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# Bridging International Job Seekers and Social-Healthcare Companies through Digital Networking

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One of the primary objectives of the DigiMESH project is to identify the requirements and needs of companies and employers regarding employing an international workforce and recognising suitable ways for networking with them. Immigrants often encounter significant challenges in accessing information about the hidden job market. Successful networking can help immigrants get information about different job opportunities and careers (Doyle 2020 in Jinia, N.J. et al. 2021).

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the labour force and the social welfare sector have undergone significant transformations. This sector faces a dual challenge: a growing demand for labour and an increase in jobless individuals with international backgrounds. There is a crying shortage of care assistants, nurses and family caregivers. Work-based immigration is needed in the social security sector (Hyvinvointiala.fi). Bridging the gap between the sectors and skilled immigrants requires effective networking and collaboration (Hillgren et al. 2021).

## Digital event as a platform for the companies and the international talents

Keeping the above scenario in mind, the Tampere UAS team organised an online event on September 21, 2022. The event was designed to facilitate building a network and foster connections between companies in the social service sector and international talents in the field. [Mehiläinen](#) and [Attendo](#) participated as the event's social services and health care companies.

We received a total of 60 applications, and after reviewing their academic backgrounds and work experience, 26 participants were selected. These individuals were collected through an open call circulated within the higher education community and via the communication channels of International House Tampere. Ultimately, 20 people participated in the event.

The Zoom event lasted for an hour-and-a-half and included components such as: i) a concise project presentation ii) instructions for participants to write down comments and questions related to company presentations to gather additional information iv) two company presentations and vi) key questions and comments were extracted from the chat and provided the presenters with an opportunity to discuss them with company representatives. The key questions and comments were brought up, and they gave a good starting point for a discussion between the company representatives and the participants.

Furthermore, during the event, we tested and assessed the Flinga platform, ensuring seamless interaction and communication for exchanging contact information in a digital setting.

### **A great opportunity to get in touch with companies**

Overall, the event went well, and both the companies and participants expressed their satisfaction. The participants mentioned that the *Social and Healthcare Professionals Getting to Know Each Other* event was an excellent means of acquainting employers with the challenges faced by non-Finnish speakers seeking employment in the healthcare sector. The event served as an invaluable platform, enabling participants to engage with companies directly, thereby gaining insights and addressing concerns pertinent to their field.

*“Upon my recent arrival in Finland, my primary goal was to familiarise myself with companies in the healthcare industry. However, the event not only allowed me to achieve this objective but also provided an opportunity for me to establish contact with them. I gained insights into the company’s values and identified the language skills necessary for potential future employment.” -event participant*

Later we scheduled a follow-up meeting for the participants, *the Net-Weaving Event*, on April 13, 2023, where we assessed the progress that had been made. Feedback from the participants was overwhelmingly positive and the opportunity was considered good.

### **Fruitful conversation about language requirements**

We received comments from participants during the event via chat and their primary focus was on the challenge of language learning. They pointed out a significant issue with Finnish language courses, which is the lack of specific healthcare vocabulary and expressions. They observed that when they begin working or undergoing training in the healthcare field, the language and terminology used in that context differs significantly from what is taught in standard language courses.

As a recommendation, we suggested that they enhance their language skills by actively building connections with native Finnish speakers and to consider enrolling in specialised language courses that cater to the specific needs of healthcare professionals.

In addition, participants mentioned that a lack of access to contact information in their professional fields is another challenge for them. Arranging networking events has helped them develop connections among international skilled individuals and companies.

### **Digital events as opportunities to identify weaknesses and challenges in the social and healthcare sector.**

Ensuring an adequate labour force in the healthcare and social welfare sector is anticipated to pose a big challenge in the future. Digitalisation and technological advancements offer fresh opportunities for healthcare and social services. To enhance labour availability, it is imperative to concentrate on enhancing the sector's appeal and improving working conditions.

To address the labour crisis in the healthcare and social sector in Finland, digital networking and organising virtual events can be considered very effective. In light of our experiences, we believe that this approach helps identify weaknesses and transform challenges into opportunities.

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**Photo:** RDNE Stock project / Pexels

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