



HIWE – High-Skilled
Internationals: Bottom-Up
Insights into Policy Innovation
for Work and
Entrepreneurship in Finland

How to Promote the Employment and Entrepreneurship of Highly Skilled Internationals in Finland?

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Introduction

Research shows that highly skilled internationals bring significant benefits to the economy, innovation, and entrepreneurship of host societies which explains why today states compete for international talent. The question of why some countries, regions, and sectors attract international talent and others do not is a pressing one for policymakers.

Finland too seeks to attract international talent. For example, the [Roadmap for Education-based and Work-based Immigration 2035](#), [the Sustainability Roadmap of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government](#), and [the government programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo](#) portray Finland as an internationally competitive and attractive place to study, work, start a business and live.

As studies show, internationals are attracted to Finland by affordable and high-quality health, welfare and education services, stable society, and reliable institutions. In contrast, internationals' perception of services specifically aimed at them is more critical. In the HIWE project, we have found that internationals see the service system as complex and difficult to use, or they are not familiar with the services to begin with. The design of services does not take sufficient account of the needs and aspirations of internationals and employers. Their voices are also easily overlooked in policy making. All these factors influence the way internationals assess Finland's attractiveness when considering where to live and advance their careers in the future.

We have addressed these challenges from multiple perspectives. [We have interviewed](#) internationals from diverse backgrounds and sectors, mapped [local service ecosystems](#), analysed [policies](#), and consulted stakeholders. Our research reveals an interesting paradox. On the one hand, Finland has actively developed policies and services to promote the recruitment, entrepreneurship, and work life participation of international talent. On the other hand, talents still face major challenges in all these areas.

As an attempt to solve this paradox, the HIWE project organised [workshops](#) with international talents and representatives from the public sector, cities, labour market organisations, companies, and universities. Discussions within the workshops affirmed that change is needed throughout society, from how internationals are perceived in general and what kind of policies are targeted at them (Policy Guidelines), to how services for talents are organised (Organisation of Services), and how they are implemented and developed at a practical level (Services in Practice).

Our findings suggest that what is needed is not so much new services but utilising existing services more efficiently. The recommendations of this policy brief are based on how the current service system looks like from the perspective of users, especially international talent, and how it could be made more responsive to users' needs.

In this publication, we focus on the service system for highly skilled internationals. Please see our [website](#) for a roadmap of how to put these into action. Please also see our policy brief "How to Promote the Participation of Highly Skilled Internationals in Policy Making, Service Development, and Workplaces in Finland?" for recommendations on how to increase internationals' participation in society.

POLICY GUIDELINES

Recommendation 1: Promote a comprehensive change in mindsets and policy regarding the importance of international talent in society.

Why is change needed?

According to the results of the HIWE project, highly skilled internationals perceive the public debate in Finland about the need for foreign talent as contradictory to their own experiences. In practice, their experience and skills are often not valued, and they do not feel part of society. Furthermore, especially the non-European talents experience racism and discrimination. For their part, immigration policy experts have pointed out that a consistent immigration and integration policy is hampered by the different priorities of changing governments, the lack of cooperation between policy areas, competition between geographical areas, and the allocation of resources to temporary projects and ad hoc solutions. Experts and practitioners agree that Finland needs a major change in mindsets and attitudes, both in policy making and in society at large. Finland should clarify what it expects from highly skilled internationals and what their rights and obligations are and pursue a coherent policy accordingly.

Means for making the change:

Vision: Develop a new long-term vision for skills-based immigration in Finland. The vision takes a holistic view of the social, economic, and cultural importance of international talent for Finnish society (cf. UN pillars of sustainable development). It also outlines the kind of service system Finland wants in the future.

Mission: Establish common principles to guide a skills-based immigration policy. The key principles are sustainability, diversity, inclusiveness, encouragement, and trust.

Leadership: Develop the public sector as a benchmark for recruiting international talent as well as developing diverse and inclusive workplace practices. Increase and monitor the share of international workers in the public sector. Address in a coherent way the challenges of language requirements and the identification of previous education and work experience.



ORGANISATION OF SERVICES

Recommendation 2: Ensure that services are easy to find, understand, use, and influence. Develop the service structure and practices of skilled migration to live up to this promise.

Why is change needed?

The results of the HIWE project show that, despite the efforts made in Finland, there are still many problems with the services offered to highly skilled internationals. Services are often scattered, difficult to find and access, or they are not available in English. In addition, service providers lack expertise in areas such as skills identification, pertinent guidance of internationals, and language skills. HIWE's research material includes examples of service situations where a talent has been left alone with their problems without advice and guidance forward. There are also problems with services for employers. Although such services exist, they are not widely known and effectively used. In addition, services are not always based on the best available knowledge. Instead, they are often designed without considering the actual experiences and needs of internationals and employers. These findings point to the need for changes in both the structure and the practices of services for international talent.

Means for making the change:

'One contact': Promote a practice whereby the first provider takes responsibility for advising the client and refers them on if necessary. Each service point is then the 'right one', and the client is not left to deal with their situation alone.

'One-stop shop': Promote the practice of permanently concentrating key services in a single point of contact, accessible physically, online, and by telephone.

One identification: Promote the adoption and development of digital service platforms and digital identity to streamline service processes and reduce paperwork.

Multilingualism: Ensure that services for international talent are also available in (at least) English at all service points. Make sure that all mandatory documents required for entry, study, employment, and residence can be completed in (at least) English.

Regular communication: Communicate regularly about services to users in a multi-directional and multi-channel way, using social media, personal communication, associations, migrants' own networks, 'city ambassadors', and other forms of communication.

SERVICES IN PRACTICE

Recommendation 3: Develop existing skills-based immigration services to make the labour market more flexible and promote the position of highly skilled internationals in the market.

Why is change needed?

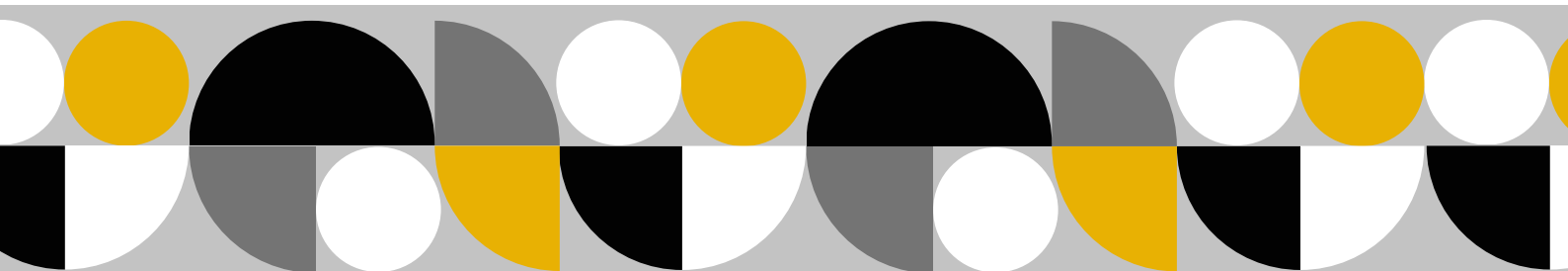
The HIWE project has found that, from the perspective of international talent, the labour market is global, but in Finland the requirements for working life are often approached from a national point of view. As a result, the labour market in Finland is partly inaccessible to internationals. Challenges include, in particular, requirements for Finnish language skills, a Finnish degree, and work experience or a network of contacts in Finland. Other perceived problems include the lack of encounters between skilled internationals and potential employers and, relatedly, insufficient guidance from the part of employment services. Those who do find employment may face language barriers, 'glass ceilings', and social isolation. Moreover, international talents do not see entrepreneurship as an attractive career option. This is partly due to current residence permit policies, which do not consider the changing work situations of internationals and do not provide flexible opportunities to move between paid employment and entrepreneurship. In addition, companies need more incentives and support to recruit international talent and to remove bureaucratic obstacles.

Means for making the change:

Employment services: Improve the identification of previous education and work experience of international talent. Develop employment services to match the specific skills of internationals and improve their employability skills. Provide and actively promote a wide range of opportunities for international talent to learn the national languages.

Entrepreneurship services: Change residence permit policies so that a single permit and the conditions for its renewal (minimum monthly income and maximum number of unemployment months) allow both paid employment and self-employment. Make sure the process for assessing the business plan of new entrepreneur is transparent and comprehensible for the applicant. Provide more courses for international students on Finnish working life and entrepreneurship.

Employer services: Promote peer mentoring between companies so that they can exchange experiences of recruiting international workers. Encourage companies to re-evaluate their requirements for language skills and Finnish education and work experience. Develop a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) index to assess and compare how companies and organisations are implementing the DEIB values in their workplaces.





About HIWE

HIWE project studies highly skilled internationals' experiences of living, working and entrepreneurship in Finland. As an outcome of our analysis, we make recommendations for policies and services that can increase the opportunities of international talents to stay in Finland. HIWE team is most grateful to individuals and organisations who provided valuable insights, experiences, and opinions, which we then synthesised. HIWE project is implemented jointly by the University of Eastern Finland and the University of Turku, and it is funded by Business Finland. www.hiwe.fi