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Obstacles in Workforce Integration Observed by Educated Migrants in Finland

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Abstract:

The thesis examines the key issues educated migrants face when it comes to work force integration found within interviews conducted with migrants living in Finland. Thematic analysis is applied to six in-depth interviews, and the themes of immigration process, language barriers, accreditation difficulties and discrimination are found. The migrants' advice to other migrants and to the Finnish government and companies is also analysed. The themes are interpreted through the theoretical framework of Berry's model of acculturation, which categorizes four types of strategies the host culture and a migrant can adopt when coming into contact: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. The strategies are based on the possibility and willingness to maintain aspects of the cultural and experiential background of the migrant. The thesis investigates which underlying strategies can be inferred from the interview answers and from the current government policies and institutional standards.

The thesis finds that integration is primarily hindered by high language requirements, the disregard of degrees obtained outside the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and subtle discrimination, such as preference for familiar sounding names. These hindrances can force skilled professionals into platform work or to fields outside their expertise. The Finnish government's purported aim of attracting international talent also contradicts with the strict requirements.

The thesis suggests that the Finnish institutional and societal responses currently point toward strategies of assimilation or marginalisation, rather than the preferred strategy of integration. To foster a more inclusive environment, adopting English as a working language in specific sectors and replicating the peer-support structure found in university environments for professional settings, are suggested. The anonymization of applications is also found to be beneficial in certain circumstances.

Table of contents

1	Introduction	4
2	Material and methods	7
2.1	Thematic analysis	7
2.2	Berry's model of Acculturation	10
2.3	Ethical considerations and limitations	13
3	Immigration process and support	15
3.1	Processing times	16
3.2	Support and bureaucracy	17
3.3	Immigration process considering Berry's model	18
4	Language barrier	21
4.1	Public Responses and Future Policies	23
4.2	Learning the Language While Working	23
4.3	Language Barrier considering Berry's model	25
5	Accreditation	27
5.1	Accreditation experiences from the interviews	27
5.1.1	Career Adaptation Strategies	28
5.1.2	Platform Work and Possibilities for Change	29
5.2	Accreditation considering Berry's model	30
6	Discrimination	32
6.1	Anonymization and DEI policies	32
6.2	Prejudices and diverse cultural styles	34
6.3	Discrimination considering Berry's model	35
7	Advice to migrants and institutions from the interviewees	36
7.1	Advice to migrants	36
7.1.1	Mindset and persistence	37
7.2	Advice to institutions	38
7.2.1	From Education to Workforce Integration	39
7.2.2	Bureaucracy & Policies	40
7.2.3	Strengths and weaknesses of Finnish culture	41
7.3	Advice considering Berry's model	42
8	Discussion	44
9	Conclusions	48
	References	49

1 Introduction

As there is a rising trend and need to attract capable working age people from abroad to mitigate the issues of an ageing population, the government and institutions in Finland and surrounding countries are seeking to streamline immigration and workforce integration. Many companies and employers are also noticing the value of multiculturalism in the globalizing economic landscape. The process of immigration and the successful participation of migrants in society and in the work force are nevertheless still hindered by the issues of language barriers, educational accreditation, and discrimination. In this thesis, six in depth interviews conducted with migrants living in Finland will be used as the basis for analysis on the observed key issues when it comes to the topics of the immigration process, language barrier and accreditation, as well as discrimination. The thesis will also look at the advice the migrants would give to companies and governmental institutions regarding workforce integration.

Other studies have been done on immigration, integration, and the experiences of migrants in Finland or in the Nordic countries. Nshom et al. (2022) found four key themes when it comes to challenges in living and integrating in Finland. Namely, language barrier, discrimination in employment opportunities, racism and inequality, and fewer opportunities of integration. Their study draws from an open-ended survey with a total of 103 immigrants from forty-one countries participating. The survey was aimed at long-term immigrants living in Finland, other than asylum seekers and refugees. Their article highlights several of the same issues that were found in the interviews for this thesis. The added aspect of discussion found within the interviews for this thesis were the answers on what advice the migrants would like to give to the Finnish government and companies looking to attract international educated workers. Chihaya et al. (2025) have looked at the incorporation strategies of human capital of migrants in the Swedish labor market. They found that migrants from the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) were able to convert their human capital into early employment, whereas educated migrants from outside the EHEA often had to obtain Swedish educational credentials before being able to secure employment. Their findings will be looked at more closely in the corresponding chapter.

This study will bring new insights via analyzing the issues raised by the migrants through the lenses of *Berry's model of acculturation* and how the theory sees the

process of acculturation as a two-way street between the host culture and the newcomer. The theory highlights four key strategies that migrants and the host culture - in the case of this thesis, namely employers, companies, and the Finnish government - can adopt or work towards. The strategies within Berry's model include *Integration, Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalization*. The theory is useful in finding out the strategy behind the actions, policies, and statements of different parties, even if the acculturation strategy has not been purposefully employed. The theory will be applied also to the advice the interviewees would give to other migrants and to the Finnish government, institutions, and companies.

The interviews for this thesis were chosen from 15 interviews gathered within the EASWork project, which worked with companies that hire or aim to hire migrant workers. The project was implemented during the years from 2023 to 2025 and cooperated in total with 20 companies in analysing and honing their respective anti-discrimination policies. The lead partner of the project was Arcada University of Applied Sciences and the researchers in charge of the project in Finland were Sofia Gylfe and Camilla Wikström. Other partners forming the EASWork project were the Deaconess Foundation (Diakonissalaitos) in Finland and the University of Tartu in Estonia. Only the interviews gathered by Arcada University of Applied Sciences in Finland were available for this thesis. The interviews conducted by EASWork were chosen for this thesis due to the possibility to look at the findings in a more academic way, as the project focused on co-operation with companies. It was deemed that there was more to be found within the answers when contrasted with recent research on the topics. In some ways, it was beneficial to utilize interviews conducted beforehand, as the questions were not chosen with a focus on what the thesis's conclusions might be. From the interview answers, via the process of Thematic Analysis, it was possible to find topics and themes that were not thought of at the design phase of the thesis. On the other hand, this way there was no possibility of revising the questions during and after a preliminary interview, for example. But then the same problem could have presented itself again of trying to phrase the questions in a way that supports the probable findings. Some revisions could be noticed between the earlier interviews conducted by EASWork, but the questions stayed similarly constructed enough that the answers were focused on the same topics. The interview transcripts utilized in this thesis can be provided upon request.

The six interviews analyzed in this thesis were chosen for their depth in answering the varying topics and due to all the interviewees having tertiary level educational backgrounds, via ongoing studies or finished degrees. All also gave the interviews in working level English. Thematic analysis will be applied to the interview answers out of which the main themes are found. By analyzing the answers through Berry's model of acculturation theory, the themes can be tied into the larger discussion around labor immigration and integration, while simultaneously highlighting the possible differences in the Finnish context.

EASWork was funded via the EU's Interreg program, which funds projects that generate cooperation across member states' borders. Interreg's aim is to find solutions to societal and environmental challenges affecting countries across national borders.

Research question 1.

What are the key themes when it comes to immigration and work force integration observed by the migrants living in Finland?

Research question 2.

Based on Berry's model of acculturation, what acculturation strategies are aimed for from the migrants' side of view and which strategies employers, and the government seem to value.

2 Material and methods

The six interviews analysed in this thesis were chosen out of 15 interviews conducted with migrants living in Finland by the EASwork project. These six interviews had in-depth answers to all the different topics in question, and all interviewees had higher educational backgrounds ranging from ongoing tertiary level studies to PHD degrees. All six also had work experience abroad or in Finland. Three of the interviewees are originally from South Africa, one from Bolivia, one from Nepal and one from Sri Lanka.

The EASwork project was funded by EU's Interreg programme. Since 2021 Interreg has funded over 4000 projects involving over 26 000 institutions. The average budget per project has been 1,7 million euros. The projects funded via Interreg should address a problem or a solution that requires cooperation across national borders. In EASWork's case, there was collaboration between Finnish and Estonian institutions and businesses. The total budget for the project was 213 491€.

This thesis will look at the issues and hopes for solutions brought forth by the educated migrants living in Finland, as the rights to the interviews in Estonia were unavailable. The interviews in Estonia were all also conducted with migrants from Ukraine, so there would have been other variables to take into consideration due to the war being a major reason for migration. In Finland there was also another batch of interviews conducted within the EASWork project via the Deaconess Foundation, but those interviews were also unavailable and focused on migrant youth, most of whom did not yet have tertiary education or work experience.

2.1 Thematic analysis

The interview transcriptions were parsed via *thematic analysis* (TA), through which key themes were found and labelled. Thematic analysis outlines the process of analysing and finding themes from qualitative material in six phases. The phases, as described by Terry, Hayfield, Clarke and Braun (2017), include.

Familiarisation and Coding (Phases 1-2)

Terry et al. (2017) describe the process of familiarisation with the data as the bedrock of well executed TA. It is the starting point for deeper analysis and involves an immersion into the data. The authors describe this immersion as mode of reading

and engaging with the data that enables noticing of patterns making of observations. The process might require re-reading or re-listening of the data. This first phase is about producing early-stage analytical ideas by being curious and asking questions from the data. Terry et al. (2017) note that at this stage there is a risk of trying to form themes of the first found analytical ideas that fit the researcher's argument without these ideas being explanatory of the data as a whole. After familiarisation, the process of coding begins, whereby the researcher systematically labels the parts of the data that are meaningful within the context of the research question or questions. Terry et al. (2017) point that proper coding is open and inclusive and aims to capture all segments of interest when it comes to the research question. Some segments can be labelled with more than one keyword, when and if they might connect with multiple areas of importance and other areas can be left without a label altogether if they are not relevant for the research question. The coding phase is thus also about data reduction. It is also useful to come back to the codes to clarify and revise the codes, as not to end up with multiple varying codes for the same analytical ideas found in the data.

As for this thesis, the transcription based on recorded interviews was done by the EASWork project. The interviews were constructed around the issues of immigration process, language barrier, discrimination, accreditation, and advice for future migrants, as well as for the government and companies seeking to attract migrants to the labour force. Some questions were still open ended, as in do you have anything more you would like to share? The interview transcriptions were read multiple times over, and the issues pertinent for the research questions were coded on a separate text file. During review, it was noted that answers to different questions often touched upon similar themes, as in the case of language barrier emerging in answers on discrimination, as well as job searching, and on language barrier itself.

Theme development (Phase 3)

Here Terry et al. (2017) note how when *constructing themes*, it is important to let the research question guide the process of determining what is relevant, as it is easy to get stuck in the analysis part. They point out, that quality themes are concise and the codes contained should not be shared with other themes if possible. Nevertheless, the themes should work in tandem with each other during analysis. The authors also note the danger of getting attached to the first themes that are produced. They suggest that

the themes are viewed as *candidates* for now as to give the researcher a chance to still dismiss or revise them before settling on a final set (Terry et al., 2017).

For this thesis, as with the coding phase too, the themes overlap due to the issues being so closely knit together. It was deemed beneficial to still have different chapters for the themes of discrimination and language barrier and accreditation issues, as there were multiple codes that were separate within those themes and the interview answers.

Reviewing and Defining Themes (Phases 4-5)

Terry et al. (2017) explain that the first steps of reviewing should focus on deciding if the themes suffice to contain the meaning of the coded key points in the data. They note that it is good to go back to the data once more and see if the themes still reflect the original codes found, and that the overall feel of the data is still present with the found and constructed themes. It is also possible to reimagine the research question, when the data contains a different emphasis, as in the case of interview participants mentioning a point that was not even thought about when designing the interview questions (Terry et al., 2017). The authors also note, that if one theme consists of only one repeating interview answer and not much discussion around it, it can be useful to see if it might fit within another theme as an enrichment to the discussion.

Conversely, if a theme is too complex or has a lot of variety, it might be beneficial to divide it into two or more parts (Terry et al., 2017).

When it comes to this thesis, the last theme containing advice for migrants pondering moving to Finland and advice for Finnish companies and the government, was easily the most substantial per number of answers in the interviews. In some ways it could have been split to two or more themes, but the answers themselves revolved around a few key issues, so it felt natural to keep the theme unified.

Producing the Report (Phase 6)

In the final phase of TA, the researcher connects the findings with scholarly literature and other sources pertaining to the themes. Terry et al. (2017) describe two specific styles of writing about the data for the final report. *Illustrative* and *Analytic*. The illustrative style contains the valuable information within the text, without need for straight quotations or extracts from the data, where the analytic raises certain excerpts from the data for analysis. They also discuss hiccups in implementing TA as

a researcher new to the method, such as themes that are same as the questions that were presented in an interview. Often the questions have answers that span wider than the questions themselves or contain contradictory statements. In such cases, the interview answers do not form a cohesive theme around the question itself (Terry et al., 2017).

In the context of this thesis, the themes are construed around similar issues as were presented in the interview questions too, but the coding was done in a way that some data points were designated as belonging to another theme not asked about specifically in the interview question. The data is presented in the illustrative style, where the meaning of the interview answers are shown in writing. Direct quotations will sometimes be shown to give the reader an understanding of the style and feeling behind the interview answers, which can be difficult to display via the illustrative style alone. The research is done in an inductive style, where specific data points are used in reasoning possible larger generalizations. The thesis is not the thematic analysis and its final report, but TA is utilised for refining the themes for discussion considering a theory, specifically *Berry's model of acculturation*. For this reason, there are two research questions. Underneath are the themes arrived at via TA for this thesis. Afterwards, we will look at Berry's model of acculturation.

1. *Immigration process and support*
2. *Language barrier*
3. *Accreditation issues*
4. *Discrimination*
5. *Advice to migrants and institutions from the interviewees*

2.2 Berry's model of Acculturation

John Widdup Berry (b. 1939) is a Canadian psychologist known for his work in cross-cultural and intercultural psychology. In this thesis, Berry's concept of acculturation strategies will be utilized in the concluding parts of the chapters when applicable. Berry (2017) expounds acculturation as the dual process of cultural and psychological changes that take place within groups and individuals of distinct cultural origins when they come upon each other. At the group level it means changes in social structures, institutions, and norms. At the level of the individual, psychological changes take place while they adapt to the intercultural encounter. An individual's

behavioural repertoire goes through changes which can include what they eat, how they dress, which language they speak, as well as their values and identity. This process of acculturation is mutual, meaning that the changes take place within all groups and individuals in contact with each other. Berry notes how, as these changes have effects and implications on the wellbeing of everyone included, it is beneficial to look at the key elements of the process of acculturation to enable better outcomes of these intercultural encounters (Sam & Berry, 2016, as cited in Berry, 2017).

Berry notes that both levels of acculturation, psychological and cultural, should be studied when seeking to understand the changes in groups and individuals after encountering another culture. Also, the relationship between these levels is important. The cultural changes at the group level affect which kind of changes happen psychologically in individuals. At the same time, not all individuals have the same experiences during this encounter and thus react and adapt differently. It is also noteworthy, that acculturation can happen remotely, without two or more cultures having continuous firsthand contact, through media and tourism (Berry, 2017).

When it comes different strategies individuals and groups can adapt in these encounters, Berry (2017) highlights the dual component of attitudes and behaviours. Attitudes refer to the preferences of an individual or a group, and behaviours denote the actual practices of relating with one's own group and other cultural groups. Berry reminds, that it is rare that these two match perfectly as social constraints, such as norms and opportunities, affect an individual's behaviour. There are also power discrepancies between groups that influence how well adaptation strategies match a group's preferences.

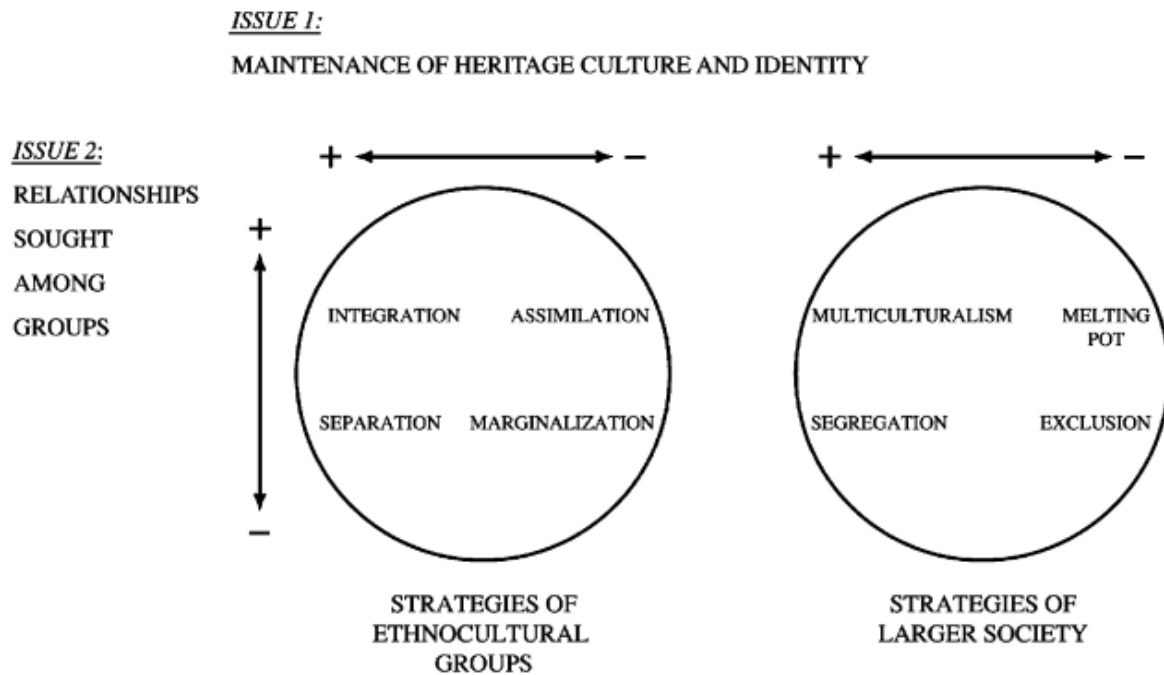


Figure 1. Four acculturation strategies based upon two issues, in ethnocultural groups, and the larger society (Berry, 2005).

Figure 1 shows the four acculturation strategies on the level of groups and of the larger society. Berry talks about two issues when it comes to orientation more toward one's heritage or towards participating in the larger society and with the other ethnocultural groups. *Issue 1* in the figure above shows relative preference towards maintaining heritage and cultural identity or being willing to let go of them. *Issue 2* looks at the relative preference when it comes to contacting the other groups or staying in one's own cultural landscape. The four strategies of acculturation have different names based on looking at the issue from the perspective of ethnocultural groups or from the larger society. *Assimilation* is defined as individuals wanting to be absorbed by the society at large, not wanting to maintain their cultural identity and seeking continuous interaction with other cultures. Conversely, *separation* is the strategy chosen when one wants to hold on to their heritage and is not interested in contacting the other cultures. *Integration* is chosen when one holds on to their heritage, but at the same time actively seeks to participate in the society at large and have contact with the other groups. *Marginalization* takes place, when there is little interest, or possibility, in holding on to one's cultural heritage and little interest in having contact with other groups. Berry notes that in the case of marginalization, exclusion and discrimination are often reasons for not seeking contact, and loss of heritage culture can be through enforcement from society's side. Berry also

emphasizes, that integration is only possible when the dominant culture is open and inclusive when it comes to its practices toward diversity, and if the non-dominant group is willing to adopt the basic rules and norms of the society. Proper integration requires the society to tweak its institutions like health care, labour markets, and education to accommodate the non-dominant groups (Berry, 2005).

The right side of the figure shows how the strategies manifest when the dominant culture enforces the distinct types of acculturations. *Melting pot* happens when the dominant culture pushes for assimilation. *Segregation* is due to the society aiming for separation. *Exclusion* takes place when the dominant group goes for marginalization. And, when the society at large accepts diversity and seeks to integrate, we get *multiculturalism* (Berry, 2005). In the context of this thesis, for the sake of readability, mostly the four different terms found in the left side of the figure will be used.

Throughout the chapters of this thesis, Berry's model will be utilised when looking at the interview answers and themes that have been found, with the goal in mind of seeing if the underlying acculturation strategy can be inferred.

2.3 Ethical considerations and limitations

As there are only six interviews consisting of four different nationalities, wide reaching conclusions cannot be drawn. The themes and interview answers are in line with what other studies have found about immigration and integration in the Finnish and Nordic context, but in case of this thesis, are representative of individual experiences of a few migrants. The thesis is written with anonymity in mind with no names available, and with no information that would make it easy to discern the identity of the interviewees.

When analysing in-depth interviews conducted with foreign born migrants, it is important to note that as belonging to the ethnical majority in Finland, being born in Finland, and being accustomed to the cultural conventions, it can be difficult in noticing and understanding of all the implicit meanings and contexts behind the answers and experiences of the interview participants. In this thesis, quotations of the interview answers will be given periodically, so that the reader can make their own conclusions. In the later chapters on advice to the government, companies and other migrants, the proposed solutions will be based on the answers and thoughts

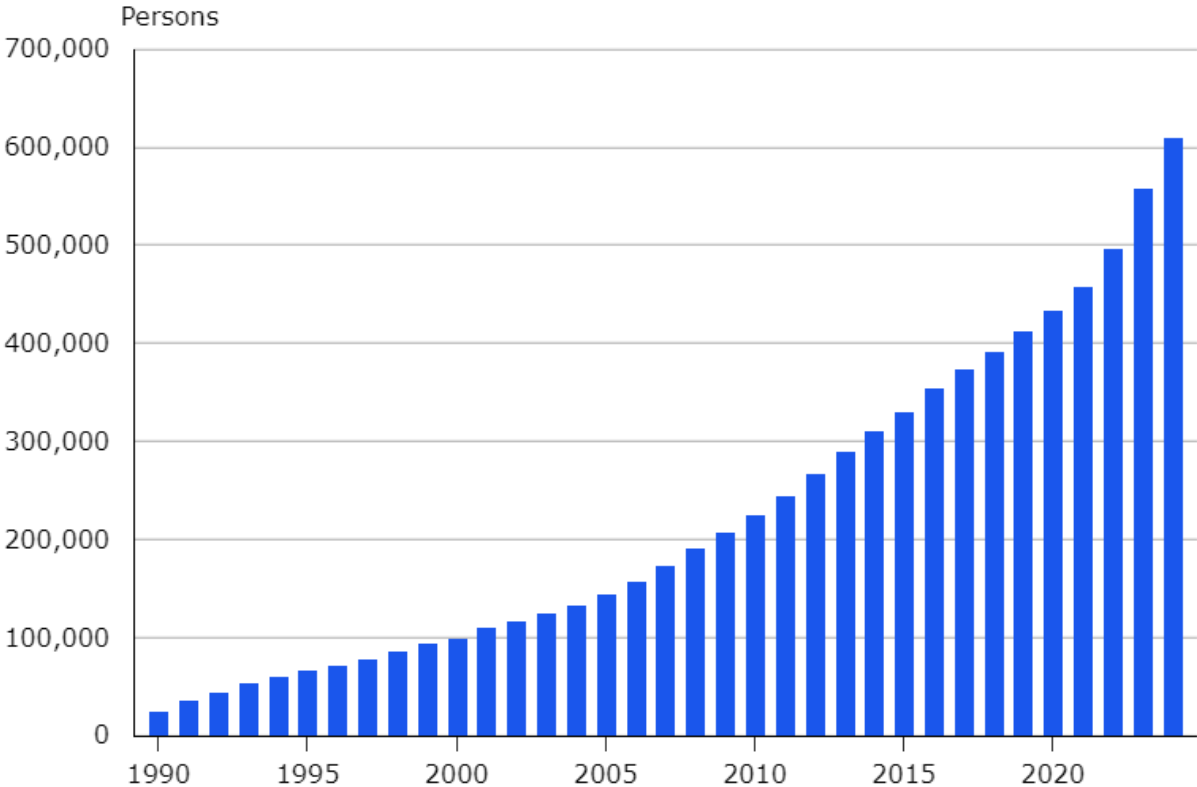
found in the interviews, as not to suppose that the author knows which actions would be most appropriate.

3 Immigration process and support

This chapter focuses on the topics of the immigration process itself and the kind of support, or lack of, the migrants had during.

Finland has a relatively small immigrant population, but it has been growing at one of the fastest rates within the OECD countries, with the people who do not speak Finnish as their native language rising from 24,783 in 1990 to 610,148 at the end of the year 2024 (Figure 2).

Number of persons speaking a foreign language as their native language in Finland in 1990 to 2024



Source: Statistics Finland, population structure

Figure 1. The number of foreign language speakers in Finland from 1990 to 2024. (Statistics Finland, 2025)

According to a questionnaire study, over half (60%) of Finnish municipalities take immigration into consideration in their municipal strategies but only 6% have immigration as one of the key issues in their strategy. Within urban municipalities, 94% include immigration in their strategies, compared to 65% of semi-urban municipalities and 53% in rural municipalities. Heino & Jauhiainen note that urban

municipalities have more experience and resources to take immigration into account, and more need for strategic planning (Heino & Jauhiainen, 2020).

I don't regard my case as the average case. Because I'm married to a Finn and it was during the middle of a pandemic. I hadn't seen my wife for six months and I hadn't met my unborn son at the time of application. And the processing time was one day which I've never heard of. And even the people at the embassy were like, well, who do you know. But I do feel that it was, the process time was shortened for two reasons. My wife had emailed the president or the prime minister or whoever directly. I don't know how she got the email, but she did. (...) But the processing time was one day in the middle of Corona. So, I don't think that our experience has, is the normal, from what I've heard from everybody else. And even my renewal also took a few days. It wasn't even two weeks or three weeks and I already had a decision. So, I don't know if my portfolio has a special exception or exemption. I have no idea. But yeah, that's been the experience. So, immigration-wise, it's been quite smooth. All the bureaucratic stuff of getting the ID document and opening the bank account and all those kind of things, those were the things that took some time (EASWork 5, 00:11:05).

The immigration process itself had been managed well for most of the interviewees. One interviewee postulated that their application for residency was almost immediate due to them being married to a Finnish citizen and having a child already. They also had a community from the university for support where the common language was English. They felt as being treated like a Finnish person would have, as they acquired their degree free of charge and could apply for a government backed loan from the bank. They also acknowledged the problem of students leaving Finland after having their degree. On the downside they mention digitalization and bureaucracy considering getting a bank account, without which one cannot do much in the Finnish society (EASWork 1). Another interviewee also saw the immigration process as straightforward, even though it included a lot of waiting. They had a place of study from Finland and overall, the process took around six months (EASWork 3).

3.1 Processing times

As of 2025, the estimated processing time for residence permits based on one's spouse being a Finnish citizen is approximately 6 months, with a minority of cases taking up to 9 months to process. If one would apply for a permit based on an intimate relationship status, MIGRI, the Finnish Immigration Service, states the estimated time as 15 months on average, but it can be as low as 2 months in a

minority of cases (MIGRI 2025). The discrepancy between the much longer processing time for some of the marital permits compared to only 2 months for some of the intimate relationship-based permits was not explained on MIGRI's web page. One might assume there are separate processing queues for permits with different bases. When applying for residence permit for studies, MIGRI's estimated processing time is 1 month, with a minority of cases taking up to 3 months (MIGRI 2025).

In some circumstances, it is possible to speed up the immigration process outside of the normal bureaucratic means. One interviewee regarded their experience as probably an anomaly as the permit processing time was just one day. They had a Finnish spouse and a child on the way and their spouse had emailed some high-ranking politician directly. They repeated what other interviewees said about the straightforwardness of the immigration process, and about the slowness of setting up a banking account and getting their ID documents (EASWork 5). It can be seen as a positive that it is possible to contact a decision maker directly, suggesting low hierarchy in Finnish society, but also as putting migrants in unequal position based on their knowledge of this possibility, as well as on their networks. Another interviewee felt that the Finnish Immigration Service, MIGRI, is organized and the people are usually kind, especially if one has the relevant documentation at hand (EASWork 8).

3.2 Support and bureaucracy

One interviewee moved to Finland after their parent who had married a Finnish citizen. They got the residency permit and applied for a university. They felt that the level of autonomy and support that one can achieve in Finland is incredible if one has the information about their rights and possibilities. They also felt that in Kela, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, the tax office and in other government offices one is expected to research the legalities themselves or risk getting heavy fines for missing a report or missing even one study point from the required amount (EASWork 15). The sufficiency of support delighted another interviewee too, who saw the possibility of coming with their family as paramount for their ability to focus on studying here. They relished that the immigration service gave ample room to explain their specific situation and that all the documentation was straightforward. They were grateful and joyful for the chance they were given, partly also for the scholarship they got for their studies in international business management in exchange for keeping

their grades at a certain level. There was also less pressure from the agencies compared to other countries, which were not mentioned by name (EASWork 4).

This feeling of pressure, or the lack of, might tie in with a survey on customer satisfaction of MIGRI's services, which were rated higher if the respondents were born outside of Finland. The survey commissioned by MIGRI in 2019 found that satisfaction with customer service was highest among customers who had applied for a residence permit based on work, while those applying for studies gave lower scores. Furthermore, customers born outside Finland had a more positive view on the Finnish Immigration Service than customers born in Finland (MIGRI 2019). Having family ties can make the process of immigration—and in the case of having peer support through being a university student, also the integration process—smoother. However, when it comes to the issue of foreign citizens leaving Finland after they graduate, a 2023 questionnaire study found that 47% of international students, as well as 39% of other international talents, plan to leave Finland, even though 86% of the students had settled down very well or somewhat well (YLE 2023). A question to ponder further would be if the community support of university students could be copied and applied to work force integration too? If similar support and community were available during job seeking and while employed, more students would want to stay in Finland in the long term.

3.3 Immigration process considering Berry's model

It can be concluded that municipalities have a large discrepancy in their focus on immigration in their strategies based on how urban the municipalities are. It might be beneficial for municipalities to include immigration in their strategies in advance and not wait until there are a lot of immigrants, as the systems and support might lag otherwise.

The interviewees had an overall positive experience of the immigration process, often describing it as straightforward. There could still be seen a discrepancy in equalness based on personal networks, as in the case of one interviewee having access to a politician and being able to speed up the process via that connection. It is impossible to know how usual these kinds of fast lane situations are, but overall, it is good to consider when discussing equality.

The issue of digitalization and bureaucracy came up in the interviews too. The trend seems to be that more artificial intelligence systems are being incorporated to banking and state services. KELA sees the proliferation of automation as a means of freeing up resources, and according to their words, thus being better able to also help the customers who for one reason or another cannot use digital services (KELA, 2025). It is prudent to wonder if KELA and other service providers can adequately recognize and reach the people that are not well equipped to use these digital services.

Studying in Finland in an English-speaking university environment came up as supportive of immigration and integration. Conversely, when applying for jobs there is often not as international of a setting, and migrants need to find their peer support by themselves. This is something where employers and the government might be able to produce solutions in fostering a similar environment to that of universities. Through hiring more migrants and easing up the language criteria from high level Finnish much could be attained. Setting up support groups formed of colleagues could assist in integration as well. The autonomy level possible in Finland was also noted as a plus, with the caveat of having to learn about the possibilities and benefits available without much assistance. Further studies and surveys on what kind of information migrants would have liked to receive upon entrance could be beneficial.

If municipalities and institutions do not proactively tackle the issues with immigration, like including proper instructions in their respective strategies, migrants can feel neglected and without a clear path towards integration. This lack of strategy can lead to *marginalization*. Autonomy was mentioned as a positive, but having to learn about the possibilities by oneself is a risky strategy on a societal level, if it can be called a strategy at all. If municipalities post pone including immigration in their strategies until there is already a large population of migrants, the inferred acculturation strategy seems to be one of *assimilation*, putting the pressure on immigrants to fit in without a guideline for integration.

Issues raised that point towards strategies of *separation* or *marginalisation*, include the emphasis on personal networks as well as being skilled with digital systems. Not everyone is able or comes to think of contacting a politician about their situation. Also, the growing leveraging of AI tools in banking, welfare and similar systems can

lead to unequal standing between more tech-savvy migrants and migrants who are more comfortable in dealing with people.

The possibility of copying the peer support systems found in university environments would take immigrating towards a more integrationist approach. The ability for people migrating for work or familial reasons to have a similar supporting community would enhance the accumulation of social capital, paramount for successful integration. As such, students have a possibility to take advantage of their knowledge of the similarity of organization within educational institutions, especially universities, around the world. The working language in international degrees is also mainly English, so that too is familiar. These two in tandem support the strategy of *integration*, as the migrants can participate in society conveniently from the beginning.

4 Language barrier

One of primary areas of difficulty, based on the interview answers, has to do with the language barrier. It was asked about specifically in the interview questions but would also be mentioned often in answers to more open-ended questions. Nshom, Sadaf & Khalimzoda found language barrier as one of key issues in their article *Perceived challenges living and integrating into Finnish society: A study among immigrants in Finland (2022)*. They had data from 103 immigrants living in Finland at the time of the study, with responses such as “The Finnish language is difficult to learn, and if you work in Finland, you have to learn it”, “adaptation is difficult because of the language”, and “language is the biggest barrier in cultural adaptation” (Nshom et al., 2022). They deduced that language can be the cause for missing employment opportunities where Finnish-language skills are preferred, and for missing other opportunities in general. These other opportunities are not extrapolated on, but the quote on language being a barrier in cultural adaptation can cover a wide range of activities which would aid in integration. Khanal (2025) found that among working age Nepalis living in Finland, challenges in language proficiency negatively affected their ability to utilize health care services, which contributed to feelings of discrimination. In trying to navigate the health care possibilities, the Nepali migrants turned to their informal networks such as ethnic communities and co-workers, which often lead to lacking or misleading information. Also, not knowing or understanding their healthcare rights as employees contributed to possibilities of exploitation at work (Khanal, 2025). Although networks can be beneficial in providing crucial information, it would be more equal if necessary legal information were readily available for all.

When looking at the responses to the questions on language barrier for this thesis, an interviewee noted that in Helsinki one might find jobs in the service sector, in a café for example, where Finnish is not required further than the basics of “hi,” “goodbye” and “yes”. They also felt like one might find a company or a team that has English as the working language, but in their field in the public sector, they thought that one could not apply for jobs without knowing Finnish (EASWork 1). On the contrary, another interviewee had applied for part-time work in restaurants, of which they had previous experience, and had been turned around due to not knowing enough Finnish. They also mentioned the language preference of firstly Finnish, secondarily

Swedish, and lastly English, found in many job descriptions, which made them wonder if studying Finnish still leaves migrants behind when competing against applicants who know a bit of Swedish too (EASWork 3).

Yes, I was in aikuiskoulutus for Finnish studies, and then I also did the YKI testi while I was there. And this was in Lappeenranta. This was just over a year, maybe like a year and two months, something like that. And it was amazing. I was already in university, I did this after university, because I got into university literally as I arrived. And I didn't even know that this language programme existed. I had heard that some sort of naturalisation programme existed, but it wasn't really clear to me what that was. And then, when I started studying, then I met people who had partners that were actually doing this programme. And then I was like, Okay, cool. So, that's how it goes. You know? (EASWork 15)

As can be seen with the response above on a question about integration courses and language classes, more or better information about the classes and possibilities would be helpful. The interviewee migrated to Finland based on familial ties, and at least in their situation the information was non-existent. Maybe the Finnish institutions suppose that one's family members already living in the country will aid with the language and integration, but such approach feels lacking. Here, the interviewee's university peers had the needed information about aikuiskoulutus (adult education) and the YKI-tests (National Certificates of Language Proficiency). It can be again noted, that migrating due to studies can offer a supportive community via peers and teachers who are acquainted with the most usual hurdles of starting a life in Finland. Similar support systems would be excellent for all migrants.

Another interviewee recounted how an employer had turned them down based on language skills, even though they knew others working for the company who hardly spoke Finnish either. Some companies had also stated that the working language is English during the interviews, but the interviewee felt that language was still a point of contention (EASWork 5). They had also been turned down by Posti, the Finnish post office, for being too overqualified and for not knowing Finnish well enough, even though they knew other people working for Posti who did not speak Finnish*. (*the interviewee said English, but the context implies they meant Finnish.) (EASWork 5). These discrepancies between what is stated by the recruiting body and what is known to be the actual situation are conducive to creating feelings of confusion, frustration and of being discriminated against.

4.1 Public Responses and Future Policies

Although most large cities in Finland understand that studies in English should be provided for international students, English as an official or working language is not yet implemented in full in any city. The city of Espoo has made plans to make English a formal third working language besides Finnish and Swedish which have their official status by Finnish law (YLE 2017). The previous mayor of Helsinki Juhana Vartiainen also stated in 2021 that Helsinki could declare itself an English-speaking city where people would not have to know Finnish or Swedish, at least in public sector jobs (YLE 2021). If such policies are implemented and monitored for their sufficient enforcement in the metropolitan area, it could send a signal to other municipalities hoping to attract international workers to refine their language requirements as well. The current government has also stated that upper secondary school should be available in English beginning from August 2026. The education providers must plan the English curriculums and apply for the permission from the Ministry of Education and Culture (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö). Head of the unit at Finnish National Agency for Education, EDUFI, Petri Lehikoinen expects the curriculums to be offered at upper secondary schools of large cities and municipalities which have more demand for such arrangement (EDUFI 2025). The demand for English upper secondary education did not come up in the interviews analysed but is relevant when thinking of the issues of language barriers and the integration of migrants.

4.2 Learning the Language While Working

There was also one interviewee who had at first practiced Finnish diligently, being able to write applications and go through job interviews in Finnish. They still ended up getting part-time work with companies where the working language was English. They felt that by getting a job in a Finnish speaking work environment could have enhanced their language skills eventually to the level of natives (EASWork 15).

I think that yes, and yes. Well, I definitely think there's always room for improvement. When I was finishing that YKI test and those studies and aikuiskoulutus, I was speaking Finnish so well back then. Like I was really into it. I was so fresh. All my interview, like, sorry, all the interviews that I did have back then were all in Finnish. All my applications were in Finnish. Letters in Finnish, CV in Finnish, phone calls in Finnish, face-to-face talks in Finnish. And I still never got really a chance. And eventually, I ended up

getting part-time work in foreign-owned companies where it was okay to speak English. And in some cases, I was the only person that could speak Finnish in the working places. But I didn't really need to speak much of it. So, I always saw that as like a very great loss and a shame that like, you know, had I been given the chance to just get any type of job pretty much when I was trying my best, that my Finnish would probably be at a native level by now, for sure. (EASWork 15)

One interviewee reminded that if employment possibilities were given more lavishly, the impetus for learning would grow in conjunction (EASWork 5). Another interviewee was calling for pioneering employers or companies to break the status quo of requiring Finnish language from migrant workers. Or for a certain percentage of jobs to be made available in English. They mentioned how their partner has 12 years of experience in software development, but they still work as a food delivery driver for Wolt due to strict language requirements (EASWork 4). Later their partner signed up for full time language training, but they did not dare to apply for the unemployment benefit being scared that it would hamper their possibilities in securing a permanent residency. Instead, their partner kept working for Wolt on the side (EASWork 4). There was recently an article on the newspaper Helsingin Sanomat talking about a technology company Danfoss Drives, which needed to find up to a hundred new employees for their new factory in 2022. The recruitment agency had found only three candidates from Finnish and Swedish speaking applicants. The company decided to ease up on their language requirements and got hundreds of applications. Danfoss Drives had been afraid to hire outside the national languages due to safety reasons, but report that no accidents have taken place due to miscommunication after the introduction of English as a working language. The company had easily found mentors for the new workers and began offering Finnish language teaching on job in 2023. Also, the concerns from other employees about working in multiple languages faded as the bilingualism became commonplace at the factory (Helsingin Sanomat, 2025). The HR manager Heidi Saarinen interviewed for the article also notes how language skills can be practiced both ways, attitude and competence are what matters. They also lament the current Finnish governments tightening immigration policies, especially the three-month rule of being unemployed, after which an immigrant can lose their residence permit. Saarinen laments that such a tight restriction creates difficulties for companies and distress for candidates. When thinking of employment processes, from applying to employment, even the fastest processes, such as summer jobs and part time postings, usually take

from a few weeks to a month. When talking of specialist positions, the process can take up to months. As the current government is, according to the Ministry of Economic Affairs (Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö, TEM), looking to attract highly educated work force (TEM, 2026), their new tightening of rules seems to contradict their stated policies as the three-month rule works especially against the hiring into expert positions.

4.3 Language Barrier considering Berry's model

Firstly, there was the issue of lacking information when it comes to adult education and YKI-tests. Having good networks can alleviate the issues migrants face in navigating the possibilities, but a more equal approach would be beneficial for all. The strategy of *integration* asks that one can participate in society from where they stand currently, having access to tools that help them learn while being able to use their current expertise and skills. The case where the interviewee was denied a job due to language barrier, while knowing others at the company with English as the working language points to discriminatory practices. They were also deemed overqualified, which does not help the situation if another position is not offered. Companies are at risk of brain waste, as they could hire a migrant to the position they are currently applying for and help them advance within the organization from there. It would be best if people found jobs that reflect their actual competencies, but at least getting a foot in the door would enable one to work on their language skills and gain knowledge of the working culture while on the job. Also, the requirement for having working level Finnish for a service job point to a, knowingly or unknowingly chosen, strategy of *assimilation*.

The interviewee's partner who had programming expertise and still only found platform work from Wolt points towards the acculturation strategy of *separation*, as the person does not get a chance to participate in their full capacity and the society and institutions demand a high level of Finnish language skills, even when their competency is in a field that mainly works with English. If the Finnish government and society want to benefit from everyone's human capital more focus on anti-discriminatory policies would be purposeful.

The strategy of *marginalization* is exemplified with the current governments three-month employment rule. According to the rule migrants that have lived in Finland for

up to 4 to 6 years, as is the current timetable for permanent residency permit (including acceptable Finnish language skills and 2-3 years of work experience in Finland), and have thus lost connection with their countries of origin, can lose their residency. The new rules have taken effect as of Jan 8th this year (Valtioneuvosto, 2025).

The solution that Danfoss Drives's example shows, would enable the strategy of *integration*, as it is meant by Berry. If applied to multiple fields and institutions, migrants could begin participating without full command of the language and learn on the side. Also, the steps being taken by Helsinki and Espoo in making services and public sector jobs available in English are implicative of the strategy of *integration*.

5 Accreditation

The accreditation of previous studies from foreign countries is another key issue for many migrants applying for jobs in Finland. Boyd and Schellenberger have investigated the accreditation of immigrant doctors and engineers in Canada in their article *Re-accreditation and the occupations of immigrant doctors and engineers* (2007). They found that doctors and engineers with foreign certificates were less likely to land a job in their respective fields, especially for migrants born in Southeast Asia and East Asia. Foreigners with a European background, excluding Eastern Europe, were more likely to practice medicine or find work as engineers in Canada. Another study focusing on accreditation of immigrants in Canada found that about 40% of immigrants have difficulties getting their educational credentials approved. The number was not affected much if the goal were to work in regulated versus unregulated professions (Zikic et al., 2011). Not a lot has been said academically about accreditation of immigrants in Finland, showing an area in need of more study.

5.1 Accreditation experiences from the interviews

One interviewee who had studied in Bolivia and Spain felt that Finland is extremely focused on practical and technical skills, while their background was in political science and urban planning. They thought that an engineering degree or one from programming would have helped secure a job more easily, when his background might have been more appreciated in cities where there is more international cooperation, such as Stockholm or Brussels, as there would be more relations to the southern hemisphere (EASWork 1).

Language would be top of the list. And second to that would be, I would say, that the weight of your experience is not, not even noted, as well as accreditation for your qualifications. You know, for example, the university I studied at, is highly, highly ranked over any Finnish university, yet they have the idea that because it's not Finnish, it's not so good. Now, honestly, rankings are neither here or there, and it just depends where you go for rankings. But there must be some sort of credence to that. I'm not the only one who has had, I mean, I had a friend who, Australian, who was here for two years. She was a psychologist, and they wouldn't accredit her studies. But she's a registered psychologist in, in Australia, and she had to leave, because she needs to work, you know, for example. (EASWork 5)

As seen above, the strictness of accreditation can bring about feelings of discrimination and as if only Finnish education is top tier. The Finnish National

Agency for Education (Opetushallitus) states, that usually the employer or the educational institution assesses the transferability of a foreign certificate. Unless if a regulated profession is in question, whereby the agency or another applicable official will decide on the recognition (Opetushallitus, 2026). The agency's web page provides a service guide for holders of foreign qualifications, but in the case where the employer needs to assess if one qualifies it can be a disadvantage. Without a proper system for assessment, many job seekers can be left with feelings of confusion as for the reason they might not have been chosen for a specific position.

Another interviewee talked about how they got excluded from applying for an art teaching position, as the possible employer did not recognize their certificate and demanded an accreditation which would cost three hundred euros and take four months to complete (EASWork 5). They felt that with their previous experience teaching in multicultural settings would have contributed positively, as many Finnish schools and teachers might misperceive cultural differences as misbehaviour or as rudeness (EASWork 5). A solution for demanding expensive accreditations would be such that the possible employer could pay the accreditation fee and deduct it from the salary. Or they could pay a part of it. In a situation where there's multiple applicants this might be an unrealistic expectation from the recruiting party. When it comes to the multicultural experience, it seems like a missed opportunity for the employer. Could it be that such experience is not included in the criteria of recruitment yet, and as such no points are gained when going through the application? The more Finland and the West become multicultural, such experience would seem invaluable.

5.1.1 Career Adaptation Strategies

Chihaya and Hedberg (2025) have looked at the transferability of human capital, and which strategies migrants apply to make use of their education in the host country in the setting of the Swedish labour market. They found that migrants whose credentials were accrued within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) were able to convert their human capital into early employment, but even highly educated migrants from countries outside the standardized European educational area usually had to obtain new credentials within the Swedish educational system (Chihaya & Hedberg, 2025). The strategies to overcome barriers to leveraging one's human capital mentioned in the study include acquiring new credentials within the host country or becoming self-employed. Acquiring new credentials improves

employability through gaining skills specific to the surrounding labour market while at the same time making them easier to recognize and understand for the possible employer.

One interviewee had 15 years of experience in banking from Sri Lanka and saw that they needed a qualification to rise higher on the job ladder. Once they had started studying their bachelors in Finland, they started applying for jobs in the banking sector ranging from positions in credit and loans to recoveries. After getting feedback from the employers, they realized that besides the language barrier, they also needed to understand the banking policies and procedures in Finland. In their own words, they had to go back to the basics, starting from point “A” again (EASWork 4).

There is a language like, they use the terms like, okay, we went through your application, you seem a very good candidate, but we like, we cannot move forward with you because you have, because language is a problem, or something like that. Or yes, they do not say directly you are not fitted, but they do say indirectly that, yes, you are not fit for the working culture. And if I have done some small kind of work, for just a few days, then they recognise that, okay, he has done work in Finnish companies. But if I have done whatever I have done in my country, how big it is, they do not value that. It is there. (EASWork 3)

As seen above, another interviewee also saw that their previous work experience from abroad would not count, and that Finnish companies would only value their experience accrued within the Finnish labour market. Based on the interviewees experience, it can be seen again that giving a chance for migrant workers even if it is not a full-time vacancy, can affect positively towards their future job applications and interviews.

5.1.2 Platform Work and Possibilities for Change

Chihaya & Hedberg (2025) note that while self-employment is a valid strategy for side stepping the issue of accreditation, it often leads to lower earnings than what is possible through other kinds of work. The study found that migrants with a tertiary education from non-EHEA member states were associated with a delayed entry into the labour force, which included a period of studies within the host country when compared to migrants from EHEA, as the migrants from non-EHEA countries spend time attaining suitable credentials. Becoming self-employed was not correlated with

education or origin country of the migrants (Chihaya & Hedberg, 2025). This aligns with the observations of another interviewee, who stays connected with a large group of Sri Lankans and have noticed that more than 90 percent are doing platform work for Foodora and Wolt, and not getting jobs related to their fields. They were hoping for companies or employers to make that initial change in recruitment criteria which might set the trend going forward (EASWork 4). Lately there has been discussion in Finland on the rules of platform work, and if the workers should be considered as employees instead of entrepreneurs. The criticism has been, that as entrepreneurs, the workers are not covered by the companies' health insurance and are not guaranteed work hours. Platform work is also seen as something that ethnically Finnish people would not happily do themselves, as the work hours and compensation seem not in line. It might be inferred that platform businesses take advantage of migrants who are not as familiar with labour legislation.

5.2 Accreditation considering Berry's model

The fact that the Finnish government aims to attract skilled workers, be it in health care or in more technical industries, but at the same time mostly values education and work experience garnered within EHEA, or more specifically in Finland, is confounding. This often forces migrants to start at the beginning and even if they can benefit from the knowledge from their previous work experience and degrees, the added years of costly education and losses in income tax paid should spur changes in recruitment criteria and the surrounding bureaucracy. In addition, when there is a possibility of accreditation of precious studies, the process itself is costly and can fall on the applicant. Due to these barriers, skilled migrants can get trapped in working in ill-suited fields, such as in platform work. According to Berry's model, *integration* is achieved when a newcomer can use their previous knowledge and expertise while participating within the host culture. Having to re-study in their respective fields from the beginning in the Finnish setting is in line with *assimilation* as the strategy, at least when it comes to work force integration. If migrants are pushed to, or if it is the only viable option, to work in fore mentioned platform companies, a strategy of *separation* can be deduced. Accurate numbers for the percentage of platform workers with a foreign background could not be found, but it is safe to say that migrant employees and entrepreneurs are crucial for the operation of the platform economy.

The interviewee commenting on how 90% of their Sri Lankan community is doing platform work supports this statement.

The platform businesses cannot solely be blamed for the situation, as it is part of a larger societal discussion on which acculturation strategies Finland aims at and should aim at. As it is, platform work is a path to gain entrance to the workforce often in short order. Svartsjö has analysed two datasets pertaining to food-delivery workers' experiences in their thesis *Unpacking Finland's Food-Delivery Workforce: Demographics, Experiences, and Satisfaction* (2025). The first dataset was a survey commissioned by the food-delivery company Wolt with 1,539 respondents, and the other was 55 interviews conducted with food delivery workers. They found a discrepancy between responses on the reasons for doing platform work. Most of the survey respondents had chosen platform work voluntarily, while most of the interview respondents claimed that they took it up due to being unable to secure other jobs. It is unclear how the survey question was framed, as the word "voluntarily" leaves room for error in how it can be understood. Svartsjö also found that out of all survey respondents, 62,6% had completed tertiary education (Svartsjö, 2025). This finding further highlights the failure in utilizing human capital on a societal level.

6 Discrimination

Discrimination was another topic that was asked specifically in the interviews. Discrimination, anti-discrimination, and DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion)-policies have been a staple of public discourse when it comes to immigration in Finland. Liebkind, Larja and Brylka in their article *Ethnic and Gender Discrimination in Recruitment: Experimental Evidence from Finland (2016)*, found that in both semi-skilled and skilled jobs, ethnical majority group was more likely to be hired compared to minorities. Another study by Rask et al. (2018), focusing on discriminations effects on the health of Somali, Russian, and Kurdish origin populations in Finland found that experiences of discrimination increased the likelihood of self-reported poor health outcomes including mental health and limiting long-term illnesses. The study divided the experiences into two classes, subtle discrimination and overt discrimination, which range from being treated less politely or respectfully due to one's ethnicity, to name calling and outright threats. Subtle discrimination experiences were reported from 29% to 35% among the groups in the study whereas overt discrimination was reported at 22% and 24% (Rask et al., 2018). These findings show how discrimination has tangible, adverse effects on migrants in Finland.

The interviewees had not faced blatant discrimination in their job seeking efforts but brought up some points that made securing a job more difficult for a migrant. One interviewee had noticed that while on a job, there is no blatant discrimination, but getting a job you usually must have relevant social networks, speak Finnish, and preferably have a familiar sounding name or last name (EASWork 3). Another interviewee summarized the situation in their view as such; "Like, I can't clearly tell you anyone's had racism thrown in their faces. But, I mean, I don't think they're going to get jobs either, if that makes any sense" (EASWork 8). Another saw the situation similarly and noted that if there had been discrimination it has been behind the screen, as face-to-face they had never encountered it (EASWork 4).

6.1 Anonymization and DEI policies

Another interviewee saw that due to innate human prejudices of the recruiting personnel, the trend of anonymizing applications is a good thing. (EASWork 1). A large-scale study done on anonymized application processes (AAP) in the city of

Hague in the Netherlands during 2016 and 2017 found that minority applicants were more likely to receive invitations to interviews when AAP was implemented. The hiring rates of minority applicants were higher too under the anonymization processes when compared to the previous year's statistics without AAP. The study also probed attitudes toward AAP among the applicants, the public, and the hiring managers. The applicants and the public welcomed the AAP much more positively compared to the managers who, according to the study, did not often believe discrimination would take place at their workplace (Blommaert & Coenders, 2024). Another study that looked at hiring for Ph.D. economists, found that AAP hindered the amount of interview invitations for female and minority applicants, as the possibility to favor applicants based on other factors besides credentials was eliminated, at least at the beginning of the hiring procedure. The authors note that utilizing AAP is more potent when there is more discrimination in the hiring process to begin with and remind that high-skilled occupations and competitive fields of work have lower levels of discrimination to begin with (Krause, Rinne & Zimmermann, 2012).

One interviewee talked about discrimination and anti-discrimination policies in academia. They surmised that recruitment in Finnish academia is an internal process, and thus hard to scrutinize. They recounted that even though universities talk about DEI policies and guidelines a lot, they do not believe in it and thus, the policies mean nothing. (EASWork 8). A study from 2021 looked at gender bias in academic recruitment in the Nordic region and found that female candidates were viewed as more competent and hireable across multiple academic fields, including faculties of Economics, Law, Physics, Political Science, Psychology and Sociology. The study concluded that biased evaluations of equally competent applicants do not explain the still prevalent gender disparities in high level academic positions (Carlsson et al. 2021). Although the study focused on gender biases, and not biases towards or against other minorities, it can be concluded that the issue of discrimination and bias in recruitment is still controversial and varies case by case. Also, the study on anonymization processes showed that sometimes anonymization can hinder getting an interview for minorities.

6.2 Prejudices and diverse cultural styles

Another interviewee recounted how due to their looks, people had come up to them and asked if they had come here to get free KELA (Social Insurance Institution of Finland) money. They also wondered if the rising nationalistic tendencies are affecting the job market in adverse ways (EASwork 15). One interviewee thought that due to the actions of some migrants, especially considering misuse of benefits and facilities given to them, all other migrants must struggle with stricter policies. They spoke about the importance of utilizing the support given in a suitable way (EASWork 4).

I don't think it will affect my job searching. I am culturally different to Finns though. Finns are very stoic. I'm very extroverted. So, it's different sides. That's not necessarily going to affect me getting a job. It's mostly about the fact that I struggle from an integration to a society point of view, if that makes any sense. So maybe that might affect it, but that's an assumption. I mean, my productivity and my ability to keep a job doesn't indicate that I struggle to get a job here. It's more about the fact that I'm more extroverted than Finns per se. That's it. (EASWork 8)

Cultural differences also came up in a couple of interviews. The interviewee with the quotation above saw Finnish people as culturally introverted as opposed to their more extroverted nature. Another interviewee described the contrast in a separate way, stating that Finnish people are softer spoken and plainer in their communication and use sarcasm less, compared to their own cultural background. This had created situations where their assertive style had been misinterpreted as aggression. They also noted, that as a foreigner, people may suppose you know less than locals (EASWork 5). Another interviewee remembered how when they tried to make contact and pass their CV around, introductions and small talk had been difficult. They had a sense that people did not like strangers coming up to them even in a working environment, due to shyness or grumpiness or just for having a difficult day (EASWork 15).

One interviewee noticed that the work life balance in Finland is stricter in a positive sense. In Sri Lanka, they had to work after hours and even after getting home they would have to log into their laptops and stand by in case they were needed. In Finland, even if there was more to be done when the hours are up, the next person coming to work would continue from where they left off. This Finnish working culture was seen as less stressful and they enjoy working in Finland due to it (EASWork 4).

6.3 Discrimination considering Berry's model

On a societal level, prejudicial comments show an attitude aligning with the strategies of *separation* or *marginalization*, depending on the level of connection with the heritage culture. In this thesis, Berry's model is leveraged in finding institutional and governmental strategies, but society at large can be thought of as a mirror image of how the government is constituted. Frequent negative comments about Finnish immigration policies by ministers or members of the parliament can make outspoken prejudice more common altogether. One interviewee mentioned how other migrants' misuse of benefits can make policies stricter for everyone. This kind of discourse can leave one feeling shunned by the host culture, while feeling that the migrant community is to blame too.

The answers highlighting the need to sound Finnish or have a familiar sounding name for migrants to become more employable, or to play down one's extroversion and become plainer and stoic in one's communication style, point to an underlying strategy of *assimilation*. Studies done on anonymization policies show that their efficacy depends on the situation, sometimes helping migrants in recruitment, but sometimes making it more difficult, especially in situations where DEI policies are a conscious choice already. It could be surmised that as foreign sounding names become more commonplace, the need for anonymization also lessens.

On a societal level, if the strategy of *integration* is the goal, understanding of varying communication styles and culturally based differences in extroversion and showing emotions is paramount. It helps to see value in having a wider scope of acceptable work life communication, especially when companies are looking to globalize. As an example of different communication styles suiting different objectives or orientations, there have been online discussions on the performance of Finland's current President Alexander Stubb in his foreign policy. Many commentators in the Finland-focused discussion channel r/Finland on the widely popular online forum Reddit, saw Stubb as too smooth-spoken or slick of a politician while he was situated in domestic politics, but feel that he is exceptionally suited for his current position, as the role of a President is more focused on foreign policy (Reddit 2026).

7 Advice to migrants and institutions from the interviewees

Finnish immigration policies are based on EU legislatures, constitutional law, international human rights treaties, and the current government program. It is difficult to find information on whom the government listens to when formulating new policies for immigration. It would be beneficial to include the experiences and advice of the migrants themselves if the goal is to attract international talent and to hold on to the international students in Finland. This chapter will focus on the advice to other migrants planning to move to Finland and advice to the government and companies when it comes to immigration and integration.

7.1 Advice to migrants

Foremost, the interviewees would advise the migrants to get acquainted with the Finnish language and set it as one of their priorities. One interviewee saw that migrants often feel that language skills are not necessary at arrival, and that they might have other priorities depending on their circumstances. They thought of language skills as the very first thing one needs to have. They were a little on the fence if the system emphasizes the learning of Finnish enough (EASWork 1).

I've told one of my friends who wanted to move here, and I was like, your wife's going to go mad. Because he works in tech, he's a programmer, his wife works in like social services. It's like you're never going to get a job here. No chance. No. There's no point in, from a foreign perspective, there's absolutely no point in moving to Finland. It's going to be impossible. And the current government is just making it worse. They're increasing the requirements for citizenship is ridiculous. I don't even know what they're going to do with the language because they said they're going to make it more complicated. Your language is not difficult enough, so make it more difficult. That's a good plan. They both say that they're open to business, but at the same time indicate that they're closed to business. It's counterintuitive again. I don't really know what else to say about that. I would just say don't. If I knew what I knew now, I wouldn't. (EASWork 8)

What makes the above answer interesting, is that the interviewee saw that even for programmers and social service workers the situation is dire. Or they meant that for the social services it is especially difficult to find work. Nevertheless, these two professions have been seen as priorities for the government to attract workers to. Very recently the situation for programmers has gotten worse, as artificial intelligence systems are able to do the basics of programming, requiring a senior

programmer to only oversee the production of code. It could be that the interviewee knew about this problem.

When asked on advice to migrants from another interviewee, the phrase “don’t come” resurfaced. They elaborated that if one is coming for the IT sector, they might have a better chance. Or if they have a solid business plan of their own. They also note how one should not rely on government resources, as so much time can be spent trying to secure those resources. They also felt that their 14 years of experience in teaching should have landed them a job at least first in English taught classes. They have noticed the difficulties with some youths from other cultural backgrounds and felt they could have helped there. As such, the interviewee is planning to emigrate with their family, but they would have stayed if they could have landed a fairly paying job in the range of 2000€ to 3000€. They also reminded how through work one can make friends and learn the language more swiftly (EASWork 5).

7.1.1 Mindset and persistence

The suggestion of getting acquainted with the language beforehand came up in another interview too. The interviewee thought it wise to start practicing Finnish already at the time when or if they are applying for a university here, thus knowing what is being asked of them considering the language proficiency later on. They also urged migrants to not give up applying for jobs in their own field, as settling with a cleaning, housekeeping or food delivery job can set a trend for migrants. At the same time, they saw the problem with managing expenses and thus having to accept jobs below one’s education level but wished still that that shift in mindset where one settles for less was not there (EASWork 4).

Another interviewee wanted to remind other immigrants how grass is not greener in other countries and that wherever one moves they will have to fight for what they want. They felt that one must get involved with the community, gain a supportive and trustworthy network and hone their skills. The interviewee reminisced how they used to gather bottles and cans for extra money as a student, even hosting parties where people would leave a lot of bottles for them to return to the shop in the morning (EASwork 15).

7.2 Advice to institutions

The language issue was one of the key topics also amongst the interviewees' advice for companies and the government when hoping to attract and hire educated migrants. For example, one interviewee pondered, how come Finland is inviting international students to study here in English even though the job market mostly prefers Finnish only. They felt that, in their experience, without embracing English as a working language Finland cannot globalize effectively (EASWork 3). Having the possibility to work in English after graduation should be made easier, as otherwise students will consider moving to a country where their sole focus is not only on studying the language (EASWork 3).

What I see in the job market in Finland is, Finland is actually like welcoming a lot of people, immigrants, and they're welcoming a lot of people with the dependence, with the family ... But then again, when we see the job market, the job market opportunities, the immigrants have, is like, very little, that is because, as I told you, the language. All I mean like, what happens, like, all recruiters and all employers have that comfort zone, like, the person we are recruiting should have a knowledge in the language. So, like, since everyone is thinking the same perspective, there should be one person who takes that, what we call, the risk or the change in recruiting policy. That may be an international language, kind like English is okay for recruiting. So, like, one employer or one company should take that challenge. So then, only this will change the environment, will change... It is true that language is important, but it's like mostly immigrants who are coming in. So, there should be a recruitment policy change, that they should give at least a certain percentage for the English-speaking immigrants. So, because my husband is a software engineer, actually. My husband is a software engineer in Sri Lanka. He has like 12 years' experience as a software developer in Java. And he worked for an international company. It's a UK parent company. But till today, he's a Wolt delivery driver. (EASWork 4)

Again, the plea for some employers and companies to take the chance in hiring someone whose work experience is not garnered in Finland, or who does not yet speak the language as it will open the playing field for more to come, came up in an interview. As for advice for companies looking to recruit, another interviewee felt that the preferred language of working should be English, and then learning Finnish could be encouraged and implemented alongside working. They saw that most migrants would love to learn the language on the side (EASWork 3). They also called for companies to reserve for example 20 percent of their recruitment need for migrants.

This way, they thought, gradually the unemployment and misemployment problem would solve itself and migrants would integrate on all levels of society.

7.2.1 From Education to Workforce Integration

One interviewee wished for the government to focus on the migrants that have completed their studies in Finland. They suggested a survey for finding the sticking points with this demography, as fixing that issue would already give support to migrants. The interviewee also suggests, besides welcoming policies, policies for ensuring graduates find suitable jobs. Otherwise, after a few years or so, people will look to move to other countries and all the money spent on their education and other benefits will go to waste. In summary, they advocate policies that encourage migrants to stay here long term (EASWork 4). One of their main points of issue was providing possibilities for students to work too, so that they can complete their education, as many international students do not have tuition from their country of origin.

Yeah, that companies, as I told you, they have to change their recruiting policies at least for a percentage. not hundred percent out of their recruitment, they should give at least 20 percent to the immigrants knowing English or other language, and they should give a certain percentage. I'm not expecting them to give or change the policy for entire, but at least, out of what we recruit, we should give 20 percent for immigrants, because if they give, like, kind of a slab percentage, I think, like, gradually this problem will solve. And also, we can see a society being mixed with all the immigrants and Finnish society. (EASWork 4)

The interviewee raised an interesting point about the integration problem fixing itself after having recruitment quotas for non-Finnish speaking applicants. As such, the issues from the recruiting parties' side, when it comes to not recognising the skills of foreign based workers, or not understanding differences in working cultures, would slowly diminish as if on its own.

Another issue that came up was the knowledge, or lack thereof, of Finnish working culture customs. An interviewee raised the issue of not knowing how and where to apply for jobs and what to include in their CV and in their cover letter. There were some inaudible parts in the interview, but the universities were mentioned as one possible provider of this information (EASWork 3). They also lamented the lack of possibilities for learning Finnish in their country of origin. On the topic of support in work force integration, one interviewee thought there should be more scrutiny on the

FEC (Further Educated with Companies) programmes. They saw that more analysis should be conducted on the efficacy in reaching and convincing migrants of the possibilities these programmes offer. Also, they called for a straight-forward path for migrants to acquire education and then continue straight into workforce. Or alternatively, a path to begin part-time work while in education. They felt that if one does not have experience working in a Finnish company, many employers are not trusting enough to hire you. Altogether, they felt that the whole path from attracting migrants, teaching the language, and getting them jobs needs to be more efficient. They also noted how many organisations offering employment training are making a lot of money with dubious claims and quality of training (EASwork 15). They also thought it would be beneficial for politicians to attend the FEC trainings and language courses, to gain firsthand knowledge of how the trainings operate and how the appointed funds are used. They felt that the feedback from attendees does not have a meaningful impact on how the courses are conducted (EASwork 15).

7.2.2 Bureaucracy & Policies

One interviewee, when asked about observed bureaucratic difficulties, firstly highlighted how the city of Espoo, thankfully, has brought in English as a third official service language alongside Finnish and Swedish. They felt that there are fantastic government programs that are functional on paper, but not necessarily in reality. For example, they had contacted the TE office, or employment office (Työ- ja elinkeinotoimisto) about a specific question that could have been answered promptly, but instead the TE office had instructed the interviewee to research the documents they had given out (EASWork 5). The interviewee also had a new business, and the amount of paperwork required, and the amount of assistance given, felt imbalanced. They saw that as an immigrant, one must try to fit in, but as of now the environment is not hospitable enough (EASWork 5).

To come back to the topic of accreditation, one interviewee wondered if even a European degree would help in securing a job in Finland, otherwise than in the tech industry, and specifically in programming. They also felt that the government has a weird stance toward immigration, where foreigners are viewed as both good and bad. The interviewee labelled this phenomenon as the Schrödinger's foreigner. They felt that the solution to this attitudinal dichotomy would be to steer away from centrist and right-wing parties in government (EASWork 8). The interviewee had advised a

friend, who was a programmer, not to move to Finland in search of a career. They felt that the current government is making acquiring citizenship and work-based permits even more difficult and saw that moving to Germany for example would be more straightforward, as their language is easier and landing an English-speaking job is possible in certain cities (EASWork 8).

7.2.3 Strengths and weaknesses of Finnish culture

One interviewee also noted the Finnish strengths of clean air, water, and kind people. Even if people do not talk and smile a lot. They also felt that some immigrants are acting against what Finnish society stands for, but they did not elaborate on how (EASWork 3).

So, if Finland is going to attract global people, if they really want the international investment, if they really want people to grow and have innovations here, I think they need to invite people from outside and preserve the language. It is a beautiful language, hard to learn, but it is interesting at the same time but give focus on English speakers also. Because if you are going to invite someone, if you are allowing them to come to Finland, then allow them to work, allow them to survive.
(EASWork 3)

Interestingly here, even when language was talked about from the viewpoint of barriers throughout the interview, the Finnish language is given praise by the interviewee. Again, it shows how the learning of the language is not an issue of itself but being able to find work and integrate before speaking Finnish sufficiently is what is causing distress.

One interviewee called for more cooperation between companies and organisations. They gave an example from South-East Asia and South Africa, especially in the tourism sector. They saw many synergies between travel companies, the hospitality sector and the tour and activities providers. They felt there is a loving and fostering relationship between the different stakeholders where everyone takes care of each other and leads to an ecosystem of sustainability. Contrary, they felt that in Finland people are too individualistic and in it only for themselves, thus missing a lot of opportunities (EASwork 15). The interviewee also gave a few examples, where they and their student peers had gotten sub-par service due to reluctance or inability to speak English by the customer servant, even when there had been a large group of customers willing to pay for the services (EASwork 15). The introversive propensity of

Finnish culture can act as a hurdle when it comes to recognizing business opportunities or creating beneficial cooperation. Once again, hiring a migrant with an understanding of another or of multiple different working cultures can bring about new vistas, opening possibilities for expansion.

7.3 Advice considering Berry's model

Starting with the issues raised that align with the acculturation strategy of *marginalization*, platform work, while offering an easy way to work force integration as such, can postpone a migrant's actual *integration* as it is understood in Berry's model, as they are not able to utilize their experience and expertise in a suitable field of work. Also, the mindset of aiming for suitable career paths was mentioned. The interviewee saw that accepting work below one's educational level can become a self-reinforcing trend. Another interviewee criticized the FEC (Further Educated with Companies) programs as having lacklustre quality. They hoped that politicians would attend these programs to see if they are just a money scheme for the providing companies. If these programmes do not lead to a permanent position, migrants can get stuck in a loop of attending one FEC program after another without true *integration* possibility. There is scant information on the actual efficacy of FEC programs in Finland leading to permanent employment. The public discourse is suspicious of the efficacy. There is a chance that companies take trainees for the 6-month period of the programme for cheap, as the trainees usually are on unemployment benefit for the extent of the traineeship, with no intention of hiring the trainees afterwards. Future studies on the efficacy of FEC programmes would be beneficial.

The interviewees advice for other migrants considering moving to Finland to not come due to difficulties in finding work point to a strategy or feeling of *separation*. There were mentions of moving to more hospitable countries when it comes to work possibilities in English. Also, becoming an entrepreneur is one way of side-stepping the barriers for employment. Both advice point to a wish of participating while leveraging one's previous expertise, which is in line with the hoped for strategy of *integration*. The societal demand for high Finnish language skills can be taken as a strategy of *assimilation*. The current government's dichotomic attitude towards immigration created confusion. The outward message is one of need for migrant

workers, but the policy changes to residency permits and language requirements send a conflicting message to people planning to migrate.

Besides alleviating the language requirement, if institutions and the government work with the strategy of *integration* in mind, a solution of hiring quotas was brought up in the interviews. The interviewee thought that such quotas, if maintained for a while, would break down many of the barriers eventually. Another interviewee saw that Finland could take advantage of synergies within companies if the culture were not as individualistic and self-focused. Proper *integration* would enable innovative ideas and ways of doing business via influence from migrants with information and practices outside Finnish work landscape.

8 Discussion

The findings indicative of the *marginalization* strategy, whereby both participation in host culture as well as connection to heritage culture are low, were the attitudes and prejudices in circulation about migrants' misuse of benefits as well as the current governments tightening of the residency laws, such as the three-month rule. Also, the risk of getting stuck in platform work, in constant FEC-trainings, or in a field otherwise outside of one's education and expertise, can push migrants toward *marginalization* or *separation*. The solutions to these would be the extension of the residency rule, which gives time for employers and applicants of mutual interests to find each other. The accreditation of non-EHEA degrees would diminish the risk of getting stuck in trainings or misaligned fields of work.

Separation, where participation in host society is low while connection to heritage culture stands, could be inferred from the advice to become an entrepreneur or like in the case of the Sri Lankan community, mostly work in platform work. Also, the advice given to other migrants to not come to Finland but instead move to another western country with more lax language requirements points toward *separation*.

Entrepreneurs can participate in the society, but possibly not in the capacity that their previous education and experience should enable. Piasna & Zwysen (2026) found that across 14 member states of the European Union, migrants are approximately 20% more likely to work within the platform economy and twice as likely to work within delivery or transportation platforms compared to the locals, especially if they are young and highly skilled. They find that migrants are drawn to platform work due not being able to find suitable alternatives from the more traditional labour market. Considering the findings of the thesis, the reason for many educated migrants opting for platform work can be partly explained with their entrepreneurial motivations and the low-cost entry into the platform economy.

The strategy of *Assimilation*, the participation in host culture while having to let go of heritage culture, was evident in answers that focused on differences in communication styles and misunderstandings caused by it. The demand for proficient Finnish and familiar sounding names can indicate that one should discard their heritage identity to fit in and participate. Hiring quotas and anonymization processes could help in getting more cultural diversity into the labour force. This could subsequently diminish future communicational clashes as well as make foreign

sounding names more familiar. Kanninen et al. (2023) looked at the findings from a pilot on anonymization in recruitment by the city of Helsinki. They also found that applicants with a foreign sounding name were hired more compared to non-anonymized recruitment. They also found that during the anonymization period, the overall number of applications increased, especially amongst female applicants. Together with the findings of this thesis, it can be thought that as the situation is currently, anonymization processes can diminish discrimination in recruitment.

With the goal of *integration* in mind, where participation level in host culture is high while being able to keep the heritage identity and previous expertise, the steps taken by cities of Espoo and Helsinki in making English a third service language and possibly an official public sector working language are in the right direction. Hiring English speaking workers and providing tutoring and language teaching on the job is also indicative of *integration* as the chosen strategy. Although none of the interviewees had experienced this yet, it had been successful in the case of the technology company Danfoss Drives. The university community with its strong peer support systems provides an example of a successful model for *integration*. The possibility of replicating such a community in the professional setting via government funding or on a municipal level could be of benefit. A report on the Integration-SIB (Social Impact Bond) experiment, which was carried out in 2016-2019 with 2217 immigrants, found that compared to the control group, the earnings of the participants were 18% higher, they received 1,340€ less transfers and paid 1,330€ more taxes. The experiment focused on personal employment guidance, language, and occupational learning on the job, and aided in bringing the participants and employers into contact. They also note, that during the period of the experiment, the public sector saved 12% per each immigrant that participated compared to the control group (Karinen, 2024). It can be deemed that companies and the public sector would benefit from a wider utilization of such programs, not to mention the humane positives for the migrants finding easier employment and learning the language while working.

Below is a table summarizing the key obstacles found within the interviews and acculturation strategies that could be inferred from the current situation and institutional and societal responses to them.

Observed obstacle	Current situation	Inferred acculturation strategy	Effect on migrants
Discrimination	Preference for familiar sounding names language skills	Assimilation	Pressure to hide or lose heritage identity to become more hireable
Degree recognition	Low valuation of non-EHEA degrees / reluctance of accreditation	Assimilation	Forced to re-study or to work in low-skill fields
Platform work	Over representation of educated migrants in platform work	Separation	Can participate in the work force, but not in full capacity
Immigration legislation	Tightening of requirements for residency	Marginalization	Professional uncertainty and fear of losing residency
Support systems	Community and peer support in universities vs. Individualistic work culture	Integration potential	Successful strategy of integration if similar support is available and English is accepted

Table 1. Observed obstacles based on discussion mapped with the according strategy of acculturation.

Further studies on the the immigration process and what information immigrants are left without when it comes to their rights and possibilities would be beneficial. Based on the interview answers essential information was often acquired through networks instead of official documents. Also, the efficacy of anonymization in hiring and whether it produces long lasting effects in workplace culture could need further study. The FEC programs and the possibility for companies to continuously take advantage of cheap labour through them needs scrutiny. Which percent of participants get hired at the end of the program, and how long are the contracts

agreed on. The Schrödinger's foreigner problem, as one interviewee put it, could be investigated more too. What are the actual policy aims and effects of the current government program when it comes to immigration and integration.

9 Conclusions

The thesis aimed to find the most pressing themes contained within the six interviews chosen from the EASWork project. After analyzing each theme and the contents of the answers, Berry's model of acculturation was applied to find out which acculturation strategies corresponded to them. Articles and other sources were used in finding viable solutions or paths to change acculturation strategies to more beneficial ones.

The key findings of the thesis were systemic barriers of high language skill requirements and lack of recognition for degrees attained outside the EHEA, as well as the policy paradox where the government seeks to attract international talent while simultaneously implementing stricter residency requirements. Also, while blatant discrimination or racism was not prevalent within the experiences of the interviewees, subtle discrimination was inferred from the preference for Finnish sounding names. The differences in communication styles were found to create friction and misinterpretations.

The acculturation strategies were found to be lacking if the goal is *integration*. Migrants would prefer to participate in Finnish society while maintaining their cultural heritage and being able to benefit from their previously gained experience and expertise. Without implementing similar peer support structures as can be found within the university environment or being open to hire with English as the working language, with the possibility for learning while working, the strategy of *integration* is unavailable.

The number of interviews analyzed for the thesis was only six, meaning that the answers can be representative of only a minority of migrants. The findings were still in line with the issues highlighted in larger survey studies.

If the Finnish government and the companies wish to thrive in the globalizing economy, it would be beneficial to intentionally shift towards the strategy leading to *integration*. Not only for economic possibilities, but also for human reasons.

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