

Implementation Checklist

FOR COMPANIES

Talent Pipeline Development

- Participate in university co-creation models where students earn degrees through practical work at companies
- Offer work placement positions and internships, and recognize prior work experience in hiring decisions
- Join shared SME talent pools coordinated by universities to access qualified candidates cost-effectively

Recruitment & Hiring

- Move key foreign qualification evaluation in-house to assess degrees directly for specific roles
- Develop sector-specific integration approaches recognizing different needs (blue-collar vs. white-collar)
- Prioritize long-term retention over short-term hiring needs to enforce a psychological safety net

Integration & Retention

- Complete organizational cultural readiness assessment and train supervisors in cross-cultural management before recruiting internationally
- Provide occupational-specific language support and set job-specific (not blanket) language standards
- Establish family-comprehensive support, including spousal job assistance and systematic welcoming systems

FOR UNIVERSITIES

Curriculum & Structure

- Implement modular, flexible degrees co-created with companies and recognize prior work experience for study credits
- Make work placements mandatory for all programs and require faculty to maintain external corporate contacts
- Embed employer visibility throughout studies through thesis fairs, mentoring, and project-based assignments

Alumni & SME Support

- Formalize alumni involvement in mentoring, recruitment, and advocacy roles
- Coordinate shared talent pools enabling multiple SMEs to access qualified candidates
- Provide administrative support for SME participation in degree-linked programs

Diploma Recognition

- Create a centralized foreign diploma comparability recognition database
- Coordinate objective diploma transferability processes free from bureaucratic barriers
- Support employers in evaluating foreign qualifications for specific roles

FOR PUBLIC SECTOR

Municipal Integration Services

- Introduce English-language daycare and schooling as municipal services
- Establish family-comprehensive services (spousal job support, housing assistance, integration clubs)
- Create municipal business service desks and cultural readiness certification programs for employers

Policy & Regulatory Reform

- Eliminate labor needs assessment (saatavuusharkinta) entirely
- Create a centralized foreign diploma recognition database coordinated with universities
- Introduce occupational-specific language vouchers (palveluseteli)

Regional Development

- Align higher education output with growing sectors (construction, data centers)
- Promote rural areas with dedicated housing and integration incentives
- Invest in systematic upskilling/reskilling programs and sector-specific cultural training

Securing Finland's Future with the Help of Foreign Talent

Finland's ability to populate, employ, and integrate talent across the country is now a national security imperative. In the face of regional depopulation, long-term labor shortages, and an aging population, work-based immigration is essential to prevent stagnation and sustain the welfare state.

Drawing on three high-level roundtables hosted by Amcham Finland's Strategic Talent Working Group in 2024–2025, this paper approaches the challenge as a full-cycle strategy: from finding Finland, to getting employment, to retaining it, treating it not only as an economic necessity but as a strategic investment in national resilience and competitiveness.

I. BUILDING TALENT PIPELINES THROUGH PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

To secure future growth, Finland must cultivate its domestic talent while making its educational system more responsive to global trends. Our discussions confirmed that collaborative, work-integrated learning models offer the strongest foundation for this goal, especially when they integrate real-world business collaboration as seen in Finland's leading modular and faculty-driven partnership models. Work-based learning is also the fastest and most effective pathway to integration and employment.

1. Embed Structural and Curriculum Innovation

- Incentivize modular, flexible degree structures co-created with companies, expanding Haaga-Helia's Open University model, where companies can pay for analysis and students earn degrees through practical work
- Mandate faculty-industry connections by requiring all faculty members to maintain external corporate contacts
- Make work placements mandatory for degree completion across all programs
- Expand recognition of prior work experience by allowing students to earn study credits based on existing job competencies before degree enrollment, following the McDonald's manager program model

2. Foster Early Corporate-Academic Integration

- Institutionalize collaborative platforms by building thesis fairs, mentoring programs, and project-based assignments directly into curricula, which are then ritualized as a part of the academic year through set dates
- Scale co-creation labs with municipalities and companies, expanding successful municipal partnerships such as those with Vihti and Helsinki
- Launch systematic connector programs, including thesis-making initiatives and career cafes, cyclically aligned with academic calendars and business cycles
- Embed employer visibility throughout studies rather than only after graduation

3. Activate Alumni and Employer Networks

- Formalize alumni involvement in mentoring, recruitment, and advocacy roles
- Create multi-stage engagement platforms, including alumni fairs and network evenings
- Establish network-building as a core competency for academic staff
- Leverage alumni as advocates, particularly in companies where they've achieved success

4. Strengthen SME Participation

- Ensure that cost-sharing models allow SMEs to employ part-time student workers as an affordable talent pipeline strategy
- Provide administrative support for smaller firms to participate in degree-linked programs by establishing shared talent pools coordinated by universities, enabling multiple SMEs to access qualified candidates, following the Swedish example.
- Address SME hesitation by demonstrating long-term competitive advantages of university partnerships by sharing peer-led success stories

II. STRATEGIC RECRUITMENT FOR A GROWING ECONOMY

Finland's recruitment systems must adapt to meet the demands of a global labor market. Our roundtables revealed persistent challenges in bureaucracy, regional mismatches, and employer hesitation. While current systems have enabled some progress, they remain mismatched with labor needs and require smarter, faster, and more regionally attuned practices that recognize recruitment as a core element of national competitiveness.

1. Embrace In-House and Needs-Based Recruitment Reform

- Highlight how moving recruitment functions in-house can lead to greater objectivity in evaluating foreign degrees, when employers themselves can judge whether a background matches a specific role
- Eliminate labor needs assessment
- Implement objective diploma transferability processes free from bureaucratic barriers
- Create a centralized foreign diploma recognition database coordinated by universities

2. Build Local and Sector-Specific Ecosystems

- Establish early-stage cultural training in major international projects, following the example of TVO in Oulu
- Foster local business adaptation to serve international residents' needs
- Develop sector-specific integration approaches, recognizing different needs between blue-collar and white-collar workers

3. Tackle Regional and Sectoral Mismatches

- Align higher education output with growing sectors, including construction and data centers
- Promote growing rural areas as an emerging talent destination with dedicated housing and integration incentives
- Address geographic mismatch between educational levels and regional opportunities
- Invest in systematic upskilling and reskilling programs, partnering with established providers

4. Long-Term Employer Commitment and Agile Governance

- Incentivize long-term retention strategies over short-term hiring approaches to combat the opportunity cost of learning Finnish
- Encourage strategic recruitment during low-growth periods to prepare for future expansion
- Elevate emotional intelligence and value alignment as key recruitment criteria
- Address timing mismatches between company cycles and academic program completion

III. INTEGRATION AND RETENTION OF INTERNATIONAL TALENT

Attracting talent is only half the equation. To fully benefit from foreign expertise, Finland must lower barriers to work and belonging while ensuring international talent stays long enough for integration investments to generate tax returns. Participants emphasized that integration must be proactive, people-centered, and locally anchored, with cultural and linguistic challenges, fragmented family support, and lack of local commitment identified as major friction points.

1. Address Language and Cultural Barriers

- Critically reassess the necessity of Finnish-language fluency for early-stage work placement.
- Introduce occupational-specific language vouchers (palveluseteli), allowing employees to choose appropriate learning methods
- Implement job-specific language standards rather than broad requirements
- Scale cultural orientation sessions to quarterly programs combining practical skills with cultural understanding

2. Make Integration a Municipal and Regional Priority

- Introduce English-language day care and schooling as a municipal service
- Establish family-comprehensive services, including spousal job-seeking support, temporary housing assistance, and social integration clubs
- Create municipal and regional business service desks specifically for international resident relocation and retention
- Pilot municipal cultural readiness support programs that assess and train organizations before international recruitment, offering employers expert guidance to ensure successful integration from day one

3. Normalize Cultural Belonging

- Develop systematic welcoming systems, including 'Welcoming Clubs' and godparent-style mentorships
- Encourage employer investment in community integration as standard business practice
- Address cultural isolation by promoting Finnish companies' inclusion of internationals in social activities

4. Promote Inclusive Branding and Leadership Culture

- Highlight English as the working language, particularly in high-tech and research sectors
- Design a dual-community onboarding connecting new hires to both expat and Finnish communities
- Document and share success stories of international talent integration
- Promote culturally sensitive leadership practices, including emotional intelligence as a strength

Conclusion

Securing Finland's future with the help of foreign talent requires reimagining how we educate, integrate, and recruit. The roundtables underscored a shared truth that Finland's competitiveness depends not just on institutions, but on relationships between people, sectors, and the wider global community.

Finland competes for talent with more internationally established neighbors, and without proactive employer branding, streamlined processes, and genuine commitment to making internationals feel welcome, talented individuals will choose Stockholm, Copenhagen, or Oslo instead. The only way to successful integration is through employment, and the cost of failed integration isn't just wasted recruitment investment but a damaged reputation that spreads through professional networks, making future recruitment even harder.

The high percentage of international academic personnel shows Finland's appeal, but significant gaps remain in student retention and employment outcomes. Moving beyond traditional approaches is essential to embracing collaborative models that treat talent attraction and retention as a strategic national priority.