



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

How to Promote the Participation of Highly Skilled Internationals in Policy Making, Service Development, and Workplaces in Finland?

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Introduction

Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's government envisions making Finland a competitive and appealing destination for professionals. Enhancing the participation of highly skilled internationals at all levels of society is crucial not only for realising this vision but also for the retention and well-being of these internationals and the development of Finnish society more generally.

Existing policy programmes and services aim at retaining immigrants and promoting their social integration. However, these initiatives often overlook the importance of including internationals in decision-making processes that directly affect them.

Our research findings reveal that a significant number of international talents feel overlooked within Finnish society and struggle to find outlets to make their voices heard, even though they hope to participate in and influence the service and policy development. However, highly skilled internationals are a heterogeneous group, and their preferences for participation methods and the depth of their involvement differ.

It's vital to find new ways to integrate the unique viewpoints, experiences, and skills of highly skilled internationals in decision-making that regards them. The policy recommendations published here seek to improve the participation of highly skilled internationals in three key areas: public policy making, service development, and workplaces.

The recommendations are targeted at organisations and individuals who initiate and facilitate collaborative processes involving highly skilled internationals, their associations, public and private employers, decision-makers, and various service providers.

The recommendations were developed through several collaborative processes and engaged over a hundred people. Please also see our policy brief "How to Promote the Employment and Entrepreneurship of Highly Skilled Internationals in Finland?", available on our website: www.hiwe.fi/policyrecommendations.



Recommendation 1. Public policymaking for integrating international talent into the Finnish working life should rely more heavily on collaboration between policymakers, internationals, and other stakeholders.

Collaboration between internationals, policymakers, and other stakeholders is crucial for integrating talents into society and fostering knowledge-based policy making. Studies show that immigrants, including international talents, participate less in political and social activities. Also, among internationals, the level of organisation in both labour market and professional associations, as well as in migrant organisations, is relatively low. Engaging highly skilled internationals in collaborative governance in public policy and decision-making is essential. For example, participatory budgeting, citizen juries, or deliberative mini-publics can be employed as methods of participation.

Means for making the change:

Develop a national online feedback and initiative platform for highly skilled internationals similar to the national Citizen Initiative. This platform should be accessible to all internationals living in Finland. The platform needs to have a structured process to act on submitted feedback and initiatives.

Develop regional interaction with highly skilled internationals. Build a bridge between decision-makers and international talents. Locally, there should be more meetings and regular discussions between internationals and decision-makers, for example through facilitated workshops or Councils of Immigrants.

Develop and strengthen partnerships between the public sector and migrant associations as well as other civil society organizations. The role of non-governmental organizations is important in facilitating the participation of highly skilled migrants in public policy development.

Encourage and enable the participation of highly skilled internationals in civil society and labour market organizations. Civil society actors and labour market organisations are involved in national public policy development in Finland, making them important channels of influence for highly skilled internationals. To enable internationals to engage more actively with them, organisations need to develop the inclusivity of their practices.

Encourage highly skilled internationals to form formal associations. Having formal associations makes it easier to contribute to drafting of legislation.



Recommendation 2. Highly skilled internationals should be more engaged in designing and improving public and private services that focus on their employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

HIWE project's research reveals that highly skilled internationals often find existing services hard to find, access, and utilise. These services do not always meet their needs, particularly in terms of finding employment. Increased collaboration between service providers is necessary, with well-defined roles and dedicated funding. Currently, service agents are not always aware of the offerings and practices of other providers, leaving international talents without guidance and causing them to fall through the cracks between services. These issues highlight the need for internationals to be more involved in designing the services and ensuring that the services are relevant and user-friendly from their perspective.

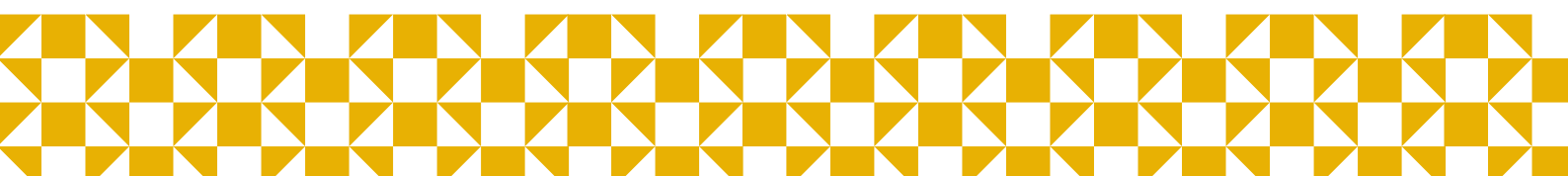
Means for making the change:

Implement participatory processes that involve highly skilled migrants in the planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of public services. Using focus groups, collaborative platforms, and co-creation workshops among other methods can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of these services.

Develop day-to-day feedback collection and utilisation. View every service encounter with highly skilled internationals as a possibility to learn about their needs, challenges, and problems as well as ideas for addressing and solving them. Strengthen and develop feedback documentation and analysis practices throughout the service chain and encourage service personnel to document the feedback they receive.

Support capacity building. Provide capacity building programs for service providers and other stakeholders to enhance their understanding of the needs, expectations, and potential contributions of highly skilled migrants. This can foster a more inclusive and collaborative environment.

Recognise and reward. Recognize and reward the contributions of highly skilled migrants to public service development. This can motivate them to participate more actively and can also encourage other migrants to get involved. Increasing involvement of migrants also lowers the power imbalance between different stakeholder groups.



Recommendation 3. Workplace inclusivity and equal opportunities for all employees should be developed in collaboration with the employer, the work community, service providers, and other employers interested in promoting inclusivity.

Private, public, and third sector workplaces should offer equal opportunities for all employees, follow diversity, equality, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) principles, and allow internationals to influence these practices. Interviews of the HIWE project demonstrate that experiences of internationals in Finnish organisations vary. Some appreciate the low hierarchies, autonomy, and work-life balance, while others feel isolated or discriminated against due to their background. As multicultural workplaces become more common, organisations need to understand the needs of internationals, access information on available services and best practices, and support the societal integration of new employees. Collaboration with international talents, service providers, and other employers can help address these issues.

Means for making the change:

Enhance psychological safety and support in organisations. Part of this can be low organisational hierarchies, culture of openness, and offering confidential feedback channels. Lower the threshold for participation.

Create channels for internationals to voice their opinions and participate in decision-making boards at workplaces. Engage internationals in discussions and decisions related to the work environment, such as company policies, project directions, or team dynamics. Consider, for example, establishing a DEIB Advisory Board, Council or Committee at the workplace.

Highlight positive examples. Publicise positive experiences and success stories of internationals being involved in decision-making. Promote awareness of internationals as an asset and 'added value' to decision-making.

Be conscious of language used in working and communication. Use English when appropriate, implement bilingual onboarding processes, and enable language learning for employees at the workplace both formally and informally.



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