

# Enhancing International Recruitment in Northern Ostrobothnia

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# 1. Executive Summary

This research aimed to address the challenges faced by companies in international recruitment, focusing on support and expectations. The basis of the report is a qualitative material consisting of interviews conducted with local public actors and companies. Interviews revealed three primary challenges: language proficiency, culture differences, and administrative tasks. Lack of a common language with colleagues or management is a significant barrier. Companies with little experience in international recruitment are hesitant due to potential changes in the work environment, while companies with existing international staff are more open to hiring non-Finnish employees.

Despite these challenges, the importance of international recruitment was repeatedly highlighted, as immigrants, as a vital part of the labor force, are stimulating economic growth, bringing unique skills and knowledge, as well as contributing to cultural diversity and inclusivity in the society. To increase international hires, companies are offered training and information sessions by public actors.

Recommendations for public organizations produced by this report include enhancing language and integration programs, cooperating with educational institutions, and improving support systems for international talents' families. For companies, it is suggested to integrate international recruitment into company strategies through partnerships with service providers, educational institutions, and public organizations, and to create a supportive and inclusive work environment to facilitate a smooth transition for newcomers.

Companies with positive experiences in international recruitment are more likely to continue hiring international talents and share their experiences, while those with less diverse staff show interest in hiring non-Finnish employees, particularly for blue-collar jobs.

# 1. Tiivistelmä

Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli käsitellä yritysten kansainvälisessä rekrytoinnissa kohtaamia haasteita keskittyen tukeen ja odotuksiin. Raportin perustana on laadullinen aineisto, joka koostuu paikallisten julkisten toimijoiden ja yritysten haastatteluista. Haastatteluissa ilmeni kolme ensisijaista haastetta: kielitaito, kulttuurierot ja hallinnolliset tehtävät. Yhteisen kielen puuttuminen kollegoiden tai johdon kanssa on merkittävä este. Yritykset, joilla on vähän kokemusta kansainvälisestä rekrytoinnista epäröivät kansainvälisen osaajan rekrytointia työympäristön mahdollisten muutosten vuoksi. Sen sijaan yritykset, joilla on jo kansainvälistä henkilöstöä, ovat avoimempia palkkaamaan muita kuin suomalaisia työntekijöitä.

Näistä haasteista huolimatta kansainvälisten rekrytointien merkitystä korostettiin toistuvasti. Maahanmuuttajat nähdään tärkeänä osana työvoimaa, jotka talouskasvun edistämisen lisäksi tuovat mukanaan ainutlaatuisia taitoja ja tietoja sekä kulttuurista monimuotoisuutta ja osallisuutta. Kansainvälisten työntekijöiden määrän lisäämiseksi julkiset toimijat tarjoavat yrityksille koulutusta ja infotilaisuuksia.

Tämän selvityksen suosituksiin julkisille organisaatioille kuuluu kieli- ja kotouttamisohjelmien tehostaminen, yhteistyö oppilaitosten kanssa ja kansainvälisten osaajien perheiden tukijärjestelmien parantaminen. Yrityksille ehdotetaan, että kansainväliset rekrytoinnit sisällytetään yritysstrategioihin palveluntarjoajien, oppilaitosten ja julkisten organisaatioiden kanssa solmittavien kumppanuuksien avulla ja että luodaan kannustava ja osallistava työympäristö, joka helpottaa uusien työntekijöiden sujuvaa sopeutumista.

Yritykset, joilla on myönteisiä kokemuksia kansainvälisestä rekrytoinnista, jatkavat todennäköisimmin kansainvälisten osaajien palkkaamista ja jakavat kokemuksiaan muillekin. Nekin yritykset, joiden henkilöstö ei ole yhtä monipuolinen, ovat kiinnostuneita palkkaamaan muita kuin suomalaisia työntekijöitä, erityisesti suorittavan tason työtehtäviin.

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## 2. Introduction

### 2.1. Background on Northern Ostrobothnia and its economic landscape.

Finland has been one of the countries attracting international talents for the recent years to promote the growth of local companies and support their internationalization strategies. Some elements of image marketing for Finland are the reputation as "the happiest country for the 7<sup>th</sup> year", work-life balance, gender equality, high-quality education, connection with nature. The promotional materials and ads also include announcements and calls for applications to work in Finland in a wide range of skills, especially in specific fields like ICT, tourism, or services sector. The companies in these fields have been interested in international talent pool and are involved in the attraction of the required expertise from abroad. Therefore, creating an international team in a local company is increasingly popular, acknowledging the benefits and advantages brought by internationalization procedures<sup>1</sup>.

Keeping in mind that the recognition of internationalization and the attraction of international talents occurs at the national level, Northern Ostrobothnia region has a special approach to these processes. The area consists of thirty municipalities (covering more than 37 thousand square km), eleven out of which are cities, and Oulu being the mostly populated part with its 200 thousand inhabitants, overall going up to 400 thousand in the whole Northern Ostrobothnia region<sup>2</sup>. The economic overview of the area shows a combination of various industry fields, such as forestry, nature tourism, hunting and fishing, IT, and services. The rich peat soil of Northern Ostrobothnia contributes to the region through its potential for forestry, energy production and biodiversity together with other fields of industry like farming and agriculture technologies.

Expectedly, Finland has started emphasizing more on the modern trends of economy, like improving the technological skills and employing various digital competence in working life. Lately, the focus of attention has been on immigrants and the attraction of international talents, as well as retaining them in the area. The labor force from non-Finnish background covers fields like technology and engineering, construction, education, healthcare, and service industries<sup>3</sup>. The recruitment of immigrants in various fields has become important considering that there is an increasing demand for skilled employees and a shortage of labor force with specific skills and educational backgrounds.

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<sup>1</sup> [Accelerate Growth with International Talents: Work in Finland - Business Finland](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Statistics Finland - Preliminary population statistics](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Immigrants' integration into the labor market of Finland | Report 2021 \(tek.fi\)](#)

## 2.2. Importance of international recruitment and retention for regional development

Using the international labor force available in the region, Northern Ostrobothnia currently improves the economic, social, and cultural landscape at the workplaces. The importance of presence of international talents in the development plans of the region is not limited to the above-mentioned phenomena, but is also beneficial for the employers of the area in the following ways:

### 1. *Economic growth and competitiveness*

- Local businesses can attract highly skilled professionals to contribute with their specific competence to boost their strategic plans, marketing methods and profit maximization.
- International talents can bring value to the companies by adding to their resources, networks and fosters their strength to become competitive in global markets.
- The increasing labor force stimulates the economic activity, thus, improves the overall economic situation in the region.

### 2. *Knowledge transfer and skill development*

- International professionals bring unique expertise and know-how in implementing projects, viewing matters at the workplace, enhancing the knowledge and overall skill level of the employees.
- With the presence of a new competence and expertise at work, the practice of different working styles is highly likely to be observed<sup>4</sup>.
- According to the regional programme 2022-2025 of Northern Ostrobothnia<sup>5</sup>, the regional development strategy considers Smart Specialization - a policy that promotes the international cooperation to enhance local competencies and innovation ecosystems.
- A similar approach from the regional development strategy<sup>6</sup> also mentions the importance of sustainable development by bringing diversity, social and environmental sustainability from different perspectives.

### 3. *Cultural diversity and social integration*

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<sup>4</sup> [About the Region - Council of Oulu Region \(pohjois-pohjanmaa.fi\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Regional Government Programme 2022–2025 - Regional Council of North Ostrobothnia \(pohjois-pohjanmaa.fi\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. (Pohjois-Pohjanmaan maakuntaohjelma)

- A socially and culturally diverse workforce enables to look at the issues from new perspectives and enhances creativity, as well as more practical problem-solving strategies in the organizations<sup>7</sup>.
- As a response to the requirements of modern society, international recruits enrich the community of the region by promoting cultural exchange and global awareness.
- The presence of international employees at the workplace helps to eliminate the potential cultural barriers boosting the integration process of the employees with non-Finnish background into the society and work community<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> [Council of Oulu Region](#)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



# 3. Current State of International Recruitment

## 3.1. Statistical Overview

- Demographic trends and employment statistics.

According to the report published by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, in 2024<sup>9</sup>, the rate of unemployment in North Ostrobothnia started to rise in autumn 2022 and the number of unemployed has steadily increased since then. At the national level, in June 2024, the number of unemployed jobseekers has increased by 28,600 compared to June 2023 bringing the overall number to 293,300 while the total workforce of Finland was equal to 2,6M<sup>10</sup>. This means 10,8% increase in the number of unemployed jobseekers at the national level and equaled to 10,9% of the workforce of the country. At the regional level, the overall workforce of Northern Ostrobothnia was around 193 200 in June 2024 with 23 200 of them being an unemployed jobseeker, drawing the unemployment rate to 12%<sup>11</sup>.

- Number and employment status of foreign population.

Coming to the number of foreigners in the labor force of Finland, according to the TEK survey<sup>12</sup>, the number of unemployed foreign job seekers was 37,650 (June 2021) which was 27,5% of the total foreign workforce. In June 2023, this number rose to 39, 597 and a year later to 46, 710<sup>13</sup>.

Some statistical information from the available databases on the employment of foreign population are as follows<sup>14</sup>:

Figure 1. Employed persons by occupational group and background country, 2022<sup>15</sup>

Employed persons by occupational group (Classification of Occupations 2010) and background country in 2022	Number of employees
<i>Foreign countries, total</i>	
Service and sales workers	49834
Professionals	40612
Elementary occupations	36378
Craft and related trades workers	27827
Technicians and associate professionals	19547

<sup>9</sup> [Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriön julkaisuja 2024:18](#)

<sup>10</sup> [293,300 unemployed jobseekers in June - Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment \(tem.fi\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Employment Bulletin June 2024 \(valtioneuvosto.fi\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Immigrants' integration into the labor market of Finland | Report 2021 \(tek.fi\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Employment Bulletin June 2024 \(valtioneuvosto.fi\)](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Employment Bulletin, June 2024 - Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment \(tem.fi\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> [PxWeb - Select table \(stat.fi\)](#)

Plant and machine operators, and assemblers	19077
Clerical support workers	6679
Managers	4493
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	3287
Armed forces	42
<b>Unit:</b>	
<i>Source: Statistics Finland, employment</i>	

According to the report by the European Migration Network and Finnish Immigration Service<sup>16</sup>, the first residence permits issued on the grounds of employment in 2023 show that the portion of population from a non-Finnish background receive a positive decision provided that they have an affiliated company or organization in Finland. This explains the considerably low rate of positive decisions made for the applications based on self-employment.

Figure 2. First residence permits issued on the grounds of employment, all categories, 2023

Categories	Positive	Negative	Total	Percentage
Self-employment	117	228	345	34%
Work requiring a preliminary decision	10,165	2,778	12943	79%
Scientific research	1099	8	1107	99%
Internship	44	0	44	100%
Sports and coaching	331	47	378	88%
Specialist	1297	26	1323	98%
Other work	160	20	180	89%
Specialist, Blue Card	164	1	165	99%
Other internship	23	2	25	92%
National researcher	100	0	100	100%
Degree or research completed in Finland	32	8	40	80%
Seasonal work	930	236	1166	80%
Seasonal work, preliminary decision	193	49	242	80%
Intra-corporate transfer	44	0	44	100%
Startup entrepreneur	344	7	351	98%
Volunteering	38	4	42	90%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15081</b>	<b>3414</b>	<b>18495</b>	<b>82%</b>
<i>Source: Statistics Finland, employment</i>				

<sup>16</sup> [Key figures on immigration 2023 | Report](#)

## 3.2. Qualitative Insights

### Summary of the interviews with local public actors and companies

The interviews with local public actors and companies focused on the importance of recruiting international talent into Finland's workforce. Although the interviews covered various fields, the responses to specific questions about company expectations varied. The initial questions addressed the general situation in Northern Ostrobothnia's most populous settlements, including cities and municipalities such as Oulu, Raahe, Kuusamo, Ylivieska and Nivala. As the conversation progressed, the focus shifted to the challenges companies face in recruiting immigrants, encompassing both employer and employee perspectives. The subsequent questions aimed to understand what can be done to retain talent and the expectations companies have from government organizations to support their internationalization process. The answers to these questions will be discussed in this part of the report, occasionally including direct citations from the interviews.

During the traineeship period of three months (summer 2024), nine interviews were conducted with various involved actors. The interviewees represented organizations in different areas of Northern Ostrobothnia. Most were public actors promoting business (seudulliset yrityspalvelut in Finnish) and other interviews represented the point of view of employers who are involved in international recruitment directly or through staffing companies.

#### 3.2.1. Changes in the general situation of international recruitment in the area

Based on the interview results, the landscape of international talent recruitment has shown significant positive changes compared to a couple of decades ago. Currently, non-Finnish speaking employees are increasingly present in workplaces, except in specific fields that require fluency in Finnish language or specialized knowledge of Finnish practices, such as business, jurisdiction, or architecture. Overall, the recruitment of international talent is viewed positively, particularly in sectors like tourism, healthcare, services, and ICT. However, there remains considerable work to be done to improve inclusivity in other fields.

Surveys and feedback previously conducted by local public actors, such as Naturpolis in Kuusamo<sup>17</sup> indicate that most companies are interested in hiring international employees. Detailed statistics on this trend will be published in autumn 2024. Although the overall percentage of companies engaged in international recruitment is not high, a notable exception is the ICT sector, where a substantial number of high-tech companies have already recruited or are in the process of recruiting international talents<sup>18</sup>. When it comes to the metal and construction sector, employees with foreign backgrounds are predominantly demanded for blue-collar positions currently and are likely to continue to be in demand for the foreseeable future. In the ICT field, the most demanded skills are chip designing and semiconductor design, while in the biosector, bioskills are mostly demanded and hired from abroad. Other relevant fields in the

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<sup>17</sup> The results of the survey will be published in autumn 2024.

<sup>18</sup> [A network of Oulu-based ICT companies from startups to giants](#)

Kuusamo area for immigrant recruitment include healthcare, restaurants, construction sites, cleaning, logistics, and forestry, with a small percentage of need for specialists.

Regarding the services offered to companies when hiring internationally, the most popular responses were that local public actors and development organizations, such as NIHAK, support companies with writing applications, the interview process, bank account matters, and accommodation. Additional services from BusinessOulu include information sessions and training for companies wishing to hire internationally. Besides these services, companies can also benefit from available coaching programs with work coaches who can work with both the companies and the employees directly. However, a critical point noted by almost all interviewees was that companies are mostly unaware of these possibilities. This is one reason why local public actors do not receive many requests from companies for help in recruiting international candidates or with the overall recruitment process. For example, the City of Kuusamo offers services for newly arriving immigrants to help them settle in, such as finding family hobby clubs. An organization in Nivala organizes International Cafes to help immigrant employees integrate, and similar initiatives are present in Ylivieska, Sievi, and Kalajoki. It was also mentioned that info-sessions and training are available, but attendance levels are low due to the busy schedules of companies or various priorities on their agendas. Employers also mentioned that when employees are found through staffing companies, the initial steps for newly arriving employees are usually managed by the staffing company. Thus, employers do not have to allocate a mentor for new employees. However, most companies involved in international recruitment for a longer period already have a separate orientation program for newcomers, either formal or informal.

In the second part of the survey, the challenges faced by companies in international recruitment processes were examined. The first challenge, unanimously mentioned by all interviewees, was language skills. This includes not only Finnish but also English proficiency. These language barriers raise concerns for both employees and employers regarding integration into the work team, society, and overall quality of life. The arrival of refugees and asylum seekers with low English skills has increased the region's workforce with highly educated individuals, yet language skills remain an obstacle for both the employers and the employees. The difficulties with English and Finnish lead to challenges in delivering safety instructions. The language difficulties are not limited to the job seekers but also the employers because the senior managers do not always speak English to communicate with the candidate. Therefore, it is difficult to make a decision to open the company working language to foreign languages, if it has previously been exclusively Finnish.

The next most frequently mentioned challenge was the international recruitment process itself, particularly for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and micro-companies that have not previously engaged in recruiting international talent. This process is perceived as lengthy and overwhelming, involving multiple registrations and visits to various government offices. Such tasks discourage companies from hiring international talent. If a position is considered for non-Finnish workers, priority is often given to applicants already in Finland, who are likely to experience difficulties in obtaining a residence permit, municipality of residence, accommodation, or job-related certifications (e.g., hygiene pass, driving license).

The third most mentioned challenge was cultural differences, especially in work culture. An example provided was a community tradition related to hierarchy in family and professional life, which is rarely observed in Finnish working culture and thus presents a challenge for employers. Additionally, companies often lack information about recruitment training and information sessions or are unsure how to get involved in international talent recruitment. Therefore, companies may need support in the hiring process through increased awareness and communication. Another common response was that companies with no prior experience with non-Finnish employees are reluctant to hire their first international employee due to the “fear of the unknown” and the bureaucracy involved in the recruitment process. To encourage more international recruitment, a positive initial experience is crucial. Furthermore, it was seen important for public organizations to be personally involved in the recruitment process.

When asked about the possible training programs to better qualify for the roles of the newly arriving international employees, the companies and local public actors noted about the importance of language courses, face-to-face and online in smaller cities. The importance of education for newcomers about the Finnish language, working life and more possibilities for traineeships, as well as longer internships in various companies was among the answers. The services that are available for the companies to provide language courses for their employees were emphasized a number of times, yet the popularity of these courses is to be boosted by various parties.

Another point discussed in the interviews regarding the integration of immigrants into the workplace was the companies’ approaches and their orientation programs for newcomers. Generally, companies appear open to integrating international employees. Finnish companies recognize the benefits of having international talent in their offices and fields and are interested in hiring more employees from diverse backgrounds. The most common response regarding workplace orientation was that companies already involved in international recruitment, such as Nokia and FingerSoft, have separate orientation programs and step-by-step guidance for new employees. These larger companies typically know where to seek help if needed and can arrange training or integration courses. However, for SMEs and companies with little or no experience in international recruiting, the orientation program is usually managed by immediate supervisors, individual employees, or specifically assigned temporary mentors. This is particularly important in industries requiring thorough safety instructions, such as metal construction, welding, nature tourism, and restaurant services. Public actors, such as Raudaskylän Kristillinen Opisto, assist companies and new international employees by translating available safety instructions, for example, for Ukrainian workers, and generally support newcomers in integrating into society in smaller cities. The integration process can vary between organizations, ranging from small gathering events, such as international potlucks, to larger networking events where individuals from Finnish and non-Finnish backgrounds can come together and share experiences.

The last section of the interview questions addressed the challenges companies face in recruiting international talent and how to mitigate them. Firstly, partnerships with various organizations, including educational institutions and training providers, were highlighted. Language courses, qualification training, and adult education were considered crucial for integrating international employees. The University of Oulu, Oulu

University of Applied Sciences, OSAO, and other institutions play a significant role in attracting international talent to the region each year. These institutions are also essential in providing language courses and promoting the use of the language among internationals, thereby enhancing integration between Finnish and international students. However, the expectations of public organizations and public actors differ slightly from those of educational institutions. Most interviewees emphasized the need for a long-term goal and vision for internationalization and open discussions with public organizations such as AVI and ELY-keskus. Additionally, one challenge for smaller municipalities, such as the lack of DVV services, tax offices, and other public registrations, could be mitigated by offering fully digital services or mobile services that are regularly available, for example, for seasonal workers.

Overall, the interviewees were supportive and passionate about the integration and retention of international talents in the region. Language skills, working culture and administrative difficulties were the most popular answers in explaining the challenges of international recruitment. Although it is rarely observed to have a non-Finnish employee in the senior positions, speaking Finnish is not the skill to take the employee higher in the career ladder. In most cases, the companies look for the best match in terms of specifically required skills for a particular position rather than the language skills. Companies who already know the procedures for recruiting abroad or who receive support from staffing companies and who have good experiences with hiring internationals are likely to continue to hire more employees from a non-Finnish background. The smaller companies with little or no experience of international recruitment often are less enthusiastic for language and cultural change at the workplace, allocation of resources for orientation of the newcomers, or to make commitments for the legal and official procedures to hire an international talent.

# 4. Challenges in International Recruitment

## 4.1. Identified Barriers

### Language and cultural barriers

The Finnish language is different from the rest of the world and the Finnish language is used commonly in the country. Consequently, Finnish language proficiency is often expected for roles that involve customer interaction or service provision. However, certain sectors such as tourism, IT, machine building, and construction may have job vacancies that do not necessitate fluency in Finnish. Nevertheless, a basic understanding of the language is deemed important for smooth integration at work.

Language barriers pose challenges not only for job seekers but also for companies, as many procedures and legal matters are typically conducted in Finnish. This includes tasks like opening a bank account in Finland or dealing with tax-related issues. In response to the increased immigration over the past few decades, Finnish institutions have begun to offer services in English and occasionally in other languages such as Arabic, Somali, Russian, Ukrainian, Thai, among others.

To address these challenges, Finland is making efforts to eliminate language barriers by providing Finnish language courses for immigrants and employers who hire immigrants. Integration courses offered by various stakeholders also aim to facilitate a smoother transition and adaptation period.

Despite the language skills, it is also important to note that companies seek the "perfect match" for their workplace environment. Employers are often cautious when hiring their first immigrant employee, as it can be challenging to determine if the individual will fit into the company culture, even though the candidate might speak Finnish. Therefore, the language skills alone are not an obstacle for the company, however, the companies need to decide on the level of Finnish skills required to undertake the tasks of the position. If the candidate meets the language requirements and is adaptable to the work culture in the company, taking the initiative to hire the first foreign employee can be advantageous for the company in multiple ways. As per the findings of this report, the initial positive experience of company managers plays a significant role in the continued recruitment of team members from diverse cultural backgrounds.

### Regulatory and bureaucratic challenges

The administrative matters and long pre-recruitment process stand as a barrier for the companies, as hiring an international talent can often mean additional documents, permissions, attention-requiring details about the employment of the newcomer. The companies manage the job vacancy listing, shortlisting of applications, interviews, residence permits, arrival of the employee, finding an accommodation, on-boarding, orientation, and integration of the newcomer. Except in special urgent cases, these procedures might take months, therefore, it is discouraging for the companies to consider

international recruitment. In **the** case of hiring specialists, the application procedure has been simplified, thus, the waiting period is shortened.

Taking the difficulties into account, the companies sometimes consider recruiting internationals who already reside in Finland. This makes the procedure easier as the foreigners in Finland already have a residence permit (for example, based on family ties, or previous work-based residence), they are adapted to the Finnish society and working life to some extent, and they already have their network of acquaintances. This is especially the case for the individuals who move to Finland based on studies and actively take part in Finnish universities to graduate and become a part of labor force in Finland. The residents of Finland also have their accommodation and active address registrations; therefore, the residents have an advantage in the recruitment process. However, in the case of special skills to be employed from abroad, the companies prepare procedures, or they apply for support from the staffing companies to manage the process of recruitment.

In case of need for recruitment from abroad, another issue that comes to front is that the qualifications of the new international employee must be recognized and valid in Finland. The responsibility to check the validity of the documents usually falls on the company once the employee candidate provides the necessary confirmations, such as the apostille of the documents, translations and notary acknowledgement. In some countries the process of getting a confirmation from a notary might take a long time such as a month. Therefore, the urgency of the job vacancy plays a big role in the recruitment process.

It is important to note that companies with prior experience in international recruitment, either directly or through staffing agencies, are already acquainted with the necessary procedures and appear more confident in hiring international talent. Conversely, smaller companies that have not yet had the opportunity to hire their first foreign employee often find themselves in a different situation. They are frequently unfamiliar with the procedures required for international recruitment, which can make the process seem daunting.

### Integration and support services for international employees

In the international recruitment process, it is expected that companies provide adequate orientation and a smooth integration process for new employees. This may require additional resources, such as assigning an employee to mentor the newcomer for the initial weeks. However, hiring another employee for these services is not always feasible, especially for micro-companies and SMEs, as it presents a financial challenge.

For employees, the relocation and adaptation process may take longer if they move from abroad directly. The process is easier for former students or employees changing workplaces within Finland. Attracting new international talents to Northern Ostrobothnia can be challenging for both employees and employers. The positive attitude of new employees and their teammates plays a crucial role in the speed of adaptation.



To address these challenges, various services and programs are offered, such as integration courses, Finnish language courses, and training for companies on recruiting international talent. Additionally, municipalities with significant non-Finnish communities, like Oulu, Kuusamo, and Nivala, provide support services for settling in, family activities, and hobby clubs for spouses and children. These courses are often free or subsidized by the government, reducing costs for companies and employees.

Although these courses and trainings are available, the biggest problem lies in the fact that companies often are unaware of the possibilities. Therefore, they cannot use the services and opportunities for their international employees. The available services also include grant and funding possibilities, however, they are usually short-term projects covering a few years, usually, up to five, such as Talent Boost. The dissemination of information regarding these services may not have been optimally executed, potentially resulting in the awareness of outcomes being confined to a narrow network of known associates.

## 4.2. Case Studies

### Examples of strategy programs for talent attraction and integration

- Similarly, the City of Tampere Strategic Programme on International Talent Attraction and Migration<sup>19</sup> is among the specifically targeted strategies for improving international talent and its attraction channels, optimal utilization of talent in the region and a responsible reception for the newcomers. This strategy also highlights the importance of collaboration with various stakeholders. Tampere Skills Centre (OSKE) is an example to the various stakeholders mentioned in this strategy.

- Finally, the City of Helsinki reports that the new integration model<sup>20</sup> supports the employment of immigrant professionals at the schools and daycare centres. The model focuses on employment of pedagogical professionals with a foreign language skill, especially for the foreign families who speak Finnish and English on a beginner or basic level. However, the model considers language and vocational training to help participants gain necessary skills for further employment. The involved sides of the cooperation here are Helsinki Vocational College and Adult Institute and the Helsinki Finnish Adult Education Centre.

## 4.3. Support Systems

### Role of local and public organizations in supporting international recruitment

The identified challenges showed that the companies are often weakly aware of the available services and opportunities by the local public actors. One service that many local public actors referred to was TE Office and consider it as an intermediary between the international job seekers who already live in Finland and the companies who want to

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<sup>19</sup> [Strategic Programme on International Talent Attraction and Migration – 2.0 | 2019–2024 // 2023–2026](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Helsinki's new model supports the employment of immigrant professionals at schools and daycare centres | City of Helsinki](#)

hire international talents. TE Offices support job search, employment consultations, business activities, training and career coaching services. Various forms of financial support are available for the companies, such as pay subsidies, start-up grants for entrepreneurs and other support for the travel and maintenance costs during the job search activities.<sup>21</sup> TE Office services are often proliferated through public actors and the organizations who work with international talents, such as the University, OAMK, and OSAO. Therefore, international students are often well aware of the availability of these services, however, as the employer assistance issues, the recruitment, restructuring and training including international recruitment advice and workplace language training are a few of the most popular services.

### Existing services and resources for employers and international employees

International recruitment encompasses several dimensions, including the recruitment of non-Finnish individuals 1) who live in Finland, 2) who live in or are the citizens of the EU/EEA area, 3) who live in and are the citizens of non-EU/EEA countries. Each of these categories involves different considerations and processes, reflecting the diverse nature of international recruitment, therefore, there are existing services to support the recruitment process through EU/EEA and other countries, such as EURES Services and various staffing companies, respectively. Employers can also receive financial support<sup>22</sup> for induction training and adaptation costs when hiring from another EU country, Norway or Iceland.

Coming to staffing companies, when the company hires these services, the whole process goes through the staffing company starting from the job advertisement, screening, interviewing and assessment, language training if needed, and leading to job offer, accommodation, residence permits and their physical onboarding<sup>23</sup>. The visibility of these services is at a satisfactory level once the company decides to hire from abroad, as they are often discussed in International Recruitment events, info-sessions and trainings for companies. However, SMEs and micro-companies who have never been involved in international recruitment and have a specific circle of activity often have to find these services as they do not have sufficient resources to allocate an employee for hiring from abroad.

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<sup>21</sup> [TE Office - Suomi.fi](https://teoffice.fi)

<sup>22</sup> [Hiring an employee from abroad - Recruitment - Job Market Finland](https://www.jobmarket.fi/en/employment/hiring-an-employee-from-abroad)

<sup>23</sup> [Find a job in Finland \(infofinland.fi\)](https://www.infofinland.fi)

# 5. Recommendations

## 5.1. For Public Institutions

### Enhancing language and cultural integration programs

Taking into account that the interviewed public actors and companies repeatedly noted on the importance of language and cultural aspects in the integration process, it is likely that the companies are in the search of the perfect match, along with language and environment of the workplace. This means that the companies hire the candidates that can fit in the company culture, given that the candidate meets the language skills required for the completion of tasks of this position. Public organization can take a role in this regard by offering more and long-term integration programs for immigrants to teach the required language and introduce the newcomer to the Finnish working life. Such services have been established in various companies individually, and municipalities under different project names like settling in services, international café or others.

The public institutions also can see the perspectives of employers by taking more part in their working life. The Finnish word for this could be *jalkautua* - meaning that the public organizations are on the same line with the companies and actively participate in the recruitment process. From the perspective of the employers, it is important to experience the state's support positively through clear policies and incentives. A repeated reference was made to the Talent Boost program<sup>24</sup> and the Talent Hub project with the support of the government, as these programs eliminate the risks of the employers and the employees' concerns about their relocation, expenses and building new network in the area after the arrival. Such programs and the presence of the public organizations also help the retention of the international talent as the improvement on their career ladder is less challenging.

The collaboration between the public organizations and educational institutions is another useful tool for talent attraction and retention. With the admission of new international students, educational institutions contribute to the labor force of Finland, and TE Offices have a huge role in the newcomers' job search and their transition to the Finnish culture. Although the educational organizations are already involved in the promotion of cultural diversity and inclusivity, strengthening the partnerships with third parties is likely to bring more opportunities and international talents into the region.

### Improving support services for international employees and their families

When recruiting internationals, their family members are also affected by the decision of relocation. Therefore, companies consider the family relocation when an immigrant starts working for them. A lot of organizations mentioned that they help with

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<sup>24</sup> [International recruitments are part of Finland's foreign and security policy - Finnish Government \(valtioneuvosto.fi\)](https://valtioneuvosto.fi)

the integration and hobby activities for the spouses and the kids of the employee. This support process includes the search for daycare centres and schools, accommodation, transportation, healthcare and other administrative actions. If the family members do not speak Finnish or English, their integration process is also taken care of by the companies. Therefore, in case of small and medium enterprises, it is more difficult to allocate an employee to arrange these necessities. However, there are also services like Work in Finland which are specialized in giving consultations in specific cases of immigrants.

Public organizations can significantly enhance international recruitment efforts by more promotion of available services, increasing its visibility in the work sites ensuring that Finland remains competitive and attractive for international employees in the global talent market.

## 5.2. For Companies

### Strategies for attracting and retaining international talent

Companies with successful international recruitment histories often emphasize their focus on the "most suitable candidate" regardless of hiring directly, or through staffing companies. Similarly, EURES services support the companies' demand for international talent, if needed, from the EU countries. The new strategies of companies can also include the hiring of international talents, how to assess the needs of skills, foreign qualifications, orientation and further integration of international talents into the workplace culture and the Finnish society. Therefore, integrating the international recruitment and the attraction of new talents can be included in the strategy of the companies.

Secondly, the recruitment of international talents depends on the company attitudes, the positive experiences shared by the companies who have hired non-Finnish employees. The networking events focusing on the international recruitment could be useful for the proliferation of positive attitude among the companies.

Thirdly, the companies might consider creating stronger partnerships with third parties, such as educational organizations and public actors like BusinessOulu to get familiarized more with the recruitment process and eliminate the perceptions about the difficulties of recruiting from abroad. It is also important to share the experiences and the step-by-step guidance by the bigger actors, or to attend the training sessions to learn the process in detail and obtain more contacts.

### Creating inclusive and supportive work environments

When organizations hire from abroad, or select a non-Finnish individual, it is important to prepare the necessary conditions for such a transformation. This can bring changes in working language, attitude and overall flow of work in the company until the newcomer is fully integrated. Firstly, the company might support the arrival of the employee through the administrative processes, such as application for residence permit, accommodation, registration and bank account opening. Moreover, the newcomers can be introduced to Finnish language courses, but also in order to eliminate the barriers of

communications the existing employees can also be offered a language course in English, in case of weak language skills.

## 6. Conclusion

The main objective of this research was to address the challenges of the companies and tackle the international recruitment matters in terms of support and expectations of the organizations. Throughout the research, the interview respondents were asked to describe the potential challenges of the companies when hiring non-Finnish employees. Almost all of the employees mentioned that the challenges regarding language proficiency come first. In many job vacancies, the candidate is required to speak some level of Finnish, however, the assessment of proficiency is yet to be defined. In some cases, the jobseeker does not have any common language with the colleagues or the management. In such a case, language skills are visibly the biggest challenge. Secondly, "the fear of the unknown" and the change resistance at the workplaces is another challenge posing difficulties in hiring internationals as this process might change the working environment in the company. Therefore, the companies with little or no experience in international recruitment are reluctant to get involved in the process, however, companies with international staff members are already well familiar with the process and are more likely to hire more internationals. The third challenge for the companies is the administrative tasks to complete before a successful international recruitment. This procedure includes the hiring stages from the job announcement, shortlisting the candidates, interviewing and supporting the foreign employee with a safe arrival to Finland, in case of hiring from abroad.

Besides the challenges, the importance of international recruitment was emphasized in all interviews. Some of the central notes are that 1) immigrants have become an important part of labor force which stimulates the economic life of the country, 2) international talents bring specific skills and knowledge to the workplace and 3) cultural diversity and inclusivity of the society are encouraged by the existing nationalities at the workplace and in society. In order to increase the number of international employees, the companies are usually offered training and information sessions by different actors, for example, BusinessOulu; and for immigrants, the integration and language courses from TE Office and Villa Victor are a few of the most popular options.

Recommendations on how to attract international talents and retain them in Northern Ostrobothnia mostly focused on the project fundings and durations, more cooperation with the actors of the field, and more positive attitude towards the "first step of hiring an international". The companies with positive experience in international recruitment are likely to add more international talents to their personnel and to share their experience in a practical environment. The companies with less diverse nationalities/ethnicities also mentioned their interest in hiring a non-Finnish staff member, although most of the vacant positions were blue-collar jobs, rather than asiantuntija/specialists. The two directions of the recommendations were identified as a result of this report: for the public organizations - enhancing language and integration programs and cooperation with educational institutions, as well as, improving support systems for the families of the international talents; for the companies - including the international recruitment process in the company strategies through partnerships with service providers, educational institutions and public organizations, creating a supportive and inclusive work environment for a smooth transition process of the newcomer.

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