



## **Addressing Career Integration Challenges of Immigrants in Finland: The Potential of Digital Mentorship**

April Rose Luza

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences  
Degree Programme in Leading Business Opportunities  
Digital Business Opportunities  
Master's Thesis  
2024

## Abstract

<b>Author(s)</b> April Rose Luza
<b>Degree</b> Master of Business Administration
<b>Report/Thesis Title</b> Addressing Career Integration Challenges of Immigrants in Finland: The Potential of Digital Mentorship
<b>Number of pages and appendices</b> 109 + 4
<p>Immigration plays a vital role in enriching host countries with valuable skills; however, many immigrants in Finland face significant barriers to career integration. To address these challenges, tailored support systems are necessary to help overcome integration obstacles.</p> <p>This study aims to explore immigrants' career integration challenges in Finland and examine the potential role of digital mentorship platforms in overcoming these barriers. It concludes by proposing a conceptual framework aimed at enhancing digital mentorship platforms to better meet the needs of immigrants in the Finnish labor market.</p> <p>The literature review covers key topics, including immigrants' career challenges, integration policies and programs, social capital, and mentorship in career integration, including both traditional and digital mentorship initiatives. The study also explores the benefits and limitations of AI in career integration tools. The empirical research adopts a case study approach, with data collected through semi-structured online interviews and structured online questionnaires. Data were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis, with some quantitative elements. The research began in May 2024 and concluded in November 2024.</p> <p>The findings emphasize the importance of professional networks and social capital in enhancing career opportunities for immigrants. The study highlights the role of technology in facilitating the career integration process, with AI offering the potential to enhance digital mentorship platforms. However, considerations must be made regarding potential bias, privacy and security issues, and the importance of maintaining human connection and trust.</p> <p>This research contributes valuable insights into the development of digital mentorship solutions to improve career integration for immigrants. By leveraging technology alongside human interaction, digital mentorship platforms can offer scalable support, fostering more inclusive pathways to success in the Finnish labor market.</p>
<b>Keywords</b> Immigration, Career Integration, Mentorship, Digital Mentorship, Finland, Social Capital, AI

# Contents

1	Introduction .....	1
1.1	Objective and Research Questions .....	2
1.2	Scope and Limitations .....	2
1.3	Key Concepts and Definitions .....	3
1.4	Structure of the Thesis .....	4
2	Immigrants' Career Integration in Finland .....	5
2.1	Overview of Immigration in Finland .....	5
2.1.1	Historical Context.....	5
2.1.2	Current Immigration Trends .....	6
2.1.3	Integration Policies and Regulations .....	8
2.1.4	Current Integration Program .....	10
2.1.5	Economic and Social Impact.....	12
2.2	Career Integration Challenges.....	14
2.2.1	Labor Market Segmentation.....	14
2.2.2	Language and Cultural Barriers .....	17
2.2.3	Discrimination .....	19
2.2.4	Social Networking .....	20
2.3	Social Capital Theory .....	21
3	The Role of Mentorship in Career Integration .....	25
3.1	Importance of Mentorship in Career Integration.....	26
3.1.1	Building Networks and Social Capital.....	26
3.1.2	Enhancing Skills and Career Opportunities.....	28
3.2	Traditional Mentorship Programs for Immigrants .....	29
3.2.1	Overview of Traditional Mentorship.....	29
3.2.2	Examples of Traditional Mentorship in Finland.....	29
3.2.3	Benefits and Limitations.....	33
3.3	Digital Mentorship Initiatives for Immigrants .....	34
3.3.1	Overview of Digital Mentorship.....	34
3.3.2	Examples of Digital Mentorship in Finland .....	36
3.3.3	Benefits and Limitations.....	39
3.4	AI in Career Integration Tools.....	40
3.4.1	AI in Career Integration .....	41
3.4.2	AI Applications in Digital Mentorship .....	42
3.4.3	AI Limitations and Ethical Considerations .....	44
3.5	Theoretical Framework.....	47

4	Research Methodology.....	49
4.1	Research Approach.....	49
4.2	Research Phases and Timeline.....	50
4.3	Data Collection Methods .....	51
4.4	Data Analysis Methods.....	53
5	Results .....	55
5.1	Interview Findings and Analysis .....	55
5.1.1	Understanding Career Integration Challenges .....	55
5.1.2	Evaluating Career Integration Services .....	60
5.1.3	Navigating the Impact of Social Connections in Career Integration .....	64
5.1.4	Assessing the Potential of Digital Mentorship in Career Integration .....	67
5.1.5	Exploring the Role of AI in Digital Mentorship Platforms.....	76
5.2	Conceptualization of the Digital Mentorship Platform.....	80
5.2.1	Overview of the Concept.....	80
5.2.2	Platform Essentials .....	81
5.2.3	Digital Tools and AI Features.....	82
5.2.4	Addressing Key Gaps in Existing Programs.....	85
5.2.5	Limitations of the Platform.....	86
5.2.6	Concept Summary .....	87
6	Discussion.....	88
6.1	Answering the Research Questions .....	88
6.2	Conclusion .....	95
6.3	Reliability and Ethics of the Research .....	96
6.4	Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research .....	97
6.5	Reflections .....	98
	Sources .....	100
	Appendices.....	110
	Appendix 1. Interview Questions .....	110
	Appendix 2. Email Invitation to Interviewees.....	113

# 1 Introduction

Immigration is a prevalent phenomenon worldwide, with millions of individuals relocating to new countries in search of better opportunities and improved livelihoods. It contributes to the transfer and growth of human capital, bringing new skills and modernizing the labor force of the host country. This includes work-related skills and qualities like risk-taking and openness, which drive technological innovation, internationalization, and entrepreneurship (Heikkilä & Peltonen 2002, 9).

Various types of immigrants are driven by diverse reasons for moving across international borders. In this thesis, the term 'immigrant' refers to foreign nationals whose residence permits allow them to stay permanently in Finland. This includes individuals who received a permanent residence permit upon entry, those with renewable temporary permits, and those who transitioned from temporary to permanent residence, such as students becoming workers. These individuals have moved to Finland with the intention of permanent settlement through various entry streams, including labor migration, family reunification, student permits, and refugee status. This definition aligns with the OECD's (2015, 56) indicator of immigrant status.

European societies have become increasingly multicultural, with the proportion of the population from diverse cultural backgrounds steadily growing over the past several decades (Ahmad 2020, 1). While Finland's immigration has been modest compared to other European countries, it has experienced significant growth in recent years. In the past 25 years, the number of foreign-born residents in Finland has increased significantly, growing at an annual rate of 6.8%. From comprising just 1% of the population in 1990, this group made up almost 6.5% by 2016. Despite the relatively small size of the foreign-born population in Finland compared to other countries, the growth rate has been one of the highest among OECD nations. (OECD 2018, 46).

Immigrant integration is complex, with obstacles and opportunities arising from individual circumstances, organizational needs, societal attitudes, and various policies (Nardon & Hari, 2022, 10). In Finland, immigrants encounter several challenges when integrating into the workforce. While there is a demand for workers to fill labor shortages, many qualified immigrants struggle to find jobs that match their skills and experience, leading to unemployment or underemployment.

Understanding the challenges faced by immigrants in their career integration is crucial, as it provides insights into the barriers that hinder their full participation in the labor market. These barriers can have significant economic implications for both individuals and the host country, making it essential to address them to foster social cohesion and inclusion within diverse communities.

As immigrant populations continue to grow, so does the need for effective support systems that assist their integration. In this context, digital mentorship platforms offer a promising avenue for addressing the unique needs of immigrants. Mentorship is an innovative approach to addressing the challenges immigrants face in entering the labor market (De Cuyper, Vandermeerschen, & Purkayastha 2019, 110). By connecting immigrants with established professionals and resources, such platforms can facilitate knowledge transfer, skill development, and networking opportunities, thereby enhancing career prospects.

### **1.1 Objective and Research Questions**

This research aims to shed light on the unique experiences of immigrants in Finland regarding their career integration challenges and to investigate their perceptions of digital mentorship as a potential supportive tool in this process. Consequently, the study proposes a conceptual framework for improving digital mentorship platforms tailored to the needs of immigrants. Additionally, this research can contribute to the literature on immigrant integration while offering solutions to help immigrants improve their career outcomes and foster social inclusion.

The Research Questions (RQ) of this thesis are as follows:

*RQ1: What challenges do immigrants in Finland face in their career integration, and what types of services, both public and private, have they accessed to support this process?*

*RQ2: What aspects of digital mentorship do immigrants in Finland perceive as most beneficial for their career integration?*

*RQ3: What role could AI tools play within digital mentorship platforms to better assist immigrants in their career integration process?*

### **1.2 Scope and Limitations**

This thesis focuses on the challenges and needs related to career integration among immigrants in Finland. It does not aim to address broader issues related to immigration policies and general societal integration faced by this demographic. The central objective is to understand the unique experiences of immigrants as they navigate their career paths and to explore the potential role of digital mentorship as a supportive tool in this process.

The scope of this study is limited to the context of Finland, which may affect the applicability of the findings to other immigrant populations or settings. The research will primarily conceptualize a

framework for a digital mentorship platform based on insights gathered, rather than detailing technical specifications. Essential features and functions for enhancing immigrants' career integration will be identified, but a full design of the platform is beyond the scope of this study.

### 1.3 Key Concepts and Definitions

**Artificial Intelligence (AI):** A collection of interconnected technologies that combine computational methods and techniques to address challenges that typically require human cognitive abilities (Walsh, Levy, Bell, Elliott, Maclaurin, Mareels, & Wood 2019, 2).

**Asylum Seeker:** An individual who leaves his/her home country due to political issues or war, seeking protection and residence in another country (Cambridge s.a.a).

**Career Integration:** The process through which immigrants engage in employment or self-employment activities that align with their professional goals, qualifications, and experience, ensuring adequate economic security and career prospects (Nardon & Hari 2022, 10).

**Digital Mentorship:** A mutually beneficial relationship between a mentor and a mentee that is facilitated through electronic means or technology (Bierema & Merriam 2002, 214).

**Emigration:** The act of leaving one's home country to settle permanently in another country (Cambridge s.a.b).

**Foreign Background:** Individuals are considered to have a foreign background if both parents, or the sole known parent, were born abroad, or if they were born abroad and their parents' information is not recorded in the Population Information System (Statistics Finland s.a.).

**Immigrant:** Refers to foreign nationals who hold residence permits that grant them the right to stay permanently in Finland. This includes those who receive a permanent permit upon entry, individuals with renewable temporary permits, and those transitioning from temporary to permanent status, such as students who later gain employment. (OECD 2015, 56).

**Immigration:** The process of relocating to a country to establish permanent residence (Cambridge s.a.c).

**Integration:** The process through which newcomers settle within a specific society and engage with the host community, leading to social changes that occur as a result of immigration. It also involves the process of becoming an accepted part of society. (Penninx 2019, 5).

**Integration policy:** Social measures aimed at helping immigrants participate in Finnish society (Pehkonen 2006, 115).

**Mentorship:** An interpersonal relationship characterized by support, exchange, and learning, where a mentor shares his/her experience to assist a mentee in developing skills and reaching professional objectives. This relationship typically involves regular meetings over a defined period. (Bagnoli & Estache 2019, 4).

**Mentor:** An individual recognized for possessing greater knowledge, wisdom, or experience in a specific area, and provides guidance, support, and insights to facilitate the personal and professional development of the mentee (Bozeman & Feeney 2007, 731).

**Mentee:** (Also referred to as protégé) An individual perceived to have less knowledge, wisdom, or experience in a particular field who seeks advice from a mentor (Bozeman & Feeney 2007, 731).

**TE Office (The Employment and Economic Development Office):** A government agency in Finland dedicated to managing employment services and supporting economic development. It offers a range of services aimed at jobseekers, employers, and entrepreneurs, facilitating quick job placements, enhancing the availability of a skilled workforce, and ensuring a favorable operating environment for businesses. (TE Services 2022).

**Traditional Mentorship:** A face-to-face relationship in which a more experienced individual (the mentor) provides guidance and support to a less experienced person (the mentee) through direct, one-on-one interactions over an extended period (Bozeman & Feeney 2007, 731).

**Social Capital Theory:** A functional concept representing various social structures that enable individuals or organizations to achieve goals through cooperation and productive interactions, highlighting its role in facilitating actions that would otherwise be unattainable (Coleman 1998, S98).

#### **1.4 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of six main chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study, outlining its objectives, research questions, scope, limitations, and key concepts. Chapters 2 and 3 provide a comprehensive literature review and theoretical framework, examining relevant studies and theories. Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology, explaining the data collection methods and the approach used for analyzing the data. Chapter 5 presents the findings and analysis based on the collected data and the proposal for the digital mentorship platform. Finally, Chapter 6 addresses the research questions, presents conclusions, discusses research reliability and ethics, outlines limitations, offers recommendations for future research, and provides personal reflections.

## 2 Immigrants' Career Integration in Finland

### 2.1 Overview of Immigration in Finland

Globally, immigration patterns have become increasingly diverse and complex. In Finland, this trend reflects broader global phenomena, with various types of immigrants arriving simultaneously and sometimes transitioning between categories, such as refugees who later bring family members through reunification (Pehkonen 2006, 114).

#### 2.1.1 Historical Context

Historically, Finland has seen more emigration than immigration, leading to a relatively low proportion of foreign-born residents (OECD 2018, 49). Many Finns moved abroad for better job opportunities, with Sweden being the main destination (Heikkilä & Peltonen 2002, 2). This trend shifted in the early 1980s when the number of immigrants surpassed emigrants. According to the OECD (2018, 49), until the late 1980s, return migrants and their families - mainly from Sweden - made up about 85% of all immigrants to Finland.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union further influenced migration patterns. Migrants and their descendants who had moved to the USSR during the Great Depression were later allowed to return to Finland. This shift marked Finland's transition into an immigrant-receiving country in the 1990s, with a notable influx of migrants from Russia and Estonia. Since 1990, approximately 30,000 to 35,000 Ingrian Finns (descendants of 17th-century Finnish-speaking settlers in the Ingria region) have moved to Finland from these areas. Around the same period, asylum seekers from Somalia and the former Yugoslavia began arriving, driven by the post-Soviet turmoil. (OECD 2018, 49). This rise in immigration coincided with a severe economic recession, leading to long-term unemployment for many immigrants and reinforcing the perception that immigrant integration was a costly burden rather than an opportunity (Pehkonen 2006, 113; OECD 2018, 49).

By 2004, Finland had approximately 108,346 permanent foreign residents, representing 2% of the population (Pehkonen 2006, 13). According to Tervola (2020), in 2015, Finland, like many European countries, saw a sharp rise in asylum requests, with nearly 32,500 individuals applying - almost nine times more than the previous year. Despite this surge, only a minority were granted residence permits, leading to stricter criteria for approval. The percentage of negative decisions on international protection rose from 16% before 2015 to 51% in 2016. While most asylum seekers in Finland came from Iraq, other European nations primarily saw Syrian applicants. By 2016, asylum requests returned to near pre-crisis levels, while the number of resettled refugees and family reunion migrants remained relatively stable. (Tervola 2020, 3).

### 2.1.2 Current Immigration Trends

Individuals classified as having a foreign background include those whose parents, or the only known parent, were born abroad (Statistics Finland s.a.). The number of people with a foreign background permanently residing in Finland has steadily increased, reaching 444,031 in 2020 (Nichols & Virsinger, 2021, pp. 8-9). This diverse group includes immigrants who come to Finland to work and those who arrive to reunite with family members already living in the country. According to the OECD International Migration Outlook (2023, 228), Finland welcomed 29,000 new long-term or permanent immigrants in 2021, a 23% increase from 2020. Of this group, 28% had access to free mobility benefits, 27.2% entered as labor migrants, 33.4% were family members (including accompanying relatives), and 10.3% were classified as humanitarian migrants. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of the categories of new long-term or permanent immigrants to Finland in 2021.

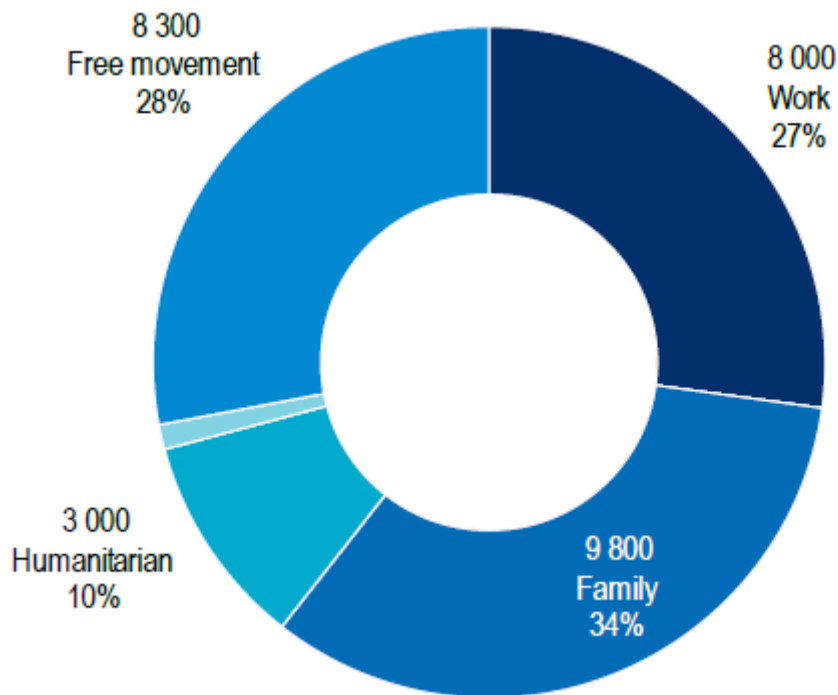


Figure 1. Long-term immigration trends, 2021 (OECD 2023, 228)

Additionally, Finland issued around 5,800 permits to international students at the tertiary level and 3,100 to temporary and seasonal workers (excluding those within the EU). Notably, there were also 14,000 intra-EU postings, a 42% decrease from 2020. The top three nationalities among the newcomers were Russian, Estonian, and Ukrainian, with Estonia experiencing the largest increase in migrants to Finland (+800) and Iraq showing the largest decrease (-200). (OECD 2023, 228).

In 2022, first-time asylum applicants surged by 250%, reaching approximately 4,800. Most applicants came from Ukraine (1,700, excluding those under temporary protection), Russia (1,100), and

Afghanistan (200), with Ukrainians representing the largest increase. Out of 2,610 asylum decisions made in 2022, 47% were positive. Meanwhile, the emigration of Finnish citizens to OECD countries rose by 6% in 2021, with 8,300 Finns leaving the country. About 20% of them moved to Sweden, 11% to the Netherlands, and 10% to Spain. (OECD 2023, 228).

In 2023, Finland's immigration patterns were influenced by several factors, including Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, tensions at Finland's eastern border, an economic downturn, and a persistent labor shortage. Despite these challenges, immigration remained high. Many Ukrainians sought refuge in Finland, leading to a record-breaking number of residence permit applications, especially among students and the family members of workers and students. (Finnish Immigration Service, 2024). According to Statistics Finland (2024a), the country saw a record high in immigration with 73,236 new arrivals. Emigrations totaled 15,322, resulting in a net immigration of 57,914 people, as shown in Figure 2. A major contributor to this net increase was the influx of Ukrainians arriving under the Temporary Protection Directive.

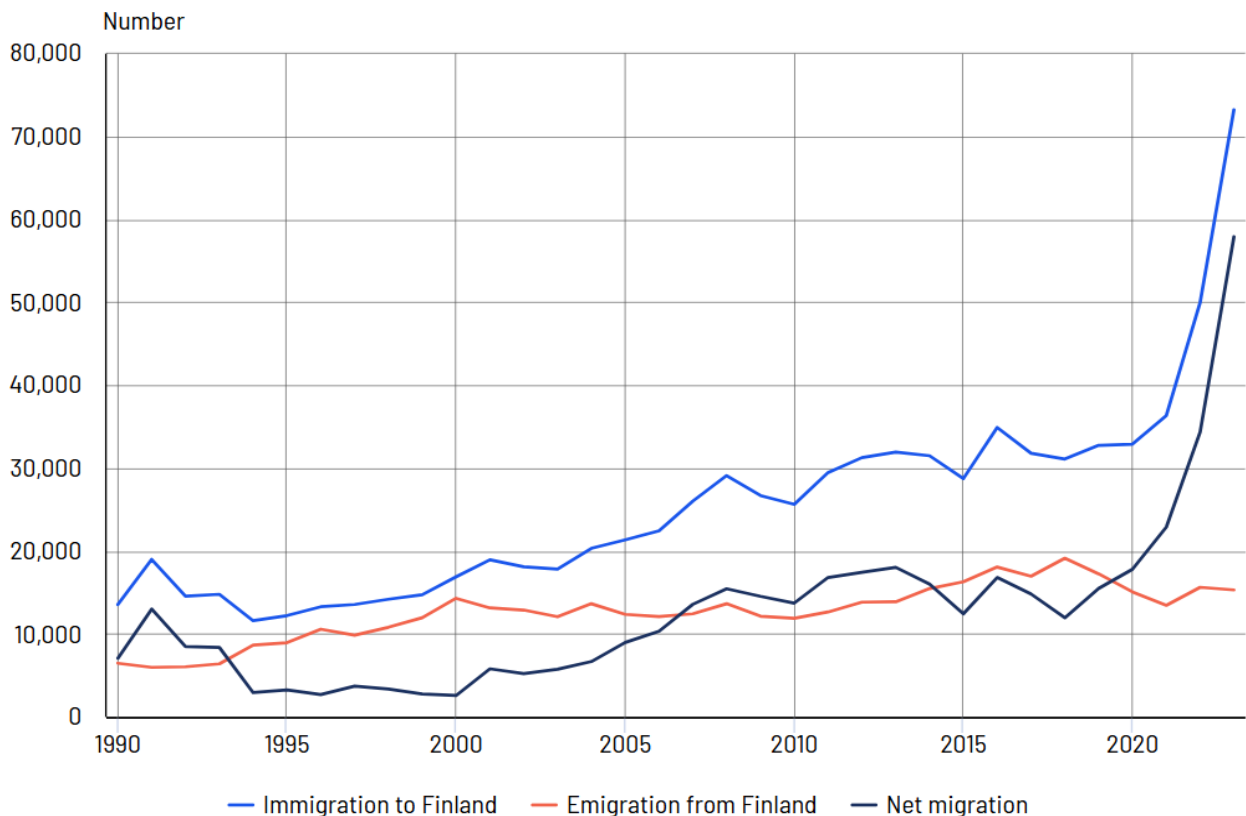


Figure 2. Migration trends in Finland from 1990 - 2023 (Statistics Finland 2024a)

The Finnish Immigration Service (2024) estimated that approximately 3,500 to 4,500 new asylum applications would be submitted in Finland, reflecting ongoing high migration pressure within the European Union. This pressure is influenced by extended conflicts in key countries of origin and

the strained refugee situation in transit countries. Labor migration to Finland remained high, with 16,999 applications for a first residence permit based on work submitted in 2023, compared to a record-high 20,960 applications in 2022. The elevated levels of labor migration were driven by Finland's ongoing labor shortages and improved recruitment networks. However, the number of applications decreased in 2023 due to an economic downturn, a slowdown in the construction industry, and a reduced number of applications from Russian citizens following the initial surge after Russia's attack on Ukraine. (Finnish Immigration Service 2024).

### 2.1.3 Integration Policies and Regulations

Before the 1990s, Finland had limited experience with immigration and a relatively undeveloped immigration policy. Public employment services did not address the specific needs of migrants, applying the same tools to both foreign-born and native-born individuals. (OECD 2018, 57). As immigration began to rise in the early 1990s, Finland updated its immigration legislation. According to Finland's Ministry of the Interior (s.a.), Finnish migration policy and legislative development are guided by government objectives, the EU's common migration and asylum policies, and international agreements.

Integration policy refers to social measures aimed at helping immigrants participate in Finnish society (Pehkonen 2006, 115). The *Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers*, effective since 1999, establishes the framework for Finnish immigration policy, promoting immigrants' integration, equality, and freedom of choice. It provides resources for acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to engage fully in society, ensuring proper support for asylum seekers and victims of human trafficking, especially during large influxes. (European Commission 2009). The law allows immigrants to maintain their native language, ethnicity, and cultural heritage. Unemployed individuals receiving social benefits are entitled to an integration plan if they moved to Finland after mid-1997 and have lived there for less than three years, provided they are registered as residents. (Heikkilä & Peltonen 2002, 7). This plan is created at labor or municipal social offices and includes language courses, vocational training, career counseling, and work experience. It aims to guide migrants toward resources that match their skills and needs, even though no additional funding has been allocated (OECD 2018, 57).

The current integration law, the *Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration*, was enacted in 2011. According to Finland's Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (s.a.), the Act aims to address recent increases in immigration and enhance diversity by supporting immigrants' inclusion into society. It provides the immigrants with essential information about Finnish society, the labor market, and available services. The Act also aims to promote gender equality, prevent discrimina-

tion, and encourage positive interactions among various population groups, emphasizing the importance of delivering comprehensive advice and guidance during the initial stages of immigration. The Integration Act applies to all immigrants in Finland with a valid residence permit, registered right of residence, or residence card as outlined in the Aliens Act, covering immigrants regardless of their reason for immigrating.

According to the OECD (2018), the 2011 Integration Act outlines the roles of various actors in Finland's integration system. At the national level, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment oversees integration through the Centre of Expertise in Integration, while the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) handles residence permits and asylum applications. The Ministry of Education and Culture, along with recognition boards, manages education and the recognition of foreign qualifications. The Public Employment Service (TE offices) focuses on integrating job-seeking migrants. Regionally, the Centres for Economic Development, Transport, and the Environment (ELY centres) promote development and support municipalities, while Regional State Administrative Agencies (AVI) ensure equal access to public services. Locally, municipalities implement integration plans and provide services to temporary residents. (OECD 2018, 58). Figure 3 shows the integration path and the key actors involved (OECD 2017, 8).

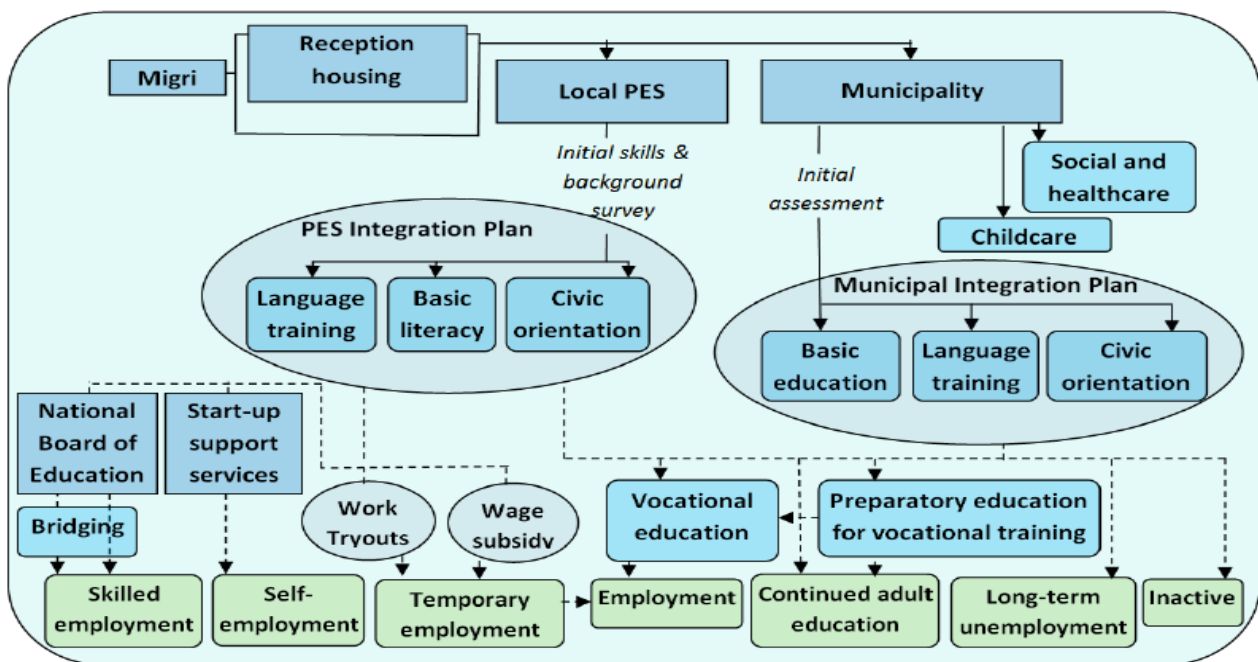


Figure 3. Newcomers' path in Finland and key actors involved in the integration system (OECD 2017, 8)

With the rise and increasing diversity of immigration to Finland, addressing the needs of immigrants in public services is essential. The Integration Act has been comprehensively reformed to

align with Parliament's goals for improving immigrant integration. According to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Finland (2023), the new Integration Act (681/2023) which will take effect on January 1, 2025, alongside TE services reform, aims to enhance immigrant integration and societal inclusion. It emphasizes better employment pathways, increased service access for women and those outside the workforce, and improved early-stage integration services. Municipalities will have greater responsibility for implementing a new integration program that collaborates with various entities. All immigrants will be provided accessible guidance, foundational information on Finnish society, skills assessments, integration plans, and access to education and employment services. Each immigrant will have a personalized, goal-oriented integration plan with a stronger emphasis on employment, shorter duration and improved pathways to work and education (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Finland 2023).

#### 2.1.4 Current Integration Program

Finland offers various services to support settling, finding employment, and learning the language. Family members who move to Finland may also be eligible for these services. These services include the initial assessment, integration plan, and integration training (InfoFinland 2024). Figure 4 illustrates the stages that make up the Finnish integration program.

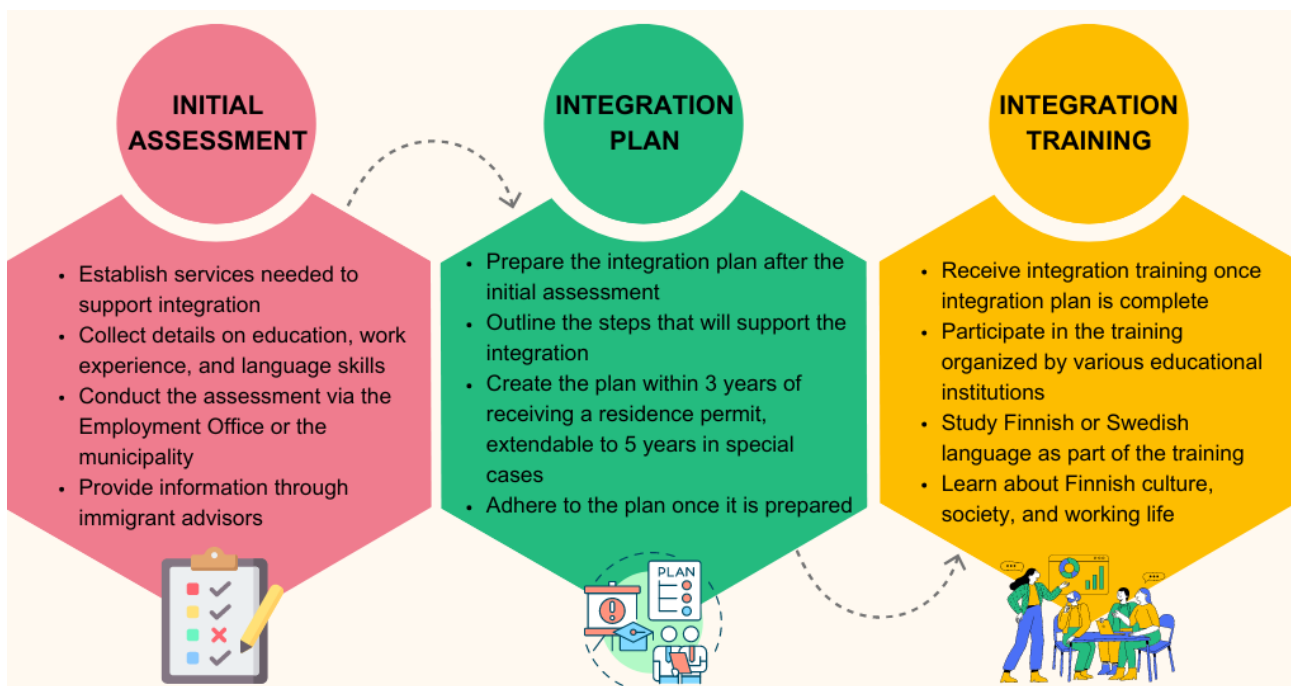


Figure 4. Stages in the Finnish integration program (adapted from InfoFinland 2024)

The first stage of the Finnish integration 'model' is the *Initial Assessment* which involves evaluating a migrant's education, work experience, and language skills. It provides a preliminary overview of

the integration and employment measures needed. The assessment is initiated by the Employment and Economic Development Office, which handles approximately 90% of cases, while the municipality is responsible for starting assessments for individuals outside the workforce. Families receive additional counseling on services specifically for them. (Kazi 2016, 6).

If support for integration is needed, an immigrant can proceed to the second stage of the program, the *Integration Plan*. An authority will create an integration plan following the initial assessment. Job Market Finland (2024) states that the integration plan aims to support integration in Finland by arranging suitable language studies and employment services. It may also include courses in native language literacy or education on Finnish society. The TE Office or local government initiates the plan preparation within two weeks of the initial assessment, working collaboratively with an expert. The initial plan lasts up to one year, with a maximum duration of three years, extendable by two years if necessary.

The third stage, *Integration Training*, will commence once the integration plan is completed, and is organized by various educational institutions. The Employment and Economic Development Office or municipality will guide participants in this training, which typically includes Finnish or Swedish language studies and introduces Finnish society, culture, and working life. (InfoFinland 2024). Immigrants may also be encouraged to enroll in degree programs, usually vocational education, or to engage in other training that may include job-seeking or career coaching, and work try-outs, which allow individuals to explore career options and labor market opportunities (Pesola, Sarvimäki, & Virkola 2024, 7; Job Market Finland 2024b).

In Finland, unemployed migrant job-seekers and those receiving income support have access to comprehensive integration services, setting it apart from many OECD countries. While most OECD nations provide publicly-funded language courses for new migrants, Finland's approach extends integration support to all resident migrants seeking work or social assistance. Unlike Finland, Nordic countries typically offer these services only to refugees and their families or require contributions from labor migrants for language learning. For example, Sweden provides integration programs only for refugees, and in Norway, labor migrants contribute to their language education. (OECD 2018, 96).

However, despite these comprehensive services, challenges remain, particularly for specific immigrant groups. Steel and Jyrkinen (2017, 40-41) conducted a qualitative study examining the experiences of highly educated immigrant women with both government-funded employment services and third-sector services. The findings reveal several issues with the official services, including the lack of personalized support, busy timetables of the service providers, and difficulties in assessing

foreign degrees. Many participants felt that the services failed to treat them as "valuable new citizens" eager to contribute to Finnish society. This suggests that, for highly educated immigrant women, the current integration programs may not fully support their integration into the workforce.

### 2.1.5 Economic and Social Impact

According to Statistics Finland (2024b), as of December 31, 2023, Finland's population reached 5.6 million, a steady increase from 2.7 million in 1900. Over the decades, the population has grown significantly, with notable changes in its structure. As shown in Table 1, the proportion of children aged 0–14 has decreased from 35.1% in 1900 to 14.9% in 2023, reflecting a shift towards an aging population. Conversely, the percentage of individuals aged 15–64 has remained relatively stable, though it declined from 66.9% in 2000 to 61.8% in 2023. The elderly population, particularly those aged 65–84, has increased substantially, from 5.2% in 1900 to 20.5% in 2023. This demographic shift highlights the rising need for effective immigration policies to address an aging population and low birth rates, which have led to a declining workforce.

Table 1. Population structure of Finland, 1900-2023 (adapted from Statistics Finland 2024b)

Year	Total Population	Males	Females	Age 0-14 (%)	Age 15-64 (%)	Age 65-84 (%)	Age 85+ (%)
1900	2,656,000	1,311,000	1,345,000	35.1	59.6	5.2	0.1
1950	4,030,000	1,926,000	2,104,000	30.0	63.4	6.4	0.2
2000	5,181,000	2,529,000	2,652,000	18.1	66.9	13.5	1.5
2020	5,534,000	2,734,000	2,800,000	15.6	61.7	19.9	2.8
2021	5,548,000	2,743,000	2,805,000	15.4	61.6	20.2	2.8
2022	5,564,000	2,753,000	2,810,000	15.1	61.6	20.4	2.9
2023	5,604,000	2,774,000	2,830,000	14.9	61.8	20.5	2.9

This situation underscores the importance of immigration as a means to boost the labor market and sustain economic growth. As the population ages, the need for a younger workforce becomes increasingly critical, making the economic and social impacts of immigration particularly significant for Finland.

Immigrants play a vital role in Finland's labor market, especially in sectors experiencing labor shortages. A report by Pesola et al. (2024) highlights that immigrants arriving with work permits have high initial employment rates and earnings, often exceeding those of native Finns in the early years of their stay. However, this advantage tends to diminish over time, with their earnings falling slightly below those of their Finnish counterparts after about ten years. Additionally, while the employment rates for EU citizens and those arriving for family reunification or international protection are initially low, these rates improve significantly over time. After ten years, around 80% of EU migrants and work permit holders are employed, compared to approximately 60% of those who arrived for international protection. (Pesola et al. 2024, 2-3). As labor market outcomes improve, immigrants' reliance on benefits decreases, allowing for greater tax contributions.

The economic impact of immigration is largely shaped by how much immigrants rely on welfare services and social benefits. When job prospects are limited, immigrants may depend more on social assistance than native residents. Moreover, welfare programs in host countries are often more generous than those in immigrants' countries of origin. (Kerr & Kerr 2011, 15-16). A study by Väänänen (2018, 60-61), discusses the fiscal impact of immigration, noting common concerns about the potential burden on public finances. Immigrants accessing local welfare systems inevitably affect public finances, though comprehensive data for precise international comparisons are limited. In Finland, significant costs arise from state income transfers and public service usage by immigrants. The economic impact is thus closely related to employment outcomes and welfare utilization.

On the positive side, immigration can benefit local employment and labor markets. Increased private consumption by immigrants can boost demand for workers. Immigrants often start new businesses and offer new products and services, enriching the economy. Additionally, immigrant labor can provide stability during economic downturns, as native workers in areas with higher immigrant populations may experience less job loss than immigrants. (Väänänen (2018, 69). The Finnish government is enhancing its migrant integration efforts by emphasizing the economic advantages of migration, such as job creation and boosting innovation. As part of the 2018-2021 fiscal plan, a cross-sectoral migration policy was developed to highlight the role of labor migration in improving employment, public finances, and global economic ties. Additionally, the Talent Boost program was launched to attract international talent and better utilize the expertise of foreign professionals already in Finland. (OECD 2018, 63).

Effective integration programs are key to the success of immigration policies in Finland. These programs aim to enhance social cohesion and provide essential services, including language training,

education, and employment support. Participating in these programs significantly improves the employment prospects of immigrants, especially those who arrived for international protection (InfoFinland, 2024). Both immigrants and the host society benefit from successful integration. Well-integrated immigrants are more likely to secure employment and actively contribute to their new community, which helps them settle and thrive while allowing the host country to benefit from their contributions. A study published in the *IZA Journal of Migration* (2013) shows that cultural diversity, especially through the recruitment of foreign workers, can boost innovation within firms. Immigrants enhance community cohesion and stimulate local businesses by increasing demand for ethnic goods and services. They also contribute to community growth and attract new investments and technologies. However, challenges such as communication barriers and potential conflicts can affect social harmony and trust. (Ozgen, Nijkamp & Poot 2013, 4-5).

## **2.2 Career Integration Challenges**

The concept of integration encompasses the process of newcomers settling into a host society, their interaction with the existing community, and the resultant social changes that occur following immigration (Penninx 2019, 5). According to a study by Isaakyan, Triandafyllidou, and Baglioni (2023), for immigrants, labor market integration means finding work under fair conditions. This includes having a job that matches their skills, fair pay, opportunities for professional growth, and protection from workplace mistreatment. It also involves access to social benefits like healthcare and retirement plans, and equal treatment compared to local and foreign workers. Equal opportunities in the workplace are crucial, as they form the foundation for fair employment. These aspects are believed to operate as a mutual exchange, where migrants adjust and evolve, while the host society also experiences changes. (Isaakyan et. al. 2023, 3). The interaction between these two entities - migrants and the receiving society, along with its characteristics and responses to newcomers - shapes the integration process over time. However, the balance of power and resources is unequal, as the institutional framework and responses of the receiving society exert far greater influence on integration outcomes than the migrants themselves. (Penninx 2019, 5).

The literature reviewed in this section shows that career integration challenges for immigrants are complex and include labor market segmentation, language barriers, discrimination, and social networking. Each factor plays a key role in shaping the integration experience, affecting both the individual and the broader host society.

### **2.2.1 Labor Market Segmentation**

Heikkilä and Peltonen (2002) provided an early examination of ethnic segmentation in the Finnish labor market, describing how different immigrant groups are categorized based on their human

capital. They argue that if immigrants face marginalization in the labor market, they risk experiencing similar marginalization in other areas of Finnish society. Additionally, labor market practices can create a cycle of frustration among immigrants, with some feeling dissatisfied with their jobs, while others struggle to find employment. There is a significant disparity in job roles among immigrants, with a small minority obtaining higher-status jobs while the majority are relegated to manual labor. Despite this division, it is important to note that a sufficient income is guaranteed for all immigrants through various income transitions. (Heikkilä and Peltonen 2002, 8).

More recently, Ndomo and Lillie (2023, 161-163) examined the challenges immigrants face in accessing the Finnish labor market, specifically focusing on labor market segmentation and occupational discrimination. The study highlights that immigrants are often confined to the secondary labor market, which consists of less secure, lower-skilled jobs, despite their high qualifications. This form of segmentation is sustained by institutional barriers and ethnic discrimination, leading to unequal opportunities compared to native workers.

Moreover, integration policies tend to push immigrants toward reskilling for mid to low-skilled occupations, which limits their career aspirations and reinforces existing labor market disparities (Ndomo & Lillie 2023, 161-163). Consequently, immigrants are often recruited for lower-skilled jobs despite their higher qualifications. This situation is aggravated by the fact that education obtained outside the OECD is frequently undervalued in the Finnish labor market. In Finland, as in other OECD countries, overqualification rates for highly educated foreign-born workers are significantly higher than those of native-born peers, largely due to the lack of recognition for foreign qualifications (OECD 2017, 12). This issue is particularly problematic for immigrant graduates, who struggle to secure positions that match their expertise. The labor market remains dualistic, with Finns and foreigners often occupying different roles. Even within the immigrant community, labor market segmentation continues, especially in high-tech fields where foreign experts are more concentrated. (Heikkilä & Peltonen 2002, 6-7).

The declining employment rates among foreign-born individuals in Finland can be partly attributed to the increasing number of new arrivals. Furthermore, the drop in employment during economic downturns indicates that many foreign-born workers are concentrated in the most vulnerable and precarious jobs. (OECD 2018, 70). Nshom, Sadaf, & Khalimzoda (2022) support this observation, highlighting that immigrants in Finland face significant discrimination in employment opportunities. Many participants in their research expressed concerns about the lack of suitable job opportunities, attributing this issue primarily to prejudice and discrimination. Immigrants often struggle to find work that matches their qualifications. For instance, one respondent noted that even when secur-

ing a job where English is the working language, they are likely to be overlooked if a Finnish applicant applies for the same role. Consequently, highly qualified immigrants frequently end up in lower-skilled jobs, such as cleaning or nursing. (Nshom et al. 2022, 35).

These challenges in labor market segmentation significantly impact the overall employability of immigrants in Finland. According to Zafar (2019, 20-21), the best way to evaluate the employment prospects of highly skilled immigrants in Finland is by comparing them with those of highly skilled native Finns. A 2014 UTH survey (survey on work and well-being among persons of foreign origins) by Statistics Finland compared the employability of individuals with foreign backgrounds to that of native Finns through face-to-face interviews. The survey, as shown in Figure 5, revealed that immigrants, particularly women, had lower employment rates than native Finns, with a 10% gap overall. Employment for people with a foreign background was 63.7%, compared to 73.7% for Finns, with the largest difference being among women - foreign females had a 17.4% lower employment rate than Finnish women. Additionally, the unemployment rate for foreign-background men was 14.4% and 17.0% for women, compared to 8.4% for men and 6.3% for women with Finnish backgrounds, as demonstrated in Figure 6. Although higher education helped decrease unemployment rates for both immigrants and native Finns, it did not entirely explain the persistent differences in unemployment rates between the two groups. (Statistics Finland, 2014).

Employment rate by gender and origin, population aged 20 to 64 in Finland in 2014, %

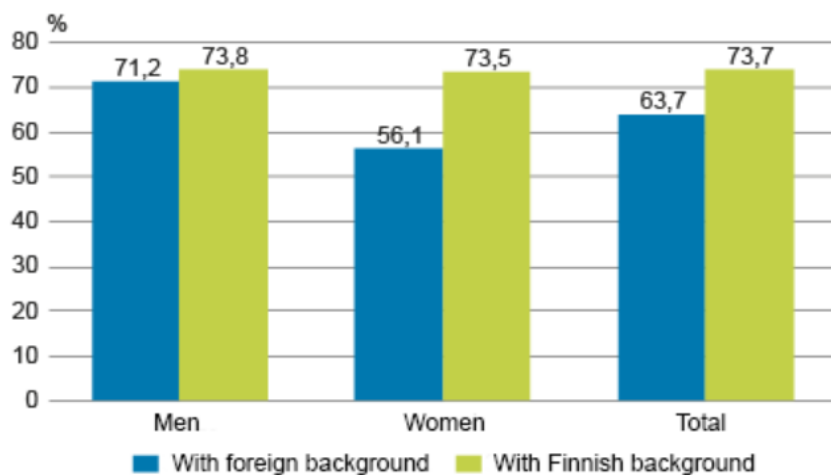


Figure 5. Comparison of employment rates between individuals of foreign and Finnish backgrounds (UTH Survey, Statistics Finland 2014)

Unemployment rate of population aged 20 to 64 with foreign and Finnish background by gender and level of education in 2014, %

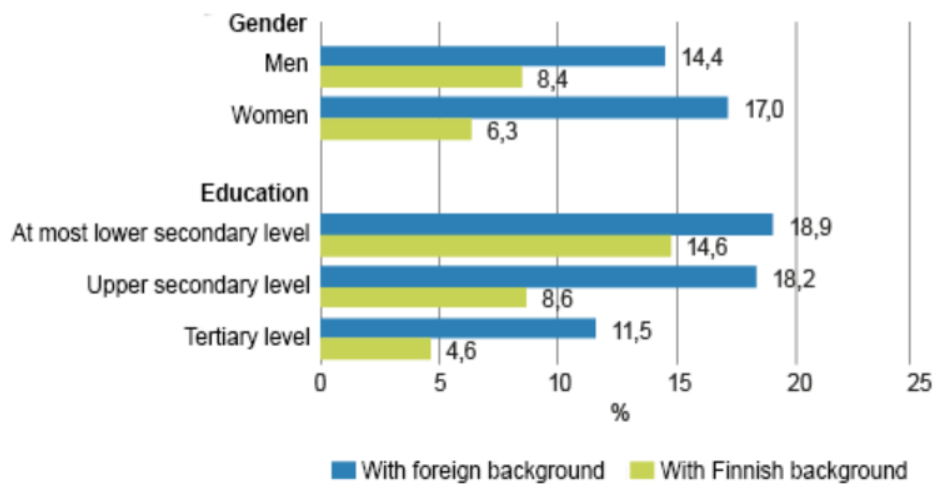


Figure 6. Comparison of unemployment rates between individuals of foreign and Finnish backgrounds, based on gender and education (UTH Survey, Statistics Finland 2014)

While the 2014 UTH survey provides valuable insights, comparing these findings with more recent data is essential to understanding current trends. According to the latest data from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in Finland (2024), there were 41,510 foreign unemployed jobseekers in May 2024, representing 16% of all unemployed individuals. This marks a 17% increase (6,038 individuals) from the previous year. The share of foreigners among all unemployed jobseekers reached its highest level in the survey's history, attributed to the growing number of foreign residents in Finland. As of Q1 2024, the employment rate for Finnish citizens is 74.4%, while it is 60.6% for foreigners. The unemployment rate stands at 7.2% for Finns, compared to 17.8% for foreign nationals. This highlights a persistent gap, with Finnish citizens having an employment rate 13.8 percentage points higher and an unemployment rate 10.6 percentage points lower than foreigners. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Finland 2024, 2-3).

The comparison of employment data for foreign nationals from 2014 to Q1 2024 reveals ongoing challenges in the labor market. Despite efforts to improve integration, the overall employment situation for immigrants remains difficult, indicating that significant barriers continue to hinder their access to job opportunities in Finland.

### 2.2.2 Language and Cultural Barriers

Across the OECD, host-country language proficiency plays a crucial role in successful integration, especially in Finland, where it is essential for social interaction and employment. Limited language skills can create a negative cycle, making it harder to build networks and secure jobs, which are

key avenues for improving language proficiency. (OECD 2017, 10). Despite the language training services offered as part of Finland's integration programs (see Section 2.1.4.), many immigrants still face significant challenges in mastering the Finnish language, hindering both social and professional integration. According to Ahmad (2005, 11), limited proficiency in Finnish is often cited as a key factor behind immigrants' poor performance in the labor market. This challenge is reflected in statistics, as in 2014, 40% of non-employed individuals aged 20 to 64 with a foreign background living permanently in Finland identified their lack of Finnish or Swedish language skills as the primary barrier to employment, while only 6% cited their foreign background, religion, or social status as the main obstacle to finding work. (Statistics Finland 2014).

The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (2024) states that almost half of the population with a foreign background in Finland views the lack of language skills as a significant barrier to employment. Prejudices and discrimination are often subtly embedded within language requirements. Furthermore, over 75% of companies are unwilling to hire immigrants who are not fluent in Finnish. Similarly, in a study by Heikkilä and Peltonen (2002, 5), Russians identified a lack of language skills as the primary barrier to employment. Of the respondents, 39% expressed a need for additional language training, while 24.7% sought further professional development in their field. The study also highlights that employment authorities stress that although immigrants are often hired for their professional expertise, recruitment is made easier when candidates possess strong language skills and an understanding of cultural factors. Even in companies where English is the official language, higher management may hesitate to hire individuals who do not speak Finnish due to concerns about complicating team communication and increasing the workload for other employees, who would need to accommodate the language needs of the new hire (Shumilova, Cai, & Pekkola 2012, 80).

In addition to formal hiring preferences, self-managed teams also present challenges for immigrants. These teams tend to recruit people similar to themselves, which can exclude immigrants due to language barriers and cultural differences (Ahmad 2005, 15). Employers noted that it is often challenging for individuals from other countries, particularly those from Asian backgrounds, to adapt to the Finnish work culture, which is characterized by straightforward communication, a flat hierarchy, and a lower degree of supervision (Shumilova et al., 65). This reinforces how both language and cultural challenges create barriers to full participation in the workplace.

Overall, the language and cultural barriers play a critical role in immigrants' ability to integrate into Finnish society. Finnish proficiency is essential, not only for accessing employment opportunities but also for social adaptation. Limited language skills are often seen not just as a barrier to finding a job, but also as a reason why immigrants may not interact with the local people. (Ahmad 2005,

12). Nshom et al. (2022, 35) report that immigrants' difficulty in learning the language hinders both their social adaptation and professional advancement. Language is seen as a crucial factor in the adaptation process; without Finnish proficiency, cultural integration becomes especially difficult. Additionally, cultural differences, such as varying communication styles and workplace expectations, further complicate immigrants' integration efforts. The language barrier significantly impacts job opportunities, as Finnish-speaking individuals are often preferred, leading to missed employment prospects and contributing to feelings of discrimination. Thus, both language and cultural barriers are closely linked to social and workplace challenges for immigrants.

### **2.2.3 Discrimination**

Discrimination in hiring can manifest in two main forms, as outlined by the OECD (2017, 16). The first, statistical discrimination, occurs when employers avoid hiring due to a lack of information about a candidate's qualifications. The second, taste-based discrimination, involves a preference for candidates from certain backgrounds. Even employers without inherent biases might limit hiring immigrants to cater to customers who prefer not to interact with foreign workers. Additionally, stereotypes held by career advisers or caseworkers from employment offices (TE) can influence immigrants' education and career paths, steering them into roles already dominated by foreign-born workers. Data indicates that discrimination is more common in lower-level positions, with those in managerial roles experiencing relatively less inequality. This observation is supported by Sutela & Lehto (2014), as referenced by OECD (2017, 16), who found that native-born white-collar workers perceive greater equality among immigrant colleagues compared to those in blue-collar roles.

A study by Nshom et al. (2022, 35) highlights that many immigrants feel job opportunities are determined by the discretion of Finnish employers, leading to a sense of exclusion and lack of recognition for their qualifications and skills. Although only 11% of foreign-born individuals in Finland report experiencing discrimination, one of the lowest rates in the OECD, field experiments reveal that discrimination in recruitment still exists. For example, research by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy (2012), as cited by OECD (2017, 16), found that job applicants with Russian names needed to submit twice as many applications as those with Finnish-sounding names to secure an interview, despite having similar qualifications. This indicates that while Finland has a strong legal framework against discrimination, subtle forms of bias continue to affect immigrants.

Similarly, Ahmad (2020) empirically tested the likelihood of receiving a job interview offer among job seekers from various immigrant groups, all of whom had identical qualifications but differed only by name. The results revealed widespread discrimination in Finland's labor market, with a significant statistical relationship ( $p=0.000$ ) between the applicant's name and the chances of being invited for an interview, which means there is an extremely low probability that the results occurred

by chance. The study showed that applicants with Finnish names were 1.45 to 3.94 times more likely to be invited than those with immigrant names. Furthermore, candidates with non-European names, particularly male Iraqi and Somali applicants, faced greater difficulties than those with European names. Discrimination was most prevalent in the retail trade and restaurant sectors, but there was no significant difference based on job skill level or customer contact roles. (Ahmad 2020, 13).

For employment authorities, prejudices among employers are a significant barrier to hiring immigrants. Negative attitudes towards foreigners often lead to worsened working conditions. These prejudices are typically driven by fears, language difficulties, and unfamiliar customs, rather than by factors such as religion, skin color, or the need for supervision. (Heikkilä & Peltonen 2002, 6).

Many immigrants experience frustration over a perceived lack of recognition and equality despite their qualifications and efforts. Instances of being treated as second-class residents are commonly reported, particularly in job recruitment and housing applications. Discrimination often reflects biases based on appearance and background, reflecting broader negative attitudes from some segments of the host society. (Nshom et al. 2022, 35-36). These ongoing challenges underscore the difficulties immigrants face in achieving fair treatment and equal opportunities, as biases and stereotypes continue to shape their experiences in both the labor market and everyday life.

#### **2.2.4 Social Networking**

Social networking plays a crucial role in immigrants' economic and social success in destination countries. It accelerates their integration process and helps them effectively use their expertise. Beyond employment, social networking allows immigrants to form social circles, showcase their skills and interests, and learn the cultural and social norms of the host country. (Hillgren, Peltola, Yilmaz, Jinia, & Koivula 2021, 11). One of the significant challenges that immigrants face when starting a new life in a different society is building a network and accessing crucial information about the labor market. Many job opportunities, particularly in the private sector, are not widely advertised, making it difficult for immigrants to find employment. Therefore, establishing local connections becomes essential for learning about these hidden job opportunities.

According to YLE News (2019), Anne Badan, The Shortcut's Swiss-born founder and CEO, highlighted the significant challenges faced by international students and skilled migrants in accessing job opportunities and pursuing entrepreneurship. Badan emphasized that these groups often lack the same opportunities as locals due to not being born in the country, not having established networks, or lacking alumni connections. She pointed out that 85% of jobs are not advertised, and hir-

ing often occurs within existing networks, which means individuals outside these networks frequently struggle to be considered or gain access to opportunities (YLE News, 2019). Employers often use recommendations and informal networks to hire workers, especially for temporary jobs, as it is quicker and cheaper. (Ahmad 2005, 15).

Moreover, Alho (2020, 6) emphasizes the significance of social ties in job searches, drawing on Granovetter's (1973, 1995) research, which differentiates between strong and weak ties. While strong ties - such as close relationships with family and friends - are important, it is weak ties, or more casual connections, that more often provide new and valuable information about job opportunities. This is particularly relevant in modern labor markets like Finland's, where many positions are filled through informal channels rather than public advertisements. Shumilova et al.'s (2012, 37) findings support this view, noting that personal recommendations from academic staff helped some international graduates secure employment. However, it was also noted that building such networks in today's fast-paced world can be challenging and time-consuming, reinforcing the essential role of weak ties in job searching.

Additionally, Hillgren et al. (2021, 17) highlight that cultural barriers can impede effective networking for immigrants. Differences in communication styles and social behaviors, such as varying degrees of shyness or extroversion, often create challenges. Immigrants may struggle to connect and build networks due to these differences, as networking requires mutual understanding and interaction. Moreover, cultural differences influence personal and professional behavior, further complicating communication and networking efforts. This supports the findings of Nshom et al. (2022), which accentuate concerns about Finnish attitudes toward immigrants. Perceptions of unwelcomeness and the challenges of integrating into Finnish society are evident, with Finnish nationals often viewed as reserved and less social, complicating the integration process for newcomers. The idea of Finnish society being "closed" and "conservative" is prevalent, with the term "closed doors" used to illustrate the sense of unwelcomeness. Limited opportunities for integration hinder immigrants' adaptation and adjustment, affecting their ability to fully integrate into their new society (Nshom et al. 2022, 36).

### **2.3 Social Capital Theory**

A key aspect of addressing immigrants' career integration challenges lies in understanding how social connections can facilitate access to opportunities. Building networks and forming relationships can help immigrants overcome barriers such as limited job visibility and lack of local contacts. This is where Social Capital Theory becomes relevant, as it explores the role of social networks in career development and integration, providing a framework for addressing these challenges.

According to Coleman (1988), social capital refers to the various social structures and relationships that facilitate actions among individuals or groups. It is productive, enabling the achievement of goals that would be impossible without these connections. Unlike physical or human capital, social capital exists within the relationships between actors rather than within the individuals themselves. While it can be beneficial for certain activities, it may be less effective or even counterproductive in others. (Coleman 1998, S98). In this context, the focus is on social capital as a resource for immigrants navigating career integration.

The theory of social capital emphasizes the resources found within an individual's social network and how access to these resources enhances their actions. These resources are valuable goods, typically linked to wealth, reputation, and power, which support an individual's self-interest and survival. The theory examines actions aimed at either maintaining or acquiring these valued resources. (Lin 2001, 55). Lin identifies four main reasons why resources embedded in social networks enhance outcomes, as shown in Table 2, collectively explaining how social capital helps individuals achieve practical and expressive goals beyond personal capabilities (Lin 2001, 19-20).

Table 2. Key functions of Social Capital in enhancing outcomes (adapted from Lin 2001, 19-20)

Function	Description
<b>Information Flow</b>	Social ties facilitate access to opportunities that may not be readily known
<b>Influence on Decision-Makers</b>	Connections can sway recruiters and enhance chances of hiring or promotion
<b>Certification of Social Credentials</b>	Social connections serve as endorsements of an individual's value to organizations
<b>Reinforcement of Identity and Recognition</b>	Relationships provide emotional support and public acknowledgment, essential for mental health and resource access

Social capital is closely linked to the integration of immigrants, as it enhances their ability to participate in various aspects of society. According to Pehkonen (2005, 116), social capital involves trust, social networks, and participation, which foster social interaction and facilitate the flow of information. These elements are vital for both individual and community well-being, helping people achieve their goals and enhancing economic development. For immigrants, building social capital

can aid their career integration and broader societal inclusion by providing essential support networks and improving access to opportunities.

Similarly, Wilhelmsson (2015, 176) highlights the increasing emphasis on the personal dimensions of integration, such as societal participation and social interactions, beyond traditional socio-economic concerns. This broader view of integration involves not just the relationship between the state and individual migrants but also partnerships with civil society. Civil society actors can play a crucial role in supporting the integration process by addressing the changing needs of a diverse population. Social capital, as measured by social involvement and trust, empowers marginalized groups, providing them with opportunities for greater equality and access to resources in both the political and social domains.

Putnam (2000, 22-23) distinguishes between two types of social capital: bridging and bonding. *Bridging social capital* refers to inclusive social connections that link diverse groups, promoting unity and broader societal cohesion. In contrast, *bonding social capital* is exclusive, reinforcing strong identities within closed groups. While bridging social capital is often seen as more beneficial for fostering connections and inclusivity, bonding social capital can also be valuable by maintaining mutual support and solidarity among group members.

Additionally, while bridging social capital encourages inclusivity and fosters integration, Forsander (2004), as cited by Wilhelmsson (2015, 178), points out that the strong social capital prevalent in the Nordic welfare model can work against migrant inclusion. Forsander suggests that the uniformity of social norms and the close-knit nature of these networks often lead to a sense of in-group loyalty that tends to exclude outsiders, especially those who don't conform to the dominant cultural values. This indicates that Nordic social capital may lean more towards bonding than bridging, which can create barriers for immigrants trying to integrate into the labor market and wider society.

The presence of social networks and social capital within immigrant groups is essential for their ability to welcome newcomers, assist immigrant entrepreneurs, and develop ethnic enclaves (Lee 2009, 740). For example, family reunion migrants, and to a certain degree asylum refugees, are often drawn to their destination due to pre-existing social connections. These connections can significantly enhance their integration into the labor market, offering more support and opportunities compared to resettled refugees who lack such networks. (Tervola 2020, 7).

In Tervola's study (2020) on the labor market integration of various refugee groups, he draws upon a wide range of sociological literature (Portes & Sensenbrenner 1993; Aguilera & Massey 2003; Ahmad 2015) to illustrate how social capital enhances labor market integration for immigrants by

providing valuable connections and information about employment opportunities. Bridging social capital (or weak social ties) - characterized by outward-looking and inter-ethnic connections - can be beneficial for immigrants' employment prospects by helping them access broader job networks and opportunities. This is in contrast to bonding social capital (or strong social ties), which tends to reinforce exclusive identities (Lancee 2010, as cited in Tervola 2020, 7).

This perspective supports earlier literature on weak social ties (see 2.2.4), emphasizing the value of looser, less close-knit connections in providing access to diverse job opportunities. At the same time, strong social ties, such as those formed through close relationships within immigrant families or communities, can facilitate labor market integration by fostering a sense of belonging. For instance, the reunion of family members can benefit both the newly arrived migrant and those who have already settled in the destination country (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015, as cited in Tervola 2020, 7).

In conclusion, Social Capital Theory highlights the importance of social networks in providing immigrants with access to opportunities, aiding their career integration. Both bonding and bridging social capital play roles in this process, with *bonding* helping to maintain support within close-knit communities and *bridging* fostering broader connections that enhance inclusion in wider society. By leveraging these social networks, immigrants can navigate the challenges of integration more effectively, gaining access to valuable resources, information, and opportunities that may otherwise remain out of reach. This underscores the need to foster inclusive networks that support both individual immigrants and the broader community.

### 3 The Role of Mentorship in Career Integration

Bagnoli & Estache (2019, 4) define mentorship as “*an interpersonal relationship of support, exchange, and learning, in which one person (a mentor) invests his or her experience to help another person (the mentee) acquire skills and achieve professional goals, through regular meetings over a certain period of time.*” This definition highlights mentorship as a continuous, structured process focused on skill development and professional growth.

Kram (1983) categorizes mentoring functions into career and psychosocial domains. Career functions include sponsorship, coaching, protection, visibility, and challenging assignments, which help mentees navigate organizational life and prepare for advancement. Psychosocial functions involve role modeling, acceptance, counseling, and friendship, fostering mentees’ personal development, confidence, and effectiveness. (Kram 1983, pp. 613-614). Both functions are particularly critical for immigrants, addressing their needs for professional skills and personal support in adapting to new environments.

In contrast, Bozeman & Feeney (2007) emphasize the inherently informal nature of mentoring, describing it as sustained, informal communication between a mentor - someone with greater relevant knowledge or experience - and a mentee. They argue that mentoring flourishes through natural, informal exchange, with formal mentoring programs sometimes constraining organic relationship-building. Informal mentoring often offers advantages over formal programs, fostering greater career support, satisfaction, and improved career outcomes. In contrast, formal mentoring can lead to mismatches, increased stress, and may overemphasize mentor traits like seniority rather than fostering effective supportive behaviors essential for mentee growth (Bozeman & Feeney 2007, pp. 732-733). Informal mentoring’s organic nature thus creates a more flexible and effective environment for personal and professional development.

Mentoring is an underexplored topic in migration and integration studies, with most research focusing on legal institutions and government practices. While these programs are important, many mentoring initiatives are organized by non-governmental organizations. Understanding these programs provides valuable insights for academic research, practitioners, and public policy. (Jaschke, Löbel, Krieger, Legewie, Kroh, Jacobsen & Schacht 2022, 4087). While mentoring is not a new concept, its application within labor market policies - traditionally the realm of paid professionals - represents an innovative approach to addressing the challenges migrants face in entering the labor market (De Cuyper et al. 2019, 110). This fresh strategy has gained traction as mentoring increasingly becomes a policy tool to support migrant integration. Similarly, Bagnoli & Estache (2019) note that several European countries are implementing various formal and informal mentoring pro-

grams, endorsed by the European Parliament, to assist migrants in finding employment. These initiatives involve activities such as resume writing, interview coaching, psychological support, job search databases, and specialized training. Although mentoring is relatively new in the context of migrant integration, it has a well-established tradition in education and workplace management, having been studied across fields like organizational behavior, education, and social psychology. (Bagnoli & Estache 2019, 2-3).

In a study conducted by Neuwirth & Wahl (2017), the "Mentoring for Migrants" program in Austria was evaluated from the perspectives of the mentees, focusing on various aspects such as career functions, psychosocial functions, satisfaction with the program, quality of training received, and overall effectiveness. Launched in 2008 by the Austrian Economic Chamber (WKO), the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF), and the Public Employment Service Austria (AMS), the program aims to facilitate the integration of skilled migrants into the Austrian labor market by pairing them with experienced Austrian professionals. (Neuwirth & Wahl 2017, 141).

The evaluation results indicated a generally positive experience among participants, who reported enhanced career and psychosocial functions, high satisfaction levels, and effective training. Notably, mentees who felt a subjective similarity with their mentors rated the program more favorably across all categories. The study highlighted some limitations, including the lack of random participant assignment and potential biases in self-reported data. To improve future outcomes, Wahl suggested that the matching process consider subjective similarities and encourage greater interaction between mentors and mentees, as these factors were linked to higher program satisfaction. (Neuwirth & Wahl 2017, 150).

In essence, mentoring serves as a valuable mechanism for sharing knowledge, social connections, and emotional support, facilitating career growth. For immigrants, mentorship is particularly beneficial as it equips them with the guidance and networks necessary to navigate career challenges in a new country. This support not only helps immigrants establish connections and improve job prospects but also enhances their ability to adapt to their professional environment. Ultimately, the positive outcomes of mentoring underscore its critical role in fostering successful integration for migrants in the labor market.

### **3.1 Importance of Mentorship in Career Integration**

#### **3.1.1 Building Networks and Social Capital**

Mentorship plays a crucial role in helping immigrants build professional networks and social connections, which are essential for successful career integration. De Cuyper et al. (2019) highlight that existing active labor market policies primarily prioritize economic capital - such as vocational

training and obtaining additional diplomas or certificates - while cultural, social, and informational capital often receive less attention. Mentoring holds significant potential to enhance these areas, particularly in building informational capital and fostering social networks. It helps develop bridging capital, which refers to connections that unite individuals from diverse social groups and classes. (De Cuyper et al. 2019, 110). Additionally, mentorship can serve as a means for behavioral and personal change by expanding one's supportive network (Jaschke et al. 2022, 4089). The psychosocial functions of mentoring contribute to the personal growth of mentees. Mentors act as role models and help bolster their mentees' self-esteem. Additionally, mentors offer friendly advice on both personal and professional issues. (Neuwirth & Wahl 2017, 142).

Numerous mentoring initiatives specifically focus on enhancing bridging social capital and fostering professional networks. Typically, mentors are an initial link to this professional network, as they are usually established professionals in the mentee's desired field. As a result, mentors are expected to facilitate introductions for their mentees to valuable contacts within their networks. (De Cuyper 2022, 191).

Zhang's study (2023) on pre-employment mentoring programs in Canada emphasizes the role of mentors as critical socialization agents for immigrants before they enter the job market. The research demonstrates that mentors enhance immigrants' job search readiness by providing valuable information about the labor market, specific professions, and organizations. Furthermore, the emotional support offered by mentors is vital for helping immigrants develop confidence in their job search efforts. (Zhang 2023, 162). These mentoring relationships are tailored to the developmental needs of mentees, assisting immigrants, refugees, and international students in securing suitable employment in their new country (Zhang 2023, 39).

Additionally, Gower, Jeemi, Forbes, Kebble, & Dantas (2022) reviewed peer mentoring programs for culturally and linguistically diverse refugee and migrant women, finding that these programs led to increased social support, reduced isolation, and strengthened social networks. Group sessions, in particular, helped create stronger community ties, and the ability to connect via mobile phones fostered continuous communication outside of formal meetings. In some cases, participation in these programs not only improved social connectedness but also elevated participants' social standing within their families and communities. However, challenges such as poor mentor-mentee relationships, competing priorities, and the mobility of refugees seeking employment were noted as factors that contributed to participants dropping out of the program. (Gower et al. 2022, 12).

In summary, mentorship not only assists immigrants in developing valuable social networks but also enhances their job search readiness and confidence, directly contributing to successful career

integration. However, recognizing the challenges within mentoring relationships is essential for optimizing their effectiveness.

### **3.1.2 Enhancing Skills and Career Opportunities**

According to Ragins & Kram (2007, 5), while the definition of mentoring has evolved, a key characteristic that sets it apart from other personal relationships is its focus on developmental growth within a career context. Unlike other work or personal relationships, mentoring specifically emphasizes career development and advancement. The career functions of mentoring involve promoting mentees through coaching, networking, and support. By assigning challenging tasks, mentors help mentees develop essential skills needed for their careers as they achieve these goals. (Neuwirth & Wahl 2017, 142). To secure employment, immigrants need access to labor market information, including job openings and qualifications. Mentors assist by helping them prepare application materials, navigate interview processes, understand cultural differences in roles, and develop job search strategies. (Zhang 2023, 118).

While numerous policies and programs exist to support migrants' labor market integration, they often fall short of addressing the various challenges migrants face, resulting in limited improvements. This highlights the need for policy upgrades and new strategies. One increasingly popular approach is "mentoring-to-work." Although this form of mentoring could also be applied to other target groups, in this context, it refers to pairing an unemployed immigrant (mentee) with a volunteer knowledgeable about the local labor market (mentor) to help the mentee secure employment. (De Cuyper 2022, 184). The primary goal of migrant mentoring-to-work is to help mentees integrate into the labor market. However, the objectives can vary. In some cases, mentoring focuses directly on securing a high-quality job, while in others, it targets intermediate goals like improving job-specific skills, interview techniques, expanding professional networks, or boosting self-confidence. The mentoring process can aim for immediate employment or take smaller, necessary steps toward that goal. (De Cuyper et al. 2019, 115).

Bagnoli & Estache (2019, 7), underscore that while mentoring-to-work is increasingly used for migrant labor market integration, its academic analysis remains in its early stages. However, initial findings offer useful guidance for designing migrant mentoring programs. Studies, such as those by Månsson & Delander (2017) and Vandermeerschen & De Cuyper (2018), as cited in Bagnoli & Estache (2019, 7), highlight that while mentoring-to-work provides targeted support and industry-specific knowledge, it cannot replace broader integration efforts. This highlights the limitations of policy designs that overlook the complementary role of job search support mechanisms.

In a study on intercultural mentoring for newcomer immigrants in Canada by Reeves (2017), mentors acknowledged that mentoring offers a well-rounded approach to skill-building, self-awareness, career development, and community integration for immigrants. However, they stressed that networking is a learned skill that varies by location and individual. Mentors emphasized the importance of focusing on helping others rather than self-promotion, a lesson they aim to pass on to their mentees. (Reeves 2017, 196).

## **3.2 Traditional Mentorship Programs for Immigrants**

### **3.2.1 Overview of Traditional Mentorship**

Traditional mentorship programs play a crucial role in supporting immigrant integration by fostering relationships that facilitate knowledge sharing and emotional support. Historically, these programs have been established in educational institutions and organizations, where individuals participate in one-on-one, real-time mentoring sessions (Rowland 2012, 229). This interaction typically unfolds over an extended period, with the mentor - someone possessing more experience, wisdom, or expertise - guiding the less experienced individual (the protégé or mentee) through face-to-face communication. (Bozeman & Feeney 2007, 731).

Colby & Young (2006), as cited in Rowland (2012), describe traditional mentorship as a process connecting the inexperienced with the experienced, allowing the former to gain knowledge, self-confidence, and skills. The authors assert that mentoring within a conventional organizational framework lays the groundwork for and is essential to transitioning to a virtual setting. (Rowland 2012, 229).

In addition, mentees may receive mentoring from various sources, such as senior colleagues (hierarchical mentoring) and peers (lateral mentoring), both inside and outside the workplace. Mentors can come from the home or host country and vary in race, ethnicity, gender, and other characteristics, representing diversified mentoring. These relationships can emerge through formal programs or develop informally. (Zhang 2023, 40).

### **3.2.2 Examples of Traditional Mentorship in Finland**

#### **EntryPoint Mentoring Programme**

The EntryPoint Mentoring Programme is a cross-cultural mentoring initiative designed to connect international talents with Finland-based professionals. The English-language program was previously run by the Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce and is now operated by the City of Espoo under the Espoo Talent Hub. (Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce, s.a.a). The program aims

to facilitate professional growth through one-on-one mentoring relationships, pairing experienced mentors familiar with Finnish work culture with mentees seeking guidance. Participants are required to invest 15 to 20 hours over five months, engaging in four collective meetings and at least four individual mentoring sessions. In addition to these meetings, participants have access to career development sessions and events alongside members of the broader Career Club community. (City of Espoo, s.a.).

EntryPoint mentees are international talents residing in the Capital Region, including job seekers, students, and recent graduates. They seek to deepen their understanding of Finnish work culture, expand their professional networks, and gain clarity on their career paths. Mentees must be fluent in English and are encouraged to actively participate in all program events. EntryPoint mentors are seasoned professionals with a minimum of three years of relevant experience within the Finnish private sector, academia, public sector, or non-profit organizations. Mentors may include retired individuals, entrepreneurs, and those on parental or study leave. They must also be fluent in English and available for both mentoring sessions and collective events. (City of Espoo, s.a.). Figure 7 illustrates the types of participants involved in the EntryPoint Mentoring Programme, highlighting the collaborative nature of the mentor-mentee relationship.

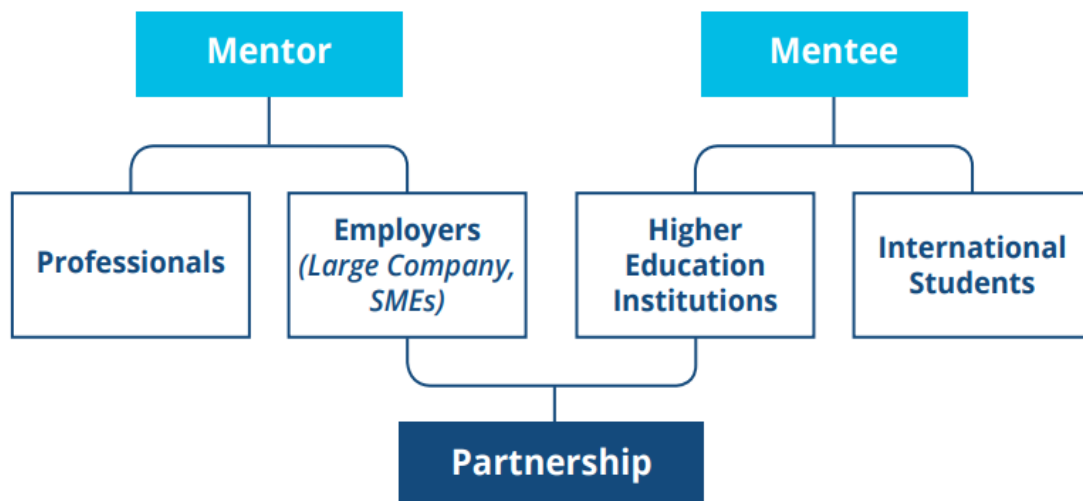


Figure 7. Mentor-Mentee Partnerships in the EntryPoint Mentoring Programme (Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce s.a.b.)

Over the years, EntryPoint has seen significant participation, with 164 participants across three rounds during the Chamber Talent Boost project, which ran from August 2019 to June 2021. Mentors come from various professional backgrounds, ranging from business to academia, and the mentee pool has been expanded to include not only international students but also recent arrivals

in Finland, such as international spouses. Although the primary goal of EntryPoint is not to guarantee employment, over 40% of mentees have successfully secured jobs or internships during or after their participation. Recognizing the needs of mentors as well, the program has facilitated peer mentoring groups to empower mentors and provide them with additional networking opportunities. With a commitment to diversity and inclusion, EntryPoint has successfully engaged over 400 participants since its launch in 2016. (Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce s.a.a).

The program fosters mutual growth and development over its duration. It is one of the few mentoring initiatives in the Capital Region conducted entirely in English and is inclusive of all genders. Mentees report smoother integration into the Finnish job market and increased self-confidence, while mentors often experience expanded networks and personal empowerment through their roles. Notably, around 30-40% of mentors choose to participate in subsequent rounds of the program. By providing a platform for international professionals to connect, share knowledge, and grow, EntryPoint emphasizes the importance of diversity and inclusion in career development. (City of Espoo s.a.)

### **Startup Refugees' Mentoring Program**

Startup Refugees is an award-winning non-profit organization dedicated to supporting refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrants in their journey toward employment, skills development, and entrepreneurship. The organization has developed a fast integration model specifically designed for newcomers, helping them navigate the complexities of the job market and adapt effectively to their new environment. With a robust network of around 5,000 members, including organizations, individuals, businesses, and various stakeholders, Startup Refugees fosters collaboration among those committed to enhancing the inclusion and integration of newcomers. The organization embraces a collaborative spirit, welcoming anyone willing to contribute concretely to the common goal of facilitating fast integration through work and entrepreneurship. (Startup Refugees s.a.).

In recent years, Startup Refugees has launched several mentoring programs aimed at connecting newcomers with local professionals. Research indicates that a lack of networks, combined with limited Finnish language skills, constitutes one of the most common obstacles for immigrants seeking employment. (Startup Refugees s.a.). Since 2018, Startup Refugees has addressed this challenge through well-structured mentoring initiatives developed in collaboration with leading companies, including Tietoevry and Telia Finland. These programs are designed to match newcomers with experienced professionals in their respective fields, providing essential guidance and networking opportunities.

In September 2024, Startup Refugees launched its highly anticipated mentoring program in partnership with Tietoevry and Netlight, to support refugees and other migrants in securing employment within the IT sector. This marks the eighth iteration of the program, which has gained popularity for its effectiveness in facilitating successful career transitions for participants. Notably, 62% of participants from recent years have found employment in their respective fields either during the mentoring program or within six months following its conclusion. This success underscores the program's potential to empower refugees and migrants, many of whom are skilled international professionals but require guidance on navigating the Finnish job market and establishing meaningful professional networks. (Tietoevry 2024).

The 10-week mentoring program fosters one-on-one interactions between mentors and mentees, complemented by group gatherings that allow participants to share experiences and insights. Around 20 professionals are selected to participate, each matched with a personal mentor from Tietoevry or Netlight. The selection process is tailored to align mentors and mentees based on their expertise and professional interests, encompassing a range of fields including ICT, sales, marketing, and administration. Participants come from diverse backgrounds, representing countries such as Ukraine, Turkey, Vietnam, India, and Ethiopia. (Tietoevry 2024).

According to Tietoevry's news room (2024), Arkan Aal-Owayef, Skills Development Manager at Startup Refugees, notes that the program offers tailored support for job searches and networking opportunities. Out of 76 participants, around 60% have successfully gained employment shortly after the program's end. Both Tietoevry and Netlight view their partnership with Startup Refugees as a significant component of their social responsibility initiatives. Katri Junna, CEO of Netlight Consulting, reflects on the fulfilling nature of the program, stating that mentors at Netlight gain invaluable insights while aiding international participants in their job searches, thereby contributing to a fairer workplace and society.

Meanwhile, Jonna Peltola, Communications Director at Tietoevry, emphasizes that their ongoing collaboration with Startup Refugees, which began in 2018, is vital for promoting digital inclusivity in the tech sector. She highlights that their employees are eager to participate as mentors once again to help migrants establish their careers in Finland. Aicha Manai, CEO of Startup Refugees, asserts that the program's success relies heavily on committed partners and motivated clients. She reiterates the organization's goal of fostering an inclusive and diverse workforce in Finland, indicating that mentoring is one of many strategies employed to achieve this mission. (Tietoevry 2024).

### 3.2.3 Benefits and Limitations

According to Johnson & Ridley (2004), traditional mentoring offers several key benefits. Frequent face-to-face interaction strengthens the mentor-mentee bond, leading to a deeper understanding of the mentee's strengths, limitations, and career goals. Accessible and approachable mentors encourage regular engagement, which helps build trust and ensures that mentees feel valued. This ongoing interaction enhances the mentee's personal and professional development and fosters a sense of commitment from the mentor. Additionally, availability is a crucial predictor of success in formal organizational mentoring programs. Research shows that frequent interactions significantly contribute to developing meaningful mentorship relationships, highlighting the importance of exposure and interaction in mentoring. (Johnson & Ridley 2004, 6). This idea is echoed by Bierema & Merriam (2002, 211), who emphasize that ease and frequency of interaction and communication are essential for a rewarding mentoring relationship.

Moreover, mentors focus on a mentee's accomplishments and growth areas within a supportive, non-threatening, and non-judgmental one-on-one relationship (Rowland 2012, 229). Mentorship is a lifelong learning relationship that can extend beyond the mentorship itself. Johnson & Ridley (2004) further emphasize that to gain a meaningful understanding of mentees, mentors must establish a personal relationship with them. This understanding goes beyond merely knowing a mentee's name; it requires knowledge gained through substantial observation, frequent interaction, and deep involvement in the mentee's journey.

Research indicates that the frequency and quality of face-to-face interactions significantly impact mentorship success. Therefore, effective mentors must not only be accessible and available but also demonstrate essential interpersonal skills such as listening, caring, open communication, and providing constructive feedback. Ultimately, taking the time to genuinely know mentees is one of the most important virtues of effective mentorship. (Johnson & Ridley 2004, 8).

Despite the acknowledged benefits of mentorship, many individuals face challenges accessing mentors within their institutions. Limitations in scheduling and office hours can restrict access to mentors. Additionally, a mentor may excel in one area, such as research, while lacking in another, like work-life balance. Consequently, mentees often require multiple mentors to address different career aspects, which can be difficult to secure within a single institution. While local mentors are valuable for navigating specific institutional challenges, options may be limited due to available expertise and capacity. External mentorship can provide access to specialized mentors and a broader understanding of various career paths, enhancing overall career development and satisfaction. (Gottlieb, Fant, King, Messman, Robinson, Carmelli, & Sherbino 2017, 1-2).

These limitations can be particularly significant for immigrant mentees, who may already face additional barriers in their career integration. Access to mentors is crucial for immigrants navigating unfamiliar systems, and the lack of mentorship resources can impede their professional development. Furthermore, the need for multiple mentors to address various aspects of career growth may be challenging for immigrants who are still building their professional networks in a new country.

A study by Bierema & Merriam (2002) highlights the complexities of effective mentoring, emphasizing that certain organizational and personal factors are necessary for success. First, they note that mentoring cannot be imposed; similar to a blind date, simply matching individuals rarely fosters the desired mentoring relationship. Successful mentorship relies on the development of mutual respect, trust, and comfort, which must occur organically. Second, both mentors and mentees need to be dedicated to the relationship, and clear expectations must be established. Additionally, organizations must show commitment to the value of their formal mentoring programs. (Bierema & Merriam 2002, 213).

According to Johnson & Ridley (2004), mentors can hinder their mentees' potential in three significant ways, resulting in suboptimal outcomes for both parties. First, when mentors set expectations too low, they fail to challenge mentees, leading to mediocrity. Although mentors may have good intentions, this lack of challenge primarily benefits only the most self-motivated mentees. Second, mentors who impose high standards without fostering confidence in their mentees can be detrimental. Mentees may feel disheartened when expected to excel without adequate support and resources. Third, setting unrealistic expectations for perfection can be harmful, as it can demoralize even the most capable mentees. Effective mentors should recognize and counter perfectionist tendencies while promoting excellence and celebrating progress toward that goal. (Johnson & Ridley 2004, 10).

### **3.3 Digital Mentorship Initiatives for Immigrants**

#### **3.3.1 Overview of Digital Mentorship**

The digital revolution has torn apart geographical barriers, enabling global connections. Today's learners often turn to online resources for assistance as frequently as they seek help locally. This trend has been recognized by both businesses and academic institutions, resulting in the establishment of online communities for similar-minded learners and web-based platforms designed to connect mentors and mentees who are separated by distance. (Gottlieb, et al. 2017, 2).

Mentorship is a longstanding approach for transferring knowledge and skills from an experienced professional to a newcomer or less experienced individual in a particular field. This practice has proven effective in education for many years. With the rise of online learning, mentorship has also

transitioned into the digital realm, commonly referred to as e-mentoring, cyber-mentoring, or virtual mentoring. (Akin & Hilbun 2007). Utilizing email, online chats, and conferencing tools, these electronic methods can serve as essential resources in achieving this objective. However, e-mentoring is still relatively new and remains under-researched (Headlam-Wells, 2004, as cited in Rowland 2012, 230). For this thesis, this form of mentoring will be termed digital mentorship.

Bierema & Merriam (2002, 214) describe digital mentorship as a mutually beneficial relationship between a mentor and a mentee facilitated through technology. This relationship encompasses learning, advising, encouragement, promotion, and modeling, and is characterized by being boundaryless and egalitarian, differing significantly from traditional face-to-face mentoring. The authors further explain that the boundaryless nature of digital mentorship allows for connections that transcend conventional limits of time, geography, and culture. This flexibility enables mentors and mentees to engage in relationships that may not be feasible under traditional models, fostering a diverse range of interactions tailored to individual contexts. By utilizing technology, digital mentorship can adapt to various needs, making it accessible to a broader audience.

Additionally, the authors highlight the egalitarian quality of digital mentorship, which helps dismantle barriers related to race, gender, age, and organizational hierarchy. This approach creates a safe environment for participants to build relationships based on mutual respect and collaboration rather than the power dynamics typically found in traditional mentoring. As a result, digital mentoring fosters more open and equitable exchanges, enriching the learning experience for both mentors and mentees. (Bierema & Merriam 2002, 219-220). Single & Muller (2001, 108) further emphasize that this relationship aims to enhance the mentee's skills, knowledge, confidence, and cultural understanding to foster their success, while also contributing to the mentor's development.

Digital mentorship programs strive to foster a more equitable environment by addressing the limitations of informal mentoring relationships, which are often not equally accessible across different demographic groups. Such programs provide structured mentoring opportunities for individuals who may otherwise lack connections to essential informal networks, thus supporting greater inclusivity and fairness in career development. (Single & Single 2005, 302).

According to Rowland (2012), technology is central to digital mentorship, significantly enhancing connections between mentors and mentees. Digital platforms enable several critical mentoring functions, such as vocational guidance, psychosocial support, and role modeling. In terms of vocational support, digital mentorship allows mentors and mentees to engage in electronic discussions where they can share guidance, feedback, and instruction. From a psychosocial perspective, online conversations enable participants to discuss personal and professional topics that foster mutual growth. Additionally, digital platforms facilitate role modeling, where mentors can publicly

acknowledge mentees' achievements on blogs or newsletters, showcasing accomplishments to a broader audience. (Rowland 2012, 231-232). Key factors for successful digital mentorship programs include trust, self-motivation, flexibility, communication skills, and technological proficiency. (Rowland 2012, 229).

### **3.3.2 Examples of Digital Mentorship in Finland**

#### **Womento Mentoring**

The Womento Mentoring program, run by the Family Federation of Finland, connects highly educated immigrant women with professionals in their fields (Family Federation of Finland s.a). These women often struggle to secure jobs that match their qualifications due to the specialized nature of high-education sectors, which typically require fluency in Finnish and confidence in their abilities. Without networks or references, demonstrating their competence can be challenging. Womento aims to strengthen professional and social networks between immigrant and Finnish women, thereby enhancing society's ability to integrate foreign-born women into Finnish working life and promoting broader social inclusion. (Heikkilä s.a.).

Conducted remotely via Teams, the program is designed to help mentees improve their professional skills, language proficiency, and understanding of Finnish work culture. Additionally, it promotes greater inclusivity in the labor market by improving receptiveness to migrant professionals. Mentoring is conducted in Finnish. Mentees and mentors engage in monthly meetings over an 8-month period, which includes mentor coaching, group sessions, and mentor-mentee meetings. The program is offered twice a year, in March and October, and is free of charge. The initiative promotes social inclusion and professional growth, encouraging participants to enhance their job prospects in Finland. (Family Federation of Finland s.a.).

To apply as a mentee, candidates must be educated women who have moved to Finland, possess sufficient Finnish language skills for communication, and seek employment in their field. Mentees commit to the 8-month process, receiving personalized mentoring, job search tips, and language support. Mentors, who must be professionals in their fields, share their experiences, provide career advice, and gain insights into the experiences of international professionals and Finnish work culture. (Family Federation of Finland s.a.).

The Womento program focuses on creating a sustainable mentoring model for immigrant women across Finland, emphasizing professional relationships, peer support, and training opportunities. By 2014, around 200 women, both immigrants and Finnish mentors, had participated. The mentor-

ing process is carefully monitored and documented, allowing for continuous development and potential growth. Immigrant women receive career guidance, while Finnish mentors gain insights into diverse working cultures. (Heikkilä s.a.).

The program addresses the challenges of finding work matching one's education, especially in expert fields requiring strong Finnish language skills. From 2017 to 2019, 36% of participants secured jobs in their fields, while 72% found employment, internships, or further education opportunities. Womento promotes social inclusion, language skills, and labor market integration, helping foreign professionals become part of Finnish working life. (Family Federation of Finland, s.a.).

### **FIKA Mentoring Programme**

The FIKA Mentoring Programme, organized by Luckan Integration, serves as a crucial link between immigrants and established members of Finnish society. This free program emphasizes one-on-one mentoring to foster meaningful connections, helping participants share experiences and navigate their integration. While primarily focused on face-to-face meetings, it also offers digital and hybrid options, allowing participants to choose the mode of engagement that suits them best. (Luckan Integration 2024). This flexibility enhances accessibility for both mentors and mentees, making connections easier regardless of location

The FIKA Mentoring Programme connects immigrants with experienced mentors in Finland to assist with their integration process. The mentorship is based on mutual sharing and collaboration, where mentors provide valuable guidance on navigating various aspects of life in Finland. For six months, mentor-mentee pairs meet three times per month. Each session is personalized to address the specific needs, challenges, and goals of the mentees, ensuring a tailored and supportive experience that enhances their integration journey. (Luckan Integration 2024).

The FIKA Mentoring Programme is designed for immigrants who have relocated to Finland and currently reside in the Capital Region. The program pairs these newcomers with established mentors from the same area. To ensure a successful match, both mentors and mentees must meet specific criteria. Mentors should be well-established in Finland and have an open mindset to connect with newcomers effectively. On the other hand, mentees, must hold a residence permit and show a genuine willingness to participate in the mentoring process actively. (Luckan Integration 2024).

The process of the FIKA Mentoring Programme is structured to facilitate effective mentoring relationships. It includes several key steps, such as application submission, interviews, and matching, leading to the actual mentoring sessions and concluding meetings. Table 3 demonstrates the detailed steps involved in this process.

Table 3. FIKA Mentoring Programme Process (adapted from Luckan\_Integration 2024)

Step	Direction
<b>Application</b>	Mentees can apply during two annual intakes, in August and January, while mentors are welcome to apply at any time.
<b>Interviews</b>	A coordinator conducts interviews with both mentees and mentors to gather relevant information and clarify expectations.
<b>Matching</b>	The coordinator carefully pairs mentors and mentees, considering individual preferences and compatibility for quality matches.
<b>Mentoring</b>	The mentorship officially begins with an introductory event, followed by six months of regular meetings between the mentor pairs.

According to a report by The Centre of Expertise in Immigrant Integration Finland (2016, 1), the FIKA Mentoring Programme was highlighted as a good practice model supporting the initial phase of integration and participation. The program's core purpose is to help immigrants build new social networks, which are critical for both integration and well-being. This is particularly important for those in the early stages of their integration, who often have limited social connections. The central idea behind the FIKA mentoring program is to enable two-way integration between the immigrant population and the majority population through personal contact. It has been recognized as a cost-effective method for promoting integration, although the activities must be carefully coordinated. Mentors, who are well-acquainted with Finnish society, are paired with mentees to foster mutual learning, with many mentees reporting improved language skills and increased participation in society.

A survey conducted by Luckan revealed that 89% of mentees felt the program helped them integrate into Finnish society, while 92% of mentors indicated a willingness to participate again. As a result of the program, new friendships have been formed, some mentees have found employment, and even new businesses have been established. (The Centre of Expertise in Immigrant Integration Finland 2016, 2). However, the report also identified several challenges in the implementation of the mentorship program. One of the main issues noted was the difficulty in successfully matching mentors and mentees. When pairs are not well-matched - whether due to differing expectations or incompatible personalities - the mentoring relationship may break down, leading to infrequent or ineffective meetings. Thorough interviews before the matching process can reduce this risk but do

not eliminate it entirely. Another challenge highlighted in the report is the unrealistic expectations some mentees may have. For instance, while mentorship can support integration, it cannot guarantee outcomes like finding a job. Therefore, participants must be given clear information at the start about what they can realistically expect from the program and its limitations. (The Centre of Expertise in Immigrant Integration Finland 2016, 2).

### **3.3.3 Benefits and Limitations**

While many individuals find traditional mentoring programs the most rewarding, logistical barriers often hinder these relationships, prompting the need for alternatives such as digital mentoring (Rowland 2012, 230). Digital mentorship is revolutionizing the mentoring landscape by leveraging information technology to overcome the limitations of face-to-face interactions. It allows mentors and mentees to connect regardless of time and geographic constraints, increasing flexibility, openness, and reflection (Akin & Hilbun 2007) through electronic communications like email, websites, and discussion lists (Single & Muller 2001, 107). This format reduces status differences, making communication more accessible, and provides scalability, enabling a small mentoring staff to support many participants (Single & Muller 2001, 107-108).

Moreover, Single & Single (2005) identify several benefits of digital mentorship over traditional face-to-face mentorship. It diminishes status differences and removes the negative perception often associated with joining support programs aimed at improvement. Additionally, digital mentorship allows for matching with mentors beyond geographical and established network limitations, providing broader access to diverse perspectives. The elimination of travel time enhances efficiency, allowing mentors and mentees to connect without scheduling conflicts. These factors contribute to trust and openness in relationships, facilitating the informational, psychosocial, and instrumental benefits of mentorship. (Single & Single 2005, 307). Furthermore, digital mentorship fosters group learning and connections between different organizations, promoting impartial relationships and reducing biases related to gender and ethnicity that may arise in traditional mentoring (Rowland 2012, 233).

Despite its benefits, digital mentorship presents significant challenges that have been noted by multiple researchers. One of the primary issues is the lack of physical proximity between the mentor and mentee, which can hinder communication and access. This is especially problematic when individuals are separated by time zones and geographical distances, making it harder to maintain regular contact compared to traditional mentoring relationships. (Rowland 2012, 234; Bierema & Merriam 2002, 221; Gottlieb et al. 2017, 5). The absence of face-to-face interaction also complicates the establishment of trust and strong interpersonal connections, which are crucial for successful mentorship relationships (Rowland 2012, 234; Bierema & Merriam 2002, 221).

A recurring concern is the lower level of commitment often observed in digital mentorship relationships. Virtual interactions can be more easily initiated and terminated than face-to-face ones, resulting in less engagement from participants (Bierema & Merriam 2002, 221). Without the physical cues present in face-to-face interactions, it is easier for participants to disengage, ignore emails, or fail to maintain the mentoring relationship (Single & Single 2005, 306). This lack of commitment leads to poor-quality mentoring relationships, aggravated by perceived competition or conflicts of interest, including the misuse of project ideas (Gottlieb et al. 2017, 5).

Technological barriers also play a significant role. Reliable access to computer technology, high-speed internet, and computer literacy are crucial for participation in digital mentorship. While public access has improved, maintaining personal devices and reliable bandwidth remains a challenge for some, especially in organizations that find technology upgrades costly. (Rowland 2012, 234; Bierema & Merriam 2002, 221). Furthermore, digital mentorship is not a cost-effective alternative to traditional face-to-face mentoring, as it requires substantial investments in website development, program software, and IT infrastructure (Single & Single 2005, 305).

To address the challenges related to trust and communication, Rowland (2012, 235) hints at the potential for combining online interactions with initial face-to-face meetings, which could help in building trust and fostering better communication. However, the study does not provide a specific recommendation, suggesting that this combination warrants further research. Similarly, a study by Single & Single (2005) highlights that while digital mentorship is gaining interest, it is not a universal solution. The authors reference several researchers (National Mentoring Center 2002; O'Neill et al. 1996; Muller 1997), who emphasize that digital mentorship should only be considered when face-to-face mentoring is unavailable, impractical, or inappropriate. These researchers suggest that digital mentorship is a practical alternative in situations where traditional mentorship is not feasible or where electronic communication offers the most effective connection. Rather than replacing in-person mentoring, digital mentoring is seen as a way to provide mentoring opportunities that might otherwise be inaccessible. (Single & Single 2005, 305).

Overall, while digital mentorship can offer flexibility and broaden the potential pool of mentors, it requires careful attention to technology access, communication dynamics, and the quality of relationships to succeed.

### **3.4 AI in Career Integration Tools**

In 1955, computer scientist John McCarthy introduced the concept of "artificial intelligence" (AI), suggesting that all facets of learning could be described with such precision that machines could

imitate those processes (Accenture 2022, 3). Today, AI is recognized as a collection of interconnected technologies that combine computational methods and techniques to address challenges that typically require human cognitive abilities (Walsh et al. 2019, 2).

There is a growing demand for the delivery and development of career guidance services, leading to expanded applications and broader scopes. Career guidance is provided by various stakeholders in the educational system, labor market, and social and health sectors. As the need for guidance intensifies, it becomes essential for these entities to leverage digital services to conserve resources and enhance effectiveness. Additionally, smart technologies can assist both guidance practitioners and lifelong learners. (Westman, Kauttonen, Klemetti, Korhonen, Manninen, Mononen, Niittymäki, & Paananen 2021, 45).

AI is one such technology that can significantly enhance career guidance services. It can offer personalized career coaching, improve job-matching processes (Telpizov 2024), and facilitate skill development and networking opportunities (Sahota 2024) tailored to individual needs. This integration of AI not only streamlines the guidance process but also empowers users to make informed decisions about their career paths.

### **3.4.1 AI in Career Integration**

The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the transition of many aspects of life online, leading to a greater reliance on information and communication technologies (ICT) and artificial intelligence (AI), which has significant implications for both career development and the workplace (Wilson, Robertson, Cruickshank & Gkatzia 2022, 48). Walsh et al. (2019, 20) highlight that AI is currently utilized in various fields and is set to become the foundational technology enabling devices to operate, communicate, and analyze data. As AI continues to evolve, its applications will grow in complexity, significantly influencing our lives, workplaces, industries, and interpersonal interactions.

In recent years, discussions around AI have increasingly focused on its impact on careers, vocational sectors, future labor markets, and the skills needed to thrive in them. Additionally, AI is expected to introduce innovative approaches to learning and teaching, reshaping how education and professional development are delivered. (Westman et al. 2021, 47). This connection is significant, as AI's diverse applications can influence career trajectories in various ways. For instance, AI offers personalized career guidance and recommends optimal career transitions, directly affecting individuals' educational and professional choices. Moreover, its integration into organizations reshapes job roles and skill requirements, potentially transforming career pathways. (Bankins, Jooss, Restubog, Marrone, Ocampo, & Shoss 2024, 2).

Building upon these impacts, artificial intelligence also plays a pivotal role in enhancing career integration by offering tailored solutions to the unique challenges faced by immigrants in the labor market. In a Forbes article by Sahota (2024), the author outlines how artificial intelligence significantly enhances career development. AI facilitates personalized learning and skill development by tailoring education to meet individual needs. It also improves recruitment processes by matching job seekers with relevant opportunities based on their skills and experiences. Additionally, AI fosters networking opportunities by connecting professionals with mentors and industry leaders. Furthermore, AI analyzes job roles to identify skill gaps, guiding individuals toward essential training to enhance their employability in the labor market.

Telpizov (2024) states several AI-powered tools can further enhance job seekers' prospects. AI-driven résumé critique platforms provide personalized feedback to optimize applications for applicant tracking systems. Additionally, résumé writing tools guide users in crafting tailored résumés based on job descriptions, and job interview coaching tools simulate interview scenarios and provide feedback on performance aspects such as speech and body language.

Another essential application of AI in career development is its role in career coaching. AI-powered career coaching platforms provide personalized guidance and support for job seekers by analyzing individual career paths, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and suggesting targeted actions to achieve professional goals (Telpizov (2024). As companies implement AI-based career advice tools, many employees are drawn to these solutions, which offer guidance without the potential shame and judgment from managers or human coaches (McGregor 2024; Wilson et al. 2022, 49). By democratizing access to career development resources, these AI platforms ensure that a broader audience can benefit from tailored coaching, regardless of their background or experience.

### **3.4.2 AI Applications in Digital Mentorship**

Mentorship plays a vital role in career development by offering skill enhancement, networking opportunities, confidence building, career advice, and guidance on work-life balance. However, traditional mentorship programs often face challenges such as limited mentor accessibility, time constraints, mismatches, geographical barriers, lack of personalization, and scalability issues (see 3.2.3). Technology aims to simplify tasks, reduce costs, and improve activities by enhancing accuracy and effectiveness or adding functionality. Recent technological advancements in mentorship can be categorized into two areas: those addressing time and space (e.g., email and online meeting platforms) and those enhancing human faculties, particularly the emerging capabilities of artificial intelligence (Clutterbuck 2020, 19).

Rhodes (2024) highlights that AI enhances mentorship through personalized learning by analyzing individual learning styles, academic history, strengths, and weaknesses to create tailored learning plans. It streamlines communication using AI chatbots for scheduling and routine queries, offering 24/7 support. AI provides data-driven insights by identifying trends and patterns that inform the most effective mentoring strategies and promoting ongoing enhancement of the mentoring program. It aids skill development for both mentees and mentors with interactive programs and training scenarios. AI improves scalability, allowing mentors to manage more mentees effectively. Lastly, AI offers career guidance by analyzing job market trends to provide personalized career advice.

Furthermore, AI is transforming mentorship by enabling data-driven matching processes that consider factors such as skills, career goals, and communication styles. Unlike traditional methods, AI uses algorithms for precise mentor-mentee pairing and provides continuous assessment for real-time feedback. It also creates personalized mentorship plans with tailored milestones, learning resources, and networking opportunities. (HR Future s.a.).

Bagai & Mane (2023, 110) explore the innovative potential of MentorAI, an AI-driven mentorship platform designed as a conceptual model for professional growth. This platform utilizes advanced artificial intelligence technologies to deliver personalized guidance and support, effectively addressing the challenges associated with traditional mentorship programs. By employing AI, machine learning, and natural language processing, MentorAI customizes mentorship experiences to meet each user's specific needs and goals.

The platform offers 24/7 accessibility, allowing professionals to receive real-time advice and support through their preferred communication channels, at their convenience. Furthermore, MentorAI's AI-centric approach enables it to scale efficiently across large organizations, providing mentorship assistance to numerous individuals without straining available resources. It also tracks user progress and generates quantifiable metrics, offering valuable insights into the effectiveness of the mentorship experience. By leveraging these cutting-edge technologies, MentorAI presents an appealing alternative to conventional mentorship programs, enhancing the overall impact of career development initiatives. (Bagai & Mane 2023, 110).

The authors highlight the potential benefits of AI mentorship platforms to significantly impact career advancement, skill development, and work-life balance. Notable advantages include boosted ca-

reer growth, enhanced skill development, improved work-life balance, increased employee satisfaction, greater employee engagement, and higher employee retention. Table 4 describes these advantages in detail.

Table 4. Advantages of AI-Powered Mentorship Platforms (adapted from Bagai & Mane 2023, 111)

Advantage	Description
<b>Boosted Career Growth</b>	Tailored guidance and suggestions can help achieve career objectives effectively, facilitating faster career advancement and informed decision-making.
<b>Enhanced Skill Development</b>	AI mentorship can identify skill gaps and recommend resources, offering targeted advice that evolves alongside the user's skill set.
<b>Improved Work-Life Balance</b>	Personalized advice on stress management and priority-setting can help navigate career challenges while maintaining well-being.
<b>Increased Employee Satisfaction</b>	Customized mentorship experiences that address individual needs can significantly enhance employee satisfaction, leading to greater contentment and engagement.
<b>Greater Employee Engagement</b>	By providing context-aware support, AI mentorship can foster a sense of connection and belonging, encouraging professionals to invest in their growth.
<b>Higher Employee Retention</b>	Support for professional development and a healthy work-life balance encourages employees to stay committed to their organizations. An AI-driven mentorship platform can enhance retention by addressing individual needs and fostering a supportive work environment.

### 3.4.3 AI Limitations and Ethical Considerations

The shift toward digital mentorship signals a transformative change in how guidance and support are provided, with AI taking on a more prominent role. As technology continues to advance, AI may evolve from simply assisting mentors to fundamentally altering the mentor-mentee dynamic. This shift brings up important considerations regarding the future of mentorship. Can AI enhance tradi-

tional mentorship models by improving efficiency and personalization, or might it disrupt the human-centered approach that has long been essential to effective mentoring? These are key questions to consider as digital tools continue to shape professional development.

Conversations about AI-powered mentorship must acknowledge the significance of retaining the human aspect, as deep understanding and empathy provided by human mentors cannot be overlooked (Join the Collective 2024). Clutterbuck (2020, 23) argues that AI lacks the life experiences and intuitive skills needed to form connections based on shared values, which are fundamental to building professional relationships. While some individuals may prefer a neutral, non-judgmental environment, the personal connections fostered by human mentors remain invaluable. Although AI can provide valuable insights and suggestions, it is crucial to supplement them with human judgment and intuition. Career choices should be informed by AI data but ultimately shaped by individual goals and values. (Sahota 2024).

Moreover, AI often lacks the nuance needed to assess soft skills, cultural fit, and unique qualifications like cross-industry experience and creative problem-solving. These subtle but crucial factors can lead to mismatches if not properly evaluated. The impersonal nature of AI-driven interactions may also result in a less personalized mentorship experience. Therefore, human oversight remains vital, especially in areas where AI may fall short, to ensure that mentorship retains its effectiveness and personal touch. (Telpizov 2024).

Another limitation to AI adoption for career purposes is primarily linked to data quality, model design, and the outputs they generate. In a study by Bankins et al. (2024), the authors note that while the accessibility of large datasets has facilitated the use of AI in career guidance, inconsistent data quality poses a significant barrier to its adoption. Variability in data quality can compromise the accuracy of AI models, potentially leading to biased outcomes and reinforcing societal inequalities. Additionally, AI may struggle to capture all relevant indicators for predicting career choices, such as individuals' evolving values and preferences, which can negatively impact the reliability of the advice provided to users. (Bankins et al. 2024, 11). Furthermore, while system designers can shape the factors prioritized in AI outputs, the interaction between system design and training data can yield unexpected results. For AI systems to be trustworthy, they must be able to explain how their outputs are derived. Although AI may simulate human intelligence, its interpretations lack the grounding in reality that human cognition possesses, as it cannot incorporate implicit personal and societal values. (Wilson et al. 2022, 49).

Clutterback (2020) further emphasizes that achieving effective AI integration in mentoring and coaching necessitates substantial time, expertise, and financial resources. Currently, the available resources are quite basic; for instance, coachbots - algorithms designed to mimic the questioning

techniques of human coaches - often come across as inefficient and can easily become confused, making them unlikely substitutes for real mentors. The financial investment required to enhance these systems would be enormous, requiring a comprehensive library of tens of thousands of coaching or mentoring conversations. However, even with such a database, defining what constitutes effective interaction remains a challenge. If AI learns from analyzing a multitude of poor or mediocre conversations, it risks perpetuating these subpar models, leading to ineffective mentoring experiences. (Clutterback 2020, 22-23).

An AI mentorship platform relies on extensive user data to provide personalized guidance and support. Ensuring the data privacy and security of this sensitive information is crucial for maintaining user trust and complying with relevant data protection regulations (Sahota 2004; Telpizov 2024). Organizations must establish strong data privacy and security protocols, which include data encryption, access controls, and secure methods for storage and transmission, to protect user information effectively (Bagai & Mane 2023, 111). Furthermore, algorithmic bias is a significant concern in AI systems. AI algorithms and machine learning models may be vulnerable to bias due to imbalanced training data or faulty algorithms. Often relying on historical data, AI may perpetuate discrimination rather than promote diversity. This algorithmic bias can lead to unfair or discriminatory outcomes for specific user groups, undermining the effectiveness of the mentorship platform and potentially harming users. Therefore, it is crucial to regularly audit the data and models to identify and correct biases. (Telpizov 2024).

Bagai & Mane (2023, 111-112) identify additional key limitations related to the ethical use of AI and the need for transparency. Concerns about AI potentially replacing human mentors may lead to job displacement and reduced interpersonal connections. Additionally, users may worry about the transparency and clarity of AI recommendations. To build trust, organizations must prioritize transparent AI systems that clearly explain their reasoning, allowing users to make informed decisions about their professional development.

As the role of AI in mentorship continues to evolve, it is essential to critically assess its limitations and ethical implications. While AI can enhance mentorship through increased efficiency and data-driven insights, it cannot replace the human qualities that strengthen effective mentoring relationships. Maintaining a balance between AI support and human interaction is vital to ensure that mentorship remains meaningful and personalized. Furthermore, organizations must address concerns related to data privacy, algorithmic bias, and transparency to build trust in AI systems. Ultimately, thoughtful integration of AI into mentorship frameworks can enhance career development while preserving the essential human elements that foster growth and connection.

### 3.5 Theoretical Framework

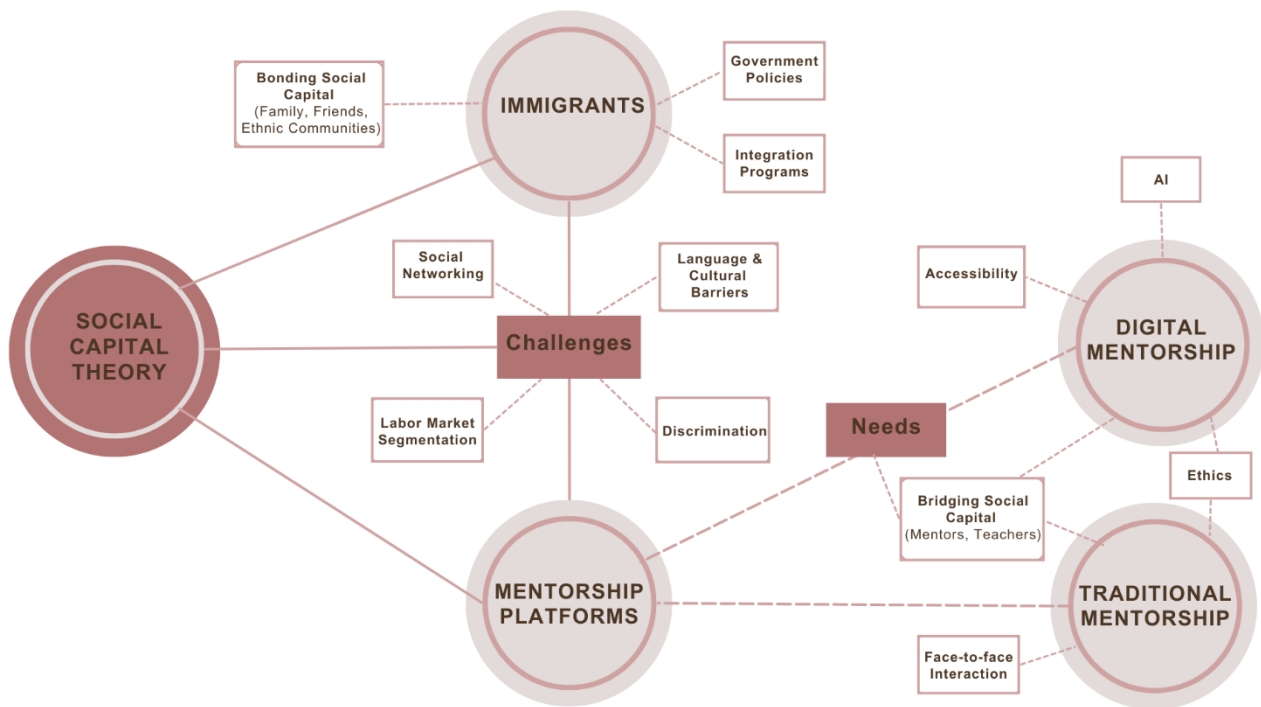


Figure 8. Theoretical framework of the thesis

Figure 8 illustrates the proposed theoretical framework for this thesis. Social Capital Theory serves as the foundational model, highlighting how social networks and relationships play a critical role in facilitating the career integration of immigrants in Finland.

Upon arriving in Finland, immigrants benefit from government policies (see 2.1.3) and integration programs (see 2.1.4), which provide essential structural support to ease their transition. These initiatives aim to create a welcoming environment, helping newcomers navigate the complexities of their new surroundings effectively. Additionally, bonding social capital - comprised of strong ties with family, friends, and ethnic communities - offers emotional and practical support during this adjustment period (see 2.2.4). However, the literature emphasizes that while these close connections are crucial for initial support, they often lack the professional networks and job market information necessary to overcome career-related challenges. Such challenges include labor market segmentation, discrimination, language and cultural barriers, and the need for broader social networking (see 2.2), hindering immigrants' ability to secure meaningful employment.

The framework distinguishes between two forms of social capital. Bonding social capital, also known as strong ties, refers to the close connections immigrants initially have with family, friends, and ethnic communities. In contrast, bridging social capital, or weak ties, includes broader connections, such as mentors and teachers, who provide valuable information and resources for career

development (see 2.3). Bridging social capital is especially important for accessing job opportunities and professional networks that immigrants may not have otherwise. As highlighted by Tervola (2020, 7), these connections can be instrumental in overcoming barriers faced by immigrants in the job market.

Mentorship programs - both traditional and digital - are identified in this framework as key platforms for facilitating the development of bridging social capital. Traditional mentorship programs have proven effective, allowing immigrants to build relationships with established professionals in their fields (see 3.1). However, digital mentorship offers additional benefits by overcoming geographical and logistical barriers, making it easier for immigrants to connect with mentors across distances (see 3.3). AI-driven tools within digital mentorship platforms can further enhance this process by optimizing mentor-mentee matching based on individual needs and experiences. Yet, ethical considerations, such as privacy and fairness, must be addressed to ensure trust in the platform (see 3.4).

Ultimately, Social Capital Theory binds all these elements together, illustrating how both traditional and digital mentorship programs can strengthen the social capital of immigrants. By enhancing connections and networks within the immigrant community and with the broader society, these programs improve immigrants' ability to overcome career-related challenges and achieve successful career integration (see 2.3). Understanding these dynamics will inform the development of targeted strategies that leverage mentorship to empower immigrants as they navigate their career paths in a new cultural landscape. This framework sets the stage for examining whether digital mentorship platforms can effectively address the unique needs of immigrants in Finland by fostering bridging social capital and supporting their career development.

## 4 Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology for the thesis, focusing on the research approach, research process and timeline, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques employed throughout the study. By providing a detailed overview of these methodological components, this chapter aims to establish a clear framework for conducting the research, ensuring that the processes effectively align with the study's objectives and questions.

### 4.1 Research Approach

The research for this thesis adopts a case study approach, which effectively provides an in-depth understanding of the complex challenges immigrants face during their career integration in Finland. A case study involves a thorough investigation of a topic or phenomenon within its real-life context, allowing for valuable insights and rich empirical accounts that contribute to theory development (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill 2023, 206). It helps readers understand concepts by illustrating how ideas and principles connect through real people in real situations (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2007, 253). This approach is particularly suited to exploring the complex dynamics surrounding immigrants' experiences, as it examines their challenges within the actual environment they navigate, thereby offering valuable insights into their career integration process.

While often associated with traditional scientific research, the case study approach can also be applied in development work, particularly when the goal is to generate actionable suggestions and ideas. This method is particularly effective for gaining an in-depth understanding of a specific development target, whether an individual, group, organization, or process, and producing tailored suggestions for improvement. (Moilanen, Ojasalo, & Ritalahti 2022, 41-42). In this context, the selection of research targets is guided by the specific needs and objectives of the project, making the case study method suitable for exploring the potential of a digital mentorship platform designed to support immigrants in their career integration.

The case study process begins with defining a preliminary development task or problem that requires investigation. This is followed by familiarization with the problem to gain a deeper understanding by examining it in both practical and theoretical contexts. Next, empirical data will be collected and analyzed using various methods, such as interviews, surveys, or observations. The final step involves generating suggestions or models for development that address the identified task or problem (Moilanen et al. 2022, 42). This structured sequence ensures a thorough understanding of the issue and facilitates the creation of targeted solutions.

## 4.2 Research Phases and Timeline

The research project commenced in May 2024 by defining the research objective and questions, and establishing a clear foundation for the study's direction. Once the initial drafts of these elements were in place, a comprehensive literature review was conducted in June 2024, focusing on gathering relevant references and theoretical frameworks that would support the study. This process involved extensive reading, summarizing key sources, and identifying gaps in current literature to refine the study's scope. The literature review and theoretical framework were written from July to the second week of September 2024, allowing ample time to refine, edit, and effectively organize the content for coherence and clarity. During this period, preliminary contact was made with potential interviewees to secure participation and set up a timeline for interviews. The interviews were conducted from the first to the second week of October 2024, to obtain detailed, firsthand insights into the career integration challenges of immigrants. Following the interviews, data analysis and documentation of the research findings took place promptly, utilizing qualitative methods to interpret the data in line with the study's objectives. Finally, the research report was finalized in the second week of November 2024, integrating the findings from both the interviews and literature review to present a comprehensive overview of the study's key findings, and implications. The timeframe of the research is illustrated in Figure 9, highlighting the sequential approach and milestones achieved throughout the project.

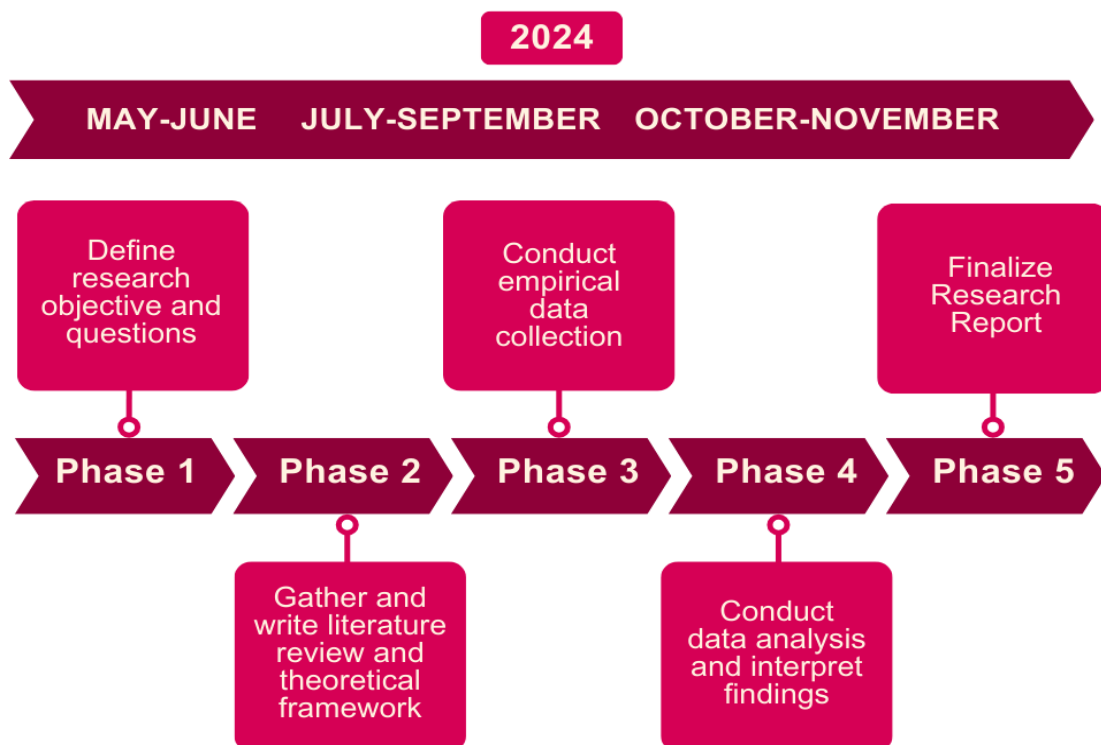


Figure 9. Phases and timeline of the research project

### 4.3 Data Collection Methods

Case studies employ various methods to achieve an in-depth and holistic understanding of a situation, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative approaches. While a combination of methods can be applied, interviews - such as thematic, open-ended, and focus group interviews - are particularly common for data collection in case studies, often providing deeper insights into the research topic. (Moilanen et al. 2022, 43). An interview involves a discussion between two or more individuals on a topic of shared interest, highlighting the importance of human interaction in generating knowledge and emphasizing the social context of the research data (Cohen et al. 2007, 349). Moilanen et al. (2022, 43) further explain that in a structured interview, questions are prepared and presented in a predetermined order, leaving only the content of the responses open to interpretation. In contrast, a semi-structured interview also utilizes pre-formulated questions, but the interviewer has the flexibility to skip any that are inappropriate and to ask new questions that arise during the conversation.

Interviews can also take place electronically over the Internet through video communication platforms, email, or text messages, a method commonly referred to as online or electronic interviews. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, video-based interviews conducted via video conferencing or telephony have become increasingly popular. These interviews can utilize Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) or web conferencing services for two or more participants. Many platforms also allow for audio-visual recording and initial transcription of the interview, provided the participants consent for it. (Saunders et al. 2023, 477-478).

This research project's primary approach is qualitative, utilizing semi-structured online interviews and a structured online questionnaire containing the same set of core questions. Both methods feature mostly open-ended questions, with a few multiple-choice questions included to gather specific information. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with participants available for real-time interaction, allowing follow-up questions to deepen responses and provide rich, detailed insights into participants' experiences. The structured questionnaire serves as an alternative for participants preferring to respond in writing, following the same question set used in interviews to maintain consistency. While both methods include multiple-choice questions that allow for quantitative analysis, the primary emphasis remains on open-ended responses, enabling a thematic analysis aligned with the study's qualitative objectives. In areas where participants may have limited familiarity with digital mentorship features, structured options in the multiple-choice questions provide guidance, helping participants express relevant preferences while supporting a focused comparison of responses.

This dual approach offers flexibility in data collection and accommodates participant preferences while ensuring comprehensive insights. The combination of qualitative data and supplementary

quantitative insights provides a holistic view of participants' experiences and perspectives within the study's qualitative framework.

The interview questions are grouped into major themes related to challenges in career integration, digital mentorship, and the potential role of AI in this process.

### *Theme 1: Career Integration Challenges for Immigrants*

This theme examines the various challenges immigrants encounter in Finland while striving for successful career integration. It also investigates the public and private services they have accessed for support, directly addressing RQ1.

### *Theme 2: Benefits of Digital Mentorship*

The second theme focuses on digital mentorship, aiming to uncover which aspects immigrants perceive as most beneficial for their career integration. This inquiry relates to RQ2, emphasizing the perceived value of mentorship services.

### *Theme 3: AI Tools in Digital Mentorship*

The final theme explores the potential contributions of AI tools within digital mentorship platforms. It assesses how these technologies could enhance immigrant support during their career integration, providing insights for RQ3.

A comprehensive version of the predefined questions is available in Appendix 1.

Participants for this study were selected based on their relevance to the research focus on immigrants' career integration experiences in Finland. The participants were drawn from personal networks and LinkedIn connections, ensuring that they possess firsthand experience with the challenges associated with career integration. To maintain confidentiality, participants' names have been coded; for example, the interview participants are designated as P1, P2, and so forth. The sample consists of 8 individuals, divided into 4 one-on-one online interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams and 4 online questionnaires distributed through Google Forms, providing a variety of perspectives on the topic. The actual duration of the Teams interviews varied from 25 minutes to 35 minutes, allowing for in-depth discussions that facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the participants' experiences. The language used in the interviews was English, enabling all participants to express their views and opinions comfortably, thereby ensuring that language barriers did not hinder the richness of the data collected. All interviews and responses were collected anony-

mously, and no identifying information was disclosed. Table 5 provides an overview of the participants' backgrounds, including their country of origin, first residence permit, years in Finland, and the type of interview they participated in.

Table 5. Overview of participants' background

Participant ID	Country of Origin	First Residence Permit	Years in Finland	Type of Interview
P1	Philippines	Family Ties	2	Online Interview
P2	Romania	Work	9	Online Interview
P3	Ghana	Family Ties	7	Online Interview
P4	Philippines	Student	2	Online Interview
P5	Philippines	Work	8	Online Questionnaire
P6	Vietnam	Student	2	Online Questionnaire
P7	Mexico	Family Ties	9	Online Questionnaire
P8	Philippines	Work	9	Online Questionnaire

#### 4.4 Data Analysis Methods

Thematic analysis was employed to examine data gathered from interviews, facilitating the identification of recurring themes and patterns in immigrants' experiences, challenges, and aspirations. This method systematically organizes and interprets data, uncovering essential details and trends in immigrants' career integration journeys.

According to Braun & Clarke (2006, 4), thematic analysis is a foundational tool in qualitative research, valued for its ability to handle the complexity and diversity of qualitative data. It equips researchers with versatile skills applicable across various qualitative techniques. The thematic analysis provides a structured yet adaptable approach, offering a logical and organized process that results in comprehensive descriptions, explanations, and theoretical insights (Saunders et al. 2023, 664). Additionally, thematic analysis is effective in managing qualitative data, allowing researchers to distill information into clear summaries while uncovering commonalities, distinctions, and unexpected findings (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules 2017, 2).

In this thesis, thematic analysis was applied using the six-phase approach outlined by Saunders et al. (2023, 665). First, data familiarization was conducted by repeatedly reading transcripts to fully understand the material. This was followed by coding, where significant words or phrases were identified to highlight recurring patterns in participants' responses. These codes supported the initial generation of themes, offering a preliminary view of recurring ideas. Next, theme development and review ensured that each theme was distinctive and accurately captured the essence of the data. Themes were refined, defined, and named to allow for clear and coherent labeling of core ideas, enhancing the analysis' clarity. Finally, the findings were written up to present a cohesive analysis that integrates insights from each stage of the thematic analysis process.

This method effectively condensed qualitative data into clear summaries, identifying key patterns, differences, and unexpected insights into immigrants' career integration needs. These findings have informed the development of a digital mentorship platform to support immigrants' integration into the labor market.

After completing the data analysis, an overlay matrix was created to map the connections between each research question, theoretical framework, and results section. This matrix offers a clear overview of how each question is addressed in the thesis, aligning themes and findings with their respective sections, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Overlay matrix of research questions and data collection (adapted from Peltonen 2017, 3)

Research Questions	Theoretical Context (Chapter)	Findings Section (Chapter)	Questionnaire Items
1. What challenges do immigrants in Finland face in their career integration, and what types of services, both public and private, have they accessed to support this process?	2.2, 2.1.3, 2.1.4	5.1.1, 5.1.2, 5.1.3	1-9
2. What aspects of digital mentorship do immigrants in Finland perceive as most beneficial for their career integration?	3.1, 3.2, 3.3	5.1.4	10-18
3. What role could AI tools play within digital mentorship platforms to better assist immigrants in their career integration process?	3.4, 3.5	5.1.5	19-23

## 5 Results

This chapter presents the research outcomes from the participant interviews, organized around key themes related to career integration challenges and the potential role of digital mentorship. Each theme offers a detailed view of participants' experiences and needs, with an analysis that highlights patterns and insights emerging from their responses. These findings provide a foundation for understanding the specific challenges faced by immigrants in Finland and inform the subsequent conceptualization of a digital mentorship platform designed to support career integration.

### 5.1 Interview Findings and Analysis

#### 5.1.1 Understanding Career Integration Challenges

Career integration is a complex and multifaceted process, particularly for immigrants who face various obstacles when attempting to enter and advance in the job market. These challenges illustrate the various obstacles immigrants face in achieving successful career integration in Finland.

Figure 10 presents the main challenges identified by the interviewees, detailing the frequency with which each issue was mentioned.

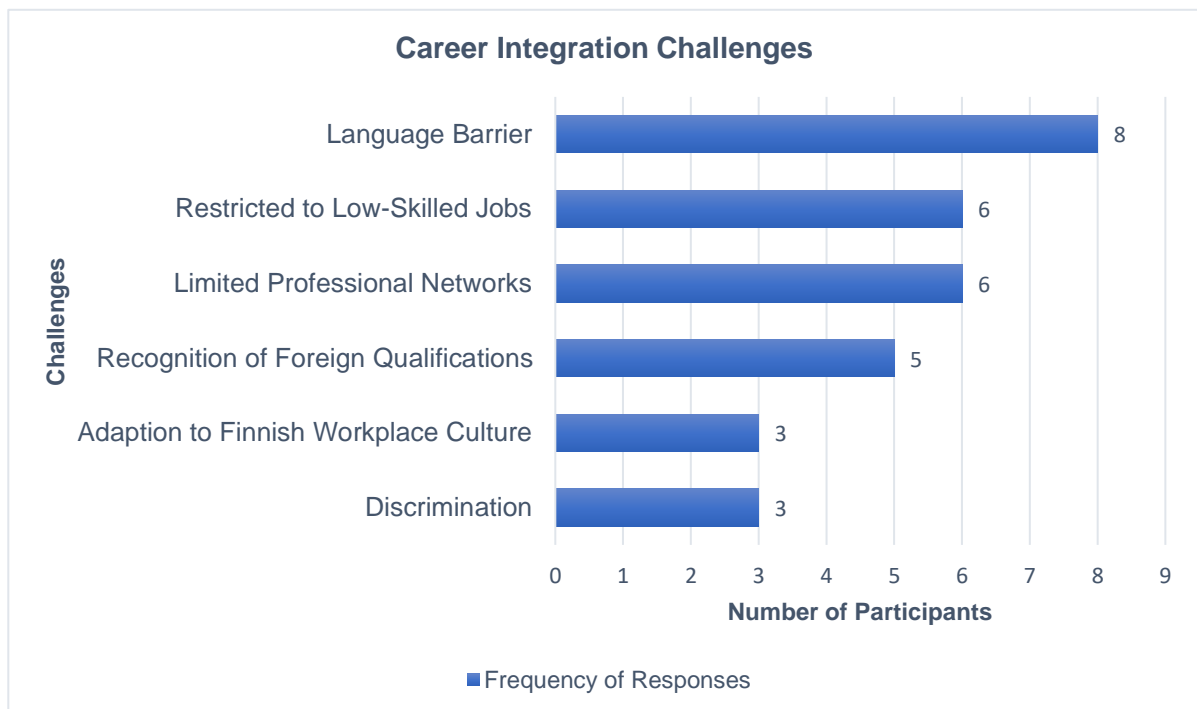


Figure 10. Immigrants' career integration challenges in Finland

The language barrier noted by all eight participants emerged as the most frequently mentioned obstacle. This was followed by being restricted to low-skilled jobs and limited professional networks,

with six participants identifying these as significant issues. Five participants also highlighted difficulties with the recognition of foreign qualifications. Other notable challenges included adapting to Finnish workplace culture and facing discrimination, each mentioned by three participants.

### **Language Barrier**

A prominent theme among participants was the struggle with Finnish language requirements. Many felt that limited language proficiency significantly restricted their job options, particularly in roles that required frequent communication.

"The language barrier is one of the biggest challenges I've faced in finding a job here in Finland. Since I don't speak Finnish, many employers prefer or require fluency, which limits my options significantly." (P1)

Participants shared frustrations about the long-term impact of language limitations on their careers. Despite years of residency and efforts to learn Finnish, some felt that achieving fluency was difficult and continued to hinder their professional interactions.

"Although I've been here for seven years, the Finnish language can be quite difficult to master, which has hindered my ability to communicate effectively in professional settings." (P3)

These insights highlight how language barriers can limit immigrants' access to suitable job opportunities and impede workplace integration, as communication challenges affect interactions with colleagues and supervisors.

### **Restricted to Low-skilled Jobs**

A common challenge for immigrants in Finland is confinement to low-skilled jobs, even when they possess higher qualifications. Several participants expressed frustration at being restricted to roles that did not match their professional backgrounds or career aspirations, with this limitation being especially prominent for those without local work experience or strong professional networks.

"I have encountered being limited to certain types of jobs, such as low-skilled positions or roles within specific sectors. These limitations make it difficult to fully utilize my skills and qualifications." (P2)

For those who arrived as students, this challenge was often compounded by the restriction to part-time, low-skilled positions, which limited their ability to gain relevant work experience or showcase their full potential.

“With my student status, I was mostly restricted to cleaning jobs, which has prevented me from fully utilizing my skills and potential.” (P4)

The lack of Finnish work experience emerged as a significant barrier, often resulting in confinement to lower-skilled roles and limited job mobility.

“As I don't have relevant work experience in Finland, it has limited my job opportunities to positions that require lower skill levels.” (P7)

Participants highlighted how these constraints prevent them from advancing into more secure and skill-aligned roles, leading to frustration and underemployment. The findings reveal how structural barriers in the Finnish labor market often keep immigrants in low-skilled positions despite their qualifications and professional aspirations, which, in turn, limits their career growth and job satisfaction.

### **Limited Professional Networks**

Limited professional networks emerged as a significant challenge for participants, who noted the importance of connections for accessing job leads and recommendations in the Finnish job market. Without established networks, securing employment was often more difficult.

"Since I only have few connections in Finland, I've found it challenging to receive job leads or recommendations, which I've realized are crucial here." (P1)

Participants described feeling isolated and uncertain about navigating job opportunities. This sense of disconnection was heightened by challenges in meeting new people, particularly in a foreign environment where language and unfamiliar social settings added to the complexity of networking.

"Building connections has been challenging, as I often feel out of place in social settings, especially where language plays a crucial role." (P8)

These experiences underscore the essential role of professional networks in supporting career integration. Without these connections, participants faced barriers to job opportunities and felt socially isolated. Building networks was a common need expressed by many to enhance employment outcomes and advance their careers.

### **Recognition of Foreign Qualifications**

A significant challenge faced by participants was the limited recognition of their foreign qualifications, often leading to underemployment and restricted career growth. Many expressed frustration over the lack of value placed on their expertise, despite holding relevant qualifications.

"My qualifications as a seafarer from the Philippines aren't fully recognized here, so my skills and experience don't seem to count for much in the local job market." (P1)

"Although I've been living here in Finland for nine years, I often feel restricted in my current role because my qualification is not recognized." (P8)

Participants mentioned that, although they held relevant experience and qualifications, employers often prioritized candidates with Finnish credentials. This practice hindered their ability to compete for higher-level jobs and achieve career progression.

" I have a master's degree but some employers are hesitant to recognize my previous experience outside the EU, which affects my competitiveness." (P6)

This issue of unrecognized qualifications limited participants' opportunities and often led them to positions that did not align with their professional backgrounds. For many, this barrier hindered their ability to fully utilize their skills and experience, impacting both career satisfaction and growth.

### **Adaption to Finnish Workplace Culture**

Adapting to the cultural expectations of Finnish workplaces presented additional challenges beyond language. Finnish work culture, often characterized by high independence and a reserved demeanor, contrasted with the more collaborative and open styles familiar to some participants. This cultural shift made it more difficult for some to build relationships with colleagues and smoothly integrate into teams.

"Finnish workplaces like to value independence and a more reserved approach, which feels quite different from the team-oriented and warm environment I'm used to." (P1)

These cultural adjustments were compounded by the need to understand local workplace norms and communication styles, prompting participants to modify behaviors they were familiar with from their home countries.

"Getting used to the Finnish work culture, understanding the local expectations, and adjusting how I communicate has not been easy, and that often makes it harder to connect with employers" (P5).

"The workplace culture and in Finland is different, and it's been a bit of a challenge for me to fit in and work well with teams." (P8)

These cultural differences, including values of independence, direct communication, and a flat hierarchy, affected participants' ability to integrate into professional settings and posed additional barriers to advancing in their careers.

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination emerged as a significant barrier for some participants, affecting their confidence and career prospects. Experiences of discrimination often intersected with other challenges, such as limited language proficiency and unrecognized qualifications, intensifying the difficulty of securing appropriate roles.

"I've experienced instances of discrimination that have affected my confidence and limited my chances for advancement." (P3)

For others, being judged based on their background rather than their abilities led to feelings of frustration and disillusionment. Some participants noted that their international backgrounds seemed to contribute to employers' hesitations, further complicating job searches.

"At times, I feel that my international background may contribute to hesitations from employers, making it harder to secure a role." (P6)

These responses underscore how discrimination, particularly based on nationality or ethnicity, creates additional barriers in the labor market. Participants expressed frustration about being assessed on factors unrelated to their skills, resulting in limited job opportunities and slower career progression. This issue, combined with other challenges, illustrates the complexity of achieving successful career integration in the Finnish labor market.

The challenges outlined above underscore the multifaceted barriers immigrants face in integrating into the Finnish labor market. Language barriers, limited access to higher-skilled jobs, unrecognized foreign qualifications, lack of professional networks, discrimination, and cultural differences collectively create a complex landscape that restricts immigrants' ability to secure suitable employment. These interconnected obstacles hinder career advancement and prevent immigrants from building the social capital essential for successful integration. Without access to social networks and professional resources, immigrants struggle to navigate the labor market and fully realize their potential. As a result, many experience underemployment, frustration, and social exclusion, which can erode their confidence and motivation over time. This cycle of exclusion and missed opportunities not only impacts the individuals but also limits the contributions immigrants could make to Finland's economy and society. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive support sys-

tems, such as mentorship programs, to help immigrants build the social capital necessary for career success. Digital mentorship platforms, in particular, hold promise for enhancing language proficiency, facilitating professional networking, and easing adaptation to local workplace cultures. By providing valuable guidance and access to professional resources, such platforms could play a vital role in helping immigrants strengthen their social capital and support their successful integration into the labor market.

### 5.1.2 Evaluating Career Integration Services

The interview findings reveal a variety of career integration services accessed by immigrants in Finland, including job placement assistance, language courses, and professional development programs. Participants shared their experiences and provided feedback on the effectiveness of these services, highlighting the need for more tailored support to better meet their diverse needs.

#### Insights on Current Support Programs

Immigrants accessed various career support services to aid their integration into the Finnish labor market. These services are provided through multiple channels, including government programs, primarily organized by the public employment services (TE Office), and various private sector initiatives. TE Offices offer essential resources such as language integration courses, job search assistance, and skills development programs for unemployed job seekers. Public and private organizations arrange job fairs, workshops, and specialized training sessions to facilitate networking and professional growth for immigrants. These initiatives seek to bridge the gap between job seekers and potential employers by equipping immigrants with relevant competencies and insights into the Finnish work culture.

However, many participants expressed dissatisfaction with the level of personalized guidance provided. A common concern was the limited support from the TE Office. While participants were required to apply for jobs, the services did not provide meaningful connections or in-depth guidance.

"TE Services... idn't provide much in terms of actual support. They required me to apply to at least four jobs each month and report on my progress, but no real guidance or connections were provided." (P1)

"...somewhat ineffective due to a lack of follow-up and consistency in guidance and assistance to immigrants." (P5)

Language courses were another point of concern, as they provided basic skills but did not focus on job-specific terminology required for professional fluency.

"The language courses were limited in helping me achieve fluency quickly, which still affects my job prospects." (P5)

"While these courses were somewhat helpful in introducing me to the basics of the Finnish language and culture, they didn't fully meet my needs in terms of practical application in the workplace." (P8)

Job fairs and networking events were also mentioned, but participants found them underwhelming and ineffective in translating into real job opportunities.

"There are job fairs available, but I find them somewhat ineffective... It can be discouraging to see so many programs that don't result in real job offers or meaningful connections in the job market." (P3)

"My friend and I attended one where only two companies, both in IT, didn't require Finnish - it was honestly a disappointing experience." (P4)

Some participants who used digital tools from government agencies found them limited in effectiveness. While these tools provided job listings, they did not offer personalized support to connect participants with appropriate roles.

"I also tried job sites provided by government agencies, but they were more about job listings than offering personalized career support, so they didn't really help me connect to roles in my field." (P5)

Despite these limitations, a few participants acknowledged the value of mentorship and online platforms. For example, P8 found mentorship particularly helpful, while P7 shared a positive experience with LinkedIn and Coursera.

"The mentoring aspect was quite helpful to me; having someone experienced to turn to for advice and encouragement made a significant difference in my career journey." (P8)

"I have used LinkedIn and Coursera for job support. LinkedIn has been helpful for networking and connecting with potential employers. At the same time, Coursera has allowed me to enhance my skills through various online courses. I feel more competitive now in the job market." (P7)

Table 7 provides an overview of the services each participant accessed and their perceptions of these programs' effectiveness.

Table 7. Support services accessed by participants and their perceived effectiveness

Participant	Service Accessed	Effectiveness Rating
P1	TE Services (job assistance)	Somewhat ineffective
P2	TE Services (language integration courses, job placement, skills training); government job sites	Somewhat ineffective
	Networking events	Neutral
P3	Language courses; vocational education; job fairs, government job sites	Somewhat ineffective
P4	Networking events	Neutral
	Job fairs	Somewhat ineffective
P5	TE Services (language integration courses); government job sites	Somewhat ineffective
P6	Job fairs; networking events	Neutral
P7	TE Services (language integration courses, job assistance, skills training)	Somewhat ineffective
	Digital tools (LinkedIn, Coursera)	Somewhat effective
P8	Language courses; career development programs; mentoring	Somewhat effective

Overall, the feedback highlights gaps in the current support programs, especially in providing personalized and practical guidance. Many participants expressed frustration with the lack of meaningful career advancement support, underlining the need for policy updates and more effective strategies, such as targeted mentorship and professional networking, to aid immigrants' career integration.

## Opportunities to Enhance Support Programs

Participants in this study identified several areas where support services could better address immigrants' career integration needs. Many participants highlighted the importance of workplace-specific language training. Current language programs were seen as insufficient for teaching the job-specific terminology required for professional roles.

“If there were more language support specifically for work-related Finnish, it would speed up my progress and help me feel more confident applying for roles.” (P1)

“I think enrolling in targeted language courses focused on professional vocabulary could significantly improve my communication skills.” (P8)

Mentorship and networking were also frequently mentioned as essential for overcoming integration challenges. Participants expressed the need for mentors familiar with the Finnish job market to guide them in aligning their qualifications with local requirements.

“Having access to a mentor who knows the Finnish job market could guide me in navigating it and understanding the work culture better.” (P6)

“I wish there were mentorship opportunities available outside the Uusimaa area. Expanding mentorship programs to other regions could provide valuable guidance for individuals like me looking to advance their careers.” (P7)

Targeted networking events, specifically tailored to immigrants, were also suggested to help connect them with employers open to hiring individuals with international backgrounds.

“It would be helpful to have job fairs or networking events specifically for immigrants, where we could meet employers who are open to hiring people with international backgrounds.” (P1)

Participants also emphasized the importance of practical opportunities such as internships and recruitment training to gain hands-on experience and improve their job prospects.

“Having access to internships would offer valuable hands-on experience and a clearer understanding of the local job market. Recruitment training programs that also guarantee a job after training would be incredibly beneficial.” (P3)

Moreover, the participants advocated for specialized initiatives catering to the unique challenges immigrants face, emphasizing the importance of educational institutions in facilitating career integration.

“If you're here in Finland on a student visa, there should be more initiatives from schools to support students.” (P4)

Additionally, participants emphasized the need for better recognition of foreign qualifications. Many expressed frustrations at being overlooked for roles that matched their previous experience, primarily due to language barriers.

“It would be great if my foreign qualifications were recognized on par with EU credentials, so I could apply for jobs that match my previous experience.” (P5)

The feedback from participants highlights the need for more tailored support programs, including professional language training, mentorship, networking opportunities, and improved recognition of foreign qualifications. Such initiatives could significantly enhance immigrants' career integration and help them navigate challenges in the Finnish labor market.

### **5.1.3 Navigating the Impact of Social Connections in Career Integration**

#### **The Impact of Personal Connections**

The findings highlight the significant role of personal connections, including family, friends, and community, in participants' career integration experiences. For some, these networks provided essential job referrals and career development support, often serving as key pathways to employment.

“A Filipino I met when I first arrived in Finland reached out to me after a few months and recommended me to his boss at a logistics company, and I was accepted for the job.” (P1)

“My personal connections have played a key role in my job search. Through numerous referrals, I was able to secure several volunteering positions, which have helped me gain valuable experience.” (P7)

For others, personal networks offered only limited support due to mismatched qualifications or industry barriers. While family provided emotional support and general guidance, their connections often lacked relevance to participants' career aspirations, particularly in specialized fields with regulatory requirements.

“My sister works in a different industry, and her profession is regulated. This has limited her ability to provide connections or guidance relevant to my field.” (P4)

Some participants also experienced frustration with personal connections that led to roles below their qualifications, a common challenge in adjusting to a new labor market. While grateful for the initial support, they faced underemployment and struggled to fully leverage their skills due to a lack of relevant networks.

“When I first arrived in Finland as a student, some personal networks referred me to their workplace, and I got a job as a waiter at a restaurant. While I appreciated the opportunity, it was frustrating to end up in a job far below my qualifications and experience.” (P6)

“She was really helpful in finding my first job, but it ended up being a role that was below my qualifications.” (P5)

The role of personal connections in career integration varied, with some participants benefiting from strong networks that provided job opportunities, while others faced challenges due to mismatched qualifications or irrelevant connections. These findings underscore the need for more targeted career support, as personal connections often provide only short-term assistance and may not be sufficient for long-term career advancement, particularly in specialized fields.

### The Influence of Mentors

Figure 11 illustrates the distribution of mentorship experiences among participants.

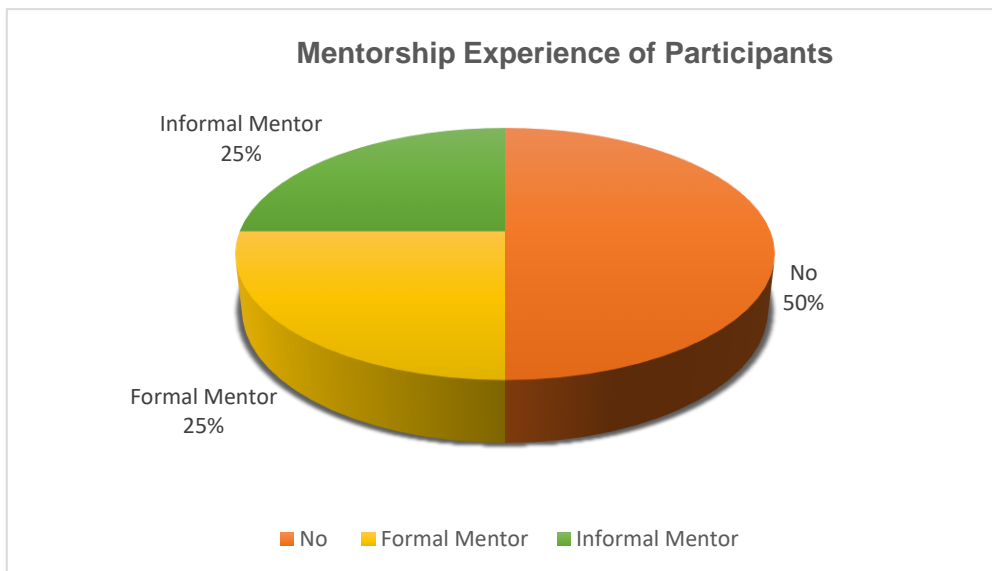


Figure 11. Distribution of mentorship experiences among participants

Access to mentors can greatly impact career development, especially for immigrants navigating a new labor market. Mentors provide valuable guidance on job search strategies and adapting to the

local work culture. However, not all immigrants have access to such support. Of the eight participants, four (50%) reported not having had any mentors. Among those who did, two (25%) had formal mentors through government programs, and two (25%) had informal mentors from personal networks.

The impact of mentorship, whether formal or informal, emerged as a significant factor in career integration. Those with mentors found the guidance and support pivotal, gaining insights into Finland's job market and work culture. Participants valued mentorship for its practical and psychological benefits, including career advice, encouragement, and connections that might otherwise be inaccessible.

“I have an informal mentor in my professional network who supported me in my career development. This mentor has been in the industry for quite some time and provides me with constructive criticism that helps me improve my skills...I appreciate having someone I can turn to for advice and support as I work towards advancing in my career.” (P8)

“Yes, I've had an informal mentor in Finland who gave me some great tips and feedback on my CV and LinkedIn profile. However, I still feel there's room for improvement.” (P7)

However, not all mentorship experiences were equally positive. For some, particularly those in formal programs, mentorships did not meet expectations due to language barriers or a lack of structured support. These participants expressed disappointment when mentors were unresponsive or guidance was inconsistent, limiting the potential for career development.

“I had a formal mentor facilitated by a government program. Unfortunately, my experience was disappointing as my mentor was unresponsive and seemed disinterested in engaging.” (P2)

“The mentorship mainly involved inconsistent advising about my unclear career pathway and I was left feeling uncertain about my next steps.” (P5)

Despite the challenges faced by participants, most believed that having a mentor could significantly enhance their career integration in Finland. They recognized that mentors could provide valuable insights into the local job market, assist with navigating cultural differences, and help build professional networks. Many participants felt that mentorship would help them gain confidence and accelerate their adaptation to the work environment.

“Having someone experienced to guide me through the local job market and help me adapt to the work culture could have made a significant difference in my journey.”

(P1)

“A mentor can offer valuable insights by assessing and advising me on my skills, helping me identify areas for improvement...and introducing me to their professional network.” (P3)

For several participants, the idea of mentorship went beyond career advice - it was seen as a potential tool to build self-confidence and make more informed decisions about their professional paths. They believed that having the right mentor could assist with career navigation and help them understand how to leverage their skills more effectively in the Finnish job market.

“I believe having a mentor could be beneficial. Ideally, they would provide valuable advice and guidance to help me navigate my career path and make informed decisions for my professional development.” (P2)

“Mentors can help me figure out how to make the most of my skills and qualifications, which is important as I work on getting the credentials I need to advance my career.”

(P8)

Participants' experiences highlight the potential of mentorship in supporting career integration, especially in a new labor market. Flexible and tailored mentorship approaches can provide valuable guidance, boost confidence, and open pathways for professional growth. By connecting immigrants with experienced professionals, mentorship programs can facilitate industry-specific networking and enhance career opportunities.

#### **5.1.4 Assessing the Potential of Digital Mentorship in Career Integration**

##### **Perceptions of Digital Mentorship**

Familiarity with the concept of digital mentorship varied among the respondents. While some participants were already aware of digital mentorship as a form of online guidance, others had no prior knowledge. Figure 12 illustrates the distribution of participants' familiarity with digital mentorship, providing a clear overview of their prior knowledge of digital mentorship as a support tool for career integration.

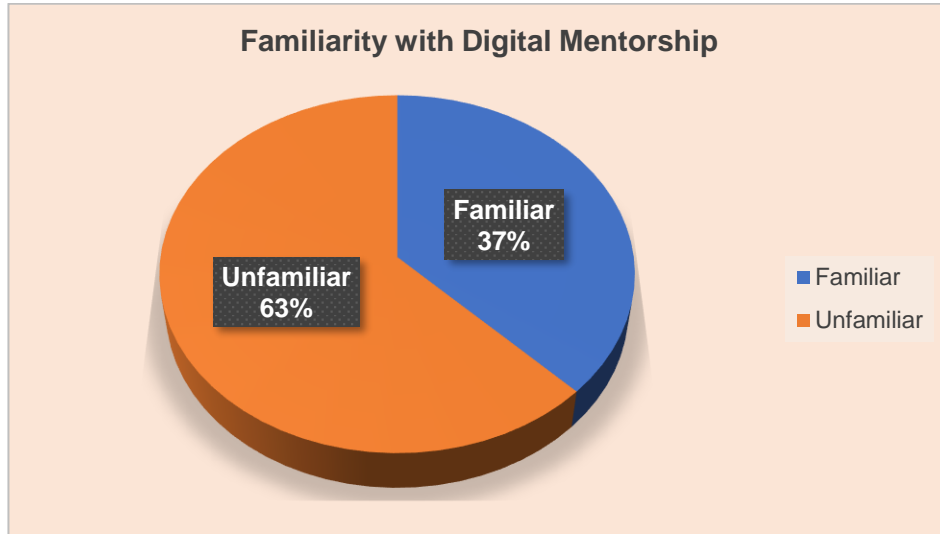


Figure 12. Participants' familiarity with digital mentorship

Overall, familiarity with digital mentorship was limited among the participants. Of the eight participants, only three (37%) were familiar with the concept, recognizing it as a method of connecting with mentors remotely through digital platforms.

"I believe digital mentorship is similar to traditional mentorship, but it takes place online. It likely involves connecting with a mentor through digital platforms." (P1)

"It involves one-on-one connections that take place online, allowing individuals to seek guidance and support from mentors remotely." (P7)

Those familiar with digital mentorship highlighted its flexibility and accessibility as key advantages, especially for individuals who may not have access to traditional in-person mentoring opportunities in their local areas.

"I see it as mentorship done online...it sounds like a flexible way to get guidance and support, especially for people who don't have access to traditional mentorship opportunities in their local area." (P3)

Those unfamiliar with digital mentorship (5 participants or 63%) found the concept intriguing. They were open to the idea but unsure how it would operate for career integration.

"I've never heard of digital mentorship before. I think it could be useful, but I'm not sure how it would work in practice for someone in my situation." (P5)

Despite initial unfamiliarity, participants highlighted a generally positive attitude toward using digital platforms for mentorship, with 87.5% (7 out of 8) expressing comfort in connecting with mentors

and seeking career advice through such platforms. This sentiment reflects a readiness to embrace digital tools for career support, often linked to the convenience and accessibility these platforms provide.

"I think it's a convenient way to get support and guidance, especially since I can access it from anywhere." (P8)

"I would feel comfortable using digital platforms to connect with mentors and seek career advice. They offer a convenient way to access support and information, and I appreciate the flexibility they provide." (P1)

A few noted specific advantages, such as the non-judgmental nature of online interactions, and one participant expressed a slight preference for in-person meetings while still valuing digital options.

"Everything is done online nowadays, and it feels less judgmental since we wouldn't be seeing each other in person. This way, I wouldn't feel embarrassed if I don't know a lot of things." (P3)

"I prefer to meet in person because it creates a more personal connection. for a more personal connection. However, I am also open to connecting online if needed. Digital platforms can offer convenience and flexibility, which are valuable in today's fast-paced environment." (P6)

Overall, the participants showed a favorable perception of digital mentorship, valuing its accessibility, comfort, and convenience. Many also recognized its potential to bridge gaps in mentorship access, particularly for those living in areas where in-person opportunities may be limited. This positive outlook suggests that digital mentorship could play a key role in enhancing career integration for immigrants.

Participants highlighted several advantages of online mentors for career integration, seeing them as valuable resources for tailored guidance that aligns with specific career goals. Many felt that online mentors could assist with practical tasks like resume enhancement, sharing industry-specific insights, and facilitating connections with professionals in their field. This kind of support was viewed as a way to receive personalized feedback and direction, essential for navigating the Finnish job market.

"An online mentor could give me job search tips, review my resume, and provide guidance on job skills. They could also connect me with people in my field." (P1)

“They could guide me through the Finnish job market, share industry insights, and suggest ways to improve my chances of getting hired.” (P3)

Participants believed digital mentorship could expand professional networks by facilitating connections with industry contacts, mentors, and potential collaborators. These platforms were seen as valuable for gaining insights, advice, and referrals, helping participants establish a foothold in their industry and connect with the Finnish job market, ultimately fostering long-term career growth and integration.

“Digital mentorship platforms can help expand my professional networks by providing a variety of choices for connecting with different professionals and mentors.” (P2)

“For someone like me who does not live in the capital region. Online access provides opportunities to connect with mentors and professionals that I otherwise wouldn't have.” (P7)

However, not all participants were fully confident in the effectiveness of digital mentorship. A few respondents expressed uncertainty, primarily due to limited experience with digital mentorship platforms. Concerns about the potential challenges of matching mentees with mentors who share relevant career goals were raised.

“I find it challenging to match mentors and mentees in their careers...effectively matching the right mentors with mentees based on their specific career goals and experiences can be difficult.” (P6)

In summary, digital mentorship was recognized as a promising tool for career integration, fostering professional connections, and offering structured guidance. However, participants emphasized the importance of personalized matching to enhance effectiveness and help them achieve their career objectives.

### **Preferences for Digital Mentorship Type and Platform**

Participants expressed varied preferences for the digital mentorship platform and style of mentorship, emphasizing different needs based on convenience, structure, and personal comfort. Four out of 8 (50%) favored websites for accessibility and comprehensiveness of resources. Two participants (25%) preferred mobile apps for convenience, while the remaining two (25%) valued a combination of both, appreciating the flexibility of apps and the more extensive resources of websites. Table 8 summarizes these preferences and the reasons behind each choice.

Table 8. Participants' preferences for digital mentorship platforms and mentorship types

Participant	Preferred Platform for Digital Mentorship	Preferred Type of Mentorship	Reason for Preference
P1	Website	Informal	Finds informal mentorship less pressuring, allowing comfort in asking questions without strict evaluations.
P2	Mobile app and website	Formal	Prefers formal mentorship for its structured approach, offering clear guidelines, expectations, and professional development.
P3	Website	Informal	Prefers flexibility due to family responsibilities; finds informal structure easier with a busy schedule.
P4	Mobile app	Informal	Appreciates a more relaxed approach without forced camaraderie.
P5	Website	Informal	Prefers flexible, supportive environment, without the pressure of rigid structure.
P6	Mobile app and website	Formal	Believes in a structured approach with clear expectations, engagement, and accountability for productivity and impact.
P7	Website	Formal	Finds formal mentorship more committed and outcome-oriented, ensuring dedication from both mentor and mentee.
P8	Mobile app	Informal	Values the relaxed, personal nature of informal mentorship.

Regarding the type of mentorship, informal mentorship was the preferred choice for five participants (63%). These participants valued the flexibility and relaxed nature of informal mentorship,

which allowed for open communication without the pressure of formal expectations. On the other hand, three participants (37%) preferred formal mentorship, appreciating its clear structure and accountability. Participants noted that formal mentorship would offer more targeted career guidance and help them focus on professional development goals.

While most participants preferred informal mentorship, some favored formal mentorship for its structure, suggesting that digital mentorship platforms should offer both flexible, informal relationships and more goal-oriented, formal options to suit a variety of preferences and needs.

### Beneficial Aspects of Digital Mentorship

Digital mentorship programs offer several key benefits that support career integration for immigrants. These programs provide valuable career guidance, skill development, networking opportunities, and insights into the local job market and workplace culture. Digital mentorship helps bridge the gap between immigrants and the professional landscape of the host country, making such programs an essential resource for newcomers. The results illustrate which aspects of digital mentorship programs participants found most beneficial in supporting their career growth and integration into the Finnish labor market. The distribution of these preferences is shown in Figure 13.

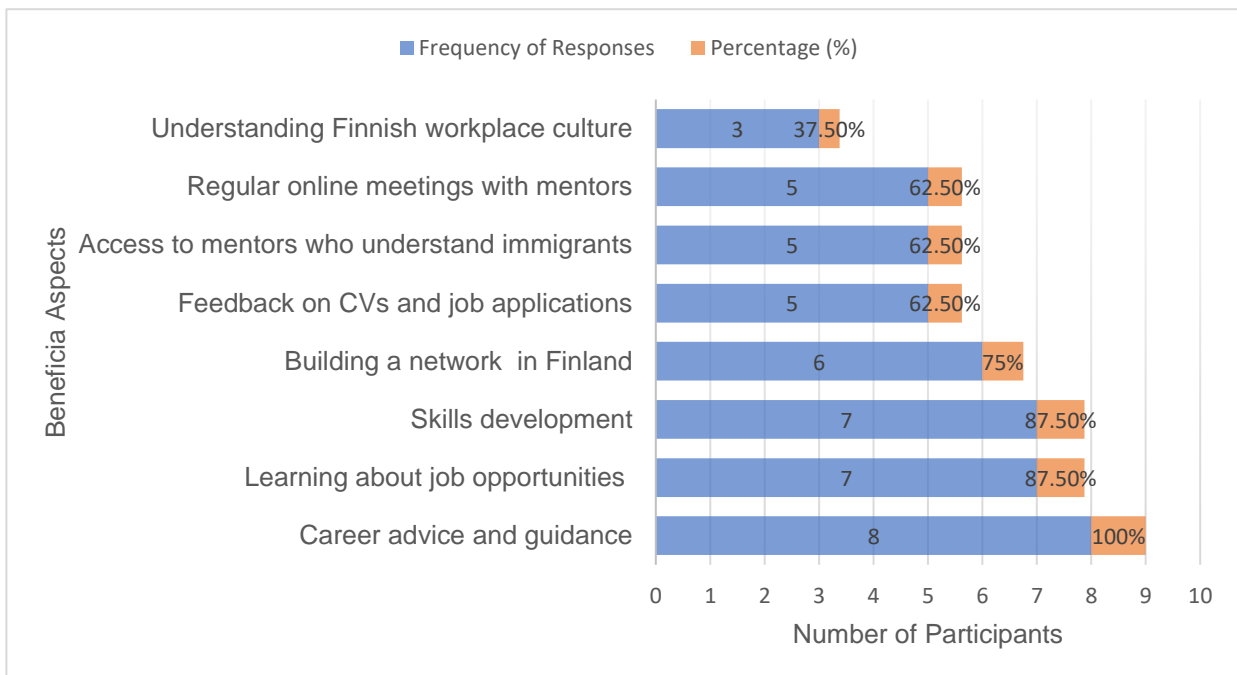


Figure 13. Participants' preferences on the beneficial aspects of digital mentorship programs

The aspect most highly valued was *receiving career advice and guidance from professionals*, with all 8 participants (100%) indicating its importance. This highlights the critical role that expert guid-

ance plays in helping immigrants navigate their career paths in a new environment. The importance of clear, actionable advice from experienced professionals is evident in its significant impact on career development.

Next, *learning about job opportunities and application processes* and *developing new skills through online resources shared by mentors* were each selected by 7 participants (87.5%). This reflects the desire for practical support in securing employment and enhancing professional skills, crucial for succeeding in the competitive job market. Access to these resources supports job acquisition and contributes to long-term career growth.

*Building a network of contacts in Finland* was chosen by 6 participants (75%), highlighting the significance of expanding professional networks to ease integration into the labor market. Networking connects immigrants with job opportunities, industry professionals, and peers, helping establish a presence in the new country. Additionally, *access to mentors who understand the immigrant experience; feedback on CVs, job applications, or interview skills; and regular online meetings or video calls with mentors* were all selected by 5 participants (62.5%). This highlights the value of personalized communication and feedback in fostering strong mentor-mentee relationships and ensuring continuous development.

Lastly, *improving understanding of Finnish workplace culture* was selected by 3 participants (37.5%), indicating its relevance, though not as high a priority compared to other aspects of mentorship. This suggests that practical career guidance and skill development were seen as more pressing needs for most participants

These findings emphasize the importance of career guidance, skill development, networking, and ongoing communication in digital mentorship for successful career integration.

### **Preferences for Digital Tool Features in Digital Mentorship Platform**

Digital mentorship platforms offer several features that enhance the mentorship experience and support immigrants' career integration. The results illustrate which features of a digital mentorship platform participants found most valuable.

The most preferred features were *access to resources and training materials* and *progress and goal tracking*, both selected by 7 participants (87.5%). These features reflect a strong demand for structured, educational content and the ability to track personal growth.

Other important features included *easy-to-use and navigate*, *access to diverse mentors*, and *personalized career advice*, each chosen by 6 participants (75%). These preferences highlight the

need for a user-friendly platform, varied mentor perspectives, and tailored guidance to meet individual career goals.

*Regular check-ins with mentors, secure, private messaging, and meeting scheduling tools* were each selected by 5 participants (62.5%), emphasizing the importance of consistent communication, privacy, and convenience in effective mentorship.

Finally, *AI-powered mentor matching* was selected by 4 participants (50%), suggesting it is valued but not as critical as other features like career advice and access to resources.

Figure 14 illustrates these preferences, showing the frequency with which each feature was selected, highlighting the most beneficial digital tool features for career integration in Finland.

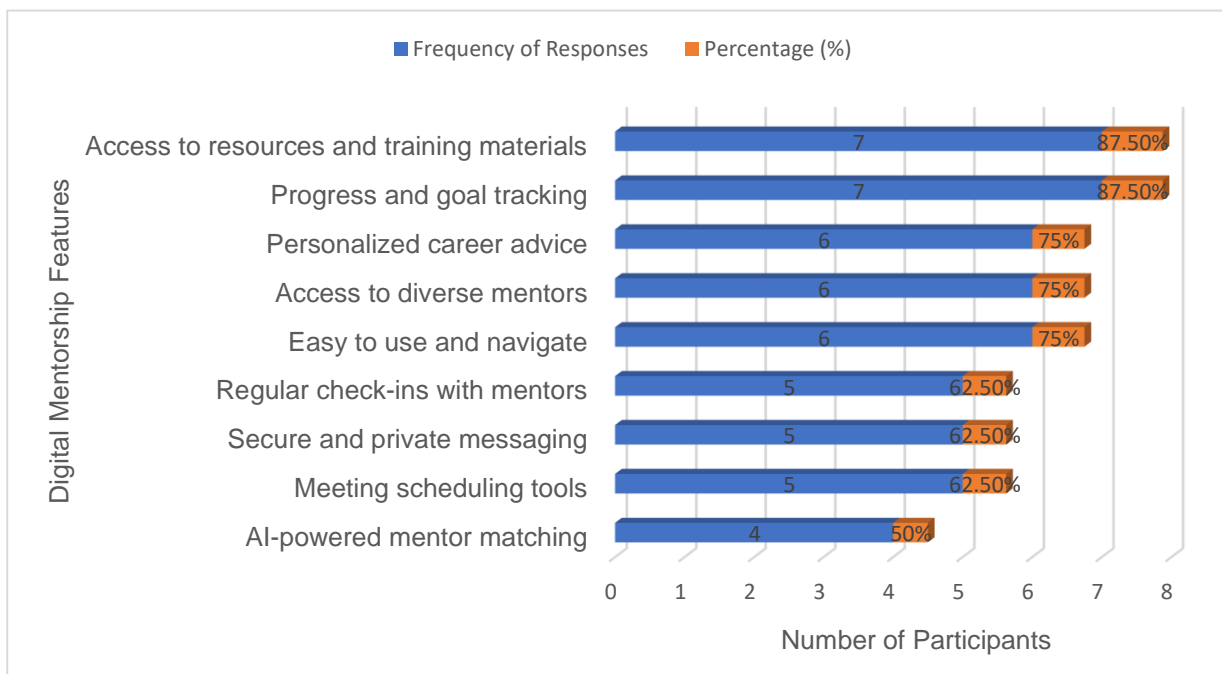


Figure 14. Participants' preferences for digital mentorship features

Participants shared various suggestions to enhance digital mentorship programs, focusing on making the mentorship experience more personalized, inclusive, and effective for career integration.

"I would like to see a feature for easy access to job listings and resources for skill development." (P1)

"I recommend adding a questionnaire feature to gather details about participants' backgrounds, career goals, and challenges. This would help mentors offer more personalized support and guidance." (P2)

The importance of inclusivity was highlighted by another participant, who suggested ensuring the program is open to all genders and backgrounds. This would broaden the perspectives and experiences, benefiting everyone in the program.

"It would be great if the digital mentorship program promoted inclusivity, ensuring it is open to all genders and groups. This would allow for a broader range of experiences and perspectives to benefit all participants." (P3)

Personalized, field-specific advice and networking opportunities were also emphasized as essential features for career development. Additionally, a feature for ratings and feedback was proposed by another participant, aiming to create accountability and improve the program.

"I'd love to see personalized advice based on my field and real-time feedback on career questions. Easy access to networking opportunities would also be a huge plus." (P4)

"A feedback and rating system would let participants to share their experiences with mentors and the platform. This would help hold everyone accountable and make it easier to find effective mentors based on others' reviews. The ratings could also highlight areas for improvement to help develop the program." (P5)

While some participants, were unsure of further suggestions, others saw great value in one-on-one advice. Personalized interactions were seen as crucial for addressing specific career challenges and providing tailored guidance:

" I would like to see one-on-one advice in the digital mentorship program, offering personalized guidance to address individual career challenges and goals." (P7)

The feedback highlights a strong preference for a flexible, inclusive mentorship model that adapts to the diverse needs of immigrants. Participants value personalized support that caters to individual career goals and challenges. The emphasis on inclusivity suggests that a platform should be accessible to people from varied backgrounds, ensuring a broader range of perspectives. Overall, the ideal mentorship model should provide continuous, tailored guidance to effectively support immigrants' career integration.

### 5.1.5 Exploring the Role of AI in Digital Mentorship Platforms

#### Familiarity and Perceptions of AI

Familiarity with AI-based tools is a crucial factor when considering their integration into digital mentorship platforms. These tools can offer personalized support and resources for career integration, but their effectiveness depends on how familiar users are with them. The responses varied among participants, shedding light on their experiences and awareness of these technologies. The results indicate that while some participants are comfortable using AI tools, others have limited or no familiarity with them. This variation provides insight into how participants may engage with AI features in digital mentorship platforms. Figure 15 shows the distribution of participants' familiarity with AI tools.

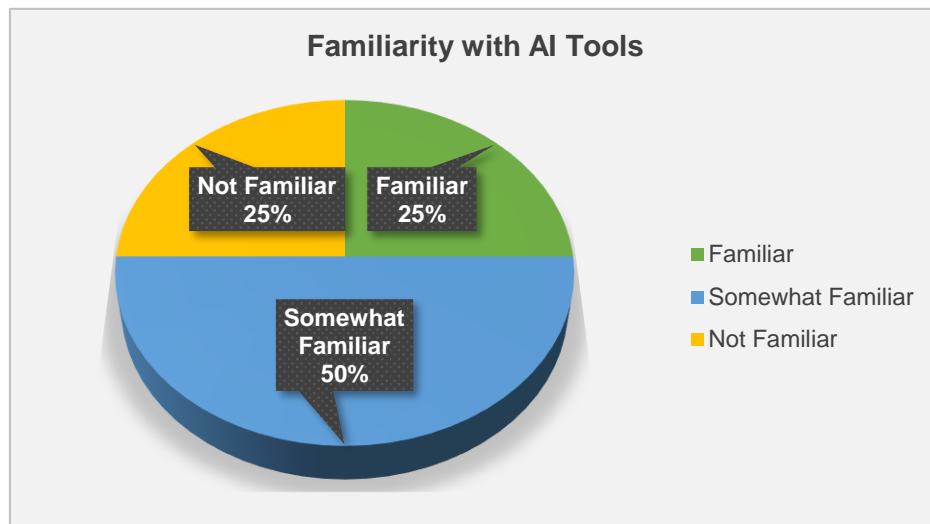


Figure 15. Distribution of familiarity with AI tools among participants

Two participants indicated *familiarity* with AI tools, suggesting a deeper understanding and experience with these technologies.

"It was both fascinating and kind of scary. Seeing what AI can do was interesting, but at the same time, it's a little worrying to realize just how advanced and capable these tools are." (P4)

"I'm familiar with AI since I've studied it and used tools like ChatGPT and other AI apps. So, I've had some experience with how these tools work." (P6)

On the other hand, four participants indicated being *somewhat familiar* with AI tools, suggesting a partial understanding, likely due to using certain tools without fully recognizing their AI components.

"I think some language apps use AI, and they can be quite helpful for learning the basics." (P3)

"I have used AI-based tools for job searching, but my experience was somewhat limited. These tools tended to provide generalized suggestions, often feeling like a one-size-fits-all approach rather than tailored support." (P7)

Lastly, two participants indicated that they were *not familiar* with AI-based tools, suggesting either a lack of exposure or an absence of use in their professional or personal lives. This unfamiliarity may point to a potential need for further education or introduction to AI tools within career support programs, particularly for those new to the technology

Despite some unfamiliarity and uncertainty with AI, there is a general perception that AI features could enhance a digital mentorship program. Several participants highlighted that AI could play a key role in personalizing the mentorship experience.

"Yes, I think adding AI could make a digital mentorship program better. It could help match people with mentors who fit their needs and interests. Plus, it might suggest useful resources or topics to discuss. This will make the whole experience more personalized and effective." (P1)

"AI features might improve a digital mentorship program, though I'm not entirely sure how. Maybe it could help match mentors and mentees based on their skills and goals." (P3)

However, other participants were more uncertain or lacked sufficient experience with AI to offer a clear perspective.

"Not sure. I don't have enough experience with AI to determine how it could enhance a digital mentorship program." (P7)

Despite these uncertainties, there was a general openness to the idea of AI's potential benefits, though participants expressed a desire for more information before forming an opinion.

"I'm not exactly sure how AI features could enhance a digital mentorship program. I don't know much about the specifics or how effective it would be in practice. I think it could be beneficial, but I would need to learn more about how it works and what kind of features it could offer." (P8)

The findings reveal a divide in participants' familiarity with AI and its perceived benefits. Some participants recognize AI's potential in mentorship, while others feel more exposure is needed to fully understand its capabilities. This highlights the importance of balancing innovation with user education to ensure AI is effectively integrated into mentorship programs. Familiarity with AI is essential to maximize its impact and ensure mentors and mentees can use these tools to enhance career development.

### Preferred AI Features in a Digital Mentorship Program

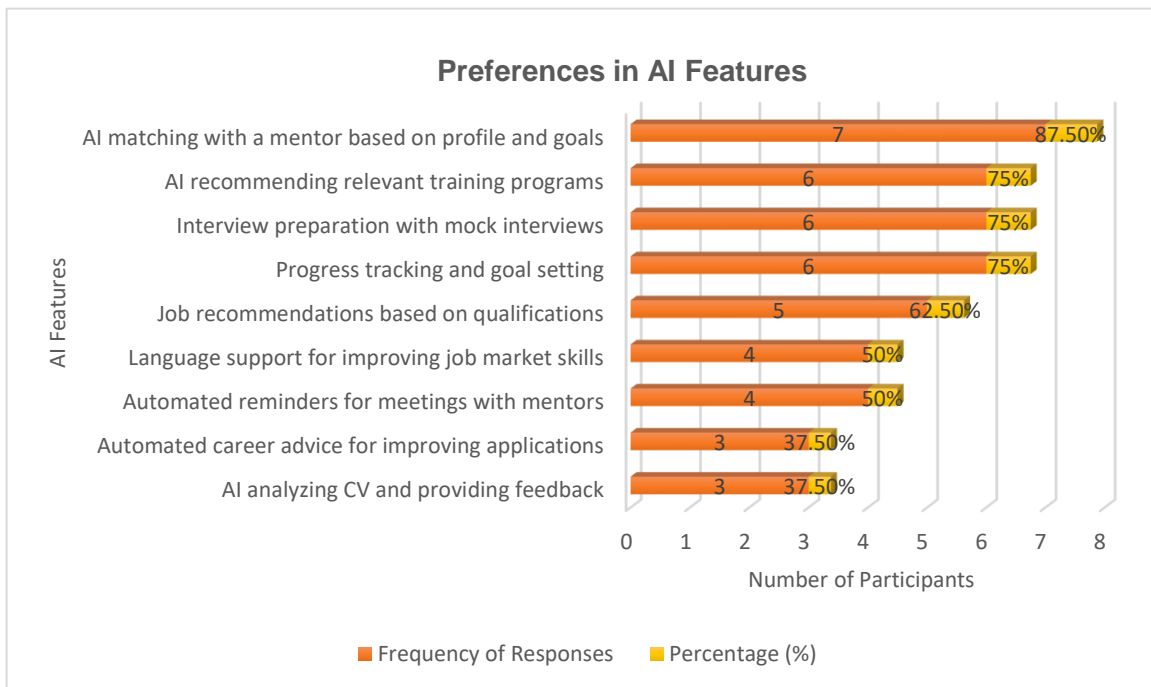


Figure 16. Participant's preferred AI features in digital mentorship programs

Figure 16 illustrates participants' preferences for AI features within a digital mentorship program. In examining the preferred AI features for a digital mentorship program, *mentor matching based on profile, skills, and career goals* was the most favored, with 7 participants (87.5%) supporting it. This suggests a strong interest in AI-driven customization to align mentees with mentors who best fit their needs and aspirations. Following closely, 6 participants (75%) valued features for *interview preparation with mock interviews*, *AI-recommended training programs*, and *progress tracking with goal setting*. These preferences highlight a desire for structured learning, practical interview skills, and consistent development monitoring within the mentorship experience.

*Job recommendations based on qualifications and experience* were also popular, selected by 5 participants (62.5%), showing a preference for AI-supported job search features aligned with participants' qualifications. Additionally, 4 participants (50%) expressed interest in *language support*

and *automated reminders for mentor meetings*, indicating that communication and time management support would enhance their mentorship experience.

Finally, *AI analysis of CVs* and *automated career advice for job applications* each appealed to 3 participants (37.5%), suggesting a moderate demand for personalized career advice and feedback on resumes to improve job application outcomes.

The findings suggest that AI has a strong potential to support immigrants' career development by providing personalized and practical tools. Participants highlighted the importance of AI in enhancing communication, streamlining time management, and offering tailored career resources. These preferences highlight the potential for AI to offer targeted career guidance and enhance immigrants' integration into the workforce.

### **Concerns About AI in Digital Mentorship**

While AI features in digital mentorship programs have the potential to offer personalized support and streamline the mentoring process, participants raised concerns about how these features may reduce human interaction.

A major concern, raised by 7 participants (87.5%), was *bias in matching algorithms*. Participants questioned whether AI could accurately match mentors and mentees based on skills and goals. *Privacy and data security* were also significant concerns for 7 participants (87.5%), who were apprehensive about how AI tools handle sensitive data and whether their personal information would be adequately protected.

Additionally, 6 participants (75%) were worried about the *lack of personal connection with mentors*, as automated features like matching or career advice might reduce meaningful, real-time communication. The desire for more human-like engagement was emphasized, with participants feeling less connected when much of the interaction was AI-driven. The *quality and reliability of AI-generated advice* were flagged by 6 participants (75%), highlighting concerns about whether automated suggestions could meet individual needs, thus emphasizing the importance of human judgment. Finally, 4 participants (50%) expressed concern about *limited access to technology*, which could prevent some users from fully benefiting from AI features, underscoring the need for adequate resources and infrastructure.

These results highlight participants' awareness of the ethical and practical challenges of AI in mentorship. While AI shows potential for enhancing efficiency, it is clear that maintaining human connection and ensuring fairness and privacy are crucial for creating a trustworthy and effective digital mentorship platform.

## **5.2 Conceptualization of the Digital Mentorship Platform**

### **5.2.1 Overview of the Concept**

#### **Purpose**

The primary goal of this digital mentorship platform is to provide a comprehensive support system for immigrants in Finland, addressing key career integration barriers through personalized career guidance, skill development, and professional networking opportunities. The design and functions of the platform are grounded in participant feedback, ensuring that it meets the specific needs and preferences expressed by immigrants. By fostering inclusivity, flexibility, and accessibility, the platform enables mentees to access tailored mentorship regardless of their education level, geographic location, or technical skills.

The platform aims to overcome the limited reach and exclusivity often found in current traditional and digital mentorship programs by centralizing support resources. It will address common barriers such as language difficulties, limited local networks, and unfamiliarity with Finnish workplace culture, connecting mentees with experienced mentors who can guide them through these challenges. Finally, the platform seeks to increase social capital among immigrants by expanding their professional networks and fostering meaningful connections crucial for successful career integration and long-term social inclusion.

#### **Target Mentees**

The platform's open-access approach invites all immigrants in Finland, regardless of education level or professional background, to join as mentees. It supports a diverse audience, from low-skilled to highly educated individuals, and is especially valuable for those in rural or remote areas with limited access to in-person mentorship. By offering a digital space for mentorship and career resources, the platform helps connect mentees with opportunities in the Finnish labor market.

#### **Mentor Role and Participation**

Mentors can join voluntarily, without a formal selection process. The platform welcomes a diverse range of mentors, including both native Finns and immigrants who have successfully integrated into the Finnish job market, offering varied perspectives and fostering a supportive community.

#### **Community Support for Mentors**

Mentors will have access to optional resources such as mentoring guidelines and cultural insights, helping them understand mentees' unique challenges. This ensures they provide relevant advice

and create a positive experience for both mentors and mentees. The platform may also organize virtual meet-ups for mentors to share insights and build connections.

### **Platform Type and Accessibility**

The platform will be a mobile-friendly website, accessible on both mobile and desktop devices. This web-based design ensures wide accessibility and provides a smooth user experience without the additional costs and complexities associated with app development.

### **Mentorship Type and Flexibility**

The platform provides both informal and structured mentorship options to meet diverse mentee needs. Mentees can choose the style that best suits their career goals and integration needs, allowing for flexible and personalized interactions.

#### **5.2.2 Platform Essentials**

*User-friendly Interface:* The platform will feature an intuitive interface to ensure ease of use for users with varying technical skills. Its straightforward design will facilitate easy navigation, enabling mentees to access mentorship resources, career guidance, and networking tools effortlessly, supporting their career integration journey.

*Profile Creation:* Users will create a personalized profile detailing their career background, goals, and preferences. This will help match mentees with suitable mentors and allow for updates as mentees progress, ensuring continued, tailored support.

*Language Accessibility:* The platform will support multiple languages, including Finnish, Swedish, and English, with additional languages considered based on demand. To further ensure language is not a barrier, translation tools will be integrated, enabling effective communication between mentors and mentees who speak different languages. This makes the platform more inclusive for Finland's diverse immigrant population.

*Personalized Mentorship:* Immigrants will be paired with mentors based on their career goals, skills, and specific needs. This approach addresses common barriers such as language challenges, tailored career guidance, and support for navigating complex issues like the recognition of foreign qualifications. Mentors will offer targeted advice on job search strategies, language improvement, and integration into the Finnish labor market.

*Inclusive and Open Access:* The platform will be open to all immigrants across Finland, with no eligibility restrictions. It will remove barriers to entry, provide support to those with limited resources or technology access, and ensure broad inclusivity.

*Networking Opportunities:* The platform will offer networking opportunities, virtual career events, and professional groups to help immigrants expand local networks and build social capital, an essential element for career integration and job search success in Finland.

*Resource Library:* An extensive library of career resources will be available, including tools for job searches, resume building, and recognizing foreign qualifications. This on-demand library will support self-directed learning and skill development for career integration.

*Cultural and Workplace Insights:* The platform will provide resources on Finnish workplace culture, including expectations, etiquette, and communication styles, helping mentees adapt and succeed in the professional environment.

*Questionnaire for Personalized Mentorship:* A questionnaire will collect relevant information about each participant's background, goals, challenges, and preferences, helping mentors offer more tailored and effective guidance.

*Ratings and Feedback System:* The platform will feature a ratings and feedback system, allowing mentees to evaluate their mentors and provide feedback on the platform. This will help guide mentor selection and inform continuous improvement of the platform.

### **5.2.3 Digital Tools and AI Features**

The findings reveal clear preferences for certain mentorship features and concerns about AI, particularly regarding bias in matching algorithms and the potential loss of personal connection. These concerns have significantly influenced the selection of AI features, with participants stressing the importance of human involvement in areas that require a high degree of personalization and emotional intelligence. As a result, the platform will integrate AI in ways that support, rather than replace, human mentorship. By incorporating these digital tools, the platform aims to provide useful support while ensuring that the essential human aspect of mentorship remains intact. This approach ensures that AI enhances the mentorship process without compromising the deep, personalized connections crucial for successful career integration. Table 9 summarizes these features and their alignment with AI integration based on the findings.

Table 9. Proposed digital tools and AI features of the digital mentorship platform

Feature	Description	AI or Non-AI	Rationale
<b>Mentor Matching</b>	Matching mentors and mentees based on profiles, skills, and goals.	AI with human review	AI matches based on skills and goals; human review ensures compatibility.
<b>Interview Preparation</b>	Offering mock interviews for practice.	Non-AI	Human feedback refines responses and offers tailored advice.
<b>Personalized Career Advice</b>	Providing advice based on the mentee's career aspirations and skills.	Non-AI	Advice needs human insight into the mentee's unique career path.
<b>Training Recommendations</b>	Suggesting relevant skill and development programs.	AI with human review	AI can suggest training, mentors refine recommendations.
<b>Job Recommendations</b>	Recommending jobs based on qualifications and experience.	AI with human review	AI matches jobs to qualifications, but mentors provide personalized guidance.
<b>Progress Tracking and Goal Setting</b>	Tracking progress and reviewing career goals.	Non-AI	Requires human oversight to personalize goals and mentorship adjustments.
<b>Language Support</b>	Providing language translation.	AI	AI handles real-time translation, enhancing communication.
<b>Automated Reminders and Scheduling</b>	Sending reminders for meetings or milestones.	AI	AI efficiently manages scheduling and reminders.
<b>CV Analysis and Feedback</b>	Reviewing and providing feedback on CVs.	AI with human review	AI helps with structure, but human input is needed for personalized feedback.

Mentorship areas such as *personalized career advice, progress tracking and goal setting, and interview preparation* will rely heavily on human interaction to ensure that each aspect is tailored to the unique needs of the mentee. On the other hand, *automated reminders and scheduling, and language support* can be efficiently handled by AI, as they do not require personalized engagement and can be standardized for all users. Additionally, AI will assist with *mentor matching, job and training recommendations, and CV analysis and feedback*, offering further support. However, human input will still be essential for maintaining a personalized approach and fostering genuine connections.

### **Considerations and Limitations of AI Integration**

AI integration in the platform must address key limitations to ensure fairness and effectiveness. A major concern is potential bias in AI algorithms. To ensure fairness, AI systems will be designed with diversity in mind, prioritizing impartiality and preventing discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, or nationality.

Privacy and security are also critical. The platform will adhere to stringent data protection standards, ensuring compliance with relevant regulations and fully informing users about how their data is collected and used.

While AI can enhance the platform, it should complement, not replace, human interaction. Participants stressed the importance of trust and personal relationships with mentors, which AI cannot replicate. The platform will balance AI use with human mentorship, ensuring technology supports rather than diminishes, the mentorship experience.

### **Digital Mentorship Process**

The proposed digital mentorship process begins with the mentee creating a profile, which includes completing a questionnaire about background, goals, skills, and preferences. AI uses this information to match the mentee with a suitable mentor. Once a mentor is notified, the mentor will review the profile and decide whether to accept the match. If accepted, the mentorship progresses with an initial meeting and continues through an ongoing process of support and guidance. Periodic assessments are conducted, leading to either mentorship completion or continuation. If needed, the mentee may be re-matched with a new mentor through AI, ensuring that the mentorship remains relevant and effective. This structured process aims to provide personalized and

adaptable support throughout the mentee's career integration journey. Figure 17 illustrates the proposed digital mentorship progression, outlining the key steps in the mentorship process.

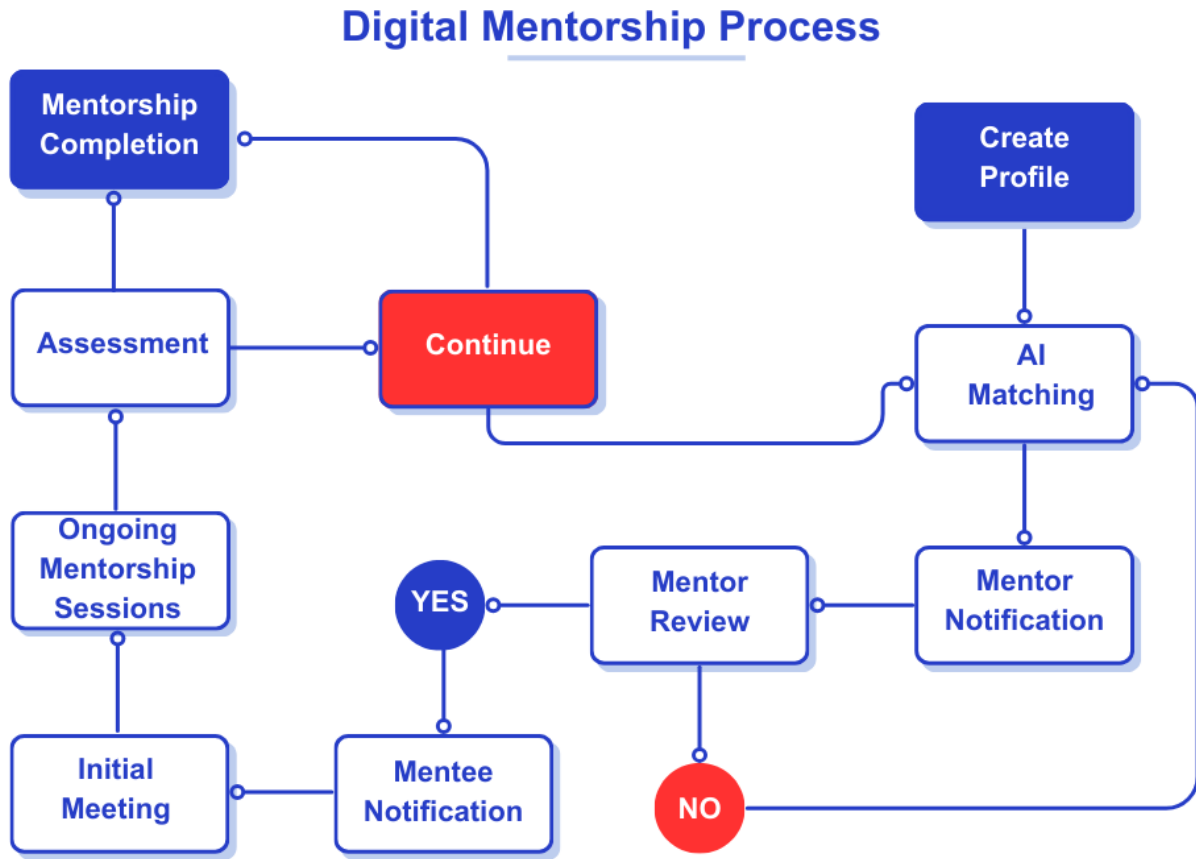


Figure 17. Proposed digital mentorship journey

#### 5.2.4 Addressing Key Gaps in Existing Programs

Feedback from participants and limitations observed in current mentorship programs (Chapters 3.2.2 and 3.3.2) highlight key gaps that the proposed digital platform aims to address. These gaps underscore the need for a more inclusive, flexible, and accessible approach to mentorship, which the proposed digital platform aims to address.

*Inclusivity:* Existing programs often have geographic restrictions, target specific groups (e.g., highly educated immigrants or women), and complex application processes, excluding many immigrants. The digital platform will offer open access to all immigrants regardless of background or location.

*Nationwide Access:* Mentorship is often concentrated in urban centers, leaving rural immigrants without support. The platform will provide nationwide access, ensuring all immigrants can participate.

*Low Barriers to Entry:* Existing mentorship programs have complex application processes that discourage participation. The platform will offer immediate access without formal applications, allowing immigrants to begin mentorship without delay.

*Flexible Mentoring Model:* Traditional mentorship programs rely on in-person meetings, which may not be feasible for all immigrants. The platform will offer virtual mentoring options, such as asynchronous communication and video calls, providing greater accessibility.

*Mentor-Mentee Matching:* A common issue in existing mentorship programs is the poor alignment between mentors and mentees, leading to ineffective mentorship. The platform will enhance matching by considering professional backgrounds, career goals, and preferences, ensuring more relevant support.

*Personalized Mentorship Focus:* While existing mentorship programs address career development, many focus more broadly on social integration or general support. The platform will provide personalized mentorship tailored to address career-specific challenges, such as navigating the Finnish job market, adapting professional skills to local standards, and building networks within specific industries, ensuring that support is directly relevant to each individual's career goals and aspirations.

*Scalable Support and Accessibility:* Traditional mentorship programs struggle with scalability due to limited mentor availability. The digital platform will scale easily to accommodate growing demand, offering continuous engagement for both mentors and mentees.

The proposed digital mentorship platform will fill these gaps, offering a more inclusive, accessible, and flexible approach to career-specific mentorship, supporting immigrants' professional integration into the Finnish labor market.

### **5.2.5 Limitations of the Platform**

While the digital mentorship platform is designed to address key challenges in immigrants' career integration, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The platform focuses primarily on career-specific barriers, such as access to mentorship, networking, and job search strategies, but does not address broader challenges like social integration or systemic discrimination, which require different interventions. Additionally, the platform may face limitations related to technology access and digital literacy, particularly among older immigrants or those unfamiliar with online tools. Language barriers also pose a challenge, as the platform may not be fully accessible for immigrants with limited proficiency in the language(s) used.

Although the platform is designed to scale, mentor availability could still be limited, especially for niche fields, which may result in waiting times for mentees. Furthermore, the platform cannot replicate the value of in-person interaction, which may be preferred by some immigrants for building stronger mentor-mentee relationships. Finally, while the platform offers flexibility and personalized support, it may not be able to provide specialized guidance across all career fields, and some immigrants may prefer more traditional or in-person mentorship methods, which the platform does not fully accommodate. Therefore, the platform is intended to complement other support systems, providing career-focused guidance while acknowledging that not all aspects of immigrant integration can be addressed through digital mentorship alone.

### **5.2.6 Concept Summary**

The proposed digital mentorship platform is designed to address key barriers to career integration faced by immigrants in Finland. It will provide an inclusive, flexible, and accessible support system for mentees, offering personalized career guidance, skill development, and professional networking opportunities. By centralizing mentorship resources, the platform aims to overcome challenges such as limited local networks, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with Finnish workplace culture, ultimately supporting immigrants in navigating the Finnish labor market.

Key features of the platform include a user-friendly interface, personalized mentorship matching, networking opportunities, and an extensive resource library. The platform will also integrate AI tools to enhance certain aspects, such as automated reminders and language support while maintaining human involvement in areas requiring emotional intelligence and personalization. This platform will address gaps in existing mentorship programs by offering nationwide access, low barriers to entry, and flexible virtual mentoring models. It aims to provide tailored support to immigrants at various stages of their career integration journey, ensuring that mentorship is relevant and practical. However, the platform also has limitations, such as its focus on career-specific challenges, which may not fully address broader integration issues. Additionally, technology access, digital literacy, and language barriers may hinder some immigrants' participation. Despite these challenges, the platform offers a scalable and adaptable model that can support a wide range of immigrants, while complementing other integration efforts.

Ultimately, this digital mentorship platform represents a step forward in enhancing the career integration of immigrants in Finland, offering them the tools and resources needed to succeed in the labor market while building a strong social network and community.

## 6 Discussion

This chapter addresses the primary research questions by analyzing findings in relation to the literature and theoretical framework discussed earlier in the thesis. Each question is answered individually, connecting findings to key concepts and exploring their practical applications in immigrant career integration. The concluding summary highlights the importance of these findings for both academic understanding and real-world practice. Finally, research reliability and ethics, limitations and recommendations for future research are discussed, followed by a personal reflection on insights gained during the research journey.

### 6.1 Answering the Research Questions

The primary objective of this research is to deepen the understanding of the challenges immigrants in Finland face during their career integration and to explore the potential role of digital mentorship, including AI tools, in overcoming these challenges. By examining immigrant experiences, this study identifies areas where digital mentorship could enhance career outcomes and contribute to broader integration efforts.

To achieve this objective, the following research questions have been formulated to guide the investigation:

**RQ1: What challenges do immigrants in Finland face in their career integration, and what types of services, both public and private, have they accessed to support this process?**

#### *Challenges Faced by the Participants*

Immigrants in Finland face multiple challenges in their career integration, such as language barriers, underemployment, discrimination, and cultural differences. The most common challenge was language proficiency, which limited participants' access to jobs matching their qualifications. This is consistent with the literature discussed in Chapter 2.2.2, which highlights language as a crucial barrier to labor market integration.

Many participants also faced underemployment, working in low-skilled jobs despite holding higher qualifications. This issue is closely tied to another challenge - the lack of recognition of foreign qualifications, forcing participants into roles that did not reflect their expertise. These issues align with the labor market segmentation discussed in Chapter 2.2.1. This concept highlights how immigrants, despite higher qualifications, are often confined to low-skilled jobs due to institutional barriers and discrimination, reinforcing inequalities between native and foreign-born workers in Finland.

Limited access to professional networks was another challenge. Without strong connections within the Finnish labor market, participants struggled to find job opportunities or mentorship. This lack of access to social capital, as discussed in Chapter 2.3, hindered their ability to integrate into the workforce. Social capital, built through relationships and professional connections, is crucial for career advancement. This aligns with Chapter 2.2.4, which emphasizes how limited social networks can isolate immigrants and restrict their access to important job leads and mentorship, further impeding their labor market integration.

Discrimination based on foreign background also hindered integration, with participants often overlooked for job opportunities due to biases. This aligns with the literature in Chapter 2.2.3, which explains that discrimination in the job market often takes the form of statistical or taste-based discrimination, where employers' biases or preferences based on background limit opportunities for immigrants, regardless of their qualifications.

Finally, cultural differences in Finnish workplaces presented integration challenges. Many participants found it difficult to adapt to the local work culture, which emphasizes direct communication and flat hierarchies. These challenges align with Chapter 2.2.2, which discusses how language and cultural differences hinder workplace integration. Finnish work norms, emphasizing independence and direct communication, posed challenges for those used to more hierarchical or collaborative environments.

In conclusion, these challenges—language barriers, underemployment, unrecognized qualifications, lack of networks, discrimination, and cultural differences—restrict career mobility and contribute to exclusion. Digital mentorship platforms, as discussed in Chapter 3, offer potential solutions by addressing these barriers and supporting immigrants in their career integration.

The challenges immigrants face in career integration are interconnected, including language barriers, low-skilled job restrictions, unrecognized qualifications, limited networks, discrimination, and cultural differences. These barriers restrict access to meaningful employment and career mobility, contributing to exclusion. As the literature suggests, targeted interventions like mentorship programs, especially digital platforms, can help address these issues by improving language skills, enhancing social capital, and aiding adaptation to local workplace norms.

### *Support Services Accessed by the Participants*

Participants in the study accessed various career integration services in Finland, including language courses, job placement assistance, skills development programs, job fairs, and networking events. However, their feedback on these services was mixed. Many expressed dissatisfaction with TE Services, citing a lack of personalized support and inadequate language courses that did

not equip them with the necessary workplace fluency. This feedback aligns with Chapter 2.1.4, which discusses the structure of Finland's integration program. As noted in the study by Steel & Jyrkinen (2017, 40-41), such services often lack personalization and fail to adequately assess foreign degrees, particularly for highly educated immigrants, limiting their effectiveness in supporting career integration. Job fairs, networking events, and digital tools, such as government job listing sites, were also seen as limited in providing meaningful connections or personalized guidance.

Despite the intent to support job placement and integration, these services often failed to foster meaningful career advancement. This aligns with the literature in Chapter 3.1.2, which discusses how existing policies and programs, while broad in scope, often fail to address the complex challenges immigrants face, highlighting the need for policy updates and more effective strategies.

Some participants found mentorship programs and digital platforms more effective, offering tailored advice that helped with their career integration. There was a general consensus on the need for more targeted services, such as professional language training, mentorship, and specialized networking. Many also emphasized the need for better recognition of foreign qualifications.

The call for improved recognition of foreign qualifications aligns with the literature on labor market segmentation (Chapter 2.1.1), where inadequate qualification recognition leads to underemployment and limits career advancement. Additionally, the demand for specialized networking and mentorship highlights gaps in current services. Many participants found job fairs insufficient, emphasizing the need for more tailored services like digital mentorship and professional networking to support long-term career success and integration into the Finnish labor market.

### *Social Capital in Career Integration*

Participants' personal networks, including family, friends, and ethnic communities, were essential for initial job searches. Bonding social capital (strong ties) helped secure entry-level positions through referrals and support. However, these connections sometimes led to underemployment, as the jobs did not always match immigrants' qualifications. In contrast, bridging social capital (weak ties), accessed through mentors and professional networks, was crucial for long-term career advancement. Mentors helped immigrants navigate the Finnish labor market, offering insights into local work culture and industry expectations. These networks enabled immigrants to move beyond entry-level positions, creating opportunities for career growth.

These findings reflect the Social Capital Theory discussed in Chapter 2.3. Bonding social capital provides immediate support while bridging social capital offers long-term opportunities and broader access to resources. A balanced approach combining both types of capital is key to meeting immediate needs and fostering career development.

## **RQ2: What aspects of digital mentorship do immigrants in Finland perceive as most beneficial for their career integration?**

### *Platform Preferences and Mentorship Styles*

Participants showed varied familiarity with digital mentorship, with some unaware of the concept, while others appreciated its flexibility and accessibility. They valued digital mentorship for overcoming geographic and logistical barriers, especially for those outside the capital region. These insights align with Chapter 3.3.1, where digital mentorship is described as a convenient tool for remote career support, providing guidance and connection beyond traditional settings.

Overall, participants expressed a favorable view of digital mentorship platforms. They highlighted benefits such as personalized resume advice, industry insights, and the ability to expand professional networks. These align with the literature on mentors fostering bridging social capital, expanding access to professional networks, and enhancing career opportunities (Chapter 3.1.1). Digital platforms were seen as tools for connecting with mentors and professionals across diverse fields, which could lead to long-term career growth and integration into the Finnish labor market.

However, some participants raised concerns about the effectiveness of digital mentorship, particularly around the challenges of matching mentees with mentors who share relevant career goals. This concern reflects the difficulties discussed in Chapter 3.3.2 regarding mismatched mentor-mentee pairs in the FIKA Mentoring Programme. Therefore, ensuring a robust matching process in digital platforms is critical to maximize the impact.

Digital mentorship was viewed as a promising tool for career integration, with the potential to provide tailored guidance and expand professional networks. However, personalized matching is key to enhancing its effectiveness and ensuring immigrants achieve their career goals.

Most participants preferred websites for digital mentorship, valuing their easy access to comprehensive resources. They favored an informal approach, appreciating the flexibility and relaxed nature of these platforms, which allowed open communication without formal pressures. However, a few participants preferred formal mentorship for its structure and accountability, aligning with their career goals. These diverse preferences suggest that a digital mentorship platform should primarily offer web-based access and informal guidance, while also providing structured options for those who prefer more formality.

These preferences align with the literature in Chapter 3.3.1, which highlights the flexibility of digital mentorship and its ability to eliminate traditional power dynamics, enabling more equal interactions between mentors and mentees. The preference for informal mentorship mirrors existing research

on its benefits, such as fostering organic connections and promoting greater satisfaction and career support. Participants also mentioned that the online format reduced feelings of judgment, enhancing their engagement.

While informal mentorship was the preferred style for most, the need for formal mentorship options underscores the importance of adaptability in digital platforms. The literature supports this, emphasizing the value of offering a range of mentorship styles to meet diverse user needs and ensure accessibility and effectiveness for all immigrants seeking career integration in Finland.

### *Career Guidance and Professional Networking*

Participants highly valued digital mentorship programs for their practical support in career integration, particularly for career guidance from professionals. This support was crucial for navigating the new professional environment, offering insights into job opportunities, application processes, and skill development. These aspects align with the literature in Chapter 3.3.1, which highlights that digital mentorship provides vocational guidance through online interactions, enabling access to advice on job applications, skills, and employment opportunities. The flexibility of digital platforms allows for continued support regardless of location, expanding access to diverse perspectives that participants appreciated.

Networking opportunities were also seen as vital, helping participants connect with potential employers, industry professionals, and peers, which is key to establishing a presence in Finland's labor market and building social capital. Personalized feedback on resumes, job applications, and interview preparation, as well as regular online meetings, were identified as crucial for sustaining mentor-mentee relationships. These elements echo the findings in Chapter 3.3.3, which discusses how digital mentorship fosters trust and openness, enhancing the informational, psychosocial, and practical benefits of mentoring.

### *Key Platform Features and Communication Tools*

Participants expressed a strong preference for tools that could support structured career development within a digital mentorship platform. The most highly valued features included access to resources and training materials, as well as the ability to track personal progress and goals. These preferences suggest a demand for platforms that provide educational content and allow individuals to monitor their growth, which is essential for guiding their career development in a new environment. Additionally, the participants valued the availability of a variety of mentors, emphasizing the importance of diverse perspectives, and appreciated receiving personalized career advice tailored to their individual goals.

Another key preference was the need for consistent communication within the platform. Participants highlighted the significance of regular check-ins, secure messaging, and scheduling tools to maintain effective mentorship. This preference aligns with findings in the literature, particularly in Chapter 3.2.3, which underscores the importance of frequent and accessible interactions in fostering meaningful mentor-mentee relationships. Regular communication is crucial for building trust, and ensuring that mentees feel supported and engaged throughout their mentorship journey.

Participants suggested adding job listings, career goal questionnaires, and a feedback system to increase accountability and mentor effectiveness. The importance of inclusivity was emphasized, with some suggesting the platform should accommodate individuals from diverse backgrounds to broaden perspectives and enhance effectiveness.

This focus on inclusivity addresses gaps observed in existing mentorship programs in Finland discussed in Chapters 3.2 and 3.3. Current programs often have criteria that may unintentionally exclude immigrants needing support, such as gender focus or high educational qualifications. A more inclusive digital mentorship platform could better meet the diverse needs of immigrants, improving career integration and development.

Overall, feedback indicates a preference for a flexible, inclusive platform offering personalized career development resources, supporting the need for a mentorship model that caters to diverse immigrant populations.

### **RQ3: What role could AI tools play within digital mentorship platforms to better assist immigrants in their career integration process?**

#### *Benefits of AI-Enhanced Features in Digital Mentorship*

Familiarity with AI-based tools varied among participants, with some having advanced knowledge and others only basic exposure. A few were unfamiliar with these tools, highlighting a potential barrier to engaging with AI-driven mentorship platforms. Despite this, there was consensus on AI's potential to personalize and improve the mentorship experience. Participants expressed interest in AI features such as tailored mentor matching, job search assistance, and language support, highlighting a preference for more customized career development resources.

This divide in familiarity and perceived benefits aligns with the discussion in Chapter 3.4.1 about AI's increasing role in career development. As the literature suggests, the pandemic accelerated the adoption of AI, underscoring the growing reliance on these technologies. However, as noted by

participants, greater exposure and understanding of AI are necessary for effective use. This reflects the evolving complexity of AI, where users must adapt and learn how to leverage these tools effectively.

Participants preferred AI features that would enhance personalization, with mentor matching based on profiles, skills, and career goals being the most favored. Other popular features included mock interview tools, AI-recommended training programs, progress tracking with goal setting, and job recommendations. These preferences point to a need for practical, skill-building tools within mentorship programs. Additionally, language support and automated reminders for mentor meetings were valued for improving communication and time management. AI tools for analyzing CVs and providing personalized career advice also garnered moderate interest.

These findings are consistent with the literature in Chapter 3.4.2 on AI's role in digital mentorship. The literature emphasizes AI's potential to personalize mentorship through data-driven matching processes, aligning with participants' preferences for customized mentor-mentee pairings. The demand for AI-driven tools like mock interviews and job recommendations further supports the literature's claim that AI can enhance skill development and career guidance.

The findings highlight AI's potential to provide targeted career resources for immigrants, aiding their integration into Finland's job market. While AI's ability to offer personalized guidance is well-documented, its effectiveness depends on user familiarity, as emphasized by participants. Balancing innovation with user education is essential for maximizing AI's impact in digital mentorship programs. This underscores the need for efforts to build user confidence, ensuring mentors and mentees can fully leverage AI tools for career development. By offering personalized support, AI can help immigrants build social capital, a key factor in successful integration.

### *Concerns and Limitations of AI in Digital Mentorship*

Participants raised several concerns about the use of AI in digital mentorship programs, including the potential for bias in AI matching algorithms, privacy and data security issues, and the lack of personal connection in AI-driven mentorship. Some participants also questioned the reliability of AI-generated career advice and noted the limited access to technology among certain immigrant groups as a barrier to participation.

These concerns align with the limitations and ethical considerations discussed in Chapter 3.4.3. The issues raised about bias in AI algorithms reflect literature warnings about algorithmic bias and the need for regular audits to prevent discrimination. Similarly, privacy and data security concerns tie into the ethical discussions of the importance of robust data protection measures, such as encryption, to maintain user trust and the system's credibility.

The concerns regarding AI's lack of empathy and personal connection resonate with the argument in the literature that AI cannot replicate the deep, personal relationships central to human mentorship. Moreover, participants' doubts about the reliability of AI-generated career advice mirror literature concerns about AI's limitations in assessing nuanced factors like soft skills and cultural fit.

Lastly, the issue of limited access to technology connects with the technological barriers mentioned in Chapter 3.3.3. While AI has the potential to make mentorship more accessible, it can exclude populations without access to necessary resources, such as devices, the internet, or digital literacy. This highlights the importance of ensuring equitable access in the design of AI-driven mentorship systems.

These findings underscore the complexity of integrating AI into mentorship programs. While AI can enhance efficiency and offer valuable insights, it cannot replace the human aspects of mentorship. Balancing AI's capabilities with human judgment and empathy is essential for ensuring digital mentorship remains effective, ethical, and inclusive.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this thesis has explored the career integration challenges faced by immigrants in Finland, focusing on key barriers such as language difficulties, low-skilled job opportunities, recognition of qualifications, limited professional networks, discrimination, and adapting to Finnish workplace culture. These challenges highlight the importance of addressing the gaps in social capital—particularly in terms of professional networks and social connections—as essential elements in the successful career integration of immigrants.

The study also examined the potential of a digital mentorship platform to address these barriers. By offering personalized mentorship, networking opportunities, and career guidance, the platform aligns with the principles of Social Capital Theory, which emphasizes the significance of social networks and relationships in career advancement. The platform can help bridge the gap in immigrants' social capital by providing access to a broader, more diverse set of professional contacts, enhancing their opportunities for career development in Finland.

While the platform integrates certain AI tools to streamline the mentorship process - such as automated reminders, language support, and mentorship matching - AI's role is designed to complement human connections, not replace them. The essence of mentorship, as framed by Social Capital Theory, lies in building trust, reciprocity, and meaningful relationships. While AI can help overcome language barriers and assist with logistics, it cannot replicate the depth of connection and mutual trust vital to the mentor-mentee relationship. Thus, while technology can enhance access and efficiency, the platform's success relies on fostering genuine human connections.

However, several concerns must be addressed for the platform to reach its full potential. These include issues of digital literacy, technology access, AI algorithm bias, and data security, which may limit some immigrants' ability to fully engage with the platform. Furthermore, while the platform can address career-specific challenges, it cannot fully address broader integration issues such as cultural adaptation and social cohesion, which require more comprehensive support systems.

The study's findings suggest that the proposed digital mentorship platform can play a vital role in overcoming the social capital gaps that immigrants often face in their career integration. By facilitating access to professional networks, providing personalized mentorship, and offering flexible, accessible support, the platform can help immigrants build the social connections needed for career success in Finland. However, it is crucial to remember that the platform is one tool among many and should complement existing integration efforts.

In answering the research questions, the thesis highlights the career integration challenges immigrants face and the potential benefits of a digital mentorship platform in overcoming these barriers, particularly through the lens of Social Capital Theory. The platform's focus on enhancing professional networks and fostering social ties aligns with the core principles of social capital, providing immigrants with the resources they need to succeed in the Finnish labor market.

Looking ahead, the development of digital mentorship platforms—supported by AI tools—can serve as a critical strategy in addressing the career integration challenges faced by immigrants. However, to fully realize the potential of such platforms, ongoing research and adaptation are necessary to ensure they continue to meet the diverse and evolving needs of immigrants. By combining technology with human interaction and focusing on strengthening social capital, digital mentorship platforms can offer scalable, flexible solutions to improve both the career integration and social inclusion of immigrants in Finland.

### **6.3 Reliability and Ethics of the Research**

Research ethics are essential for ensuring the integrity of a study and for protecting the rights of participants and others impacted by the research (Saunders et al., 2023, 253). In this study, participants were informed that responses would remain anonymous, with personal identifiers kept separate from the collected data. All data was stored securely in password-protected files, and coded identifiers (e.g., P1, P2) were used to safeguard anonymity. This approach ensured that individual responses remained confidential and unlinked to identifiable personal information.

Ethical principles outlined by Saunders et al. (2023, 57) were strictly adhered to, emphasizing fairness, transparency, and respect throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement, and detailed information was provided regarding the

research objectives, scope, and potential impacts. Participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Participants were briefed on data use and storage, ensuring an informed and voluntary decision to participate.

To further protect confidentiality, all data collected, including interview transcripts and survey responses, was handled carefully, with access limited to authorized personnel only. Upon the completion of the thesis evaluation, all data and materials will be securely deleted, following the school's guidelines and ethical standards for data handling and storage. If no further use is agreed upon, data containing personal or confidential information will be deleted promptly to comply with privacy regulations.

The data analysis was conducted fairly, and findings were reported accurately without manipulation or omission. The analysis adhered to ethical guidelines of transparency and honesty, ensuring that conclusions were based solely on the data gathered. Academic integrity was maintained through proper acknowledgment of all sources and adherence to anti-plagiarism standards.

By following these ethical principles, this study was conducted with respect for participants' rights and confidentiality while upholding the reliability and integrity of the research.

#### **6.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study has provided valuable insights into the challenges immigrants face in their career integration in Finland, as well as the potential role of a digital mentorship platform in addressing these challenges. However, several limitations must be acknowledged, and the findings suggest several areas for future research to build on and refine these insights.

A key limitation of this research is the small sample size, with only eight participants from the researcher's personal and professional networks in the Capital Region. This sample is not fully representative of the diverse immigrant populations across Finland, and the findings may not capture the experiences of immigrants in other regions. Future research should aim to include a more diverse and geographically varied sample, representing a broader range of backgrounds, education levels, and employment statuses.

Additionally, while this study conceptualizes a digital mentorship platform, it does not evaluate its practical effectiveness. Future research could involve pilot testing such platforms with a larger group of immigrants to assess usability, user satisfaction, and career integration outcomes. These studies could also explore how different AI tools, such as machine learning algorithms, might support the mentorship process and whether they can effectively address the diverse needs of immigrant populations.

Another important area for future research is the inclusivity of digital mentorship platforms. While the proposed platform offers open access to all immigrants, regardless of background or location, there is a need for ongoing research into how digital tools can better serve marginalized groups. Despite the platform's inclusive design, future studies should investigate how digital tools can reach immigrants with limited access to technology or digital literacy, ensuring that these platforms do not inadvertently exclude those who may benefit most. This would help maximize the potential of digital mentorship in supporting the career integration of all immigrant groups.

Ethical considerations around the use of AI in mentorship programs also require attention. AI has the potential to enhance mentorship but raises concerns about bias, privacy, and the loss of human interaction. Future research should focus on mitigating AI biases, protecting user privacy, and ensuring that the human element of mentorship is maintained.

In conclusion, while this study contributes to understanding the role of digital mentorship in immigrant career integration, there are many areas for further exploration. Future research could expand into areas such as long-term impacts, inclusivity, AI ethics, and comparisons with traditional mentorship programs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how digital tools can enhance immigrants' integration into Finnish society.

## **6.5 Reflections**

The thesis topic holds a special significance to me, as I too am an immigrant who started my journey in Finland as an international student. Having personally experienced some of the challenges faced by immigrants, such as navigating the job market, language barriers, and adjusting to a new culture, I have a deep understanding of the obstacles that many newcomers encounter in their career integration process. These experiences motivated me to explore ways in which digital tools, such as a mentorship platform, can support immigrants in overcoming these barriers.

While my background shaped my interest in the subject, I made a conscious effort to ensure that the research was conducted with thoroughness and objectivity. Throughout the process, I was committed to basing the development of the digital mentorship platform on the insights gained from interviews and existing literature, rather than on personal assumptions. This approach allowed me to create a research-driven concept, grounded in the actual needs and preferences of immigrants, as opposed to solely reflecting my own experiences.

The time commitment required for this project was substantial, especially considering the tight timeframe from May to November 2024. At first, I had doubts about whether I could complete the thesis on time, but having already finished all my courses allowed me to focus fully on the research

and development. While balancing personal life and thesis development, I proposed a digital mentorship solution that evolved through refining literature, interview insights, and mentorship features. Despite the challenges, I am grateful for the unwavering support of my family, friends, thesis supervisor, and personal networks who participated in the interviews.

Throughout my courses, I gained insights into AI and its applications, which were integrated into both this thesis and the conceptualization of the digital mentorship platform. It was rewarding to see how AI could support mentor matching and other platform features, and aid my writing process. ChatGPT was used to enhance readability by rephrasing and correcting grammatical errors while maintaining the original meaning. Each revision was carefully reviewed to ensure the intent of the content remained intact. This experience highlighted AI's potential in platform development and refining academic work.

In reflecting on the thesis as a whole, I realize how much I have grown both academically and professionally. The process of researching, interviewing, and conceptualizing a digital platform has not only enhanced my understanding of career integration challenges but also deepened my appreciation for the impact of mentorship and human-centered design. Moving forward, I am excited to continue exploring the intersection of technology and mentorship, particularly in how digital tools can support career development in diverse populations.

## Sources

- Accenture 2022. The Art of AI Maturity: Advancing from Practice to Performance. URL: <https://www.accenture.com/content/dam/system-files/acom/custom-code/ai-maturity/Accenture-Art-of-AI-Maturity-Report-Global-Revised.pdf>. Accessed: 05 September 2024.
- Ahmad, A. 2005. Getting a Job in Finland: The Social Networks of Immigrants from the Indian Sub-continent in the Helsinki Metropolitan Labour Market. Academic Dissertation. University of Helsinki, Department of Sociology. URN: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:952-10-2792-4>. Accessed: 29 July 2024.
- Ahmad, A. 2020. When the Name Matters: An Experimental Investigation of Ethnic Discrimination in the Finnish Labor Market. *Sociological Inquiry*, 90(3), pp. 468-496. URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/10138/328226>. Accessed: 10 July 2024.
- Akin, L., & Hilbun, J. 2007. E-mentoring in three voices. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 10(1). URL: <https://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/spring101/akin101.htm>. Accessed: 27 August 2024.
- Alho, R. 2020. You Need to Know Someone Who Knows Someone: International Students' Job Search Experiences. *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 10(2). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.v10i2.120817>. Accessed: 02 August 2024.
- Bagai, R. & Mane, V. 2023. Designing an AI-Powered Mentorship Platform for Professional Development: Opportunities and Challenges. *International Journal of Computer Trends and Technology*, 71(4), pp. 108-114. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14445/22312803/IJCTT-V71I4P114>. Accessed: 18 September 2024.
- Bagnoli, L. & Estache, A. 2019. Mentoring Labor Market Integration of Migrants: Policy Insights from a Survey of Mentoring Theory and Practice. Working Paper No. 2019-15, ECARES. Université Libre de Bruxelles. URL: [https://econpapers.repec.org/paper/ecawpaper/2013\\_2f288197.htm](https://econpapers.repec.org/paper/ecawpaper/2013_2f288197.htm). Accessed: 08 August 2024.
- Bankins, S., Jooss, S., Restubog, S. L. D., Marrone, M., Ocampo, A. C., & Shoss, M. 2024. Navigating career stages in the age of artificial intelligence: A systematic interdisciplinary review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 153, pp 1-19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2024.104011>. Accessed: 24 September 2024.
- Bierema, L.L. & Merriam, S.B. 2002. E-mentoring: Using Computer Mediated Communication to Enhance the Mentoring Process. *Innovative Higher Education*, 26(3), pp. 211-227. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1017921023103>. Accessed: 24 August 2024.

- Bozeman, B. & Feeney, M.K. 2007. Toward a Useful Theory of Mentoring: A Conceptual Analysis and Critique. *Administration & Society*, 39(6), pp. 719-739. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399707304119>. Accessed: 08 August 2024.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. 2006. Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77-101. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>. Accessed: 15 October 2024.
- Cambridge s.a.a. Asylum Seeker. URL: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/asylum-seeker?q=Asylum+seeker>. Accessed: 07 August 2024.
- Cambridge s.a.b. Emigration. URL: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/emigration>. Accessed: 07 August 2024.
- Cambridge s.a.c. Immigration. URL: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/immigration>. Accessed: 07 August 2024.
- City of Espoo s.a. EntryPoint mentoring programme. URL: <https://www.espoo.fi/en/working-life/es-poo-talent-hub/entrypoint-mentoring-programme>. Accessed: 18 August 2024.
- Clutterbuck, D. 2020. The challenges of coaching and mentoring in a digitally connected world: An essay of an academic practitioner. In R. Wegener, S. Ackermann, J. Amstutz, S. Deplazes, H. Künzli, & A. Ryter (Eds.), *Coaching im digitalen Wandel*, pp. 19-29. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666407420.19>. Accessed: 12 September 2024.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. 2007. *Research Methods in Education*. 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. Routledge. London.
- Coleman, J. S. 1988. Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94(1), pp. S95-S120. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2780243>. Accessed: 05 August 2024.
- De Cuyper, P., Vandermeerschen, H. & Purkayastha, D. 2019. Migrant mentoring to work: defining an old-but-innovative instrument. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 17 (2), pp.108-121. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24384/cy2r-id97>. Accessed: 24 July 2024.
- De Cuyper, P. 2022. Mentoring migrant talent to work: a conceptual and empirical framework. In M. Counihan and W. van Winden (Eds.), *Cities for Talent: Good practices for internationalisation in medium-sized European cities*, pp. 183-203. University of Groningen Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21827/6270dd2d5e9b0>. Accessed: 12 August 2024.

- European Commission 1999. Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers. URL: [https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/library-document/act-integration-immigrants-and-reception-asylum-seekers\\_en](https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/library-document/act-integration-immigrants-and-reception-asylum-seekers_en). Accessed: 16 July 2024.
- Family Federation of Finland s.a. Womento mentoring. URL: <https://www.vaestoliitto.fi/en/immigrants/womento-mentoring/>. Accessed: 02 September 2024.
- Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare 2024. A language-aware approach. URL: <https://thl.fi/en/topics/migration-and-cultural-diversity/support-material/good-practices/a-language-aware-approach>. Accessed: 29 July 2024.
- Finnish Immigration Service 2024. Immigration statistics 2023: The effects of international conflicts and of the economic downturn on immigration to Finland. URL: <https://migri.fi/en/-/immigration-statistics-2023-the-effects-of-international-conflicts-and-of-the-economic-downturn-on-immigration-to-finland>. Accessed: 14 July 2024.
- Gottlieb, M., Fant, A., King, A., Messman, A., Robinson, D., Carmelli, G., & Sherbino, J. 2017. One Click Away: Digital Mentorship in the Modern Era. *Cureus*, 9(11), pp. 1-7. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.1838>. Accessed: 24 August 2024.
- Gower, S., Jeemi, Z., Forbes, D., Kebble, P. & Dantas, J.A.R. 2022. Peer Mentoring Programs for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Refugee and Migrant Women: An Integrative Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(19). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191912845>. Accessed: 15 August 2024.
- Granovetter, M. S. 1973. The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), pp. 1360–1380. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2776392>. Accessed: 02 August 2024.
- Granovetter, M. S. 1995. *Getting A Job. A Study of Contacts and Careers.* (first ed. 1974), The University of Chicago Press. Chicago.
- Heikkilä, E. s.a. Womento. European Commission. URL: [https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/integration-practice/womento\\_en](https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/integration-practice/womento_en). Accessed: 02 September 2024.
- Heikkilä, E. & Peltonen, S. 2002. *Immigrants and Integration in Finland.* Migration Institute of Finland. URL: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/246422099\\_Immigrants\\_and\\_integration\\_in\\_Finland](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/246422099_Immigrants_and_integration_in_Finland). Accessed: 10 July 2024.
- Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce s.a.a. EntryPoint. URL: <https://helsinki.chamber.fi/en/our-services/talent-boost/entrypoint/>. Accessed: 18 August 2024.

Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce. s.a.b. EntryPoint Toolkit: Cross-cultural Mentoring Partnership. URL: [https://interculturaltoolkit.helsinki.chamber.fi/entrypoint/docs/entrypoint\\_booklet.pdf](https://interculturaltoolkit.helsinki.chamber.fi/entrypoint/docs/entrypoint_booklet.pdf). Accessed: 18 August 2024.

Hillgren, E., Peltola, J., Yilmaz, F., Jinia, N.J. & Koivula, U.M. 2021. Networking To Work: Introduction to The New Models for Integrating Immigrants in Belgium and Finland. *Horizon Insights*, 4(2), 11-19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31175/hi.2021.02.02>. Accessed: 02 August 2024.

HR Future s.a. Mentorship in The Digital Age: AI And Virtual Platforms for Optimized Career Growth. URL: <https://www.hrfuture.net/talent-management/personal-development/mentorship-in-the-digital-age-ai-and-virtual-platforms-for-optimized-career-growth/>. Accessed: 17 September 2024.

InfoFinland 2024. Integration into Finland. City of Helsinki. URL: <https://www.infofinland.fi/en/settling-in-finland/integration-into-finland>. Accessed: 22 July 2024.

Isaakyan, I., Triandafyllidou, A., & Baglioni, S. 2023. Immigrant and Asylum Seekers Labour Market Integration upon Arrival: NowHereLand: A Biographical Perspective. Springer Nature. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14009-9>. Accessed: 28 July 2024.

Jaschke, P., Löbel, L.-M., Krieger, M., Legewie, N., Kroh, M., Jacobsen, J., & Schacht, D. 2022. Mentoring as a grassroots effort for integrating refugees – evidence from a randomised field experiment. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48(17), pp. 4085-4105, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2022.2058918>. Accessed: 08 August 2024.

Job Market Finland 2024a. Integration plan. Keha Centre. URL: <https://tyomarkkinatori.fi/en/services/63170062-159b-4668-8046-80ba188e4dc7/integration-plan>. Accessed: 23 July 2024.

Job Market Finland 2024b. Services and integration plan for immigrants. Keha Centre. URL: <https://tyomarkkinatori.fi/en/personal-customers/information-about-working-life/internationality/services-and-integration-plan-for-immigrants>. Accessed: 23 July 2024.

Johnson, W.B., & Ridley, C.R. 2004. *Elements of Mentoring*. St. Martin's Press. New York, NY.

Join the Collective 25 February 2024. Revolutionizing Mentorship: How AI Enhances Human Connections and Personal Growth. URL: <https://www.jointhecollective.com/article/mentorship-in-the-age-of-ai/>. Accessed: 18 September 2024.

- Kazi, V. 29-30 November 2016. Senior Specialist. Migrant Integration in Finland: Policies and Practices. Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. Conference Presentation. Tallinn. URL: <https://misakonverents.ee/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Kazi.pdf>. Accessed: 22 July 2024.
- Kerr, S.P. & Kerr, W.R. 2011. Economic Impacts of Immigration: A Survey. Finnish Economic Papers, Finnish Economic Association, 24(1), pp. 1-32, Spring. URL: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w16736>. Accessed: 26 July 2024.
- Kram, K. E. 1983. Phases of the Mentor Relationship. The Academy of Management Journal, 26(4), pp. 608–625. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/255910>. Accessed: 08 August 2024.
- Larja, L., Warius, J., Sundbäck, L., Liebkind, K., Kandolin, I., & Jasinskaja-Lahti, I. 2012. Discrimination in the Finnish Labor Market: An Overview and a Field Experiment on Recruitment. MEE Publications. Accessed: 16 September 2024.
- Lee, C. 2009. Sociological Theories of Immigration: Pathways to Integration for U.S. Immigrants. Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 19 (6), pp. 730-744. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10911350902910906>. Accessed: 20 September 2024.
- Lin, N. 2001. Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action. Cambridge University Press. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815447>. Accessed: 05 August 2024.
- Luckan Integration 2024. FIKA Mentoring Programme. URL: <https://integration.luckan.fi/mentoring-networking/fika/>. Accessed: 03 September 2024.
- McGregor, J. 26 August 2024. AI Could Take Your Job - Or Help Find Your Next One. Forbes blog. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jenamcgregor/2024/08/26/ai-could-take-your-job-or-help-find-your-next-one/>. Accessed: 22 September 2024.
- Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Finland s.a. The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration guides integration work. URL: <https://kotoutuminen.fi/en/the-act-on-the-promotion-of-immigrant-integration-guides-integration>. Accessed: 19 July 2024.
- Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Finland 2023. Comprehensive reform of Integration Act will speed up integration and employment of immigrants. URL: <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1410877/comprehensive-reform-of-integration-act-will-speed-up-integration-and-employment-of-immigrants>. Accessed: 19 July 2024.

Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Finland 2024. Ulkomaalaisten työttömyys ja palveluihin osallistuminen, Kesäkuun 2024 luvut. URL: <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/documents/56901608/199909426/Ulkomaan-kansalaisten-ja-vieraskielisten-tyottomyys-ja-palveluihin-osallistuminen-kes>. Accessed: 29 July 2024.

Ministry of the Interior Finland s.a. Finnish migration policy is based on Government objectives, EU legislation and international agreements. URL: <https://intermin.fi/en/areas-of-expertise/migration/migration-and-asylum-policy>. Accessed: 16 July 2024.

Moilanen, T., Ojasalo, K. & Ritalahti, J. 2022. Methods for development work: New kinds of competencies in business operations. BoD - Books on Demand. Helsinki.

Nardon, L. & Hari, A. 2022. Making Sense of Immigrant Work Integration, An Organizing Framework. International Marketing and Management Research. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13231-5>. Accessed: 17 July 2024.

Ndomo, Q. & Lillie N. 2023. Resistance Is Useless! (And So Are Resilience and Reworking): Migrants in the Finnish Labour Market. In I. Isaakyan et al. (Eds.), Immigrant and Asylum Seekers Labour Market Integration upon Arrival: NowHereLand: A Biographical Perspective pp. 161-184. Springer Nature. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14009-9>. Accessed: 28 July 2024.

Neuwirth, E. and Wahl, I. 2017. Effects of the similarity between mentees and mentors on the evaluation of the 'Mentoring for Migrants Program.' International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring, 15(2), pp.140-154. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24384/000255>. Accessed: 12 August 2024.

Nichols S. & Virsinger P. "Always standing on the fragile side of ice": Immigrants' integration into the labor market in Finland – Report. TEK. URL: [https://www.tek.fi/sites/default/files/attachments/immigrants\\_integration\\_into\\_the\\_labor\\_market\\_in\\_finland\\_2021.pdf](https://www.tek.fi/sites/default/files/attachments/immigrants_integration_into_the_labor_market_in_finland_2021.pdf). Accessed: 07 September 2024.

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. 2017. Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16(1), pp. 1-13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>. Accessed: 15 October 2024.

Nshom, E., Sadaf, S., & Khalimzoda, I. 2022. Perceived challenges living and integrating into Finnish society: A study among immigrants in Finland. Journal of Intercultural Communication, 22(3), pp. 31-42. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v22i3.82>. Accessed: 28 July 2024.

OECD/European Union 2015. Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In. OECD Publishing, Paris/European Union, Brussels. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264234024-en>. Accessed: 10 July 2024.

OECD 2017. Finding the way: A discussion of the Finnish migrant integration system. OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/acf7ef05-en>. Accessed: 17 July 2024.

OECD 2018. Working Together: Skills and Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and their Children in Finland. OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264305250-5-en>. Accessed: 18 July 2024.

OECD 2023. International Migration Outlook 2023. OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/b0f40584-en>. Accessed: 15 August 2024.

Ozgen, C., Nijkamp, P., & Poot, J. 2013. The impact of cultural diversity on firm innovation: evidence from Dutch micro-data. *IZA Journal of Migration*, 2(18). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-9039-2-18>. Accessed: 26 July 2024.

Pehkonen, A. 2006. Immigrants' Paths to Employment in Finland. *Finnish Yearbook of Population Research*, 42, pp. 113-128. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23979/fypr.45029>.

Peltonen, L. 2017. Työhyvinvoinnin tila autoalan pk-yrityksessä. Bachelor's Thesis. Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Degree Programme in Business Management. URL: <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-201704184864>. Accessed: 26 October 2024.

Penninx, R. 2019. Problems of and Solutions for the Study of Immigrant Integration. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 7(13). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-019-0122-x>.

Pesola, H., Sarvimäki, M., & Virkola, T. 2024. Paths to Integration: Labor Market and Social Integration Across Immigrant Admission Categories. SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4825789>. Accessed: 23 July 2024.

Putnam, R.D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster. New York.

Ragins, B.R. & Kram, K.E. 2007. *The Handbook of Mentoring at Work: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Reeves, R.B. 2017. Inter-cultural mentoring for newcomer immigrants: Mentor perspectives and better practices. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 15(1), pp. 186-

207. URL: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317369812\\_Inter-cultural\\_mentoring\\_for\\_newcomer\\_immigrants\\_Mentor\\_perspectives\\_and\\_better\\_practices](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317369812_Inter-cultural_mentoring_for_newcomer_immigrants_Mentor_perspectives_and_better_practices). Accessed: 15 August 2024.

Rhodes, J. 20 March 2024. Mentor in the loop—Is there a role for AI in mentoring relationships? The Chronicle of Evidence-Based Mentoring blog. URL: <https://www.evidencebasedmentoring.org/mentor-in-the-loop-is-there-a-role-for-ai-in-mentoring-relationships/>. Accessed: 17 September 2024.

Rowland, K.N. 2012. E-Mentoring: An Innovative Twist to Traditional Mentoring. *Journal of technology management & innovation*, 7(1), pp. 228-237. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-27242012000100015>. Accessed: 15 August 2024.

Sahota, N. 25 July 2024. AI Energizes Your Career Path & Charts Your Professional Growth Plan. Forbes blog. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/neilsahota/2024/07/25/ai-energizes-your-career-path--charts-your-professional-growth-plan/>. Accessed: 22 September 2024.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. 2023. *Research methods for business students*. 9<sup>th</sup> Edition. Pearson. Harlow.

Single, P.B. & Single, R.M. 2005. E-mentoring for social equity: review of research to inform program development. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 13(2), pp. 301–320. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611260500107481>. Accessed: 27 August 2024.

Single, P.B. & Muller, C.B. 2001. When email and mentoring unite: The implementation of a nationwide electronic mentoring program. In L. K. Stromei (Ed.). *Creating Mentoring and Coaching Programs*. American Society for Training Development in Action Series. Alexandria, VA

Shumilova, Y., Cai, Y., & Pekkola, E. 2012. Employability of International Graduates Educated in Finnish Higher Education Institutions. University of Helsinki. URL: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233426293\\_Employability\\_of\\_International\\_Graduates\\_Educated\\_in\\_Finnish\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Institutions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233426293_Employability_of_International_Graduates_Educated_in_Finnish_Higher_Education_Institutions). Accessed: 30 July 2024.

Startup Refugees s.a. URL: <https://startuprefugees.com/>. Accessed: August 2024.

Statistics Finland 2014. Survey on work and well-being among persons of foreign origin (UTH). URL: [https://stat.fi/tup/maahanmuutto/uth-tutkimus/yhteenveto\\_en.html](https://stat.fi/tup/maahanmuutto/uth-tutkimus/yhteenveto_en.html). Accessed: 28 July 2024.

Statistics Finland 2024a. Net immigration nearly 58,000 persons in 2023. URL: <https://stat.fi/en/publication/cln4jbg3b6u210avtv0wphb8k>. Accessed: 14 July 2024.

Statistics Finland 2024b. Population and society. URL: [https://stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk\\_vaesto\\_en.html#Age%20structure%20of%20population%20on%2031%20December](https://stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto_en.html#Age%20structure%20of%20population%20on%2031%20December). Accessed: 24 July 2024.

Statistics Finland. s.a. Foreign Background. URL: [https://stat.fi/meta/kas/ulkomaalaistaus\\_en.html](https://stat.fi/meta/kas/ulkomaalaistaus_en.html). Accessed: 07 July 2024.

Steel, T., & Jyrkinen, M. 2017. Searching for employment: highly educated immigrant women and combined capabilities. *Finnish Journal of Social Research*, 10 (1), pp. 35–42. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51815/fjsr.110764>. Accessed: 24 July 2024.

Sutela, H. & Lehto, A. 2014. Työolojen muutokset 1977-2013. Statistics Finland. URN: <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-244-515-5>. Accessed: 30 July 2024.

TE Services 2022. TE Offices as an employer. URL: <https://toimistot.te-palvelut.fi/en/te-offices-as-an-employer>. Accessed: 11 August 2024.

Telpizov, R. 04 September 2024. Five AI Trends For Career Centers At Professional Associations. Forbes blog. URL: <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbestechcouncil/2024/09/04/five-ai-trends-for-career-centers-at-professional-associations/>. Accessed: 22 September 2024.

Tervola, J. 2020. Different selection processes, different outcomes? Comparing labor market integration of asylum refugees, resettled refugees and their reunited family members in Finland. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 8(28). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00183-4>. 14 July 2024.

The Centre of Expertise in Immigrant Integration Finland 2016. FIKA – mentorskap som stöd för integrationen. URL: [https://kotoutuminen.fi/documents/3464316/4354573/fika\\_sv.pdf/d8c2304a-3619-4495-9d19-42d1d4ca8939/fika\\_sv.pdf.pdf](https://kotoutuminen.fi/documents/3464316/4354573/fika_sv.pdf/d8c2304a-3619-4495-9d19-42d1d4ca8939/fika_sv.pdf.pdf). Accessed: 03 September 2024.

Tietoevry 12 September 2024. Mentoring opens doors to the Finnish job market. URL: <https://www.tietoevry.com/en/newsroom/all-news-and-releases/other-news/2024/09/mentoring-opens-doors-to-the-finnish-job-market/>. Accessed: 23 September 2024.

Väänänen, T. 2018. Can immigration save the ageing economy of Finland? The labor market integration of immigrants in the 21st century and the impacts of immigration on public economics. Master Thesis. University of Tampere and University of Fribourg, Faculty of Management. URN: <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:uta-201807022191>. Accessed: 26 July 2024.

- Walsh, T., Levy, N., Bell, G., Elliott, A., Maclaurin, J., Mareels, I., & Wood, F. 2019. The effective and ethical development of artificial intelligence: An opportunity to improve our wellbeing. Australian Council of Learned Academies. URL: [https://acola.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/hs4\\_artificial-intelligence-report.pdf](https://acola.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/hs4_artificial-intelligence-report.pdf). Accessed: 05 August 2024.
- Westman, S., Kauttonen, J., Klemetti, A., Korhonen, N., Manninen, M., Mononen, A., Niittymäki, S., & Paananen, H. 2021. Artificial Intelligence for Career Guidance - Current Requirements and Prospects for the Future. *The International Academic Forum Journal of Education*, 9 (4), pp. 43-64. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22492/ije.9.4.03>. Accessed: 05 September 2024.
- Wilhelmsson, N. 2015. Social Capital as a Resource for Political Participation: Finland in a Nordic Comparative Perspective. In P. A. Kraus & P. Kivisto, *The Challenge of Minority Integration: Politics and Policies in the Nordic Nations*, pp. 176-201. De Gruyter Open Ltd. Warsaw/Berlin.
- Wilson, M., Robertson, P., Cruickshank, P., & Gkatzia, D. 2022. Opportunities and risks in the use of AI in career development practice. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, 48 (1), pp. 48-57. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.4807>. Accessed: 07 September 2024.
- YLE News 20 November 2019. APN this week: “85% of jobs not advertised”, says NGO’s tackling Finland’s workplace diversity problem. YLE. URL: <https://yle.fi/a/3-11076243>. Accessed: 02 August 2024.
- Zafar, A. 2019. Revamping the employability of highly skilled immigrants in Finland. *Migration*, 45(4), pp. 20–25. URL: <https://siirtolaisuus-migration.journal.fi/article/view/89329>. Accessed: 28 July 2024.
- Zhang, H. 2023. Socializing Immigrant Jobseekers: The Role of Pre-Employment Mentoring Programs. Doctoral dissertation. Carleton University, Faculty of Graduate and Post-doctoral Affairs. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22215/etd/2023-15457>. Accessed: 13 August 2024.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview Questions

<i>Demographic Question</i>
Age, Gender, Country of Origin, Type of First Residence Permit, Duration of Stay
<i>Theme 1: Career integration challenges and support services accessed</i>
1. What challenges have you faced in finding a job or advancing your career in Finland?
2. Can you share specific obstacles like language barriers, recognition of qualifications, or adapting to work culture?
3. What do you think would help you overcome these challenges?
4. Have you used any public or private programs or services to help with your career? How were they useful (or not)?
5. Are there any services you wish were available to better support your career development?
6. Have your personal connections (family, friends, or community) helped in your job search or career progress? Could you share how they have contributed to your employment or career development?
7. Have you used any digital tools (websites, apps) for job support? Which ones and how did they help (or not)?
8. Have you ever had a mentor (formal or informal) to support your career development in Finland? Please describe your experience. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>What type of organization facilitated your mentorship, if any? How did this organization support your experience?</i></li> <li>– <i>How did your mentor support your career journey, and can you share a specific instance where their guidance had a significant impact on your career integration?</i></li> </ul>
9. Do you believe having a mentor could aid in your career integration? Why or why not?
<i>Theme 2: Benefits of digital mentorship</i>
10. Are you familiar with the concept of digital mentorship? If so, how would you describe it?

<p>11. Have you ever participated in a digital mentorship program or used online tools to connect with mentors? Please describe your experience and what you found most useful or challenging.</p>
<p>12. What type of support do you think an online mentor could offer that would help you with your career integration?</p>
<p>13. In your opinion, do you think digital mentorship platforms could help expand or strengthen your professional networks? Please explain why or why not.</p>
<p>14. What type of platform do you think would be most effective for digital mentorship (mobile app, website)? Please share your thoughts.</p>
<p>15. What type of mentorship do you prefer (formal or informal), and why do you feel that way?</p>
<p>16. What aspects of a digital mentorship program do you think would be most beneficial for your career integration in Finland? Please elaborate on your ideas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>learning about job opportunities and application processes</i></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>receiving career advice and guidance from professionals</i></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>building a network of contacts in Finland</i></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>access to mentors who understand the immigrant experience</i></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>feedback on CVs, job applications, or interview skills</i></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>improving understanding of Finnish workplace culture</i></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>developing new skills through online resources shared by mentors</i></li></ul>
<p>17. What features of digital tools or platforms do you believe would make a mentorship program more effective? Feel free to describe any specific functionalities or characteristics you think are important.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>personalized career advice</i></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>access to resources and training materials</i></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>access to diverse mentors</i></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>progress and goal tracking</i></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>easy-to-use and navigate</i></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>meeting scheduling tools</i></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>regular check-ins with mentors</i></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>secure and private messaging</i></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>AI-powered mentor matching</i></li></ul>

18. Would you feel comfortable using digital platforms or apps to connect with mentors and seek career advice? Why or why not?

*Theme 3: AI tools in digital mentorship*

19. Have you ever used AI-based tools for job searching or other purposes? If so, how was your experience?

20. Do you think AI features could enhance a digital mentorship program? If yes, how?

21. What features would you find most useful in an AI-enhanced mentorship platform?

- mentor matching based on profile, skills, and career goals*
- automated reminders for mentor meetings*
- job recommendations based on qualifications and experience*
- progress tracking and goal-setting*
- automated career advice for job applications*
- interview preparation with mock interviews*
- AI-recommended training programs*
- language support*
- CV analysis and feedback*

22. What concerns do you have about using AI in mentorship?

- bias in matching algorithms*
- quality and reliability of AI-generated advice*
- limited access to technology*
- privacy and data security*
- lack of personal connection with mentors*

23. What additional suggestions or features would you like to see in a digital mentorship program that could enhance your career integration?

## **Appendix 2. Email Invitation to Interviewees**

Dear XXX,

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to invite you to participate in an interview for my thesis at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. My research focuses on understanding the career integration challenges faced by immigrants and exploring the potential role of a digital mentorship platform in Finland.

The purpose of the interview is to gain insights into the obstacles immigrants face during their career integration, the role mentorship can play, and how digital tools may improve this process. Your input would be extremely valuable for this research.

The interview will be conducted online via Microsoft Teams and will last approximately 30-40 minutes, at a time that is most convenient for you. Please be assured that your responses will remain confidential and anonymous, and the data will be used solely for academic purposes. The interview will be recorded for accuracy, and all data will be securely stored and deleted upon the completion of my thesis.

If you are willing to participate, kindly let me know, and we can arrange a suitable time for the interview.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to your response.

Best regards,

April Luza