



Companies' solutions for retaining international talent in Finland

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1. Introduction

Background of the study

Ageing population poses a challenge to society

– the need for international talent will continue to grow

CHANGING SOCIETY

- › The population in Finland is ageing, and this situation is widely recognised as unsustainable. The country continues to need an international workforce for a variety of jobs, including expert roles across different fields.
- › To support this, Finnish society must improve its capacity to welcome and integrate employees who do not yet speak our native languages, Finnish and Swedish.
- › In addition, companies have a role in attracting and retaining international talent.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

- › Based on previous studies and reports, there is a relatively good understanding of the factors attracting and retaining individuals in Finland (e.g. country's high standard of living, proximity to nature, work-life balance, and overall safety)*
- › Among highly educated internationals and their spouses in Finland, the main factors that have assisted their settlement here include work (46%), partners (38%), the international community (30%), and learning Finnish or Swedish (23%).**
- › Conversely, the challenges they face in settling in Finland are primarily related to language barriers (63%). Other significant difficulties include trouble finding a job (48%), making friends (43%), and the lack of support networks (23%).**

COMPANIES' ROLE IN RETENTION

- › While many industries continue to face challenges in recruiting talent internationally, there are certain fields that are leading the way, such as IT, gaming, and various areas of technology.
- › By learning from their experiences and established practices, other sectors can improve their work practices as well as recruitment strategies to ensure a sufficient talent pool for available positions.

References: *Alho, R., Niskanen, V., and Pitkänen, V. (2023). Maahanmuuttajien kokemuksia Suomessa asumisesta ja työskentelystä. Tulevaisuuden Suomen tekijät project. E2 Research.

Finders Seekers (2024): International tech talent in Finland 2024. Motivations and experiences of work life in Finland. International Tech Talent in Finland 2024

**Pitkänen, V., Välimäki, M. & Niemi, M.K. (2023). Ulkomaalaiset osaajat Suomessa: työelämä, arki ja osallisuus. International Talent Finland research project. E2 Research.

Objectives and data

Concentrating on pioneering companies provides opportunities for learning

OBJECTIVES

1. This study presents the most effective, tested retention practices used by 20 mid-sized, midcap, and large companies operating in Finland. These companies have a highly educated workforce and have actively developed and implemented strategies to improve employee retention.
2. The insights provided by the expert interviewees offer a valuable perspective on current practices and highlight what, in their experience, proves to be effective.



Data: 20 qualitative interviews with experts from medium-sized, midcap, and large companies

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The data consists of individual interviews (n=20) conducted on the Teams platform between March and May 2025.



All the companies selected for the interviews already employ highly educated foreign experts. The interviewees included individuals from the company's human resources management, as well as others who work with international personnel and possess knowledge of the company's strategies in that area.



The business sectors represented by the companies were ICT (incl. gaming), and the green transition industry. One interviewee was from the health-care field. All companies are located in urban areas, particularly in the densely populated Uusimaa region.



2. Key take aways for companies

Retention should be viewed as a process – manage expectations and support retention in long term

To attract top talent, positively differentiating an organisation from others involves providing a smooth, well-planned, and personalised relocation process that supports employee retention.

This requires understanding the process-nature of settling in and integrating into the new country. The most effective support for retention includes not only assistance with moving home and onboarding, but also requires a longer, more comprehensive process that supports the goal of retention step by step.

The foundation for successful employee retention is established during the recruitment phase.

The key challenge is to balance realism with attraction. While promoting Finland as a great place to live and work, it's essential to present the company and the available position effectively.

However, this should never come at the expense of honesty. Providing candidates with comprehensive information to make informed decisions and ensuring that they align with the company's values are essential for future retention.

In retaining international experts, factors related to life outside of work are significant.

Building social life is one key element supporting the newcomers' well-being in Finland and longer-term attachment to the country. Employers aiming to improve employee retention should not underestimate the opportunities they have to contribute to this goal. Many international experts find it challenging to make friends in Finland; however, when friendships do form, they are often rooted in work relationships.

Facilitating this process by organising events or gatherings and involving employees' families occasionally can significantly enhance building friendships.

Supporting individuals in learning the native language is highly beneficial, as it opens opportunities and allows connecting more deeply with society and various communities.

Understanding and leveraging the diversity of different target groups

When it comes to retention, “one size” does not fit all. This is an area where a more nuanced understanding within employer organisations could be helpful.

Individuals who move to Finland for work typically have some things in common, yet they remain a diverse group in many ways.

Understanding the needs of those whose retention we wish to improve is the key to success. Most new foreign employees have specific information needs and may desire some flexibility to stay in touch with friends and family from their home country. Some individuals may find it more challenging to make friends and connect with Finnish society than others.

Additionally, the needs of those arriving with families are likely to differ from those relocating alone.

The life situations of newcomers can vary significantly.

Understanding what is important to them individually, and at different stages of their career, can strengthen their relationship with the employer. For individuals moving to Finland, key considerations may include ensuring that their accompanying family enjoys their time in Finland, maintaining connections with loved ones who remain in their home country, and having the opportunity to practice their own culture and religion to some extent.

Employers should recognise that while everyone values flexibility, the specific needs for it may differ from one employee to another.

Developing the company’s cultural skills and sensitivity promotes well-being and commitment among all employees.

This could include acknowledging Ramadan and Diwali alongside Christmas, depending on the backgrounds of employees.

While not all the factors are within the control of employers, some certainly are

Many international experts moving to Finland do so to further their career.

Moving country can be most rewarding but comes with a price of being separated from ones' existing social circles, customs and culture. It can be hard work.

Understandably, many taking the step do expect it to pay off as career progress. Therefore, it is advisable to have this dialogue as ongoing, from the interview stages through the years of employment, to ensure the employee is receiving the support and information relevant to further their career and grow in their roles if they so wish.

Some international talents plan their time in Finland to be just one stage in their careers.

However, this shouldn't deter companies from trying to retain these individuals long-term, as plans can change. Companies can support this effort by providing information about services available for families and outlining career prospects both within the organisation and more broadly in Finland.

With the helpful information, employer commitment, and a vision for the future, people may reconsider their plans and be encouraged to stay.

Companies' views on their role in retention, especially related to integration outside work, vary.

Some risks may emerge if society is unable to support employees to integrate, and if employers do not take on this responsibility either.

Some companies may be tempted to adopt a narrow view of their role, thinking that supporting employees in areas like social integration and language studies, or assisting their spouses in finding employment, is outside their scope or too expensive if outsourced.

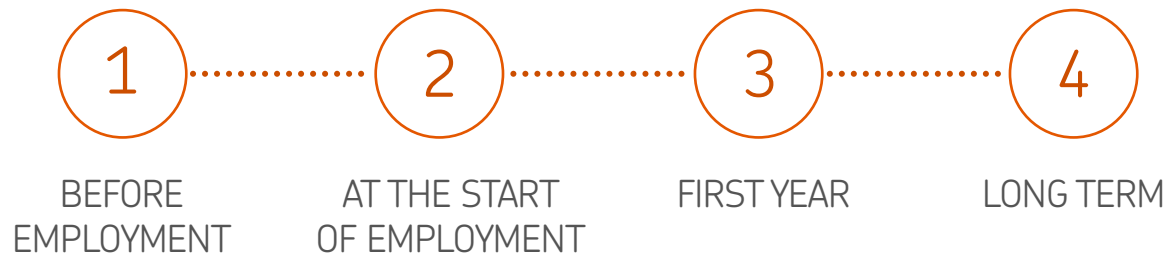
However, neglecting these areas can lead to serious consequences. If the family's social and professional connections in Finland remain weak, their likelihood of relocating to another country increases.



3. Recommendations

Recommendations for different stages of employment to enhance employee retention

Here are four actionable steps to follow



BEFORE EMPLOYMENT

- › **Acquire information about international recruitment.** Utilise resources such as employers' associations and relocation partners.
- › **If recruiting your first foreign team member, prepare the work community.** Ensure the team is ready to welcome a new international employee. Pay attention to language practices (e.g. meetings, documentation, intranet in English) and attitudes within the workplace.
- › **If possible, use your existing international personnel in the recruitment process.** Someone who has moved to Finland or lived abroad themselves might be able to address the applicant's questions and concerns effectively.
- › **Open a dialogue about expectations with candidates.** Ensure that employer and employee expectations regarding job responsibilities, opportunities, and life in Finland are aligned.
- › **Consider offering a pre-employment visit.** Provide candidates with the opportunity to visit Finland before starting employment to get acquainted with the country, city, and workplace.

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[W]e need to be able to explain things like taxation in Finland and the standard of living you get with net salary. [W]e just had a guy from Qatar who would get half the net salary here in Finland compared to Qatar. [I]n the end, he accepted [our offer]. But the whole process was like, no way, this is not going to work out. Then when we explained everything that is for free – healthcare, education, and all that, the big picture, in the end there really was no difference at all.

Interview 11, industry

AT THE START OF EMPLOYMENT

- › **Develop a straightforward onboarding process and consistent follow-up.** Create and maintain onboarding policies and ensure that they are followed during the onboarding process. It is a good idea to have regular discussions with the new employees to ensure mutual understanding.
- › **Assist with relocation.** Moving to a new country can involve a lot of extra work, such as finding housing, preparing documentation, and enrolling children in school. To help make the transition as smooth as possible, it is advisable to offer tailored support. A relocation partner can assist with these tasks.
- › **Assign a dedicated contact person.** This could be, for example, an HR representative, who is available for questions related to work and settling in Finland (especially with bureaucracy).
- › **Benefit of a buddy practice.** Designate a colleague to support the newcomer during their first months. The buddy can provide valuable, easily accessible assistance and share practical knowledge about work-related matters and daily life in Finland. Having a buddy with an international background can be particularly beneficial in helping a new employee acclimate. This support may be especially valuable for those relocating alone.
- › **Introduce newcomers to Finnish society and available services.** Assist new employees and their families in integrating into the local community and navigating available services. Many have found spouse programs and language courses to be especially helpful.

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During the onboarding phase, create these "buddy" practices. In other words, on top of the standard onboarding, there should also be a person with international background who helps to adjust, so to speak. Especially if it's their first job in Finland, [the mentor can relate to and] tell you that yes, I know they are a bit weird and they don't talk much and they don't go out with you in the evening, they go home to have dinner with their family and that's quite normal here.

Interview 1, industry

FIRST YEAR

- › **Engage international employees in all work-related matters.** Provide equal opportunities for participation in the workplace, including involvement in improvement projects. Ensure that everyone feels their input is valued and their voice is heard.
- › **Ensure that social events are inclusive and promote friendship.** Organise after-work events and social gatherings where employees can bring family members and friends to help strengthen social networks. Listen to employees' preferences, as meaningful activities encourage participation. Is it going to be Pizza Friday or a Games Night?
- › **Provide support for families and spouses.** If the new team member relocates with their family, pay attention to how well the family is adjusting. Participate in spouse programs offered by the city, host networking events, and share information about schools and other resources that can help with everyday family life.
- › **Pay attention to details that matter.** Acknowledge cultural preferences in e.g. workplace meal options, holiday celebrations, and other everyday matters to foster a sense of belonging.
- › **Emphasise culturally sensitive leadership.** This can be done, for example, by assisting managers in guiding multicultural teams and recognizing unconscious biases.

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[We] are involved in the City of Helsinki's Spouse Program, because one of the most typical reasons why relocated people may leave us is that they or their family do not integrate into life in Finland --.


Interview 3, ICT

LONG TERM

- › **Foster meaningful career development.** Ensure that international employees have access to meaningful career development by providing them with opportunities for advancement and ongoing professional growth. Foster commitment from employees by demonstrating the company's dedication to their success.
- › **Organize regular performance discussions.** Engage in continuous discussions about performance and future opportunities within the company. Consider personal motivational factors, desires, and any potential concerns.
- › **Acknowledge the importance of learning Finnish or Swedish.** Even if learning a native language is not required for work, it significantly improves long-term integration into society and is essential for a possible citizenship application later on. Consider offering language courses and allowing employees to attend these courses during working hours.
- › **Support maintaining family relationships and friendships across national borders.** This may include providing opportunities for longer periods of remote work or extended holidays to visit one's home country.
- › **Encourage long-term commitment to Finland among those planning to start a family.** Not everyone relocates with a family but may still intend to start one. Ensure these employees receive adequate information about the country's family-friendly policies.
- › **Support your employees to maintain good work-life balance.** Managers should lead by example – when they establish clear boundaries, it becomes easier for others to follow. Hold on to the strengths of the Finnish work culture.

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[Y]ou can also use our education budget for these [Finnish language] studies. [T]he reason we support it is so that, at some point, they could take the YKI test and apply for citizenship --.
Interview 20, ICT

A photograph of three women in professional attire, smiling and engaged in conversation. The woman in the center is wearing a dark blazer over a white shirt. The woman on the left is wearing glasses and a dark top. The woman on the right is wearing a light blue striped shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

4. Related resources and literature

Read more

Alho, R., Niskanen, V., and Pitkänen, V. (2023). Maahanmuuttajien kokemuksia Suomessa asumisesta ja työskentelystä. Tulevaisuuden Suomen tekijät project. E2 Research. [Link here](#)

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Keskuskaupakamari (2023): Kaupakamarikysely 2023: Osaavan työvoiman saatavuus ja kansainväliset osaajat. <https://kaupakamari.fi/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Kaupakamarien-osaajakysely-PDF.pdf> (11.6.2025)

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Välimäki, M., Pitkänen, V., Niemi, M.K. & Veijola, R. (2023). Kansainväliset osaajat ja Suomi: Mielikuvat, kotiutuminen, työelämä ja tuen tarpeet. Final report of the International Talent Finland project. E2 Research. [Link here](#)

A photograph of two women in conversation. The woman on the left is older, with short blonde hair and glasses, wearing a white turtleneck and a dark vest. The woman on the right is younger, with dark hair pulled back, smiling, and wearing a light-colored blazer. They are in an indoor setting with a blurred background.

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