AspirE Asian prospects in (re)migration to/within the EU

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FINAL REPORT

Seasonal and long-term Thai migrants in Finland: An analysis of decision-making from individual choices to migration governance

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, 2,000 to 4,000 Thai nationals have travelled to Finland each summer for seasonal berry-picking work. Additionally, the number of Thai women moving to Finland as marriage migrants has been growing since the 1990s. This study examines the material, temporal and emotional dimensions of migration decision-making, focusing on the factors influencing Thai migrants' decisions to migrate from Thailand, stay in Finland, return to Thailand or remigrate within Europe. The connections between the migrants' behaviour and the Finnish migration regime were also studied. The results show that 1) the emphasis of the Finnish migration regime is on control and limitations, 2) the seasonal berry-pickers have ended up in a very vulnerable position and cases of human trafficking have eventually led to legislative changes and 3) marriage migration is a multifaceted phenomenon, with women taking various factors (e.g. the daughter duty) into account during their migration trajectories.

Keywords

aspiration, temporality, decision-making, seasonal migration, marriage migration, Thailand, Finland

Introduction

Migration from Thailand to Finland has increased over the past three decades. In 1990, 387 Thai-born people were residing in Finland and by 2024 the number had risen to 13,604 (Statistics Finland, n.d.). In addition, during the past two decades approximately 2,000–4,000 Thai nationals have come to Finland each summer for seasonal berry-picking work. Migration from Thailand to Finland reflects changes in both nations' economies and in their attitudes towards migration.

In 2024, 12% (ca. 580,000) of Finland's 5.6 million population comprised of foreign-born people. The largest groups were people born in the former Soviet Union, Estonia and Sweden. A significant group – 44,000 residents – had been born in the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam (Statistics Finland, n.d.). In 2024, after citizens of the Philippines, Thai citizens were the group issued the most work-based residence permits (European Migration Network, 2025).

In this report, we summarise the results of the research we conducted in 2023–2025 with Thai migrants in Finland. The study concentrates on the two groups of Thai migrants: those coming to Finland for seasonal wild-berry-/mushroom-picking work and those residing in Finland long term but also involved with berry-/mushroom-picking.

This research has addressed the following questions:

1. How do migration regimes in Finland consider (aspiring) (re)migrants' behaviour in their policies?
2. Why do people decide to (re)migrate or to stay?
3. When do individuals' migration decisions evolve?

We utilise a humanising framework (Fresnoza-Flot, 2024) in order to address the shortcomings of previous research, which, according to Fresnoza-Flot (2024), often tends to rationalise migration decisions, lacks analysis of cognitive processes and emotions linked to migrants' decisions, and considers different levels of analysis (micro, meso and macro) separately. The AspirE project has strived to analyse the material, temporal and emotional dimensions of migration decision-making, highlighting individual agency as part of larger structures. By emphasising emic perspectives and placing gender at the forefront of the analysis, the project has aimed to contribute to decolonising and engendering perspectives. Our case study on Thais in Finland proved to be an excellent setting in which to pursue these goals.

We begin this report by describing the background of Asian migration to Finland. We continue with a literature review followed by a contextualisation of the social and legal factors influencing the migration flows. We then describe the research methodology and outline our main results, focusing on drivers of migration decisions, aspects of temporality and the place of human behaviour in mobility policies. Finally, we elaborate on potential future research directions and on the policy relevance of our results.

Asians in Finland

In 2024, the Finnish Immigration Service (FIS, 2025), the authority responsible for residence permits, received 54,091 applications for first residence permits. Of these, 44% were for family reunification, 28% for labour, 26% for studies and 2% for other reasons (e.g. for au pairs). Regarding first residence permit requests from third countries, Russian citizens were a dominant group for many years, until they were overtaken in 2024 and 2025 by East Asian countries, including the Philippines, China, Vietnam and Thailand. Since September 2022, Finland has severely restricted the number of visa applications it accepts from Russia because mobility from Russia has been considered a threat to Finland's international position and relations (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Migration from some of the Asian countries included in AspirE (Hong Kong SAR, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand) is highlighted in labour-related statistics. In 2024, the most residence permit applications for employed persons were received from the Philippines. For seasonal work, in 2022, people from Thailand (14%) and Vietnam (10%) were the largest groups after Ukrainians (49%), and in 2024 Thailand and Vietnam were the biggest groups in both the employed persons and seasonal work categories. It is also noteworthy that, especially before the war in Ukraine, Ukrainians mainly came to pick garden berries, while wild-berry-picking was a Thai-dominated field (Korpela et al., 2017, p. 216). As for permits for specialists, in 2024 the majority of such applications were submitted in India (36%), China (12%) and the UK (10%) (FIS, 2025).

The fact that Filipinos are the most prevalent group of labour migrants in Finland can be explained by the fact that private companies have been recruiting professional (mostly female) nurses from the Philippines since 2007 (Vaittinen, 2017). However, these trained individuals initially have to work as assistant nurses, since their professional qualifications are not recognised in Finland without further studies and language skills (Vartiainen et al., 2016).

Vietnamese citizens were among the first recognised refugee groups in Finland in the 1980s. In the 2000s, Vietnamese people were recruited for agricultural work, especially in the small town of Närpiö. In 2022, the largest proportion of residence permit applications for Vietnamese citizens (36%) were for student permits (Tiitola & Seikkula, 2024).

In Sweden and Finland, there has been a similar marriage migration pattern from Thailand for decades (Härkönen, 2024; Webster & Haandrikman, 2014). In 2022 in Finland, however, the employed person's residence permit was the kind most applied for by Thai citizens (FIS, 2023). For about 20 years, Finland applied the exceptional practice of utilising the Schengen visa scheme as an instrument to bring in up to 4,000 Thai nationals annually to pick wild berries, at the invitation of the Finnish wild-berry companies. In allowing them to work without the status of an employed person, the Schengen visa procedure placed workers in a vulnerable situation. Since 2016, various investigations into human trafficking and other violations have taken place, and in 2024 the Schengen practice was abolished.

In addition to those involved in the seasonal berry-picking, there are many Thai nationals who reside in Finland on a permanent basis, working for example in massage parlours, restaurants and as cleaners. These can be seen as occupations related to ethnic-dominated jobs in association with 'Thai-ness' (Boonjubun, 2026). The gender distribution of resident Thais is skewed, with almost 80% being women (Statistics Finland, n.d.), due to the prevalence of marriages between Finnish men and Thai women (Härkönen, 2024).

Literature review

Along with marriage, low-skilled work has long attracted Thai nationals to Europe (Niyomsilpa et al., 2018). While marriage migrants account for the largest group of Thai migrants in Europe, berry-pickers constitute the largest group of annual mobility. Jaisuekun and Sunanta (2024) state that the two major factors driving domestic and international migration among Thai nationals are uneven levels of economic development between Thailand's rural and urban areas, and the lack of adequate opportunities for livelihoods and employment in the countryside. Yet, focusing only on economic disparities gives a simplistic picture of migration.

In the existing literature, marriage migration is covered in many European contexts (e.g. Butratana & Trupp, 2021; Statham et al., 2020). According to Statham et al. (2020), the migration phenomenon goes both ways between Thailand and 'the West' – i.e. North America, Australia and Europe – and should be observed as such. Three features of globalisation processes specific to Thailand are essential in understanding the phenomenon: 1) 'the West'-to-Thailand tourism, 2) the transformation of Thailand's rural societies, and 3) immigration regimes in 'the West', where marriage is often the most accessible pathway. Thus, Statham and colleagues argue that marriage migration must be considered as *more than marriage migration*. Moreover, it has been argued that existing studies on Thai marriage migrants have long objectified female migrants (Kim, 2010) by reinforcing the popular discourse on them as individuals who lack agency and whose lives depend on their 'Western' husbands (Constable, 2006; Kim, 2010). Yet, a more comprehensive approach to investigating the phenomenon is needed.

There are few published studies on Thai berry-pickers in Finland but the phenomenon of berry-industry-linked seasonal migration has been covered by Swedish scholars. Hedberg (2013; 2016) explains the establishment of the migration-dependent business model, initially founded on ties formed in marriage migration. Sweden-based researchers have also made efforts to map the pickers' earnings (see Tollefsen et al., 2020) and have studied the relations and regulatory practices that the migration pattern relies on. In addition, Van Eerbeek and Hedberg (2021) detail the multiple roles of migration brokers in migration related to the berry industry.

In Finnish academic literature, Pekka Rantanen and Jarno Valkonen (2013) have considered migrant berry-pickers from the viewpoint of encounters between locals and foreigners in rural areas as well as the industry's production technologies and the industry-related regulations (Rantanen & Valkonen, 2008). Musicpunth and colleagues (2023) have investigated laws and policy practices related to Thai berry-pickers' status in Thailand–Finland seasonal migration. Other Finnish scholarly contributions in this area include non-work migration (Saarinen, 2011), Finnish men who are married to Thai women (Sirkkilä, 2005; 2015) and Thai women and Buddhist practices (Borup et al., 2025; Härkönen, 2025).

Context of the case study

Thailand's economic structure changed in the 1970s, when the agriculture-dominated economy turned towards manufacture and services. This led to massive migration from rural areas to cities, where the former farmers searched for low-skilled jobs (Boonjubun, 2020). The growth of urban economic life relied on the cheap workforce provided by the farmers' offspring, and was initially concentrated in Bangkok and other large cities. This led to a disparity between cities and rural

areas and the area of Isaan in the northeast especially suffered, becoming Thailand's lowest per capita income region (Boonjubun, 2026).

The 1970s economic shift also marked the beginning of marriage migration: Thai women marrying 'Westerners' (Sunanta, 2020). The largest numbers of Thai migrants in Europe have been female marriage migrants, the majority of whom come from Isaan (Niyomsilpa et al., 2018; Sunanta, 2020). Additionally, since the 1970s the promotion of labour migration has been part of government policies in Thailand (Van Eerbeek & Hedberg, 2021). These phenomena became more visible as a result of the 1997 economic downturn, when about two million rural migrants in cities lost their jobs and had to return to their hometowns. Many women in this group decided to marry 'Westerners', to be better able to support their families by working abroad (Statham et al., 2020). The couples usually met when single men were travelling in Thailand (Leinonen & Pellander, 2013).

The creation of the Finnish migration regime can be traced back to the late 1990s. The period between the 1950s and the 1980s was characterised by an absence of declared immigration policy (Välimäki, 2019, as cited in Tiitola & Seikkula, 2024). From the 1980s to the 2000s the number of immigrants grew fivefold due to changes in asylum-seeker and refugee policies (Heino & Jauhiainen, 2020). In addition, between 1990 and 2016, more than 30,000 Ingrians moved to Finland from Russia with the status of return migrants (Tietävä, n.d.). Since Finland joined the EU in 1995, its migration policy's main concern has been that of managing immigration (Saarinen, 2011). National strategies and policies have emphasised active immigration policy and attracting highly skilled immigrants (Heino & Jauhiainen, 2020).

At the same time, the Finnish economy is in need of a foreign workforce due to an ageing population. The country's agricultural sector, including the wild-berry industry, has long utilised a foreign workforce. Traditionally, berry-picking has been a popular pastime and has provided a supplementary income for some Finns. However, due to both ageing and urbanisation, the number of Finnish commercial pickers has decreased. Although many Finns still pick berries and mushrooms for their personal consumption, commercial picking has now become the domain of a large-scale berry industry that relies on foreign labour. Locals do not want to work for the industry because the pay is low and the work hard. The industry operates mostly in the large forests of sparsely populated northern Finland. In the late 1990s, pickers came from Russia, the Baltic countries and Ukraine (Seikkula, 2024). In 2005, based on the Swedish berry industry model, a Finnish company invited a pilot group of Thai nationals over, and for almost two decades now the Finnish wild-berry industry has relied mainly on these Thai labourers (Seikkula & Jaisuekun, 2026), who, according to Seikkula (2024), pick up to 90% of the industry's raw material.

The economic hardships in Thailand provided fertile ground for foreign companies wanting to recruit workers. Thai marriage migrants inviting relatives over to pick forest berries had become an established practice by the 1990s in Sweden, and in the 2000s Swedish-owned companies developed this as a business model, with similar attempts to use Thai labour beginning to appear in Finland (Seikkula & Jaisuekun, 2026). A 2005 Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs document is the earliest record of the Finnish berry industry's interest in recruiting from overseas (Seikkula, 2024), and in that year the first Thai berry-pickers, 88 in total, came to work for the industry (Musicpunth et al., 2023). Approximately 3,000 to 4,000 pickers came to Finland from mid-July to early October every year from 2008 until 2024, when the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs stopped accepting Schengen visa applications for berry-picking purposes. For about 20 years, Thai migrant workers had been allowed seasonal residence in Finland with Schengen visas

actually meant for tourism. The set of problems now latent in the berry industry are wrapped up in this longstanding policy.

Many Thai nationals have been able to help their families back home by working as berry-pickers in Finland in multiple years. The payment for the work, although by Finnish standards the bare minimum, is said to be up to 80,000–180,000 baht (2,100–4,800 euros) (Phaholtap & Photisan, 2023), which is a large sum in a country where the minimum daily wage is 300 baht (8 euros). For Thais coming from poor rural areas with high rates of unemployment, an offer like this can be tempting. At the same time, however, they need to cover various expenses, such as travel costs and the purchase of berry-picking tools, and the pre-departure process can cost between 60,000 and 100,000 baht (1,500–2,500 euros) (Seikkula & Jaisuekun, 2026). Therefore, while some pickers manage to achieve relatively good earnings, others' earnings are modest and some make no money at all (or even end up in debt) after their expenses are deducted.

Problems with the berry-pickers' situation have gradually gained more attention in Finland. A police investigation that started in 2016 led to one berry-purchasing entrepreneur being sentenced to prison in 2022 on 26 human trafficking charges. The Finnish police announced new criminal investigations concerning human trafficking in the industry later in 2022, in addition to a misconduct charge against a high-ranking Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment official. Similar cases have arisen in Thailand as well (Seikkula & Jaisuekun, 2026). These cases have led to public scrutiny of the berry industry and its related policies. Yet, the media discussion has centred on the Finnish actors while the voices of the pickers themselves have been largely neglected.

A distinction can be made between two types of seasonal work in the berry industry – garden-berry-picking and wild-berry-picking – with different visa requirements applied to the two groups. The 2004 Aliens Act exempted third-country nationals employed in wild-berry-picking from the requirement for a residence permit and enabled their entry into Finland with a Schengen visa specifying seasonal work. Wild-berry-pickers, unlike garden-berry-pickers, were not required to have work contracts. The interpretation of wild-berry-picking as not being employment was based on the practice called 'freedom to roam', referring to everyone's right to pick wild berries and mushrooms anywhere in Finland and to sell them tax-free. Inviting Thai berry-pickers to work without a contract or a work-based residence permit relied on the assumption that they were not working directly for the company that had invited them. In practice though, labour in remote areas has meant dependency on the inviting companies, and the companies have often sought to limit the right to sell the berries to a third party (Seikkula, 2024).

Methodology

Our project included several methodological approaches and multiple datasets. In considering macro-level factors, we conducted 21 expert interviews and 3 focus group discussions. Micro-level analysis is based on interviews with 13 seasonal berry-pickers and 19 long-term and permanent migrants. Social network maps were conducted with 13 of the latter group in order to analyse the meso-level factors, and a contribution to micro-level analysis was made by 6 of these participants, who recorded 21 video diaries in total.

First, Dr Minna Seikkula and MSocSci Sonja Tiitola conducted policy analysis focusing on Finland's mobility policies. An additional part of the macro-level analysis consisted of 21 expert interviews with policymakers and other stakeholders, which were carried out by Dr Seikkula.

These interviews focused on policies framing the berry-industry-linked seasonal migration from Thailand to Finland. The interviews lasted 60 to 90 minutes on average. Most of them were conducted in person, with just a couple carried out online. The interviewees were identified based on their professional role, and included people from both state and local-level administration as well as private sector representatives. We also conducted three focus group interviews, one independently, one in collaboration with Mahidol University and one with Université Libre de Bruxelles. The first two focused on decision-making regarding berry-industry-related migrations, whereas the third had a broader scope regarding migration from Thailand to Europe.

Thirteen seasonal berry-pickers were interviewed in the summer of 2023. These interviews were conducted by Dr Mitra Härkönen together with a Thai interpreter. The participants were recruited from a camp run by a berry company with whom Härkönen managed to negotiate access. Härkönen stayed at the camp for a couple of days and invited volunteers to be interviewed in their free-time. The majority of the interviewees were men – only three were female – which reflects the gender ratio in the camp.

In addition, we interviewed 19 Thais who were living long term or permanently in Finland but nevertheless picked and sold berries and/or mushrooms to earn extra income. These interviews were conducted by Dr Chaitawat Boonjubun (with the exception of 3 that were conducted by Dr Härkönen). As a native Thai speaker, Boonjubun carried out the interviews himself. The resident Thai interviewees (17 women, 2 men) were recruited via the snowballing method, and the interviews, which lasted approximately 30–60 minutes, were conducted in the participants' chosen locations.

Among the seasonal migrants interviewed, educational and occupational backgrounds were varied. Most of them had completed their compulsory education and one of them had a higher vocational certificate. Most but not all of them were farmers. The most prevalent educational background of the long-term migrants was also compulsory education, with their occupations varying from cleaners to massage therapists and online marketers.

Dr Boonjubun also conducted 13 social network maps (using Network Canvas software) with 11 females and 2 males living permanently in Finland. Three types of maps were collected – actors, locations of actors and forms of support –focusing on various kinds of support and assistance from individuals, groups and organisations in both Finland and Thailand that the migrants had received during their migration processes. Social network mapping was carried out only with long-term migrants because the seasonal berry-pickers had already left Finland and did not respond to our invitation to participate.

In addition, six of those who had participated in the social network map interviews were invited to record short video diaries every three months during 2024. These diaries were intended to capture the micro-level viewpoint of the migrants' everyday life. In each video, an avatar was used to represent the participant's emotions, thoughts and feelings. We managed to obtain 21 video diaries in total – one participant withdrew after submitting their first one. Most of our informants were not familiar with mobile technologies and video recordings; consequently, Dr Boonjubun had to be onsite at all stages in order to facilitate data collection and transfer and to ensure participant privacy.

Accessing research participants was challenging in all datasets, and the three researchers had to use various means to gain access to potential interviewees. Throughout the project, we paid particular attention to research ethics, constantly reconsidering issues related to the anonymity

of the participants. In addition to the ongoing court cases and related ethical issues, we had to take into account the fact that the Thai community in Finland is small and berry-picking is stigmatised, seen as indicating that someone does not have ‘a good job’ or is encountering financial difficulties.

Moreover, due to the ongoing court cases regarding human trafficking related to berry-picking and the related heated public debate, many officials and other stakeholders either refused to be interviewed or appeared particularly careful in what they said. We faced challenges also when recruiting participants for the focus group discussions, partly because we felt uncomfortable bothering the same individuals several times and partly because the sensitive nature of the topic easily made people reluctant to express their views publicly.

Key results

The results are discussed below in relation to the three levels of analysis, following Fresnoza-Flot's (2024) humanising framework. The first section focuses on the macro level, while the latter two sections deal with the micro and meso levels.

The place of human behaviour in mobility policies

Based on the results of our policy analysis and the data from focus group discussions, in this section we aim to answer the question: *How do migration regimes in the countries of origin and destination consider (aspiring) (re)migrants' behaviour in their policies?* Human behaviour in migration policy is understood here as both the authorities' restrictive reaction to migrants' unexpected behaviour, and as flexibility allowing migrants to reconsider their life choices and everyday practices as (aspiring) permit-holders. We first describe the migration regime in general and then look into the restrictions and flexibility of the regime.

The migration regimes in Finland and Thailand

In their AspirE policy report, Tiitola and Seikkula (2024) adopted an understanding of aspiring (re)migrants' behaviour as a space in which to reconsider one's choices as declared during permit processes. Based on this, they suggest that the consideration of aspiring re-migrants' behaviour is practically non-existent in Finnish migration regime policies. Possible remigration within the EU by people holding Schengen residence permits is recognised only in the form of time limits for meeting different permit criteria. The migration regime reflects the state's interest in minimising the possibility of the migrant becoming a burden on the state. Moreover, over the last few decades migration has been politicised in Finland. On the one hand, the pan-European trend of anti-immigration right-wing politics has influenced both political discussions and policy-making in Finland. On the other hand, labour migration as an economic necessity has been recognised, for instance, in government programmes. This also means that, when attracting a foreign workforce, the emphasis is on the needs of the nation state or the private sector rather than on those of aspiring migrants (Tiitola & Seikkula, 2024).

Finland's migration regime is layered around the categories of labour, family, study and international protection. Here we limit the discussion to the first two categories, which are those relevant to our study.

Within labour migration, several distinct permit types exist. The most important of these are the residence permit for employed persons, the specialist permit for highly skilled professionals, and the seasonal work permit for seasonal employment of up to nine months in agriculture and forestry. Each of these categories carries its own requirements and conditions, reflecting a broader orientation that restricts entry. Family migration is grounded in the principle of family reunification, enabling spouses, registered partners, children and guardians of minors to join family members in Finland.

The Finnish system combines a restrictive stance towards low-skilled labour migration with greater openness to highly skilled workers. Finland has an employer-led labour migration regime. There are no quotas, and foreign workers are permitted to work according to employer-stated demand. However, a certain amount of state control remains in the form of a labour-market test

for first permit applicants. Labour-market testing is a practice meant to support the employment opportunities that already exist in the Finnish labour market but it is not required for seasonal workers staying for less than six months (see Tiitola & Seikkula, 2024).

In Thailand, government policies since the 1970s have included the promotion of labour migration overseas. Thai citizens are free to travel and emigrate. However, when travelling to work overseas, migrants are required to notify the authorities, so that they can spot cases of illegal employment agencies and identify those intending to work abroad illegally. The Ministry of Labour is a supervising authority in regard to berry-pickers, even though there is no specific state-sponsored programme linked to berry-industry-related migration. Some of the experts interviewed in our research in Finland claimed that Thailand has an exit-visa procedure, but according to the Thai authorities this is not the case (Seikkula & Jaisuekun, 2026). Although there are no policies in Thailand that restrict the mobility of female Thai citizens who immigrate to Europe to work, study or marry European partners, they are required to meet the criteria set by the Finnish immigration authorities.

Restrictive reactions in Finnish immigration policy

Beyond policing and restrictive reactions, migrants' behaviour is recognised to a limited extent in the Finnish migration regime. The emphasis is on control and limitations. The restrictions are twofold: there are certain boundaries the applicant has to comply with when applying and there are means of supervising the extent to which the boundaries are adhered to.

Since 2025, Thai nationals doing seasonal work in Finland have needed work contracts and visas for seasonal workers (Embassy of Finland, Bangkok, n.d.). The residence permit for seasonal work is granted only for work with a specific employer. If a seasonal worker wants to add a new seasonal employer, a separate application is needed, and if there is a break between permits the applicant has to leave Finland until the new permit takes effect (FIS, n.d.). A migrant's request to change their permit may also create a reason for authorities to believe that they intended to evade the provisions regarding residence in the country (Tiitola & Seikkula, 2024). The ethos of control becomes visible also regarding family ties; the Immigration Service may, for example, investigate the genuineness of a marriage (Tiitola & Seikkula, 2024).

Latitude of (aspiring) migrants in Finland

Permit extensions and faster permit processes provided for certain groups of migrants are examples of allowing flexibility for migrants in their life decisions. A first residence permit is always fixed term, and can be renewed if the holder still qualifies – after several years they may become entitled to permanent residence (Korpela et al., 2017, p. 219). The permit can also be extended on different grounds to those of the first permit. For instance, someone who has had a work-based permit can apply for an extension based on family ties. Permit-holders seeking an extension to their work-based permit are exempt from labour-market testing (Tiitola & Seikkula, 2024).

Furthermore, some privileged groups of migrants are provided with faster permit processes, which too can be regarded as consideration of human behaviour. Specialists already holding a Schengen visa may work in Finland for 90 days without a residence permit and then apply for one while in the country (Aliens Act §81b 216/2023, as cited in Tiitola & Seikkula, 2024, p. 13). Specialists also have a right to apply for a residence permit via a fast-track service. The

processing fee for a first application for a specialist permit is considerably lower than those for an employed person or for seasonal work (Tiitola & Seikkula, 2024).

Interestingly, a similar practice to that of streamlining the processing of applications for specialists was in effect with the Schengen visa applications of Thai nationals coming to Finland to pick berries. According to Seikkula and Jaisuekun (2026), visa regulations were applied more loosely and the application process was streamlined. This practice, however, changed in 2022, after the gravity of the human rights violations related to Thai berry-pickers began to be revealed extensively.

The drivers of mobility aspiration and/or intention

In this section we aim to answer the second research question: *Why do people decide to (re)migrate or stay?* The duality of Thailand–Finland migration is present in our interview data: of the 32 interviewees, 13 were seasonal migrants, while 19 were residing in Finland longer term. The key findings are thus grouped based on these two categories.

Long-term migrants

When it comes to the aspirations of Thai migrants staying in Finland on a long-term basis, love and financial aspects are deeply intertwined. When asked about their reasons for migrating, the first answer people gave was 'love' or 'to live with my loved one'. Upon closer examination, however, it can be seen that love is not the only reason for migrating; it is linked to migrants' capability to maintain and improve their lives and livelihoods in Finland and support their natal and marital families as well.

The interviewees described how their partners had supported them with travel documents and marriage certificates (Boonjubun, 2026), as well as with housing and financial and emotional issues. In addition, family members and friends, both in Thailand and Finland, offered emotional support. The Finnish state's welfare services, such as municipal job-seeking agencies and schools providing language teaching, were described as important too. Compared with the family-based welfare system of Thai society, the Finnish welfare model, with strong public institutions providing social support and assistance, such as unemployment benefits, pensions, child benefits and emergency assistance, are significant factors that influence Thai marriage migrants' decision to stay in Finland.

The older generation of female marriage migrants who moved to Finland in the 1990s and 2000s are more dependent on their husbands than the younger generation. A few of our younger interviewees had prepared themselves for migrating by doing research about the country and matching their education and work experiences with the Finnish labour market. Before migrating, the majority of female Thai migrants were engaged in low-skilled labour jobs; however, Finland's macro-level migration policies prioritise highly skilled labour migrants. Therefore, as these policies implicitly discouraged their migration prospects, the women chose the marriage pathway as an alternative route.

Finally, our research points to the significance of 'the daughter duty', which is a long-standing social norm related to gender roles in Thai society. It determines the responsibilities assigned to Thai women living abroad. On the one hand, the role of breadwinner may motivate them to stay

in Finland to continue their income-generating activities and send remittances, but on the other hand the role of caregiver may lead them to return to Thailand to take care of their ageing parents. When asked, all of the migrants we interviewed said without hesitation that they sent remittances home.

Most of the long-term migrants interviewed held permanent residence status. They were not planning to remigrate, except for one who was afraid Russia would attack Finland. Instead, they preferred to travel back and forth between Finland and Thailand, ideally staying in Thailand during Finland's cold winter months. A few participants expressed that they might return to Thailand permanently if their parents needed looking after.

Seasonal migrants

For the seasonal migrants we interviewed, the experience of a few months' hard work in Finland was considered 'worth trying'. The berry season in Finland begins shortly after the end of Thailand's rice-cultivation season, which is good timing for rice farmers wanting to try to earn additional income abroad. Most participants came from Isaan, the most disadvantaged region of rural Thailand. However, not all of them were farmers.

Economics is a key consideration for Finnish berry companies when recruiting from abroad. The special Schengen visa practice pursued for two decades enabled them to have extremely cheap Thai labour because it enabled a situation where the companies were able to avoid employer costs of a contractual employment relationship. In our interview data, we did not witness cases of labour exploitation; however, the interviews with the seasonal migrants were held at the beginning of the season, so they would not have known what their future earnings would be.

Recruiters working for the Finnish berry industry – usually Thai nationals themselves – play a crucial role in the seasonal migrant's decision-making processes. They act as intermediaries between the companies and the migrants, often searching for new workers via relatives or neighbours who are experienced in berry-picking. The reason for employing Thais in this role is a practical one: they, unlike most of the potential pickers, can speak both the pickers' language and either English or Finnish.

The temporality of non-/mobility decision-making

In this section, we answer the research question: *When do individuals' migration decisions evolve?* The temporality related to migration decisions is linked to the length of a migrant's residence permit, which dictates the frame within which they can aspire. The macro and micro levels thus function in parallel. Finland has recently implemented practices that aim to speed up the permit process for some visa categories, but these apply only to skilled labour migrants and their families, not seasonal workers.

Long-term migrants

In this section, we mainly utilise the data collected by means of video diaries. All of the participants who provided these diaries were Thai women in their mid-40s residing in Finland long term. Findings from the diaries highlight the complexity and dynamics of migration

decisions, shaped by diverse and intersecting drivers in relation to temporal dimensions of life situations. These include life-course events, work–life transitions, financial situations, permanent residence status, family obligations, caregiving cycles, and other aspects of the future that are foreseen by migrants. The findings thus manifest the 'mosaic of life' of migration journeys that are dynamic and complex.

The migration decisions of marriage migrants begin to develop when they first meet their future partner, when he is travelling in Thailand. Our participants had met their partners in a large Thai city, where they had been working as rural–urban migrants in service industries. They had then visited Finland as tourists once or several times before getting married (Boonjubun, 2026).

While in Finland, a migrant's marriage may end in divorce, their partner may die as time passes (many Thai women marry men considerable older than them), and their children grow up. Marriage migrants may then need to rethink their decisions and choices in line with these changes. For example, one participant ended up divorcing their spouse because of domestic violence. Despite this, she had no plans to return to Thailand. She praised the Finnish social welfare system for having provided her with shelter and other support after the hardships she had endured. Social welfare in Finland is residency-based, so resident non-nationals are also entitled to receive it.

Another factor influencing decisions regarding staying or returning is ageing parents back in Thailand. The daughter duty tradition discussed in the previous section affects the decision itself as well as the timing of the decision process. The duty can either mean staying in Finland to work and to send remittances home or being constantly ready to return to Thailand to take care of family members. However, this duty applies only to women. Migrants may also set up businesses or change profession when in Finland, which may make them more committed to staying. Regarding their long-term plans, many expressed a desire to live in both Finland and Thailand after retirement, if they had enough money and no family obligations.

Seasonal migrants

The decision process of seasonal Thai berry-pickers begins when they hear about the opportunity to earn extra income in Finland. This may be from a family member, a relative, a neighbour or a professional recruiter. Recruiters operate through pickers' relatives or neighbours and are usually experienced berry-pickers themselves (Boonjubun & Härkönen, 2026). The timing of the rice-cultivation season sets the rhythm for the seasonal migrants' journeys. Some of them end up coming to Finland year after year, especially if they have been able to make good money. The berry-picking season is a short period of intense work, starting in mid-July and ending in early October and their short-term visas dictate when the seasonal pickers need to return to Thailand. In addition, after a few months' hard work in Finland they usually want to return to their families.

Discussion and future directions

In this report we have gathered together the results of the research conducted in Finland as part of the AspirE consortium. We have looked at 1) the Finnish migration regime from the point of view of human behaviour, 2) the reasons behind the decision-making of seasonal and long-term migrants from Thailand to Finland and 3) the temporality of migrants' decision-making. Adopting a humanising framework has affected the methodology, perspective and level of analysis of our research.

Seasonal migration from Thailand to Finland has provided extremely cheap labour for the Finnish berry industry. Migrants who reside in Finland long term and also pick berries or mushrooms in order to earn extra income usually sell the products privately via their own contacts. Those who come to Finland only for the summer season do not usually have a real choice of whom to sell to. Berry-industry-linked seasonal migration has been an exceptional case in the governance of migration in Finland. The flexibility created for the benefit of the industry has meant the exclusion of the berry-pickers from labour protection laws, making them vulnerable to exploitation. Today, industrial berry-pickers have to apply for a seasonal worker's visa due to legislation changes prompted by police investigations into human trafficking. However, access to a permit is not as effortless as it was previously, which highlights Finland's restrictive attitude towards low-skilled labour migration.

Economic and spatial disparity in both Finland and Thailand works as a motivator for migration. On the one hand, the Finnish wild-berry industry has an economic and geographical incentive to invite Thai nationals to Finland, as there is no local labour force available, or at least not one that would accept the wages on offer, and on the other hand Thai nationals want to come and try their luck at earning extra income during the months when there is no work for them in Thailand. For the seasonal migrants, key contributors to their migration choices are recruiters who act as intermediaries between the berry industry and the pickers. These migrants, mostly from the poor northeastern parts of Thailand, have similar motivations to those coming to Finland to stay longer term. However, the phenomenon of marriage migration is distinct from seasonal migration. The marriage migrants interviewed in this study reported love as being their primary reason for coming to Finland, but financial reasons were also significant. When looking at marriage migrants, it is also important to acknowledge that several factors affect the women's trajectories. The strong support provided by the Nordic welfare state compared with Thailand's family-based model influences migrants' decisions to stay or return. Other factors that influence the decision-making of long-term migrants are work–life transitions, gender roles, social relationships and networks, and unexpected circumstances.

With regard to the temporality of migration decisions, the most important factors for long-term migrants are related to family and marriage. The decision to move to Finland begins to develop when they meet their partner. Awareness of family members back in Thailand needing help or changing situations in their work or family life in Finland may contribute to their decision regarding staying or returning. For the seasonal migrants, decision-making usually begins when they hear about the opportunity to improve their personal finances by working in Finland. The end of the rice-cultivation season in Thailand, when the berry season in Finland begins, affects the timing of the decision.

With regard to further research, we see video diaries as a powerful tool to study the temporality of (re)migration decisions. Future studies should consider a period of data collection longer than

the year involved in the current study. In addition to using avatars, footage from participants' working or living environments could be used to represent their real-life situations. A group related to the mobilities of Thai nationals that has not had its voice heard in this research is that of the berry industry recruiters and future research should consider data collection with them too. There is also a need for researchers to analyse the intangible costs that seasonal Thai migrants have incurred when coming to Finland; it is important to bear in mind that financial success or failure is only one manifestation of the phenomenon in migrants' lives and that there are also consequences related to, for example, health and social relations. In addition, an ethnographic approach would enable more insights into the berry-pickers' everyday realities.

The seasonal berry-picking work manifests global inequalities and the Finnish case aptly illustrates that, even in a relatively well-organised Nordic welfare state, there are legislative loopholes that can push people into extremely vulnerable positions. Now that the policy regarding seasonal berry-pickers has changed, it is important to evaluate the impact of these changes in the future. Moreover, dozens of berry-pickers are still waiting for the final outcomes of the ongoing court cases, and their difficult situation should not be forgotten. Finally, when considering migration policies and migrants' decisions, it is important to remember that situations change over time, and migration is thus a fluid and multifaceted process.

Finally, now that the legislation has changed, we urge Finnish officials to improve the monitoring of seasonal berry-pickers' working conditions. Moreover, the evaluation discussions run by officials should include migrant-worker representatives. In addition, state-led mechanisms for advancing the Employer Pays Principle (EPP) should be considered. Lastly, long-term migrants would benefit from better integration measures and improved monitoring of equal treatment.

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