



HELSINKI LEFT

Alternative 2023 Government Programme

A fair & compassionate Finland for all

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Preface

The **2023 Government Programme** of the Orpo Cabinet, entitled **“A strong & committed Finland”** is a **severe attack on the rights, welfare, and quality of life** of the overwhelming majority of Finland’s residents, particularly immigrants. Experts from across diverse fields have critiqued the programme as being not only unjust but also harmful to Finland’s economy, equitable society, and global standing.

HELSINKI LEFT’s Alternative 2023 Government Programme entitled **“A fair & compassionate Finland for all”** sets out a feasible, fair, compassionate, and optimistic vision for Finland’s future. In this first version, we focus on the most urgent issues, providing a counter proposal to the severe **attacks on workers’ and immigrants’ rights and social welfare**.

1. Protecting labour laws & trade unions to strengthen workers’ rights

Trade unions & the right to strike are fundamental pillars of democracy

Finland is currently one of just nine countries with the top score in the International Trade Union Confederation’s Global Rights Index, thanks to its high trade union membership (three quarters of workers) and long history of collective struggle for labour rights. The 2023 Government Programme puts forward a series of severe attacks on labour laws and trade unions, which together will weaken the position of workers in relation to employers.

HELSINKI LEFT believes that workers, as the main creators of value in our society, should be entitled to the fruits of their labour. Trade unions are a fundamental part of a democratic society, central to bargaining for better wages and working conditions, defending workers’ rights, and making the labour market fairer and more sustainable, and the economy more resilient against shocks. The demands of workers and the trade unions that represent them should be placed at the centre of the government’s economic and labour policy instead of being eroded. Trade unions are also important entry points into wider democratic participation in society, and the erosion of unions will affect other areas of civil society.

Some of the most fundamental restrictions in the government’s proposal are the limiting of the right to political strike to only one day and the removal of the right to take industrial action in solidarity with another labour dispute unless it is “proportionate in relation to the objectives” and “only affects the parties to the labour dispute”. A political strike is one in which workers withhold their labour in protest against a proposed policy that is not directly connected with their own working conditions. This is an overt attempt to reduce the public’s participation in scrutinising and protesting against proposed legislation, which is a fundamental democratic right. All three of Finland’s trade union confederations—one blue collar and two white collar confederations—strongly oppose attacks on this fundamental principle and are currently preparing to take industrial action against it in the new year.

The government is also seeking to limit industrial action among healthcare workers by introducing “essential work” clauses, claiming these are needed to protect lives and keep society operational. This is the only area of Finland’s existing workers’ rights legislation criticised by the International Trade Union Confederation. During strikes, sufficient

emergency care always remains operational to avoid harm to human life. By contrast, long waiting lists in the public healthcare sector can contribute to delayed treatment and worsening of health conditions. While better investment in public healthcare would save lives and improve the quality of life of Finland's residents, the essential work clause will not save lives but will prohibit essential workers from striking, weakening industrial action and workers' rights – rights which must be protected!

The justification given by the government for its various attempts to limit industrial action are to "improve industrial peace". **HELSINKI LEFT** proposes that to improve industrial peace, employers should be mandated by law to implement comprehensive co-determination rights for workers on the boards of medium and large enterprises. More diverse employment options should also be provided via the expansion of producer and consumer cooperatives, in which workers and the public have a more direct say in the governance of the companies they work for or buy produce from.

Collective bargaining is essential for ensuring fair wages & working conditions

The proposed legislative changes would increase opportunities for local bargaining at the company level, which would undermine the role of trade unions and shop stewards in collective bargaining on a sectoral level. Strong trade unions ensure a balance of power in negotiations, which is important for maintaining the culture of agreement in the labour market. Collective bargaining is a fundamental tool for protecting workers' rights. **HELSINKI LEFT** believes that local bargaining should only be accepted within the context of wider collective agreements; collective bargaining must be entered into properly, and shop stewards and unions must not be bypassed. The position of shop stewards, as well as occupational safety and health delegates, should be improved and ensured to adequately protect workers in collective bargaining negotiations, dispute resolution, representation, and in the other important roles they play.

The government plans to "strengthen the export-driven labour market model" by preventing trade unions from negotiating general wage agreements in cases in which wage raises are set by export industries via settlement proposals issued by the National Conciliator's Office or conciliation boards. The government also seeks to prevent industrial action and to promote voluntary mediation. Such interference in wage setting would undermine the process through which employers and employees bargain. In addition, the minimum negotiation times for change negotiations will be halved, giving significantly less time for workers and trade unions to prepare to negotiate.

In some sectors, collective agreements do not exist. We support the development of new collective agreements between employer federations and trade unions, so that the sectors are required to adopt practices that offer stronger worker protections than local agreements alone would provide. Some employers even lack a local agreement – we propose that no employer should be able to operate without at least a local agreement with its employees.

To further punish workers seeking to defend their rights, the government plans to increase fines for industrial action ruled to be illegal to up to €150,000 for trade unions and up to €200 fines for individual workers. We reject those fines. In fact, many employer federations

purposefully delayed collective bargaining in 2022–2023. We propose the introduction of fines for the delay of already-arranged collective bargaining by employer confederations, unless the trade union consents to the delay.

Immigrants are in a particularly vulnerable position within the Finnish labour market. Unions play an important role in protecting the rights of the vulnerable and precarious workers, and their ability to undertake this work must not be undermined.

Insecure & illegal working arrangements weaken workers' position & efficiency

The government's plan to remove the first day of sick pay during an absence from work, unless otherwise determined in the collective agreement, would not only cruelly and disproportionately punish people with chronic illnesses and women, but would also lead to greater labour inefficiencies, due to the wider spread of infectious diseases among colleagues by workers who cannot afford to forgo a day's pay.

We strongly reject the proposals to: a) amend fixed-term employment contracts so that they can be concluded without a special reason; b) make it easier to terminate an employment contract based on "proper grounds"; c) shorten the required notice period for a layoff to seven days; and d) abolish the obligation for small companies to re-employ an employee – (c) and (d) regardless of collective agreement provisions. These policies would make employment significantly less secure and make unemployment grow faster in an economic downturn. This would expose some workers to abuse and exploitation, decrease job security, and increase financial stress.

HELSINKI LEFT rejects proposals to make Finland's labour market more "flexible" through less secure employment arrangements. Contrary to the claim that increasing flexible employment arrangements—such as zero-hour and fixed-term contracts—would support employment, economic growth, competitiveness, and productivity, we believe that it will weaken job security, thereby reducing workers' spending power. This would not only harm wellbeing but also weaken the economy.

One especially problematic form of "flexible" labour is the Act on the Legal Status of Foreigners Collecting Natural Products (487/2021), quickly introduced in response to illegal operations by berry companies that recruit trafficked Eastern European and especially Thai seasonal workers to pick berries under intolerable conditions. The law allows seasonal workers to travel to Finland as "tourists" to work as foragers under "Everyman's Right", and does not provide the protections of the Seasonal Work Act or regular labour legislation. It does not sufficiently protect against the organised trafficking of workers and their exploitation by the berry companies and their agents once they reach and work in Finland.

HELSINKI LEFT supports the immediate suspension of visa issuance to Thai seasonal workers until Finnish legislation is changed through a multi-actor process to protect their rights.

In addition to seasonal workers, both temporary and long-term immigrant workers lacking knowledge about their rights under Finnish labour legislation are routinely exploited in various sectors, from blue collar workers in the hospitality, cleaning, horticultural, logistical, and construction sectors to highly-educated, white collar workers in startup companies. It is common for people from non-EU/EFTA countries to not be paid the sick leave they are

eligible for, to work longer hours than legally allowed, or not be paid for overtime they work. Many are paid less than Finnish counterparts who have equivalent skills and experience.

Some trafficked workers are forced to pay their traffickers to obtain or renew their residence permits, while others have agreed to pay a substantial part of their wages back to their traffickers in cash to cover fees for their trafficking to Finland or their accommodation here. Phoney “partnerships” are another form of exploitation, whereby the worker is, on paper, a “partner” in a company in order to avoid labour legislation but has no decision-making power, and receives negligible compensation for their work. It is also typical for traffickers to confiscate workers’ passports.

To overcome worker exploitation, **HELSINKI LEFT** proposes: a) collaboration with the authorities in Finland and in the most common countries of origin of overseas workers; b) raising awareness of labour rights among new arrivals within Finland in commonly-spoken languages; c) introducing photograph ID for workers in the hospitality industry and other relevant sectors; d) providing more time to find new employment after the end of an employment agreement, to reduce the pressure to renew the residence permit; e) allowing the issuance of zero-hour contracts and other flexible working arrangements only in cases in which the employee requests it; f) harsh sanctions on companies and individuals involved in violating labour laws, including the long-lasting prohibition of business activities; e) giving undocumented migrants the opportunity to legalise their residence, as they are the most vulnerable to exploitation; and f) increasing funding for NGOs that work to abolish worker exploitation, especially those working with immigrants.

Summary

Finland’s strong labour rights and the trade unions that have helped secure them benefit the overwhelming majority of the population, yet both are under severe attack. The government is currently working through the night to avoid journalistic scrutiny as it prepares legislation. All coalition parties are united in their ambition to weaken the position of workers in relation to employers. **HELSINKI LEFT** believes that the existing legislation largely works well and should not be weakened; in the several areas mentioned, it must be improved to better protect workers.

2. A just & secure economy that serves the interests of the majority

Protecting the social security safety net that ensures the wellbeing of all

Finland has long been among the countries with the least income inequality. It currently has the tenth lowest Gini coefficient, a remarkable achievement that can be partly attributed to its robust social security policies. The commitment to fostering policies that safeguard the wellbeing of the citizens has been pivotal in mitigating social disparities and ensuring a robust economy while also providing a comprehensive safety net for different members of society and maintaining the overall quality of life. Some aspects of this safety net were already weakened by the Sipilä-led right-wing coalition of 2015–2019, leaving vulnerable groups exposed to financial insecurity. For these reasons, **HELSINKI LEFT** strongly rejects the

proposals to further weaken social security; instead, we advocate for strengthening social security policies so that they regain their former level.

Choosing between a just or unjust society, not between spending and austerity

During an economic downturn, lower spending power decreases the demand for products and services by most workers, while increasing saving among higher earners with discretionary income. This causes reduced investment, less hiring, and a decrease in private sector jobs. Private debt also tends to rise, as businesses and households borrow more in order to cover essential expenses. This vicious cycle can worsen if the government further reduces people's spending power by cutting benefits or raising VAT or income tax.

Finns are understandably very cautious during economic downturns, due to the trauma experienced during the very severe economic depression of 1991–1993. The public debate is heavily focussed on how to balance public spending, and **HELSINKI LEFT** recognises the general concern about how to fund social welfare in an ageing population. We strongly believe that welfare must be protected and returned to its previous level.

Finland's debt-to-GDP ratio is predicted to rise from 73.3% in 2022 to a plateau of 79.0–80.3% from 2025–2028. The World Bank considers public debt to start slowing economic growth when it remains above 77% for a prolonged period. Given that Finland's debt ranked 56th globally in 2022 and was lower than that of nine of the G10 countries, we do not believe the country's fiscal situation merits undoing almost a century of progressive policies that directly affect and protect the majority of Finland's residents in their daily lives and keep society operational. We contend that such austerity measures will harm the economy and prolong the downturn, and that social welfare is required more than ever for a quick recovery.

Despite this, the prediction that the debt-to-GDP ratio will remain slightly above the threshold of 77% for several years does suggest that economic balancing is needed. This should involve a redistribution of wealth from high-earning and asset-rich individuals and businesses to the most needy in society. **HELSINKI LEFT** proposes the following policies:

- *The total restructuring of income tax bracket thresholds and taxation rates.* The exact thresholds and tax rates would require detailed research and planning using data which we do not have access to. The table below is a simple example of how Finland's taxation system could be restructured to produce a smoother transition between tax brackets. The current system can discourage career progression among middle earners, since promotion can move people to a bracket with a significantly higher tax rate, meaning it might not pay off financially. The low taxation rate of very high earners should also be addressed to redistribute wealth and minimise wealth disparity. The funds raised through the reformed taxation system and a tax of 50% on annual income above €1 million would go towards funding Finland's social welfare system and its climate actions.
- *Introduction of progressive taxation on corporate income, following a simpler version of the reformed income tax model above.* Corporate tax at a fixed rate of 20% discourages entrepreneurship and places a disproportionately high burden on small and medium-sized enterprises. Introducing several brackets, with higher rates for larger companies than the current rate, would minimise corporate dominance, prevent the

growth of a class of shareholders who do not contribute productively to the economy, and minimise income disparity.

Current brackets & rates		Example brackets & rates – to be refined through research & planning	
Income bracket	Taxation rate	Income bracket	Taxation rate
€0–€19,899	0.000%	€0–€19,999	0%
€19,900–29,699	2.515%	€20,000–24,999	1%
€29,700–€48,999	4.377%	€25,000–€29,999	1.5%
€49,000–€85,799	10.215%	€30,000–€34,999	2%
€85,800+	22.727%	€35,000–€39,999	3%
		€40,000–€44,999	4%
		€45,000–€49,999	5%
		€50,000–€54,999	6%
		€55,000–€59,999	7%
		€60,000–€64,999	8%
		€65,000–€69,999	10%
		€70,000–€74,999	12.5%
		€75,000–€79,999	15%
		€80,000–€84,999	17.5%
		€85,000–€89,999	20%
		€90,000–€99,999	22.5%
		€100,000–€124,999	25%
		€125,000–€149,999	30%
		€150,000–€199,999	35%
		€200,000–€299,000	40%
		€300,000–€999,000	45%
		€1,000,000+	50%

- *Reduce YEL pension tax for entrepreneurs earning below €40,000.* Owners of a sole proprietorship currently have to pay at least 24.1% of the income from their labour as pension contributions. This is to make up for the lack of an employer's contributions to their pension; however, the high rate is a very large burden on small business owners and a barrier to entrepreneurship for many. By contrast, wage earners pay just 7.15%. We propose a sliding scale for the YEL tax: entrepreneurs with an income below €40,000 should pay 7.15%, those earning €40,000–€59,999 should pay 15%, and those earning above €60,000 should pay 24.1%. This would more effectively promote entrepreneurship.
- *A five-year reduction in VAT rates in sectors where an accompanying reduction in prices for the end consumer can easily be enforced, such as renewable energy production, water provision, and public transport, accompanied by a law prohibiting increases in base price above inflation.* Since reducing VAT is often not reflected in reduced prices because of profiteering, this temporary reduction, overseen by the Finnish Competition & Consumer Authority, would reduce costs for low-income people and could be used as an incentive for sustainable alternatives, such as renewable energy and public transport. Essential services such as energy, water, and transport are needed by everyone, and they make up a significantly larger proportion of a low earner's income than that of a high earner.
- *A new luxury product VAT rate of 50%, to be applied to high-end goods, such as items of apparel costing above €1,000 or cars costing above €100,000.*

Saying NO to austerity measures that harm the most vulnerable in society

When the government under-spends by introducing harsh austerity measures, the whole economy can collapse, as was demonstrated during the Eurozone Debt Crisis. None of the Eurozone countries that introduced austerity measures over a decade ago now has an excellent economy. The recent period of price inflation has decreased the real value of wages, and many workers—supported by trade unions—are putting forth demands to try to reclaim some of this lost value. The government's proposals to cut almost all forms of social welfare further reduce the spending power of residents today and the productive capacity of future generations. Reducing unemployment benefits is unnecessarily harsh treatment of vulnerable residents, who already face many challenges. **HELSINKI LEFT** opposes any plan to cut spending on social programmes, such as:

- *Freezing unemployment benefits, child care allowances and study grants at 2023 rates during 2024–2027.* Over the last two years, people have experienced significant inflation, while their income has increased at a much slower rate than living expenses. The most vulnerable are already disproportionately affected by these changes. Freezing these essential benefits for the most needy will have profound consequences and drive many thousands into poverty (or worsening poverty).
- *Making social assistance conditional on whether an individual has applied for an unemployment-related benefit.* The purpose of social assistance is to provide a safety net for the most vulnerable, ensuring they have access to essential resources. Tying it to an individual's employment status undermines the broader intent of the assistance, leaving those most in need without this crucial support.

- *Reducing unemployment benefits.* This measure includes several drastic changes to unemployment benefits, such as requiring that an individual has been employed for 12 months instead of 6 in order to qualify for benefits, as well as eliminating the allowance to earn up to €300 per month without it affecting their unemployment allowance.
- *Reducing general housing benefits.* This measure affects residents who are already economically vulnerable, such as students, especially in areas where there is already a shortage of affordable rental housing. Reducing housing benefits can have significant knock-on effects, such as reducing the possibility for individuals to live in the city where they work or study.
- *Halving the number of people receiving social assistance.* The measure has been warned against by bodies such as the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Finnish Federation for Social Affairs & Health, for its potential to force more people below the poverty line, including 170,000 children, meaning 14,000 more than in 2023.

These benefits have been fought for by previous generations, and are fundamental components of the Finnish society and the welfare state, where quality of life for the whole population is put before special interests of any type.

A job guarantee to motivate people without punishing the unemployed

The government's proposal to 'incentivise' unemployed people to find jobs by cutting their benefits is an unnecessarily harsh treatment of an already vulnerable part of the population. **HELSINKI LEFT** instead proposes exploring options for developing pathways to work, such as implementing a "job guarantee" for anyone willing and able to do work that is meaningful and socially valuable for at least 12 hours per week. In return, they would receive a socially inclusive living wage set by a politically independent authority. This living wage would be set so that someone working 36 hours per week would receive sufficient income to lead a comfortable life.

The salary would be paid by the government for a set period of time, and the programme would include measures to encourage employers to create continuous contracts and support the transition into continuous employment paid fully by the employer. The programme would be locally organised at the municipal level, aided by a local transition council in which labour unions can participate, to help determine the type of jobs that would be created. The job guarantee programme would add to the workforce instead of being used to replace regular employees. This programme would increase the country's economic activity and make it more resilient against external economic shocks.

The job guarantee would help people transition to jobs in the private or public sectors by supporting the development of working life skills, professional networks, and expertise. The jobs should take the skills, qualifications, and experience of the applicant into account.

The goal of the programme would be to help the Finnish economy reach its full potential and productivity, and to assist people—particularly the long-term unemployed, who are often left isolated and stigmatised—in contributing to and reintegrating into society. When the economy is strong, fewer people will be reliant upon the job guarantee programme. When the economy is affected by a significant external shock, the programme will act as an

automatic stabiliser for the economy, without the need for introducing new exceptional legislation.

Such a programme is inclusive by design. It would not discriminate based on any grounds and, unlike the Finnish military or civil service, the programme would be voluntary and not conditional on whether an individual receives social security.

3. Compassionate & effective immigration & integration policy that respects international law

Preventing polarisation & encouraging solidarity

HELSINKI LEFT comprehensively rejects the 2023 Government Programme's proposed set of immigration and integration policies, which are an overt attack on immigrants and their human rights. Some of the proposed policies do not comply with the Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014), and some are even unconstitutional and in breach of relevant international conventions and agreements. The policies divide immigrants into different categories, creating further disparity between groups in the country's already multi-tiered immigration system. This would stoke division between immigrants with different social positions and distract immigrants from working together in solidarity to reject austerity and attacks on social welfare, workers' rights, and trade unions.

It is notable that the government has opted to place the issue of migration and integration under a section entitled "A safe, secure & resilient state governed by the rule of law", alongside subsections entitled "Strengthening national security & society's resilience" and "Strengthening the rule of law & democracy in Finland". Placing migration and integration issues under this heading is an intentional xenophobic choice that implies that immigrants are a threat to Finland's security and democracy. In fact, a humane immigration system and supportive integration services are essential for the resilience of Finland's future economy and society.

Compassionate asylum policy that respects international commitments

As one of the world's wealthiest nations, Finland should be a leader in protecting refugees. We support **Left Alliance's** proposed minimum quota of 2,500 refugees per year (amounting to fewer than one refugee for every 2,200 residents of Finland), and propose modifying the quota annually according to the need for resettlement forecast by the UN. Quota refugees typically spend a long time in UN camps, and this is a safe and robust means by which to select and support the most vulnerable people.

Finland's asylum policy does not need tightening; instead, it needs expediting. Processing an asylum application should take no longer than six months, but rather than the government's proposal to achieve this by "making the process more efficient" in an unspecified way, we propose investing more resources in the process. The Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) has already introduced artificial intelligence to support semi-automated decision making. Bias in AI systems has been well established in other contexts, and we are very concerned about the possibility that the use of AI could introduce further bias into immigration processing

while appearing to provide objective evaluations. Targeting efficiency could risk rejecting legitimate asylum applications if Migri has insufficient staff and financial resources.

Finland should invest in ways of integrating asylum seekers into regular social housing and provide them support and integration services via community centres instead of segregating them in reception centres, a form of low-security prison that isolates and stigmatises already vulnerable refugees. Social security and healthcare should also be provided equally to everyone residing in the country, instead of segregating people based on their background or legal status.

We also should not allow the repatriation of employees who have been denied asylum while their work permit application is in progress. It should be feasible to issue a residence permit to individuals who have sought asylum and lack a valid travel document, possibly by broadening the use of the non-citizen passport.

We fully support the principle that immigrants should attempt to learn an official language and should be supported in doing so via integration training. The government demands that immigrants integrate, but it increases the barriers to integration. Integration training is currently limited to people who have become unemployed within three years of residing in Finland; we believe it should be made accessible to all immigrants, to support them all in truly integrating. We also propose introducing more diverse and interactive teaching methods to improve the quality and accessibility of integration training.

Facilitating permanent residence & naturalisation as a means to integration

The longer period required to be eligible for permanent residence or citizenship proposed by the government adds further barriers to integration. Permanent residence requirements should remain at four years of residence and should not include a language proficiency test. Increasing the requirement to six years offers no known benefits; instead, it is likely to make Finland a less attractive country for highly-skilled workers from abroad, who the government wants to attract to strengthen specific industries. Predicating the residence application on income, employment and other related factors would create discrimination based on the economic situation of an individual.

The current rules for citizenship should also be left unchanged, as they are the most commonly used across the EU. All major EU economies have a five year residence requirement. The government's proposal to increase the requirement to eight years and add a citizenship test has no proven benefits but, as with the proposed changes to residence permits, will make Finland a much less attractive destination for immigrants, which the country desperately needs. Reducing the number of days that can be spent abroad also has no proven benefits. Requiring sufficient financial resources would introduce discrimination based on economic circumstances.

HELSINKI LEFT opposes the proposal to expedite residence applications for people earning at least Finland's median salary. In practice, this would favour workers from wealthier countries, effectively discriminating between people based on their origin. Furthermore, allowing the revocation of citizenship would introduce discrimination against naturalised citizens, some of

whom were stateless before becoming Finnish citizens. Native and naturalised Finns would have different rights, creating a two-tier legal system based on ethnicity or origin.

Fair streamlining of immigration services

Collaboration between different institutions should be intensified to reduce the exploitation of immigrant workers and make them more aware of their rights. We also encourage the expansion of safe channels through which immigrant workers or immigrants affected by employment disguised as business activities can seek and receive proper assistance.

The Employment & Economic Development (TE) Office should receive investments for modernising its work, while the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela) should provide more funds to better assist immigrants in finding employment and integrating into Finnish work life. The employer should not be made responsible for reporting on the termination of an immigrant's employment agreement, but instead the TE Office should notify Migri only as a last resort, after all other means to provide training and support with finding employment have been exhausted. Ideally, the duration of this would extend until the end of the validity period of the existing residence permit.

The proposed requirement that employers notify Migri upon job termination would unduly increase the pressure on immigrant workers and further imbalance the power dynamics in favour of employers, increasing the risk of exploitation. Immigrant workers could be pushed into a precarious position, making Finland a less attractive destination for international talent.

Residence permits based on work or other reasons should be equally and fairly available to citizens from different countries. **HELSINKI LEFT** would make it possible for individuals with work-based residence permits to explore different job opportunities, rather than restricting them to specific sectors.

The cost of residence permit applications should be reduced to the lowest level possible. The process of relocating to a new country inherently entails significant expenses, so financial burdens should be alleviated. This would also make the economy and job market more dynamic and receptive to immigration, particularly when there is a skills shortage in certain sectors, such as health and social care. By pushing for more affordable application fees, **HELSINKI LEFT** aims to facilitate the integration of newcomers and ensure that access to residence permits is as accessible and equitable as possible, particularly for individuals and families already grappling with the financial challenges of migration.

The government's proposal that education-based residence permits could be revoked if the resident seeks Finnish social assistance overlooks the fact that students are allowed to work up to 120 hours per month while fulfilling their social contributions and other obligations. Creating separate social security systems for migrants and residents contravenes international law and practices, and would lead to social exclusion and discrimination.

Integration through work

HELSINKI LEFT firmly opposes the differentiation of social support and labour market assistance for immigrants, denouncing it as a policy that is not only discriminatory but also

runs counter to constitutional principles and international legal norms. Our principles are that the state should provide help and encouragement for newcomers to navigate and integrate into a new society – we believe this to be essential for rapid integration and retention of immigrants, in the interest of the entire society. Receiving decent financial support is not incompatible with taking responsibility for one's integration and employment. The objective of integration through work should be ensuring safe, fair, and stable employment. Municipalities and the new wellbeing services counties should be supported and compensated in their efforts to offer an adequate integration process.

Integration is a multifaceted process, but the government programme judges immigrants based on their tax contributions vs. benefits claimed, and fails to take into account the other diverse ways in which immigrants contribute to the economy and civil society. Securing successful integration through work requires tackling two key issues:

- First, a significant portion of the Finnish labour market is poorly advertised and heavily reliant on networking, and many immigrants lack professional networks in Finland. Long-term unemployment and under-employment are consequences of this mismatch, which is a structural issue. Measures must be taken at an institutional level to ensure more transparency in how work opportunities are advertised and to connect immigrants with relevant networks as part of the integration process.
- Second, because language is an essential part of integration, integration plans should include a clear, unified language learning curriculum and prioritise active skills, in particular spoken Finnish. To ensure that 5–10% of integration is done in Swedish, the benefits of choosing Swedish should be made clear to learners. Immigrants can be incentivised to learn Swedish, but their integration cannot be made conditional upon it.

Cutting social assistance in an effort to accelerate integration will drive vulnerable immigrants to take on jobs in which they would face exploitation and abuse. The objective of integration through work should not be securing employment at any cost but ensuring safe, fair and stable employment. A good integration plan should educate immigrants about the Finnish labour market, the role of trade unions, and how to address cases of workplace abuse, as well as how to negotiate contracts and get support from employers for further education. In the long term, empowering immigrants to become well-informed, active workers who are aware of their rights is more beneficial and less costly than punishing them by cutting social support. The benefits of fairer and more welcoming immigration and integration systems would be felt by both the state and employers, since retention and productivity would be higher.

Finally, **HELSINKI LEFT** voices strong reservations about the proposal to immediately implement the obligation concerning job seeking and acceptance of work throughout the integration process. We believe that immigrants should be able to concentrate their efforts on studying or training during the integration process and then orient themselves towards finding employment in their field after acquiring the proper qualifications.

Summary

In our **Alternative 2023 Government Programme**, we have not only scrutinised and broadly rejected the **government's proposed attacks on the rights, welfare, and quality of life** of the overwhelming majority of Finland's workers and immigrants – we have also proposed a set of **fair, compassionate, and feasible policies** that serve the socioeconomic interests of the majority of Finland's inhabitants, for an **optimistic vision of Finland's future**.

We welcome you to join **HELSINKI LEFT**, in order to contribute to further conceptualising our vision, and working towards realising it through the better representation and integration of immigrants in Finnish politics!