

Employer deep dive report for Finland

Executive Summary

In the Erasmus+ project INTERLOCALITY co-funded by the European Union, we believe that it is important to not only address the employability of international students in the host country but also the employer-ability of local employers. In the project we have defined employer-ability as the employers' willingness and ability to attract and retain international students and graduates.

In the autumn of 2022, in-depth interviews were conducted in Denmark, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands. The respondents were 10 international students and -alumni, 10 employer organisations, 3-4 higher education institution (HEI) staff, and 3-4 third sector organisation staff in each country.

This executive summary was written in 2024 by Sandra Slotte, INTERLOCALITY Project Manager at Arcada University of Applied Sciences.

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INTRODUCTION

In this report, we have analysed the interviews with ten employer organisations and three third sector organisations in Finland. **The purpose of this analysis is to focus on the barriers, enablers, challenges, and opportunities in the local employment of international students and graduates.** We have also analysed the **forms of collaboration between the employers and other stakeholders.**

The analysis was done based on the following research questions:

1. What barriers, enablers, challenges, and opportunities do employers and third sector organisations perceive in the local employment of international students and graduates?
2. What kind of collaborations do local employers have with other stakeholders in the employment of international students and graduates?

**An employer may be able to employ international students and graduates but unwilling to do so.
Vice versa, an employer might be willing but unable to do so.**

FINDINGS

1. What barriers, enablers, challenges, and opportunities do employers and third sector organisations perceive in the local employment of international students and graduates?

Almost all barriers and challenges to the employment of international students and graduates, reported by the employers themselves, were primarily related to their willingness. The barriers were practical obstacles like lack of resources, employers' requirements of local language skills among staff, and the lack of suitable tasks or vacancies. According to the interviews, these practical obstacles could be overcome if the employer so wished. This shifted barriers such as resources, language requirements, and vacancies from ability to willingness. The only barrier that only related to ability but not willingness was language requirements based on safety issues.

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What is worth noting is that the interviewed third sector stakeholders did not report any enablers, opportunities, or challenges – only barriers to employment. Most of the barriers were connected to the willingness of employers and some also to the ability. The perceived barriers were related to company culture, attitudes, the requirements for local language skills, lack of resources, costs (of e.g. translations), lack of suitable tasks, and safety regulations. Barriers such as company culture, attitudes, and requirements for local language skills were felt to be relatively rigid and related to willingness rather than ability as these obstacles were connected more to mindset than to imposed or practical limitations. Some barriers were related both to willingness and ability as these current practical obstacles could be overcome if the employer wanted to prioritise e.g. resources for them.

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In short, both employers and third sector organisations perceived that barriers and challenges to the employment of international students and graduates pertained to the willingness of the employers. Employers additionally found that enablers and opportunities related to both willingness and ability of employers. This really highlights the need for other stakeholders to not merely address the ability of employers to employ international students and graduates but also their willingness to do so.

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2. What barriers, enablers, challenges, and opportunities do employers and third sector organisations perceive in the local employment of international students and graduates?

The forms of collaboration with higher education institutions (HEIs) in the employment of international students and graduates were: talent pools, internships and trainee programmes, recruitment fairs, events, company visits, thesis- and project work, research- and laboratory collaboration, incubator programmes, advertising vacancies, pre-screening of candidates, and collaboration around matching internship tasks with curricula.

Most collaboration with HEIs were seen by employers as enablers. For the most part they were connected to both the willingness and the ability of employers to employ international students and graduates. However, **recruitment-related collaboration only affected the ability of the employers, as the willingness was already in place.**

The willingness of the recruiting employers was already in place and they were looking for ways to be able to employ international students and graduates.

The interviewed employers mentioned collaboration with some specific third sector organisations such as staffing companies, international internship matchmaking providers, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) training providers, and labour market organisations. The collaboration consisted of participation in staff competence development trainings, spouse programmes, recruitment and relocation support, language training internship (as a part of the integration process for unemployed immigrants), industry networks, and funding.

The employers' collaboration with third sector organisations were for the most part connected to the ability to employ international students and graduates, but nevertheless required the willingness to engage in such collaboration. The challenges were indeed the lack of time and resources to engage in activities. The only barrier to employment was the lack of awareness of collaboration opportunities with third sector organisations. Such collaborations could potentially affect both the willingness and the ability of employers.

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The third sector organisation respondents stated that they offered collaboration opportunities in the form of e.g. staff competence development and language training, spouse programmes, integration support also for families, employer branding and diversity management training, mentorship programmes and inclusive leadership training, funding opportunities, advocacy, and talent matching.

There were no challenges mentioned, but the two **barriers** were the **lack of interest of employers to engage with support that was offered**, and the **requirement of local language skills** in vacancies. The one **opportunity** mentioned was the potential to **increase the collaboration between multiple stakeholders to support the employers**, such as the cities and the governmental organisations.

The third sector organisations mentioned a lot more collaboration opportunities than the employers, which points to a **lack of awareness of external stakeholder support available to employers**. The third sector organisations also stated lack of interest, time, and resources of employers to engage in support offered by external stakeholders.

The lack of awareness of collaboration opportunities with third sector organisations was a barrier to employment. The third sector organisations also stated lack of interest, time, and resources of employers to engage in support offered by external stakeholders.

CONCLUSIONS

In about half the statements, enablers were connected only to the ability of employers. Thus, there seems to be a **mismatch between the barriers and challenges to the employment of international students and graduates to a large degree being related to the willingness of employers, while the collaboration opportunities and support offered relate more to the ability of the employers than their willingness**.

There is a mismatch between the barriers and challenges to the employment of international students and graduates, and the support offered to enhance such employment.

There seemed to be a **blurring of lines between** the need for local language skills, lack of resources, and lack of suitable tasks or vacancies as either a **definite inability to offer employment due to these barriers, or as a lack of willingness to rethink organisational priorities, resource allocations, task and role division, and level of language requirements**. These different views on the same barriers as either willingness or ability might explain the mismatch between the barriers and challenges to employment (mainly willingness) and the support offered by other stakeholders (mainly ability).

There did not seem to be any major differences between large enterprises and smaller ones. However, the **smaller enterprises** often mentioned the lack of resources and HR departments as potential challenges. The **larger enterprises** did have HR departments, but stated that managers play a key role in acting as gatekeepers for recruitment. In enterprises of all sizes, the barriers to employment were more related to employer willingness than to ability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many of the barriers and challenges related to employer willingness were in fact issues that could be rather easily changed if they were prioritised internally. Our recommendation would therefore be to **1) further explore ways of supporting the willingness of employers** to employ international students and graduates, and to **2) increase the communication towards employers regarding the already available support** for employing international students and graduates.