



UNIVERSITY  
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MINISTRY OF  
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FINLAND

A photograph of a lecture hall with concrete steps and grey seats. A young man in a black sweater sits on a higher step, looking towards a young woman in a striped shirt who is sitting on a lower step. In the foreground, a woman with dark skin and a blue denim shirt is out of focus, looking towards the camera.

# International talent programmes in Finland: a call for better service accessibility

REPORT

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# Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	3
1.1 Aim of the report .....	3
1.2 Methodology .....	4
1.3 Authors of the report .....	4
2. Benchmarking study: a comprehensive analysis of international talent programmes in Finland .....	6
2.1 A closer look at the different categories and their characteristics .....	7
2.2 Talent programmes and their target audience.....	8
3. Interviews: collection of data and results .....	10
3.1 How data was collected.....	10
3.2 Recording of results .....	10
3.3 Overview of interview results and international talent needs.....	10
4. A descriptive model of information sharing as a supportive resource for the proposed Virtual Finland service platform in the Roadmap .....	13
4.1 Implementing a single login and profile system .....	13
4.2 Path towards immigration, studies, employment, and integration from the start .....	14
4.3 Connecting international talent with the right services: a comprehensive database .....	14
4.4 Platform provides options for direct networking with the private sector and other parties .....	14
4.5 Platform provides placement style opportunities with private sector .....	14
4.6 Platform provides guidance and support during the most challenging transition phases .....	15
5. Conclusion .....	16
Annex .....	17

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Aim of the report

Finland's working age population, defined as those between the ages of 15 and 64, is facing a decline due to the country's low fertility rate and aging population<sup>1</sup>. This trend poses a risk of a future labour shortage, which could have negative impacts on the country's economic growth and competitiveness<sup>2</sup>. In response to this challenge, the Finnish Government has implemented a strategy to attract and retain international talent through immigration.

In 2021, the Government released the "Roadmap for education-based and work-based immigration 2035," which outlines an ambitious and bold plan to double the current volume of work-based immigration and triple the number of foreign degree students in Finland<sup>3</sup>. To successfully implement this strategy and support the migration experience, it is important to explore and adopt new innovative approaches.

The Roadmap presents three strategic objectives:<sup>4</sup>

1. Finland is globally interesting and attractive.
2. Towards the world's best migration experience.
3. International talent promotes prosperity.

As part of our efforts to support the second strategic objective of the Roadmap (towards the world's best migration experience), we present in this report the importance of creating a single service portal – a comprehensive database that provides information and assistance to individuals looking to relocate to Finland (and those already here) for work or study. This portal, similar to the Virtual Finland service platform mentioned in the Roadmap<sup>5</sup>, would serve as a valuable resource for individuals navigating the often complex process of moving to a new country<sup>6</sup>. It would provide access to important information such as job search resources, talent programmes that support the integration and employability of newcomers in a new city or region, as well as practicalities of relocating, such as finding a place to live, enrolling children in school, and enrolling in healthcare.

In addition to the potential development of a single service portal, there are also a number of existing talent programmes in place to support the integration and employment of internationals in Finland<sup>7</sup>. While these programmes have had some success in helping newcomers find work and build a new life in Finland, there is still room for improvement. In this report, we will examine these talent programmes<sup>8</sup> in detail and provide

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Finland (2021): Birth rate in Finland is not sufficiently high for the age structure. Retrieved from [https://www.stat.fi/til/vaenn/2021/vaenn\\_2021\\_2021-09-30\\_tie\\_001\\_en.html](https://www.stat.fi/til/vaenn/2021/vaenn_2021_2021-09-30_tie_001_en.html).

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and Business Finland (2020): Talent Boost Cookbook Finland 2.0. Retrieved from: [https://tem.fi/documents/1410877/0/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland\\_2.0\\_FINAL.pdf/137bb163-1029-66ce-ce7d-1e81cf764775/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland\\_2.0\\_FINAL.pdf?t=1615875183962](https://tem.fi/documents/1410877/0/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland_2.0_FINAL.pdf/137bb163-1029-66ce-ce7d-1e81cf764775/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland_2.0_FINAL.pdf?t=1615875183962) (Page 6).

<sup>3</sup> Finnish Government (2021): Roadmap for Education-based and Work-based Immigration 2035. Retrieved from: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-939-7> (Page 21).

<sup>4</sup> Same source (Page 22).

<sup>5</sup> Same source (Page 27).

<sup>6</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2022): World Migration Report 2022. Retrieved from <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022> (Pages 11-12).

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and Business Finland (2020): Talent Boost Cookbook Finland 2.0. Retrieved from: [https://tem.fi/documents/1410877/0/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland\\_2.0\\_FINAL.pdf/137bb163-1029-66ce-ce7d-1e81cf764775/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland\\_2.0\\_FINAL.pdf?t=1615875183962](https://tem.fi/documents/1410877/0/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland_2.0_FINAL.pdf/137bb163-1029-66ce-ce7d-1e81cf764775/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland_2.0_FINAL.pdf?t=1615875183962) (Page 18).

<sup>8</sup> Benchmarking study on international talent programmes in Finland (2022). The study is available here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1T4hSfsM4SOjlucu25exSzomHxB3-uHua/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=115369739466633947102&rtpof=true&sd=true>

recommendations for how they (and their accessibility) can be improved to better meet the needs of internationals in Finland. By focusing on creating a world-class migration experience and supporting the integration and employability of international talents, we firmly believe that Finland can truly become a global leader in attracting and retaining the best and brightest from around the world.

This report has been created as part of the HEI LIFE project<sup>9</sup>, which aims to foster a more welcoming and inclusive environment for international academics, staff, and their families in Finnish higher education institutions. Through the development of national models and practical, adaptable solutions, the project aims to support the retention and integration of international talent and their families, foster collaboration with cities and regional partners, and encourage Finnish employers to hire international talent<sup>10</sup>. The ultimate goal of the HEI LIFE project is truly inspiring – to create a more inclusive environment for all internationals in Finland.

We hope that others find the results of this report useful in their own efforts to support and integrate international talent in their own communities.

## 1.2 Methodology

This report carefully assesses the effectiveness of the Virtual Finland service platform and provides recommendations for its implementation in the near future, as outlined in the Roadmap. To gather the necessary data, we conducted a multi-faceted research study, consisting of the following three steps:

1. **Benchmarking:** We conducted a thorough review of international talent programmes in Finland, including the HEI LIFE project, to identify best practices and key success factors.
2. **Interviews:** We interviewed five international talents currently residing in Finland to gain insight into how they access information about different services and career development opportunities offered to them.
3. **Descriptive model creation:** Based on our findings from the benchmarking study and interviews, we developed a descriptive model outlining the flow of information between authorities, private sector organisations, and international talent.

## 1.3 Authors of the report

Kristaps Kovalonoks and Ameya Foujdar, the authors of this report, have a strong connection to the University of Turku as international talents in Finland. They have been actively involved in the HEI LIFE project, which has allowed them to gain a deep understanding of the value of international talent programmes in Finland. They have personally benefited from these programmes through their studies, volunteering, and work at the university. Determined to give back to the community, they are dedicated to finding new innovative ways to improve Finland's talent attraction and retention efforts and to enhance the experiences of other international talents in the country.

Their background in higher education administration has provided them with a valuable and unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities of international talent programmes, as well as the complex

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<sup>9</sup> HEI LIFE stands for Higher Education Institutions Support for International Academics and Staff - Living, Integration, Family, and Employment in Finland.

<sup>10</sup> Read more about the HEI LIFE project: <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/cooperation/international-cooperation/hei-life>

issues surrounding immigration and integration. They have seen first-hand how these programmes can benefit both the individual and the wider community, and they believe that a well-designed integration model is key to maximising their impact. In this report, they explore the potential benefits of creating a single service portal and offer recommendations for its implementation, all with the goal of making Finland a more welcoming and supportive place for international talent.

Keywords: benchmarking study, Finland, HEI LIFE, immigration, integration, international talent, Roadmap 2035, service design, talent attraction and retention, Virtual Finland service platform.

## 2. Benchmarking study: a comprehensive analysis of international talent programmes in Finland

As part of the HEI LIFE project, we conducted a benchmarking study on international talent programmes in Finland<sup>11</sup>. This study involved a thorough review of various talent programmes, including those offered by higher education institutions, cities, the business sector, and NGOs. The study was completed in the summer of 2021, and the findings were first presented at a HEI LIFE sub project meeting on September 2, 2021, which focused on spouse activities. The audience at the meeting praised the study and expressed their appreciation that such research was being conducted. The study also received widespread promotion on social media platforms, particularly LinkedIn, with many participants in the HEI LIFE project sharing the findings. An example can be seen below (*image 1*).

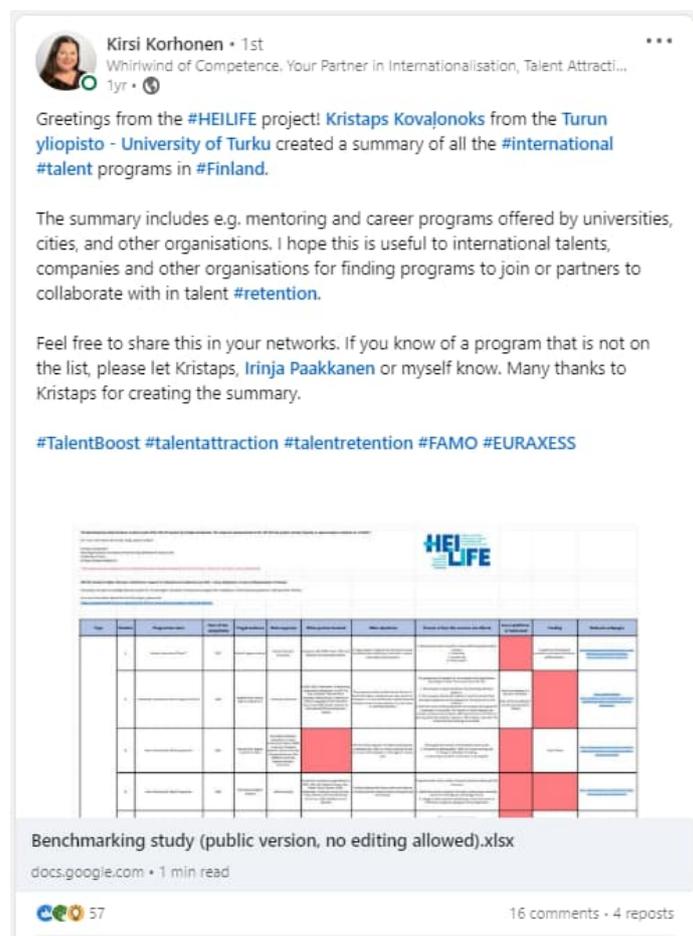


Image 1: Kirsi Korhonen from the University of Helsinki promoting the benchmarking study on LinkedIn.

In order to stay current in the rapidly evolving field of international talent development, we updated our study on international talent programmes in Finland at the end of 2022 to ensure that all the information we gathered was accurate and up to date.

<sup>11</sup> Benchmarking study on international talent programmes in Finland (2022). The study is available here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1T4hSfsM4SOjLucu25exSzomHxB3-uHua/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=115369739466633947102&rtopof=true&sd=true>

## 2.1 A closer look at the different categories and their characteristics

The latest version of the benchmarking study includes 49 distinct international talent programmes, providing a comprehensive overview of the various services available to support and promote the employment and integration of internationals in Finland. These programmes have been classified into eight categories to illustrate their diversity (*image 2*). It is worth noting that all of these programmes are instructed in English, and it is likely that there are many additional programmes out there. However, as an international talent, finding the right services can be a challenge. With so many options available and no central database or portal to access information about them, it can be difficult to locate and determine which services are the best fit for your needs. That's where the new proposed Virtual Finland service platform comes in. By recommending programmes that match international talent's interests, it gets easier for them to find the services that are right for them.

Programme category	Number of programmes
International talent programmes	13
Mentoring programmes	5
Spouse programmes	4
Talent hubs	4
International houses	3
Ambassador networks	4
Talent Boost	3
Other	13
<b>Total programmes</b>	<b>49</b>

*Image 2: Talent programmes supporting the employment and integration of internationals in Finland.*

The recent surge in the introduction of numerous programmes supporting international talents suggests a growing need for these services. Our analysis revealed that 12 programmes were launched in 2021, 6 in 2020, 6 in 2019, and 11 between 2015-2018. This, once again, indicates that there is a demand for a comprehensive database where all of the information about these programmes can be easily accessed. To ensure the accuracy and thoroughness of the data, we focused on collecting data in 11 key areas (*image 3*).



Image 3: Key areas when collecting the data.

During the data collection phase of our benchmarking study, we faced some difficulties. While some project websites were comprehensive and provided detailed information, others had minimal information available. In addition, we noticed that the duration of the talent programmes varied widely, with many relying on external funding sources that were often short-term in nature. This raises the question: How to sustain talent programmes in the long-term? Many international talents in Finland, including ourselves, have witnessed promising initiatives being launched to facilitate our integration, but these programmes often struggle to continue once external funding ends and there are no plans in place for sustainability or longevity<sup>12</sup>. This highlights the need for long-term strategies to support and retain international talent in Finland.

## 2.2 Talent programmes and their target audience

Interestingly, the target audience for these talent programmes can be defined in a number of ways. For example, international talents, their spouses, specific professions (such as IT professionals), and companies may all be considered target audience. Adjectives like "international," "highly skilled," and "highly educated" are often used to describe the target audience for a particular project. The most common groups identified include:

- Master's degree students / International degree students / International students interested in working in a specific region / International students and researchers / International academics, staff and their families / International newcomers / International talent working in a specific region.

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and Business Finland (2020): Talent Boost Cookbook Finland 2.0. Retrieved from: [https://tem.fi/documents/1410877/0/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland\\_2.0\\_FINAL.pdf/137bb163-1029-66ce-ce7d-1e81cf764775/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland\\_2.0\\_FINAL.pdf?t=1615875183962](https://tem.fi/documents/1410877/0/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland_2.0_FINAL.pdf/137bb163-1029-66ce-ce7d-1e81cf764775/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland_2.0_FINAL.pdf?t=1615875183962) (Page 13).

- Unemployed academically educated refugees and immigrants in Finland / Immigrants looking for jobs / Highly educated migrant women in Finland / Highly educated immigrants in a specific region.
- Tech talent / Tech professionals looking to relocate.
- Spouses following their partners / Spouses of international talent.
- Companies searching for workforce and international expertise / International workers and companies / Companies willing to hire international professionals.

As seen above, the target audience for these talent programmes is truly diverse. In addition to the groups mentioned before, such as international talents, their spouses, specific professions, and companies, creating a single service platform could also be useful for HR staff, those involved in well-being services, those working with incoming researchers, those providing career services (including guidance, coaching, and advisory work), returnees (Finns who have lived abroad and are now planning to return to Finland), and other internationally minded Finns.

To effectively meet the needs of this diverse audience, the virtual platform must be tailored to the specific needs of different target audience segments (referred to as “talent segments” in the Roadmap<sup>13</sup>). These segments may have unique needs and preferences that must be considered in the development and implementation of the virtual platform. By addressing the needs of each segment, the virtual platform can better support the goals and objectives of these talent programmes.

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<sup>13</sup> Finnish Government (2021): Roadmap for Education-based and Work-based Immigration 2035. Retrieved from: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-939-7> (Page 26).

## 3. Interviews: collection of data and results

### 3.1 How data was collected

In order to gather insights and perspectives for this report, we invited ten international talents in Finland to participate in interviews, five of whom agreed to participate. While we aimed to interview people from both the EU and outside of it, all of the interviewees were from outside of the EU. Like the authors of this report, all of the interviewees are highly skilled internationals living in Finland. Some are still students, while others have graduated and are focusing on building their professional careers. The interviews were conducted in the summer of 2021. During these interviews, we asked specific questions to understand how these individuals currently access information on essential talent services while building a life in Finland.

The following questions were posed to the interviewees:

1. Have you participated in any international talent programmes (for example, mentorship, spouse support, ambassador networks)?
  - a. If yes, which programme did you participate in? How did you learn about it? Was the information easily accessible?
  - b. If not, why? Was there any lack of information / difficulties finding the right information?
2. Have you received enough support outside of university to successfully build a life in Finland?
  - a. If yes, how? What has helped you? How accessible were the services?
  - b. If not, why? What are you missing?
3. Which was the most challenging time for you as an international talent in your journey of building a life in Finland? (Transition points) Would having a single database / service platform with all international programmes have helped you?

### 3.2 Recording of results

All interviewees were informed that the interviews would be anonymous and that the recordings would be used solely for research purposes. We assured them that the recordings would be kept confidential and would only be accessible to us (people conducting the interviews). After conducting the interviews, we carefully analysed the responses to the questions in order to understand the needs and preferences of the international talents we interviewed. We used both statistical and text analysis to extract insights from the data and present our findings in the report. Our goal was to provide a comprehensive overview of the experiences and perspectives of the international talents we spoke with, and we hope that the results of our analysis will be useful in any future research and decision-making. A more detailed overview of the responses received can be found in the Annex at the end of this report.

### 3.3 Overview of interview results and international talent needs

All of the interviewees shared some background characteristics, such as their decision to move to Finland in order to pursue higher education. Upon graduating, each of the interviewees was committed to finding work, establishing a successful life, and staying in Finland for the long-term.

### Question 1: Participation in international talent programmes

2/5	Respondents attempted to participate in a mentoring programme, but were unable to find a mentor. They reported that they had searched for available opportunities, but had been unable to locate any mentors who were a good fit for their needs and goals.
4/5	Respondents did not participate in talent programmes due to either a lack of information or a lack of available free time. The respondents reported that they had encountered various challenges and barriers that prevented them from accessing these programmes. Some respondents cited a lack of information about the programmes and the eligibility requirements, and reported that they had difficulty finding out about available opportunities. Other respondents mentioned that they had busy schedules and conflicting commitments, and struggled to find the time and energy to participate in talent programmes. Despite these challenges, the respondents expressed an interest in exploring opportunities to develop their skills and advance their careers, and indicated that they would be more likely to participate in talent programmes if they had more information and more flexible options.

### Question 2: Receiving support services, accessibility, and feedback

3/5	Respondents were unaware of support services outside of the university. They reported that they had limited knowledge about the resources and assistance available to them beyond the campus, and that they had difficulty accessing information about these services. The respondents mentioned that they had relied primarily on their own networks and resources, or had relied on the support of their university, to find information and assistance.
1/5	Respondents had either accessed one service or attended career fairs and events.
1/5	Respondents reported feeling a lack of support in finding a community and friends, which is essential for staying in Finland long-term.
2/5	Respondents expressed the need for intensive and extensive language training from the start of their studies. They emphasised the importance of receiving such training early on in order to better integrate into Finnish society and increase their chances of long-term success in the country. The respondents noted that learning the language is crucial for building connections, finding a community, and accessing support services, all of which are important for thriving in Finland.
1/5	Respondents emphasised the need for international talent to actively contribute to the development of services for other internationals. They suggested that these efforts should be driven by a sense of community and solidarity among internationals, with one international reaching out to support and assist another.

### Question 3: Feedback on the most challenging transition period

2/5	Respondents reported that the beginning stages of their experience in Finland (including the process of moving to the country and the time thereafter) were the most challenging. They described facing various challenges and barriers during this period, such as adjusting to a new culture, learning the language, and navigating unfamiliar systems and processes. The respondents noted that they had struggled to find information and support to help them overcome these challenges, and had often felt isolated and overwhelmed as they tried to establish themselves in their new environment.
2/5	Respondents reported that the second year of their studies and the time leading up to graduation were the most challenging periods of their experience in Finland. They described

	facing various challenges and barriers during this time, such as balancing the demands of their studies with their other commitments, navigating the job search process, and preparing for life after graduation.
	Respondents reported finding the transition from the education system in their home country to the education system in Finland challenging. They noted that the study methods in Finland were different than what they were used to, and that they had struggled to adapt to the new style of learning.

During the interviews, several challenges were mentioned by the respondents:

1. Access to information about various international talent programmes is scattered throughout Finland: Some of the respondents acknowledged that they had experienced difficulties in finding comprehensive and accessible information about the options available to them, particularly since they had been living in a "university bubble" and were not fully aware of the resources and opportunities beyond the campus. They suggested that more resources and support could be provided to help internationals access talent programmes and realise their full potential in Finland. They emphasised the importance of having access to reliable and up-to-date information about the various programmes and services that are available to internationals.
2. Engaging with Finnish society and building connections through networking, making friends, and socialising: Many of the respondents reported feeling isolated and disconnected from the wider community, and struggled to find ways to build relationships and establish a sense of belonging.
3. The transition to a new education system: Some of the respondents described feeling overwhelmed and frustrated as they tried to adapt to the new style of learning and the expectations of the Finnish education system.
4. A lack of early, intensive language training: Some of the respondents reported that learning the language was crucial for building connections, finding a community, and accessing support services, but that they had struggled to find adequate language training or personal free time to help them succeed.
5. The lack of internationals taking part in developing services for other internationals: Some of the respondents suggested that more could be done to encourage internationals to collaborate and work together to support one another, and argued that such efforts would be beneficial for both internationals and the wider Finnish society.

## 4. A descriptive model of information sharing as a supportive resource for the proposed Virtual Finland service platform in the Roadmap

The Virtual Finland service platform is described to be an information sharing interface between public authorities, the private sector, and international talent. Its purpose is to provide international talent with access to necessary services through a single portal, even before they move to Finland<sup>14</sup>. Our research, including interviews with international talent and a benchmarking study, has shown that there is a strong demand for such a service.

Top talent recruitment to Finnish higher education institutions is often hindered by integration and employment challenges, limited and inconsistent support services for spouses, and uneven quality and availability of different services<sup>15</sup>. In order to address these issues and align with the goals of national initiatives like the Roadmap for education-based and work-based immigration 2035 and Talent Boost<sup>16</sup>, it would be beneficial to establish a virtual service platform that could be included in talent attraction campaigns. In addition to supporting international talents, the virtual platform outlined in the Roadmap could also serve as an interface between international talent, authorities, and the private sector. By providing a comprehensive and easily accessible source of information and resources, the database could help streamline the integration and employment process for international talent and their spouses and families, as well as facilitate connections and collaboration between international talent and potential employers or partners.

### 4.1 Implementing a single login and profile system

The platform for international talents is designed to streamline the process of creating a study and integration plan in Finland. With a single login, users can create a personalised profile that includes personal information, industry preferences, and desired stage of Finnish language learning. The platform offers specific profile types for international talents, public authorities, and private sector organisations.

In addition to personal profiles, the platform also offers search and filter functions to make it easy for users to find the information they need. Users can filter results based on the city in which they are interested in participating in talent programmes, allowing them to easily find programmes that are offered in their desired location. Overall, the platform is user-friendly and designed to be easily navigable, making it a valuable resource for international talents looking to make the most of their time in Finland, offering personalised support and a range of tools and resources available to help users success in their studies, careers, and personal lives.

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<sup>14</sup> Finnish Government (2021): Roadmap for Education-based and Work-based Immigration 2035. Retrieved from: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-939-7> (Page 27).

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and Business Finland (2020): Talent Boost Cookbook Finland 2.0. Retrieved from: [https://tem.fi/documents/1410877/0/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland\\_2.0\\_FINAL.pdf/137bb163-1029-66ce-ce7d-1e81cf764775/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland\\_2.0\\_FINAL.pdf?t=1615875183962](https://tem.fi/documents/1410877/0/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland_2.0_FINAL.pdf/137bb163-1029-66ce-ce7d-1e81cf764775/Talent+Boost+Cookbook+Finland_2.0_FINAL.pdf?t=1615875183962) (Pages 12-13).

<sup>16</sup> Talent Boost is a cross-administrative programme designed to attract and retain international talent, and to help with immigration. It aims to make Finland better known and more attractive to international talent. Read more about Talent Boost: <https://tem.fi/en/talent-boost-en>

## 4.2 Path towards immigration, studies, employment, and integration from the start

Our vision is that the platform aims to provide international talents with the tools they need to navigate the process of immigrating to Finland and successfully integrating into their new community. This can include a checklist of necessary steps and resources, as well as a personalised plan-building feature that allows individuals to map out their journey from start to finish. By offering these resources, we hope to make the transition to living in Finland easier and more transparent for those considering a move to the country.

## 4.3 Connecting international talent with the right services: a comprehensive database

The platform could help international talent find the right services by recommending programmes that match their interests. Through interviews with international talent, we learned that it can be difficult for them to find the services they need because there isn't a central database or portal with this information. This report confirms the vital need for such a platform that serves as a one-stop database for international talent, providing a comprehensive list of services available to them. With automation, users can be immediately informed about the services that are most suitable for them, streamlining the process of finding and selecting the right options.

## 4.4 Platform provides options for direct networking with the private sector and other parties

The platform serves as a coordinator for a mentoring programme and connects international talent with local companies. The goal of this platform is to provide opportunities for networking and building connections, with the potential to develop these relationships into company visits and internships down the line. By serving as a facilitator for these interactions, the platform helps international talent establish connections and gain valuable experience in their fields.

## 4.5 Platform provides placement style opportunities with private sector

The platform serves as a place for businesses looking to scout for international talent to meet their growing needs. It also provides eligible candidates with a clear path to placement, which can be an attractive feature for talent considering a move to Finland. By creating a centralised hub for businesses and international talent to connect, the platform helps facilitate mutually beneficial relationships that can help both parties thrive.

Universities have their own platforms that help international students on job seeking and provide job boards for companies and alumni to post internship and job opportunities. Such platforms can be observed at various regional levels, for example at the city level and then the national level. As an example, at the city level in Turku is the Career in Southwest Finland<sup>17</sup> webpage that services as a One Stop shop for all international community's career needs. At the university level in the Turku region there is University of

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<sup>17</sup> Job openings - Career in Southwest Finland website Retrieved from: <https://careerinsouthwestfinland.fi/job-openings/>

Turku's Career services<sup>18</sup> and their JobTeaser Platform<sup>19</sup>. Then at the national level is the Jobs in Finland webpage that serves the same needs. On these webpages' companies are given a voluntary opportunity to post their job openings.

More collaboration between current regional job platforms is needed. Serving as a central hub, the Virtual Finland platform could provide a connect to the regional services that are currently available. City level job seeking and support services for international could have a responsible role in this platform as they are the point of contact locally for internationals. International Houses<sup>20</sup> in bigger cities could serve as points of contact.

#### 4.6 Platform provides guidance and support during the most challenging transition phases

During our interviews with international talent, we asked about the challenges they faced and where they felt the most support was needed during their journey in Finland. One area that came up frequently was the need for guidance on how to integrate into Finnish society and navigate the Finnish job market and education system. To address this need, it would be beneficial to share best tips and tricks for successfully transitioning to life in Finland. By providing this type of support, we can help international talent feel more confident and prepared as they embark on their new journey in Finland.

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<sup>18</sup> Careers Services at UTU: [sites.utu.fi](https://sites.utu.fi/rekry/en/) Retrieved from: <https://sites.utu.fi/rekry/en/>

<sup>19</sup> University of Turku's Career Services Job Teaser Platform. Retrieved from: <https://sites.utu.fi/rekry/aarresaaren-avoimet-paikat-siirtyvat-jobteaseriin/>

<sup>20</sup> International House Turku Retrieved from: [ihturku.fi](http://ihturku.fi)

## 5. Conclusion

Overall, this report has provided a thorough analysis of the potential benefits and challenges associated with the implementation of the Virtual Finland service platform outlined in the Roadmap. Through interviews and benchmarking study on international talent programmes, we have identified key issues that should be considered as the platform is developed and rolled out. It is clear that the Virtual Finland service platform has the potential to greatly enhance the experience of international talent seeking to study or work in Finland. However, it is also important to recognise that the needs and experiences of these individuals will vary, and that the platform should be designed to accommodate a diverse range of users.

To this end, we recommend that a larger, more comprehensive study be conducted to fully understand the needs and expectations of international talent in Finland. Such a study could include in-depth interviews with international students, surveys of international professionals and entrepreneurs, and focus groups with other stakeholders, such as Finnish universities and employers. This research could provide valuable insights into the types of services and resources that would be most useful to internationals, as well as the most effective ways to deliver these services through the Virtual Finland service platform.

In addition, we believe that it is essential to engage with a wide range of stakeholders as the Virtual Finland service platform is developed. This could include representatives from Finnish universities, employers, government agencies, and other organisations that interact with international talent on daily basis. By working together and sharing ideas and perspectives, we can ensure that the Virtual Finland service platform is both relevant and effective in meeting the needs of internationals in Finland (and those planning to move here).

We hope that this report serves as a valuable resource for those involved in the creation of the Virtual Finland service platform. Additionally, we hope that the insights contained within this report will be useful to others as they work to support and integrate international talent in their own communities. We are eager to offer our expertise and assistance in any way possible and hope that additional funding will become available, allowing us to make a greater impact on this important project. By working together, we can create a service platform that helps to make Finland an even more attractive and welcoming place for international talent.

# Annex: Record of responses to interviews

## Respondent 1

Background: Moved to Finland 2 years ago as a master's student. Respondent would like to stay in Finland but is currently unsure due to limited opportunities.

### Question 1: Participation in international talent programmes

Respondent tried to participate in a mentoring programme, but a suitable mentor was not found. Has participated in Ambassador networks. For career support, the respondent went to the programme coordinator. Programme coordinator organised a networking event with researchers.

Respondent does not know about any other programmes. They feel that you have to go out and look for them on the internet. They did not know of the existence of support programmes until a lot later. Most help received from faculty staff.

### Question 2: Receiving support services, accessibility, and feedback

All support received from within the university (programme coordinator was helpful). None from outside and respondent is not aware of the existence of such services.

What the respondent feels is missing from outside the university. They lack a 'support system' as in a community and friends here. All current friends are other internationals from master's programme. Corona has limited opportunities to connect with people outside the university. Extracurricular activities to meet more local and Finnish people are missing. More social events would be good outside the university. In previous universities they had a lot of social events like arts and crafts to meet like-minded people. They wish for more social events to meet like-minded people because that's what students do to meet more people and build their own support system. For them to stay here this support system is crucial. They feel the lack of Finnish friends and interprets it has a cultural divide. Networking opportunities from outside the university have not reached the respondent. They feel that there is a lack of information on events and similar career / life support services. They feel that these services could also be shared on social media. They have not received emails about these services, and they feel that looking randomly on the internet is not the best way to find these. They feel that there is no centralised place to get this information. They feel lost as to where to go looking for this information. There is a need to know the name of a specific event or programme in order to find it, which is not efficient. They intend to approach university's career services for future support. They feel the need for more specialised career advice and help related to their field.

### Question 3: Feedback on which has been the most challenging transition period

Most challenging has been the beginning of the second semester. Financial stress was a part of the challenge. Transition from previous education system to the Finnish system was tough.

## Respondent 2

Background: Moved to Finland 2 years ago as a master's student. Respondent would like to stay in Finland.

### Question 1: Participation in international talent programmes

Has participated in webinars on networking and career development. Has not participated in project-based training programmes and wishes that they could have. Has attended Study and Stay in Finland event. Has wanted to participate in Talent Workshop but there were not enough spaces and mentor was not found.

### Question 2: Receiving support services, accessibility, and feedback

Access to information of talent programmes has been through email and newsletters. Feels that information is accessible but is not easy. Shares experiences of digging through a lot of material to find the ones that you want. And hence it is easy to miss them. On need of advice on which programme is suitable or to know more about the options the respondent would contact career services at the university. Alternative to that is searching for information online through Google.

Support from outside the university to build a life in Finland was 'definitely' not adequate. Moving to another country as a foreigner is challenging. In this process it would be nice to have a mentor. Someone who every now and then can check up on you. Respondent feels his case is unique due to covid due to pandemic related disruptions. Workshops were cancelled and opportunities were limited. Overall, more support would go a long way. Feels the need that internationals should have a dedicated support system and compares expectation to a football team that has agents and coaches to guide them.

### Question 3: Feedback on which has been the most challenging transition period

The beginning was the most challenging. Hard to pinpoint a specific point as all stages have different challenges. Feels lack of support in the beginning right after moving to Finland. Networking and social life were missing. There was also a 'student mid-life crisis'. It was difficult to stay motivated and study. That is also when support is needed. And naturally also after graduation support is needed. A service platform can really help and feels that it can help especially in the later stages of job search as it takes a lot of energy and there are so many things to do. Suggests having one platform where you can have all information that is necessary for an international in an easily accessible manner. Easy means of contacting people or companies or chatting with representatives. One platform dedicated to international talents.

### Respondent 3

Background: Moved to Finland 15 years ago as a student at a university of applied sciences. Respondent is still in Finland.

#### Question 1: Participation in international talent programmes

Has never participated in any talent programmes. Has never had information about these programmes. Respondent did not have the information and hence did not know what to expect and judge their needs.

Has never accessed support from outside the university. Has only been to unemployment offices and was told that as a student they cannot be served. Respondent never revisited TE offices.

#### Question 2: Receiving support services, accessibility, and feedback

Has not received information about availability of services outside the university. Respondent has always been a student since moving to Finland and still there have been issues in getting access to relevant information. Needed language and career support but was not aware of SIMHE until interviewed. Thinks that because of distance learning within different cities in Finland might be reason for not getting information. Lives in a different city in Finland than where they are registered within Finland.

#### Question 3: Feedback on which has been the most challenging transition period

Most challenging has been the first year. Being a foreigner in a new culture and society is not easy and such a person needs a lot of information. Respondent says that they have always been a continually active student and are puzzled by the fact that the information did not reach them. The first job offered by a suggestion from a teacher at school was berry picking. Feels that they were not offered any help in looking for work even recently.

Suggestions on how Finland can retain international talent: they should have more extensive and practical Finnish language training included in the studies from the very beginning. Involve other foreigners in building services and language trainings. Without language it is particularly challenging for any foreigner to consider staying in Finland long term. Language is essential to build a life in Finland but not enough, you also need career trainings and support.

Respondent is not sure if a database will help but agrees that information on talent programmes is scattered. Language services could be part of the service package of career development. People who have been through the international experience should be a part of the solution.

## Respondent 4

Background: Moved to Finland 6 years ago as a master's student at a university. Respondent is still in Finland.

### Question 1: Participation in international talent programmes

Has not participated in any and did not feel the need for these services. Has tried to participate in UNICOM mentoring but the schedules did not match. Appreciated existence of UNICOM. There was not an apparent accessibility issue, and the respondent has not tried to find information actively.

### Question 2: Receiving support services, accessibility, and feedback

Respondent is of the opinion that they have not tried actively to access services from outside the university. Has only participated in a Friendship programme and made a good friend. Involved meeting new people and exploring the city and helped build a familiar environment and community feeling.

### Question 3: Feedback on which has been the most challenging transition period

The work environment in Finland lacks passion and feels the lack of motivation at work which is affecting the respondents will stay in Finland long term. Feels the lack of a clear language path and services and the this might help them is staying in Finland. Feels that there are a lot of similar services like mentoring and CV clinics. Is very happy with tutor service and Friendship programme. Was aware of them. There are a lot of services that do the same thing so more of the same is not needed. As regards employment, a database with private sector employment opportunities with interaction with employers would help. The current source of information on talent programmes is through friends and networks. Similar with relevant jobs.

Most challenging period. Tutoring programme and university housing made the move easy. University initial events helped me to get used to the city. Overall, there were few challenges. Most help would have been needed after second year of master's degree when graduation is close. Two years is not a lot of time to build a network, so the graduation period is quite uncertain while writing the thesis, so employment opportunities are restricted. A single database would help. Respondent feels that the most helpful though the database would be networking with people and employers. Currently they access information from email and friends.

## Respondent 5

Background: Moved to Finland 6 years ago to pursue a bachelor's degree, later also a master's degree. Respondent is still in Finland and wants to stay here long-term.

### Question 1: Participation in international talent programmes

Shortly after arrival in Finland, the respondent attended a 1 week long coaching course (offered by the university) open to all international students. The course included useful information about how the job market in Finland works, where to seek relevant information, and an opportunity to hear alumni sharing their stories. CV clinics have been helpful, too. The respondent first studied in a small Finnish city, where not so many opportunities for internationals were available. Moving to a bigger city helped expanding one's social network and taking part in different volunteering and other programmes. Receiving mentors through different stages while still being a student and taking part in career fairs has been extremely beneficial. Most experience with mentoring programmes, ambassador networks, and Talent Boost.

### Question 2: Receiving support services, accessibility, and feedback

The respondent has received support from different higher education institutions, cities, as well as international houses. At the same time, the respondent has been independent when searching for information online, but has also received a lot of help from others (local Finns and other active internationals). During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was difficult to take part in different activities. Online activities were not carefully organised and did not seem enough interesting. Support in practicing job interviews and improving one's Finnish language skills was highlighted as a positive thing.

Question 3: Feedback on which has been the most challenging transition period. Feedback on single database assisting in improving accessibility to services.

Challenges go beyond just international talent programmes. Even still nowadays, many internationals face difficulties in understanding how the Finnish tax system works and how to access the public healthcare. While you are a student, accessing the Finnish Student Health Service and receiving all kinds of other information is fairly easy. However, once you graduate, you feel like you are left all alone and university has not prepared you for what comes next and how to act in different situations. More guides and videos in English are needed.