

TALENT AVAILABLE

Tapping the Expat Talent Pool

Aira Vehaskari



www.eva.fi

EVA's homepage contains reports, articles and other material in Finnish and in English.

Publisher: Taloustieto Oy

Cover: Antti Eklund

Printing: Yliopistopaino, Helsinki 2010

ISBN 978-951-628-505-7

Preface

The public debate in Finland over immigrant labour is gravely oversimplified. It makes little distinction between black-market construction workers, for example, and high-powered professionals who move here with their spouses.

It is no wonder, then, that the discourse is rife with contradictions. While top industry leaders call for more immigration to stave off a labour shortage, the media reports statistics showing climbing unemployment among immigrants.

The public, understandably, is dubious. A poll commissioned in May 2010 by the national broadcaster YLE shows that 63% of Finns do not want the country to attract more foreigners. In the meantime, the Confederation of Finnish Industries EK insists that Finland must do more to entice immigrants into the country.

This report will not delve into the issue of *how* to attract foreign talent. The point is that Finland already has a cosmopolitan, skilled and motivated pool of highly desirable labour living inside its borders. Tapping into this resource would offer Finnish companies an easy way to internationalise and broaden their prospects.

This report came about in the aftermath of the EVA Expat Forum that was organised in January 2010. I want to thank Uusimaa Regional Council for their valuable support both for the forum and the report.

In Helsinki 27 September 2010

Matti Apunen
Director
EVA

To the Reader

Why is this report being written?

This report explores a topical issue that concerns the debates on both employment and immigration. The public discussion on immigrant employment is sadly one-sided and over-simplified, and is most often based on the assumption that immigrants have nothing to offer the Finnish economy or the workforce – or worse, that they are by default a drain on the system. This view fails to recognise the fact that the immigrant population is as varied as the native one. And although the population of skilled, educated foreigners in Finland is a tiny portion of the overall Finnish work force, it is a demographic that could be immensely valuable for Finnish businesses. This report will demonstrate that *not* taking advantage of this resource is literally costing the country valuable expertise and millions of euros.

Who is the subject of this report?

This is about the population of skilled and educated foreigners living in Finland, who do not intend their stay here to be short-term. This means people who are trying to build careers and lives here (such as employees, spouses, students, etc.), not foreigners who come for short-term assignments and fully intend to go back home without transitioning to another job.

What is the purpose of this report?

It is to discover how to build bridges between this untapped labour force and the Finnish job market and employers. The second goal is to discuss ways to empower the foreign community by improving professional and social networking.

What is the methodology of this report?

This report is essentially an investigative journalistic piece. The author delved into research and statistics, and interviewed both expat and government experts and created a synthesis of their concerns and ideas. She weighed various opinions and concerns against each other and the data to crystallise the issues and solutions. Expert interviews were supplemented with interviews of the people directly affected by the issues.

Who is the intended audience?

This report is intended to introduce Finnish employers and other labour market representatives (employers' organisations, unions etc.) to an underused market resource, one that can add value to business competencies and broaden entrepreneurial horizons. To do so, the report has dual goals of illuminating the issues foreign job seekers face in the labour market, and explaining why this particular demographic is an extremely valuable asset for Finnish businesses.

In Helsinki 27 September 2010

Aira Vehaskari

CONTENTS

PREFACE

TO THE READER

1	STEP ONE: KNOWING THE PROBLEMS	9
1.1	Real life examples	9
1.2	The reasons Finnish businesses are losing out	11
1.3	How these problems affect the economy	14
2	LINKING AMBITIOUS ENTERPRISES TO SKILLED EXPATS	17
2.1	Barking up the wrong employer's tree	17
2.2	Overcoming the challenges	19
2.3	The language factor	21
2.4	Finding talent	23
3	STUDENT LIFE AND STRIFE	25
3.1	Graduates: a lost opportunity for Finnish businesses	25
3.2	Wasting millions of euros, one student at a time	27
4	CHALLENGING THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS MINIONS	30
4.1	Shortcomings in public administration	30
4.2	Time and money	31
4.3	A different sort of immigrant?	33
4.4	Legal language pitfalls	34
5	CREATING AN EXPAT GREY EMINENCE	36
5.1	The tangle of expat organisations	36
5.2	A liaison of expat activity	38
	EPILOGUE: DON'T BLAME THE FINNS...	41
	CONCLUSIONS	44

Endnotes

Acknowledgements

About the Author

1 Step one: Knowing the problems

1.1 Real life examples

Victoria is a recent graduate of Lappeenranta University of Technology. She has a competitive innovation business degree, is fluent in Russian and English, has excellent Finnish cultural and linguistic knowledge and a real motivation to work in Finland. She could be the ultimate addition to any company looking to create ties to or open up markets in Eastern Europe or Russia. But instead of being snapped up by employers, she was forced to return to her home in Moldova six months after graduation.

People like Victoria are lost resources because of flaws in the residence permit bureaucracy and the inability of the labour market to help foreign students connect with potential employers.

Tiffany is a geologist with a Master's Degree from a top US University. She moved to Finland as the spouse of a technical translator, optimistic that her credentials would secure her a job in her chosen field. After years of searching for jobs, taking equivalency exams, and gaining excellent conversational Finnish, she was still unable to find a job. One geological mapping institute, while keen to borrow data from her thesis, said her lack of fluent Finnish was the reason they could not hire her, even though the industry language and all the scientific papers had to be written in English.

People like Tiffany are closed off from the labour market because of old-fashioned attitudes towards non-Finnish or Swedish speakers, even when global expertise should trump language shortcomings.

Susan is a corporate employee with a major Finnish company. She has strong ties to both Finnish and Asian businesses, plus several years of work experience in Finland. She is here on an expat contract, but the limitations imposed on her residency give her little to no room to transition to another employer before her permit expires. She is finding it impossible to access information for jobs that pertain to her, because those networks are too difficult to break into.

People like Susan are invisible to Finnish enterprises because the traditional job networking possibilities are closed off to her. Finnish employers are either oblivious to the potential of resident expats or too scared of “upsetting” the workplace with the introduction of a foreigner’s language and working habits.

Who’s an Immigrant Anyway?

Expat, immigrant, foreign national, resident, international, foreign talent. These words have almost identical dictionary definitions, but they each have a subtext that conjures up different images. The Finnish media, for example, misguidedly speaks of immigrants when they are dealing with refugee issues. “Foreign nationals” is a formal term that hints at someone who is uninvolved and perhaps only passing through. The term “expat”, especially for corporate HR units, typically means someone who is, at great expense, brought into Finland for a short-term assignment.

This report will wilfully disregard any between-the-lines connotations of the aforementioned terms. All of these terms are equally applicable to the population of people who legally live in Finland but who are not Finnish. This is done purely for reasons of equality and simplicity. Also, there is no term that will keep everybody happy, so I won’t even try.

And while the focus is on people who choose to come to Finland, and who are searching for white-collar jobs, there is no reason that a refugee with a doctoral degree or a Polish welder could not benefit from the suggestions presented here. Which is to say: the focus of this report has been narrowed simply for the sake of creating reasonable research parameters. But I believe any improvements that are made could benefit the entire community of foreign nationals (immigrants, expats, whatever) seeking employment.

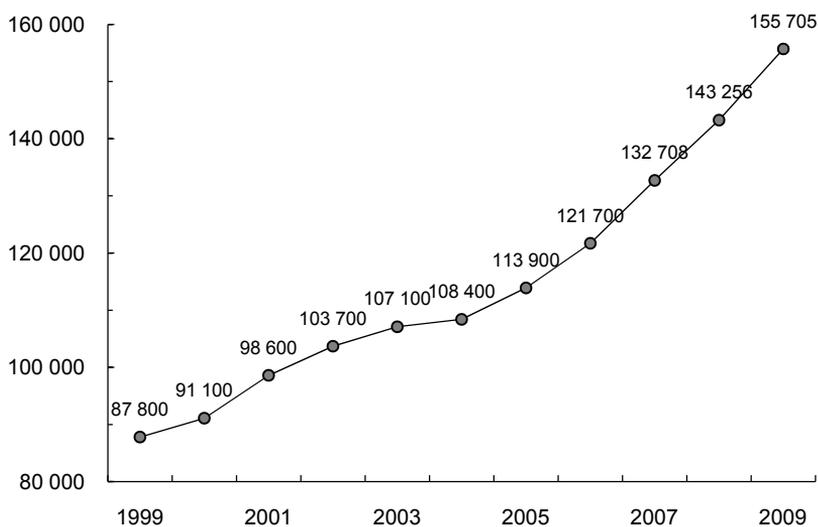
1.2 The reasons Finnish businesses are losing out

Finland is becoming more international every year. The percentage of foreigners in the workforce is growing, and they are seeking their place in Finnish economy and society. A prevailing assumption in Finland is that the rising number of foreigners is due to an influx of refugees. While refugee applications are rising, it is foolish to ignore the fact that in 2009, for example, 155 705 *non-refugee* foreigners lived in Finland.

In fact, foreigners seeking to study or work in Finland make up the largest groups applying for residency. But gainful employment for many foreigners – even highly educated, skilled professionals – is often an uphill battle.

This report investigates the main reasons why Finnish companies are not able or willing to take advantage of the pool of expat talent that already resides in the country. It will also break

Number of Foreigners in Finland 1999-2009



Numbers correspond to foreigners that live permanently in Finland. It does not include asylum seekers or people who have been granted with a citizenship.

Source: Statistics Finland

down the reasons why highly desirable employees will often choose to move away from Finland to a place that can offer them a better career or lifestyle.

1. Language

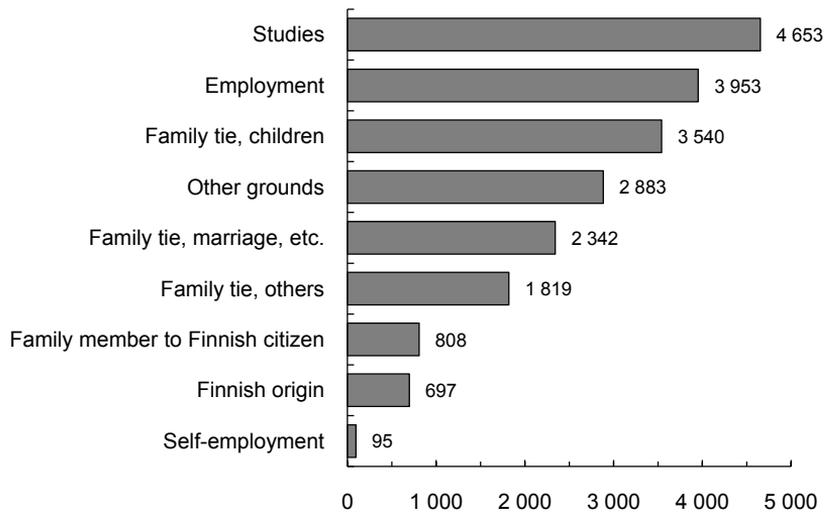
Finnish employers often have unrealistic expectations of Finnish language mastery; especially in sectors where the working language is English. Or, employers are too wary of applicants speaking faltering Finnish to see the advantages that fluency in other languages can bring.

2. Complicated / restrictive bureaucracy

Bureaucracy in Finland is complicated and often does not serve people who do not speak one of the country's official languages. The immigration and residency process has several pitfalls that

Residence permit applications in 2009

According to the grounds for the application



Total number of applications: 20 790

In 2009 residence permit was granted to 15 208 people out of 18 260. “Other grounds” regards mainly to employment based immigration; it includes people who do not need a residence permit for employee in order to work in Finland.

Source: The Finnish Immigration Service

make it difficult for foreigners to smoothly take care of their paperwork. Processing times are long, leaving foreigners in legal limbo. In addition, important documents like tax cards and legal documents are simply unavailable in any other language than Finnish or Swedish.

3. Closed professional networks

Finland is still dogged by a good old boys' network: contacts that Finns make with other Finns and potential employers during their time as students and interns, or even through sports and social clubs as young adults. Foreign adults who come to Finland equipped with foreign degrees and expertise often feel they are unable to break into these professional networking circles.

4. Family integration and social networks

The integration of foreign families can be very difficult. If a family moves to Finland for one spouse's career, the other spouse often finds him- or herself facing all of the problems listed above and becoming frustrated househusbands or -wives. Many families move away after a short time because the other spouse could not find work. Another issue in family integration is the limited choices available for their children's education and social activities.

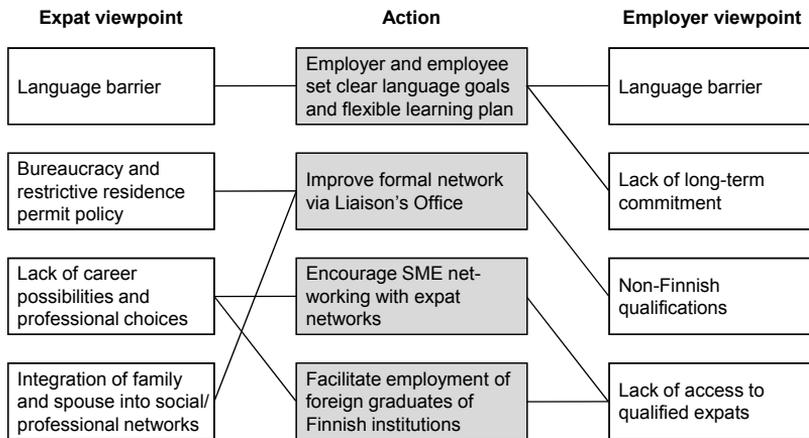
5. Limited career options

All of these problems add up to the conclusion for many foreigners that they have stunted career possibilities in Finland. Highly desirable employees will often choose to move abroad (and not necessarily back to their home countries) if they feel that career advancements here are closed off to them because they are not Finns.

The conclusion is evident: when it comes to engaging foreign nationals in Finland, the labour market is seriously deficient. It simply doesn't work well.

All of these problems add up to the conclusion for many foreigners that they have stunted career possibilities in Finland

Impediments to retention



1.3 How these problems affect the economy

The statistical trend in population growth shows that the number of foreigners is climbing. And as the data shows, a large percentage of this growing population are people who want to study and work in the country. This means Finnish enterprises are being offered an ever increasing pool of global talent right on their doorstep.

Consequently, enterprises looking to diversify their employee pool's competencies, especially with an eye for internationalisation, no longer have to spend the money and effort recruiting from overseas. Companies for whom overseas recruitment has never even been an option are now free to tap into the domestic expat talent pool.

Internationalisation can mean different things. Not every company wants to market itself outside of Finland, but gaining foreign expertise can add value to innovation, design, and even marketing. But those that do have global goals will find it unnec-

essarily difficult to internationalise without some foreign expertise on their side.

Language skills, knowledge of the new market, contacts to businesses and institutions, and an understanding of foreign political, business and cultural conventions are among the advantages available to Finnish enterprises when they opt to hire a foreign national. And when that foreign national is a Finnish resident, the company also gets someone with knowledge of Finnish life and the ability to create bridges between business cultures.

Obviously, in the internet age, there is no reason for enterprises to restrict sales and services to Finland. For example, the business opportunities in growing Russian markets are enormous. But so are the challenges without a proper knowledge of language and legislation, for instance. Thus, foreign employees can significantly increase a company's ability to step into foreign markets on a more comfortable footing.

The difficulty in retaining skilled expats is a problem that also affects a larger picture. If the flow of talented professionals is not welcomed and integrated into the labour market, Finland will no longer be seen as a dynamic, innovative destination for foreign talent. In a worst case scenario, the country will lose the ability to attract international talent and expertise, thus losing a competitive edge and missing out on opportunities to develop and internationalise business interests.

In a worst case scenario, the country will lose the ability to attract international talent and expertise

The consequences have a ripple effect on the rest of the Finnish economy.

The University of Tampere, for example, published a report¹ in June 2010 dealing with the difficulties of internationalising Finland's academic spheres. Authors identified many of the same problems that this report investigated: the lack of career possibilities, difficulties with bureaucracy, the dearth of networking and social possibilities, and of course the language barrier. The authors pointed out over and over again how important internationalisation is for academia, and how difficult it is to retain international talent in Finland.²

What is slightly alarming is that if tolerant, multilingual, outward-looking institutions like universities are unable to crack this problem, what chance does the rest of the society have? If this is true for academia, then certainly it is true for any sector of the Finnish economy with goals of international or intellectual growth. Finnish businesses will suffer if the already high turnover of foreign professionals becomes a revolving-door phenomenon, with expats quitting the country because the labour market fails to integrate them successfully.

Hey, All You Small to Medium-Sized Businesses! Read This!

Do you wish you had the same access that the major listed companies have in attracting top foreign talent? Are you struggling to forge the kind of international contacts that come so naturally to Finland's biggest firms? Do you fear you could never compete with what they can offer with expensive "expat" contracts, with adjusted cost of living, moving, housing expenses?

You are absolutely correct. Can't be done.

But don't let that stop you. If you have read any of this report, you should by now be aware that here in Finland there are a number of internationally connected, linguistically talented and highly educated people searching for jobs. If you look in the right place, you could find the keys to the global stage right on your doorstep.

And here's the bottom line – they will work for *local* contracts. Yes, this pool of Finland-friendly global talent won't cost you a cent more than anyone else.

All you need to do is adjust your attitude. First, make the minimal effort to advertise even temporary positions in something other than a Finnish-language newspaper. Put the ad in English into the Employment Agency or the Helsinki Times, or let a university with a related degree program know what you are looking for. The nice people at Jolly Dragon or other organisations would probably help you translate a job ad into English before putting it out on their network.

Second, consider relaxing the reigns a little on the question of language requirements. Is fluency absolutely necessary? What's the worst that can happen if the weekly meetings are held in Finglish? Perhaps everybody's language skills would improve if both locals and foreigners stretched their language abilities.

In the end, the tradeoff (a few language issues in exchange for a talented international employee) may well be worth it.

2 Linking ambitious enterprises to skilled expats

Small and medium-sized businesses have a lot to gain – and offer – by hiring foreign professionals already living in Finland. Hiring a resident expat is an affordable way to bring foreign expertise and networks into the enterprise. This connection simply has not really been explored.

2.1 Barking up the wrong employer's tree

Large multinational companies may seem the obvious place to look when trying to forge links between employers and resident expats. But there is very little room for development in this direction. The multinationals are actually doing fine on the subject of expat workers. They recruit from abroad, bring them here for a few years and send them back. They have large HR departments that help relocate employees and help them find the services and hobbies they are looking for.

And here's the thing: no employer has a vested interest in helping their foreign employees build meaningful careers in Finland. It simply is not their top priority. This would mean priming them to accept other jobs with competitors.

Of course many companies feel a real responsibility for the welfare of their employees, and many superb HR people do all they can to help employees settle in and, if necessary, make transitions to other areas in the Finnish job market. But the company has no obligation or financial motivation to do so.

Also, big companies have the kind of visibility that makes recruitment – especially of foreigners – a relatively easy task. Finns and foreigners alike are hurling their CVs at them, and the companies themselves are already open-minded and active in hiring foreigners. When it comes to looking for *new* solutions, perhaps we should be looking elsewhere.

This report suggest that it is actually the small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) that have a lot to gain – and offer – by hiring foreign professionals already living in Finland.

Consider the case of Ms X. She has been on an international contract with a top Finnish company for three years. Her contract ends in the fall, and it will not be renewed. The day the contract ends, so does her residence permit. Her application for an extension was denied.

Smaller companies, competitors and subcontractors should be positively itching to get their hands on her. But at the moment it is hard to build a bridge between this type of expat and potential employers from smaller companies.

Business value of expats

In April 2010, the EK and Ernst & Young assembled an annual report³ on the forces for economic growth in the world of SMEs. The focus of the report was on how to help companies internationalise. The report points to data from the OECD that shows the path to internationalisation comes from the ability to forge new networks and to take advantage of the skill sets within a company. In addition, the OECD notes that a company's ability to internationalise is markedly improved if the company employs people who have lived, studied, or worked abroad.

“This raises the thought that immigrants and foreign students living in Finland could be used more effectively as resources to help Finnish companies internationalise. They could have valuable information about target markets, their economies, history, and culture. In other words, they have personal experience and relevant market information, which is usually very difficult for SMEs to find.”

2.2 Overcoming the challenges

For the average Finnish entrepreneur of a small business, the idea of taking on a foreign employee can cause anxiety. They struggle to find answers to questions such as how a foreigner can communicate with colleagues, bosses, and clients – and usually end up avoiding the challenges by hiring a Finn, if possible.

There is also the question of culture shock. Finnish employers may feel unprepared to face different work ethics and methods of communication. One of the benefits of turning to an expat is that they are already far more integrated and familiar with Finnish working life than people recruited directly from other countries.

Finnish entrepreneurs who have already navigated these challenges say that it comes down to a question of leadership. Foreigners may have certain expectations of how an employee-employer relationship works, among other things. One example of different working cultures is that Finnish employees are usually used to working independently, without a lot of “interference” from their supervisor. However, for someone from another working culture, this can be seen not as a vote of confidence, but as neglect.

Good leadership skills, which includes facilitating open and active communication on the team, is often enough to resolve cultural difficulties. When all members of a team know what is expected of them and what they can expect from their colleagues and supervisors, cultural differences start to crumble.

Entrepreneur and start-up expert Taneli Tikka⁴ has been involved in many start-up enterprises where cultural differences were overcome through clear communication and good leadership. He also has years of firsthand experience to show how beneficial expat hires have been to small companies. For example, he ran a small company that was looking for ways to expand overseas. They hired one Swiss and one Asian expat, and in very little time had made inroads to Eastern Europe and Thailand.

Good leadership skills, which includes facilitating open and active communication on the team, is often enough to resolve cultural difficulties

“We might have been able to do it without them, but it would have been very slow. Plus they already understood the markets, buyer habits, and ways of working. We did not have to learn these things the hard way or spend lots of money doing market research,” he says.

Many small companies and micro-enterprises may feel they lack the leadership skills to take advantage of expat hires. But there are resources available. Several Finnish companies specialising in multinational business environments offer training courses on this very subject (including but not limited to Deep Lead and Mercuri International, for example).

Changing attitudes may seem harder than simply trying to find a way to legislate the problem away, such as through affirmative action initiatives. But this could be problematic when the target is companies with small workforces, in a country where only 2.7 percent of the population are foreigners, according to September’s Eurostat figures.

Nonetheless, it is an option that could be explored for feasibility, as some experts feel that benefits like tax refunds for hiring foreigners could make an impact.

Kristiina Äimä⁵, acting professor of international tax law at the University of Helsinki, for example, points out that some countries have already implemented measures involving “positive discrimination” in relation to women, disabled people and other minorities.

However, she points out several other hurdles. One is the fact that tax incentives for affirmative action would have to be reviewed to make sure they are not in conflict with the Finnish constitution. This would require a specific case study. Another difficulty is compliance with European Union rules forbidding legislation that would warp the natural functioning of the internal market, although exemptions have been made in the past on the grounds of employment policy. A third difficulty is the fact that the national budget is already under pressure from the financial crisis, and the government is trying to cut spending.

However, Äimä says that it is an option that should be looked into: “Measures involving positive discrimination may sometimes be a means to reach factual equality. Whether derogation from the principle of equality is justified, it should be further investigated.”

Still, the better – perhaps more idealistic – plan is to show SMEs the business sense in tapping into the expat talent pool, and thus create a demand for the supply.

2.3 The language factor

The Finnish language may be a major factor in integration and job seeking, but there are several contradictory and equally valid points on how this should be addressed. This issue can only be resolved through a shift in attitudes in the labour market.

Many immigrants feel they are passed over for jobs because of the language barrier. Many employers *do* pass over immigrants because they fear the hassle of a workplace without a common native language.

In any case, the problem lies perhaps in the inability of employers and potential employees to identify exactly what kind of language skills are actually needed for a particular job. This is not something that can be solved through policy. There is simply never going to be a single solution that can be imposed top-down on employers and job applicants alike.

What is needed is a shift in attitude.

Larger Finnish companies are more comfortable hiring employees with other native languages. Smaller companies often simply fear the challenges. When faced with job applications from foreigners, it can be easy to see only the problems. What language will meetings have to be held in? How will you know if your foreign employee has misunderstood something? How will they interact with clients or co-workers?

The problem lies perhaps in the inability of employers and potential employees to identify exactly what kind of language skills are actually needed for a particular job

In some cases, the questions are irrelevant. Let's consider again the case of Tiffany (see page 9). She was told in 2006 she could not be hired by a potential employer because her good conversational Finnish was insufficient – despite the fact that the working language was English, and all the Finnish geologists were required to write in English. This is a rather extreme example, but certainly not unheard of.

This underlines a prevailing attitude in the labour market: a lack of fluency is equated with an inability to successfully perform the job

This underlines a prevailing attitude in the labour market: a lack of fluency is equated with an inability to successfully perform the job.

How can employers be encouraged to shift their outlook? They may be bypassing opportunities to inject a fresh perspective into their unit's work. Smaller companies may be overlooking chances to grow their international expertise. Educational and research institutions may be ignoring potential experts that would help them attract even more international students and researchers.

Employers, when faced with a skilled foreign applicant, must consider precisely what the language requirements are for the job's tasks. If there is a skill gap, they should really consider if gaining the applicant's unique expertise might be worth offering to help them reach those language goals. Offering to give them a few hours a week for language study would be an excellent step.

It has also been suggested that employers create “language intern” positions at their companies, which would take on foreign job seekers and help immerse them in the professional language.

Foreign job applicants, too, should examine their attitudes. It is often too easy to blame the language barrier for failures in the job market. Applicants should investigate the job they are applying for, and identify the real language requirements themselves. Then, they can proactively address this issue by presenting either a reasonable study plan, or demonstrate that their language abilities really are sufficient for the actual tasks involved in the job.

A small shift in attitude on both sides could create the flexibility to link ambitious employers with skilled expats who are already on the local job market.

2.4 Finding talent

But where is a smaller business to look for global talent, once they recognise the advantages? Well, there are the obvious suspects: a well placed English-language ad in the Helsinki Times, the English-language online version of Helsingin Sanomat, and at the local Employment Office could do the trick. Or, employers could contact the organisations that cater to the expat populations such as Jolly Dragon⁶, Caisa⁷, university career services, and some online communities.

But face to face networking is far better, both for job seekers and small scale employers who may not have a brand image among potential employees. For innovative, dynamic groups especially in the business and technology sectors, start-up incubators that are often attached to universities offer a goldmine of smart employees and investment opportunities. These include Altoes, Arctic Startup, Open Café, Hankenen, and Hues, for example.

More importantly, this dynamic start-up activity is one way that students can experiment with starting up their own companies. Entrepreneurship is often an excellent option for foreigners living in Finland. An important point of contact for people with cutting-edge ideas for innovation and business development is the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation Tekes, for example.

Tekes requires that an enterprise is registered in Finland in order to receive funding, but the entrepreneur can be of any background. Unfortunately, while Tekes' "Feeler Form" for initial contact is available in English, the actual application forms for funding are only in Finnish and Swedish. Nonetheless, Tekes pledges to respond to Feeler Forms within one week with advice on how an entrepreneur could proceed with an idea. In this case, the priority for personal contact is a good point of service.

Muxlim, a Muslim lifestyle network, is a perfect example of an expat success story. Egyptian Mohammed El-Fatraty came to Finland in 2003 as an IT student. In 2006, he and Pietari Päivinen founded Muxlim.com, a non-religious online social network

for Muslims. Within a few years, this Helsinki-based start-up, which began as a hobby, has become the world's largest Muslim social networking portal.

Muxlim's meteoric rise is a shining example of the potential of Finland's expat population. It also highlights the fact that for the smart venture capitalist in any sized company, these start-up networks offer incredible potential to tap into the next big thing in their sector.

Question of language training

One of the key questions is whether institutions of higher learning, particularly those with programmes for foreigners, are offering the right kind of language class. It may be up to the student groups of each school to make it clear that in addition to basic linguistic social skills, they also need targeted professional language training.

But this is a highly divisive issue among students. Many feel that requiring more courses to be completed in Finnish or Swedish would be a detriment to their professional studies, while other students feel a priority should be given to skill sets, including language that will allow them to find jobs in Finland.

One of the problems is that many public courses for intensive Finnish are reserved for people with permanent residence status, which includes refugees but excludes students, for example. Perhaps this restriction should be eased, to include a percentage of non-permanent residents.

3 Student life and strife

Students are an especially important demographic in Finland's population of expatriates. There are thousands of them, and each one is a potential wellspring of multinational, multicultural and multilingual talent. Finland is spending millions of euros to educate foreign students with the hopes of boosting the country's international reach and reputation. Why is this goal failing?

3.1 Graduates: a lost opportunity for Finnish businesses

Twenty-seven year old Victoria Panfilii is precisely the kind of employee Finnish industry says it craves. At a time when the EK is begging the Ministry of Education to push Russian and English language classes in school, she is fluent in both, with a solid working knowledge of Finnish. And now, when "innovation" is a buzzword heralding a brave new world of creative and technical development, Victoria has a Master's Degree in Innovation Management. Finland attracted her to study at the Lappeenranta University of Technology and paid for her education.

Where is she now? At home, in Moldova, desperately seeking a way to come back to Finland and put her talents in good use. She had the misfortune of graduating in 2009, with the worst of the economic crisis looming, and at a time when companies were slashing staffing levels. Non-EU students in Finland have only six months to find a job before their residence permit expires. Even Finnish students would consider themselves lucky to get a job in that time period fresh out of university.

Victoria religiously logged onto online job searches in several languages, milked every contact she had made at University, and even secured a four-month job on a temporary project. But when that ended, she was back where she started and the clock was still ticking on her time left in Finland.

“It is a paradox: you get your education for free, but you are not allowed to stay and contribute, to pay taxes back into the system”, an exasperated Victoria said from her home in Moldova. She is now trying to obtain Romanian citizenship so that at least she has the advantages of an EU citizen.

Victoria’s case is an example of a common problem. Some foreign students solve the dilemma by taking cleaning and café jobs in order to continue their search, but one person noted that cafés do not want to hire waiters with Master’s Degrees.

It should be noted that yes, native Finnish graduates are also investments. They also face problems in finding jobs. But the difference is that Finnish students have clear advantages on the job market, and Finland has little trouble keeping them in the country. Eventually, that investment will pay off. By contrast, when Finland pays for a foreign student’s education and integrates him or her into the culture, there is a short-term window for getting any return at all on that investment.

In financial terms, it is a zero return on a significant investment of taxpayer money

Fine – this is clearly a sad situation for Victoria and other non-EU students, but is it really a problem for the Finnish economy? Certainly. In financial terms, it is a zero return on a significant investment of taxpayer money. It is also a loss of an intellectual investment. Industries – particularly those with global goals and *especially* those championing “innovation” – need a regular circulation of new ideas, business models, inspiration, and contacts. Few businesses that interact with the rest of the world can draw such rich resources from their own backyards.

3.2 Wasting millions of euros, one student at a time

In terms of cold hard cash, according to the Ministry of Education, Finland invests an average of 29 400 euros for every economics degree student, 37 900 euros for every humanities degree, and 102 700 euros for every medical degree.⁸ The most recent data by Statistics Finland shows that 1 124 foreigners were granted university degrees, and another 787 graduated from polytechnics in 2009.⁹

Conservatively speaking, if each degree costs an average of 30 000 euros, then Finland spent more than 57 million euros on the graduating class of 2009! This sum covers all the years they worked towards their degrees.

In fact, if you include exchange students, the number of foreign students in Finland in 2008 was 23 831, according to Statistics Finland. Based on this, it is clear that even over a short period of time, the sum of money used to educate foreigners reaches hundreds of millions.

This is not a waste of money. This is a richness; but only if we allow these students to find a place in the Finnish work force. Surely it makes financial sense to give foreign graduates more time and resources to help them “pay back” that investment. After all, this is a population that is already qualified and integrated into society: the model immigrant.

When confronted with the monetary figures of educating foreign students, a knee-jerk reaction might be to suggest that this money should be cut off. But this would be an extremely damaging course of action. Previous chapters have already laid out the real advantages of skilled expats to big and small companies, research institutions and innovation start-ups.

Finland’s education system is one of the best tools the country has to attract these assets.

The pressure to cut costs in higher education is as great in Finland as it is elsewhere. Many European countries have already

This is a population that is already qualified and integrated into society: the model immigrant

instituted tuition fees for non-EU students, and it is hard for Finland not to follow suit.

Finland has instituted a trial programme which will allow universities to charge non-EU and non-EEA students tuition fees under some circumstances. The trial will be in place until 2014. Until then, the government will allow schools to charge fees for English-language Masters' degree programmes only. To do so, the schools must apply for approval from the Ministry of Education. Each educational institution must base its fees on actual expenses, and will be required to institute a stipend system to help non-EU and non-EEA students.

It is arguable that nominal fees may increase the funding that universities can put back into these English-language degree programmes, which would in turn improve quality and make the programmes even more attractive. However, there is a danger that tuition fees will hit qualified students from other continents, unless the fees are adequately balanced by a stipend system.

The Centre for International Mobility CIMO has expressed concern over the tuition trial, and will no doubt be closely following whether it helps to improve universities' quality and competitiveness and what the effects might be on student applications.

Another clear obstacle facing foreign students wanting to enter the job market is the residence permit issue. Currently, non-EU students have only six months after graduation to find a job before their permits expire.

The good news is that Minister of Migration and European Affairs Astrid Thors has been instrumental in drafting badly needed reforms that may come into force in early 2011. The bill has been presented to Parliament and at the time of writing this report was awaiting feedback from MPs.¹⁰

In its current state, the bill would allow students to stay in Finland longer to look for jobs. For working expats, it opens the door to the possibility of an initial five-year residence permit, instead of the current one-year permit. A third major reform would be to eliminate the need for a foreigner to present a statement from an employment office when applying for a job-spe-

cific work permit. This has been required in the past to show that the employer is not “unnecessarily” hiring a foreigner for work that a Finn could do.

Minister Thors says that she is trying to reign in the bureaucratic timespan, not only for residence permits, but for citizenship as well.¹¹

The developments of these nascent reforms must be monitored to see that they go through undiluted. In addition, the government could capitalise on the co-operation engendered by the legislation process. The same working groups and ministerial representatives could continue to meet to discuss how their various units can unify public policy and streamline bureaucracy (see the next chapter for more details).

4 Challenging the government and its minions

The myriad departments of Finnish public administration get a lot of flack from foreigners frustrated with bureaucracy, waiting lines, and a perceived lack of service. Some problems can and should be addressed; others are simply a fact of bureaucratic life.

4.1 Shortcomings in public administration

The government's stated policies on attracting talent to Finland, and on facilitating integration into Finnish society, are often in conflict with the realities foreigners face in getting their paperwork in order.

Many government departments are aware of the frustrations aimed at their bureaucracy, including the Immigration Police, Kela, the Magistrate's Office, and the Finnish Immigration Service. The problem runs deeper than having too few people sifting through the applications – although I will return to this detail in a moment.

On a policy level, many immigrants have run into confusion caused by splitting immigration affairs between the Ministries of Interior and Employment. Government policy seems to be at loggerheads with itself. But the government has made improvements here, centralising immigration affairs under the umbrella of the Interior Ministry in 2007.

Several ideas to help to put in place a policy of encouraging job seeking immigration in Finland has been discussed at the Em-

ployment and Equality Committee of the Finnish Parliament. The government recently had several policy and programme level initiatives in the pipeline to help resident immigrants integrate into the labour force. But these fell by the wayside when the economic crisis and downturn hit in 2009, and it became more of a priority to focus on the employment of Finns. There have also been plenty of individual smaller projects in place around the country, but what is missing is the national agenda that got lost in the economic downturn.¹²

It is important that the detailed projects that were designed to improve expat retention and immigrant employment are brought back on track. Previous chapters have shown why Finland simply cannot afford to let talented foreign professionals fly away. The next government agenda should restart these programmes as part of its employment policy.

4.2 Time and money

Everybody knows that the immigration and residence permit renewal process is slow. It has been suggested that it may actually infringe upon civil rights. For example, people waiting more than six months for a decision on extension of a residence permit are in a state of limbo: they cannot leave the country, local employers are wary of hiring them, their access to public services is undermined, they cannot sign longterm leases on housing or indeed plan anything at all for the future.

They are in danger of becoming a drain on the system instead of an asset. There has to be a maximum waiting time allocated for this process.

They are in danger of becoming a drain on the system instead of an asset

And since there is no guarantee of when a decision is forthcoming, applicants have no idea of how long they have to hang on, or when they might be entitled to place a few phone calls to get an update on the process.

But it is also important to note that the situation is very different across the country. Rural police offices are often much quicker

to process residence permit renewals, simply because in rural areas there are fewer applicants than in urban centres. Meanwhile, the situation at the Immigration Police office in Malmi is embarrassing with people waiting months for a decision.

A thorough examination of the immigration process and its stumbling blocks is needed, with the goal to allocate more funds for streamlining the process and unclogging bottlenecks. The parameters of this report are not wide enough to make specific suggestions on this point. It must be up to the Ministry of the Interior to set up a working group to examine where the system is failing to serve the public.

For example, the country's biggest bottleneck should be closely examined: the Immigration Police Office in Malmi, where the capital city region's foreigners are required to submit resident permit renewals. The problems of efficiency at the Malmi police station merit exceptional attention through sheer force of numbers: 68 958 foreigners live in Helsinki, Espoo, and Vantaa – the highest number and highest concentration of foreigners anywhere in the country¹³.

For many foreigners, it is the first point of contact with the government. It services the biggest foreign population in the country, and is the de facto flagship of the government's immigration process. It is by and large responsible for the reputation of the country's immigration practices.

Some improvements have already been made. The Immigration Police has shown initiative by implementing an online appointment system to save people the trouble of waiting in line. As long as a person is not pushing a deadline, they can get an appointment within a month or so. But with a dearth of appointment slots, many people still have to spend a day waiting to submit papers.

The situation is only getting worse with rising numbers of foreigners moving to Finland – surely the skyrocketing demand for services must be met with a corresponding increase in service?

4.3 A different sort of immigrant?

One of the issues that arose frequently during interviews for this report is the hope that the Finnish bureaucracy would officially distinguish in some way between refugees and professionals who have moved to Finland for a job. For example, some expressed frustration that regardless of your country of origin or what your employment status was, everyone had to go through the same time-consuming lines and procedures.

To rectify this, it has been suggested that government offices such as Kela could designate a contact person for professional white-collar expats – as opposed to other types of immigrants. Also, some overworked professionals interviewed for this report were frustrated by the hours they had to wait for service at the Immigration Police, for example. They desired some way to expedite the process.

But these ideas would actually serve to undermine and fragment the process rather than streamline it.

Who, for example, would be eligible to make use of a special expat contact person? Only employed immigrants? Would the job level, i.e. salary, determine who could cut the queues, so that CEOs could bypass bus drivers? What about foreign students, or professionals who have just lost their jobs? No, this is far too complicated and threatens to turn an egalitarian system (however frustrating) into an unequal system. At the moment, one of the strengths of the system is that it is the same for everyone. If immigrant demographics were to be served differently, it would create even more confusion.

The problems with complications, time, confusion and the need for information are the same for everyone. The solution is to solve the problem as a whole, not just for a select few.

By streamlining current processes and perhaps eliminating some unnecessary steps, the government stands to lighten the load of its officials and perhaps save money. It would also simplify the process for immigrants, leading to fewer misunderstandings and delays.

4.4 Legal language pitfalls

One serious problem for expats in Finland is that frequently, they are bound by legal documents which they do not understand. For example, rental agreements, real estate contracts, and court documents are not provided in English. Even the Tax Administration, which has done a wonderful job of providing online documentation in English, still does not issue tax cards or annual tax proposals in any language other than Finnish and Swedish.

The Tax Administration's communications office says that they are very aware of the need for these forms in other languages, but face problems of prioritisation and resources. The Tax Administration says that before any translation project can be launched, a committee must decide through empirical data which languages documents should be translated into. Then they must identify qualified legal translators, copy-editors, get government approval for the translation project and then funding for the undertaking.

At the moment, they do not have the money needed to put such a programme into place, although they believe this will happen, eventually.

It is outrageous, that after years of being an EU member state, and with visionary goals of becoming an international hub of technology and innovation, Finland cannot even provide vital tax information in foreign languages

This attitude is almost comical if it were not so frustrating: a seemingly unwillingness to commit to action because of a sea of red tape, a lax service attitude and the desire to avoid being seen as putting any language above any other. It is outrageous, that after years of being an EU member state, and with visionary goals of becoming an international hub of technology and innovation, Finland cannot even provide vital tax information in foreign languages.

Yes, it would be ideal to be able to provide forms in a variety of languages, and yes, this will take some planning and funding. But there is no reason that with minimal effort, the tax office could not quickly provide its forms in English – which is, after all, a kind of default international language. Certainly it would be a vast improvement over the current situation. This would in

no way raise English up as any kind of official language – this is merely a quick practical step to serving the international community.

The issue does not really seem to be a priority.

The question of legal documentation is one that foreigners face in many different areas of Finnish life. In individual circumstances, such as the Tax Administration, pressure could be brought to bear on the basis of civil rights to encourage rapid change. But in general, no solution is going to solve the problems across the board, across so many areas of private and commercial life.

Perhaps the only practical way to look at this problem – for now – is from an entrepreneurial standpoint. There is clearly a demand for a service. Therefore, there is potentially money to be made in providing this service. Legal translation houses do exist in Finland, but typically stick to international business contracts and the like.

Perhaps it would only take one entrepreneurial bi-lingual lawyer to put together a start-up and sell services to both individuals, government offices and translation houses.

5 Creating an expat grey eminence

The expat community in Finland is fractured. The diversity of organisations is a richness, but it can also make it difficult to create a cohesive network with real influence. Perhaps the best thing that can be done to empower the expat community is to create a point of communication, a single person or team who can shuttle between government and non-governmental organisations to help the immigrant network become more than the sum of its parts.

5.1 The tangle of expat organisations

Finland's expat community, and the existing networks and services that tie it, are fractured and uncoordinated. Many are centred only on life in the capital city.

Projects, services, and events are created from scratch without an understanding of whether another group has valuable insight or experience to offer

There are several groups organising grassroots services and events. Some of them have a specific focus, others try to be a universal portal for any and all information in Finland. Many groups are tied to other institutions, such as universities or government offices. The reproduction of useful information on as many channels as possible is a good thing for people who aren't yet sure what portal works best for them. As long as there is plenty of cross-referencing with lots of potential groups and services, there is little problem with having a diversity of organisations available for helping expats.

The problem occurs when projects, services, and events are created from scratch without an understanding of whether another group has valuable insight or experience to offer. Co-operation does occur, of course, but it is often haphazard.

It seems to be the consensus that these various groups, and the people that seek their services, crave more communication and co-operation.

Take the hypothetical example of an internship programme for expats. One organisation, on its own, might try to get specific Finnish businesses to accept a couple of expats for a new professional language immersion internship programme. Across town, another group has its own budding internship aspirations and a network of some businesses that have expressed interest. Meanwhile, a cultural organisation has a large pool of interested foreigners, and its own connections to businesses. The Employment Office can post jobs not only in Helsinki, but around the country, reaching many more potential interested expats. Universities and polytechnics across the country are trying to offer contact building events to their students. Unions have foreign members as well, many of whom may be looking for work. Elsewhere, dynamic start-up ventures are on the lookout for smart, fresh innovators who would be willing to work a short-term project.

The potential synergies go on and on. The point is, that with the right communication and co-ordination, a modest idea for a couple of summer internships can be turned into a national programme, with a burgeoning pool of talent attracting the notice of employers. Get all the expat-oriented organisations to advertise the programme on their websites, and it instantly has national visibility.

Student networking

Another issue is a limitation of student networking. In many cases, Universities with programs designed to cater to international students need to improve their career services beyond a website. The most valuable thing a foreign job seeker can get in Finland is contacts.

Aalto University offers a look at what a best practices case might be. In addition to all career services being available in English, each foreign student is provided individual job counselling, and invited to all corporate events and company presentations whenever they are held in English (many students could benefit from being invited to Finnish-language events, as well).¹⁴

If only these groups could act not as one, but at least as a well-synchronized movement of many parts, think of what could be accomplished.

5.2 A liaison of expat activity

What we need is a liaison:

Someone – or a group of someones – whose sole purpose is to serve as a communication conduit between government offices, educational institutions, the private sector and expat groups. Their goal would be to upkeep a formal network between organizations working on ways to improve the life of expats in Finland.

First and foremost, the Liaison's goal would be economic: to prevent the brain drain of foreign talent

But first and foremost, the Liaison's goal would be economic: to prevent the brain drain of foreign talent.

Should one of the existing non-governmental organizations take the lead?¹⁵ It is unlikely that any organisation is currently well enough positioned to do so. The liaison must have the partnership of public administration, labour market representatives, academic institutions and the private sector in order to get anything meaningful done. It must be non-profit, have a budget and be attached to a respectable brand. This means having influential, motivated partners involved in the creation of this post.

This idea is something that has been discussed before, but never quite gotten off the ground. One of the stumbling blocks is the placement of the post. Should it be located in the public sector, in a relevant Ministry, in an NGO or some other place?

Here are some of the problems with placing a Liaison's Office. Attaching it to a government department like the Ministry of Interior, for example, is one option. However, many fear this would slow down what in essence must be a fast moving and independent post.

There are online resources such as Infopankki and ExpatFinland, which offer expats all over the country excellent advice, but they are more devoted to an online presence, and it may be

too difficult or limiting to try and develop one of these services into the kind of liaison needed.

It seems more appropriate that a Liaison's Office be situated some place with its finger on the pulse of Finland's business sector or labour market, as the ultimate goal is to improve employment and benefit the economy.

With this in mind, one possibility would be to turn to the unions. Unions should be motivated to further the cause of reducing joblessness in any demographic. The difficulty in such an arrangement is the diversity of unions – which one would take the lead in representing expat interests, as foreigners are found in every sector? Should the place be found in one of the three trade union confederations in Finland? Of which the most logical ones to reach expats such as students and innovation professionals would be either Akava or STTK.

Another possibility, then, would be to turn to employers' organisations and business interest groups, such as the Confederation of Finnish Industries EK, the Central Chamber of Commerce or the Federation of Finnish Enterprises. Here, there would be a more focused network connecting expats to employers.

Another option would be to create an office with an entirely new brand that could quickly develop a strong image. Finding a kind of patron, someone who is well-known in Finland and has connections to the international community, would be one way to do this. The stakeholders who would be gathered to lay the groundwork for the Liaison's Office could better identify people who fit this role. This could adopt a patron politician, noteworthy entrepreneur, or even someone associated with Finland's multicultural society. This person would not necessarily act as the Liaison itself, but rather as an ambassador for the expat community and someone with the name recognition to lend to a fledgling Liaison's Office.

No matter where the Office would find a home, it should be independent enough that it could forge its own agenda.

The administrative location of the liaison should give it the image necessary to maintain strong ties to Finnish institutions and

government offices (Labour offices, Kela, Immigration Police, Universities, etc.) in order to make any significant waves. But wherever the eventual administrative location might be, it is important to note that the liaison would be independent of that umbrella organisation. The organisation would lend its brand to the task, but the liaison would not directly represent their interests.

The liaison's duties should not include being a contact person for immigrants or expats who need help with specific issues. There are, as has been noted, a plethora of organisations for this. The liaison's responsibility would be exclusively to maintain a tight communication and co-operative network of public, private, and NGO activities so that the expat community as a whole is served.

Why is creating a solid expat network beneficial to the Finnish economy and society?

A better network would serve two purposes: first, obviously, it would better serve foreigners here and allow a pooling of information on events, education, hobbies, legal assistance, and so forth. Secondly, if the community could be solidified as a viable and visible part of Finnish society, it has the potential to attract the interest and investment of services and employers alike.

Once this has happened, foreigners will cease to be seen as outsiders and will begin to be seen as a vibrant slice of Finnish life.

Epilogue: Don't blame the Finns...

...for everything.

Many of the issues faced by foreign professionals in Finland are not unique to Finland. Language, bureaucratic and cultural barriers are faced by expatriate populations all over the world. Show me the country with a flawless immigration process and I will move there personally to prove you wrong.

To be fair, Finnish really does take the cake for being a monumentally tricky language, and the country may seem a bit more homogeneous and a bit more insular than other countries. But nonetheless these problems are not uniquely Finnish, and therefore solutions that exist elsewhere have merit here too.

Also, as one expat said, you cannot move to Finland and then complain that the Finns are all behaving in a very Finnish manner.

You have to keep your eye out for how things work in this culture, and find access points to take advantage of the existing social and cultural infrastructure. On the other hand, Finnish society cannot expect immigrants to integrate so completely that they give up their own cultural characteristics.

“I am Irish, so I am about ten times more social than Finns. Am I supposed to suddenly stop talking to people in order to integrate into Finnish society? Finnish society has to come part way, too.”

Having the two sides meet in the middle is a tricky goal indeed, because it involves changing social conceptions on both sides. This is not usually something that policy or action plans can influence.

You cannot move to Finland and then complain that the Finns are all behaving in a very Finnish manner

On the other hand, Finnish society cannot expect immigrants to integrate so completely that they give up their own cultural characteristics

But there may be things that can be done to encourage social interaction. The important thing is to create real opportunities for the expat and native populations to interact in meaningful social and professional ways. In this way, expats are encouraged to become active in both professional and social networks in Finland, and hopefully create bridges to the native population.

There are excellent case studies available. The European Union Chemicals Agency based in Helsinki worked very hard in its inception stage to consider how to make its international staff and their families comfortable and happy. Caisa and Jolly Dragon are excellent resources where foreigners can develop a social network and find a community.

But when it comes to improving the social and leisure time welfare of expats and their families, it seems unlikely that we can legislate our way to utopia. People who move to Finland must accept that the native population speaks, behaves, and plays in a different way.

It is true that a major issue to retaining international talent is helping integrate them and their families into the society. And some things, such as the lack of space in quality international schools, are real stumbling blocks that families are largely powerless to change on their own.

But most of the social networking has to be done by the expats themselves. Regardless of whether you are a high-school student, a stay-at-home parent or a financial consultant, the opportunities do exist. It takes more effort than in your home country, and the language difficulties can contribute to the shyness factor, at first. But people who are persistently outgoing usually have the least problems making friends even in Finland.

Finns are active hobbyists and sports enthusiasts. Finland must have one of the highest number of leisure time organisations per capita in the known universe. Sports clubs, dog showing, horseback riding, theatre, cooking, swimming lessons, travel clubs, documentary and movie clubs, fishing, hunting, bird watching, and many, many more. With a rudimentary knowledge

of Finnish anyone can find listings online, through community centres, or through local government services.

And it is true that many, if not most, of these hobby groups will be speaking Finnish or Swedish. But what is wrong with that? Nothing inspires learning like a shared passion. And you cannot erase the fact that we are, after all, in Finland.

Conclusions

It is a fallacy to claim that caring for the welfare of a nation's immigrant population undermines the welfare of its native population. Yet this idea is resurrected around the world especially during recessions, when it becomes politically popular to preach an "Us First" message. Closing up the borders, quashing the careers of the resident foreign population and excluding foreign students from the job market will not save Finland from recession, *it will make it worse.*

Nowhere in the history of human economics has total isolationism proved to be a sound economic principle.

This report endeavours to begin a dialogue on how Finland can best utilize the talents of the immigrant population already residing in the country. Bridging the gap between skilled expats and the job market benefits the Finnish economy. This is simply a point of supply and demand.

Many issues have been identified in the preceding pages. Some areas will evolve when attitudes change and the labour market overall becomes more flexible. Other issues lend themselves to concrete solutions:

- The most important goal of this report was to suggest a way that these issues could be actively addressed. **The creation of an Expat Liaison** would ensure that there was an ombudsman for supervising projects such as an Expat Fair, cementing co-operation between various groups, and encouraging the development of networking and job opportunities. It would also ensure a continued momentum in development of the professional expat community.

The Liaison's key goal would be to prevent expat brain drain by building bridges between Finnish employers and the expat talent pool. Tasks for the Liaison would include building an Expat Fair to showcase diversity and competencies, facilitate internship programmes, lobby for expat-friendly legislation, provide guidance for Finnish employers stymied by the

challenges of an multicultural workforce, etc. (See pp. 38-40 for details)

- Another concrete solution, when it comes to the language issue, would be providing **key public service documents of a private and sensitive nature (such as tax cards) in English as quickly as possible**. There is no reason not to make a vast improvement to the current situation with a minimal effort. In practise, **parliament should make a statement in principle that the above mentioned documents should be available in English** until that department is able to arrange to have these documents translated into a number of other languages. (See pp. 34-35 for details)
- The most urgent steps to be taken in terms of legislation and bureaucracy would be **passing resident permit reforms in early 2011 and streamlining the immigration residence permit process by adopting a maximum processing times for residence permit approvals**. The expat interest groups should actively follow the progress of current bill *HE 269/2009 vp* which is intended to ease resident permit policy. The principles outlined in this bill should be adopted without dilution, and in a reasonable time frame – in early 2011. (See pp. 28-32 for details)

But why care about the welfare of such a small segment of society? Because from the perspective the Finnish economy, this demographic can help Finland grow, internationalise, become more competitive and cosmopolitan. *This is not a welfare report, this is an economic one.*

Finland will have to start convincing skilled immigrants to stay. Already the number of Finns retiring exceeds the number of people entering the work force, and this gap will have to be filled somehow. Statistics Finland calculated in December 2009 that if the borders were closed to immigrants, Finland's labour force would drop by around 280 000 people in the next two decades. This work force would be unable to support and finance the care of those not working¹².

So far, Finland has done an acceptable job in enticing skilled foreigners to move here, but this achievement falls flat if the harsh realities of living and working in Finland chase these people away.

In the end, I hope this report opens up a slightly broader view into Finland's immigrant population. It is not as inert or homogeneous as the general perception would have us believe. At the same time, Finland may not be as insular as many expats believe. A willingness to learn and adapt will ultimately benefit all sides.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Kannattaako kansainvälistyä? Suomen yliopistot kansainvälisinä akateemisina ympäristöinä* (2010). Mika Raunio, Marjaana Korhonen and David Hoffman. University of Tampere.
- ² Another excellent report published by UK-based urban development think tank Comedia tackles the same issues from a city governance perspective, showing that attitudes and other barriers stifle the development of a healthy, vibrant multicultural capital city.
<http://www.hel.fi/wps/wcm/connect/8b9c36804d836d0b8696af395efc1337/Intercultural+City+raportti.pdf?MOD=AJPERE>
- ³ *Kasvun Ajurit 6, Kansainvälistymisen menestystekijät ja esteet – Kasvuyritysten ja PK-yritysten vertailu* (2010). EK and Ernst & Young. Translation of the excerpt by Aira Vehaskari.
- ⁴ Interview with Taneli Tikka in September 2010.
- ⁵ Interview with Kristiina Äimä in September 2010.
- ⁶ Jolly Dragon is a social networking portal that has branched out to facilitating professional and student networking. It has also founded units called the Department of Fun and Action Tank in order to improve expat networking and improve the lives of foreigners in Finland.
<http://www.jollydragon.net>
- ⁷ Caixa is an international cultural centre in Helsinki under the umbrella of the City of Helsinki Cultural Office. <http://www.caixa.fi>
- ⁸ http://www.yle.fi/tv uutiset/ uutiset/ upics/liitetiedostot/Yliopistokoulutuksen_menot_uusi2.pdf
- ⁹ Statistics Finland. Data provided by Vesa Hämäläinen.
- ¹⁰ Bill proposal HE 269/2009. <http://217.71.145.20/TRIPviewer/show.asp?tunniste=he+269/2009&base=erhe&palvelin=www.eduskunta.fi&f=WORD>
- ¹¹ Interview with Minister of Migration and European Affairs Astrid Thors in June 2010.
- ¹² Interview with National Coalition MP Arto Satonen, Chairman of the Committee on Employment and Equality in August 2010.
- ¹³ Maahanmuuton vuosikatsaus 2009. [http://www.intermin.fi/intermin/images.nsf/files/a71bddf6297091a3c22577200042cc7f/\\$file/maahanmuuton_vuosikatsaus_2009.pdf](http://www.intermin.fi/intermin/images.nsf/files/a71bddf6297091a3c22577200042cc7f/$file/maahanmuuton_vuosikatsaus_2009.pdf)
- ¹⁴ Although few schools have the power and funding of Aalto, administrators could still pay a visit to Aalto to see what ideas they could implement in their own institutions.
- ¹⁵ Jolly Dragon's founder Paul Brennan is already in the first stage of proposing the creation of a paid position to advocate for a great variety of expat issues, and he does have useful contacts with the provincial government. This is an excellent idea, but I do not feel it duplicates the work of an Expat Liaison. Many of Jolly Dragon's goals focus on being a welcoming institution and forum for foreigners in Finland, while the Liaison would focus entirely on building industry connections and job market synergies. In this sense, some of Jolly Dragon's goals do overlap with the proposed Liaison, and there would be a great advantage in bringing Brennan and his organisation on board with the project.
- ¹⁶ Statistics Finland. www.stat.fi/artikkelit/2009/art_2009-12-18_002.html

Acknowledgements

This report changed many times through the process of its creation, to the point where the outcome was in many ways a surprise to its author. One of the privileges of being a journalist is that I get to talk to people wiser than I am about subjects that can be quite complicated. I've learned a lot, and these are some of the people and organisations I have to thank for that. Many provided background, others valuable interviews and insights, still others editing help.

MANY THANKS:

Finnish Business and Policy Forum EVA:

Ms **Maiju Karsikas**, Project Manager,
Finnish Business and Policy Forum EVA

EVA Expats Steering Group:

Ms **Suzanne Innes-Stubb**, Counsel, White & Case
Mr **Alberto Morino**, Dancer, Finnish National Ballet
Ms **Bhavna Talwar**, Global HR Manager, Nokia Corporation
Ms **Kerttu Tuomas**, Executive Vice President,
Human Resources, KONE Corporation

Experts:

Ms **Melissa Arni-Harden**, Project Director,
Otaniemi International Network
Ms **Helen Blässar**, Certified personal and
professional development coach, Northsand Coaching
Mr **Paul Brennan**, Founder, Jolly Dragon;
Director, Department of Fun™; CEO, Unfair Advantage
Ms **Andrea Hernandez**, Business Analyst, Wärtsilä Corporation
Ms **Erika Holt**, Researcher, VTT
Ms **Susan Ingman**, Senior Consultant, IBM Group
Mr **Alexis Kouros**, CEO, Helsinki Times and SixDegrees

Mr **Davide Lamparelli**, Designer, Alhena
Ms **Liz Paavolainen**, CEO, Transite Relocations
Ms **Victoria Panfilii**
Ms **Leena Plym-Rissanen**, Head of Career Services,
Aalto University
Mr **Martin-Éric Racine**, Business Development,
International Trade and Immigration Policy Consultant
Ms **Leigh Anne Rauhala**, Visiting Lecturer, Metropolia,
Degree Program in Social Services
Ms **Heather Ross-Sirola**, Communications Manager, ACC Global
Ms **Surya Santhi**, Ovi Maps Community Manager,
Nokia Corporation
Mr **Arto Satonen**, Member of Parliament
Mr **John Simon**, Communications Officer, KONE Corporation
Mr **Dinesh Subramaniam**, Senior Manager, Communications,
Nokia Corporation
Mr **Taneli Tikka**, Entrepreneur
Ms **Samantha Vesala**, Global Sourcing Category Manager,
Nokia Siemens Networks
Ms **Kristiina Äimä**, Acting Professor of International Tax Law,
University of Helsinki

Institutions:

Aalto University
Centre for International Mobility CIMO
Confederation of Finnish Industries EK
Finnish Immigration Service
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Employment and Economy
Ministry of Interior
Statistics Finland
Uusimaa Regional Council

About the Author

Aira-Katariina Vehaskari is a dual Finnish-American citizen who has split her time between living in the US, in Finland, and working on five continents as a journalist. She considers herself half-immigrant, half-native and thus has an excellent vantage point for both sides of immigration issues. In her career she has examined human rights, cross-cultural and theological conflicts in Finland, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Brazil, and beyond. She is a photojournalist, former broadcast journalist/anchor for the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE, current correspondent for AFP, and owner of her own documentary and media company Blooming Rock Films.