

At What Cost?



International Students in Finland research

Research reveals how international students are doing in the promised land of education

More and more international students are studying in Finnish higher education institutions, as envisioned in the Roadmap for Education-based and Work-based Immigration 2035. In 2023, the number of international students already exceeds 32 000.

Finland is attracting international students to address the pressing skills shortage and improve the country's demographic dependency ratio, but not enough is done to integrate them. This often leads to international students leaving Finland to work elsewhere.

In autumn 2024, we surveyed international students about their experiences and perspectives on studying and their future in Finland. The research was commissioned by the National Union of University Students in Finland (SYL) and the National Union of Students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (SAMOK) and carried out by the Research Foundation for Studies and Education (Otus).

656 international higher education students responded, representing about 2% of all international students in Finland. Of the respondents, 34% were from EU/EEA countries, and 66% were from other countries.

The survey results reveal a divided situation: on the one hand, people are satisfied with Finland as a country of study, but at the same time they find it difficult to integrate and find employment. We need to find ways to hold on to these talented people. In this publication, we present our own proposals to address this challenge.



OPISKELUN JA
KOULUTUKSEN
TUTKIMUSSÄÄTIÖ

Summary of the results



Daily Life, Studies and Integration

- The most common reasons for choosing Finland as a study destination were the good reputation of the Finnish education system, Finland's attractiveness as a country and the quality and reputation of higher education.
- The most common obstacles to academic progress were financial difficulties, problems with integration into Finnish society, and motivational issues.
- 1/5 of the respondents felt unwelcome in Finland and half of the respondents reported difficulties with integration into Finnish society.

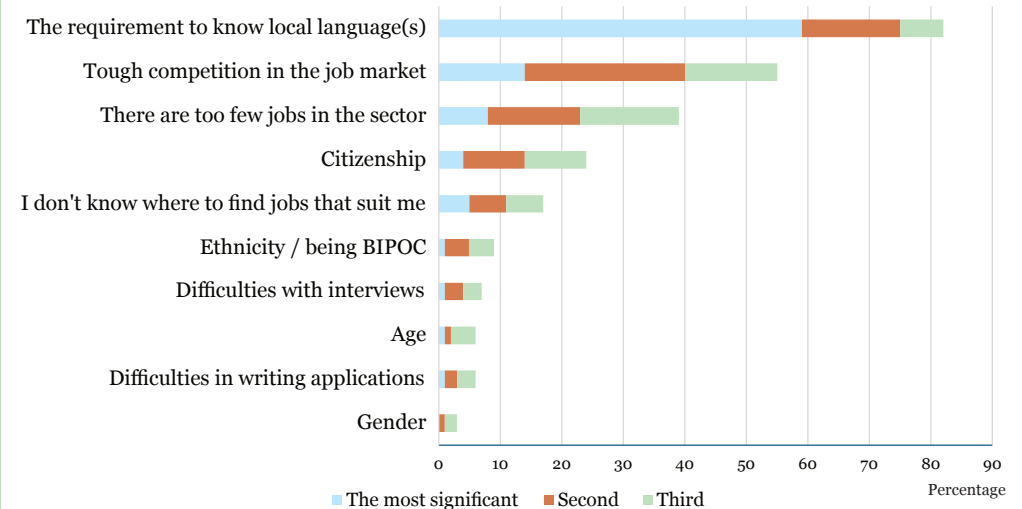
Financing Studies and Tuition Fees

- The most common way to finance studies was through family financial support. Savings, wage income and scholarships were also important sources of funding.
- Among tuition fee payers, 4/5 indicated they would not be willing to pay higher tuition fees.
- Nearly 2/3, however, felt they received good value for the money spent on their degree.

Employment

- Only slightly more than half of the respondents believed their studies provided them with sufficient skills and qualifications to find employment in Finland.
- The best opportunities for employment were seen elsewhere in Europe, with 2/3 agreeing to this view.
- The main obstacles to employment were local language requirements, intense competition in the labor market, and a general lack of job opportunities.
- The key factors that could help with finding work were learning Finnish or Swedish and a more open attitude toward using English in the workplace.

What are the three most significant factors that have hindered you from finding a job or a traineeship in Finland?



Future in Finland

- The vast majority of respondents would recommend their own degree programme to an international applicant, and well over half of respondents would choose Finland as their country of study if they were applying now.
- Residing in Finland was considered quite likely after 5 years, but in the longer term, staying in Finland was considered unlikely on average.
- The most important reasons to stay in Finland were safety, the international atmosphere, the functionality of Finnish society, and employment opportunities.
- Factors that reduced Finland's attractiveness included challenges in obtaining a residence permit or citizenship, employment difficulties, and the weather and environmental conditions.

Proposals for action by SYL and SAMOK

Revoke the Tightening of the Aliens Act and Make it Easier to Obtain a Permanent Residence Permit

- A permanent residence permit must be granted on application to a person who has completed a higher education degree in Finland.
- The deadline for finding a new job after unemployment should be extended to at least one year.

The State Must Ease the Financial Burden and Employment of Foreign Students

- Tuition fees must be kept at a fair level, and the student's income requirement for obtaining a residence permit must be lowered.
- Employers should be supported to recruit international talent.

Higher Education Institutions Should Take an Active Role in Integrating Foreign Students

- Higher education institutions should assist international students in connecting with the labor market.

Employers Should Rethink the Requirement for Local Language Proficiency

- Let's improve the opportunities to study national languages in working life and reassess the level of language requirements.

Student Organisations Should Take Better Account of International Students in Their Activities

- Student organisations should take into account the diversity of international students when organising services and events.

Read More



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Roosa Veijola

Adviser, SAMOK

+358 50 389 1012

roosa.veijola@samok.fi

Saku Pesonen

Adviser, SYL

+358 40 017 4913

saku.pesonen@syl.fi