

## FINLAND

# Implementing local development strategies

### Location

Punkalaidun

### Programming period

2007 – 2013

### Axis / Priority

Axis 4 – LEADER

### Funding (EUR)

Total budget 110 600

EAFRD 42 000

State/regional 57 540

Private 11 060

### Project duration

2011 – 2014

### Project promoter

Punkalaidun municipality

### Contact

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### Website

[www.punkalaidun.fi](http://www.punkalaidun.fi)

An integration coordinator was hired to help refugees mostly from Myanmar and Syria with language, housing, education, employment etc issues.

## Summary

Since 2011, the most rural municipality of Joutsenten Reitti LAG in South-West of Finland, Punkalaidun, has been investing in the integration and welfare of immigrants, refugees. The Immigrant Villages project concentrated on the integration of Punkalaidun immigrants, employers, as well as village associations and other voluntary actors.



An immigration coordinator was hired to solve basic problems and build bridges between the newcomers and Punkalaidun residents. In addition a series of events were organized include Christmas parties, family events, handicrafts workshops, mother-and-child clubs and language courses.

## Results

Effective integration of immigrants provides a future for immigrants to stay in the community over a number of years. There were once 24 immigrants housed locally, and now there are over 120.

The project has received a number of awards for integration, as it has been recognized for the impact on the community.

## Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Employment opportunities is a key factor to successfully keep immigrants to the rural area.

## Context

The refugee centre at Punkalaidun in the province of Western Finland has accommodated thousands of asylum seekers over the years. There was a refugee centre in the village as early as 1992, and in 2008 this was re-opened as a facility for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers.

The local community (the public sector, companies and NGOs) were willing to come together to help the newcomers. Local agricultural businesses and SMEs require seasonal labour, and the local population is decreasing as well as ageing. The town is also able to offer suitable buildings and public services (schools, health services etc.)

## Objectives

The aim of the project was to show solidarity with people who have left their homes and risked their lives in order to find a new start. The integration project is assisted and supported by the LAG in the municipality of Punkalaidun.

## Activities

The project hired an immigration coordinator to solve basic problems and build bridges between the newcomers and Punkalaidun residents. The coordinator had a key role in establishing mutual trust and respect.

In accordance with a strategy that seeks to provide education for all, the municipality has organised education to pre-school and school age children. The Western Finland Sastamala College and the Education Centre in Satakunta provide educational services for adult asylum seekers. Training begins while the asylum application process takes place.

Connections were made with the newcomers through the organisation of such activities as football matches, blueberry picking and even tango dancing.

The Immigrant Villages project, which commenced in 2012 concentrated on targeting the integration of Punkalaidun immigrants, employers, as well as village associations and other voluntary actors. The project aims to promote employment opportunities for immigrants on

farms, in small businesses and in the third sector.

The project is a Leader-funded non-profit development project. Private funding was needed to cover the financing of the plan by 20% and some work was also provided free of charge through voluntary work, which often meant unpaid work by volunteers, for example events, football coaching, homework support etc.

Organized events included Christmas parties, family events. Handicrafts, mother-and-child clubs, and language courses. There is even a football team, FC Vartiola, which is led by 71-year-old Italian football coach.

## Main results

The Immigrants Villages Project consciously promotes the integration of immigrants into Finnish society through versatile and practical measures. Effective integration of immigrants provides a future for immigrants to stay in the community over a number of years. There were once 24 immigrants housed locally, and now there are over 120.

This increased interaction at the same time supports the vitality of the villages, the business sector's potential, and the uptake of leisure activities. Co-operation with local business has helped increase rural employment.

## Key lessons

Prior to the project, many immigrants to the area housed in the reception centre moved away from the rural area towards larger cities, whereas now many more stay within the community, as they have employment opportunities.

The project has received a number of awards for integration, as it has been recognized for the impact on the community.

*"I'm really proud of the feeling I get supporting the inhabitants in establishing a new life and to be able to guide and support their daily life in everything possible. To see how I can help gain confidence is a great honour."*

Maarit Tiitanen, Project Manager

## Additional sources of information

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