



SEINÄJOEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU  
SEINÄJOKI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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# **International employees' experiences of finding employment in South Ostrobothnia**

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SEINÄJOKI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

## Thesis abstract

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This thesis researches the employment and recruiting of international employees in the South Ostrobothnia region. The thesis was commissioned by the Prow towards South Ostrobothnia project, managed by Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences. The goal of the thesis was to research the experiences of international employees of searching for employment in South Ostrobothnia, as well as the experiences South Ostrobothnian companies' experiences of recruiting and working with international employees.

The first section of the thesis focuses on immigration to Finland and the current state of immigrant employment in Finland. In addition, the thesis examines the population trend in South Ostrobothnia, as well as immigration to the region.

The research data was collected using semi-structured interviews. Five companies were contacted, and a total of ten interviews were conducted. Five of the interviews were held with supervisors or recruiters, and the rest with the international employees of the company.

Based on the interview results, international employees have trouble finding employment in the region. However, with the help offered by schools or institutes of higher learning, they have been able to get in contact with local companies via practical training or student projects. International employees also found that being able to visit a company was helpful in the process of finding employment. In general, companies considered finding employees to be difficult, as there was a lack of individuals with the right skills and motivation.

The key element affecting the employability of immigrants is the language barrier. In this thesis, it was noted that having adequate Finnish language skills were only necessary at companies in the social and healthcare industries. In other industries, language requirements mostly included sufficient English language skills. On the other hand, employees themselves found that the ability to speak Finnish was beneficial in their search for employment.

Based on the results of the study, a plan for co-operation between companies, vocational schools and institutes of higher learning was drafted.

<sup>1</sup> Keywords: employer, employment, language skills, immigration

SEINÄJOEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

## Opinnäytetyön tiivistelmä

Koulutusyksikkö: Liiketoiminta ja kulttuuri

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Tämän opinnäytetyö tutkii maahanmuuttajien työllistymistä ja rekrytoimista Etelä-Pohjanmaan maakunnassa. Opinnäytetyö tehtiin Kokka kohti Etelä-Pohjanmaata -hankkeelle, jonka vetämisestä vastaa Seinäjoen Ammattikorkeakoulu. Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli tutkia kokemuksia, joita maahanmuuttajilla on ollut Etelä-Pohjanmaalla, kun he ovat etsineet työpaikkaa. Myös paikallisten yritysten kokemuksia maahanmuuttajien työllistymisestä tutkittiin.

Opinnäytetyön alussa käsitellään maahanmuuttoa ja maahanmuuttajien työllistymistä Suomessa sekä Etelä-Pohjanmaan väestönkehitystä ja maahanmuuton kehitystä.

Tutkimus tehtiin teemahaastattelumenetelmää käyttäen. Yhteensä viiteen yhtiöön otettiin yhteyttä, ja haastattelut toteutettiin haastatteleamalla viittä työntekijää sekä viittä esimiestä.

Tutkimustulosten perusteella kansainvälisillä työntekijöillä on ollut vaikeuksia löytää töitä Etelä-Pohjanmaalta. Harjoittelupaikat ja opiskelijaprojektit ovat kuitenkin mahdollistaneet kansainvälisten työntekijöiden työllistymisen ja tutustumisen paikallisiin yhtiöihin. Kansainväliset työntekijät olivat myös sitä mieltä, että mahdollisuus vieraila yrityksessä paransi työllistymisen mahdollisuuksia. Eteläpohjalaiset yritykset olivat enimmäkseen sitä mieltä, että työntekijöiden löytäminen on vaikeaa, koska riittävän osaavia työntekijöitä ei ole saatavilla.

Puhuttaessa maahanmuuttajien työllistymisestä tulee esiin usein kielimuuri. Tässä tutkimuksessa selvisi, että hyvä suomen kielen taito vaadittiin vain sosiaali- ja terveysalan töissä. Muilla aloilla vaatimuksena oli riittävä englannin kielen osaaminen. Kansainväliset työntekijät katsoivat kuitenkin itse, että hyvä suomen kielen taito oli eduksi heille työn haussa.

Tutkimustulosten perusteella luotiin suunnitelmaehdotus yhteistyöstä yritysten, ammattikoulujen ja korkeakoulujen välisestä yhteistyöstä.

<sup>1</sup> Asiasanat: maahanmuutto, työnantaja, työllistyminen, kielitaito

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Thesis abstract .....	2
Opinnäytetyön tiivistelmä .....	3
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	4
Pictures, Figures and Tables .....	6
Terms and Abbreviations.....	8
1 Introduction .....	9
2 Background of immigration and immigrant employment in Finland.....	10
2.1 Immigration to Finland.....	10
2.2 Education of immigrants in Finland.....	14
2.3 Employment of immigrants in Finland.....	14
2.3.1 Hiring of immigrants in Finnish companies .....	15
2.3.2 Hiring of international students in small and medium-sized companies .....	23
2.3.3 What benefits can international students bring to companies .....	25
3 South Ostrobothnia .....	28
3.1 Entrepreneurship in South Ostrobothnia .....	28
3.2 Population trend.....	30
3.3 Immigrants of South Ostrobothnia.....	31
3.4 Employment of immigrants in South Ostrobothnia region.....	32
3.5 Employment of Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences alumni in the region.....	33
4 Prow towards Southern Ostrobothnia.....	35
5 Research method.....	36
5.1 Qualitative research .....	36
5.2 Interview.....	36
5.3 Data collection.....	37
5.4 Analysis of data.....	39
6 Interview result .....	41
6.1 Finding employment.....	41

6.2 Finding employees .....	42
6.3 Language requirements .....	43
6.4 Orientation .....	45
6.5 Integration to workplace .....	45
7 Development proposal.....	47
8 Conclusions.....	48
8.1 Reflecting on the results.....	48
8.2 Research reliability and validity .....	49
8.3 Future recommendations .....	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	52
APPENDICES .....	57

## Pictures, Figures and Tables

Picture 1 Foreign-born population by country of birth, 1 January 2019 (Eurostat 2020) .....	11
Picture 2 The largest background groups with a foreign background 2019 (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020a).....	12
Picture 3 Age structure of people with a foreign background 2019 (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020a).....	13
Picture 4 The shares of foreign citizens in Finland's largest cities 2017(Miettinen 2020b) ....	13
Picture 5 Employment rate (15-64) by sex and country of birth (in Finland) 2019 (Labor force survey by Eurostat according to Immigration Department) .....	15
Picture 6 How hard employment is (Taloustutkimus Oy, 2020) .....	16
Picture 7 How willing are companies to hire unemployed applicant (Taloustutkimus Oy, 2020).....	17
Picture 8 Employer thinks that immigrant's Finnish language must be close to fluent (Taloustutkimus Oy, 2020).....	18
Picture 9 Employer thinks immigrants have a hard time adapting to the practices of Finnish working life (Taloustutkimus Oy, 2020).....	19
Picture 10 immigrants are as skilled employees as Finnish employees are (Taloustutkimus Oy,2020).....	19
Picture 11 Country of origin affects how well employee performs on the job (Taloustutkimus Oy, 2020).....	20
Picture 12 Which countries companies would prefer to hire (Taloustutkimus Oy 2020) .....	21
Picture 13 Which countries companies would prefer not to hire (Taloustutkimus Oy 2020)...	22
Picture 14 Willingness to pay language training (Taloustutkimus, 2020) .....	23

Picture 15 Purpose of hiring international expert (Owal Group Oy 2017) .....	24
Picture 16 Reason why companies have not hired international experts (Owal Group Oy 2017).....	25
Picture 17 Municipalities of South Ostrobothnia (Etelä-Pohjanmaan liitto 2020) .....	28
Picture 18 Number of opened and closed companies in South Ostrobothnia. (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT). 2020c). .....	29
Picture 19 Does your company have experience of international employees? (Lehtinen 2018, 13).....	30
Picture 20 Population forecast 2019: Population 31.12 (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT), 2020d).....	31
Picture 21 Numbers and shares of persons with foreign background by area, 2019 (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020b) .....	32
Picture 22 Employment at the end of December 2020 (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020e).....	33
Picture 23 Employment of internationals at the end of December 2020 (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020e).....	33

## Terms and Abbreviations

<b>ESR</b>	European Social Fund.
<b>ELY centre</b>	Centre for economic Development, Transport and Environment
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Co-operation and development
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High commissioner for Refugees
<b>IT</b>	Information technology
<b>Etelä-Pohjanmaa</b>	South Ostrobothnia
<b>CV</b>	Curriculum Vitae
<b>Kokka kohti</b>	Prow towards South Ostrobothnia
<b>Etelä-Pohjanmaata</b>	
<b>Kotona Suomessa</b>	Home at Finland



## 1 Introduction

South Ostrobothnia is a region in western Finland. The region has one of the lowest percentages of unemployment in the country which is supported by the tradition entrepreneurship in the region. Companies in the region are troubled from the lack of skilled employees and this problem is going to get worse due the ageing of the population and population migration to other regions in the coming years. There has been a lot of discussion how this problem could be solved, and the most common suggestion is immigration. With immigration companies can get the needed employees as well as increase the internationalization of the company. However, South Ostrobothnia has the country's lowest percentage of people with foreign background compared the total population of the region.

The international companies operating in the region have experience of working with international employees and immigrants. Meanwhile, small and medium-sized companies are lacking in experience but might be willing to recruit international employees after gaining some experience and exposure to international employment. In addition, the region has access to international students who want to stay in the region after graduation but finding an employment fitting of their education is challenging.

In this thesis the goal is to explore what kind of experiences the employed immigrants have had in the region and what kind of companies have recruited them. This thesis tries to seek ways of which immigrants themselves and the companies could make recruiting and finding employment more efficient for both parties.

## 2 Background of immigration and immigrant employment in Finland

### 2.1 Immigration to Finland

There has been practically zero immigration to Finland after the second World War. Up until the 1990s Finland was mostly country from where population would emigrate to Sweden or Northern America. (Häkkinen & Mattila 2011,18.) During the 1980s immigration was done for family reunification or refugee purposes (Miettinen 2020b). The first cases of immigration to Finland began in early 1990s (Häkkinen & Mattila 2011,18). The surge in immigration that happened in the early 1990s was due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fleeing Ingrian Finns (Leitzinger, 2010, according to Saari, 2013). Also, Somali refugees who travelled through the collapsing Soviet Union to Finland. In addition, the crisis in the former Yugoslavia brought refugees to Finland.

In 1990, Finland had over 26 000 noncitizens, 64 000 persons who were born abroad and 37 000 people with a foreign background and 24 000 people who spoke foreign language. In contrast, next year 37 000 noncitizen, 77 000 persons born abroad and 49 000 people who had a foreign background. This increase in all the categories would indicate that Finland received over 10 000 migrants in a span of one-year. (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020b.) Because of the steadily rising number of immigrants there is a need for research that focuses on the integration of these people (Häkkinen & Mattila 2011,18).

Immigration is still relatively minor in Finland compared with other European countries. In 2019 according to Eurostat (2020) the foreign-born population in Finland was 377 400 which equals 6.8% of total population. Compared with Sweden with the foreign-born population of 1 954 100 which equals 19.1% of the total population or Norway 841 600 equalling 15.8 % of total population. (Eurostat 2020.)

## Foreign-born population by country of birth, 1 January 2019

	Total		Born in another EU-27 Member State		Born in a non-EU-27 country	
	(thousand)	(% of the population)	(thousand)	(% of the population)	(thousand)	(% of the population)
Belgium	1.968,1	17,2	879,2	7,7	1.088,9	9,5
Bulgaria	172,0	2,5	51,1	0,7	120,9	1,7
Czechia	507,1	4,8	192,4	1,8	314,7	3,0
Denmark	707,9	12,2	226,2	3,9	481,6	8,3
Germany	14.879,6	17,9	.	.	.	.
Estonia	197,9	14,9	24,4	1,8	173,5	13,1
Ireland (*)	844,4	17,2	.	.	.	.
Greece	1.307,5	12,2	.	.	.	.
Spain	6.539,0	13,9	1.648,4	3,5	4.890,6	10,4
France (†)	8.355,0	12,5	2.015,9	3,0	6.339,1	9,5
Croatia	527,3	12,9	.	.	.	.
Italy	6.298,0	10,4	1.771,9	2,9	4.526,1	7,5
Cyprus	185,5	21,2	.	.	.	.
Latvia	241,8	12,6	23,8	1,2	217,9	11,4
Lithuania	138,2	4,9	16,7	0,6	121,5	4,3
Luxembourg	290,6	47,3	209,5	34,1	81,1	13,2
Hungary	564,8	5,8	315,1	3,2	249,6	2,6
Malta	99,6	20,2	.	.	.	.
Netherlands	2.298,7	13,3	591,7	3,4	1.707,0	9,9
Austria	1.722,8	19,4	773,4	8,7	949,4	10,7
Poland	760,8	2,0	.	.	.	.
Portugal	959,2	9,3	.	.	.	.
Romania	611,6	3,2	217,1	1,1	394,6	2,0
Slovenia	265,1	12,7	65,1	3,1	200,0	9,6
Slovakia	194,4	3,6	150,0	2,8	44,4	0,8
Finland	377,4	6,8	120,2	2,2	257,1	4,7
Sweden	1.954,1	19,1	528,7	5,2	1.425,4	13,9
United Kingdom	9.469,0	14,2	3.660,0	5,5	5.809,0	8,7
Iceland	60,0	16,8	40,8	11,4	19,2	5,4
Liechtenstein	25,6	66,6	8,3	21,6	17,3	45,0
Norway	841,6	15,8	337,9	6,3	503,7	9,5
Switzerland	2.469,4	28,9	1.389,5	16,3	1.079,9	12,6

Note: The individual values do not add up to the total due to rounding and the exclusion of the 'unknown' country of birth group from the table.

Germany, Ireland, Greece, Croatia, Cyprus, Malta, Poland and Portugal are not displayed because no detailed data by individual country are available.

(\*) Estimate.

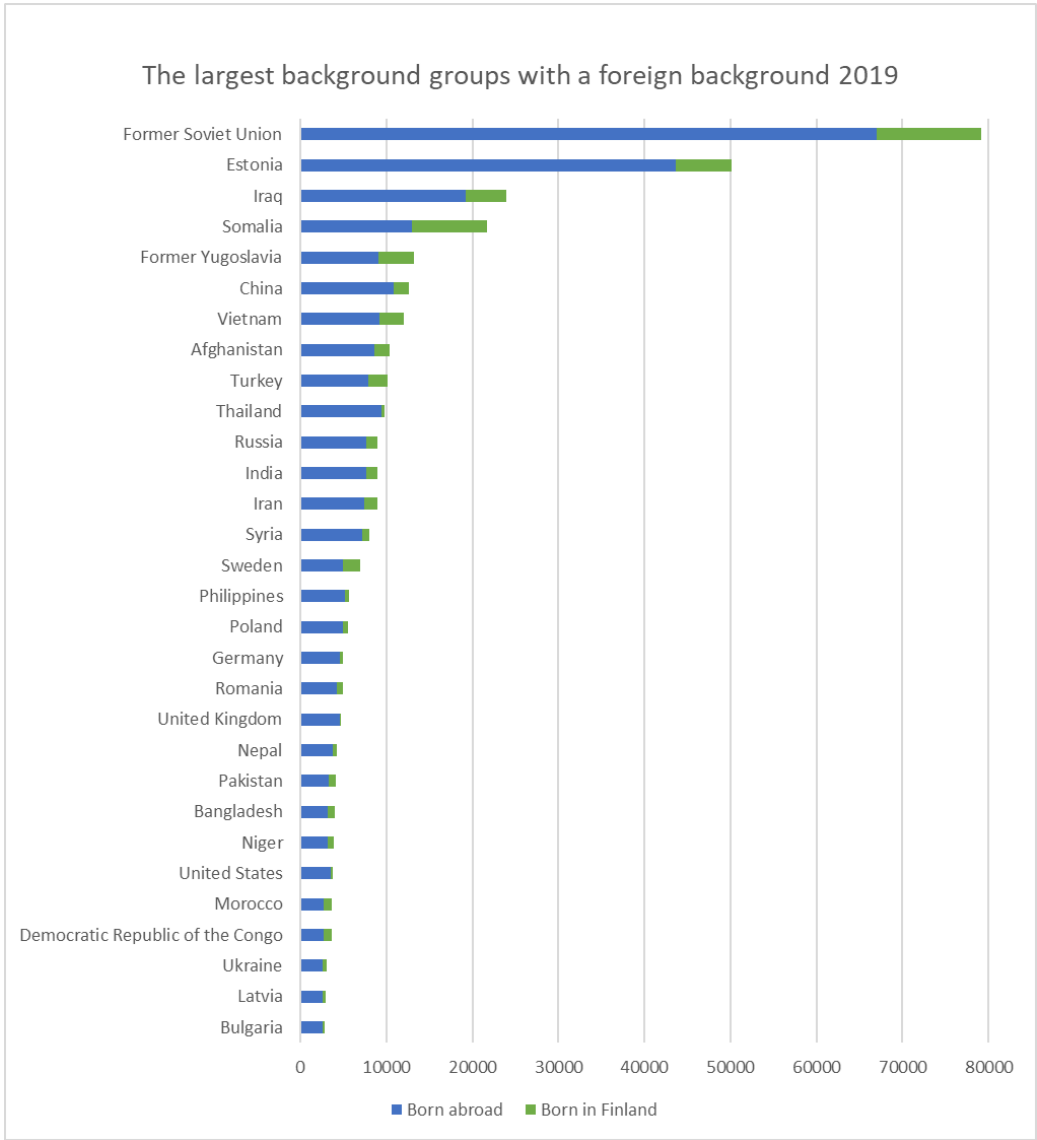
(†) Provisional.

eurostat 

Source: Eurostat (online data code: migr\_pop3ctb)

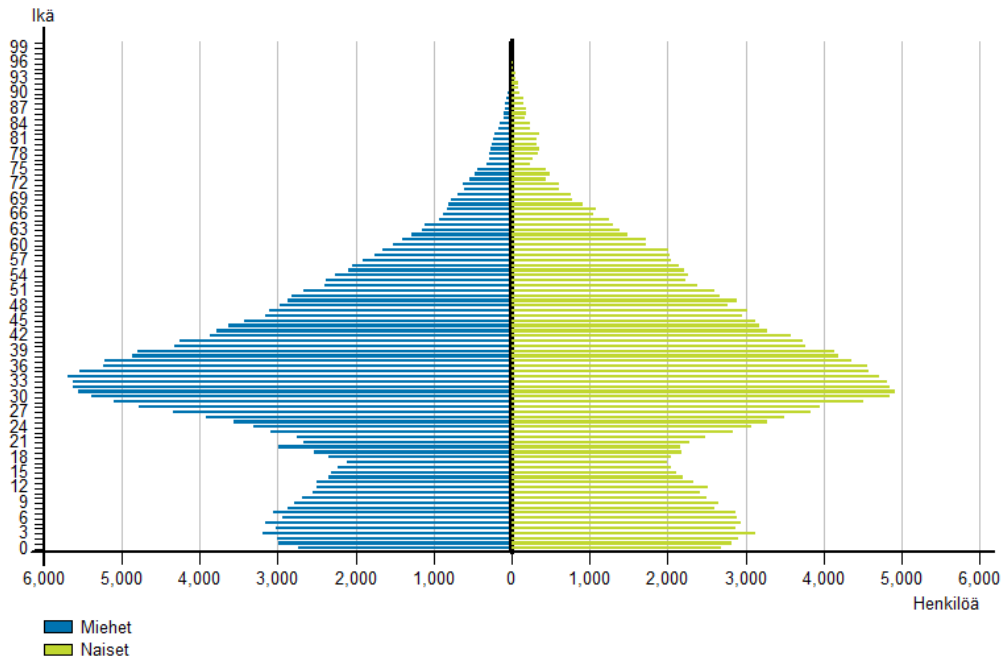
Picture 1 Foreign-born population by country of birth, 1 January 2019 (Eurostat 2020)

In 2019, according to Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) (2019) Finland had 423 494 people with a foreign background 351 721(83%) of them are first generation immigrants and 71 773(17%) second generation. The definition of a person with a foreign background in this case is determined according to the country of birth of persons parents. To qualify as a person with a foreign background their both parents have had to be born outside of Finland or the only known parent is born outside of Finland. In 2019, 129 285 of the people with a foreign background are mostly from the former Soviet Union and Estonia. Next largest groups were Iraq and Somalia. In addition, 321 699 of people with a foreign background are aged around 18 to 64. (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020a.)



Picture 2 The largest background groups with a foreign background 2019 (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020a)

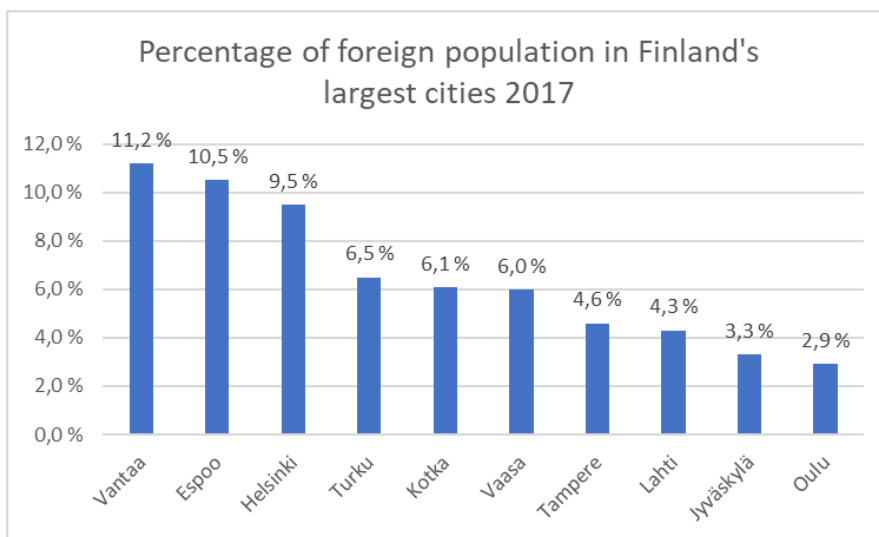
Age structure of people with a foreign background 2019



Tilastokeskus / Väestörakenne

Picture 3 Age structure of people with a foreign background 2019 (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020a)

In 2017, 65% of foreign population was in the ten largest cities. The city with most migrants was Helsinki with 9.5% of the total population. Also, the cities of Espoo and Vantaa had the highest percentage of migrants compared with total population. (Miettinen 2020b.)



Picture 4 The shares of foreign citizens in Finland's largest cities 2017(Miettinen 2020b)

## **2.2 Education of immigrants in Finland**

Immigrants between the ages of 7 to 17 are eligible for the same basic education as Finns (Studyinfo 2020). Basic education consists the school grades from 1 to 9 (OPH 2020). Immigrants are placed in an appropriate grade that is determined by their age, knowledge and skills (Studyinfo 2020). In addition, new students can also be provided with supplementary education. Also, immigrant students can take part in instructive lessons that will last for a year. This will help them to prepare for the basic education. These instructive classes will teach the student the basic Finnish and key concepts of other subjects

For adults with lacking education Finland offers adult basic education which stands for grades from 7 to 9 allowing the immigrant to apply for secondary education (Studyinfo 2020).

In 2014, 40% of the 25 to 54 years old with a foreign-born background had a tertiary degree. In comparison, domestic-born population the corresponding number is 44%. And, 18% of the refugee population had a tertiary degree. In addition, 8% of completed master's degrees was finished by a person with a foreign background and one sixth of the doctorates. (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2020.)

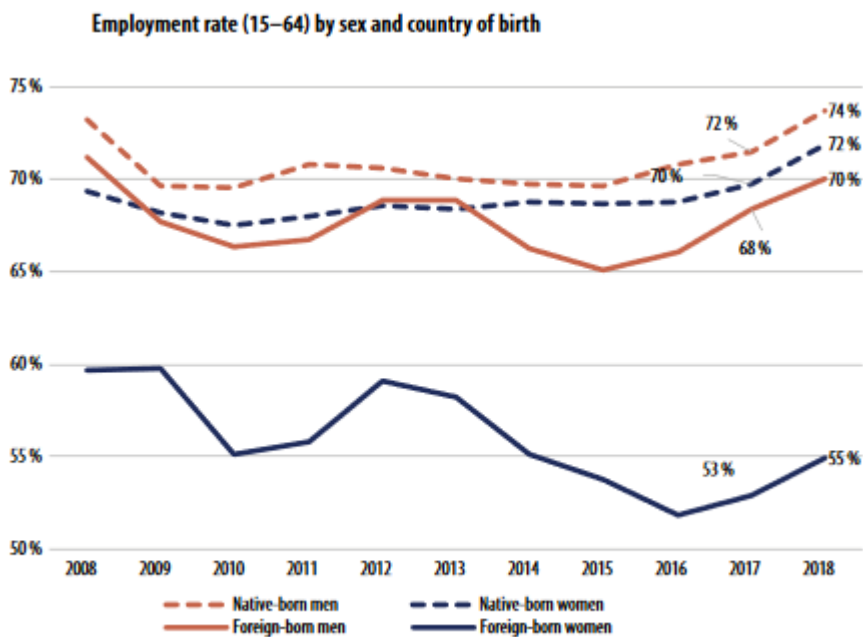
By developing and increasing the coaching, training and language training offered to immigrants it is expected to increase the number of immigrants in higher education institutes. As of now, the universities and the universities of applied sciences offer many degrees in an English that make studying a higher degree in Finland easier for immigrants. (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2020.) In 2020 higher education institutions of Finland offer 400 bachelor's and master's degree programs that are in English. Universities of applied sciences offer most of bachelor's degrees in English while master's degrees are taught by universities. (Study in Finland 2020.)

## **2.3 Employment of immigrants in Finland**

In Finland the number of working age citizens decreases approximately by 25 000 people per year. Currently, immigration cuts the number in half, but the trend is estimated to continue at least for the next 20 years. Currently, most of the immigrants are of working age and are possibly the solution to even the decreasing number of working people. (Myrskylä 2013.) In addition, birth-rates are the lowest they have been since the great famine of 1866-1868 with

only 55 000 new-borns in 2015 (Busk 2016). In 2019, there were 45 613 new-borns (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020f).

The employment rate of foreign-born population in Finland was 62.2% in 2018 which was 2% increase to previous year. Meanwhile, the domestic-born employment rate in 2018 was 72.8%. The 10% gap between domestic-born and foreign-born can be partly explained by the weak labour market performance of foreign-born women. (Immigration Department 2019.)



Picture 5 Employment rate (15-64) by sex and country of birth (in Finland) 2019 (Labor force survey by Eurostat according to Immigration Department)

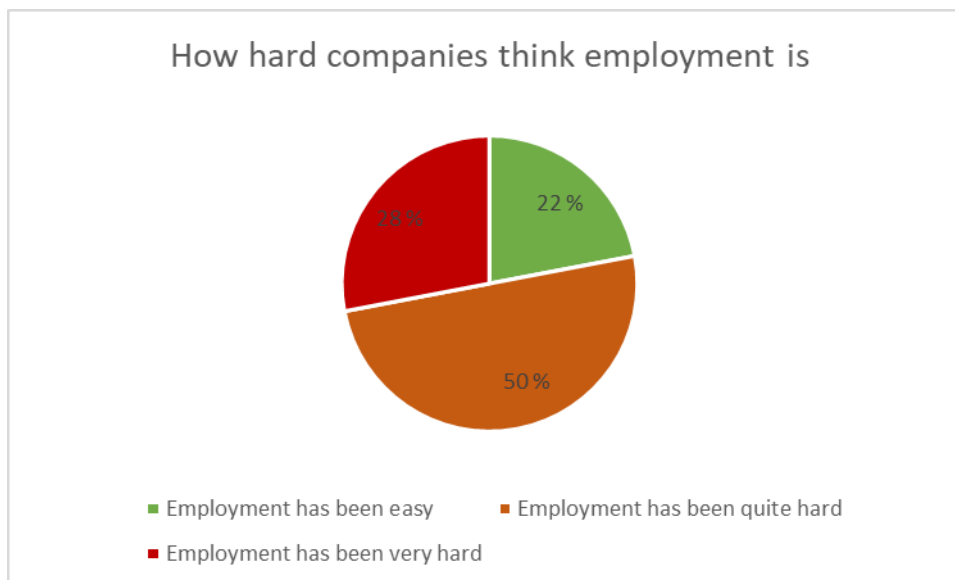
### 2.3.1 Hiring of immigrants in Finnish companies

In a report made in co-operation by OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and development) and UNHCR (United Nations High commissioner for Refugees) (2016) it is stated that companies that are interested in the hiring of immigrants do it because they want to use the newly available labor force, or they want to carry their social responsibility as a company. However, even though companies acknowledge benefits they can get from hiring immigrants they have some concerns that outweigh the benefits. These concerns include cultural

differences, language problems, public opinion and skills and qualifications. (OECD&UNHCR 2016.)

In study made by Hakala (2020, 57) states that need to recruit immigrants arises from the lack of skillful and proficient domestic employees. In addition, employers are looking for employees with the right attitude towards the work. Furthermore, the more demanding the work is the higher the education requirements are, which makes it even harder to find suitable employees. Hakala further adds that the problem might not be just the lack of labor, but the lack of labor with the right skills.

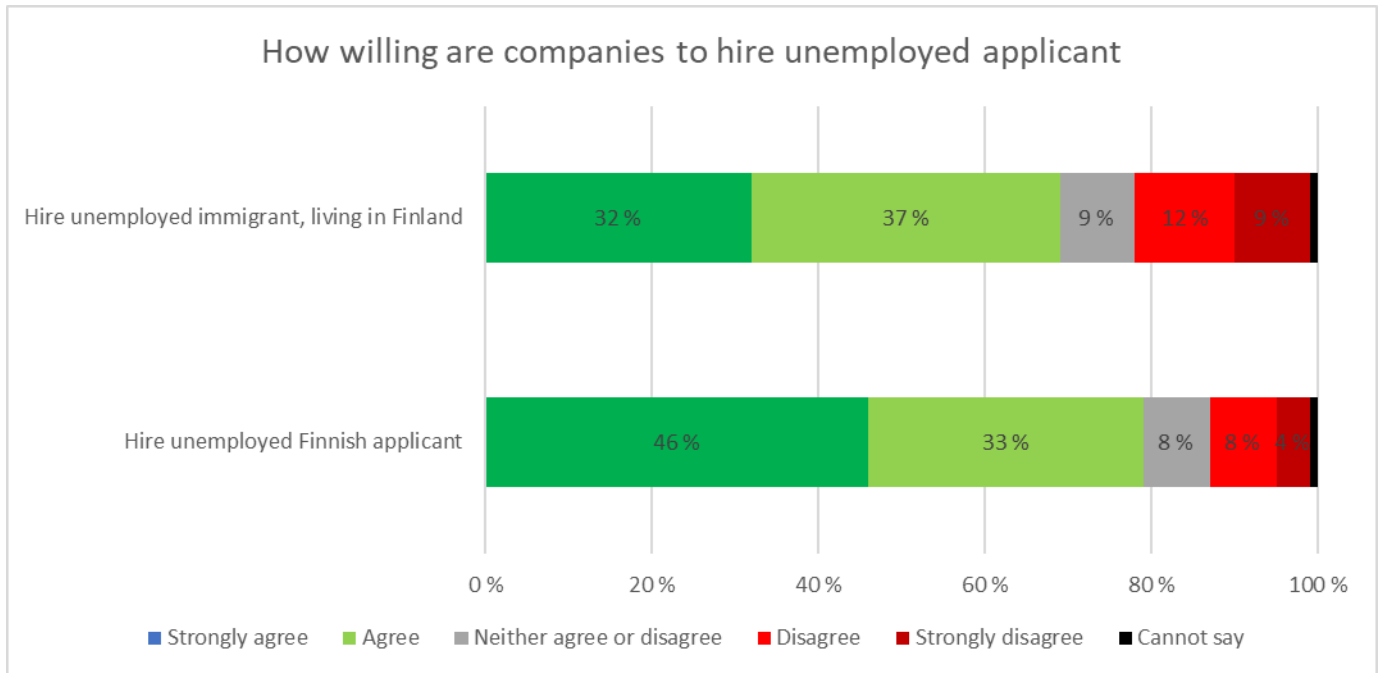
According to a research report about immigrant recruitment in Finland made by Taloustutkimus Oy(2020, 12) for Kotona Suomessa project, during 2020 86% of the companies that were part of the survey (n=1009) have tried to recruit new employees in the past 12 months. Only 22% of the companies reported that the hiring process has been easy. Furthermore, 50% of the companies reported that the hiring process has been quite hard and 28 % reported the process to be extremely hard. The most common reason why companies had trouble hiring was finding skilled enough employees. Also, lack of motivated employees and lack of employees that could fit in with the work community were minor trouble. (Taloustutkimus Oy 2020, 12.)



Picture 6 How hard employment is (Taloustutkimus Oy, 2020)



When asked if companies would be willing to hire an unemployed applicant who is of Finnish background 46% strongly agreed and 33% agreed. In contrast to Finnish applicants, only 32 % of the companies would strongly agree and 37% agree to hire immigrants. (Taloustutkimus Oy 2020, 14.)

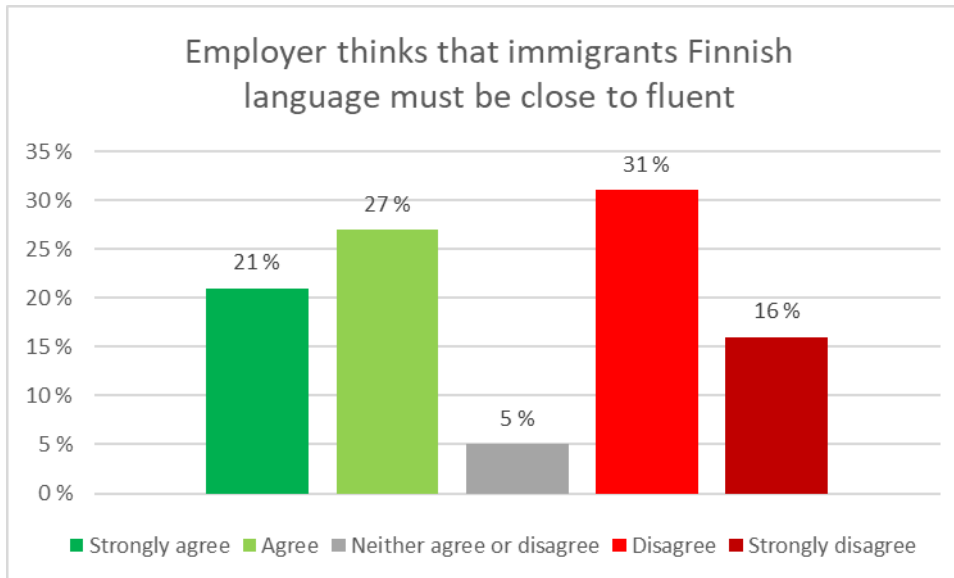


Picture 7 How willing are companies to hire unemployed applicant (Taloustutkimus Oy, 2020)

Adequate language skills are one of the most important skills needed to be able to work independently (Tarnanen & Pöyhönen, 2011, 139-152). In addition, employers and employees both think that it is an important factor in the employment of immigrants. Lacking language skills are the largest barrier to the employment of international employees (Yli-Kaitala et al. 2013, 45).

Almost half of the Finnish companies require their employees to have at least close to fluent Finnish proficiency to be eligible for recruitment (48%). In addition, when looked at a sector by a sector, the requirement of fluency in Finnish language is especially high on the social and healthcare sector 67%. Furthermore, only 23% of the companies are willing to recruit an immigrant without sufficient Finnish proficiency. Regional differences regarding Finnish proficiency are negligible. When asked if companies would be willing to hire employees directly from abroad only a quarter would do it. The reason why companies would not hire directly abroad was in most of the cases, the language barrier (62%) and in a lesser degree, the lack

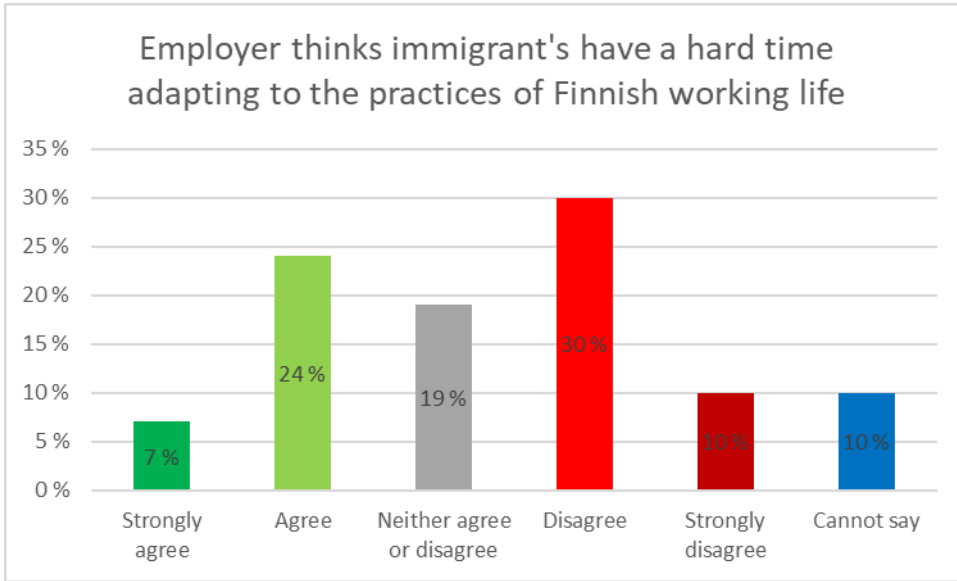
of knowledge regarding professionalism, education and Finnish regulations. (20%) (Taloustutkimus Oy 2020, 5.)



Picture 8 Employer thinks that immigrant's Finnish language must be close to fluent (Taloustutkimus Oy, 2020)

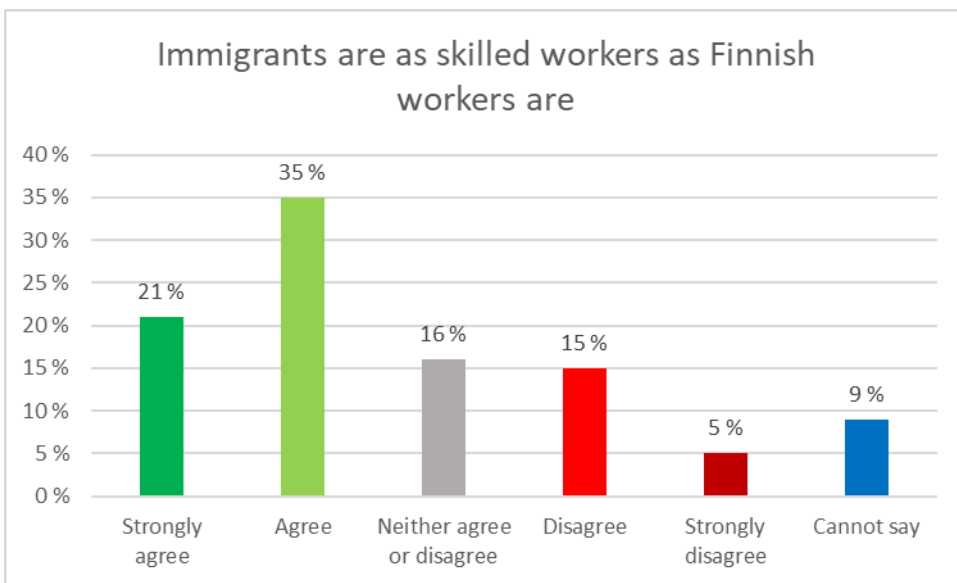
In report made by OECD & UNHCR (2016) it is stated that cultural attitudes, expectations and experiences of immigrants can cause tensions in working environment. However, it is noted that companies have reported that while these are common thoughts in the business world it is still not that large of an issue as has been thought.

Third of the Finnish companies (31%) think that immigrants have a hard time adjusting to Finnish workplace practices while 40% oppose this. Furthermore, in two out of five companies thought that cultural differences might cause problems in the workplace. Also, two out of five companies thought the longer person has been in Finland the better they could handle their work. (Taloustutkimus Oy 2020, 5.)



Picture 9 Employer thinks immigrants have a hard time adapting to the practices of Finnish working life (Taloustutkimus Oy, 2020)

In most Finnish companies' immigrants are held as good employees as others (56%). In addition, when examined in the point of view of companies that have not hired immigrants the corresponding number is little lower (43%). Meanwhile, the companies that have hired immigrants before, the corresponding number was higher (62%). (Taloustutkimus Oy 2020, 6.)

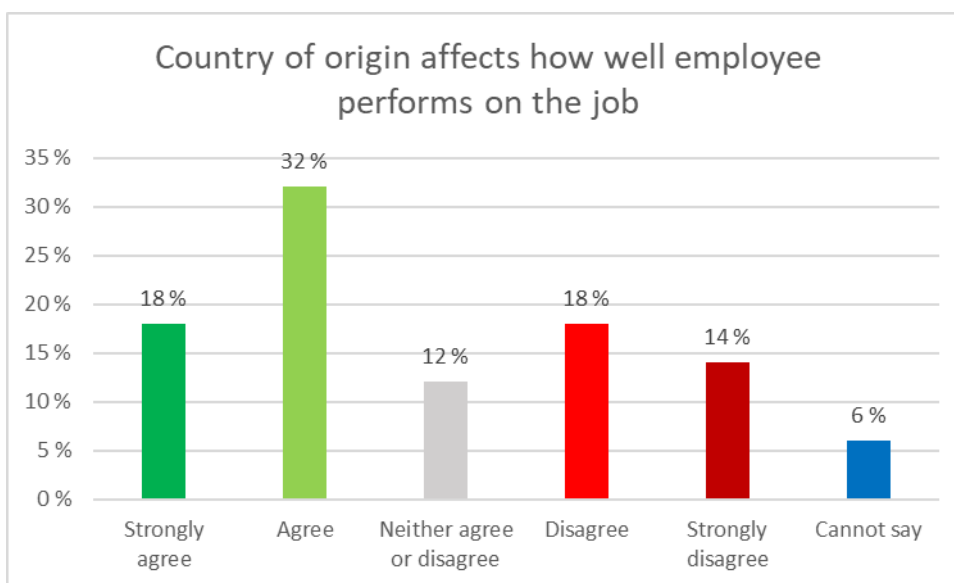


Picture 10 immigrants are as skilled employees as Finnish employees are (Taloustutkimus Oy,2020)

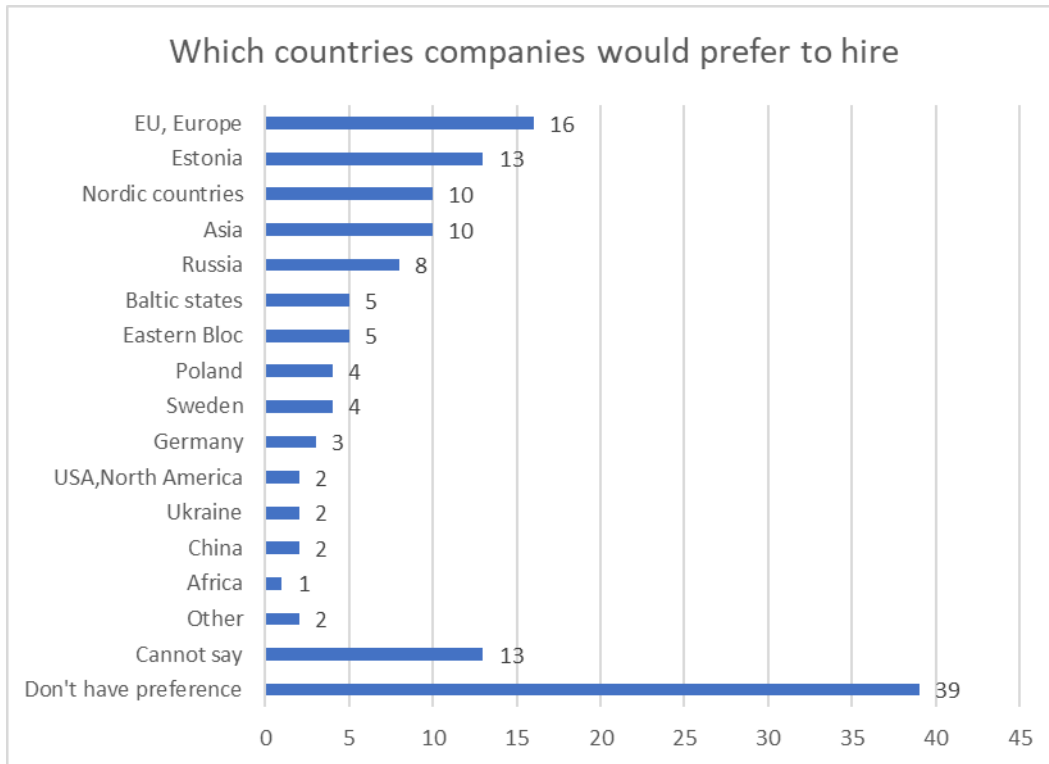
Immigrants of Finland are a varied group of people from different countries like Russia, Estonia, Iraq and Somalia (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020a). How immigrants get employed varies between different variables like gender, personal circumstances, and country of origin.

In addition, the longer immigrant has been in Finland the easier time they have in finding employment. Immigrants from the Middle East and Somalia who are mostly refugees, have trouble finding employment. (Busk, 2016.)

Half of the Finnish companies (50%) think, that country of origin affects how well the employee will manage on the job. When looking the different sectors, the construction sector is more critical than the average with 60% thinking about that country of origin matters. Also, smaller companies looked at either by the size (the number of employees) or by the revenue were more critical regarding the country of origin. Hence, 54% of the companies with the staff of 10 to 19 thought that country of origin matters and 58% of the companies with revenue between EUR 200 to 999 thousand. The companies were asked in an open-ended question from which country/continent they would preferably hire from. The most common answers were Europe (16%), Estonia (13%), the Nordic countries (10%) and Asia (10%) as the top four. In addition, the most common reasons why companies preferred these countries/continents was the assumption of their diligence, motivation and work culture (16%), language proficiency (13%), culturally very close to our own (12%), professionalism (8%) and earlier good experiences (6%). When examined together with the preferred country or continent, European countries were most associated being culturally knowledgeable and diligent. In addition, Nordic countries where associated with similar culture and similar country of origin. The Estonian's were considered diligent and having good language skills. Meanwhile, Asian people were associated to be diligent. (Taloustutkimus Oy 2020, 20-24.)

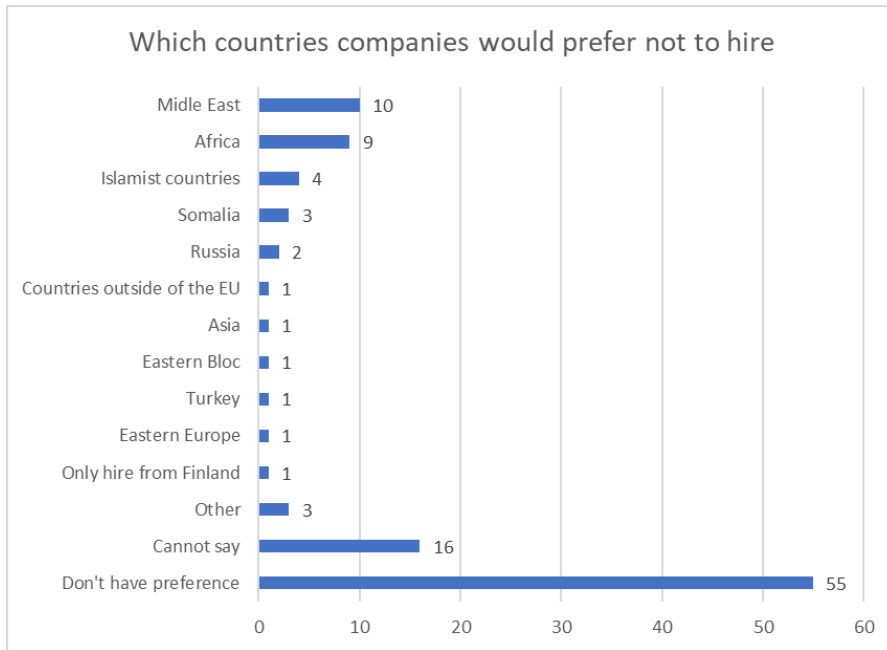


Picture 11 Country of origin affects how well employee performs on the job (Taloustutkimus Oy, 2020)



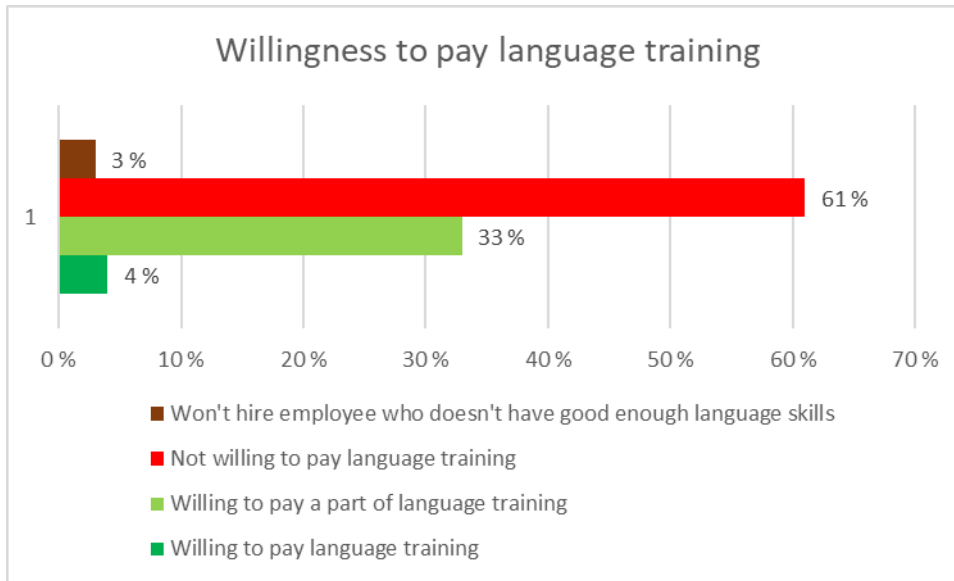
Picture 12 Which countries companies would prefer to hire (Taloustutkimus Oy 2020)

In an open-ended question countries/continents where companies would not prefer to hire were the Middle East (10%), Africa (9%), Arab countries (4%), Somalia (3%), Russia (2%) and some minor ones totaling together to 29%. In contrast, 16 % of the companies could not specify country of where they would not want to hire and 55% of the companies did not have any such country. Most common reasoning why not to hire from these countries were different culture (10%), low motivation to work/ different work culture (6%) and lack of language skills. (Taloustutkimus Oy 2020, 25.)



Picture 13 Which countries companies would prefer not to hire (Taloustutkimus Oy 2020)

As mentioned before that the lack of proficiency in language skills plays large part when determining if a person can be hired to a company (Taloustutkimus Oy 2020, 28). When asked if companies would be willing to pay for language training for its employees only one third was willing to do it. However, when looking by the size of a company it is noticeable that larger companies are more willing to invest in language training than smaller companies. Therefore, 52% of the companies with staff over 50 people were willing to pay for language training and 49% of the companies with revenue over EUR 10 million, were willing to invest in language training. (Taloustutkimus Oy 2020, 31.)



Picture 14 Willingness to pay language training (Taloustutkimus, 2020)

### 2.3.2 Hiring of international students in small and medium-sized companies

Finland has about 21 000 students with a foreign background. These students include degree students or students who have come abroad to do their practical training (Garam 2018). In Finnish universities, over 7.1% of all students are internationals (Garam 2016). In addition, students are distributed quite equally to the universities and the universities of applied sciences. According to Mathies & Karhunen (2019, 69) the university network of Finland can be a funnel from where gifted students can be selected and in future turned in to experts of their fields. This mechanism is needed in the future due to the aging population.

Small and medium-sized company is defined as a company which have the maximum of 250 employees and yearly revenue maximum of EUR 50 million (European Commission, 2020). According to the report made by Owl Group Oy (2017, 71) Finnish small and medium-sized companies cannot or do not know how to fully utilize assets offered by the international students. In addition, failing to fully utilize these assets Finland will lose part of its investment in education resulting in the loss of talent. According to Mathies & Karhunen (2019, 69) 60-70% of international students live in Finland three years after graduation. In addition, being employed during studies and having family and social networks in Finland increased the probability of staying. Furthermore, they state that international experts are becoming a greater asset in the future economic competition.

There is abundance of international students in Finland and outside of the country, who are willing to come abroad, while many small and medium-sized companies struggle with not having enough international expertise. (Owal Group Oy 2017, 5.) Most companies are looking at international students to help with the productive work (43%) and bringing knowledge that only internationals have (28%). In addition, companies wanted help with foreign trade (26%), knowledge in the development of new services / products (22%), knowledge on managing international customers (19%) and lastly companies wished to be socially responsible (15%). Furthermore, in “other” responses, companies mentioned that international students could help their company image. Also, some companies recognized that international employees could be an asset when the company starts doing business overseas in the future. (Owal Group Oy 2017, 57.)



Picture 15 Purpose of hiring international expert (Owal Group Oy 2017)

When, asked why companies have not hired international students the most common answer was that there were no applicants. This was the case in 47% of the companies that had not hired international students. The second most common answer was that there just was not any need to hire employees or trainees (33%). In addition, 22% of the companies stated that international students lack required language skills. (Owal Group Oy 2017, 55.)





Picture 16 Reason why companies have not hired international experts (Owal Group Oy 2017)

Companies that did not have international students found it hard to find information about how to hire and utilize them. They think that there could be a portal that would allow them to explore the CVs and skills of international students, they would be more confident in hiring them. In addition, companies think that there is not enough information on how to hire an international student and what is required of them when hiring a student. (Owal Group Oy 2017, 58-61.) Other issues were lack of language skills (Finnish, English and Swedish) and requirement of financial aid (Owal Group Oy 2017, 65).

Companies that have hired international students had also stated that more information regarding international students is needed. These companies mentioned that they find their relationships with schools to be important. More initiative from the student/school side was wanted. (Owal Group Oy 2017, 58.)

### 2.3.3 What benefits can international students bring to companies

International students are an attractive choice for companies because they are trained in the same country where the company operates which removes the need to recognize qualifications that are learned elsewhere (Mathies & Karhunen 2020).

Working with international students or immigrants can give companies many benefits and advantages. Students can use their mother tongue and knowledge of their home country to help companies to expand their export and import practices or help the company to enter a

completely new market (Sievers & Pakalén 2020). In addition, benefits can vary depending on of what kind of co-operation is planned.

### **2.3.3.1 Hiring of a trainee**

International trainees can help companies internationalize, develop the language skills of the workforce, and bring in a fresh point of view (Owal Group Oy 2017, 18, 20-21). International students are also motivated, adaptable and have the courage to tackle unknown and be able to work in diverse environment (Shalini 2020). Because trainees are students, they will have new information regarding their field and are likely well versed in the current trends of the industry (Owal Group Oy 2017b, 14-17). Furthermore, students also bring in the knowledge of international markets, business practices and cultures. In addition, trainees will be extra labor in the company and have positive effect on the company image. During training the employer can also gain an idea of the students' skills and see how well they can adapt to the community of the workplace (Korkeakouluosaajat 2020). In addition, the students are introduced to the working habits of the company which makes them good potential hires as they know how the place operates.

### **2.3.3.2 Commissioning thesis**

Having the international student make a thesis for the company has many benefits. It can give companies an opportunity to access the latest research information and access to language and cultural knowledge that international student provide. The thesis is always made to serve the company beneficially, and it can provide quick results on a research problem the company might have. (Owal Group Oy 2017b, 15.) By requesting a thesis from a student companies can get to know of the student's skills and capabilities (Korkeakouluosaajat 2020). In addition, this can work as an introduction to a possible new hire for the company. Furthermore, thesis work is also always overseen by the student's teachers who are experts of their fields.

### **2.3.3.3 Student projects**

Companies can define a practical problem that can be solved with the help of universities and their student. Teams of students will plan and develop solutions to the practical

problem and international students can bring in new ideas and points of view based on their language and cultural knowledge. Project work will make the company known among students and can in future lead to continued co-operation. (Owal Group Oy 2017, 16.)

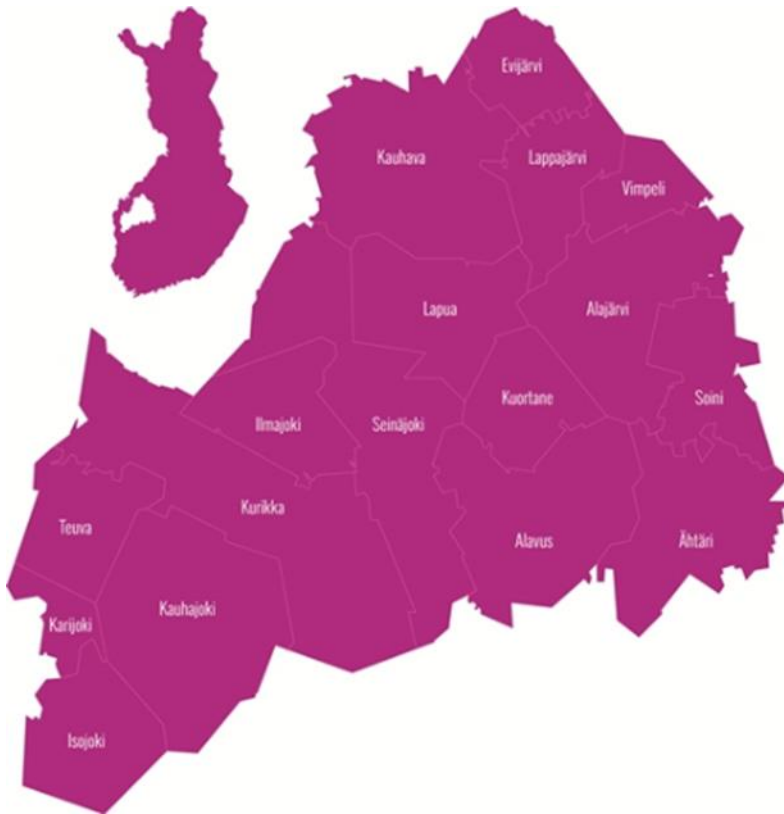
Working with the schools also allows the companies to develop their own business using the school's facilities and equipment. The commissioning company also gets access to the results of the completed project. During the project company and the students will interact with each other sharing knowledge about the industry, work life needs and allows companies to reflect their operation on current research and trends. (Korkeakouluosaajat 2020.)

#### **2.3.3.4 Hiring of a graduate or student full/part -time**

Employing a graduate offers the same benefits as a trainee, but in addition they are motivated employees. International degree students in Finland have a residence permit which allows them to do seasonal and part-time work. Graduated students can get the residence permit based on employment. (Owal Group Oy 2017, 14-18.) After graduation, the students have high quality Finnish education which the students are willing to use in the Finnish labor market (Sievers & Pakalén 2020). The students are motivated to show their knowledge and skills for Finnish companies as well as they are willing to stay in Finland if they get hired here (Korkeakouluosaajat 2020).

### 3 South Ostrobothnia

South Ostrobothnia is the region located in western Finland and it is made of 17 municipalities of which the largest is Seinäjoki (Etelä-Pohjanmaan liitto 2020).



Picture 17 Municipalities of South Ostrobothnia (Etelä-Pohjanamaan liitto 2020)

#### 3.1 Entrepreneurship in South Ostrobothnia

South Ostrobothnia is known for the entrepreneurial spirit of its inhabitants. In quarter one of the 2019 there were 14815 companies in South Ostrobothnia which is roughly 300 more than previous year. In addition, each year the number of discontinued companies is somewhat lower than the number of new ones. Municipality with the most companies is Seinäjoki and it is growing by far the fastest in terms of new companies. In 2018, 40.9% of new companies in South Ostrobothnia were established in the Seinäjoki municipality. Furthermore, 29% of the companies in South Ostrobothnia are in the Seinäjoki Municipality. (Etelä-Pohjanmaan liitto 2020b; Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020c.)

Year	Enterprise openings (No.) Q1	Enterprise closures (No.) Q1
2017	270	159
2018	303	141
2019	289	176
2020	317	238

Picture 18 Number of opened and closed companies in South Ostrobothnia. (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT). 2020c).

According to Etelä-pohjanmaan liitto (2020b) sectors with most companies in South Ostrobothnia are wholesale and retail with 2433 companies, construction with 2264 companies, agriculture, forestry and fishery 1765 and lastly industrial sector 1670. South Ostrobothnia has 3.8% of the total number of companies in Finland.

In 2019 interview study held by TE-services and ELY-center for South Ostrobothnia companies found out that 67% (N125) of companies interviewed had a need for an additional workforce. In addition, 53% mentioned that they lack appropriately skilled employees. Furthermore, the lack of skilled employees was apparent especially in the social and healthcare services, machinery and technology industry, service sectors and agriculture. Also, the companies are mostly looking for employees for manual labor. (Tuohimaa-Kari 2019.)

In study ordered by Eteleä-Pohjanmaan ELY-Center and reported by Lehtinen (2018), it was found that majority of South Ostrobothnia companies have not had international employees (71%). Meanwhile, only 27% of the companies had experience of international employees and they mostly had a positive experience (93%) working with internationals. In addition, majority (68%) of the interviewed companies considered hiring internationals in the future. The companies interviewed in this study employed at the minimum of five people and 252 answers were collected.



*Picture 19 Does your company have experience of international employees? (Lehtinen 2018, 13)*

### **3.2 Population trend**

South Ostrobothnia is facing a deep decrease in population. Forecast published by Suomen virallinen tilasto (2020d) states that the population of Southern Ostrobothnia is expected to decrease by 18000 by 2040. With the decreasing population, South Ostrobothnia companies are faced with lack of manpower (Niemistö 2019). In addition, there are already companies that are dependent on employees coming from abroad.

Year	Finland	South Ostrobothnia
2020	5 530 922	187 713
2021	5 536 943	186 739
2022	5 542 572	185 794
2023	5 547 759	184 858
2024	5 552 441	183 940
2025	5 556 546	183 043
2026	5 560 015	182 163
2027	5 562 826	181 283
2028	5 564 865	180 405
2029	5 566 184	179 523
2030	5 566 685	178 645
2031	5 566 369	177 758
2032	5 565 202	176 883
2033	5 563 141	176 008
2034	5 560 243	175 130
2035	5 556 472	174 243
2036	5 551 856	173 365
2037	5 546 460	172 501
2038	5 540 199	171 641
2039	5 533 247	170 792
2040	5 525 528	169 919

Picture 20 Population forecast 2019: Population 31.12 (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT), 2020d)

### 3.3 Immigrants of South Ostrobothnia

South Ostrobothnia has the population of 188685 in 2019 of which people with foreign background 4591 equaling 2.4% of total population having a foreign background. Meaning that South Ostrobothnia is the region with the lowest percentage of people with a foreign background compared with total population. (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020b.)

Year	Region	Population 31.12.	Foreign background	Foreign background % of total population
2019	MK01 Uusimaa	1689725	240435	14,2
2019	MK02 Southwest Finland	479341	36828	7,7
2019	MK04 Satakunta	216752	8117	3,7
2019	MK05 Kanta-Häme	170925	7337	4,3
2019	MK06 Pirkanmaa	517666	26384	5,1
2019	MK07 Päijät-Häme	199604	11285	5,7
2019	MK08 Kymenlaakso	171167	10463	6,1
2019	MK09 South Karelia	127757	8351	6,5
2019	MK10 South Savo	142335	4945	3,5
2019	MK11 North Savo	244236	7664	3,1
2019	MK12 North Karelia	161211	6389	4
2019	MK13 Central Finland	275104	9807	3,6
2019	MK14 South Ostrobothnia	188685	4591	2,4
2019	MK15 Ostrobothnia	180445	13614	7,5
2019	MK16 Central Ostrobothnia	68158	2123	3,1
2019	MK17 North Ostrobothnia	412830	12744	3,1
2019	MK18 Kainuu	72306	2154	3
2019	MK19 Lapland	177161	5505	3,1
2019	MK21 Åland	29884	4758	15,9

Picture 21 Numbers and shares of persons with foreign background by area, 2019 (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020b)

### 3.4 Employment of immigrants in South Ostrobothnia region

In December 2020 South Ostrobothnia had 18 612 jobseekers. This number includes unemployed, working shortened weeks, employed and people outside of the workforce who are seeking employment. Furthermore, 996 of these jobseekers had international background and 374 of them were unemployed. Out of 996 jobseekers 363 were classified as being outside of the workforce and 276 of them were classified as being in training or studying. (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020e.)



Employment at the end of December 2020		#
<b>Unemployed jobseekers</b>		<b>8894</b>
of whom fully laid off		2411
<b>On reduced working week</b>		<b>698</b>
<b>Those who have work</b>		<b>6049</b>
of whom in the general labour market		5573
of whom employed through employment services		476
<b>Persons outside the labour force</b>		<b>2971</b>
of whom in services promoting employment		873
of whom in training		1374
<b>Total</b>		<b>18612</b>

Picture 22 Employment at the end of December 2020 (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020e).

Employment of internationals at the end of December 2020		#
<b>Unemployed jobseekers</b>		<b>374</b>
of whom fully laid off		107
<b>On reduced working week</b>		<b>19</b>
<b>Those who have work</b>		<b>240</b>
of whom in the general labour market		224
of whom employed through employment services		16
<b>Persons outside the labour force</b>		<b>363</b>
of whom in services promoting employment		47
of whom in training		276
<b>Total</b>		<b>996</b>

Picture 23 Employment of internationals at the end of December 2020 (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT) 2020e).

### 3.5 Employment of Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences alumni in the region

Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences has around 200 international degree students and thanks to its wide network of partner schools around the world over 300 exchange students each year (SeAMK – Practical Information for Students 2020).

In study made 2018 by Ahola Aatu researched the situation the employment of former International Business alumni it was concluded that majority of the alumni still lived either in Seinäjoki or in the neighboring region. Most of the students that had remained in the region

had found employment but not been able to find work that relates to their studies. (Ahola 25-26, 28-29, 38 2018.)

#### **4 Prow towards Southern Ostrobothnia**

The Prow towards Finland is a project funded by European Social Fund (ESR). The main goals of the project are to increase the availability of a skilled workforce in Finland from other European countries and creation of subprojects that has similar goals tailored for each ELY center and the area they are based in. (Kokka kohti Suomea 2020.)

The Prow towards Southern Ostrobothnia is a subproject led by Seinäjoki University of applied sciences. The main goals of the project are to improve the employment of immigrants and foreign degree students in local companies around South Ostrobothnia. The key point of the project is to increase knowledge of companies so that they can hire international employees more readily locally and abroad. In addition, the project aims to improve the odds of international students staying in the region by introducing them to local companies. (Kokka kohti Etelä-Pohjanmaata 2020.)

## **5 Research method**

### **5.1 Qualitative research**

Research done for this thesis is done using the qualitative method. Qualitative research is at its core a research method that tries to describe real life (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009). In qualitative research, collected data is non-numerical and it seeks to interpret the social life of the research target group (Crossman 2020). Qualitative research is conducted with small sampling size, so generalization is not possible (Kananen 2017, 32-36). Furthermore, the goal of qualitative research is to be able to describe, understand and explain the phenomenon using words.

In qualitative research data collection and analysis of the data walk hand in hand. In brief, the analysis is being done at the same time as the collection of data thus shaping the focus of the data. Because of this interaction between data collection and analysis, the researcher can recognize themes, patterns and relationships and allow the researcher to reanalyze previous data looking for newly found ideas. (Saunders et al. 2019, 641.)

To conduct the research two groups were chosen. First group was International employees of Southern Ostrobothnia companies and second was the recruiter or supervisor of the same company. The goal was to hear different experiences companies and employees have had during employment and recruiting. Also, to find practices and methods that can make hiring an international employee easier for the companies the person who is looking for employment and the company looking for employees.

### **5.2 Interview**

Interviewing is a useful method for gathering data when the goal is to research behavior, thoughts or fields of research that are new (Boyce&Neale 2006, 3). If researching the past or future, interviewing is the only qualitative method that can be applied (Kananen 2015, 143).

Advantage of interviewing is that the researcher gets more detailed data than other research methods would provide like for example a survey (Boyce&Neale 2006, 3). In addition, interviewing also provides the subject more comfortable environment, so they might be willing to share more than they would on a survey form. Interviewing is a flexible method of data

gathering as it allows the researcher to help the interviewee if they do not understand the question or ask for more information if the need arises (Kananen 2015, 143).

As with any research method, interviewing has some limitations and disadvantages. Interviewees are prone to bias. They might try to give the interviewer a more positive image of the situation that it is due to their stakes in the situation. Interviewing is also time intensive. Interview takes a lot of time as it requires traveling to the interviewee and then conducting the interview. In addition, there is the transcribing of the interview recordings and analyzing the data. (Boyce & Neale 2006, 3.) Another problem in interviewing is that the results cannot be generalized due to the small sample size and random sampling methods being unusable (Boyce & Neale 2006, 4). However, as a rule of interviewing regarding the sampling size when the same stories, themes, issues and topics are coming up from the interviewees, large enough sample size is reached. Other drawback of interviewing is the manner you conduct with the interviewees may affect how they answer the questions (Saunders et al. 2019, 445).

Interviewing is meant to describe the reality at the time of collection it is not always possible to repeat the research. To ensure the reliability of the research in case like this it is important that the person conducting the research documents and explain reasoning behind his choices and explaining how the data was collected. (Saunders et al. 2019, 449.) During the interview researcher is asking questions about events that have happened in the past, so it is hard to determine if data is reliable, because it is dependent of memory of the subject (Kananen 2015, 340). However, because of the nature of the interview, where the interviewer can ask the interviewee to clarify or explain what they said it is considered possible to attain a high level of credibility (Saunders et al. 2019, 455).

### **5.3 Data collection**

Research data for this thesis was collected by interviewing employees of South Ostrobothnia companies at the request of the commissioner. Companies chosen for this study were all voluntary participations. The companies were contacted via e-mail or a phone call. Most of the contact information was provided by the commissioner of this thesis and the contacted companies are Prow towards South Ostrobothnia project partners. The aim was to interview companies from different fields. The represented fields were as follows: cleaning, manufacturing, IT and social and healthcare.

It was decided that the interview would be conducted by using the semi-structured interview method. In the semi-structured interview, the researcher has a list of themes and some key questions related to the themes (Saunders et al. 2019, 437). In addition, these themes will allow the interviewer to control the direction of the interview.

Semi-structured interview is a good method of choice when the study is exploratory in nature. In exploratory research, the purpose of research is to understand the decisions and actions of the subjects. The semi-structured interview method also allows the researcher to examine the answers more in depth by asking the interviewee to explain or build on their answer. Semi-structured interview may also lead to new information that you had not thought out before allowing you to see your research in a new light. (Saunders et al. 2019, 444-445.)

Interviews were conducted as an individual interview. In each company there were two interviews; one which was for the international employee and another which was for the person in charge of recruiting or the supervisor of the employee. In total, data was collected from ten separate interviews. Six out of the ten were held in person at the place of business of the company. The other four were held via Teams software due to long distances and the Covid-19 pandemic which limited the possibility of a meeting in person. Interviews were conducted in November, December 2020 and January 2021.

Before the interview started, the interviewees were explained the premise of the research including the name of the researcher, the study program and the purpose of the research. Interviewees were then explained how their data would be handled with complete anonymity. Also, it was explained that the researcher would be the only person who will have access to research data. In addition, they were explained how the collected data would be disposed when the thesis is completed.

Interview was structured around five topics: education, seeking employment/recruitment, language and culture, orientation and working life. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewee, so they could be transcribed and analyzed later. Interview questions were agreed together with the commissioner of this thesis. While the interview was semi-structured it came quickly apparent that interviewees would tell their experiences out-of-order, so the structure came to serve as a checklist to confirm all topics of interest were discussed and questions asked. The interviews took approximately 40-60min. After the

interview was concluded, the interviewees were asked if they had something else to add. This would usually cause them going in depth of previously discussed topics.

Due to the requests of the international employees, their interviews were held in Finnish in four of the five Interviews. In case of difficulties in communication English was used as a backup method for making sure everything was understood correctly. Excerpts of interviews presented in the paper are translated into English by the author.

#### **5.4 Analysis of data**

The analysis of qualitative data always requires the reading of the collected data. To better understand the data, it should be read multiple times. Also, by replaying the recordings, one can increase their understanding of research material. The recordings are then transcribed into text. To reduce the amount of text it is then summarized and cut to a smaller size. (Kananen, 2015, 163.)

In this thesis, the data was analyzed using the inductive content analysis method. Inductive content analysis means that the research focuses on the interpretation of the collected data. Content analysis can be segmented in to three separate stages: Data reduction, Clustering and Abstraction. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, 91-94.)

The first stage data reduction is where all the unrelated information is removed, or parts of the text are summarized or cut in smaller pieces. In clustering, the data is combed for similarities or differences. When, the similarities and differences are found they are then combined to their own categories. These categories can then be further categorized forming the main and subcategories. In the abstraction stage the combination and categorizing can still be continued until it stops serving the purpose of the research. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, 91-94.)

Analysis of the data started by transcribing the interview records. The transcribing process was not done in perfect accuracy. Transcript of the record would omit repeated words and unfinished sentences that did not add anything new. Sentences would also be transformed to written language. In case a full citation is needed there is always the original recording. After the transcribing, the analysis process began by reading the transcripts and coding them into five groups: recruiting and employment seeking, language skills, orientation, workplace

experiences and cultural experiences. Relative segments of the transcript were placed fittingly under these categories and parts that were similar were color-coded.



## 6 Interview result

### 6.1 Finding employment

Three out of five interviewed employees thought that finding employment in Finland is hard. The interviewees mentioned that hearing back from the company was the problem, as they would apply for a position, but the process would not move forward afterwards. Two of the three stated that when applying for employment their foreign sounding name might be the reason why the company did not contact back. One person gave me a detailed explanation why they think this is the case.

I5: I applied and did not hear anything back. Then my spouse applied, whose obviously Finnish. Has a Finnish name. They phoned back asking if they were still available to work.

Interviewees thought that they had to be hard-working to find employment. Four of five interviewees found that by visiting the company where they were looking for work was key to get employed there.

I1: First I asked around for jobs, then I went and visited the company and got to go into a job interview.

I2: I knew the phone number where I could have called, but instead I just went and visited the company. If you are an immigrant or a foreigner, I recommend that you do not call the company, but instead go and visit the company.

I3: I found the job from the company website. I went to visit and take my application to the company. I first applied through internet.

I4: In the end, I found this job when I went to the office of CEO and knocked on his door and asked if they would have a job for me.

Four of the interviewed employees had vocational education and one had degree from the institute of higher education. Schools have provided support for international and immigrant students. Four of the five interviewees have had support from their schools about finding employment. Three out of five interviewees told that they had prepared their CVs in Finnish

and English. One had prepared his CV only in Finnish. Two of the interviewees mentioned that they got help in making their CV at school when they were studying.

Two of the interviewees had found employment during their practical training from school. One had since changed his place of employment. One of the interviewees began to work in company as a summer employee after they took part in a school project which was done in co-operation with the employing company and after his practical training and later full-time employment.

The most used medium when seeking employment was the use of the TE-services webpage and the websites of the companies they were applying to. When asked if they had used other job listing webpages, the response would be that they have not used anything else. Visiting the TE-office has also been a way to look for work, four of the five stated they had visited there. Two of the interviewees had negative experience.

I2: They ask you if you can speak Finnish or do you have the certificate which proves that you speak Finnish. You can say that yes, I have the certificate and so on. They take your name, number and address and tell you they will be contacting you back. Usually, they never called me back.

I5: I went to get the tax card from the tax office, but they said I had to have a job before I can get it. So, I went to TE-office, and they said I had to have the tax card before I can apply. Then I got sent around different offices. Until I got hired without the help from TE-office, I was able to get into the system and get the tax card.

## **6.2 Finding employees**

The interviewed companies have had experiences of having international employees for some time. The companies were asked how long they had hired internationals, most of them stated that they can not specify exactly how long. Two of the supervisors stated that for as long as they have worked there, they have had international employee. Two of the companies have been working on the international scale and have been working with international employees for a long time. One company stated that they have had international trainees seldom, but the currently employed is first international employee to work for a longer period.

Three of the five interviewed companies thought finding any employees is hard. Two of these companies added that recruiting employees with an international background did not help them

as the requirements of the work are so high, or they just cannot find enough people with the right education. Both told that they would recruit whoever as long they pass the requirements. One of the three mentioned that recruitment is especially hard during the summer period. The other two stated that they have no need for recruitment now or that they do not have enough appropriation to hire more. Each of the interviewed companies would be interested to hire international employees in the future if the employee had the required skills and situation was right.

Two of the companies mentioned that co-operation with schools has helped them in hiring employees. One company stated that they hired all their international employees via projects they have offered for schools. Other company stated that they would like to have more interaction with schools and that schools should offer more help in finding employment for their international students after their graduation.

### **6.3 Language requirements**

When asked if good Finnish skills are critical to be employed in the company there were three companies stated that knowing Finnish is not required as their working language is English. All these three companies have worked in the international scale for some time so English as a working language is becoming the norm if it is not the norm already.

Two of the companies stated that Finnish is a critical skill to be eligible for employment. Both companies worked in social and healthcare industry. They stated that because they are working with patients who are elderly, sick and might have problems to communicate having the ability to speak and write in Finnish is critical.

When asked if the employees thought that Finnish language skills helped in job hunting, four out of five agreed that being able to speak Finnish was helpful for them when they were searching for employment. Three of them stated that it was needed for their current employment. One stated that the position that they have now does not require the Finnish language, but knowing Finnish allowed him to get the starting position in the company.

The interviewees were asked how they would describe their Finnish skills; everyone stated that their Finnish is between average to good.

I1: I speak good enough Finnish. Writing is still somewhat hard.

I2: I think my Finnish skills are about average. Writing is harder.

I3: I think I can read quite well. Speaking and writing in Finnish is still hard, but I can understand when I am spoken Finnish to.

I4: I think my Finnish skills are not excellent, but sufficient. I think that when you can joke around with your co-workers you know the language well enough.

I5: My Finnish reading and writing skills are pretty good as I have passed the YKI-test which is not easy. (National certificate of language proficiency that is required when applying for citizenship)

Every employee interviewed thought that they can manage with their current level of language skills at work. In addition, they stated that if there is something, that they do not understand it is better to ask. The employees reported that they have studied Finnish during their studies in Finland. One reported that they have learned Finnish by themselves and are now later studying it in school among their other studies.

Companies have not offered their employees chance to improve their Finnish skills as most of the employees already spoke good enough Finnish. Four of the employees also agreed that they can now speak Finnish at a sufficient level. The best way for them to improve it was to continue working and learn as they speak more of it. Two of the employers also mentioned that there are many good language courses on offer in Finland so there is no reason for them to offer any. To avoid miss communication, two of the employers stated that they have told the employees to ask if they do not understand.

When asked if the employees have been able to use their own language at work; only two of the employees mentioned that they have been able to communicate with a customer or co-worker in a foreign language. However, it was minor in the scope of all things. On the other hand, English had been more useful. English was used as a backup when communication in Finnish was lacking.

## 6.4 Orientation

Orientation relates to the language requirements because of the interactive nature of the process. All companies stated that their orientation would be the same regardless of one's background. In healthcare due to the requirement of good Finnish language skill, the orientation is held only in Finnish with Finnish materials. Three of the companies stated that their orientation is the same to all, but due the international status of the company the orientation is held in English. All these three companies offered the usual orientation leaflets and printouts in English. In one company where they did not have specific leaflets in English the person in charge of human resources would create translated copies by themselves.

The orientation processes itself was different in every company as they work in different sectors with different requirements for the employees. In one company new employees were assigned a tutor who would teach and help the new employee. Similarly one company had new employees work with other more experienced employees at first before working alone.

## 6.5 Integration to workplace

The companies were asked how well employees had adapted to Finnish working environment and all companies agreed that the international employees adapted mostly well. Two of the companies stated that there have been some minor issues.

I8: We have had some cultural issues. For example, some of our younger employees have thought that they cannot issue commands to older employees even though they are in the superior position.

I10: We have had to teach some international employees who come from countries with a high-power distance to work in the Finnish low-power distance work culture. Also, we have had to teach some employees that it is okay to ask if there was anything that they did not understand.

The companies have found their international employees to be skillful and hard-working. Three of the companies stated that their international employees are incomparable in their job and exactly what the company needed in the situation they were at the time.

Four of the five companies stated that international employees had been enriching effect on the workplace. They help make the everyday working life a lot more colorful and enjoyable for the work community. In addition, one of the employers stated that because the employee comes from different culture, they have been more approachable in interaction with customers and co-workers. Employee from a different company also thought that because they come from a culture that is more sociable, they have been able to integrate the work community easier, because they are easy to talk to. The employer also said that they think the integration of international employee is not dependent of them as much, but the attitudes and world views of the Finnish employees and how well they adapt to change. In addition, they mentioned that generally it all comes down to the individual's ability to adapt in the workplace.

All the interviewed employees found their workplace enjoyable and think they belong to the work community. This is further reinforced by the fact that all the employees thought they would be working in the company after five years of time from now. Employees expressed that they have found employment from a place which is just right for them. Some stated that the location of the workplace is perfect for them and others told that five years is so short time they could not imagine themselves working anywhere else. Nobody directly stated that they are unhappy in their workplace or that they are looking to find employment elsewhere.

Three of the employees stated that they can advance in responsibilities or promotions and one employee stated that they see themselves becoming full-time employee in the future. The rest of them reported that they are currently satisfied with their role in the company.

## 7 Development proposal

Considering the results of the Uutta osaamista pk-yrityksiin study made by the Owl Group (2017, 10,55), where it was determined that international students and companies do not encounter each other enough to make a contact and the results of the interviews where practical training or other co-operation was the key factor in finding employment for an immigrant living in South Ostrobothnia. Perhaps the support schools offer for their students can help them find employment. Also, the comments from a few of the companies stating that co-operation has been helpful for the companies, and they hope for more interaction between the vocational schools and institutes of higher education.

Company visits and project work is conducted between some companies and schools. However, these companies have already established contact between schools, focus could be shifted to the smaller companies which do not have the experience of employing international employees. This way companies which are worried about the lacking experience and the difficulties of hiring international could gain exposure in controlled environment. Students would also gain valuable knowledge. In addition, companies that co-operate with the institutions will get to know of the local internationals. These encounters would make the companies more knowledgeable of the skills of the students and the students could be more confident in applying to one of the co-operating companies as they have interacted with the company before.

Companies need to be made aware of the possibility to contact the schools and institutes of higher education. Schools on the other hand should be actively marketing their students to companies. The co-operation can be achieved in forms of guest lecturers, seminars, company visits, fairs, projects offered by the company and other activities in the school world. In addition, the students should be encouraged to contact these companies as it was apparent in the study made by Owl Group Oy (2017, 55) that international students do not contact them. Creating these opportunities for international students to contact the smaller companies is important step for the region if it aims to keep the talent that is nurtured here. In addition, this co-operation could be extended to recent graduates who are struggling to find employment.

## 8 Conclusions

### 8.1 Reflecting on the results

The goal of the study was to explore what kind of experiences South Ostrobothnia companies had recruiting and their international employees had when finding employment. For the most part the experiences have been in line with the data from previous studies, but there were exceptions too. However, due to the small sample size of this study these results are based on the experiences and feelings of the interviewees.

As stated in the Kotona Suomessa (2020,11-13) study companies have the need for new employees, but finding recruits is hard for most of the companies. Also, Lehtinen (2018, 3) states that in South Ostrobothnian, companies had trouble to hiring employees. This was the case also in three of the four companies interviewed. In addition, the lack of applicants or lack of applicants with right skills was a common theme amongst the companies. In some companies the addition of international employees was not seen to help the problem as the requirements of the work are too high. The companies did not perceive the background of the employee as a factor that could negatively affect employability or integration to workplace, but on the contrary in some cases there were benefits like approachability and sociability. On the other hand, some employees had thought that their foreign sounding name had negatively impacted their job search. According to Ahmad (2019, 25) this happens in Finnish companies quite often. In his study it was deducted that person who had “wrong” name but otherwise similar education, a resume and a background had much lower chance to be contacted back. In addition, the origin of the used name affected the chance of being called back.

According to the Kotona Suomessa (2020, 5,28) study and study made by Tarnanen & Pöyhönen (2011, 139-152), companies think that proficiency in Finnish language is an extremely important factor when considering employment. The language requirements were highlighted in social and healthcare industry (Kotona Suomessa 2020, 5,28). In case of this study, language proficiency requirements were very important for the employees who worked for social and healthcare companies. However, in the other companies the need for Finnish language proficiency was not required as knowing English was enough according to the companies. However, it was a common consensus amongst the employees that being able to communicate in Finnish had helped them in the search of employment in some manner.



Reason why the companies except the social and healthcare did not require Finnish proficiency is according to the companies the fact that they work in the international scale and English is one of the official working languages. Any of these companies have not considered offering Finnish language training to their international employees. It was common thought that employees would get better at Finnish by using it during work. It was also brought up that Finland has good language courses in schools and other institutions where the employees can go on their own if they so desire.

Even with decent Finnish language proficiency finding employment was still hard for internationals and some thought that there is still a lot of prejudice towards applicants like for example foreign sounding name. Employees have had good success in finding employment if they have been visiting the company they are applying, also finding a practical training place has allowed them to get in contact with companies. In addition, companies might be more willing to hire employees who have started as a trainee. As a whole employment of the interviewed internationals has been dependent on the willingness and hard work to find employment.

International employees have integrated mostly well in South Ostrobothnia companies with some minor cultural problems. International employees were held as good employees as anyone else, some companies even stated that they were exceptional. Employers mostly thought that the addition of international employees made the work community more enjoyable and colorful. Employees generally felt their job was enjoyable, and they saw themselves continuing working for the same company in the future.

## **8.2 Research reliability and validity**

Ethicality of qualitative research is built upon the responsible conduct of research (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 110). Research must be conducted by following the principles that are supported by the research community. These principles are integrity, meticulousness, accuracy while conducting the research and in recording, presenting and evaluation. Research data must be acquired in accordance of scientific criteria and be ethically sustainable. Research results must be presented in openly and responsibly. Furthermore, credit and recognition must be given to its rightful author and their work. (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2021.) Data protection and handling of personal information is done

carefully and precisely. Interviews must be conducted so that the interviewees cannot be recognized from it and gathered information must be anonymized. (Arene Ry 2020, 7.) This means that no personal data is collected that allows person to be identified by their name, picture, or the combination of both (Saunders et al. 2019, 276). Before the collection of the data, the participants must be informed of the study. This includes the background, the goals of the research, agreement of participation and explanation how the data is stored. (Kananen 2017, 191–193.)

Discussing the reliability of a research it is important to acknowledge the subject of the research and why you are researching it. The researcher must reflect on why the research is important, how the data will be collected and if there are any challenges associated with it. In addition, an explanation of how the informants were chosen for the research. Also, it must be explained how the data was analyzed and how the conclusions were made. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 156.)

This thesis and the research are done following the responsible conduct of research guidelines. The text is written by the author of this thesis and the thoughts of others are indicated appropriately. The process of the thesis is documented accurately from the choices of the research method to the results of the interviews. Choices made are discussed in the text and reasoned. As mentioned earlier, the small sampling size can be a negative factor when considering the reliability of this thesis. The results of this thesis must be looked while keeping the sample size in mind. However, even with the small sample size, themes and thoughts repeated in the interviews.

### **8.3 Future recommendations**

In the interviews it was discovered that companies which did not work in social and healthcare industry thought that knowing Finnish is not required, but when asked from the employees four out of five thought it was important when applying for employment. Future research could focus in-depth on the language requirements of South Ostrobothnia companies that have difficulties in recruitment. It would be beneficial to research into the language requirements of companies that have not hired international employees at all and in what position they are looking to fulfil.

Another research idea came up when the author was contacting companies for interviews. Some companies that were contacted stated that they decline the interviewing invitation,

because they have not recruited international employees by themselves, but used staffing services to find employees. So, research on the methods how staffing services arrange employment for international employees in the area and experiences that internationals have from being employed by a third party.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1. Interview structure in English and Finnish

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### Employee interview structure

#### Background:

Age?

How long have you lived in Finland?

Why have you come to Finland?

What is your education?

#### Seeking employment:

How long did you look for work before you got this job?

What kind of support did you receive when you searched for work?

What kind of experiences did you have about searching for a job in Finland?

How did you search for work? Did you receive information for example your friends, Linked in, paper or WWW-pages like Monster, Oikotie or Duunitori or TE-services (web pages with jobs on offer)?

How did you find this workplace?

How did you apply for this job?

Did you receive any help in your job search? Help for making CV or application?

In which language did you prepare your cv and job application?

What was the job interview like and in which language was it held?

#### Language:

How would you rate your Finnish language skills? Reading and writing.

How important was Finnish language skills regarding getting the job?

How much do you need the Finnish language in your work?

How do you manage with your current language skills in work? Have you had any problems?

Do you need other languages in your work? Do you know other languages than Finnish?

How have foreign languages benefited your work?

Have you had chance to improve your language skills in work?

Has your employer offered you chance to improve your language skills?

#### Orientation:

What was your orientation like?

Was there something special in your orientation that made it good or bad experience? Something unusual?

Was there anything you would you have liked to get more guidance and support?

How was your international background taken into consideration during your orientation?

In what way were possible cultural differences considered in the orientation?

**Work:**

Does your current job match your education?

Have you had other jobs before this one? Did it match your education?

What opportunities have been offered to you to improve your skills?

What kind of opportunities do you have to advance in your career in the future?

How have you adapted to the work community?

What benefits have your international background offered for you in working life?

Have you been able to use your own skills to influence different procedures in your workplace?

Do you see yourself working in this place after a year? What about five years? If not, why?

**Employer interview structure****Recruitment:**

What kind of challenges your company has had when recruiting employees?

Have recruiting international employees been difficult? What kind of problems do you have had?

How long has the company been recruiting international workers? What kind of jobs have you been recruiting them to?

Has your company had any other reason to hire international workers than lack of skilled workers? If so, can you specify?

Will your company recruit international workers in future?

How could the recruitment of international workers be made easier for companies?

What channels has your company used in recruitment?

What is the process of recruiting international workers like? Does it differ from recruiting local population? Could it be made easier somehow?

Where have you received information regarding the recruitment of international workers? Is enough information available?

**Language:**

Were the employee's Finnish language skills pivotal regarding landing the job?

Is knowledge of the Finnish language absolutely needed in the workplace?

Has the language skills or knowledge of a foreign culture of the international worker been useful? In what way?

How do the local employees fare with colleagues with an international background? Has there been any problems? If so what kind?

Does your company provide international employees with the chance to improve their language skills? What kind?

**Job orientation:**

What kind of process is the orientation of international?

Is it some way different from the orientation of the local employees?

In what way are the different background and cultural differences taken on account?

Are there other procedures that can help the international workers to better fit for the company?

**Work:**

How well you think the international workers have adapted to into your company's working environment?

Has there been problems caused by cultural differences? What kind of problems? How were the problems solved?

What kind of value international workers bring to your company?

How do the international employees help your company in internationalization?

**Kysymyksiä työntekijöille**

**Tausta:**

Ikä?

Kaunako asunut Suomessa?

Miksi tullut Suomeen?

Koulutus?

**Nykyinen työpaikka:**

Kauanko olit työnhakijana Suomessa ennen kuin sait töitä?

Millaista tukea saitte, kun haitte töitä?

Minkälaisia kokemuksia teillä on työn hakemisesta Suomessa?

Miten etsit töitä? Mistä yleensä etsit tietoa työpaikoista? Saitko tietoa esimerkiksi kaverilta, LinkedInistä, lehdestä, joltain www sivustolta kuten monster, oikotie tai duunitori, TE-toimisto?

Miten löysit nykyisen työpaikkasi? / Miten kuultit tästä työpaikasta?

Miten hait tätä työpaikkaa?

Saitteko apua työn hakemiseen? Työhakemuksen/CV:n tekoon?

Millä kielellä teit CV:n ja työhakemuksen?

Millainen työhaastattelu oli ja millä kielellä se pidettiin?

**Kieli:**

Minkälaiseksi arvioitte suomen kielen taitoanne? Puhetaito ja kirjoittaminen.

Millainen merkitys suomen kielentaidolla oli työpaikan saamisen kannalta?

Minkä verran tarvitset suomen kieltä työssäsi?

Miten olette tulleet toimeen nykyisellä kielitaidollanne töissä? Millaisia ongelmia on ollut?

Millaista hyötyä vieraista kielistä on ollut työsi kannalta? Muuta kuin suomen kieltä.

Minkälaisia mahdollisuuksia sinulla on ollut parantaa kielitaitoasi töissä?

Onko työnantajasi tarjonnut mahdollisuuksia tähän?

**Työhön perehdytys:**

Millainen perehdytys työtehtäviisi oli?

Sisälsikö perehdytyksesi jotain erityistä, joka teki siitä hyvän/huonon kokemuksen?

Missä asioissa olisit kaivannut enemmän opastusta tai tukea?

Miten perehdytyksessäsi otettiin huomioon kansainvälinen taustasi?

Millä tavalla mahdolliset kulttuuri erot otettiin huomioon perehdytyksessä?

**Työ:**

Vastaako työ koulutustanne?

Onko sinulla ollut muita työpaikkoja ennen nykyistä? Vastasiko aiemmat työpaikkasi koulutustanne?

Millaisia mahdollisuuksia teille on tarjottu osaamisesi parantamisesi?

Millaisia mahdollisuuksia teillä on edetä urallasi tulevaisuudessa?

Miten olette sopeutunut työyhteisöön?

Millaista hyötyä kansainvälisestä taustastasi on ollut työssä?

Oletteko voinut omalla osaamisellanne vaikuttaa eri menettelytapoihin työpaikallanne?

Näetkö itsesi työskentelemässä tässä yrityksessä vuoden/ viiden vuoden kuluttua? Jos ei, miksi?

**Kysymyksiä rekrytoijalle.****Rekrytointi:**

Onko sopivien työntekijöiden löytäminen haastavaa? Millaisia ongelmia?

Onko kansainvälisten työntekijöiden löytäminen haastavaa? Millaisia ongelmia?

Kuinka pitkältä ajalta yrityksellänne on kokemusta kansainvälisten työntekijöiden rekrytoinnista? Millaisiin tehtäviin olette rekrytoineet?

Onko yrityksellänne ollut muita syitä kansainvälisen työntekijän rekrytoinnille, kuin osaajapula? Jos, mitä?

Aiotteko jatkossakin rekrytoida kansainvälisiä työntekijöitä?

Miten kansainvälistä rekrytointia voisi helpottaa?

Mitä kanavia käytätte rekrytoidessanne?

Millainen prosessi kansainvälisen työntekijän rekrytoiminen on? Miten se eroaa kantasuomalaisen rekrytoimisesta? Miten sitä voisi helpottaa?

Mistä olette saaneet tietoa kansainvälisen työntekijän rekrytointiin? Onko tietoa mielestänne riittävästi saatavissa?

**Kieli:**

Oliko suomen kielen taito ratkaisevassa osassa työpaikan saamisen kannalta?

Onko suomen kielen osaaminen välttämätöntä työpaikalla toimeen tulemisen kannalta?

Onko kansainvälisen työntekijän kielitaidosta tai vieraan kulttuurin tuntemisesta ollut hyötyä?

Miten työntekijät ovat tulleet toimeen vieraskielisten kollegoiden kanssa? Millaisia ongelmia on ollut?

Tarjoaako yrityksenne mahdollisuuksia parantaa työntekijöiden kielitaitoa?

**Työhön perehdytys:**

Millainen prosessi kansainvälisen työntekijän perehdytys on?

Miten se poikkeaa normaalista perehdytyksestä?

Millä tavoin kansainvälisen työntekijän tausta ja mahdolliset kulttuurierot huomioidaan perehdytyksessä?

Muita toimia, jotka parantavat työpaikalle sopeutumista?

**Työ:**

Miten arvioitte kansainvälisen työntekijän sopeutuneen teidän yrityksenne työyhteisöön?

Onko työpaikalla ollut eri kulttuureista johtuvia ongelmia? Miten ne on ratkaistu?

Millaista lisäarvoa kansainvälinen työntekijä on tuonut yritykselle?

Miten kansainvälinen työntekijä on auttanut yritystänne kansainvälistymään?