, in which asylum-seekers are expected to prove their eligibility for asylum to the authorities. Asylum-seekers' powerlessness is present in their relationships with employers (Könönen, 2018; Waite et al., 2015) and legal advisers (Crawley et al., 2011), as well as with their families, ethnic communities, and coworkers (Bloch et al., 2014; Dreby, 2015; Sigona & Hughes, 2012). Rejected asylum-seekers may also feel incapable of helping themselves and their families (Crawley et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2015).

Finally, the *exploitation perspective* (e.g., Bloch et al., 2014; Crawley et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2015; Stewart, 2005; Waite et al., 2015) emphasizes that rejected asylum-seekers are exposed to the risk of exploitation and abuse when their access to legitimate sources of everyday security is systematically obstructed. Following Watts & Bohle's (Watts & Bohle, 1993) findings that lack of entitlement, powerlessness, and exploitation are interrelated and work in tandem in creating vulnerability, Stewart (2005) highlighted that for asylum-seekers, these dimensions of vulnerability are cumulative, interconnected, and mutually reinforcing.

In this article, I will apply Crawford and Hutchinson's (Crawford & Hutchinson, 2016) conceptual understanding of everyday security and systematically employ Watts and Bohle's (Watts & Bohle, 1993) three causal processes of vulnerability to investigate the everyday lives of rejected asylum-seekers from Somalia in Finland, scrutinizing the everyday insecurity of asylum-seekers through the lenses of the lack-of-entitlement perspective, the powerlessness perspective, and the exploitation perspective. Furthermore, I consider how these aspects of everyday insecurity are interrelated in terms of causality.

Policy Context

The arrival of large numbers of asylum-seekers in Finland in the latter part of 2015 coincided with the rise in popularity of the Finns Party, a populist right-wing political party with an anti-immigration agenda. The Finns Party not only gained a large number of seats in Parliament, but also joined the government, forming a coalition with the Centre Party and the National Coalition Party. The other parties in the government also adopted some of the anti-immigration political agenda of the Finns Party (Mehtonen, 2019). Immigration authorities were seemingly responsive to the Finns Party's demands at the time, as well. For instance, on March 16, 2016, the Finns Party's parliamentary group leader, Sampo Terho, criticized Migri's liberal asylum practices as being costly to the economy. The next day, the director of Migri's asylum unit reminded Finns Party members and supporters that Finland's asylum policy had been tightened and assured them that upcoming asylum decisions would offer proof of this (Ojala et al., 2019).

Migri's director was referring to amendments that had been made to the Finnish Aliens Act (Ministry of the Interior, 2020). The Aliens Act contains most of Finland's domestic legal provisions applying to the entry, residence, employment, and departure of non-citizens. By May 2016, the Finns Party was convinced that stricter immigration policies were being implemented but underscored their aim of having all the restrictive measures in the government's action plan carried out (Perussuomalaiset, 2016). Indeed, the number of rejected asylum-seekers living in Finland increased dramatically, as noted above.

The main purpose of the amendments to the Aliens Act and the changes in Migri's practices was to deter potential asylum-seekers and make Finland unwelcoming for those already in the country. This was very clear both in the parliamentary debates (Pyrhönen & Wahlbeck, 2018) and in the restrictive asylum policies suggested by the government in 2015, the aim of which was "to bring the Finnish legislation in line with the general requirements laid down in EU legislation" (Ministry of the Interior, 2015). Both processes were spearheaded by the Finns Party (Pyrhönen & Wahlbeck, 2018; Wahlbeck, 2019).

The amendments to the Aliens Act did not breach the minimum requirements of the 1951 refugee convention (UNHCR, 2017). However, a study commissioned by the Finnish Government to investigate the combined effect of amendments to the Aliens Act in 2015–2019 found that these amendments have not only weakened the position of asylum-seekers, but have made the whole asylum

system more difficult to understand, which disproportionately impacts marginalized groups (Pirjatanniemi et al., 2021). Furthermore, the public reaction to the consequences of the amendments has been mixed. For instance, a series of protests against these consequences, as well as smaller scale counterprotests, were organized in several cities (Näre, 2020).

Next, I will outline several of these amendments and changes that have had serious implications for Somali asylum-seekers.

First, the possibility of granting residence permits on the grounds of humanitarian protection to asylum-seekers whose applications would otherwise be rejected was abolished. In the years preceding this change, asylum-seekers from Somalia were among the main groups authorized to stay in the country on the basis of humanitarian protection. The stated aim of this change was to bring the Finnish legislation on international protection into line with that of other countries in the European Union. As a result, the Finnish asylum system is no longer more favorable for applicants than that of other EU states. This change has contributed to an increase in the rejection rate of asylum-seekers in Finland (Mehtonen, 2019).

Second, Migri reassessed the security situation in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia and deemed these countries safe for asylum-seekers to return to (Finnish Immigration Service, 2016). Here, the aim was to reduce the granting of subsidiary protection, an international protection given to asylum-seekers who do not qualify as refugees but who, if returned, may face serious security concerns. This would significantly decrease the number of residence permits granted. (See Salomon, 2021, for a discussion of the assumptions surrounding the use of subsidiary protection as a migration control mechanism in Europe). As a result of Migri's security reassessment, asylum-seekers from Somalia have little chance of being eligible for a residence permit based on subsidiary protection (Finnish Immigration Service, 2016). And, as expected, an exceptional rise in the number of negative decisions was soon noted (Stricter, 2016). At the same time, however, Human Rights Watch (2016) found that the security situation in Somalia was not improving, and Amnesty International (2017) warned that Somalia was not safe for migrants to return to. Migri's decision therefore forced rejected asylum-seekers to return to a volatile and unpredictable environment where state institutions are still ineffective and unreliable in the provision of services and protection.

Third, an asylum applicant's right to housing was limited to one month after the date of a negative decision. After this period, asylum-seekers who do not leave voluntarily and whom the authorities are unable to deport lose the right to accommodation, reception funds, and health services (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.-a). This has serious implications on the lives of asylum-seekers (Näre, 2020).

Fourth, the period for appealing asylum decisions to the administrative courts was reduced from 30 days to 21 days, and in the case of appeals to the Supreme Administrative Court, the court of last resort for the legality of immigration decisions, to just 14 days (European Migration Network, 2016, p. 42). The ability of the Supreme Administrative Court to hear cases already decided by the administrative courts is now limited (Hallituksen esitys 32/2016, 2016).

Fifth, while both public and private legal counsel may provide assistance to asylum-seekers, amendments to the Aliens Act restricted the availability of legal

counsel in asylum interviews, and applicants are for the most part expected to present their cases without legal aid (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.-b; Hallituksen esitys 32/2016, 2016). This is problematic because the interview is a vital moment for the applicant to prove his or her eligibility for asylum (Bodström, 2020b). In addition, the trauma that applicants may have experienced before, during, and after migration can make them extremely vulnerable in a context in which authorities are inherently suspicious and may assume that the asylum-seeker is being dishonest (Bohmer & Shuman, 2008; Rider, 2013). Furthermore, before the Aliens Act was amended, legal aid to asylum-seekers had been primarily provided by private legal assistants, but since 2016, this service has been primarily provided by public legal counsel (Pirjatanniemi et al., 2021). According to Anna-Maja Henriksson, the chairperson of the Swedish People's Party and a former minister of justice:

The government's reform has basically led to the misuse of tax money, as the money is being put into the pockets of lawyers who take advantage of people in need without being genuinely interested in doing their job as well as possible. The current system will ultimately undermine the credibility of our rule-of-law state (Teivainen, 2017).

Research findings have also shown that Migri's asylum assessment process became increasingly problematic after 2015. Bodström (2020b) found that the dramatic increase in the rate of rejected asylum applications could be attributed not only to legal and policy changes, but to changes in Migri's internal policies. Vanto et al. (2021) conclude that changes in Migri's asylum credibility assessments were key in the rising rejection rate. Bodström (2020a) found fallacies in the credibility assessment practices, such as negative decisions based on unjustifiable grounds. An investigative article by *Helsingin Sanomat*, the largest subscription newspaper in the country, noted that Migri officials who assessed asylum applications were instructed to reject an increasing number of asylum applications (Teivainen, 2016). Furthermore, the effectiveness of the asylum procedure and the experience of caseworkers, on the one hand, and the applicants' access to information and legal aid, on the other, were questionable (Mehtonen, 2019).

These changes were in addition to other difficulties faced by asylum-seekers. Rejected asylum-seekers are prohibited from taking paid work, and strict measures on employment opportunities were introduced for those in the asylum process. An additional problem is that due to the fragility of post-conflict state institutions in Somalia, Migri does not recognize documents from Somalia such as passports and birth certificates. These restrictions further limit the avenues for gaining a Finnish residence permit. Those whose asylum applications are rejected are entitled to apply for a residence permit on other grounds, such as employment, education, or family (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.-b). However, almost all of these alternative grounds for applying for a residence permit require the applicant to hold a valid passport or other identity document—an obstacle for Somalis, as Finnish authorities do not recognize any document from Somalia.

There is no limit to the number of asylum applications an applicant can lodge in Finland. If a rejected asylum-seeker's appeal is turned down by an administrative court, they can be removed from the county, but it is difficult for the Finnish authorities to remove immigrants from Somalia: not only do most Somali asylum-seekers

lack identification documents but Finland has also yet to arrange a bilateral return agreement with Somalia.

All of the Nordic countries took a restrictive approach in responding to the human displacement of 2015–2016, but the policy instruments they devised to attain their goals were different, particularly their approach to restricting migrants' access to entitlements (Hagelund, 2020; Hernes, 2018). The recent changes in Finnish asylum legislation, policy, and assessment practices aim to make Finland a less attractive destination and deter asylum-seekers. Other factors, such as the lack of recognition of Somali passports by the Finnish authorities, also have an impact on the outcome of the asylum process. In this article, I use *restrictive asylum policies* as a general term for all these factors that, in concert, produce the everyday insecurity faced by rejected Asylum-seekers.

Method

This article draws primarily on 19 in-depth individual interviews with Somali migrants (11 men and 8 women) whose asylum claims were rejected by the Finnish authorities.² Age-wise, 11 were younger than 30, seven were aged between 35 and 55, and one was in her 60s. Seven of them had no formal schooling, eight had a primary education, and the rest had some secondary education. Most were either unemployed or outside the labor market, as housewives, for instance. Only a few were working before they fled: Four reported they had been self-employed (two shop owners, a farmer, and a baker), while a few had some other form of employment, such as a football player and a rickshaw taxi driver. Six of the interviewees were widowed, one was divorced, and one was single; the rest were married. Four were living with their families (two were a couple) and the rest were living apart from their families. Four lived in remote reception centers, while the others lived in major Finnish cities. As for their immigration status, 14 of the interviewees (8 men and 6 women) had arrived in 2015 or later and had never received a residence permit. The others (3 men and 2 women) had arrived prior to 2015 and initially received a residence permit on humanitarian grounds; after the amendment of the Aliens Act in 2016, however, their renewal applications had been rejected. The residence permit of one female interviewee had been revoked by the authorities based on the claim that she had lied about which part of Somalia she was from.

One of the key themes of the main project from which this article has arisen was the impact of migration policies and migration status on experiences of everyday security among vulnerable migrants in Finland. Interviews lasted 1 to 2 h and explored what living in Finland as a rejected asylum-seeker means practically in terms of everyday life. For example, what was a normal day in Finland like for them? What were their sources of livelihood, and how did they organize their

² This article was part of my recent study 'The New Migration Regime in Finland and Transnational Somali Migrants: Strategies and Lived Realities of Survival', which was a substudy of the larger research project 'Family Separation, Migration Status and Everyday Security: Experiences and Strategies of Vulnerable Migrants', funded by the Academy of Finland and led by Dr. Marja Tiilikainen.

everyday life in Finland? How did prolonged family separation affect them emotionally, socially, and financially?

All of my interlocutors had lodged more than one asylum application and appeal. At the time of the interviews, some were waiting to hear from Migri about their asylum applications, and some were waiting to hear from an administrative court about their appeals on rejected asylum applications. Some were struggling with a recent negative decision from Migri or the courts and wondering what to do next. Some had lodged more than one application at the same time on different grounds, such as asylum, work, and family. I conducted 18 interviews in person at the interviewees' preferred sites and one interview by phone. To understand my sources' experiences over time, I stayed connected with eight of them (five men and three women) for 6–18 months. I had follow-up meetings, phone calls, and WhatsApp communication with the men, but to safeguard prevalent gender norms, I had no further in-person meetings with the women, communicating with them only through phone calls and WhatsApp.

In this qualitative study, a rejected asylum-seeker is a person whose first asylum application to Migri and first appeal to a Finnish administrative court have both been rejected and who lacks legal permission to stay in the country. Before the decision of the administrative court, applicants are allowed to stay in the country, but after a negative decision by the administrative court, the applicant is deportable. The inclusion criteria for participation in this study was based on this definition.

To recruit rejected asylum-seekers from Somalia, one of the groups worst affected by the recent policy changes in Finland, I approached them through community associations and employed the snowball method. I conducted all fieldwork in Somali, using open-ended interview questions. After several attempts, I abandoned my initial plan of tape-recording the interviews, as most interlocutors were not comfortable with it. I took extensive notes during the interviews and compiled the data soon after the interviews. Interviewees were informed they would have an opportunity to review and check the interview data, but no one seemed interested in that.

The data was analyzed using content analysis methods with the help of Microsoft Word and Excel. To interpret and identify key themes, I employed several strategies: I utilized an everyday security framework, and I contextualized my findings within the literature on irregular immigration. I sought deeper understanding of my interlocutors' everyday lives by regularly (once or twice per week) visiting the public spaces they frequently visit (such as community mosques, teashops, and cultural associations) during the first 13 months of the fieldwork. I helped them with their everyday life, such as by translating documents and assisting with job applications. I also had informal discussions about my interlocutors' everyday lives with informed community leaders and activists.

Several limitations in the data collection process hindered my research. Due to the legal status of my interlocutors, some were unwilling to discuss some aspects of their everyday life in any detail. Some interlocutors, particularly women, were uncomfortable talking about the types of exploitation they had experienced. I always assured my interlocutors that they could choose not to answer any question or discuss any topic and were free to withdraw from the research at any time. The

Table 2 Somali immigrants who received a residence permit for humanitarian protection before May 16, 2016, and received a decision on a subsequent application after May 16, 2016

Application type	Case lapsed	Not examined	Negative	Positive	Total
Extended permit	5		35	29	69
Permanent residence permit	1		1	4	6
New asylum		17	38	11	66
Total	6	17	74	44	141

Source: Unpublished data provided to author by the Finnish Immigration Service in 2019

education level of some of the participants also posed challenges when explaining the aim and possible impact of the findings. In one case, I found it difficult to explain to an interlocutor what *cilmi-baaris* (scientific research) means. I eventually stopped the follow-up process with this interlocutor, as I realized that she was often confusing *cilmi-baaris* with *dembi-baaris* (criminal investigation).

When conducting this study, I gave utmost consideration to ethical issues, since the group being researched is vulnerable and the topics we discussed were sensitive. The project plan and other relevant documents, such as the information sheet, consent form, privacy note, and interview guide, were approved by the Ethics Committee for Human Sciences the University of Turku. I used pseudonyms for my interlocutors and removed all identifying information from the interview data. When reporting on my research, here and elsewhere, I have obscured details of the participants' backgrounds to ensure their anonymity.

Findings

Lack of Entitlement

Finland's new asylum policies have made it more difficult to gain access to legal permits, hampering asylum-seekers' access to employment, housing, and health services. My interlocutors also emphasized how Finland's migration policies have hindered access to other avenues to gaining residence, such as employment, study, or marriage, with Somalis in particular facing additional challenges.

Table 2 illustrates the number of people who lodged an asylum application and received a humanitarian protection residence permit before May 16, 2016, and who submitted a subsequent application of any type (extended permit, permanent residence permit, or asylum) and received a decision after May 16, 2016. Although Table 2 does not exclude other factors that could have affected asylum decisions, it shows a trend of fewer positive decisions after the 2016 amendment to the Aliens Act. Less than one-third of applicants received a positive decision after May 16, 2016.

The discontinuation of humanitarian protection residence permits had serious implications on the everyday security of asylum-seekers, particularly on those who were initially granted permits on humanitarian grounds. Seeraar, a 35-year-old

father who had initially received a residence permit based on humanitarian protection, discussed how he perceived the policy change:

[After receiving the permit,] I started establishing myself in Finland. [...] I started studying. I was admitted to a high school. [...] However, while I was pursuing my regular life, I received a letter informing me about the government's decision to terminate the [residence permit based on humanitarian protection] and that if I want to stay in the country after my current permit expires, I would have to submit a new asylum application. [...] An era of instability has started for me. (Interview, February 2019)

Those who try to obtain a residence permit on other grounds often fail due to this lack of acceptable identification. For instance, Suufi was married in a religious ceremony in Finland, but cannot formalize his marriage and apply for a residence permit on family grounds because he has no valid passport (Interview, February 2019).

Sugaal's application for a work permit was rejected due to the lack of a valid travel document. He was then instructed by his legal assistant to simultaneously submit applications for a work permit and a Finnish alien's passport. After 10 months, he received rejections on both applications. Migri's reasoning for the rejection of the work-based residence permit was as follows:

The applicant applied on [date] for a residence permit on the basis of employment. The applicant simultaneously applied for an alien's passport. ... The Finnish Immigration Service has not issued the applicant a residence permit because the applicant does not have a valid travel document. In Finland, the state does not accept a Somali passport as a travel document. The applicant has applied for an alien's passport to fulfill the condition of a travel document for the residence permit application. (Author's translation from the Finnish document)

At the same time, Migri rejected his application for an alien's passport because:

A valid travel document is a mandatory attachment to an employment-related residence permit application, and a missing travel document cannot be replaced by applying for an alien's passport. ... The issuance of an alien's passport requires that the applicant has either a valid residence permit or a similar right of residence in Finland, or that he or she is being issued a residence permit at the same time as the alien's passport. (Author's translation from the Finnish document)

Migri thus recognizes that the solution in a case like this is to issue a residence permit at the same time as an alien's passport and acknowledges that Sugaal applied for the alien's passport to fulfill the requirement of a travel document for his work-based residence permit application. Nonetheless, Migri first rejected his residence permit application because he did not have a valid travel document and then rejected his alien's passport application because he did not have a valid residence permit.

Sugaal shared with me a WhatsApp message his lawyer had sent to him, and the reaction of his lawyer to Migri's decision is telling. His lawyer reiterated, "An alien's passport is applied for at the same time as applying for a residence permit ..." and noted "If you are a Somali, it is difficult for you to get an alien's passport." He angrily concluded, "I cannot advise you further on this matter."

Nevertheless, based on my experience with them and with families left-behind in Somalia by rejected asylum-seekers in Europe, very few of these rejected

Asylum-seekers would voluntarily return to Somalia, and their removal from the country is hardly feasible. Furthermore, they are excluded from access to entitlements that would allow for a decent livelihood. The consequence is that many of them stay in the country and live for many years in a state of everyday insecurity.

Powerlessness

My findings showed two ways that everyday insecurity arises in line with the powerlessness perspective: when immigrants feel powerless compared to others and when individuals find they are unable to help themselves and their loved ones.

In terms of their relationships with others, asylum-seekers often feel powerless compared to the politicians, bureaucrats, employers, and lawyers who play a role in shaping their access to entitlements such as residence permits and the legal, economic, and social rights essential for their everyday security.

Here, powerlessness emerges when asylum-seekers, with all the vulnerability and insecurity they had on arrival, are expected to provide evidence of eligibility for asylum in the face of officials' suspicions that asylum-seekers may be making false claims (Bohmer & Shuman, 2008; Rider, 2013).

In a meeting I attended in Helsinki in November 2018 with prominent members of the Finnish-Somali community, a community activist noted:

Members of the Finns Party or their ideologues are increasingly employed in the service-providing agencies that serve asylum-seekers. These people are a heavy burden for immigrants without legal status.

All of my interlocutors were extremely unhappy with the Finnish asylum process, associating the decision-making processes with hate, racism, incompetence, injustice, and carelessness. This unhappiness was also directed toward others, including their legal advisers. Their frustration was not limited to the asylum process, but also extended to other means of obtaining a residence permit.

Sugaal, mentioned in the previous section, had received several negative decisions on asylum applications before submitting an employment-related residence permit application. His job in Finland had been terminated each time he received a negative decision, but his employer had always accepted him back once Sugaal was regranted the right to work. When Sugaal finally applied for a residence permit based on employment, he again received a negative decision. At this point, he started questioning the fairness of Migri's decision. The main justification for the negative decision seemed to be that he did not have a passport. He therefore tried hard to get one, paying a large sum of money in the process. While in the process of seeking a Somali passport, he was surprised to notice that Migri does not recognize Somali passports as legitimate travel documents. It was then that he started feeling powerless. During the interview, he frequently asked me, "Is there justice in this country?" (Interview, January 2019).

Asylum-seekers also experience powerlessness in their relationships with others because their everyday security strongly depends on the decisions and actions of non-state actors. For instance, the extent to which employers are prepared to accept

the extra requirements, uncertainties, and potential risks associated with employing asylum-seekers is important: For rejected asylum-seekers, access to employment is not only a source of revenue, but also a means to secure a residence permit and regularize their stay, thus gaining access to entitlements.

Though Sugaal felt the asylum determination process was unjust, he had strong and unwavering support from his employer and supervisors. However, Suldaan, a 23-year-old single man, reported that a friend had a very different experience. Suldaan's friend had applied for and been offered a full-time job, but the potential employer was unwilling to meet Migri's requirement that the employer provide updates every 3 weeks. After discussing the situation with a Migri officer, the employer informed Suldaan's friend, "I gave you the job, but unfortunately, Migri has refused it to you!" (Interview, January 2019).

In Sugaal's case, the employer was not only prepared to report to Migri every 3 weeks, but also fought to secure a work permit for Sugaal. However, in most cases, potential employers do not even call Migri. Therefore, the destiny of asylum-seekers is also defined by the desires, perceptions, and attitudes of potential employers.

Asylum-seekers' relationship with other social actors, including their spouses, children, members of their ethnic community, and coworkers, is also affected by their lack of legal status. For instance, Saalax discussed at length how peers within the community, young men with legal status and employment, sometimes put him down in social spaces, adding to his feelings of powerlessness (Interview, January 2019).

The second way in which everyday insecurity arises in the powerlessness dimension is when individuals are unable to help themselves and their loved ones. Salaado, a 49-year-old mother of nine, told me: "What makes my life challenging is the living condition of my children. [In Somalia,] I used to provide for them. [...] I do cry, from my heart" (Interview, February 2019). Salaado then became emotional, crying and reciting verse 94:5 of the Quran: *Inna ma'al usri yusran*—verily, with every hardship comes ease. A few female informants recited this verse during the interviews when they felt helpless and became emotional.

Seeraar, the father mentioned in the previous section, said, "Think of it – I am deeply scared of contacting my mother and my daughter! I do not dare to call them, because I cannot help them" (Interview, February 2019). Sareedo worried about her mother and siblings, noting that "The fact that I cannot help my mother who is sick and in need of medication has serious implications on my life" (Interview, February 2019).

Even those who provide as much financial help as they can are not spared the feeling of powerlessness. Suuban, a 29-year-old mother, had been separated from her four children since 2015, when she left them in Mogadishu in the care of a relative. Her only income was €310 per month in social benefits. She regularly sent US\$200 (about €200), sometimes more, to her children. However, she noted that separation from her children imposed horrendous consequences on her life:

I worry a lot about the children. [I am] a mother who has not seen her small children in four years. I cannot visit them. I cannot help them! [...] I sometimes wake up at three in the morning, sit down and cry. [...] I go and check the mailbox, in case something [from Migri] is there. [...] I live in agony. (Interview, February 2019)

Rejected asylum-seekers often perceived this powerlessness as a product of their lack of entitlement, believing that had they received a legal permit in the first place, their situation would have been better. Those who had initially received a residence permit, like Seeraar, stressed how the loss of their legal status left them powerless.

Entrapment, Exploitation, and Abuse

Although the aim of restrictive asylum policies and the denial of legitimate sources of everyday security was to make Finland less attractive, the consequence of these policies has been that rejected asylum-seekers are susceptible to extreme forms of exploitation, particularly in the labor market. After 2015, the exploitation of irregular immigrants became increasingly rampant in the Finnish labor market (Inspector, 2017; Schenner et al., 2019; Teittinen, 2020; Undocumented, 2017). According to Finnish prime minister Sanna Marin, "The situation in the Finnish labor market is completely unbearable when labor exploitation is so widespread and systematic" (Teivainen, 2020).

My interlocutors also believed that they had been victimized in asylum determination processes and in the provision of legal and social services, particularly in the reception centers. My data illustrate that extreme everyday insecurity may lead some asylum-seekers to feel they have no choice but to accept unfavorable and illegal employment practices.

Soomow, a 46-year-old father who works in a small cafeteria, said:

I start at nine in the morning and finish sometime around 1 a.m. In that time, I sometimes even combine the [different daily] prayers and eat standing up. There is nothing called *tauko* [Finnish for 'break'] and I receive a very small salary. (Interview, February 2019)

Soomow endures these conditions "to help my children and the children of my brother, who was killed. They are very young. [...] I feel exhausted!"

In addition to employers, other social actors may materialize the opportunity and exploit vulnerable irregular migrants. According to Suufi, workers with access to the legal labor market sometimes receive an employment contract and then informally delegate the job tasks to an irregular immigrant. The irregular immigrant actually carries out the work, but receives only half of the salary; the formal employee keeps the other half of the salary for himself. "You become vulnerable to exploitation by another person who is like you [...] because the government failed you" (Interview, February 2019). Through my informal discussions with activists and community leaders, I realized that they are aware of these practices.

Rejected asylum-seekers may also face exploitation in the marriage and housing markets. Several young female interlocutors noted that men had approached them with exploitative marriage proposals. For instance, Safiyo, a 28-year-old widow, declined a marriage proposal because the potential spouse wanted to live separately in order to avoid shouldering her financial responsibilities (Interview, February 2019). Salaado and Soomow confirmed that some men with legal status exploit vulnerable women through marriage proposals.

Most of my interlocutors had left reception centers for the major cities, with many hoping to gain access to the formal and informal labor markets in the Helsinki area. Asylum-seekers who live in reception centers that provide free meals are given €90 per month in reception allowance. However, if they leave the reception center and no longer receive meal service, the reception allowance rises to €312, prompting some asylum-seekers to leave reception centers to receive the higher amount and save some money for the benefit of their transnational families. They are also motivated by trying to escape the stress and other mental disorders caused by idleness and isolation in remote reception centers.

However, for many, leaving the reception centers leads to exploitation. To get permission to live elsewhere, the asylum-seeker must provide an address to the reception center. Of course, the asylum-seeker also needs an actual place to live. Many asylum-seekers are able to find free accommodations with members of the community and other migrant groups, but others pay rent for the stay, for the use of an address, or both. In addition to these financial burdens, they are frequently expelled from houses, and some are treated as unwanted guests. Female asylum-seekers in particular may face exploitation when living in private homes rather than reception centers. This exploitation may be in the form of excessive household chores, such as childcare and housecleaning. For instance, Saluugla, a mother of three, said her host usually kept her awake late into the night to socialize. She would then ask Saluugla to get up early in the morning to take care of her small children while she slept in. During the day, she instructed Saluugla to carry out heavy housecleaning tasks, once causing Saluugla to be injured. Saluugla also emphasized the psychological abuse she endured in the form of her host's humiliating and demeaning words (Interview, December 2019).

Finally, my interlocutors frequently emphasized that their lawyers had been rude and careless with their cases. Safiyo, who suffers from serious heart and liver diseases, noted that her asylum application was rejected because her lawyer had neglected to attach vital supporting medical statements to her application. She concluded, "It's him who destroyed me! For me, he is more damaging than the one who gave me the negative decision" (Interview, February 2019). Sahal even thought that his lawyer worked for Migri (Interview, May, 2019).

Again, my interlocutors noted that lack of entitlement has made them prone to exploitation. Suufi's blaming of government policy, above, demonstrates this. Even Sugaal implied that he works 12 h a day, 7 days a week, perhaps not only for the financial benefit but also to please his employer. He was once put on unpaid furlough with a large number of coworkers, but he was soon called back to work. He believed the main reason for this was his unparalleled dedication to the work: "I do in a week what [some coworkers] do in two weeks," Sugaal noted.

My interlocutors also discussed how lack of entitlement and restricting access to sources of everyday security may drive irregular immigrants to become involved in crime. Though Suldaan had a job, he was afraid that the police would enforce the termination of his contract due to his negative asylum decision, as had happened to his friends, asking, "Why are they canceling my job? Do they want me to be a criminal? Because they are not giving me any options for life" (Interview, January 2019).

Conclusion

Recent restrictive policies designed to deter asylum-seekers from arriving in Finland have resulted in harsh everyday insecurity for rejected asylum-seekers. In this article, I studied the everyday life of rejected asylum-seekers from Somalia in Finland, employing Crawford and Hutchinson's understanding of everyday security as a guiding analytical concept. I utilized Watts and Bohle's structure of vulnerability to scrutinize the everyday insecurity of rejected Somali asylum-seekers from three interrelated perspectives: lack of entitlement, powerlessness, and exploitation. Within each of these broad perspectives, there are a number of ways in which restrictive asylum policies shape the everyday insecurity of rejected asylum-seekers.

This article situates the everyday insecurity, destitution, and precariousness experienced by rejected asylum-seekers as primarily a product of the state's asylum regime. I argue that Finland's new restrictive asylum policies deny rejected asylum-seekers basic entitlements, increase their vulnerability, and decrease their ability to help themselves and their loved ones. In addition, without access to sources of everyday security, they are exposed to the risk of exploitation and abuse. A related finding is that these dimensions of everyday insecurity are interconnected, and the presence of one insecurity often increases the likelihood of the others. Sugaal's case illustrates this well. Yet, although lack of entitlements plays a central role here, the relationship between vulnerabilities may be more complex and overlapping. For instance, Soomow, in an exploitative employment situation, blamed his own inability to find a better way to support his family, not the asylum policy directly. In addition, the vulnerability and insecurity rejected asylum-seekers were already experiencing on arrival may affect their access to entitlements. However, this needs further research.

Therefore, the new restrictive asylum policies have made it more difficult to gain access to legal permits, with Somalis, in particular, facing additional challenges. However, many rejected Asylum-seekers stay in the country and live for many years in a state of everyday insecurity, as they are excluded from access to entitlements that would allow for a decent livelihood. Consequently, these policies have contributed to the emergency of disproportionately marginalized groups in the country. Another consequence of these policies has been that rejected asylum-seekers are susceptible to extreme forms of exploitation. Furthermore, my interlocutors' feelings of injustice and lack of professionalism in the asylum determination process corroborate recent research findings that have shown that new policies encourage unconventional, inconsistent, and perhaps ill-fated practices.

This article argues that, as asylum-seekers are in a vulnerable situation in the asylum process and might not present their case effectively to the decision-makers, a lack of adequate information and legal support for asylum applicants, including sufficient legal counsel in asylum interviews, may undermine the basic rights of asylum-seekers during the asylum determination process, thus increasing their everyday insecurity. Relatedly, systematic monitoring of the quality of the legal services provisions is essential.

In addition, approaching the asylum policymaking processes primarily through the lenses of immigration control, not through the protection of the human rights lenses, might utterly undermine basic human rights principles and relevant legal standards. Furthermore, ineffective and irregular practices in the implementation of asylum policies may also endanger asylum-seekers' access to basic human rights. Thus, asylum status determination process should be fair and effective, based on the merit of the case and the individual circumstances of the applicant. Therefore, without ensuring that implementation of asylum policies is free from anti-immigration practices, asylum-seekers' access to basic human rights might be affected, and their suffering might be heightened.

Finally, the impact of restrictive asylum policies is an area that needs greater and systematic scholarly attention and the article suggests that everyday insecurity, as an analytic concept, is useful as a general term encompassing all other terms in the literature, such as vulnerability, destitution, marginalization, exclusion, and precarity.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The author declare no competing interests.

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