Working together to retain international talent in the region

Sandra Slotte
Senior Consultant
Doctoral Candidate

Linnaeus University, Kalmar 17.9.2026

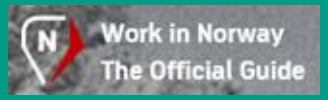
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Why me?

- Over 20 years of experience in the strategic internationalisation of higher education
- Long involvement with the national Talent Boost programme in Finland
- Doctoral Candidate in internationalisation of higher education, focusing on employer-ability and external actors' support for the employment and retention of international talents in micro and small enterprises
- Speaker in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Lithuania, and Germany
- Projects on employer-ability with partners from Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy


Bild av Emiliano Vittoriosi på Unspalsh


WORK IN
FINLAND

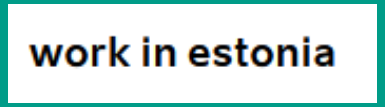

Work in Norway
The Official Guide


Work in
Iceland


Work in Sweden


WORK IN DENMARK


Work in
Lithuania


work in estonia


Work in Riga


WORK IN AUSTRIA


WORK IN CZECH


Workinholland
.com

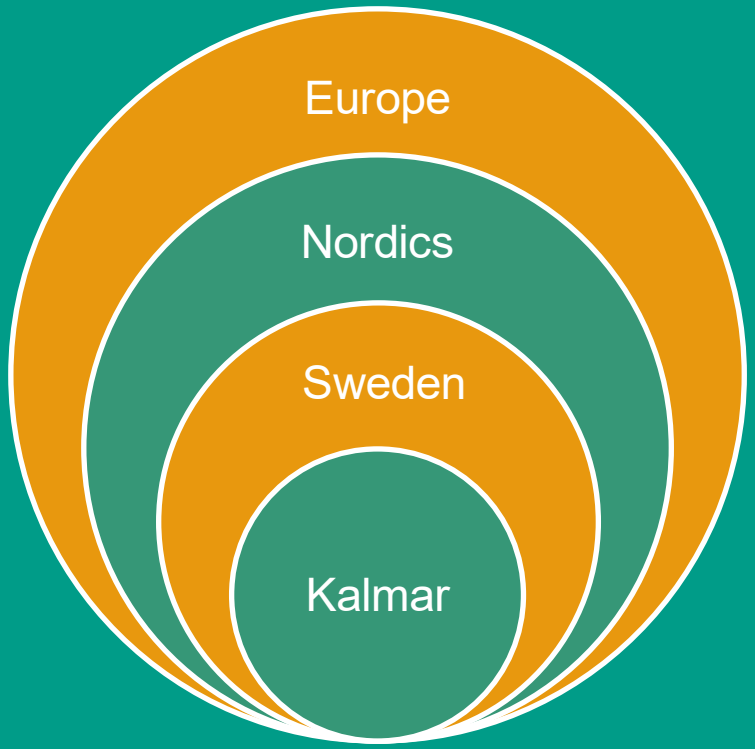

CYPRUSWORK


Make it in Germany
Working in Germany: the official website
for qualified professionals


JOBS FOR
UKRAINE


WORKFROMGREECE.GR

Competition at multiple levels



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Bild av Resume Genius på Unsplash

Achievements, skills, and personal attributes that make you “employable”

EMPLOYABILITY

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Bild av Degraphe on Medium 21.4.2025



Microsoft Copilot 24.2.2025 med prompten: "Create an image of students interviewing an employer."

The willingness and ability of employers to employ and retain international talents

(Slotte, 2025)

EMPLOYER-ABILITY

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Bild av Stephan Louis på Unsplash



Bild av City Church CA på Unsplash

ABILITY

CAN BE TAUGHT

WHAT ABOUT

WILLINGNESS?

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Barriers in Sweden

Swedish companies struggle to attract international talent

“The main challenges companies face in attracting, recruiting, and retaining people with international expertise include:

- permit processes that are time-consuming and resource-intensive
- an expert tax that is not competitive
- a housing market that hinders long-term integration
- a lack of access to international schools
- difficulties for accompanying family members
- a deteriorating image of Sweden and problems communicating Sweden’s appeal.”

(Svenskt Näringsliv, 2023, page 10)



SCB reports 2025

“Of all workplaces, 46 percent had experienced recruitment problems in the past six months [...].”
(Lediga jobb och rekryteringsbehov, SCB 2025)

“Difficulties in finding qualified candidates within the country do not appear to be a driving force behind international recruitment.”

“It is just as common to recruit directly from abroad as it is to hire people who have recently arrived in Sweden, but less common to hire international students who have graduated in Sweden.”

“Interest in international recruitment in the future is limited.”

SCB Små och medelstora företag: erfarenheter av internationell rekrytering



Barriers in Finland

- The tasks require native-level proficiency in local languages
- Customers and/or government agencies require proficiency in local languages
- Legislation and permits
- It is more difficult/expensive to recruit or hire international talents
- Adapting to workplace norms and integrating into the work community
- Current staff lacks sufficient language skills (in English)
- Current staff is not prepared for multiculturalismsm
- The quality or suitability of available staffing services
- Identifying qualifications (foreign degrees or work experience)
- Family-related or personal reasons (e.g., challenges for the employee's partner in finding work)
- Attitudes and resistance among current staff / We do not want to recruit or hire international talent

Barona's surveys on international labour and the future 2021–2025
Finland Chamber of Commerce's surveys on international labour 2023–2025
Confederation of Finnish Industries' survey on international recruitment 2024
Federation of Finnish Enterprises' poll on the recruitment of immigrants 2024-2025

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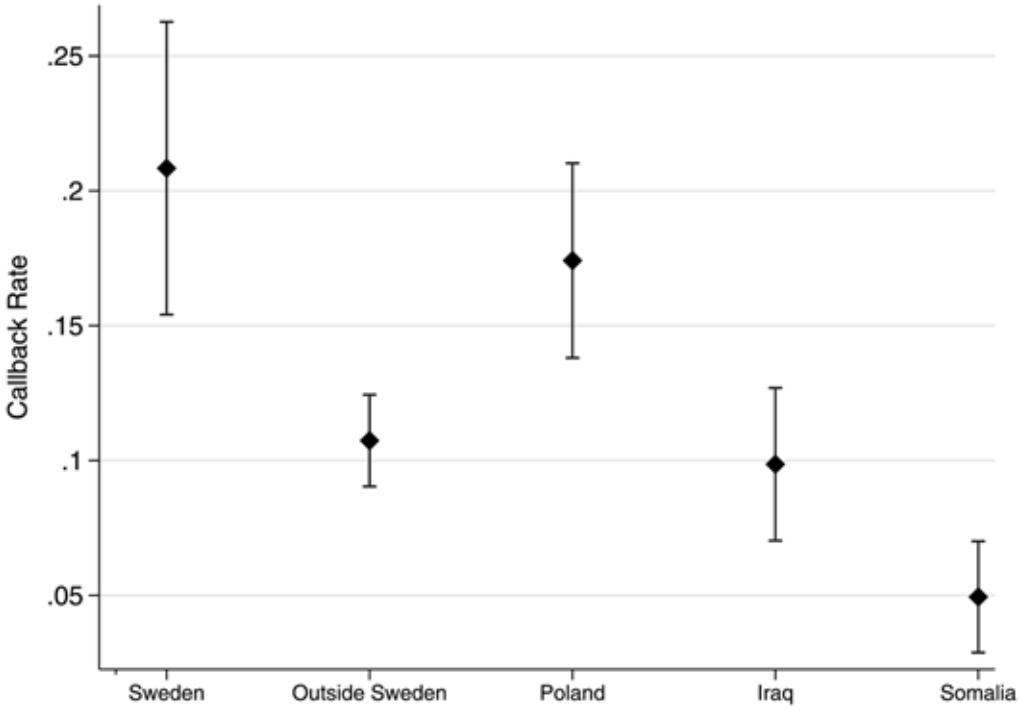
Support in Finland

- Financial support for recruitment / language training
- Finnish language courses
- Work permit services / streamlined permit processes
- Training or guidance on recruitment / mentoring / of international talent and diversity and inclusion
- External workforce
- Consulting services, e.g., current situation assessments and cultural support
- Assistance with recognising foreign degrees or qualifications
- Settlement services (e.g., help finding housing, local registration, and assistance with family support)
- Family reunification for international workers
- Streamlined everyday services (e.g., opening a bank account, obtaining a tax card)
- English-language daycare and education for children

Barona's surveys on international labour and the future 2021–2025
Finland Chamber of Commerce's surveys on international labour 2023–2025
Confederation of Finnish Industries' survey on international recruitment 2024
Federation of Finnish Enterprises' poll on the recruitment of immigrants 2024-2025

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Is language the biggest real barrier?



(Vernby & Dancygier, 2019)

Sverige: Vernby, K., & Dancygier, R. (2019). Can immigrants counteract employer discrimination? A factorial field experiment reveals the immutability of ethnic hierarchies. PLoS ONE 14(7): e0218044. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0218044

Norway: Larsen, E.N., & Midtbøen, A.H. (2024). Det etniske hierarkiet: Diskriminering på grunnlag av landbakgrunn, religion og hudfarge i det norske arbeidsmarkedet. *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning*, 65(4), 207-226. https://doi.org/10.18261/tfs.65.4.1

Finland: Ahmad, A. (2025). A Comparative Analysis of the Reception of Immigrants into Finnish Working Life in 2016 and 2024. Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/server/api/core/bitstreams/86041fcf-c2c4-4600-98f3-4102db5816f8/content

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Common areas of discrimination in working life

- Recruitment and employment contracts
- Wages
- Working conditions
- Competence development
- Career development

Good resource: Delmis rapport *Etnisk diskriminering i rekryteringsprocesser – orsaker och åtgärder* https://www.delmi.se/publikationer/kunskapsaversikt-2024-14-etnisk-diskriminering-i-rekryteringsprocesser/



Bild av Brittani Burns på Unsplash

Even those with jobs leave

- Unclear expectations, roles, and career paths
- Lack of support from supervisors or cultural differences in leadership
- A sense of exclusion in everyday life

Often, it's not a matter of ill will, but rather that this hasn't been considered important enough.

Companies don't lose international talent for a single reason, but because of many small, recurring signals.



Image by Nik on Unsplash

Digital Hub Denmark Exit Interviews Report 2025
Copenhagen Capacity Expat Survey 2025
E2 Tutkimus Ulkomaalaisten työntekijöiden rekrytointi: pullonkaualat ja hyvät käytännöt 2024
E2 Tutkimus Ulkomaalaiset osaajat Suomessa: työelämä, arki ja osallisuus 2022



99% of all Swedish companies are micro and small (MSEs)

They employ 41% of the workforce

94% of Swedish companies are micro

They employ 23% of the workforce

DOES SIZE MATTER?

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Social sustainability

Employer-ability is social sustainability in practice:

- Promote diversity and inclusion
- Ethical and responsible recruitment
- Applies to both the company and the entire supply chain
- Support the local community

- EU Corporate Social Responsibility Directive (CSRD)
- Voluntary Reporting Standard for SMEs (VSME)



"We don't have the time, nor the resources."



Employer-ability is not about resources – it is about attitude



What is considered important and deserving of resource allocation.

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Employer-ability is not more work – it is risk management and competitive advantage



- Recruiting is expensive, but losing an employee is even more so
- If promises of social responsibility do not match up with everyday reality, word gets around quickly

Changes in the workplace due to international employees:

- Staff attitudes have become more tolerant
- The atmosphere in the workplace has improved
- The company's ability to serve diverse customers has improved
- The workplace's rules and guidelines have been clarified
- Companies' ability to recruit the talent they need has improved
- Staff's ability to find new solutions has improved

Finnish Entrepreneurs: Yrittäjägallup Joulukuu 2025 - Maahanmuuttajien palkkaaminen

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WE PREFER TO EMPLOY OURSELVES

Nordic employers and systems are currently not designed for international recruitment


Bild av Olegs Jonins på Unsplash

Employers' emotions

- Threat to 'normality' (Risberg & Romani, 2022)
- Resistance to change
- Risk of loss of productivity
- Avoidance of conflict

- "This is not a problem"
- "This is not our problem"
- "What about other problems?"

(Shakkarwar, 2024)

- Frustration when cultural misunderstandings disrupt the workflow

- Guilt when you unintentionally exclude employees from social and professional networks

Emotional Health Project

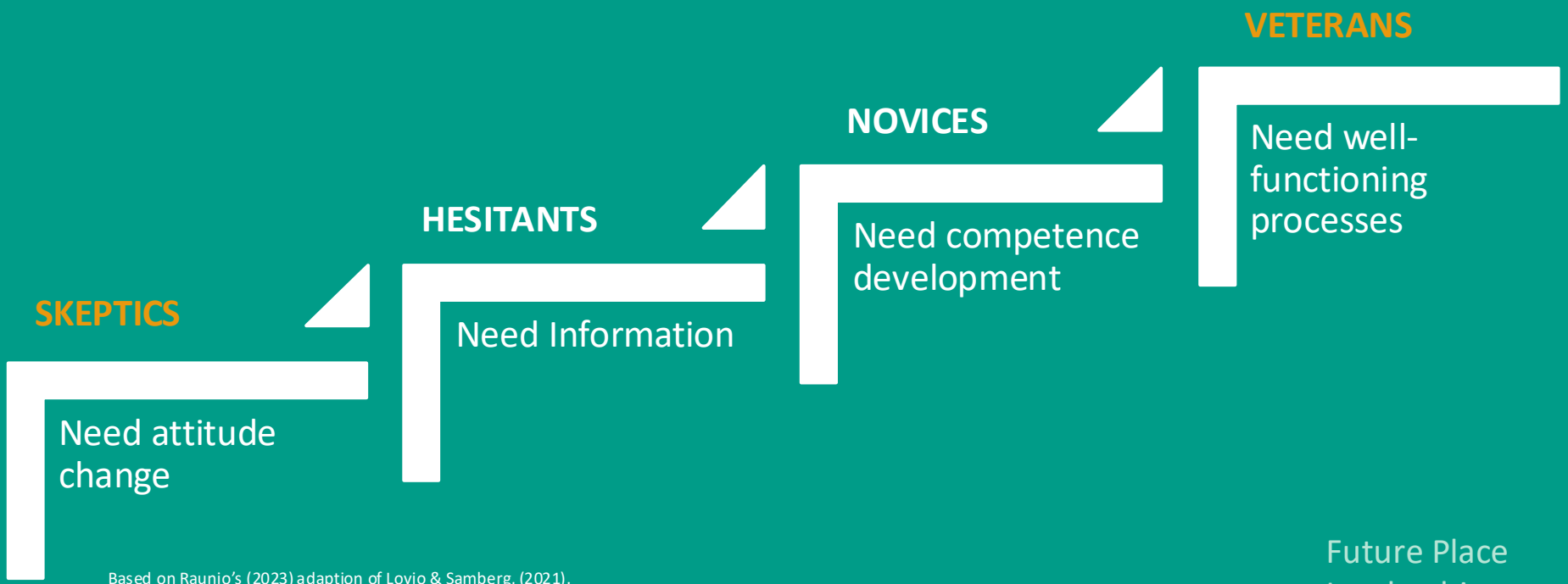
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TAKING RISKS REQUIRES TRUST

- What are the root causes for the lack of trust?
- What would remove those causes?



Employers' levels of readiness and need of support



Based on Raunio's (2023) adaption of Lovio & Samberg, (2021).

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Bild av Neil Thomas på Unsplash

- Financial incentives
- Permit processes
- Raising awareness of the benefits
- Practical tools
- Peer support
- Matchmaking
- AI job portals
- Recognition of skills and credentials
- Free and tailored practical support
- Training in employer branding
- Language instruction or funding for it
- Support for integration and housing
- Social events for employees and their families
- Support for accompanying family members

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT THEM?

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GUIDES FOR EMPLOYERS

Do not reinvent the wheel!

https://mediabank.businessfinland.fi/l/JQWn2SGF98rB/f/Jg5M



https://switchtosweden.se/publications/the-insiders-guide-to-recruiting-international-talent/

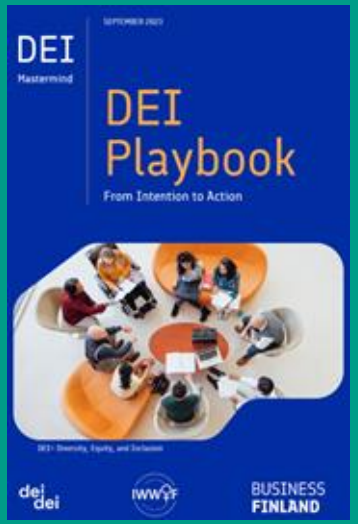




https://ise.org.uk/knowledge/resources/289/recruiting_international_graduates_a_guide_for_employers



https://issuu.com/discoverireland/docs/international_recruitment_guide?fr=sNDI0ZTU0Mjg3NjU



https://mediabank.businessfinland.fi/l/JQWn2SGF98rB/f/Jg5

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Erasmus+ project INTERLOCALITY
– Increased Local Employability of International Degree Students

ONLINE STAFF TRAINING COURSES

3 Training Courses on Guidance&Counselling, Intercultural Sensitivity, Employer-Ability are developed by INTERLOCALITY project, in order to support HEI, SMEs and Third Sector's staff in the local employability and retention of international students.

Employer-ability



Start the course

- Employer Readiness Scan
- Guide for Successful Internships
- Language Inclusive Recruitment Guide
- A short guide for employers

Download course files

Guidance & Counselling



Start the course

Download course files

Intercultural Sensitivity



Start the course

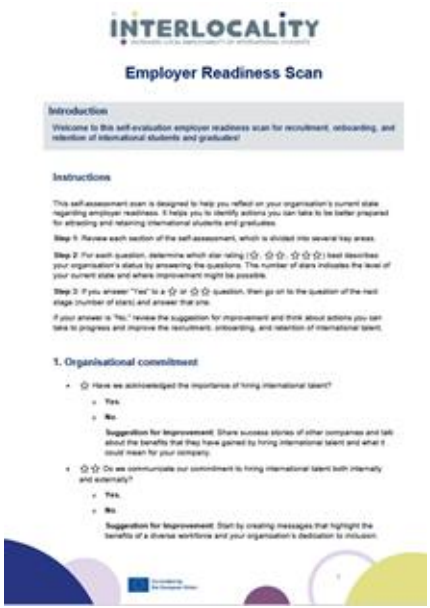
Download course files

Co-funded by the European Union

Userguide for implementation of online courses

https://www.interlocality.eu/resources

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https://www.interlocality.eu/resources

Co-funded by the European Union

TOOLS FOR EMPLOYERS

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How is lack of language skills a barrier?



- The tasks require Swedish? All of them? How much? Written or oral?
- Colleagues/manager are not used to speaking English?
- Multilingualism in the workplace feels awkward/like a burden?
- Customers require it? Do we know that or do we think that?

Or are language requirements sometimes used as an easy way of covering up more complex feelings of uncertainty and fear?

Employer-ability is a shared responsibility

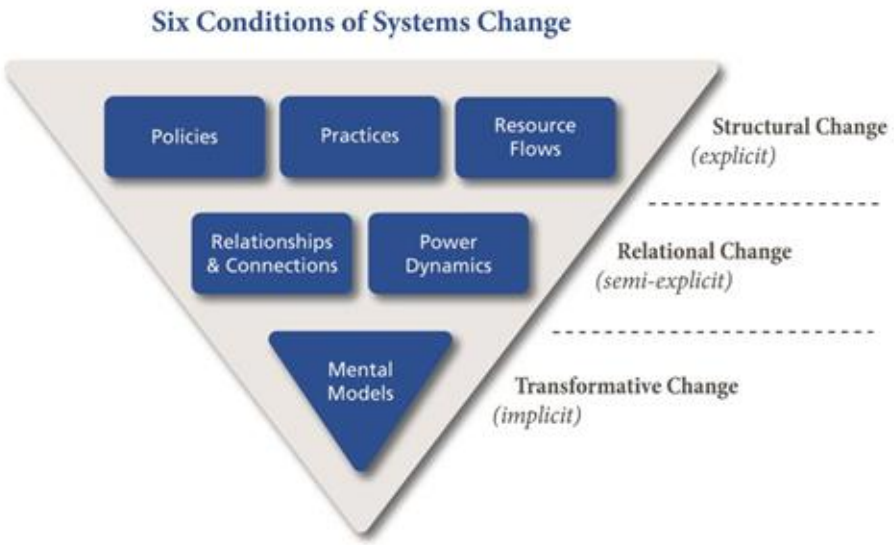
Government agencies, educational institutions, service providers, and members of the public all help shape how employers can and are willing to act

—through policies, incentives, rhetoric, services, and attitudes



Bild av Eugene Kucheruk på Unsplash

Mental models shape behaviour



Kania, Kramer, & Senge (2018):
https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/

Polishing the surface is not enough

We need to “shift the conditions that hold the problem in place”



The university can attract and educate international students but it cannot, on its own, create:

- employer willingness and ability to recruit them
- social belonging in the workplace and society
- long-term retention in the region

This is why a **talent ecosystem** is needed

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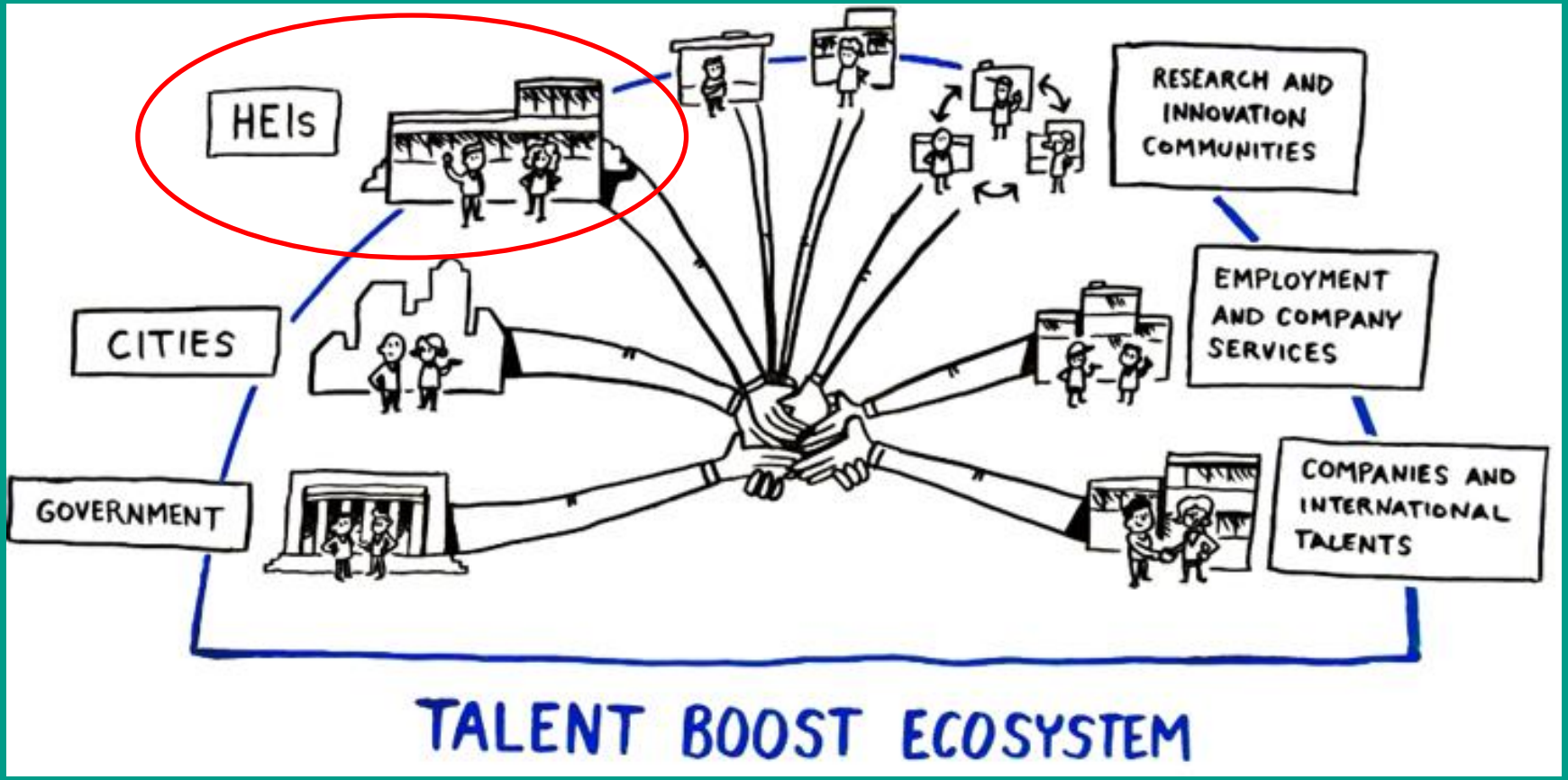
Work in Sweden Interim Report 2, 2026

Work in Sweden

3.6 Efforts by regions, municipalities, and higher education institutions to attract, establish, and integrate international talent

- Work in this focus area involves **establishing structures for the exchange of experiences, knowledge development, and collaboration between government agencies, regions, municipalities, and higher education institutions**, with the aim of jointly attracting and establishing international talent
- There is a need to do even more to attract and retain talent. **Regions, municipalities, and higher education institutions are key actors with greater resourcefulness than government agencies in this effort.** We need to continue **testing and developing arenas** for the exchange of experiences and knowledge development, as well as **developing and testing approaches** together with municipalities, regions, and higher education institutions

Work in Sweden - Tillväxtverket



(Laura Lindeman, Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. Presentation at the Talent Boost Network Day 12.10.2023)

1. Lack of orchestration



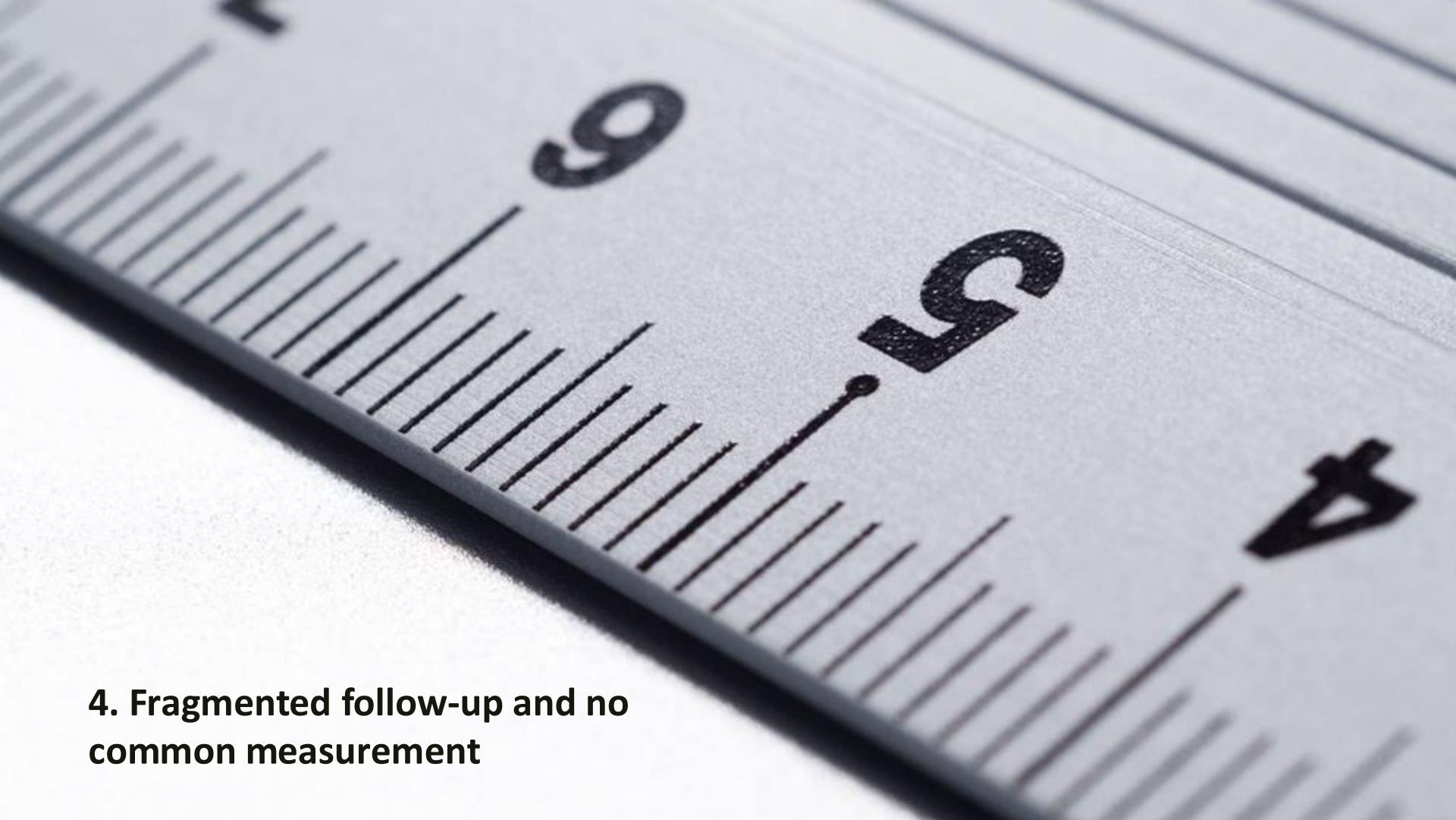
Bild av Pierre Goiffona på Unsplash

2. Only Finns involved
- only in Finnish



Bild av HUUM på Unsplash


3. ”I think there are Teams meetings… But
I don’t know how to get onto the e-mail
list …”



4. Fragmented follow-up and no common measurement

5. Terminated national funding



Bild av Towfiqu Barbhuiya på Unsplash



6. External project funding for the same ideas - but in different regions



7. Focus on the talents and on attraction

Bild av Kate Pierotti på Unsplash



IS COLLECTIVE IMPACT FOR YOU?

- There is an urgent need to address the issue in new and different ways
- A variety of organisations are involved in addressing the issue on a large scale, that is, throughout the region
- You agree that systemic changes, as well as better coordination and collaboration, are required

Adapted from Collective Impact Forum's Readiness Assessment

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DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?

- Are there influential driving forces that can bring together leaders from different sectors and target groups and initiate a joint planning process?
- Are there resources (financial and human) that can support the planning process and a long-term commitment to the issue?

Adapted from Collective Impact Forum's Readiness Assessment



ARE YOU READY TO GO?

- Is there a tradition of collaboration among the organisations participating in the initiative?
- Is there an impartial convening organisation that commands respect among the stakeholders?
- Are the stakeholders committed to using data to set the agenda and improve their work over time?

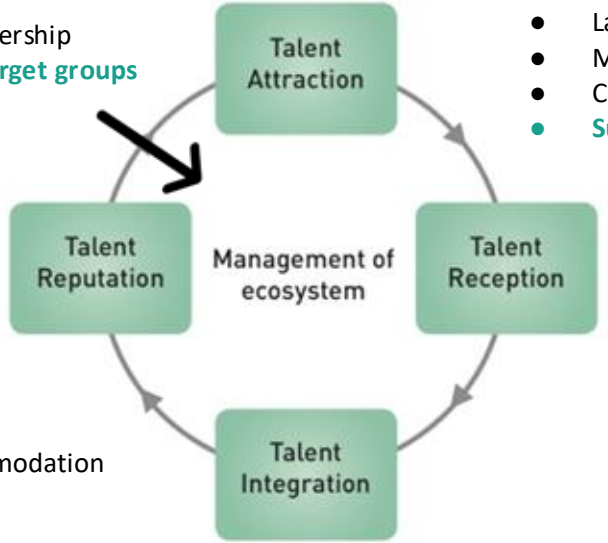
Adapted from Collective Impact Forum's Readiness Assessment

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Talent Attraction Management (TAM)-model and Employer-ability

Coordination
- Strategies
- Mandate & mission
- Funding
- Place leadership
- **Involve target groups**

Attraction & Recruitment
- Digital campaigns
- Events, fairs & delegations
- Landing pages
- Matchmaking
- CRM
- **Supporting companies - recruitment**



Brand & appeal
- Place brand
- Promotion
- Attractiveness
- **Value proposition**

Reception
- Contact with authorities
- Jobs for spouses
- Schools & childcare
- Welcome event
- First accommodation
- Bank account, telephone & internet
- **Supporting companies - onboarding**

Integration
- Long-term accommodation
- Jobs for spouses
- Career guidance
- Leisure time & associations
- Social & professional networks
- **Supporting companies - career development**

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Source: Future Place Leadership, modified from Tendensor 2013



Regions that in partnership with employers can turn attraction into retention gain not only skilled workers but also the potential for long-term innovation and growth

EMPLOYER-ABILITY IS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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As a country?

As a region?

As an employer?

As colleagues?

As neighbours?

As friends?



Bild från Pixabay

WHAT DO YOU OFFER?

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WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU STAY?



Bild av Matthew Fassnachta på Unsplash



Bild av Joseph Bobadilla på Unsplash

It is time to shift the question from "How do you attract talent?"

to

"How do you become ready to employ and retain talent?"

ARE YOU READY?

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WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU EMPLOY AN INTERNTAIONAL TALENT?



Thank you!

Please stay in touch!

Employer-ability and talent ecosystems, internationalisation of higher education



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https://www.linkedin.com/in/sandraslotte/
futureplaceleadership.com

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Publications

- Slotte, S. (2026). Compulsory Internships in Finland: Symbiosis Between Universities of Applied Sciences and Industry. In R. M. Helms & K. Bista (Eds.) Mapping community colleges around the world: Comparative perspectives and collaborative pathways. Volume 4: An Ecosystems Approach: Partnerships, Innovation, and Workforce Development. Association of Community College Trustees & STAR Scholars Press.
- Slotte, S. (2025). Talent Without Opportunity: The Policy-Practice Divide and Employer-Ability in Finland's International Student Labour Market. *Internationalisation of Higher Education – Policy and Practice, 12*(2), 111-131. https://doi.org/10.25162/int-2025-0006
- International student retention: going beyond 'just learn the local language' (Schüller & Slotte, 2025)
- Who is an international talent? (Slotte & Perkins, 2024)
- International graduate employability: whose job is it anyway? (Slotte, Spencer & Werner Mikkelsen, 2024)
- Balancing employability with 'employer-ability' (Slotte, 2023)
- Fast Expert Teams as a method for addressing the complex issue of retaining international students in Finland (Slotte, 2023)
- The Complexity of Internationalisation Calls for Collaboration (Slotte, 2022)
- Tools and mental models for internationalising with society (Slotte, 2022)
- Behov av utökat nordiskt samarbete kring integration av högutbildade immigranter (Slotte, Stadius, Bruun & Mäkeläinen, 2021)
- Creating space for global and intercultural competence development through curriculum design (Holm, Slotte & Wikström-Grotell, 2021)
- Internationalisation in Post-Corona Higher Education: What Will Change (Slotte & Wikström-Grotell, 2020)
- Future work skills in higher education - learning to be an international intrapreneur (Isacsson, Slotte & Wikström-Grotell, 2020)
- Future-proofing ALL our students and graduates (Slotte, 2020)
- Internationalisation at Home: The Road to Success (Slotte & Stadius, 2019)

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Exempel på hur vi kan samarbeta:

- **TAM - Talent Attraction Management** - utbildningar och samskapande utvecklingsprogram för kommuner och regioner som vill lära sig mer om hur man som plats kan bli bättre på att attrahera och behålla kompetent arbetskraft
- **STAF - Swedish Talent Attraction Forum** - nationellt nätverksforum för kommuner och regioner i Sverige som arbetar med kompetensattraktion (ca 25 deltagande organisationer)
- **SSCN - Swedish Student Coordinator Network** - nationellt nätverksforum för dig som arbetar som studentkoordinator och studentfrågor vid kommun/region eller lärosäte (medlemmar: Sundsvall/Östersund, Lund/Kristianstad, Luleå, Karlstad, Eskilstuna)
- **Talent City Index -** ett Talent Intelligence-verktyg för datadriven, målgruppsanpassad talangattraktion och rekrytering
- **Talent City Index Students -** en årlig specialutgåva av Talent City Index, genomförd av Future Place Leadership i samarbete med weStudents och studentum.se

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