



EMN study

Fostering sustainable labour market integration of migrants: skills matching policies and instruments – National Report of Finland

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1. Introduction

This report on the employment of immigrants and the mismatch between skills and job requirements is based on data collected primarily for an EU level study prepared by the European Migration Network (EMN). The EU level study examines the employment of immigrants in tasks that match their skills and the barriers to employment in different countries. Data for the EU level study was collected from EMN Member Countries using a set of pre-defined questions. As a result, the Finnish report is not an exhaustive overview of the topic.

The first chapter of this report discusses the mismatch between skills and job requirements using the concepts of vertical and horizontal mismatch. The chapter also examines the barriers to employment that immigrants face in the Finnish labour market and that make it more difficult for immigrants to find employment matching their skills.

The second chapter proceeds to examine measures that can promote immigrants' employment in jobs matching their skills. The chapter presents the authorities responsible for promoting the employment of immigrants, reviews both the authorities' measures as well as third-sector projects undertaken to promote employment, and highlights good practices and future development needs.

2. Finding employment in jobs matching skills

2.1. Mismatch between skills and job requirements

In this report, the mismatch between skills and job requirements mainly refers to a situation where an immigrant is unable to make use of their education and/or skills in their job. In other words, the employee's skills or training do not meet the skills or training requirements set for the job. The concept of skills mismatch can be divided into vertical and horizontal mismatches. A vertical mismatch refers to a situation where a person's level of experience or education is higher (over-experienced or overqualified) or lower (under-experienced or underqualified) than the level required in a job. For example, a registered nurse employed as a practical nurse could be considered overqualified. A horizontal mismatch refers to a situation where an employee's field of education is not related to their field of work. This means that the person works in a field for which they have not been trained. For example, a horizontal mismatch can occur when a construction engineer works as a marketing expert.¹

A mismatch between skills and job requirements must be distinguished from a labour market mismatch, even if these concepts are closely linked. Overall, a labour market mismatch means that there are both vacancies and unemployed people in a particular sector or occupation. In practice, a labour market mismatch involves simultaneous supply and demand for a certain profession, but for whatever reason, these do not match.²

In Finland, there has been relatively little political debate on the mismatch between skills and job requirements and the employment of immigrants in jobs that match their skills. While the problem has been identified, there has been greater concern about the overall employment outcomes among immigrants. Any employment of immigrants has generally been regarded as a positive outcome, even if it means finding temporary employment in a field that does not match the person's education and/or skills.³

At times, international recruitments in the healthcare and social welfare sector have sparked discussion on the match between the educational backgrounds required by job vacancies and those of recruited persons. International recruitment has been considered one solution to the chronic labour shortage in the healthcare and social welfare sector. Foreign labour has been recruited from countries such as the Philippines, which is one of the partner countries for international recruitment identified by the government.⁴ Healthcare and social welfare are regulated sectors in Finland, and qualifications obtained abroad do not usually entitle individuals to practice regulated professions as such. As a result, for example, individuals who have trained as nurses in their country of origin may, in practice, end up working as nursing assistants in Finland. According to the Union of Health and Social Care Service Professionals (Tehy), the lack of a permanent qualification path is a particular problem. Tehy has emphasised that establishing a permanent model that enables those coming to Finland to find employment in positions matching their education as quickly as possible should be set as the goal.⁵

¹ EMN (2025).

² Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (8.3.2024).

³ KEHA Centre, interview, 26.8.2025.

⁴ Yle (27.9.2022).

⁵ STTK (18.3.2024).

On a more general level, several private sector actors have noted that Finland needs more foreign labour. For example, ETLA Economic Research has examined the need for immigration, the number of immigrants and the effects of migration on the Finnish economy. According to their report, immigration has a positive impact on the public sector, but preventing the decline in the working-age population would require a net annual migration of 44,000 people.⁶ At the same time, for example, Barona's employer surveys indicate that there are still many practical challenges related to increasing the workforce, including inadequate language skills of employees and/or employers and permit processes.⁷ These factors may lead employers to perceive hiring their first foreign employee as a laborious process.⁸ It has also been emphasised that overall attitudes and discrimination affect the employment of immigrants. For example, Finnish higher education graduates from third countries have been found to face challenges in finding employment that matches their qualifications. Many start their career in a workplace where Finnish language skills are not needed, for example, as a cleaner. Some graduates will remain permanently in jobs that do not match their education, as they fail to find work in their field.⁹ According to a survey conducted by the Union of Professional Engineers in Finland and the Academic Engineers and Architects in Finland, TEK, employees felt that insufficient language proficiency was the factor that most hindered their access to suitable employment.¹⁰ In some cases, the reason may not be so much a lack of language proficiency as the high level set for Finnish language proficiency.¹¹

2.2. Barriers to finding employment in jobs that match skills in Finland

Insufficient language proficiency

Various factors make it difficult for immigrants to find employment in jobs that match their skills. While the mismatch between skills and job requirements is a relatively common phenomenon in Finland, it has been found to be the most prominent among highly educated immigrants. In survey data collected by Statistics Finland, immigrants mentioned inadequate language proficiency as the most common reason for difficulties in finding employment. On average, women with an immigrant background demonstrate higher proficiency in Finnish or Swedish than men. In fact, women have been observed to be more likely than men to find employment in fields requiring good language skills, such as in education and nursing. Compared to other groups, a lack of language proficiency was slightly less likely to prevent higher education graduates from finding employment. This may be partly explained by English being one of the working languages available in specialist positions requiring a degree from higher education.¹²

Employers may require good Finnish language skills even when they are not necessary for the job in question. Finding employment is increasingly challenging if the person also does not speak English. Due to insufficient language proficiency, some end up in jobs without language skill requirements that do not match their skills.¹³ If, after moving to Finland, an immigrant has to work in a job that does not match their skills, over time, it may become increasingly difficult for them to access jobs that match their qualifications. In general, gaps in a person's work history in a relevant field are viewed negatively in Finland.¹⁴

⁶ Etla (2024); Etla (2.12.2024).

⁷ Barona (12.9.2024).

⁸ Job Market Finland (26.6.2025).

⁹ Akava (21.3.2024).

¹⁰ TEK (26.8.2025).

¹¹ Akava (7.11.2024).

¹² Statistics Finland (17.1.2023).

¹³ Akava (21.3.2024).

¹⁴ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, interview, 25.8.2025.

Meanwhile, the language skills of employers may also affect immigrants' employment prospects. According to an employer survey conducted in 2021, employers' poor language skills were the most common reason for not hiring international labour. If a workplace is not accustomed to using English, it may not consider hiring international labour as a viable option. In a similar study completed in 2023, employers' preconditions for employing foreign-language workers had improved, and an increasing number of employers had discussed hiring international labour. Nevertheless, language was still perceived as the greatest challenge among employers.¹⁵

Discrimination in society and the labour market

Discrimination is a key factor complicating immigrants' lives and making it harder for them to find employment. In a survey conducted by Statistics Finland, respondents with a foreign background reported that discrimination based on their origin was the second most significant reason for difficulties in finding employment, right after language proficiency.¹⁶

According to the MoniSuomi report of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 42% of immigrants had experienced discrimination during the year preceding the survey. In addition, 26% had experienced discrimination, especially in working life, during the past year. At the total population level, the corresponding rate was 14%. Of men with an African background, up to 46% had faced discrimination in working life. Of men who had moved to Finland from the Middle East and North Africa, 41% had experiences of discrimination at work or in job-seeking. Of women of African origin, 33% had experienced discrimination in working life during the previous year.¹⁷

The Ombudsman for Equality prepared a report based on an online survey on discrimination experienced by people of African background. According to the respondents' experiences, discrimination in working life is related to both access to jobs and career development opportunities in a specific job. According to the report, people of African descent face diverse and structural discrimination in working life which results in people of African descent ending up in fields or tasks that do not match their education. The respondents also felt that they were only offered short-term employment relationships or worse terms of employment compared to others working similar jobs. Discriminatory practices were considered to apply to immigrants in general, but especially those with an African background.¹⁸

Discrimination in recruitment also has a major impact on the employment opportunities of people with a foreign background. A study carried out in 2024 examined discrimination in recruitment in Finland. A similar study was carried out in 2016. Both studies included a large number of fictitious job applicants, all of whom had completed the same education in Finland, had the same amount of work experience, and had excellent Finnish language skills. The applicants represented five ethnic groups: Finnish, English, Russian, Iraq and Somali. The study results showed a direct causal relationship between the applicants' foreign-seeming names and their likelihood of receiving a job interview invitation. Applicants with Finnish-sounding names had by far the highest rate of interview invitations relative to the number of applications submitted. In turn, applicants with a name indicating a Somali background had to submit 2.48 times as many applications to receive an interview invitation. For applicants with an Iraqi background, the corresponding number was 2.06. These differences between applicants decreased significantly from 2016 to 2024, which may partly indicate that the Finnish labour market has become more inclusive. Despite this, Finnish applicants continue to be at a clear advantage compared to applicants with an immigrant background.¹⁹

¹⁵ Barona (22.09.2022); Barona (8.9.2023).

¹⁶ Statistics Finland (17.1.2023).

¹⁷ THL (2022).

¹⁸ Non-Discrimination Ombudsman (2020).

¹⁹ Ahmad (2019); Non-Discrimination Ombudsman (2020).

The 2019 integration overview also found that, in practice, the Finnish labour market is ethnically hierarchical. Not only do immigrants have to submit more job applications than those with a Finnish background in order to receive an interview invitation, but their earnings and employment levels also fall behind those of people with a Finnish background.²⁰

Differences in education and qualifications

There may be major differences between the education systems of immigrants' countries of origin and Finland, and the countries' education levels do not always match. A vocational qualification obtained in a country of origin may not correspond to the level of a Finnish vocational qualification, or its content may be considerably different. For example, the content of a qualification in the construction sector may be significantly different due to the different climate and environmental conditions in the countries. As a result, education acquired in the country of origin may not be directly comparable with an equivalent level of education in Finland.²¹ Skills required in the country of origin may also not always correspond to the skill level required in Finland. For example, factors such as the country's level of technological development affect skill requirements set for tasks related to information technology.²²

It is also often challenging to identify prior learning acquired in the country of origin. The lack of documents necessary for the identification of skills makes the validation of prior learning difficult. There are significant differences in how skills are recorded across countries, and in some cases, it may also be difficult for immigrants to obtain official documents due to the situation in their country of origin. If a person does not have the necessary documents, the authorities have limited means to verify their skills. Assessing the reliability of documents can also be challenging.²³

It is particularly difficult to find employment in regulated professions. Finland has several regulated professions which may only be practised by applying to the competent authority for the right to practice. If the person has completed their education abroad, they must apply for a decision on recognition of a qualification obtained abroad. The Finnish National Agency for Education decides on the qualifications provided by a foreign degree for a position requiring a higher education degree at a certain level or specific qualification. Sector-specific authorities decide on the right to practise a profession or to use a professional title. For example, to practice as a doctor in Finland, a person needs approval from the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health.²⁴ Permit applications are subject to a fee.²⁵ Especially immigrants outside integration services have often been found to be excluded from services for the identification of skills.²⁶

Poor knowledge of the labour market

Knowledge of the labour market system also affects the employment opportunities of individuals. In Finland, recruitment processes are largely based on a CV and a written application. By contrast, job search may take very different forms in immigrants' countries of origin.²⁷ Writing applications that match requirements can be challenging, especially for those who struggle with Finnish or English.

²⁰ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2020).

²¹ KEHA Centre, interview, 26.8.2025; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, interview, 25.8.2025.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Finnish National Agency for Education (2021).

²⁵ KEHA Centre, interview, 26.8.2025; Finnish National Agency for Education (undated a).

²⁶ Finnish Government (2025).

²⁷ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, interview, 25.8.2025.

The knowledge of the labour market is also often influenced by the extent of a person's network, and the lack of networks may make it more difficult for a person to access jobs in their field.²⁸ In a research project of the University of Eastern Finland and the University of Turku, international experts reported that the hidden job market made it harder for them to find employment. As international employees lack networks, they may not hear about the hidden vacancies that come to Finns' attention.²⁹ At the same time, local workplace culture may also make it more difficult for immigrants to build networks and advance in their careers, especially if they do not speak Finnish.³⁰

Poor knowledge of the labour market and working conditions may also expose international employees to weaker working conditions and labour exploitation. Immigrants are considerably more likely to work in part-time and fixed-term jobs compared with Finns. In particular, immigrants are over-represented in involuntary part-time work and temporary agency employment relationships. For example, a gap of up to 15 percentage points has been observed between highly educated language minorities and Finnish and Swedish speakers in precarious work. Immigrants' working conditions are also often poor. The bargaining position of an immigrant with a fixed-term employment relationship may be impaired by factors such as a fear that the employment will not continue, which may lead to the person accepting unfavourable terms of employment.³¹ Indeed, immigrants are at greater risk of being exploited in the labour market because of their more vulnerable position, as the right of residence of immigrants in Finland is often based on employment.³²

Impact of integration on employment

The duration of a person's stay in Finland may have an indirect impact on their possibilities of finding work that matches their education and skills. A person who has resided in Finland for longer is more likely to have established social networks, acquired the skills required in the labour market, learned the language and generally integrated into Finland.³³ The impact of the length of stay is evident, for example, in the employment outcomes of beneficiaries of international protection. While the employment situation of those arriving in Finland on the basis of international protection is, on average, initially poor, in the long term, their employment rate is close to that of people arriving in Finland on other grounds. For example, 10 years after their entry into Finland, the difference in employment rates of those who came to the country with a work-based residence permit and the beneficiaries of international protection is just 20 per cent, while being as high as 80 per cent in the first year.³⁴ The positive impact of integration is also particularly reflected in improving employment rates among mothers with an immigrant background over time.³⁵

Further years of residence may also have reverse effects. For example, if a highly educated person has initially worked in a job that does not match their education in Finland, it may become more difficult for them to find employment in their field later.³⁶ The residence permit process may also make it challenging to change fields. Those whose residence in Finland is based on a residence

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Akava (7.11.2024).

³⁰ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, interview, 25.8.2025.

³¹ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2024)

³² Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, interview, 25.8.2025.

³³ KEHA Centre, interview, 26.8.2025; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, interview, 25.8.2025.

³⁴ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2024a).

³⁵ Statistics Finland (12.5.2016)

³⁶ Akava (21.3.2024).

permit for an employed person have been issued a permit for a specific professional field. In practice, this means that the person is only entitled to work in the field identified in their permit. If the person wishes to work in another field, they must apply for a new residence permit.³⁷ The issuance of a residence permit may take time, making it impossible to change jobs without a delay.

Challenges related to gender and age

The employment rate of women with an immigrant background in Finland appears to be low compared to not only men with a foreign background but also women with a Finnish background. Factors such as the level of education affect women's employment opportunities. Especially women from the Middle East and Africa often have relatively low levels of education. In addition to the level of education, parenthood, and the number of children often affect employment, especially if childcare and home care are the sole responsibility of the mother. After becoming parents, women with a foreign background are less likely to contribute to the labour market. It may also be harder for them to re-enter the labour market if they have little work experience or vocational training before becoming parents. As fixed-term employment relationships are also more common among people with a foreign background, a woman taking family leave may not have a job to return to.³⁸

While age discrimination occurs in the Finnish labour market regardless of people's backgrounds, older immigrants may face greater challenges in learning the language and the way the labour market operates.³⁹ On the other hand, older immigrants may have more work experience, which makes it easier for them to find a job that matches their skills.⁴⁰

Finland's economic situation and structural factors

In addition to individual factors, Finland's weak economic situation and economic fluctuations have broad impacts on immigrants' employment opportunities and income development. Economic fluctuations also affect the number of foreign employees arriving in Finland.⁴¹ In recent years, the weak economic situation has resulted in a decrease in the employment rate of immigrants.⁴² However, according to Barona's employer survey, the number of international recruitments increased last year despite the weak economic situation.⁴³

While Finland has a relatively comprehensive framework of integration services, municipalities, which are responsible for employment and integration services, have limited resources for implementing the services and ensuring everyone who needs these services gets them. As a result, it is not always possible to allocate resources to all necessary areas.⁴⁴ New cuts have also been planned for integration services, which may impair the availability of integration services.⁴⁵

Of the Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection living in the Helsinki metropolitan area, 57% reported working in jobs below their previous professional level prior to arrival in Finland. A study examining the experiences of Ukrainians also found that service providers, such as Employment

³⁷ Finnish Immigration Service (undated).

³⁸ Statistics Finland (12.5.2016).

³⁹ KEHA Centre, interview, 26.8.2025; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, interview, 25.8.2025.

⁴⁰ Statistics Finland (17.1.2023).

⁴¹ Etila (2024); KEHA Centre, interview, 26.8.2025; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, interview, 25.8.2025.

⁴² Finnish Government (26.3.2024).

⁴³ Barona (2025).

⁴⁴ KEHA Centre, interview, 26.8.2025; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, interview, 25.8.2025.

⁴⁵ STT (19.2.2026).

and Economic Development Offices, may pressure job applicants to accept jobs at a lower occupational level instead of, for example, offering them training programmes that match their previous work experience.⁴⁶

The employment situation may also be influenced by the difficulty of coordinating low earnings and social benefits. The complexity of legislation related to issues such as the job search requirement makes it challenging to understand the law and related obligations, especially for non-Finnish speakers. In addition, the status of certain employee groups, such as platform workers, is rather poor in terms of unemployment security.⁴⁷ In some cases, social benefits may constitute an incentive trap if the person concerned is worried that, for example, increasing their working hours would lead to a reduction in benefits, leaving them with no financial gain from the additional work.

As a rule, Finland has relatively long childcare leaves and, for example, a person taking care of their child aged under three outside the municipal early childhood education and care service may receive child home care allowance. However, in some cases, this may constitute an incentive trap, especially for immigrant women with more limited opportunities for accessing jobs with good pay due to structural factors compared to women with a Finnish background. A problem may also emerge due to delays in access to childcare. Under the law, in urgent situations, a place in municipal early childhood education and care must be arranged within two weeks. In situations such as being invited to a job interview, it may be difficult to secure childcare in time.⁴⁸

The majority of immigrants arriving in Finland move to large cities, especially the Helsinki metropolitan area. Large cities do not have sufficient affordable housing available for everyone in need. In 2022, living in overcrowded conditions⁴⁹ was 21% more common among immigrants (35%) than those born in Finland (14%). The fact that there are more families with children among immigrants compared to the total population contributes to the difference in prevalence.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Finnish Refugee Council (2025).

⁴⁷ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2024).

⁴⁸ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, interview, 25.8.2025.

⁴⁹ Living in overcrowded conditions means that there is more than one person per room living in a dwelling. The kitchen is not included in the number.

⁵⁰ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2024b).

3. Promoting employment in jobs that match immigrants' skills

3.1. Parties responsible for promoting employment

Finland does not have a designated authority responsible for reducing the mismatch between skills and job requirements among immigrants. By contrast, several different authorities may play a role in promoting the employment of immigrants. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment is responsible for developing the policy, legislation and governance related to labour migration and integration. The ministry is also responsible for the overall steering of public employment services. Immigration of international talent and labour is developed through the national Talent Boost programme coordinated by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education and Culture.⁵¹ For example, the programme is used to strengthen cooperation between the private sector and the public Talent Boost network. The programme aims to attract a work-force that corresponds to the needs in Finland and to enable those arriving in the country to find employment that matches their skills. One of the measures entered into the programme is also shortening the processing times for the recognition of qualifications and developing alternative models to supplement foreign qualifications. The aim is to introduce a scheme in which skills obtained outside Finland would allow smoother access to jobs that match applicants' skills. The Ministry of Education and Culture, the National Board of Education, the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health are jointly responsible for the implementation of this measure.⁵²

A new Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (681/2023) entered into force in 2025. The starting point of the new act is to enable multidisciplinary cooperation between the authorities and other actors promoting integration at the local, regional and national levels. However, municipalities have overall responsibility for the integration of immigrants. The aims of the reform include streamlining the pathways to working life and making it easier to provide immigrants outside the labour force with access to services.⁵³ As a result of the reform of employment and economic development services, municipalities are also responsible for the provision of employment services. The aim is to provide the customers of employment services with targeted services that match the labour market needs in a given region.⁵⁴ In municipalities, the employment authority organises the services covered by the integration programme, which include assessment of integration service needs and skills, as well as the provision of training that supports Finnish and Swedish language proficiency, literacy and writing skills, societal and working life skills and employment.⁵⁵

Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY Centres) are responsible for the regional development, cooperation, coordination and monitoring of the promotion of integration and settlement. ELY Centres also monitor the availability, quality and impacts of integration services for immigrants outside the labour force. The Employment, Development and Administration Centre of the ELY Centres, i.e., the KEHA Centre, is an authority that supports the parties responsible for integration. The KEHA Centre's tasks include the monitoring of employment and integration.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (undated a).

⁵² Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2023).

⁵³ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (18.12.2024).

⁵⁴ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (undated b).

⁵⁵ Integration.fi (undated).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for education policy in Finland. Citizens of third countries mainly participate in the same training and education as Finns, but support measures and preparatory education and training are available for them to acquire the necessary language proficiency as well as other skills. Liberal adult education institutions, such as adult education centres, organise training in literacy and integration for adult immigrants. The training is free of charge if it has been approved as part of the person's integration plan.⁵⁷

The Finnish National Agency for Education is an expert network operating under the Ministry of Education and Culture that implements education policy and develops education in Finland. The agency also produces and distributes information on various functions in the field of education, such as support measures that Finnish higher education institutions provide for immigrants. The Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland (SIMHE) services organised by higher education institutions aim to, for example, streamline the identification and recognition of prior learning acquired by highly educated people with a foreign background and support them in finding employment in the Finnish labour market. The goal is to enable highly educated immigrants arriving in Finland to find suitable education and career pathways as quickly as possible. Higher education institutions are responsible for providing practical support measures for immigrants, but their activities are subsidised by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Finnish National Agency for Education is in charge of the SIMHE cooperation group, which coordinates the activities nationally.⁵⁸

The Finnish National Agency for Education also provides advice on issues related to the academic and professional recognition of qualifications completed abroad. In practice, the recognition of qualifications means a decision on the eligibility of a qualification obtained abroad for employment. The Finnish National Agency for Education decides on the qualifications provided by a foreign degree for a position requiring a higher education degree at a certain level or specific qualification. Sector-specific authorities, such as the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health, decide on the right to practise a profession or use a professional title.⁵⁹

3.2. Measures and projects to promote employment

In the data collection for the EU level study, EMN Member Countries were asked to present measures and projects promoting the employment of immigrants in jobs that match their skills. The key official measures identified in Finland include integration training organised as labour market training, Work in Finland activities and SIMHE services provided by higher education institutions.⁶⁰ Third-sector projects included the Auroras network and the Sauma training and mentoring programme for jobseekers.

Integration training is among the services provided under the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration which are offered to persons who have moved to Finland permanently. While the content and scope of integration training vary according to individual needs, in general, the training includes instruction in Finnish or Swedish, an on-the-job learning period, identification of prior learning, and vocational planning and career guidance. In practice, integration training is usually organised as labour market training. Integration training organised as labour market

⁵⁷ Ministry of Education and Culture (undated).

⁵⁸ Finnish National Agency for Education (undated b).

⁵⁹ Finnish National Agency for Education (2021).

⁶⁰ KEHA Centre, interview, 26.8.2025; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, interview, 25.8.2025.

training has been considered a good practice and a significant service promoting integration.⁶¹ Essential parts of labour market training include a workplace-oriented approach to integration and setting employment as the target. Labour market training is organised by the employment authority, which plans the training together with the training provider. Employers can also participate in the organisation of labour market training.⁶² During the training, participants are entitled to receive unemployment benefits and expense allowance. In the context of integration training procured by ELY Centres, customers have, on a case-by-case basis, been provided with various permits or certificates, National Certificates of Language Proficiency (YKI) tests that measure language proficiency levels, and been reimbursed for costs related to the recognition of qualifications when the customer has sought access to a regulated profession.

Foreign jobseekers can also benefit from the services provided by Work in Finland. The Work in Finland service, consisting of Business Finland and the KEHA Centre, includes support services for both employers and foreign employees. The section aimed at foreign jobseekers includes job advertisements in English, information on living and working in Finland and events aimed at jobseekers. English-language jobs are filtered to the Work in Finland website from Job Market Finland, an employment service platform implemented by the KEHA Centre and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. On the platform, users can filter jobs based on the sector and city they want. Those seeking employment may also create a job applicant profile on the platform and receive direct suggestions for jobs that correspond to their skills and wishes based on the profile.⁶³

The Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland (SIMHE) services of higher education institutions promote participation in higher education studies and employment in Finland's labour market among highly educated immigrants. The SIMHE services offered by the responsible higher education institutions include preparatory training, language instruction, career guidance and advice. Another aim is to improve the efficiency and speed of the recognition of immigrants' skills and studies. The responsible higher education institutions cooperate with parties such as other higher education institutions, authorities and stakeholders.⁶⁴ Since 2022, the number of responsible higher education institutions has been ten. The activities are supported by strategic funding allocated by the Ministry of Education and Culture to higher education institutions. In 2021, a significant share of the immigrants applying for the SIMHE guidance and mentoring programme were unemployed. Those participating in the programme have been referred to open education offered by universities or universities of applied sciences, language courses, the TE Office or job search, and to pursue degree studies at a university or university of applied sciences.⁶⁵

The focus of the SIMHE activities varies between different higher education institutions. For example, the University of Helsinki has developed advisory services and application processes for applicants unable to validate their prior learning with official documents. One of the focus areas of these development efforts has also been determining qualification pathways for regulated professions. The "Pätevänä töihin" ('Get qualified and get a job') project organised pilot studies that provided 24 persons who had completed a degree in the field of education abroad with support and guidance that enabled them to participate in the same courses as Finnish-speaking pedagogy students. The experiences gathered were used to develop a separate application process for

⁶¹ Economic Development Centre (2022); KEHA Centre, interview, 26.8.2025.

⁶² Job market Finland (undated a).

⁶³ EMN Finland (2025); Work in Finland (undated).

⁶⁴ Finnish National Agency for Education (undated b).

⁶⁵ Finnish National Agency for Education (2023).

non-degree teacher qualification studies based on a decision on degree recognition.⁶⁶ The University of Helsinki also offers preparatory AKVA Training in academic readiness for immigrants interested in studying at a higher education institution and building a career in Finland. The training provides students with personal guidance on education and careers.⁶⁷

The SIMHE services have been developed as part of the Talent Boost programme. For example, some universities have collaborated with local International House activities to provide joint services for immigrants who have moved to Finland because of studies and employment. International House activities provide official and advisory services for immigrants on a one-stop-shop basis. The University of Tampere has developed the International Talents Mentoring Programme and traineeship support to promote employment. The Savonia University of Applied Sciences aims to attract more students to Eastern Finland and to improve the employment of international experts already in the region in jobs that match their skills. The Savonia University of Applied Sciences mainly uses the SIMHE activities to help immigrants living in the region gain access to higher education studies, as well as support those with a higher education degree in finding work that matches their education.⁶⁸

In addition to official measures, third-sector projects promote the employment of immigrants. For example, the Auroras network promotes the employment of highly educated women in their field of expertise. Auroras is a national working life network that supports, for example, the Finnish language studies, networking and career development of immigrant women. The network organises language and mentoring groups consisting of highly educated women in Finland who are familiar with working life, as well as those who have moved to Finland and require support in finding employment and strengthening their Finnish language skills. In the language groups, women get to practice Finnish language skills needed in applying for jobs and working life. Discussion topics include identification of skills, job search and Finnish working life in general. Individuals with Finnish language skills at the A2 level can participate in the language group activities. The mentoring group meetings involve discussing topics related to working life in more depth in Finnish, including competence development, job search, networking and self-management. Individuals must have Finnish language skills at the B1 level to participate in the mentoring group.⁶⁹

In addition to the group-based work, the Auroras network organises various working life events for groups. For example, in January 2026, the network organised the Auroras & CeMeWe Development Event, the focus of which was on career development. The event programme consisted of a talk on recruitment processes, tips for the job search process and workshop activities.⁷⁰ The network also organises visits to companies and organisations, whose aim is to create interactions between companies and highly educated immigrant women.⁷¹

The Sauma working life training programme, organised by the Finnish Refugee Council, provides immigrants with concrete assistance related to job search, information on Finnish working life and employers, and practice in job interviews. The training programme is primarily aimed at refugees arriving in Finland without a job or a study place, but other immigrants may also participate in the training. Participants must live in the Helsinki metropolitan area and know basic Finnish.⁷²

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ University of Helsinki (undated).

⁶⁸ Finnish National Agency for Education (2023).

⁶⁹ Auroras (undated a).

⁷⁰ Auroras (undated b).

⁷¹ Auroras (undated c).

⁷² Finnish Refugee Council (undated).

The working life training course is free of charge, and the language used is simple Finnish. The course is organised together with employer partners who can provide participants with access to a job interview and employment. Approximately half of those who completed the course in 2025 found a job.⁷³ The employer partners mostly represent sectors without a need for extensive training, including logistics, restaurants, cleaning, construction and trade.⁷⁴ The Sauma working life training courses have been organised in cooperation with companies such as Lidl and Ikea.

3.3. Good practices that promote employment in jobs matching skills and related development needs

Good practices

The good practices identified to promote the employment of immigrants included integration training organised as labour market training, a pay subsidy granted to employers, tools that enable identifying skills, and public and third-sector projects promoting employment. Integration training was discussed in the previous section. A pay subsidy is a subsidy intended to promote the employment of an unemployed jobseeker. The employment authority may grant employers hiring unemployed jobseekers a subsidy covering 50% of wage costs. The pay subsidy is granted for a fixed period, usually five or ten months, depending on the period of unemployment before work. The purpose of the pay subsidy is to promote the jobseeker's employment in the open labour market and to improve the jobseeker's professional skills. The granting of the subsidy is based on the service needs of the unemployed jobseeker, even though, in practice, the subsidy is granted to the employer. The pay subsidy must be applied for before the employment relationship begins.⁷⁵

Previously, the use of a pay subsidy to promote the employment of immigrants was hindered by the fact that the duration of the unemployment period determined the subsidy amount. In 2023, Marin's Government reformed the pay subsidy, making the subsidy amount 50% of wage costs regardless of the duration of unemployment. Among other things, the reform aimed to improve the opportunities to use pay subsidies to support the employment of immigrants, for example, during or after integration training.⁷⁶ There is also some research evidence on the positive impact of pay subsidies on the employment of immigrants.⁷⁷

Tools that enable identifying skills were highlighted as another good practice. To implement Finland's Sustainable Growth Programme, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a working group on the identification of skills in summer 2021. The aim of the working group was to find new solutions for the identification of skills, especially outside the formal education system. The working group published an interim report in 2022. In the report, the group proposed studies and pilots to find ways to promote the procedures and tools used in the identification of skills. Some pilots sought to test a model for the identification of skills among immigrants outside the labour force and integration services. The aim was also to create a proposal for a widely used model for the identification of the skills of this target group. Hyria, Spring House and Axxell Utbildning Ab, which carried out the pilots, published final reports on their results.⁷⁸

For example, the pilot carried out by Hyria resulted in a web-based toolkit for the identification of skills that can be used to build a competence profile, identify needs for further guidance and

⁷³ Finnish Refugee Council (2026).

⁷⁴ Service Manual (23.1.2026).

⁷⁵ Job market Finland (undated b).

⁷⁶ Finnish Government (2021); Finnish Government (23.3.2023).

⁷⁷ VTV (2020); Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (13.6.2017).

⁷⁸ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (undated c).

ensure that customers are heard. The toolkit consists of two steps, the first of which is simpler and also aimed at illiterate customers. The second step involves assessment of daily life management, working life skills, interaction skills, digital skills and skills obtained outside work and education.⁷⁹ The pilot carried out by Axxell Utbildning Ab created a model to assess participants' broad-based skills, professional skills, work ability and background, and their overall life situation. The aim of the multidisciplinary skills assessment and guidance service, the OSAAJA skills assessment, was to enable the assessment of skills and needs and to provide low-threshold guidance to refer participants to further services.⁸⁰

The activities of the working group on the identification of skills continued until the end of 2024, and its final report was published in early 2025. According to the final report, employers do not make very extensive use of the tools for the identification of skills, but other organisations, such as employment services, organisations and liberal adult education institutions make more versatile use of the tools for identifying informal skills. The identification of skills can be based on, for example, certificates granted outside the education system as well as discussions and tests.⁸¹

Development needs

According to the final report of the working group on the identification of skills, a more extensive identification of skills would be possible, but this requires cultural change, wide-ranging discussion on skills and consideration of identification of skills as a civic skill. According to the parties that implemented the pilots for the identification of skills aimed at immigrants, it is particularly important that guidance services are available in places where the target group also otherwise spends its time. Non-governmental organisations play a key role in reaching target groups. Services should therefore be delivered as close as possible to their users. In addition, immigrants should be more closely involved in processes that concern them. To ensure that the identification of skills brings more benefits, the services should also guide customers to supplement their skills. Overall, the processes for identifying prior learning and qualifications should be more efficient and productive.⁸²

Reaching customers may be particularly challenging in smaller municipalities that may not have any third-sector operators to partner with. Sufficient support is needed to ensure that customers do not fall outside the scope of the services. The pilot target group consisted of immigrants outside the labour force, but when developing services, it may not be necessary to limit them to immigrants outside the labour force or integration services. It is important for both individuals and the labour market to make as effective use of employees' skills as possible and target them accurately. When previously acquired skills are identified, individuals can better assess whether their current skills meet job requirements or whether it is necessary for them to acquire new skills, for example, to transition to more suitable tasks.⁸³

The receptiveness of society has a significant impact on the employment opportunities of immigrants. The effectiveness of measures promoting employment depends on issues such as how receptive the labour market is. Prejudices and discrimination play a key role in creating an imbalance between immigrants' skills and job requirements. To make full use of immigrants' skills, attitudes will also have to change.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Hyria (undated).

⁸⁰ Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2023).

⁸¹ Finnish Government (2025).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ahmad, Akhlaq (2025).

4. Summary

A mismatch between skills and job requirements mainly refers to a situation where an immigrant is unable to make use of their education and/or skills in their job. The concept of skills mismatch can be divided into vertical and horizontal mismatches. A vertical mismatch refers to a situation where a person's level of experience or education is higher or lower than the level required in a job. In turn, a horizontal mismatch refers to a situation where an employee's field of education is not related to their field of work. In Finland, there have been relatively few discussions on the mismatch between skills and job requirements and the employment of immigrants in jobs that match their skills. More attention has been paid to the overall employment situation of immigrants, regardless of whether jobs match their skill level.

Several factors have been identified in Finland that make it difficult for immigrants to find employment in jobs that match their skill level. The most significant barriers to employment identified include insufficient language proficiency and discrimination and prejudices faced by immigrants. Immigrants themselves have mentioned inadequate language skills as a typical reason for struggling to find employment. Employers may also require good Finnish language skills even when they are not necessary for the job in question. Meanwhile, the inadequate language skills of employers may also negatively affect immigrants' employment prospects.

In a survey conducted by Statistics Finland, respondents with a foreign background reported that discrimination based on their origin was the second most significant reason for difficulties in finding employment, right after language proficiency. Respondents to the online survey conducted by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman felt that discrimination in working life includes both finding work and career development opportunities. The respondents also felt that they were only offered short-term employment relationships or worse terms of employment compared to others working similar jobs. Discrimination in recruitment also has a major impact on the employment opportunities of people with a foreign background. A study carried out in 2024 examined discrimination in recruitment in Finland. The study results show a direct causal relationship between the applicants' foreign-seeming names and their likelihood of receiving a job interview invitation. Applicants with Finnish-sounding names had by far the highest rate of interview invitations relative to the number of applications submitted.

In addition to language skills and discrimination, other factors may also make it more difficult for immigrants to find employment. There may be major differences between the education systems of immigrants' countries of origin and Finland, and the countries' education levels do not always match. It is also often challenging to identify prior learning acquired in the country of origin. It is particularly difficult to find employment in regulated professions that require applying to the competent authority for the right to practice. Knowledge of the labour market system also affects the employment opportunities of individuals. Factors such as the extent or lack of networks may affect a person's knowledge of the labour market and thus make it more difficult for them to find work in their field of expertise. This is particularly the case with hidden jobs. Poor knowledge of the labour market and working conditions may also expose international employees to poorer working conditions and labour exploitation. In fact, immigrants are considerably more likely to work in part-time and fixed-term jobs compared with Finns.

The duration of residence in Finland and thus integration may also affect the possibilities of finding jobs that match one's skills. A person who has resided in Finland for longer is more likely to have established social networks, acquired the skills required in the labour market, learned the language and integrated into Finland. The positive impact of integration is particularly reflected in improving employment rates among mothers with an immigrant background over time. In general, the employment rate of women with an immigrant background in Finland appears to be low

compared to not only men with a foreign background but also women with a Finnish background. In addition to the level of education, parenthood, and the number of children have an impact on finding employment. After becoming parents, women with a foreign background are less likely to contribute to the labour market.

In addition to individual factors, Finland's weak economic situation and economic fluctuations have broad impacts on both the number of immigrants arriving in Finland, as well as immigrants' employment opportunities and income development. The economic situation is reflected in matters such as the limited resources available for employment and integration services. Other challenges may arise, for example, due to having to coordinate low earnings and social benefits, the difficulty in securing a childcare place and high costs of housing in large cities.

In Finland, several stakeholders can influence the employment of third-country nationals. At the highest level, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment is responsible for developing the policy, legislation and governance related to labour migration and integration. Following the entry into force of the new Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration in 2025, the responsibility for organising integration and employment services was transferred in full to municipalities. Of the other operators, the Finnish National Agency for Education produces and distributes information on various functions in the field of education, such as support measures that Finnish higher education institutions provide for immigrants. The Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland (SIMHE) services organised by higher education institutions aim to, for example, streamline the identification and recognition of prior learning acquired by highly educated people with a foreign background and support them in finding employment in the Finnish labour market. The Finnish National Agency for Education also provides advice on issues related to the academic and professional recognition of qualifications completed abroad. The Finnish National Agency for Education decides on the qualifications provided by a foreign degree for a position requiring a higher education degree at a certain level or specific qualification. Sector-specific authorities, such as the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health, decide on the right to practise a profession or use a professional title.

The key official measures identified in Finland include integration training organised as labour market training, Work in Finland activities and SIMHE services provided by higher education institutions. Third-sector projects mentioned in the responses included the Auroras network and the Sauma training and mentoring programme for jobseekers. Integration training is among the services provided under the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, which are offered to persons who have moved to Finland permanently. In practice, integration training is usually organised as labour market training. Integration training organised as labour market training has been considered a good practice and a significant service promoting integration. The Work in Finland service, consisting of Business Finland and the KEHA Centre, includes support services for both employers and foreign employees. The section aimed at foreign jobseekers includes job advertisements in English, information on living and working in Finland and events aimed at jobseekers. The SIMHE services of higher education institutions promote participation in higher education studies and employment in Finland's labour market among highly educated immigrants. The SIMHE services offered by the responsible higher education institutions include preparatory training, language instruction, career guidance and advice.

Third-sector projects mentioned in the responses included the Auroras network and the Sauma training and mentoring programme for jobseekers. Auroras is a national working life network that supports, for example, the Finnish language studies, networking and career development of immigrant women. The Sauma working life training programme, organised by the Finnish Refugee Council, provides immigrants with concrete assistance related to job search, information on Finnish working life and employers, and practice in job interviews. The course is organised together with employer partners, who can provide participants with access to a job interview and employment.

The report also identified good practices that promote the employment of immigrants and future development needs. The good practices included integration training organised as labour market training, a pay subsidy granted to employers, tools that enable identifying skills, and public and third-sector projects promoting employment. The identified development needs included the provision of services as close as possible to their users and the stronger involvement of immigrants in processes that concern them. The processes for identifying skills and qualifications could also be much more efficient than currently. Developing the receptiveness of society and Finnish working life also plays a key role, as prejudice and discrimination significantly contribute to the emergence of a mismatch between immigrants' skills and job requirements.

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