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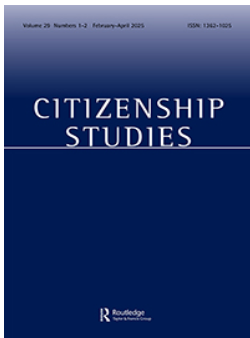
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'Fear of small numbers': assemblages of power in the deportation regime in Finland

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ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the multiscalar, transnational, and interdependent nature of deportations with a focus on complex assemblages of power in shaping deportation outcomes inside and beyond the state. The police are the main actor in the security-oriented deportation regime in Finland, playing a key role in the formation of deportation policies by developing new assemblages with different actors in order to advance deportations. While deportations entail multiple forms, methods, and strategies with different degrees of coercion, geopolitical realities and readmission policies contribute to asymmetric outcomes. Even if tight asylum policies are central to the legal production of deportable people, deportations from Finland are mainly enforced to other member states and post-socialist countries, often on other grounds than negative asylum decisions. Despite the small numbers, the deportation regime by default targets all deportable people considered as a problem for the social and national order, rather than manifesting normative ideals of citizenship.

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Introduction

In Finland, public debates and political mobilisations against deportations have predominantly focused on rejected asylum seekers, following the record number of 32,477 asylum applications in 2015 – around ten times more than in previous years. Before these new asylum applications were even investigated, the Finnish Government (2015) proposed several measures to intensify deportations, including European and Nordic cooperation, promotion of voluntary returns, utilisation of Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency) support, and completion of bilateral readmission agreements with Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia. While the recognition rates for international protection – in particular, for asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Iraq – dropped dramatically in 2016 (e.g. Vanto et al. 2022), thousands of people got stuck in the maze of asylum bureaucracy due to largely ineffective voluntary return and deportation policies. In addition to 'social exclusion policies' aiming to advance voluntary returns (see Leerkes and van Houte 2020), complications in readmission to African and Middle Eastern countries have contributed to a turn towards pre-emptive policies: at the end of 2023,

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Finland closed border-crossing sites with Russia following the arrival of 1,300 asylum seekers mainly from Syria, Somalia, and Yemen, based on the claimed instrumentalisation of migration threatening national security and reception capacity, despite the small numbers. However, most asylum seekers have arrived in Finland through the Schengen Area, instead of the eastern migration routes used mainly by labour and other legal migrants from post-socialist countries, with the exception of 75,000 Ukrainians granted temporary protection status in 2022–2024 due to the Russian invasion. While tight asylum policies have significantly contributed to the legal production of deportable people and the deportation of rejected asylum seekers has been a key focus in the expansion of the deportation regime across local, national, and transnational levels, effective deportations are a completely different matter.

Despite the relatively low numbers of immigrants in the European context, Finland has adopted a strict security-oriented approach towards all deportable people due to the presumed problems for social cohesion, public order, the welfare state, and the labour markets, with the police as the main actor in immigration enforcement (Könönen et al. 2025). The disproportionate anxiety surrounding irregular migrants and asylum seekers reflects the idea of *'fear of small numbers'* (see Appadurai 2006): repressive exclusive measures are justified to prevent a small-scale phenomenon from escalating towards an uncontrollable political and societal problem. Consequently, enforcement of deportations is regarded as necessary to prevent the emergence of a undocumented population, considered as a problem for the universalistic welfare state and a threat to the social order (Ministry of the Interior 2021) as well as national identity. While the deportation regime is mobilised to enforce the social and national order, supported by 'deportation fantasies' of efficient immigration enforcement (see Coutin 2015), deportations often involve complex processes and negotiations instead of being a straightforward matter. Moreover, geopolitics and international relations (Collyer 2012; Fakhoury and Mencütek 2023; Hyndman 2012) entail asymmetries in deportation practices; despite a large number of deportable people from the global south, deportations from Europe are inclined towards nearby areas, in particular, Balkan, post-socialist, and North African countries (Frontex 2023, 55–57). At the same time, deportation regimes also create north-south and west-east east deportation geographies inside Europe as people are deported from one member state to another, including criminalised EU citizens and third-country nationals, in addition to transfers of asylum seekers (Brandariz 2021; Könönen 2021). Therefore, it is important to examine actual deportation practices and outcomes, which can differ from public views, political debates, and academic discussions: deportations from Finland are predominantly implemented to other member states and post-socialist countries, often on other grounds than negative asylum decisions.

Notwithstanding growing critical literature, there is still limited empirical knowledge and theoretical understanding about deportations as a process and an outcome (Fakhoury and Mencütek 2023, 972). Moreover, states often tend to be regarded as central actors in the discussions on deportation policies, possessing different interests and enforcement capacities (Ellermann 2008; Gibney 2008; Kaushal 2023; Leerkes and van Houte 2020). Instead of a fixed and coherent national entity, the state comprises different and also mutually contradictory governmental objectives and rationalities among the various institutions that determine policy outcomes. As Foucault (Foucault 2008, 77) argues, the state is only the outcome or 'the mobile effect' of a complex

interplay of multiple governmental technologies and rationalities. In a similar way, the concept of assemblages of power is used to analyse migration governance as consisting of various actors, rationalities, discourses, and technologies beyond state-centrism and sovereign power in critical migration and border research (Bigo 2014; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Salter 2013; Walters 2015). While enacting state powers over foreign nationals, deportations encompass various legal and administrative processes involving local, national and transnational actors, even if the enforcement of deportations is largely at the discretion of the police and other security authorities (Kalir 2022; Walters 2002). In addition to local and national actors participating directly or indirectly in the deportation process alongside the security authorities, deportation arrangements from EU member states occur increasingly within European legal, financial, and administrative frameworks as well as through transnational cooperation. The multiscale nature of deportations entails the redistribution or reassemblage of state powers beyond the national framework (see Allen and Cochrane 2010; Sassen 2006), manifested in the deportations implemented by authorities from other member states or transnational organisations. In particular, Frontex coordinating joint deportation operations (Lemberg-Pedersen and Halpern 2021) and the International Organization of Migration (IOM) providing assisted voluntary return programmes – and other ‘migration-related services that governments find themselves unable or unwilling to carry out for legal and political purposes’ (Ashutosh and Mountz 2011, 22) – demonstrate transformations of state power in immigration enforcement. In addition to the adaptability and non-linearity – or messiness (Kalir 2014) – of deportations, assemblages of power highlight asymmetrical relations, heterogeneous combinations, and cooperation among multiple actors that facilitate and sustain deportation regimes.

This article provides insights into the operation of deportation regimes through a comprehensive analysis of deportation policies in Finland, from the production of deportable people to effective deportations with different methods, logistics, and strategies, instead of focusing only on certain deportable people (e.g. asylum seekers) or forms of enforcement (e.g. escorted deportations). Drawing on an analysis of relevant statistics,¹ legal frameworks, and administrative and governmental documents on immigration enforcement in Finland, I focus on the oft-overlooked differences in deportation criteria, destination countries, effective deportations, and enforcement methods. Assemblages of power provide a theoretical framework to trace the dispersed and multifaceted power relations that shape the operation of the deportation regime inside and beyond the state. This article contributes to the critical literature on deportations by demonstrating how deportations take place within complex assemblages of power, involving various negotiations and asymmetrical relations at the national and transnational levels and resulting in unexpected deportation geographies. I argue that the police and other security authorities in charge of immigration enforcement play a key role in the formation of deportation policies by developing new assemblages with different actors to advance and facilitate deportations, by default targeting all deportable people, even if deportation outcomes remain contingent on a complex combination of factors, such as geopolitical relations, European collaborations, police resources, and responses among deportable people. After discussing the theoretical framework and introducing the contours of the Finnish deportation regime, I examine in detail the production of deportable people through

border, asylum, and immigration policies, the implementation of deportations and different logistical arrangements to various destination countries, and diverse deportation methods and enforcement strategies.

Assemblages of power in deportation regimes

The deportation of irregular migrants, foreign offenders, and rejected asylum seekers has become a political priority in Western countries in the 21st century, often referred to as ‘the deportation turn’ (Gibney 2008), notwithstanding considerable national variations in immigration enforcement (Leerkes and van Houte 2020). In addition to border controls, states have allocated resources to deportation infrastructures, defined by Walters (2018, 2800) as ‘*the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions and actors that facilitate and condition the forced movement of persons who are subject to deportation measures, or the threat of deportation*’.² In addition to relying upon existing national security institutions and infrastructure, and ‘the surveillant assemblage’ (Haggerty and Ericson 2000), the deportation regimes resort to cooperation models and technologies developed for border controls: Frontex coordinates European deportation operations and organises joint deportation flights (Lemberg-Pedersen and Halpern 2021), whereas European databases recording information on visa applicants, irregular migrants, and asylum seekers also provide the digital infrastructure for deportations (Soysüren and Nedelcu 2022). While states have sovereignty over their immigration and deportation policies by default – Frontex supports the EU member states on their request only – transnational cooperation has advanced new spaces of networked governance in deportations (Ashutosh and Mountz 2011). The expansion of deportation regimes takes place both horizontally and laterally, incorporating new actors and procedures at local, national, European, and international levels. In addition to state authorities in the deporting and destination countries, security and immigration officials from other member states, European and international organisations (such as Frontex, IOM, and UNHCR), non-governmental organisations, private security actors, and transport companies also participate in the deportation process during different phases (Drotbohm and Hasselberg 2014; Kalir and Wissink 2016; Walters 2018; Wissink 2021), entailing new assemblages of power with intersecting asymmetrical relations within the deportation regimes.

In addition to political, economic, and social factors affecting national responses to migration, ‘geopolitics of deportation’ (Collyer 2012; Fakhoury and Mencütek 2023), colonial histories (El Qadim 2014), and bilateral relations ground assemblages of power in immigration enforcement, making certain nationalities more vulnerable to deportations in some countries than others. Despite global power asymmetries, deportations remain contingent on readmission by destination countries, with embassies and foreign authorities identifying deportable individuals and providing travel documents thus incorporated into deportation regimes (Carrera 2016; Griffiths 2012). In addition to restrictive asylum policies (e.g. Näre 2020), migrant protests also target embassies and their participation in the deportation of their own citizens (see Korvensyrjä 2025). Notwithstanding the political contestations of deportations, unilateral deportation policies in Western countries tend to fail due to foreign governments’ disinterest in readmitting their citizens or accepting only voluntary returns, thereby shaping the de facto deportability of foreign nationals and resulting in varying deportation rates and

‘deportation gaps’ for different nationalities (Ellermann 2008; Gibney 2008). Consequently, the EU member states have aimed to facilitate voluntary returns for rejected asylum seekers and other difficult-to-deport people. In particular, the assisted voluntary return programs coordinated by the IOM complement the deportation regimes, albeit criticised for masking the violence of deportations and legitimising the return of asylum seekers as humanitarian politics (Robinson 2022). The EU and bilateral partnerships with third countries also aim to facilitate deportations through trade agreements, development aid, and visa policies, the latter in particular being an important leverage in readmission negotiations (European Commission 2021; Carrera 2016). Despite the varying relevance of readmission agreements (Stutz and Trauner 2022), most deportations from Europe have been enforced to post-socialist, Balkan, and North African countries (Frontex 2023), which benefit from EU cooperation to different degrees.

Notwithstanding different enforcement capacities and priorities, deportation practices reflect selective immigration policies and the geopolitics of mobility (Hyndman 2012). Post-arrival enforcement regimes are not detached from admission policies (cf. Leerkes and van Houte 2020), because the hierarchised opportunities for movement render people from low-income countries without any available legal entry channels, as they are immediately deportable to begin with; moreover, they are less likely to become permanent residents and naturalised citizens. Inversely to differential inclusion in the sphere of rights and differentiated paths towards permanent residency and citizenship (see Könönen 2018; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), immigration law also produces differential exclusion by distributing deportability unevenly for foreign nationals, depending on their citizenship (EU citizens vs third-country nationals) and residency status (visa holders, asylum seekers, temporary and permanent resident permit holders, and so on) (Radziwinowiczówna and Lewis 2023; Waldinger, Hoffmann, and Tianjian 2024). Consequently, some foreign nationals are legally more easily deportable than others: in general, long-term residents have higher legal protections against deportations, reflecting their integration into society, whereas thresholds for deportations based on criminal offenses vary greatly, depending on legal status, for example (Könönen 2024). While immigration law stipulates different criteria for movement, residency, and deportations, individual and ‘collectivized discretion’ (Vanto et al. 2022) practised by immigration officials significantly contribute to the legal production of deportable people (e.g. Eule et al. 2019). Additionally, the police and other security authorities have considerable administrative powers in immigration enforcement, including the use of coercive measures: for example, the police regularly prioritise the deportation of criminal offenders for public order reasons (Kalir 2022; Könönen 2022). Despite considerations of foreign affairs, labour markets, and humanitarian policies, security concerns often drive the assemblages of power in immigration enforcement.

Deportations represent ‘the international police of population’ (Walters 2002), aiming to protect and reproduce national and social order by removing undeserving or criminalised foreign nationals from the country (see Anderson, Gibney, and Paoletti 2011). Notwithstanding under-enforcement policies due to insufficient resources, a lack of cooperation with destination countries, or labour market needs (see De Genova 2002; Fabini 2017), other means to control deportable people and advance returns extend assemblages of power in the deportation regimes into the society. In addition to state,

local, and private actors detecting and identifying deportable people, the deportation regimes also incorporate social services and the reception system for asylum seekers in the governance of deportable people, with the goal of promoting voluntary returns through social exclusion policies (Leerkes and van Houte 2020). Despite the prevalent imaginary of escorted deportations in migration research, deportations comprise different methods and forms, varying considerably depending on cooperation by the deportable people and the destination countries, including controlled exits, voluntary returns, and other forms of ‘self-deportations’ (i.e. self-organised departures due to the absence of other options and untenable conditions) (see Park 2019).³ While immigration detention and other police measures provide the requisite coercive infrastructure for deportations, they also function as deterrence for deportable people to cooperate during deportation proceedings (see Könönen 2021; Leerkes and Kox 2017). Instead of representing fixed power or a straightforward instrument, deportations adapt and experiment with new methods and tactics, forming a ‘dynamic assemblage’ that ‘does not unfold according to a neat logic so much as adding bits and pieces, pushing at limits, withdrawing here, extending there’, as Walters (2019, 176) points out.

The deportation regime in Finland

In Finland, immigration has increased and become more diversified since the turn of the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the global impact of armed conflicts on migratory movements. In fact, Finland was a country of emigration for decades in the post-war era, with limited immigration before the 1990s. The development of the asylum system and legal protections for foreign nationals occurred gradually from the 1980s, supported by the EU membership process completed in 1995. Additionally, the movement of EU citizens, irregular migrants, and asylum seekers has increased since Finland acceded to the Schengen Agreement in 2001. Currently, around half a million foreign-born people living in Finland represent nine percent of the population of 5.6 million. In most years, employment, family relations, and studies have been the main grounds for immigration: the annual number of first residence permit applications has varied between 22,870 (2015) and 52,385 (2023), albeit including persons awaiting decisions abroad (Finnish Immigration Service 2024). Nevertheless, political debates have centred on the asylum system, which offers access to labour markets and reception services for disadvantaged and vulnerable people, creating tension between humanitarian commitments and alleged misuse. While immigration has been historically considered as a police matter in Finland (see Könönen et al. 2025), rising support for anti-immigration agendas has advanced a policy shift away from immigrants’ integration in the early 2000s (e.g. Ministry of the Interior 2013) towards restricting humanitarian migration and reducing presumed ‘pull factors’, such as generous social benefits and family reunification (see Finnish Government 2023).

Institutionally, the police are the main actor in the deportation regime: the Helsinki and Southeast Finland police departments have national responsibilities for deportation arrangements, but all police departments participate in immigration enforcement with broad powers to employ coercive measures. Additionally, the Finnish Immigration Service coordinates the assisted voluntary return system, and the Helsinki police department oversees international cooperation with Frontex and foreign embassies (National

Police Board 2022). While the Finnish Immigration Service decides on residence permits, international protection, and deportations, the police and border guard can also issue removal orders based on minor offenses or irregular entry for visiting third-country nationals, provided that the person has not been in Finland for more than three months. In Finland, all the immigration procedures (excluding citizenship) are stipulated in the Alien Act (301/2024), including immigration detention and deportation measures. Despite humanitarian narratives presenting voluntary returns as humane and dignified removals (see Pirjola 2015), a strong public order and security framework has characterised immigration enforcement under the Ministry of the Interior, regardless of the political composition in the government. Recently, the Ministry of the Interior (2021, 2023) has emphasised a holistic, cross-administrative approach to immigration enforcement, aiming to incorporate foreign policies and development aid to advance readmission policies, and social services to promote voluntary returns. Historically, the Ministry of Justice, in charge of the criminal justice system, has been detached from immigration enforcement, which is considered a matter of internal security.

The Finnish deportation regime increasingly operates in the European and transnational context, forming new assemblages with various actors and institutions. Finnish authorities have participated actively in European deportation cooperation with Frontex and other networks (such as the European Integrated Return Management Initiative); Finnish police officers also have acted as EU return liaison officers in Iraq and Nigeria, for example. The Finnish border guard has sent personnel and equipment to several joint border-control operations in the Mediterranean Sea and the Balkan region for years, whereas Frontex has recently provided support for control of the Finnish-Russian border. In addition to border guards and police officers being assigned periodically to Finland's embassies to prevent unauthorised migration, the police are planning to send 'national return experts' to the main destination countries – including other member states' embassies – to facilitate deportation arrangements (Ministry of the Interior 2021, 33–40). In addition to Frontex, the IOM coordinating voluntary return activities complements the deportation regime in Finland: the IOM opened a country office in Helsinki already in 1993. In addition to bilateral readmission agreements mainly with Eastern European countries,⁴ Finland has several cooperation protocols on immigration and crime control and a separate implementation protocol complementing the EU readmission agreement with Russia. Overall, the border controls have concentrated on the eastern border and international airports; while Finland also shares territorial borders with Sweden and Norway, the Nordic Passport Union has provided free movement for Nordic citizens since 1958 (Tervonen 2015).

The production of deportable people

The legal production of deportable people through the entry and residency criteria stipulated in the Alien Act constitutes an imperceptible basis for the deportation regime. To begin with, foreign nationals without legal entry permits are directly subject to removal at external borders. In addition to denial of entry based on a lack of (or invalid) travel documents or visas, the border guard can issue removal orders for persons violating the immigration regulations (e.g. counterfeit documents, false information, or an effectual entry ban). The increased number of foreign nationals prevented from

Table 1. Removal and denial of entry decisions 2014–2023 (Finnish Border Guard).

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Removal order	296	217	288	351	499	308	1609	2498	583	224
Estonia	25	41	109	78	56	7	219	683	82	0
Russia	163	60	55	79	129	95	105	84	95	81
Ukraine	6	6	9	11	58	37	141	173	31	4
Romania	4	1	0	3	2	0	147	237	45	1
Nigeria	6	5	17	29	50	28	53	41	8	15
Denial of entry	1305	861	733	992	990	883	821	683	3609	1944
Russia	1166	704	578	758	674	645	631	325	3160	1693
Ukraine	25	15	17	45	74	58	53	99	56	11
Moldova	22	41	15	17	41	40	2	14	48	33
China	13	13	11	18	29	13	22	58	66	23
India	6	8	16	25	24	19	4	1	15	11
Total	1601	1078	1021	1343	1489	1191	2430	3181	4192	2168

entering Finland since 2020 reflects the mobility restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic and tightened border policies following the Russian attack on Ukraine. Indeed, Russians have been by far the largest group subject to pre-entry removal measures (Table 1), although the number has been considerably low considering almost ten million border crossings at the eastern border before 2020. The Russian border guard has participated in the control of EU borders through a militarised border zone and extensive pre-exit controls only allowing people with valid documents to arrive at Finnish border-crossing sites, which has limited irregular border crossings to a few individuals in most years (see Laine 2015). In practice, the close border cooperation has relied on relaxed visa policies for Russian citizens: Finland's embassy in St Petersburg has issued the most Schengen visas of all EU embassies for many years, exceeding one million visas in 2014, for example. Additionally, Finland has issued the most Schengen visas for citizens of China, India, and Thailand, mainly reflecting labour mobility. Then again, visa policies extend the border controls outside the national territory, targeting presumed risk groups from low-income countries potentially overstaying their visas or applying for asylum: the rejection rates have been over 50% in Finland's embassies in Nigeria, Morocco, Nepal, and Iran (Schengen Visa Info 2024).

The asylum system plays a key role in the legal production of deportable people: the most common ground for removal orders in Finland has been negative asylum decisions (Table 2), in particular following the tightening of decision-making practices for international protection in 2016 (Vanto et al. 2022). Then again, the asylum system has also provided a legalisation channel, even if a temporary one, thereby limiting the number of irregular migrants. Due to the possibility of (re)applying for asylum during the deportation proceedings, the same individual can have several removal orders, complicating the analysis of statistics. In most years, the number of new asylum applications has been around a few thousand, excluding 2015 and over ten thousand subsequent applications during 2016–2022. The largest groups of asylum seekers have been from Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Russia, and to a lesser extent from Syria, Eritrea, Iran, Turkey, Nigeria, and Albania, with significant differences in acceptance rates (Finnish Immigration Service 2024). While subject to individual assessment, the production of knowledge on the security situation in countries of origin by the Country Information Service under the Finnish Immigration Service contributes to the deportability of foreign nationals from presumed safe areas (see Bodström 2020; van der Kist and Rosset 2020).

Table 2. Removal and deportation orders 2015–2023 (Finnish Immigration Service).

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Removal orders	5750	20041	6676	4712	5882	3769	2437	2790	2994
<i>Negative asylum</i>	4352	18744	5132	3068	3784	2029	1340	1432	1412
Iraq	2087	12247	2682	1369	1485	734	509	376	263
Afghanistan	198	3162	896	315	369	235	118	60	36
Somalia	154	1040	284	263	291	207	123	122	79
Russia	111	164	158	185	500	227	148	186	200
Albania	638	170	91	37	26	3	5	12	10
Iran	42	233	151	115	231	58	43	46	54
Nigeria	120	140	83	65	95	59	59	72	113
Turkey	37	54	50	45	67	47	34	40	69
Morocco	68	98	48	23	38	13	13	30	24
Syria	47	100	35	32	28	21	15	39	18
<i>Negative residence permit</i>	743	638	821	883	1325	1076	658	760	877
Russia	111	51	70	66	124	145	89	123	210
Ukraine	86	63	53	79	140	128	87	19	0
Iraq	17	23	80	126	102	58	84	85	74
Turkey	34	36	56	43	64	57	32	45	37
Thailand	82	39	44	59	39	17	9	20	26
<i>Other reason (inc. crime)</i>	655	659	723	761	773	664	439	598	705
Romania	117	160	216	206	186	186	95	141	171
Estonia	121	134	111	139	129	129	123	125	118
Russia	66	54	67	49	66	20	12	39	36
Lithuania	46	35	33	34	36	36	32	13	43
Latvia	24	13	17	13	20	23	27	41	25
Deportation orders	277	430	897	1083	1955	1799	1302	1244	1197
<i>Irregular residency</i>	185	284	798	991	1833	1680	1201	1161	1062
Russia	14	23	98	146	232	236	189	188	155
Iraq	28	80	99	98	155	130	115	143	95
Uzbekistan	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	331	200	15	51	91
Vietnam	11	2	53	68	79	81	81	69	65
Ukraine	4	5	40	48	107	140	105	26	0
<i>Criminal offenses</i>	92	146	99	92	122	119	101	83	135
Iraq	8	n/a	27	30	26	17	22	13	25
Estonia	19	n/a	6	13	17	26	23	16	32
Russia	10	n/a	8	6	5	9	4	9	10
Somalia	0	n/a	13	6	12	7	5	6	7
Turkey	5	n/a	6	2	3	3	4	1	6
Total (removal + deportation)	6027	20325	7573	5795	7837	5568	3739	4034	4056

The asylum system also defines different speeds for decision-making and deportability: in addition to expedited procedures for ‘manifestly unfounded applications’ and inadmissible applications (including the Dublin procedure), the border procedure introduced in June 2024 aims to expedite decision-making and removals at external borders. Nevertheless, the fact that negative asylum decisions are subject to a lengthy appeal process makes administrative courts important actors in the legitimisation of deportation policies.

The Finnish Immigration Service also has broad powers in deciding on residence permits and deportation and removal orders (Table 2). In the Finnish Alien Act, deportation is a separate legal category from removal: deportation orders (*karkotus*) are issued for registered EU citizens and third-country nationals with legal residency status, whereas all other foreign nationals receive removal orders (*käännytys*), including rejected asylum seekers. In contrast to deportations of legal residents and asylum seekers becoming enforceable only after the appeal process, removal orders for non-registered foreign nationals can be implemented immediately. During recent years, approximately

one thousand removal orders have been issued, mainly based on negative residence permit decisions, and to a lesser extent for other reasons, mostly for EU citizens based on criminal offenses.⁵ In addition to irregularised people with pending removal orders, deportation orders based on irregular residency have increased since 2017, mainly including labour migrants who had overstayed the permitted period of stay. Despite public concerns, only around one hundred legal foreign residents have received deportation orders based on criminal offenses in recent years; around 40% of the deportation proposals are rejected due to an overall assessment concerning family and social ties and residence time (Finnish Immigration Service 2024). Notwithstanding the minor role of the criminal justice system in the deportation regime, immigration authorities can issue removal orders for non-registered foreign nationals based on suspected offenses without criminal convictions, even for EU citizens. Indeed, the police issue a few hundred removal orders annually for third-country nationals due to minor criminal offenses or irregular residency. Moreover, the police can implement the whole process, from criminal charges to deportation, in a quick timeframe without judicial intervention (Könönen 2024).

In addition to immigration authorities issuing deportation decisions, the police initiating the deportation process for foreign offenders, and courts supervising decision-making practices, other institutions and private actors reconfigure assemblages of power underpinning deportation policies. For example, trade unions and labour market organisations participating in the sector-specific assessment of labour availability (i.e. labour market testing) directly affect legalisation opportunities through work permits (Könönen 2018). The continuation of employment (or intimate relations) as a precondition for the extension of temporary residence permits transfers the power to control the residency of foreign nationals to third parties, involving them indirectly in deportation policies. While the police are in charge of immigration enforcement within international cooperation, the preparation of deportations incorporates the reception centres for asylum seekers and the Prison and Probation Service of Finland in assisting logistical arrangements, whereas private actors from employers to landlords can take part in detecting deportable people. Notwithstanding varying outcomes for different nationalities and destination countries, immigration policies reproduce racialised, class-based, and gendered hierarchies (Ellermann 2019; Schclarek Mulinari and Keskinen 2022); in addition to disproportionately targeting people from low-income countries in the global south and post-socialist countries, over three fourths of all removal and deportation orders have been issued for men (Finnish Immigration Service 2024).

The geopolitics of deportations: effective deportations and logistics

‘The geopolitics of deportation’ (Collyer 2012) shapes deportation practices, rendering some foreign nationals more easily deportable than others, depending on the cooperation with the destination countries. While the police have deported people from Finland to over 100 countries annually (Ministry of the Interior 2021, 58), more than half have been Estonian, Iraqi, Russian, Romanian, Ukrainian, and Albanian citizens (Table 3).⁶ Even if enforceable decisions are fewer than issued removal and deportation orders (due to pending appeal processes, several decisions for the same individual, or departures without notifying the authorities), deportation rates vary considerably for different

Table 3. Effective deportations by citizenship 2011–2022 (Police of Finland).

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Estonia	221	328	377	402	427	406	457	487	405	363	242	262	337
Iraq	130	102	166	185	386	2222	187	166	84	53	26	85	109
Russia	306	403	443	336	238	230	244	243	264	204	198	161	256
Romania	110	159	163	151	103	175	197	191	207	192	98	116	190
Ukraine	19	26	49	72	92	72	87	82	147	111	130	33	5
Albania	4	17	30	52	380	105	49	42	79	42	29	39	45
Gambia	17	20	72	94	73	68	93	154	117	38	41	40	62
Nigeria	94	76	114	109	57	49	78	69	71	39	54	33	39
Belarus	66	62	53	48	47	54	75	63	116	40	23	54	84
Afghanistan	28	56	39	34	26	340	77	37	36	29	16	31	17
Stateless	64	105	105	98	60	60	50	36	49	43	27	26	27
Somalia	135	45	51	47	66	108	32	27	31	17	27	16	12
Turkey	25	49	42	36	29	55	61	45	54	57	40	58	50
Lithuania	34	79	75	53	47	35	39	35	41	36	42	28	44
Kosovo	23	64	70	40	60	64	26	16	29	22	20	28	23
Uzbekistan	0	3	0	1	6	1	0	1	39	196	140	59	38
Morocco	20	39	56	39	43	43	48	24	29	14	13	27	26
Thailand	12	30	18	29	44	41	32	31	36	19	20	23	26
Georgia	14	14	9	17	9	4	47	61	45	43	15	36	40
Latvia	20	15	23	31	33	23	18	20	28	23	21	41	38
Total	2206	2387	2643	2555	2736	4828	2479	2472	2656	2127	1704	1740	2124

nationalities. Despite political efforts, effective deportations to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia, in particular, have remained relatively few due to those countries' reluctance to readmit forced deportations of asylum seekers. While Finland signed a cooperation memorandum with Afghanistan in May 2016 and Afghan officials from the Stockholm embassy have visited Finland to issue passports and other documents to their citizens, deportations to Afghanistan were halted altogether after the Taliban coup in 2021 (Ministry of the Interior 2022). In practice, assisted voluntary return programmes – outsourced to the IOM but coordinated by the Finnish Immigration Service and co-funded by the EU Return Fund – remain the only feasible administrative solution for rejected asylum seekers in the case of non-cooperation with destination countries. Despite efforts to enhance voluntary returns by increasing return subsidies to key countries and improved information after 2015 – for example, fifteen return counsellors were hired for reception centres in 2017, with the optimistic aim of 400 new voluntary returnees every month (National Audit Office of Finland 2019) – only some hundreds of asylum seekers have returned through IOM programmes during most years, excluding 1,672 voluntary returns to Iraq in 2016–2017 (Table 4). Overall, Iraqi citizens have

Table 4. Assisted voluntary returns 2013–2023 (IOM Finland).

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Iraq	81	75	250	1527	1102	449	187	56	50	29	37
Albania	n/a	20	147	147	64	14	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Russia	39	37	31	34	40	24	42	40	42	15	21
Afghanistan	n/a	n/a	5	144	47	18	7	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Georgia	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	29	32	26	21	10	29	33
Ukraine	n/a	37	51	29	37	n/a	17	8	n/a	n/a	n/a
Serbia	44	19	28	24	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Kosovo	n/a	22	40	40	n/a	9	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Iran	n/a	7	n/a	26	8	10	22	7	4	7	10
Turkey	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9	n/a	8	17	n/a	3	13
Total	341	318	634	2113	1422	646	391	217	148	130	181

comprised more than 60% of voluntary returns from Finland. Regardless of varying outcomes, the IOM is an integral part of the deportation regime in Finland, actively disseminating information on voluntary return and taking charge of travel arrangements and return assistance for returnees.

Whereas deportations to African and Middle Eastern countries remain a complicated matter, deportations from Finland are mainly implemented to other European countries. Excluding the returns of asylum seekers to Iraq, the main deportation countries from Finland include Estonia, Russia, Italy, Sweden, Romania, Germany, and Spain (Table 5). In addition to EU citizens – in particular, Estonians and Romanians – a significant share of third-country nationals are deported to other EU member states. Indeed, individual migration histories in Europe carry legal implications for deportations. The Dublin Regulation determining the country in charge of asylum investigation has increased deportations between the signatory states, subject to bureaucratic transfer procedures. According to police statistics, approximately a few hundred deportations have been based on the Dublin Regulation annually since 2011, excluding over one thousand transfers in 2016. Despite intra-European deportations being affiliated with the Dublin Regulation (see Picozza 2017), third-country nationals can be deported under other procedures as well: for example, most West Africans are deported from Finland based on criminal offenses to Italy or Spain, where they have obtained a residence permit (Könönen 2024). In contrast to notable ‘deportation gaps’ among many nationalities (Gibney 2008), enforced deportations exceed the deportation orders for Estonians: this ‘*deportation excess*’ owes to recurrent deportations of the same individuals returning to Finland, based on the national entry bans attached to previous removal or deportation orders. Additionally, deportable EU citizens can leave for another EU country, provided that they pay the travel costs themselves: for example, many Romanians take a ferry to Stockholm or Tallinn and sometimes return immediately back to Finland (Könönen 2023).

Table 5. Effective deportations by destination country 2011–2023 (Police of Finland).

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Estonia	436	622	656	646	593	560	619	663	554	510	373	399	510
Russia	287	372	413	323	253	229	255	224	300	199	177	146	225
Iraq	42	5	3	15	218	1724	142	137	47	14	8	24	76
Italy	192	113	262	230	176	211	144	229	158	68	61	78	66
Sweden	119	132	143	114	114	204	128	68	106	95	68	83	81
Romania	83	102	88	88	92	100	127	138	160	134	64	68	112
Germany	32	44	44	63	32	621	44	44	39	32	27	50	46
Spain	71	85	117	111	90	51	66	73	75	42	34	45	60
Albania	1	12	19	43	366	97	43	39	58	32	27	30	32
Turkey	57	51	44	34	38	68	64	50	63	73	75	80	87
Ukraine	18	19	31	41	47	59	63	62	132	89	101	25	3
Belarus	52	40	33	26	35	27	38	38	70	89	35	24	50
Kosovo	48	70	75	39	63	63	25	16	33	19	17	34	32
Lithuania	36	50	59	40	27	39	31	30	29	22	26	18	30
Uzbekistan	0	3	0	1	6	1	0	0	25	152	108	39	27
Poland	63	32	45	22	25	31	26	20	21	5	12	27	30
Thailand	12	26	16	28	41	39	29	30	37	19	23	24	25
France	11	9	28	42	58	27	31	21	42	19	6	20	34
Norway	70	49	59	47	8	36	16	6	10	2	6	6	10
Great Britain	44	12	30	38	11	26	7	12	16	18	9	36	31
Total	2206	2387	2643	2555	2736	4828	2479	2472	2656	2127	1704	1740	2124

Notwithstanding established operating models among the police, complex assemblages of power characterise the organisation of deportations due to various negotiations and procedures involving security authorities (also from other member states), the foreign affairs administration, destination countries, transport companies, the IOM, Frontex, and deportable people. Deportation is not an event but a process (Peutz 2006), which also involves ‘bureaucratic knowledge practices’ (Wissink 2021) after enforceable decisions, such as acquisition of transit visas and other required documents, travel arrangements, recruitment of police escorts, risk passenger notifications for transport companies, informing supervising authorities, and negotiations on readmissions with foreign authorities (coordinated by the Helsinki police department in Finland). While readmission agreements mitigate bureaucratic work, deportation arrangements often require cooperation with embassies for the acquisition of travel documents (Carrera 2016; Griffiths 2012), despite the introduction of the temporary European travel document and digital databases facilitating the identification of deportable people. In addition to police resources and compliance among deportable people, the speed of deportations largely depends on the destination country: deportations to other member states can be arranged in days – or even the same day for Estonians subject to a national entry ban – whereas deportations to Middle Eastern and African countries usually require lengthy negotiations and preparations. As immigration enforcement targets all deportable people, varying deportation rates in practice reflect ‘workable cooperation relationships’ with destination countries that are highlighted as ‘a key factor for the success of returns’ (Ministry of the Interior 2021, 58); according to police statistics, between 2011 and 2023 more people were deported from Finland to the United States than Afghanistan, for example.

Regardless of the enforcement method, most deportations from Finland are carried out by commercial flights, usually with transit connections from other European countries, regulated by the EU Directive concerning assistance from authorities in transit countries and international aviation law. Due to widespread public contestations of deportations of rejected asylum seekers and possible disruptions in commercial flights (e.g. the airline captain has the right to remove deportees and escorts for safety reasons), deportations to third countries increasingly take place out of view within European cooperation. In 2015–2022, Finland deported 721 people in 76 joint deportation flights to countries such as Afghanistan, Kosovo, Iraq, Pakistan, and Nigeria (National Police Board 2024). Consequently, security authorities from other member states participate in deportations from Finland, demonstrating the redistribution or reassemblage of state powers in the deportation regime. In addition to national charter flights, for example to Albania (Non-Discrimination Ombudsman 2020), Frontex coordinated and financed nine return flights from Finland to Iraq in 2016 under its mandate to support member states facing a disproportionate number of persons staying irregularly in its territory. Moreover, as a last resort the police can even rent private planes to carry out individual deportations (National Police Board 2021). Despite aviation being a key component in deportation infrastructure (Walters 2018), ferries and trains are also used for deportations to neighbouring countries; deportation can even take place by driving for those who have arrived in Finland with a vehicle.

Deportation methods and enforcement strategies

Notwithstanding reliance on transnational cooperation, the police have considerable discretion in deciding when and how to implement deportations. By default, unforced returns are the primary form of deportations: in addition to assisted voluntary return for asylum seekers, compliant foreign nationals (excluding foreign offenders) usually receive a 30-day period for self-organised return in accordance with the Return Directive. Even if only around one-fifth of all deportations are categorised as self-organised in police statistics (Table 6), deportations intertwine coercion and voluntariness to different degrees. In Finland, the most common deportation method is the so-called ‘controlled exit’, meaning the obligation to report to the border authorities, who hand over confiscated travel documents and supervise departure from the country. A similar deportation method is ‘transport to the border-crossing site’; this is usually employed for Estonians and Russians.⁷ (National Police Board 2021.) Supervised deportations can include people with a self-organised return, rejected asylum seekers (when transported from a reception centre to the airport), and detained foreign nationals (escorted to the departing plane or ferry). In contrast to the prevalent imaginary, the share of escorted deportations is relatively low in Finland. Moreover, they can include voluntary returns by charter flights when police officials are on board⁸; airlines also require the presence of escorts for deportees convicted of criminal offenses, irrespective of their compliance. Regardless of the selected method, the police usually inform compliant deportees of the deportation schedule and procedures in advance (National Police Board 2021). The police also record enforced deportations and entry bans in national and European databases, which enable subsequent deportations by other member states in the European space.

Table 6. Deportation methods by citizenship 2011–2023 (Police of Finland).

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Self-organised return	341	358	441	433	589	820	452	358	518	585	523	455	554
Russia	53	83	98	85	75	62	59	56	63	84	100	75	132
Iraq	4	7	5	13	146	398	32	8	17	4	1	8	8
Ukraine	3	13	17	20	42	36	38	34	72	70	59	19	1
Estonia	27	19	25	29	36	20	45	22	20	23	31	27	33
Albania	2	3	8	5	60	20	15	11	24	22	12	11	13
Transport to border	405	482	456	371	247	412	456	472	144	55	40	48	65
Estonia	89	129	102	78	44	97	158	159	28	7	10	4	7
Russia	95	125	130	101	56	35	53	48	31	12	6	2	3
Romania	41	35	26	22	13	54	88	70	22	9	0	4	13
Stateless	20	44	31	21	6	12	14	14	7	0	3	0	1
Belarus	24	26	17	11	17	8	22	17	10	2	0	3	10
Escorted	438	491	470	449	682	1675	557	560	421	205	161	285	372
Iraq	34	20	27	54	47	1121	125	118	28	25	9	45	80
Albania	0	6	5	30	314	61	17	17	23	4	7	15	8
Afghanistan	12	23	12	12	20	56	70	30	29	21	11	22	7
Gambia	9	13	46	39	19	26	24	32	20	4	8	14	24
Nigeria	14	20	30	42	16	19	35	29	26	6	8	11	11
Controlled exit	1021	1056	1276	1302	1218	1921	1013	1079	1572	1280	980	950	1132
Estonia	101	169	234	288	337	283	247	287	345	327	200	226	283
Iraq	84	69	111	96	163	650	27	37	37	24	15	26	21
Romania	36	85	106	81	73	85	72	87	148	141	79	94	134
Stateless	35	51	63	69	48	42	28	19	40	37	21	21	26
Ukraine	14	10	27	51	41	28	41	36	71	37	65	12	4
Total	2206	2387	2643	2555	2736	4828	2479	2472	2656	2127	1704	1740	2124

Immigration detention provides an important technology of power to facilitate deportations and produce compliance during the deportation process (see Könönen 2021; Leerkes and Kox 2017; Turnbull 2019), reducing the need for escorted deportations. Finland has two detention units with a total capacity of 110 places, one in Helsinki and the other in Joutseno near the Russian border; currently, a new unit under construction near the Helsinki-Vantaa airport will replace the Helsinki unit and increase the detention capacity by 20–50 places. The institutional responsibility for national deportation arrangements for the Helsinki and Southeast Finland police departments reflects the role of detention units as logistical centres of the deportation regime. Before the COVID-19 pandemic limited mobility as well as deportations, the police detained approximately 1,250 foreign nationals annually in Finland (Table 7), accounting for around half of all deportations over many years.⁹ While the police can also employ alternative security measures (such as periodic reporting orders or residency obligations for asylum seekers), immigration detention is a common police measure preceding deportations. Risk assessment in removal hearings (return counselling in EU terminology) is a key event in the deportation process: if the person does not arrange a return following notification of a deportation or removal order, the police organise hearings to promote voluntary return and estimate the need for coercive measures (National Police Board 2021). However, a mere verbal objection to removal or unwillingness to return voluntarily has been sufficient grounds for detention, enabled by the largely ineffective judicial review process. While the average duration of detention has been only a few days, the maximum detention time of 12 months enables the police to pressure non-compliant people to cooperate during deportation proceedings. Additionally, the police detain deportable foreign nationals who have committed or are suspected of minor offenses under immigration law, contributing to the overrepresentation of Eastern European and African nationals in immigration detention (Könönen 2022).

Table 7. Police detention orders by citizenship 2011–2023 (Police of Finland).

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Estonia	116	199	207	177	196	178	207	229	182	171	100	118	132
Romania	93	146	126	107	96	124	137	156	139	123	63	58	109
Iraq	153	94	134	83	68	64	177	195	44	39	22	46	92
Gambia	23	36	70	118	71	67	82	121	91	32	34	31	47
Russia	59	95	80	58	54	45	53	58	52	26	22	16	10
Belarus	64	59	50	35	33	31	43	42	65	26	14	27	46
Nigeria	95	44	70	63	28	25	39	26	29	17	13	10	17
Stateless	41	48	51	39	37	26	23	18	36	24	13	19	28
Morocco	17	49	84	63	36	37	34	15	15	11	6	18	11
Afghanistan	44	41	33	23	15	33	64	46	36	18	17	17	6
Algeria	34	55	61	53	55	24	28	14	12	3	9	6	12
Lithuania	29	46	47	36	24	11	12	18	30	21	18	14	34
Somalia	86	40	26	20	24	33	15	26	19	14	12	14	10
Georgia	36	27	6	15	6	2	47	43	30	29	12	16	25
Turkey	28	45	39	21	12	16	21	6	12	21	6	5	11
Latvia	15	13	14	21	29	13	10	11	17	14	15	23	21
Kosovo	34	40	32	12	18	13	9	6	1	1	1	4	1
Albania	1	7	15	21	32	22	20	16	17	3	4	6	8
Ghana	29	20	38	12	10	10	11	7	6	5	1	3	2
Bulgaria	9	7	6	9	14	10	17	29	10	5	6	4	16
Total	1234	1372	1499	1290	1083	983	1246	1294	1074	698	473	563	783

Assemblages of power underpinning deportation policies have implications for individual strategies among deportable people; for example, nationals from a country refusing readmission of forced deportations have better opportunities to stay irregularly. In addition to residence time and social ties in the country, the destination country and associated opportunities for re-migration after removal shape deportable people's compliance and the micro-politics of deportation. Whereas deportable people can use different strategies to resist deportations, including non-compliance in identification, resorting to legal appeal processes, escaping to other European countries, or physical resistance (van Houte et al. 2021; Hasselberg 2016), people awaiting deportations to nearby areas may even urge the police to speed up the procedures when detained (Könönen 2021). To minimise the opportunity for resistance, the police can initiate deportation proceedings well in advance and detain foreign nationals just before the pre-arranged deportation (Borrelli 2021). Likewise, the confiscation of travel documents during the asylum (or residence permit) process aims to facilitate immigration enforcement. In addition to short preparation times, the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman (2020) monitoring deportations in Finland – as well as participating in the supervision of European deportation operations – has raised concerns about insufficient translation services, use of force, communication restrictions, and non-reception of new asylum applications during deportation procedures. While having a mandate to monitor and provide recommendations, supervising authorities tend to promote humane and dignified removals as they lack the authority to interrupt deportations, thereby becoming entangled in the legitimation and 'ethicalization' of deportations (Walters 2019; see; Kalir and Wissink 2016).

In addition to different strategies to advance cooperation among deportable people, varying from coercive police measures to return counselling and other persuasion tactics, social services and the reception system for asylum seekers are also entangled with assemblages of power in the deportation regime through the promotion of voluntary return. The assisted voluntary return and reintegration program run by the IOM involves positive incentives, such as financial or in-kind assistance, although the threat of a two-year Schengen entry ban for non-compliant individuals can play an even more important role for those with opportunities for legal re-migration after deportation (Könönen 2023). Nevertheless, social exclusion policies complement coercive measures in immigration enforcement (Leerkes and van Houte 2020); the termination of reception services after an unsuccessful appeal process aims to advance voluntary return and self-deportations among rejected asylum seekers by complicating their survival in the country. Although social workers are not obliged to inform the police about undocumented individuals in Finland, irregular migrants are only entitled to urgent temporary assistance. However, municipalities like the city of Helsinki and non-governmental organisations have provided non-urgent health services for irregular migrants, contesting strict state policies. Instead of introducing regularisation programs to compensate for recognised failures in asylum proceedings (Vanto et al. 2022), the new government has excluded rejected asylum seekers from applying for residence permits on other grounds (such as employment or intimate relations), which had comprised a viable alternative legalisation channel.

Conclusions

In this article, I have examined the operation of the deportation regime in Finland beyond the state-centric paradigm, focusing on complex assemblages of power between various national, European, and international actors in shaping deportation outcomes. Instead of humanitarian considerations, the security framework has dominated immigration policies in Finland, with the police possessing broad powers for immigration enforcement and the development of the deportation regime. In contrast to public views and political debates, the comprehensive analysis of varying grounds, methods, and destination countries reveals how deportations from Finland are mainly implemented to other member states and post-socialist countries, reflecting facilitated deportation logistics, intra-European mobility, and police preferences to deport foreign offenders. Even if usually carried out without the use of force in commercial transport connections – including supervised departures – the police use immigration detention extensively to facilitate deportations and pressure deportable people to comply with return procedures. While the asylum system has played a pivotal role in the legal production of deportable people, geopolitical relations shape the de facto deportability of foreign nationals. Deportations to African and Middle Eastern countries remain a persistent concern, despite the increased collaborations with Frontex and other member states, and to lesser extent, the IOM. Rejected asylum seekers have been the key target in the development of European cooperation and a holistic approach to deportations, including social exclusion policies and other methods to advance voluntary returns and self-deportations. While the police aim to deport all deportable people, the destination country and deportable people's compliance shape the dynamics of deportations. Ultimately, individual deportation outcomes can depend on a complex combination of factors related to administrative procedures, geopolitical relations, European collaborations, and police resources and preferences.

The inclination of deportations to other member states and post-socialist countries has remained absent in the police and governmental documents, whilst immigration debates largely focus on the asylum system in Finland. The asylum system provides a potential channel to citizenship for people from impoverished countries and their family members, regardless of their economic contributions, in contrast to other conditional immigration channels subject to self-sustainability requirements and fixed-term residence permits (see Könönen 2018). In addition to the recent closure of the eastern border, the Finnish government has introduced several reforms weakening the position of humanitarian migrants. Since 2015, deportations of asylum seekers also have become a concern of ordinary citizens: strict asylum policies undermine citizens' trust in the state to protect fundamental values and humanitarian commitments (Horsti 2017). At the same time, the scarce (if any) attention paid to other groups deported regularly indicates a moral economy regarding differing levels of deservingness of deportable people (e.g. Ticktin 2011), which is also implicit in academic research. In particular, deportations of foreign offenders to eastern member states and post-Soviet countries tend to be overlooked, despite their high share in Finland and also other European countries. In addition to producing insecurity among deportable people and local communities, deportations break up families and dramatically affect deportees' family members, who are often citizens themselves (Hasselberg 2016). Intimate ties to a deportable migrant can

also transform citizen-partners into ‘failed citizens’ whose belonging and worthiness are called into question (Griffiths 2021). Employment and family ties in Finland – even if unregistered – are an important factor in continuous mobility among criminalised foreign nationals, who become a particular group of ‘banned citizens’ subject to recurrent deportations due to entry bans based on previous criminal offenses (Könönen 2023). Despite deportations becoming a ‘way of life’ (Khosravi 2016) and even resulting in deportation excess for some nationalities, re-migration after deportation often represents the most effective means for deportable individuals to contest the deportation regimes.

The deportation regimes are embedded in the wider political economy of social and economic relations concerning membership, exclusion, and social order. Similar to criminal policies (Garland 2001), immigration and deportation policies reflect the current social and political environment, which shapes the perception of social problems and feasible solutions to them. In Finland and other Nordic countries, rising support for right-wing, nationalist, and anti-immigration politics has intensified contestations over humanitarian commitments with concerns about social cohesion, the welfare state, labour markets, and national identity (see Barker 2018; Lindberg 2022). While allegedly serving to affirm the idealised values of the political community by excluding individuals deemed unfit for citizenship (Anderson, Gibney, and Paoletti 2011), deportations also target ordinary workers and other deserving individuals who have only failed to meet the tight immigration and asylum criteria. At the same time, rejected asylum seekers and other difficult-to-deport people remain in the country due to complications in readmission, whereas many economically inactive or marginalised native citizens fail to meet the same presumed ideals of citizenship (Sassen 2006, 294–297). Even if deportations are a technology of citizenship by confirming and reproducing the boundaries of the political community (Walters 2002), inconsistent if not arbitrary deportation outcomes complicate wider arguments on the manifested ideals of citizenship. Although the immigration system produces deportable people and excludes them from a path to citizenship, the deportation regime forms to a certain degree a self-supporting security-oriented machine due to broad executive powers, yet without possessing inherent normative rationality beyond the enforcement of social order. Despite asymmetric outcomes, Finnish deportation policies guided by fear of small numbers and related deportation fantasies (Coutin 2015; Kalir 2014) concerning effective immigration enforcement tend to reflect nationalist and protectionist values rather than the normative ideals of deserving citizens.

While manifesting state sovereignty over foreign nationals, deportations are increasingly carried out in administrative cooperation with actors from other member states, Frontex, the IOM, destination countries, and transit companies, forming complex transnational assemblages of power that reconfigure and transform state powers. In addition to horizontal expansion beyond the state, the deportation regime extends its tentacles laterally into society to detect deportable people and advance (self-)deportations through administrative cooperation and social exclusion policies. A similar holistic approach characterising deportation policies is needed in academic research to grasp assemblages of power that shape deportation outcomes and result in asymmetric deportation rates for different nationalities. Complex deportation proceedings, overlapping individual deportation grounds, and diverse deportation methods (with varying definitions) also complicate any aggregate statistical analysis (Stutz and Trauner 2022; Weber 2014) or

categorisations of deportation regimes (Leerkes and van Houte 2020), as well as wider conclusions on deportations as a technology of citizenship (Walters 2002). In addition to inconsistent and asymmetric outcomes, the deportation regimes themselves incorporate different logics, procedures, and methods, which vary depending on the targeted people – or even during their individual deportation processes. Consequently, Europe is not only a differentiated space of mobility but a differentiated space of deportations, with new hierarchies among citizens. At the same time, the multiscale and transnational nature of deportations creates opportunities for novel contestations at different stages and the formation of assemblages of solidarity and resistance.

Notes

1. Despite possible overlaps and deviances, the statistics obtained from the National Police Board (2024), the Finnish Border Guard (2024), and the Finnish Immigration Service (2024) provide a comprehensive overview of deportations. Variations in the year scales owe to the limitations in official statistics.
2. Italics in the original.
3. Different forms of voluntary departures and self-deportations supported by exclusive policies have long histories alongside formal deportations (see Goodman 2020).
4. These agreements include Bulgaria (1998), Estonia (1996), Kosovo (2013), Latvia (1997), Lithuania (1997), Romania (2001), and Switzerland (2010).
5. In addition to criminal offenses, ‘other reasons’ include violations of immigration regulations.
6. The category ‘Stateless’ in the police statistics covers people belonging to the Russian minority in Estonia.
7. The similarities between a ‘controlled exit’ and ‘transport to the border-crossing site’ can result in an interchangeability in categorisation; increased use of the former may explain the decrease in the latter after 2018.
8. This explains the high number of deportations to Iraq in 2016, mainly covering people who withdrew their asylum applications.
9. Additionally, border guards can detain foreign nationals during border checks, though immigration cases subject to deportation are usually transferred to the police.

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