



Finnish Education Employers (FEE)

International staff in the education sector

2026 FCG

Objective of the study

- This report by Finnish Education Employers (FEE) focuses on the number of international personnel in the education sector, the types of positions they hold in the sector, and how their job descriptions compare to those of the majority population.
- The study sought to identify the factors that hinder and promote international personnel's entry into the field and recruitment, good job performance, job satisfaction, and career advancement. In addition, education and training in the field were examined.
- The aim of the study, in addition to strengthening the knowledge base, is to identify measures that can promote the internationalisation and multiculturalism of personnel in the education sector.
- In addition, the study sought to identify and anticipate the fields and roles in which the need for foreign labour is most likely to be concentrated in the future.

Methods used in the study

- As part of the study, a survey was conducted and targeted at nearly all employers in Finland's education sector.
- In addition, the report analyses statistical data on the workforce in the education sector and their backgrounds.
- In this report, the private sector refers to education providers and higher education institutions operating in private legal forms (associations, foundations, limited liability companies, and public-law entities). The public sector, in turn, refers to schools and educational institutions operating as part of a municipality, a joint municipal authority, or the state. Both sectors are subject to the same rules and legislation.
- The study was carried out by FCG Finnish Consulting Group. The work was led by Project Manager Jarno Parviainen. Research expert Juuso Ilmola was involved particularly in the survey, while special expert Rasmus Aro was responsible for the statistical analysis.

According to Statistics Finland, 8.7% of employed persons in Finland worked in the education sector in 2023. The number of employed persons in the education sector increased by approximately 26,000 between 2014 and 2023. **Over the same period, the number of foreign nationals working in the sector has nearly doubled, broadly reflecting the overall trend of internationalisation. The education sector has internationalised rapidly, considering that many roles involve strict educational and language requirements.**

In 2023, approximately 17,500 foreign nationals were employed in the education sector, meaning that one in ten employed foreign nationals residing in Finland worked in this sector. In the Helsinki-Uusimaa region, around 20% of childcarers in early childhood education and care currently have an international background. **More than half of all foreign nationals working in the education sector live in the Helsinki-Uusimaa region.**

The number of international employees in the education sector is most pronounced in positions requiring lower levels of formal education and, on the other hand, in research-level positions at higher education institutions. Individuals with an international background are rarely found in leadership roles. **Among citizens of EU and EEA countries, teachers make up a particularly large share, whereas among citizens of other countries, childcarers in early childhood education and care and teaching assistants are especially prominent.**

Based on the survey results, language requirements and the sufficient availability of domestic labour are the main reasons why recruitment does not target international labour. **However, experiences of recruiting international employees are very positive. In addition, staff diversity is perceived as beneficial for the organisation's core mission.** International employees are seen to have integrated excellently into their work communities, and likewise, work communities are perceived to have adapted very well to international employees.

According to the survey, private-sector employers in the education sector have been more successful than public-sector actors in recruiting and retaining international labour. The private sector has also been better able to support international employees in their career development. Opportunities for career progression compared to the majority population are perceived to be more equal in the private sector.

More international labour is needed, at least to some extent, across all roles in the education sector. Growth is very likely to be concentrated mainly in the same fields and positions where the number of international employees has increased the most over the past decade. Measured by the share of international labour, universities of applied sciences are behind universities in terms of internationalisation, and they can be expected to face a growing need to recruit international staff.

The need for international labour is significantly influenced by the availability of domestic labour. **The level of public funding directly affects employment in the sector, and government spending cuts have also targeted the education sector.**

Relatively large numbers of foreign applicants apply to Finnish university degree programmes that qualify graduates for work in the education sector. However, only a relatively small proportion are admitted: approximately 300 individuals per year. Between 2020 and 2024, around 1,350 foreign nationals accepted a university study place in education-related fields (out of approximately 8,000 applicants). During the period 2015–2024, a total of 660 foreign nationals graduated from university education programmes, compared with 13 500 graduates overall. **Many foreign graduates also leave Finland after completing their studies.**

Based on the survey, there are some shortcomings in the provision of education in foreign languages, and certain challenges have been identified in the suitability of education sector training for non-native-language speakers.



Highlights from the survey

- The share of international labour in the education sector varies significantly depending on the level of the position. International employees are particularly prominent in roles requiring lower levels of education, and, at the other end of the spectrum, in positions at higher education institutions that require research-level qualifications.
- **International employees are perceived to have adapted excellently to their work communities**, and likewise the work communities themselves are seen to have adapted very well to international staff.
 - **Factors that support the integration of international labour** include sufficient Finnish language skills and an interest in developing those skills further, as well as the individual employee's own motivation and positive attitude.
- **International employees have generally been successfully retained within organisations**, although some differences can be observed. Staff turnover among international employees is, for the most part, at the same level as that of the overall workforce.
- There is room for improvement at a general level in preparedness to support the career development of international employees.
- Language requirements and the sufficient availability of domestic labour are clearly the main reasons why recruitment is not targeted at international labour.
- **Approximately 70% report language requirements and the availability of domestic labour as barriers.** Other significant reasons include qualification requirements and the fact that international candidates have not applied for positions.
- **Experiences of recruiting international labour are very positive**, and negative experiences are remarkably few.
- **International labour is needed to some extent in all roles within the education sector.** The respondents estimate that the greatest need for international labour will be in teaching and research positions at higher education institutions, and the least in management positions. In addition, labour demand also extends to roles requiring lower levels of education.

- **Decisions to actively promote diversity in recruitment have been made relatively infrequently.** The responding organisations are in very different positions in terms of how far they can decide to give special consideration to diversity: in early childhood education and care, comprehensive school and upper secondary school, language and/or qualification requirements are strict.
- In the private sector, taking diversity into account is clearly more common than in the core public education functions. **Among the universities of applied sciences that responded to the survey, as many as 90 % have made a decision to give special consideration to diversity in recruitment.**
- Staff diversity is perceived beneficial for the organisation's core mission and is widely valued. In the private sector, increasing diversity is perceived clearly more beneficial than in the public sector. **Nearly 80 % of respondents share this view.**
- **Room for development is seen in the provision of foreign-language education.** About half of the organisations that responded to the survey feel that there are at least some challenges in the availability of foreign-language education preparing candidates for careers in the education sector.
- Foreign-language preparatory education for the education sector is seen to serve vocational education and training, higher education institutions, and liberal adult education best. It is seen to serve early childhood education, comprehensive schools and upper secondary schools least effectively.
- According to the survey, cooperation with working life functions well for about 40% of employers in the education sector. In the public sector, cooperation with working life does not function as well as in the private sector. There is also room for improvement in continuing and supplementary education.

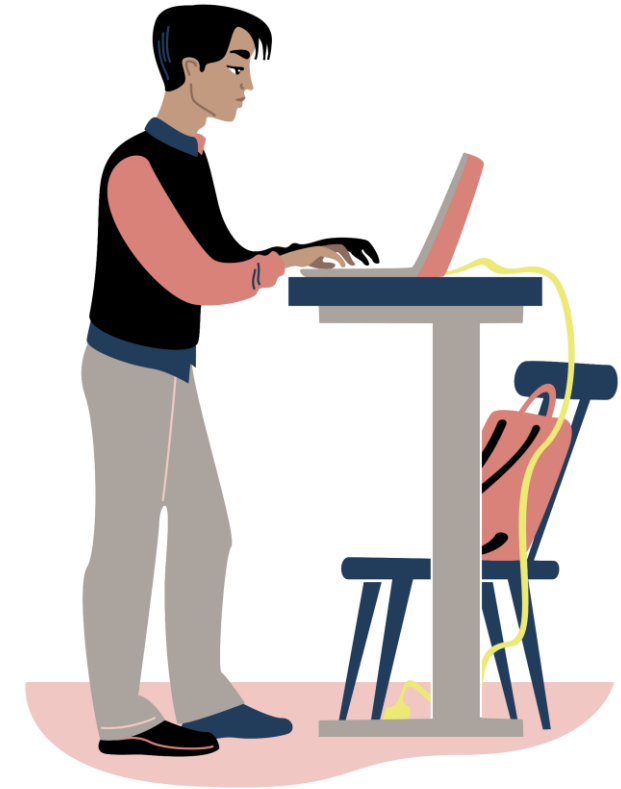
- Across the entire dataset, around 40% of the new international workforce consists of job changers. Direct recruitment from abroad accounted for 34%.
- Of the international workforce, approximately one quarter of new employees had been unemployed prior to their employment.
- Among employees with an international background, there are relatively few career changers, and the use of temporary agency work is almost nonexistent.
- When comparing public and private employers, it is evident that those entering the public sector often have a background of unemployment, whereas transitions to the private sector typically occur through job-to-job moves.



- **In positions requiring higher education, as well as in other education and training roles, it is typical that international staff account for less than 5% of the total workforce.**
- In some vocational education institutions, foreign staff make up more than half of those working in teaching positions. Similarly, in liberal adult education and basic education in the arts, there are more organisations than average where over half of the teaching staff have an international background.
- Around 20% of the employers who responded to the survey have no international workforce at all.
- Among comprehensive schools and upper secondary schools, just under one fifth report that international staff account for 5–25 percent of the workforce, while just under one tenth report that international staff make up more than 50 percent.
- **Majority of higher education institutions employ international research expert staff.**
- In approximately one third of higher education institutions, the share of international staff within research expert positions is between 5 and 25 percent.

- **Language requirements and the sufficient availability of domestic labour are clearly the main reasons why recruitment does not target international workers.**
- Around 70% of respondents cite language requirements and the adequate supply of domestic labour as barriers.
- Other significant reasons include formal qualification requirements and the fact that international workers have not applied for the positions.
- Approximately 10 per cent of all respondents identify the following as challenges:
 - Bureaucracy related to foreign qualifications.
 - A lack of suitable job roles.
 - Insufficient expertise related to recruiting international staff.
- The responses of public and private employers are fairly similar. However, educational and qualification requirements are clearly more strongly emphasised by public-sector employers than by private-sector ones.
- **Experiences of recruiting international workers are very positive overall.**
- Of all respondents, more than 90 per cent report that their experiences have been at least somewhat positive. Across the entire dataset, slightly over one third consider the recruitments to have been completely successful.

- Around 40% of all respondents estimate that some international labour from abroad will be needed for education and training positions requiring higher education qualifications.
- Public-sector employers consider the domestic Finnish workforce to be sufficient more often than private-sector employers.
- Particularly in universities of applied sciences and vocational education institutions, it is anticipated that foreign labour will be needed over the next five years.
 - Among early childhood education and care providers, approximately half report that they will need some foreign labour.
- For other education and training roles, just over 40% of all respondents expect to need some international labour from abroad.



 SIVISTA FCG.