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Economic Drivers of Estonian Migration to Finland

Primary Motivators

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the economic motivations influencing Estonian migration to Finland, focusing on wage disparities, employment opportunities, cost of living, and remittance trends. The research is based on a survey conducted among Estonian migrants in Finland, which provides insights into their work sectors, financial well-being, and future migration plans. Study findings confirm that economic factors, especially higher wages and better job stability, remain the dominant drivers behind migration. Nonetheless, additional trends appeared, such as increasing dissatisfaction with living costs, a possible decline in remittances, and indications that some migrants may be working below their qualifications. These insights align with the neoclassical migration theory, which implies that people migrate to maximize earnings. While the study delivers valuable perspectives, limitations such as the collected sample size and demographic representation must be considered. Future research with a more extensive and diverse respondent base could provide deeper insights into long-term migration trends and labour market integration. The study's results contribute to understanding the evolving migration patterns between Estonia and Finland, the motivations behind them, and potential policy considerations for labour mobility and migrant support.

Keywords: Migration, Estonian Migrants, Economic Drivers, Remittances, Labour Market

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Glossary

EAKL Eesti Ametiühingute Keskliit

EU European Union

OECD The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

TALO Teenistujate Ametiliitude Keskorganisatsioon

VAT Value Added Tax

1 Introduction

The migration movement of Estonians to Finland started slowly in the 20th century. It accelerated at the beginning of the 21st century when Finland joined the Schengen area and opened its job market to the European Union member countries in 2006. These policy changes opened the barriers between the two countries and created labour migration opportunities. As a result, migration trends have constantly changed since then and have been influenced by economic factors, social-political reasons, and labour market dynamics.

This thesis focuses on economic factors currently influencing the recent migration trend, such as differences in living costs, wages, and employment opportunities. Additionally, it will explore the role of remittances, meaning the money a migrant sends home to support their families, and which is often used for necessities like food and housing. With the gathered information, we can better understand migration's economic impact on Estonians and the Finnish job market and be aware of the current factors behind Estonians' migration choices toward Finland.

Understanding these economic factors will help policymakers and businesses in Finland and Estonia to adapt and plan for possible new labour migration trends. Also, the understanding we gain from researching this subject area will allow us to see what possible economic benefits migration has, for example, in the form of remittances that support Estonian local economies and households.

The main research question for the base of the thesis is, "What are the primary economic drivers behind the migration of Estonian citizens to Finland?". The following supplementary questions will be addressed throughout the thesis to answer this main question:

- How do wage differences between Estonia and Finland influence migration decisions?
- What role do job opportunities in Finland play in attracting Estonian migrants?
- How do living costs affect the decision to migrate?
- To what extent do remittances from Finland-based Estonian migrants benefit Estonia's economy?

The scope of this thesis is limited to focusing on the economic drivers of migration and excludes sociopolitical and cultural factors. Excluding these factors will allow for a more in-depth analysis of key drivers such as wage disparities, living costs, and remittances. While sociopolitical and cultural factors undoubtedly influence migration trends, this approach will help acquire a comprehensive understanding of the economic side.

This thesis is structured into six chapters. The first chapters introduce the research topic and review relevant literature, covering the historical background of Estonian Finnish migration and key economic factors such as wage disparities, employment conditions, cost of living differences, and remittances. The subsequent chapters examine the economic contributions of migrants in Finland, go over the research methodology, and present the results. The final chapter provides a summary of the findings and conclusions. The thesis aims to contribute to understanding the cross-border labour migration movement and how it impacts the Estonian and Finnish economies.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Concept and History of Estonian Finnish Migration

There are different types of migration, including forced, voluntary, temporary, and permanent. Migration is also influenced by different motivational drivers, such as social, political, environmental, demographic, and economic drivers.

According to the European Migration Network (2025), an economic migrant is a person who decides to leave their country of origin solely for economic reasons. However, it must be acknowledged that while economic reasons might be significant and even dominant, in practice a variety of incentives can motivate migrants (for example, see Dohlman et al. 2019). For this reason, it is probably more helpful to define as economic migrants those mainly motivated by economic factors such as income levels, employment opportunities and financial safety, and other non-economic factors such as personal safety, family ties, or professional development.

Historically, the contact between the two countries has faced some challenges due to past events. For example, the Soviet occupation of Estonia in the years 1940–1941 and 1944–1991 ended most of the contact between Estonia and Finland, especially

during the years of Stalinism. The Estonian people were very restricted and monitored by the Soviet authorities (Pitkänen, İçduygu & Sert, 2012, p. 162).

Economic migration between Finland and Estonia was not as effortless as it is now. One notable historical event was the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. This event greatly impacted Finnish policies even though Finland itself wasn't a post-communist country. In 1991, Finland also signed the Schengen Agreement and joined the European Union in 1995 (Pitkänen, İçduygu & Sert, 2012, p. 168).

After Finland joined the European Union, Estonia's turn was to join in the fifth EU enlargement period. There have been seven periods of EU enlargement so far, occurring when new countries join the European Union. Estonia joined in 2004, and after the 2004 period of EU enlargement, there was a notable shift in migration patterns toward Finland from Estonia. This was driven by removing work restrictions in 2006 and easier cross-border mobility facilitated by cultural and linguistic ties (Hazans & Philips, 2011, p. 9).

The shift in the migration pattern after Estonia's accession to the EU is also evident in remittance statistics, which increased sharply from €51 million in 2003 to €254 million in 2005 (World Bank, 2023). The following figures show the growing economic role of Estonian migrants working abroad and sending income back to their home country at that time.

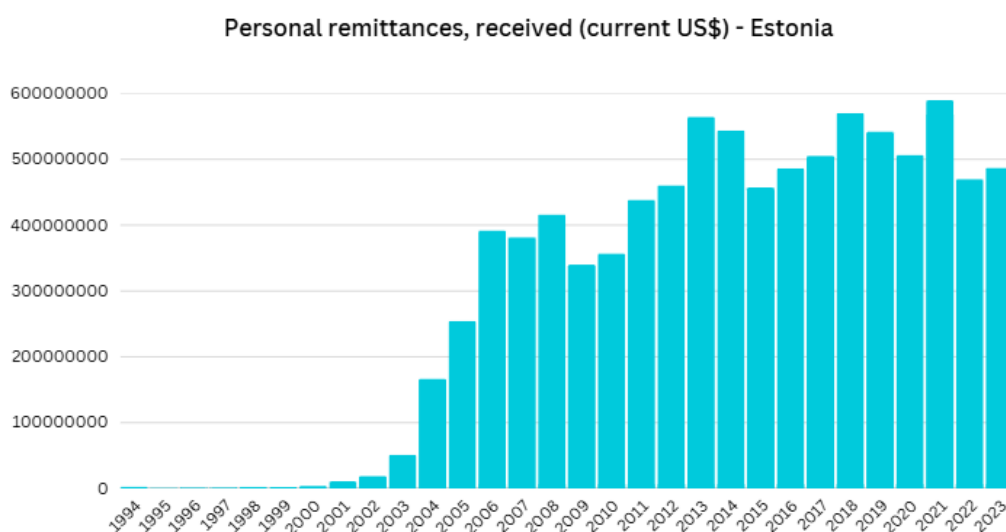


Figure 1. Annual remittances to Estonia 1994-2023 (World Bank 2023)

The growth trend continued throughout the early 2000s, showing rapid growth until roughly 2014, after which the increase slowed but remained steady. The highest remittance levels occurred in 2021, after which a declining trend emerged for 2022 and 2023. The increased remittances seen between 2003 and 2005 highlight the economic impact of Estonia's EU membership and draw attention to the evolving migration within Europe. This period marked an era of a new trend in which Estonian migrants could migrate to new labour markets, especially Finland, due to its proximity.

The declines and decreases seen on the remittance figure suggest that migration has evolved. Possible explanations for the changes and eventual drop in remittance flows could include increased permanent settlement in Finland, leaving migrants to keep more of their income rather than sending it back to Estonia. Additionally, Estonia's economic growth and rising wages may have reduced remittance dependency, leading to fewer transfers from abroad.

Sayeh (2020) discusses how the COVID-19 pandemic affected remittance flows globally and highlights just how much of a shock it will be to countries of low income or fragile states to have a sudden decrease in the remittances they are used to receive. However, the figure shows that the pandemic does not appear to have had any significant influence on remittance levels. While global remittance flows were affected in many regions, World Bank data shows that remittances to Estonia remained stable throughout 2020–2021, even reaching their peak in 2021. These remittance figures imply that the slowdown and decline in remittances began after the pandemic rather than because of it.

It remains uncertain what the remittance trend will be like for the long term, because if more migrants choose to settle permanently in Finland, remittance flows may gradually decline. The post-2021 decline seen in the data raises questions about whether this is a temporary change or the beginning of a more permanent shift in migration patterns. Having established the concept and history of economic migration, the next section will explore the economic factors influencing Estonian migration to Finland.

2.2 Economic Factors Influencing Estonian Migration to Finland

Migration between Estonia and Finland is shaped by economic disparities, as Estonian migrants seek better income opportunities (Alho & Sippola, 2019, p. 4). Besides

income, other economic factors play a role in migration patterns. These factors include job opportunities, living costs, and the ability to send remittances. The next section examines these more deeply, highlighting their significance in cross-border migration.

2.2.1 Wage Disparities

One of the main pull factors influencing the decision to migrate is the income differences between the migrants' country of origin and the destination country. People often seek a better quality of life, and higher wages are one way to achieve this. Comparing Estonia's and Finland's wages, it shows that Finnish wages adjusted for purchasing power parity are significantly higher, with an average annual salary per capita in Finland reaching approximately €34,000 in 2016 compared to €19,000 in Estonia. This and social benefits create a strong pull factor for Estonian migrants to Finland (Alho & Sippola, 2019, p. 5). More recent figures for 2023 confirm that Finland's average per capita income is 8 per cent above the EU average, whereas Estonia's is 19 per cent lower than the EU average (Eurostat, 2024). This indicates a closure of the gap between the countries, but as with all such statistics, caution is required due to the absence of data regarding income distribution, including geographical income distribution. Meaning that wages vary significantly within Finland and Estonia, with metropolitan areas such as Helsinki and Tallinn having higher salaries compared to more rural regions. Therefore, the actual wage gap experienced by a migrant often depends on their place of origin in Estonia and their employment location in Finland.

It is also important to acknowledge that a notable number of Estonians have adapted to a temporary migration pattern, commuting between Estonia and Finland while maintaining their home in Estonia. The geographical location of Estonia and manageable commuting fees create the perfect opportunity for this. This way, the temporary workers can benefit from Finland's higher wages while keeping costs lower by living in Estonia. Often, workers work and are accommodated in Finland on weekdays and weekends, return to their families in Estonia, or perhaps have adopted a rotational schedule where they work for three weeks and spend one week at home in Estonia. With the aid of communications technology, such as video calls, instant messaging, and social media, the migrants working in Finland can actively communicate with their close people during their free time. It's a way virtually to feel close to their family and have a break from work, and current technological

advancements have significantly reduced the feeling of distance, allowing migrants to sustain family connections that would have been much more challenging to do just a few decades ago. (Telve, 2019, p. 720).

Wages between Estonia and Finland vary by sector, but the differences are notable. For example, in Finland, the median salary for construction workers is roughly €3,250 per month (Oikotie, 2025). However, in Estonia, the median salary for a construction worker is around €1,372 per month (Palgakalkulaator, 2025), which is significantly lower compared with Finland. A median salary means that half of the salaries earned can be either lower or higher than the given amount.

While average salaries are often referenced in wage comparisons, this thesis focuses on median salaries as they provide a more representative measure of typical earnings. Median salary figures better reflect what a worker in a given job sector is likely to earn, as extremely high or low wages do not influence them. This approach aligns with standard wage analysis methods used by statistical institutions such as Statistics Finland.

2.2.2 Union Structures

Migrants often seek a better quality of life, and differences in union structures between Estonia and Finland likely also play a role in migration decisions. Unions also try to ensure that workers get their deserved benefits and are paid accordingly.

Estonia's worker protection and unions are quite different from Finland's. In the EU, Estonia has one of the lowest union membership numbers, with only 6% of the workforce being members (Finnwatch, 2022, p. 5). One reason behind such a low number might be Estonian employers' resistance to union activities (Finnwatch, 2022, p. 7). In comparison, in Finland, most employees have collective agreements covering them, and the unionization rate is noticeably higher than in Estonia. As of 2019, trade union membership was 60 per cent of the workforce, down from an "absolute peak" of 78,5 per cent in 1994. However, collective agreements' coverage of the workforce has increased to approximately 90 per cent (Sippola and Bergholm, 2023, 387-388).

In Estonia, unions are represented by Teenistujate Ametiliitude Keskorganisatsioon TALO and Eesti Ametiühingute Keskliit EAKL (Finnwatch, 2022, p. 5). Compared with

Finland's centralized union systems, Estonia's union systems are limited in their operations, which plays a big part in negotiating wages and ensuring workers' proper working conditions and protections.

Comparing Finland's union structure to Estonia, according to InfoFinland (2025), Finland has about 80 different trade unions and these belong to three different trade union federations. SAK, the Central Organization of Finnish Trade Unions (industrial), STTK, the Finnish Confederation of Professionals (white collar), and AKAVA, the Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland (academically qualified).

In addition to a stronger union structure in Finland, unemployment funds exist side by side with unions. Upon becoming unemployed or temporarily laid off, these pay up to 60% of the last working month's salary for up to 500 days, making the feeling of financial security in case anything happens one of the more significant influencers of Estonians working in Finland (Velsker, 2013).

2.2.3 Employment Opportunities

Job vacancies in Estonia have declined significantly in recent years. In January 2025, fewer than 1,800 new jobs were listed, down from 2,600 in January 2023 (Silm, 2025). Rural areas of Estonia face a bigger lack of vacancies than urban areas, where more economic growth has occurred, so many rural residents travel further to a bigger city or town for work. For example, in Estonia's Ida-Viru County, according to a recent article published by (Põhjarannik, 2025), the labour market continues to face challenges with little to no improvement seen over the past few years. Challenges like these often force people to migrate to bigger cities in search of job opportunities, but when jobs are hard to come by, even there, people are often forced to consider working outside of Estonia.

This is where Finland can easily seem like an attractive idea. Many Estonian people already have friends or friends of friends who have gone through the migration process to Finland, so it doesn't seem so complicated to begin with.

Finland often has more job vacancies, especially in sectors that are in high demand, like construction and healthcare. Many sectors in Finland face labour shortages. Therefore, skilled migration workers have become an asset to Finland, leading to

Finland focusing on passing reforms, simplifying and expediting immigration processes to address these challenges (KPMG, 2024)

Intriguingly, migration from Estonia to Finland exhibits clear gender patterns. Male migrants are mainly employed in construction, while female migrants are more commonly found in cleaning jobs (Alho & Sippola, 2019, p. 349).

2.2.4 Cost of Living Differences

As of 2024, the cost-of-living differences between Finland and Estonia are more dramatically conspicuous in some areas than others. With taxes rising in both countries and new taxes being implemented in Estonia as of 2025, the cost of living remains an important economic driver for some migrants.

The following table compares living costs in Helsinki and Tallinn to give a better overview of the differences. The data has been gathered from Numbeo (2024a) for Helsinki and Numbeo (2024b) for Tallinn.

Table 1. Comparison of living costs in Helsinki and Tallinn Numbeo (2024a) and Numbeo (2024b)

Category	Estonia, Tallinn	Finland, Helsinki
Rent (1- bedroom, city centre)	700.32 €	1,037.64 €
Utilities (monthly)	297.74 €	116.09 €
Public Transport (monthly pass)	30.00 €	66.60 €

Although housing costs have noticeably bigger differences, in other areas, such as groceries, there has been an interesting turn of events in the last few years. Whereas earlier groceries were cheaper in Estonia, and it was reasonable to buy them from Estonia while visiting and bring them to Finland, now many food items are cheaper in Finland, and Kivil (2023), referencing Taloussanomat (2023), reported that in February 2023, the overall inflation rate was 17.6% in Estonia and 7.9% in Finland, based on a grocery price comparison article.

As an example, to illustrate the differences in groceries between Estonia and Finland, a comparison was conducted with current prices from Prisma supermarkets in Tallinn (Kristiine) and Helsinki (Kaari) as of January 2025. The following table presents the key food items side by side and the currency for the prices in euros. Given data was manually gathered from the official Prisma Estonia and Prisma Finland websites (Prisma, 2025a) and (Prisma, 2025b).

Table 2. Comparison of groceries between (Prisma, 2025a) and (Prisma, 2025b).

Product	Estonia	Finland
Potatoes 2kg	2,19	1,79
Milk 1L	1,39	0,94
Cheese 500g	6,79	4,95
Eggs 10-pack	1,92	2,09
Chicken Fillet 400g	4,49	5,99
Total	16,78	15,76

The food items compared above were either local or imported products. Some identical products were compared to isolate the impact of location pricing, and other products were selected to reflect typical consumer behaviour.

In the summer of the year 2025, Estonian grocery prices are bound to increase again as the Estonian government has decided to raise the VAT from 22% to 24% starting 01.07.2025 (Estonian Tax and Customs Board, 2025)

While the VAT tax in Finland, according to the Finnish Tax Administration (2025), is 25.5%, groceries specifically have a reduced VAT percentage of 14%, which excludes alcoholic beverages.

With Estonian taxes rising and salaries relatively lower than in Finland, Estonians may re-evaluate their future planning. Unlike in Finland, where unions are well structured and help workers maintain fairer wages and purchasing power, Estonia, with weaker labour protections, often leaves employees more vulnerable to economic changes.

This may affect how Estonians perceive their quality of life, meaning evaluating the difference between when they can only cover necessities like housing and food or afford more and enjoy comfortable living standards. The differences between the welfare systems of Estonia and Finland are important influencers when making migration decisions, as Finland's welfare structure and higher wages can provide not only better financial stability but also a sense of security, making Finland an attractive destination for work and long-term settlement (Alho & Sippola, 2019, p. 343).

Given that Finland has been seen as an attractive destination for Estonian migrants due to its financial stability and social benefits, future migration trends still can remain uncertain. Economic conditions often tend to change over the time and policies evolve, the long term sustainability of Finland's attraction is unclear. Whether Finland continues to provide the same level of security and opportunity for Estonian migrants will depend on how these factors develop in the coming years.

2.2.5 Role of Remittances

The importance of remittances worldwide is astonishing, as approximately one in eight people, one billion worldwide, depends on them. The money sent by 200 million migrant workers supports 800 million recipients (IFAD, 2025).

The word remittance is used to talk about money that is transferred from someone working abroad to someone residing back in their country of origin. Many Estonians who have migrated to Finland regularly send remittances back to Estonia, and one of

the factors influencing this, according to Anniste, Pukkonen & Paas (2017, p. 110), is the short distance between the two countries that creates the possibility for incomplete migration patterns such as transnational commuting.

Remittances that migrants send back to people in their home country often play a significant role in the receiving country's economy. For example, remittances sent to Estonia accounted for approximately 1.2% of Estonia's GDP in 2023 (World Bank, 2023).

To maximize the remittances commuter workers can send back to their families, they often live modestly in Finland. This decision exhibits the economic benefit of supporting families in a lower cost living environment, where life is perceived to be better for them that way (Telve, 2019, p. 717).

Remittances sent back home are invested in Estonia's economy. For example, families purchase groceries, pay for housing and services, and much more with the money received. This stimulates the Estonian economy, supports businesses, and generates tax revenue.

According to Komp, Parkkinen and Jokela (2016) Estimates suggest that between 50,000 and 100,000 Estonians migrated to Finland during the previous ten years. Earlier migration waves were primarily driven by temporary labour migration, with workers frequently sending money home, a swap towards long-term settlement appears to be occurring. The younger generation of migrants may be more focused on career-building and personal financial stability rather than short-term earnings. If this trend continues, future migration policies in Finland and Estonia may need to adapt to a workforce that integrates more permanently rather than one that circulates back and forth.

2.3 Gaps in Existing Literature

Although previous studies have given valuable insights into Estonian migration to Finland, the data in most studies can be considered older and not reflective of the current economic conditions. Existing research relies more on macroeconomic statistics. Even though there are first-hand accounts of migrant experiences mentioned

in studies, they can be considered outdated and would need to be investigated again to see if the trends and motivations have changed.

Recent economic changes in Estonia may influence how Estonian migrants in Finland manage their finances these days. Estonia has rising taxes generally, new vehicle tax policies starting in 2025, and increasing living costs. As some migrants working in Finland have sent remittances home or spent their earnings while visiting Estonia, it is crucial for further research to find out whether migrants have changed their financial behaviours due to any of these changes. That is because no studies have been conducted yet on recent tax increases and whether they affect migration decision-making. This thesis does not plan to provide a final answer in this matter but will examine remittance trends by gathering first-hand insights through a survey and see if rising taxes have had a cause and effect on migrant spending patterns.

There is no recent data on what sectors Estonian migrants work in while in Finland and what employment challenges they face. Existing data from research dates back several years, and some of the available data on Finland's side refers to all migrants generally and does not single out Estonian citizens. Conducting research on this would offer a clearer picture of the role Estonian migrants play in Finland's workforce.

2.4 Conclusion of Literature Review

This literature review covered topics connected to Estonian Finnish migration, such as history, wage disparities, union structures, employment opportunities, cost of living differences, and the role of remittances. The studies and materials reviewed provide strong evidence that the economic conditions reviewed remain the primary drivers of migration toward Finland. Wage disparities and social benefits create a noteworthy pull factor, with job availabilities and labour shortages in some sections of Finland creating opportunities for Estonian migrants.

According to existing statistics, remittances sent back by migrants not only help their families but also contribute largely to the Estonian community. Previous research revealed that remittances increase the purchasing power of Estonian families and that temporary migrants send back remittances even more likely still in Estonia.

The existing literature provides a solid foundation for this study, giving valuable insights into economic migration influences. However, certain areas still have gaps that this thesis aims to address.

The most notable gap that would benefit from newer research is current migration trends. Additionally, with the new taxation policies and rising costs, there is no new research on how this affects remittances and influences migration decisions.

This thesis will address some of these gaps by collecting primary data through surveys and interviews with Estonian migrants in Finland. This study will provide updated insights into the economic factors shaping migration today by focusing on wage disparities, employment opportunities, and remittances.

3 Economic Contributions of Migrants to Finland

3.1 Employment Sectors

The share of immigrant workers has been growing everywhere in recent years. For example, in OECD countries, a little over 15% of all workers were immigrants, and the percentage had even risen to 20% in nine of them (OECD, n.d.). OECD, which stands for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, has 38 member countries, including Finland and Estonia.

In Finland, Migrant workers are an important part of the economy and the employment sectors, as without migrant workers the overall number of workers would have fallen significantly over the past years. According to ETLA (2024, p. 4), the number of migrant workers among all workers in Finland has grown from 3,9 percent in 2010 to 7,5 percent, and considering the numbers, the assumption is that it has grown even more until this moment.

Finland offers a wide range of job opportunities, which can be categorized into various sectors. The sector labeled “other workers,” including cleaners, couriers, personal care workers, and other outside categories, has the most migrant workforce. A tenth of the building, production, and maintenance workers were migrants in the year 2020, according to ETLA (2024, p. 4). The assumption is that since then, the numbers have most likely increased, and the above-mentioned sectors employ even more migrants.

Without migrant workers, these job sectors could struggle to function properly, especially due to Finland's aging population, as migrants often fill the gaps in industries facing labour shortages.

Interestingly, according to an article by Koskinen (2024) exploring what sectors in Finland will employ the most migrants, in 2022, 11,9 percent of migrants were entrepreneurs, compared to the working Finnish population, which was 9,9 percent.

3.2 Economic Productivity

The success that migrants have in the Finnish labour market has a noteworthy effect on Finland's economy, as it indicates the amount of tax they pay as well as how much money they invest back into the economy with purchases and usage of different services, for example such as healthcare (ETLA 2024, p. 7).

In the end, how migrants use the services in Finland is affected by their employment status, as often people who are employed are more likely to use occupational healthcare provided and paid by their employer (ETLA 2024, p. 7).

Migrants can bring specialized skills or technical expertise that benefits the Finnish economy. Companies that hire these migrants have a diverse workforce and have the possibility to increase production as well as services. Additionally, a diverse workforce promotes innovation and creativity (Govendo 2005).

Due to the declining birth rate in Finland as well as the aging population migration seems to be crucial for Finland's economic stability, and according to Finland's leading organisation representing corporate interests, Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto (n.d.), In the upcoming years more people will be retiring than new workers starting, and by the year 2030 the amount of working aged people will decrease by about 130 000 people. Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto (n.d.) also mentions that migration can fill a part of this shortage gap, but first, it is necessary to encourage more migration.

4 Methodology

4.1 Data Collection

The research for this thesis uses a survey-based method to gather quantitative and qualitative data. The target audience was Estonian migrants working in Finland within the last 10 years. The survey was distributed through social media, such as Estonian Facebook communities, and by people sharing it with their contacts who are migrants in Estonia. The survey gathered responses for two weeks.

No personal identifiers such as names or contact details were collected to ensure full anonymity. The participants were informed at the beginning of the survey that their answers would be used for academic purposes only. All data was stored securely and only used for this thesis, ensuring compliance with data protection regulations.

4.2 Survey

The survey consisted of multiple choice and open-ended questions to capture statistical trends as well as personal experiences to gain a better understanding of the mindset of Estonian migrants and other, less quantifiable data.

The survey's first section goes over the demographics of the participants, age, gender, education, Job position, and whether they currently live full time in Finland or do they travel between Finland and Estonia. Also relationship status was asked to see if more context could be provided on family-related migration decisions, as people with children might prioritise stability and financial security more than single respondents who might have different migration motivations.

The next section dived deeper into motivations, and participants were asked their prime motivators for migrating to Finland. The question consisted of multiple-choice answers, and participants could add their own reasons that were not listed. The section also included two Likert scale answers where participants were asked how important it was for them to have a higher salary and more existing job opportunities, and then lastly for this section participants were asked if they considered any other country before moving to Finland and if yes then why did they choose Finland in the end.

The following section of the survey discussed the participants' financial situation and salary in Finland. Participants were asked how much higher their salary is compared to what they previously earned in Estonia, if they were happy with their current salary, how they would rate their personal job opportunities now in Finland compared to previously in Estonia, and how they perceive Finland's living expenses compared with Estonia.

The remittance section asked if participants send remittances to Estonia, how much do they think in percent of their salary gets invested back into Estonia's economy monthly, and what the money is used for there. It also asked if participants think the Estonian economy is supported by remittances sent from Finland.

And the last section asked participants about their future plans and overall reflections about coming to Finland. They were asked do they plan to stay in Finland permanently, if they do plan to leave then what would most likely be the reason behind it, how easy was it for them to migrate to Finland for work, would they recommend coming to Finland to others, if they could change something about their living and work conditions what would it be, and the final question of the survey was do they have anything else they would like to share about their experience.

5 Results and Analysis

5.1 Results

5.1.1 Demographics of Respondents

The survey received 45 responses from Estonian migrants working in Finland. Of these, 33 were women (73.3%) and 12 were men (26.7%). This could suggest that Estonian women are generally more willing to participate in surveys, whereas men may be less inclined to take the time to answer such questions. Although this assumption is based on cultural observations rather than statistical evidence, it aligns with common anecdotal experiences that women are often more responsive to survey participation requests, especially in academic research, so these responses don't necessarily reflect the actual gender distribution.

Historically, men have been more represented in physically demanding sectors such as construction, while women are often employed in service and healthcare industries. Since these job sectors, according to the survey, seem to remain key employment areas for Estonian migrants, it is reasonable to assume that both genders are represented in the Finnish labour market in significant numbers. However, without recent official statistics on the overall gender composition of Estonian migrants in Finland, this remains an area for further research.

Most respondents were aged 35-44 and 45-54, and a few were in the youngest 25-34 or oldest 55+ categories. The most common education level among respondents was vocational education, at 17 respondents. The second highest was bachelor's degree holders, accounting for 14 respondents, while 8 had secondary education. Only 4 respondents had a master's degree or higher, and 2 had only primary education.

The survey results for living situations found that 36 respondents (80%) are living permanently in Finland, five respondents (11.1%) work in Finland but live in Estonia and four of the respondents (8.9%) previously worked in Finland but now live in Estonia.

Survey results for marital status and children revealed that 18 respondents (40%) were married or in a relationship with children, 12 respondents (26.7%) were married or in a relationship without children, eight respondents (17.8%) were single without children, and seven respondents (15.6%) single with children.

5.1.2 Employment Sectors and Job placements

The three largest employment sectors among respondents were construction, with nine responses, healthcare and social work, with nine responses, and cleaning services, with eight responses. Other employment sectors that gained responses were transport and logistics, sales and IT technologies, production, and beauty services, and three respondents were retired. The pie chart below provides a graphic distribution of industries between the respondents by percentage for a more visual overview.

What industry do you work in?

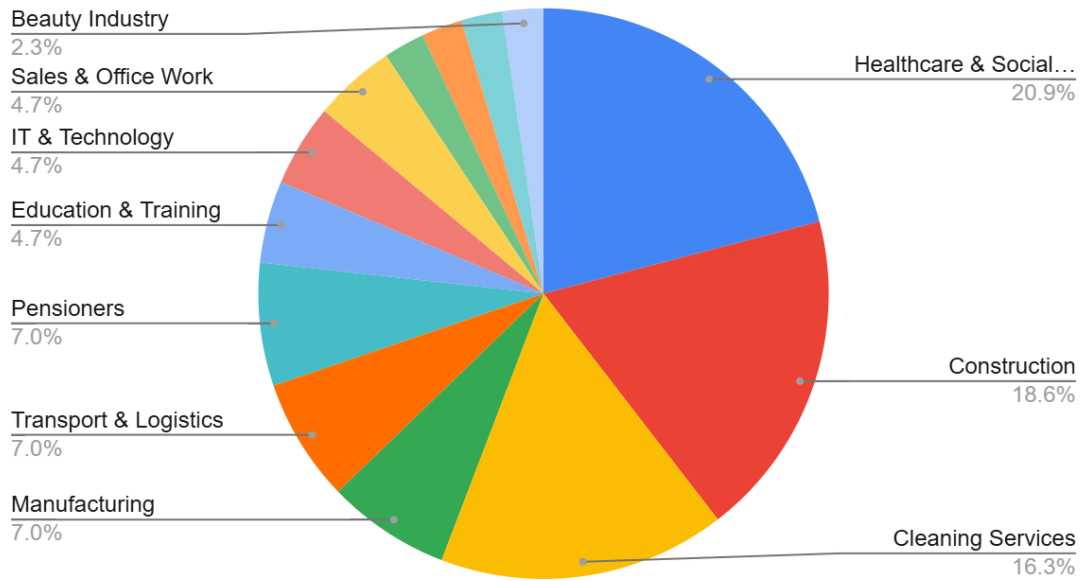


Figure 2. Respondents' type of work by sector

Data also revealed that respondents with vocational education are most employed in construction and cleaning services sectors, while those with higher education, such as bachelor's or master's degrees, are more frequently found in office-based or healthcare roles. This aligns with Finland's labour market demand, where manual labour jobs often require vocational training, while regulated professions such as healthcare and IT typically require higher academic qualifications.

5.1.3 Salary Importance & Economic Motivations

Respondents were asked about the importance of salary when moving to Finland on a scale of 1-5, with five being extremely important and one not important. The results can be seen in the following figure.

How important were salary differences with Finland in your decision to migrate?

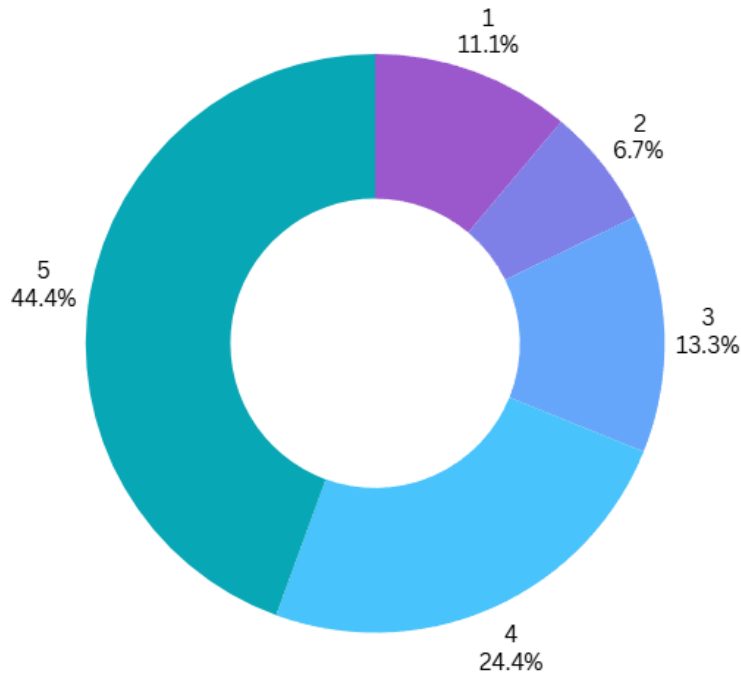


Figure 3. Importance of salary in migration decisions

The figure shows that 20 respondents (44.4%) rated salary as extremely important, 11 respondents (24.4%) rated it as very important, 6 respondents (13.3%) rated it as neutral, 3 respondents (6.6%) rated it as less important, and 5 respondents (11.1%) indicated salary was not a major factor for them.

Also, when respondents answered the Likert scale of 1-5 of whether the existence of job opportunities in Finland played a role in their migration decisions, the results show that 21 of the respondents considered it extremely important. The full overview of the answers can be seen in the figure below.

How important was the existence of job opportunities in Finland in your decision to migrate?

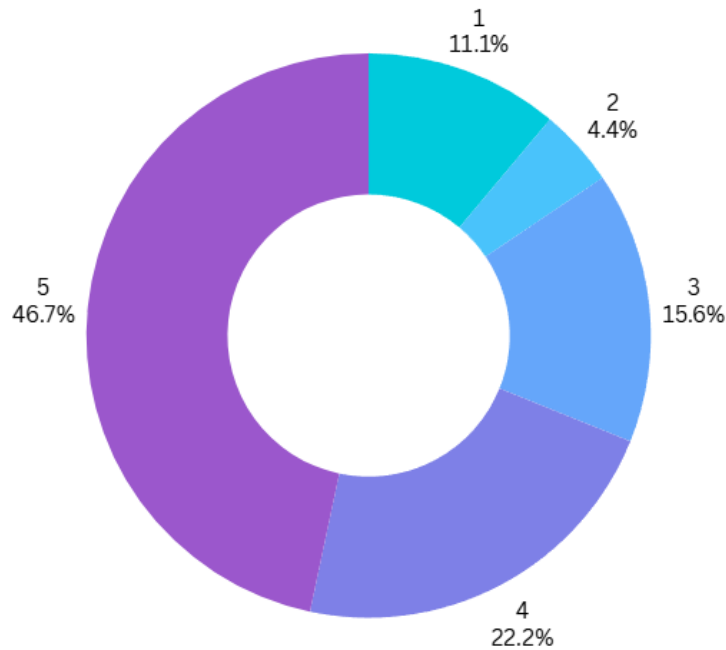


Figure 4. Perceived job opportunities in Finland as a migration factor

Observing the figure, it can be seen that most participants saw it as important that they had existing job opportunities in Finland before deciding to migrate. A few migrants, however, thought it was not important at all or not so important.

The top four motivations that participants said they had moving to Finland were higher salaries, family reasons, better working conditions, and stability. This was a multiple-choice question, and higher salaries had 22 responses, family reason was the highest with 23 responses, better work conditions with 18 responses, and stability with 21 responses. The remaining seven responses were divided between different life situations that respondents had mentioned under the option "other".

5.1.4 Choosing Finland: Did migrants consider other countries?

In the survey, participants were asked an optional question, meaning they could answer based on their own will. Participants were asked if, prior to moving to Finland, they had considered any other countries, and if so, why did they, in the end, choose Finland.

From the 45 people who took the survey this question got 29 responses, 20 responded with just “no” meaning they did not consider other countries, and nine respondents shared their thoughts.

Countries mentioned as alternative options by one participant to Finland were Sweden and Ireland, but the deciding factor for this participant was Finland's fast connection to Estonia, and that their family remained there. Finland's geographical location stood out as one of the most common reasons, with participants adding comments such as “close to Estonia, home is not far”, “always the possibility to go home quickly and easily” and “easier and faster connection with Estonia”.

Other reasons people ended up choosing Finland were in their words “linguistically easier language to learn”, “better economic situation in Finland than in Estonia at that time” and “family and friends were mostly in Estonia”.

5.1.5 Evaluating Life in Finland

Since salary is often seen as the primary motivator for migration, the survey included questions about whether their salaries in Finland are significantly higher than in Estonia, their satisfaction with their earnings, and how they perceive the cost of living in Finland compared to Estonia. As inflation continues to rise prices, it is important to examine whether the wage gap between Estonia and Finland still makes migration financially worthwhile. The following figures show how the 45 participants of the survey felt about their salaries.

How could you compare your current salary to what you earned in Estonia?

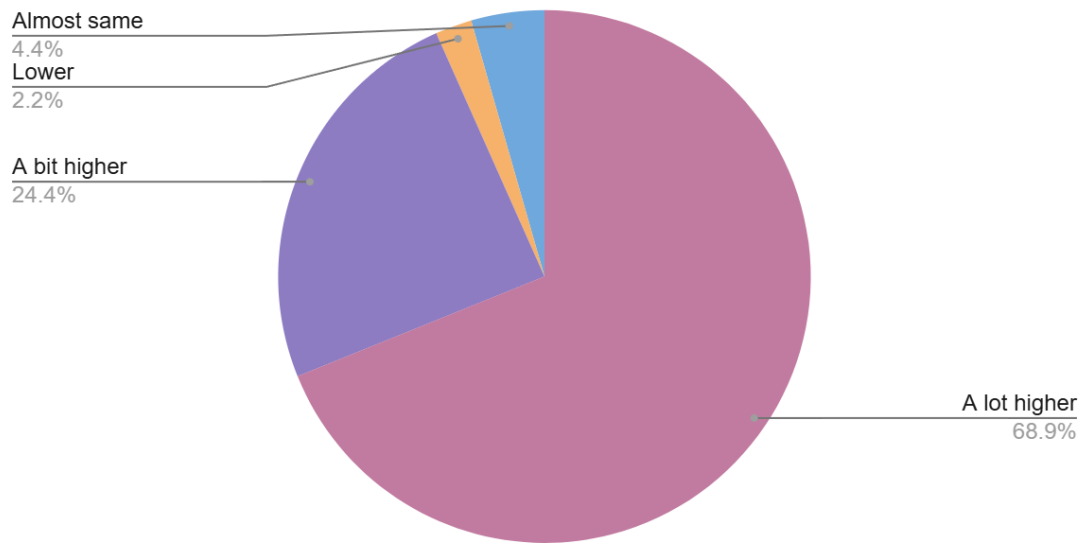


Figure 5. Salary differences between Finland and Estonia

From the above figure we can see that most of the survey participants said their salary in Finland was indeed higher than in Estonia, with 68.9% stating it is a lot higher and 24.4% saying it as a bit higher. A few participants did state that their current salary is lower or almost the same. The next figure dives deeper into how satisfied the participants are with their salaries.

Are you happy with your current salary?

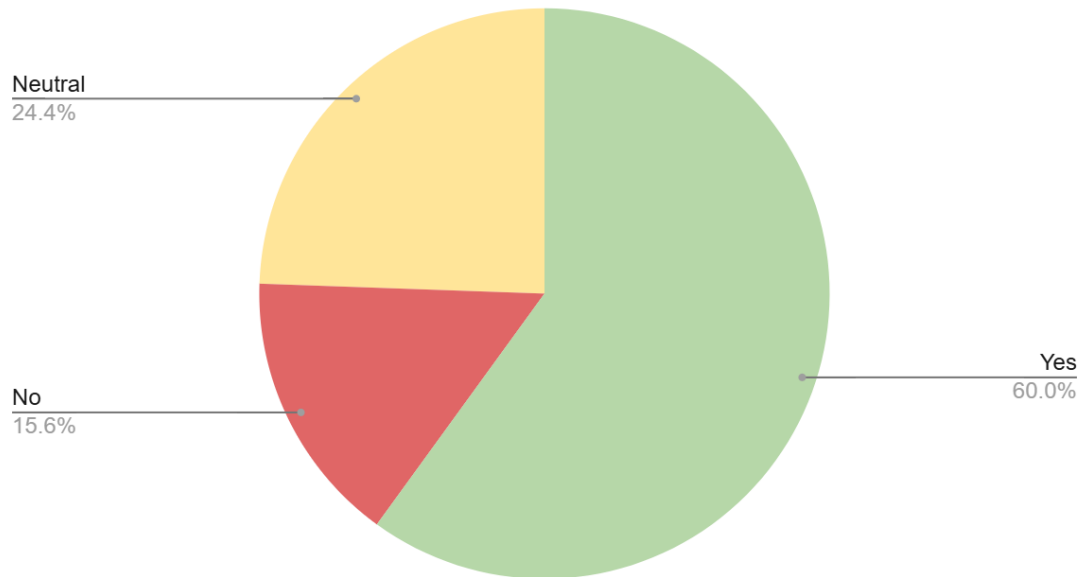


Figure 6. Satisfaction with current salary in Finland

Once again, the majority of 60% stated that they are happy with their current salary, 24.4% remained neutral, and 15.6% are unhappy with their salary, these insights suggest that, for most respondents, their salary expectations have been met. For the people who are dissatisfied with their salary, it is likely that factors such as high living costs, taxation, or possible unmet career expectations contribute to their dissatisfaction. The next figure provides further insight into how migrants perceive the cost of living in Finland.

How do you compare the cost of living in Finland compared to Estonia?

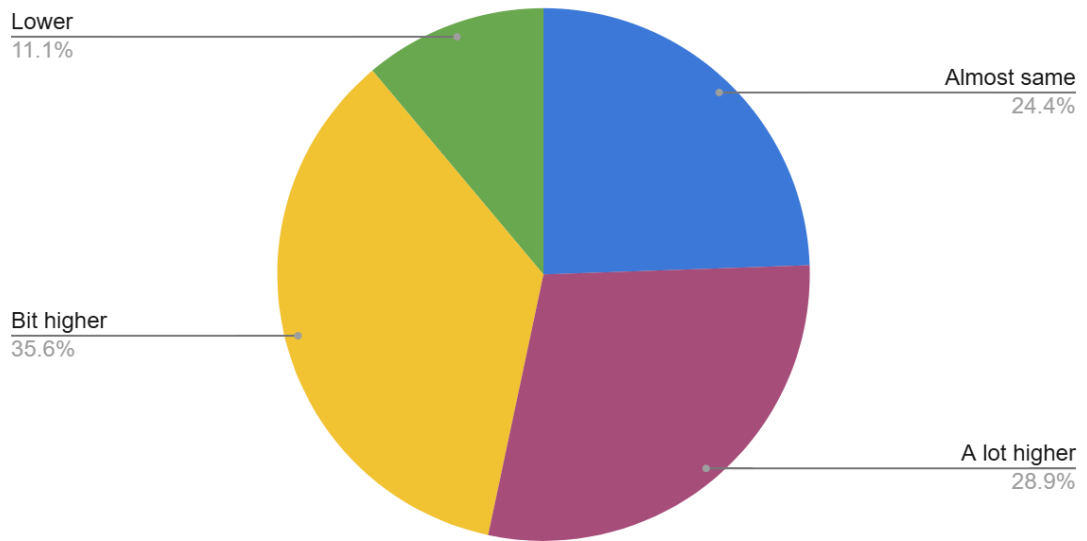


Figure 7. Perceived cost of living in Finland compared to Estonia

Looking at the figure we can see that a majority of the respondents see the living costs to be higher in Finland's, the 24.4% of respondents who answered same could highlight to the growing prices in Estonia as well as the new tax policies, and to conclude a surprising amount of 11.1% of respondents saw living costs in Finland to be lower.

5.1.6 The Role of Remittances

Out of the 45 respondents, 34 stated that they do not remit any portion of their salary, whereas six sent money occasionally, and five sent money regularly. The division can be seen in the figure below.

Do you send remittances to Estonia?

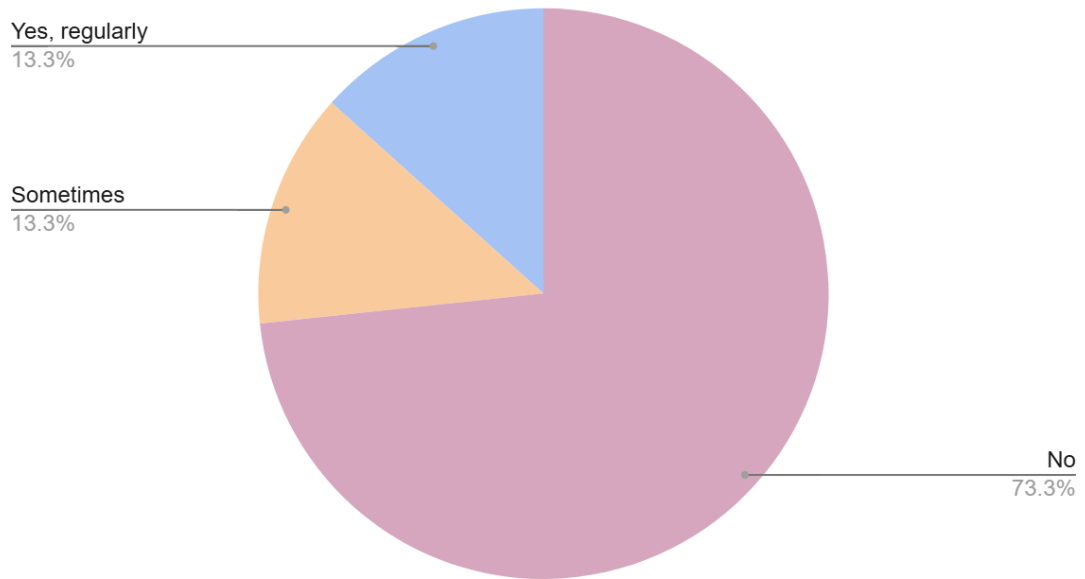


Figure 8. Remittance behaviour among respondents

It is important to mention that even though a large part of the respondents said that they don't send remittances back to Estonia, the amounts vary significantly among those who do send money. Some respondents remit small percentages (5-10%) of their income, while others transfer moderate amounts (30-40%), and a few send almost all their earnings (80-100%). A few respondents also mentioned that they do not send direct remittances but do contribute to Estonia's economy by making purchases during visits, such as buying groceries before returning to Finland.

According to the participants' answers, the most common use of remittances, mentioned by at least ten respondents, was supporting family members by covering food, household expenses, and utility bills. Participants also mentioned that they use remittances to pay off loans and mortgages in Estonia. Some respondents also mentioned that they invest their remitted earnings into real estate or other assets in Estonia, and a smaller portion of respondents reported sending money for gifts.

At the end of the remittance section, the participants were asked for their overall opinion on how much they think the Estonian economy relies on or gets aid from remittances sent from Finland. Out of 45 participants, seven believed that Estonia does not rely on remittances from Finland at all, 15 thought it relies very little, 11 remained

neutral, five felt that Estonia relies somewhat on these remittances, and five believed that Estonia depends on them significantly.

5.1.7 Future Plans and Reflections

Participants were asked in this section questions regarding their future plans and reflections.

Do you plan to stay in Finland permanently?

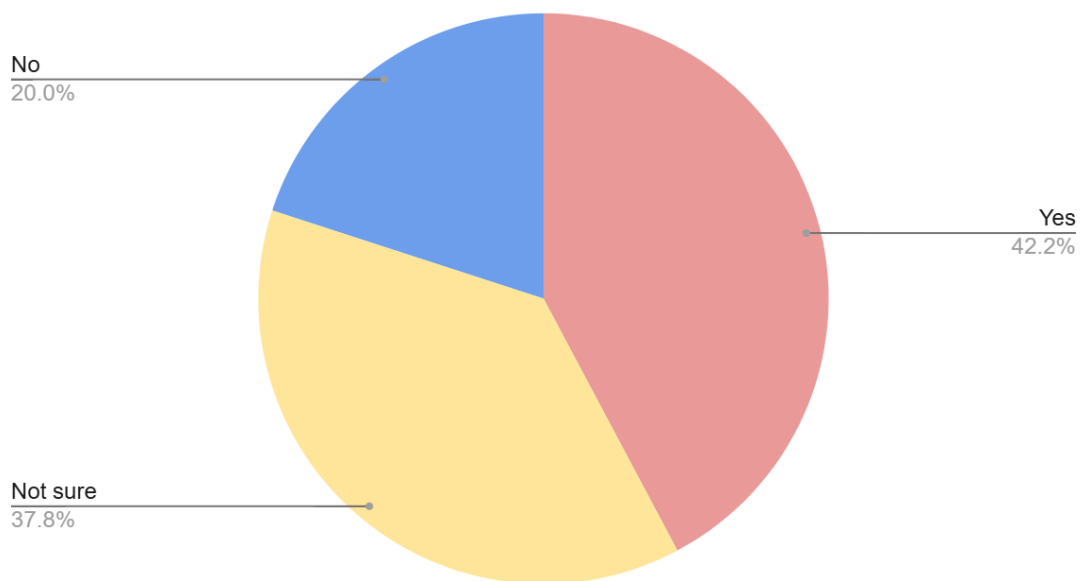


Figure 9. Future plans of the respondents

Next, it was asked if the participants were to leave what would be the most likely cause of any departure in their opinion. The responses included personal, professional, and socio-political reasons. The most common reason was family ties in Estonia, and the desire to be closer to children and grandchildren. Retirement was another factor, as some participants mentioned plans to return to Estonia or move elsewhere once they reach pension age.

In addition to family and pension considerations, some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the Finnish society, mentioning issues such as negative attitudes toward foreigners and bureaucracy. Lastly, a smaller group expressed a desire to relocate to a warmer climate, and the countries mentioned were Spain and Italy.

The last three questions of the thesis asked the respondents to share their thoughts and feelings, and their answers provide valuable insight into their personal experiences and perceptions of economic opportunities in Finland.

The survey asked if they would recommend that other Estonians migrate to Finland as well. The responses to the question varied on the positive side, many recommended moving to Finland for work, mentioning higher salaries, better job security, and better work culture where employees are treated more fairly. Survey results for this question did also display a degree of hesitation among respondents when recommending Finland as a work destination. While economic factors remain strong motivators, concerns about rising living costs suggest that financial benefits may no longer be as prominent as in previous decades. This could suggest a gradual shift in the cost-benefit analysis for Estonian workers, potentially influencing future migration flows.

Respondents also emphasized the importance of learning the Finnish language or at least a little bit of it before moving here. In addition to language skills, it was suggested that people should have a concrete plan and a secure job.

5.2 Survey Limitations

The size of the sample was indeterminate due to the method employed to distribute the questionnaire, which ultimately generated 45 responses. This is large enough to provide some indicative insights into the migration trends of Estonians in Finland but of course it does not represent even close to the entire Estonian migrant population in Finland. For example, Komp, Parkkinen and Jokela (2016) estimated the number of migrants from Estonia to Finland to have ranged between 50,000 to 100,000 during the preceding decade.

As participation was voluntary, self-selection bias may have influenced the results, as individuals with strong opinions or specific experiences may have been more likely to respond. Despite these limitations, the survey still provided valuable perspectives on the economic motivations of Estonian workers in Finland, consistent with the literature discussed earlier.

Additionally, the survey was available online, which means that respondents were limited to people with internet access. This may have left out certain demographics,

such as older people, although the likelihood of anyone of working age to be without internet access is relatively low (Statista 2025).

Another limitation is the uneven gender distribution, with more women participating than men. This could have influenced the findings regarding employment sectors and migration motivations.

Noteworthy is that some respondents mentioned that they would not recommend moving here for work due to rising wages in Estonia, attitudes against Estonian workers, and because they believe migration is no longer as beneficial financially as it was before. Some respondents also warned that coming with low qualifications is not a good idea as competition for jobs has increased, and low-skilled workers may end up struggling.

The next question asked if they could what they would change about their current life in Finland. Generally, respondents mentioned being happy with their current lives, stating they would not change anything. Few respondents stated wanting a larger home or lower rental costs. Some also wished to own property rather than rent. One respondent expressed regret that they did not pursue their education in Finland instead and one mentioned potential career changes.

The last question of the survey gave respondents an opportunity to share any further thoughts about their experience if they wanted to. While most decided to leave this box empty, good answers were still given. Many of them once again emphasized the importance of the language, and if you learn it, more opportunities arise. Also, it was mentioned that Finnish people are very friendly. However, important to note that this perspective was not universal, as some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with Finnish society, citing issues such as negative attitudes toward foreigners and bureaucracy.

Some respondents highlighted the opportunities in Finland, particularly in education, entrepreneurship, and state support. One participant compared this to Estonia, stating "In Finland, everything is possible if you just have the will. There are extensive opportunities for free education, starting your own business, etc. The state supports and helps always! Unfortunately, based on my experience, the same cannot be said about Estonia."

Even though the number of respondents was 45, the gathered responses still give valuable insight into the experiences and challenges those Estonian migrants face in Finland. The following section goes over the answers more in depth and analyses their broader economic implications.

5.3 Analysis

The survey results confirm that higher wages and better job opportunities remain the primary motivators for Estonians migrating to Finland. The gathered data provided additional insights into current migration trends, such as the declining role of remittances and perceptions of Finland's cost of living. Sectoral trends indicate that most Estonian migrants work in the construction, cleaning, and healthcare industries.

Furthermore, the results on higher wages and better job opportunities confirm the neoclassical migration theory, which, according to De Haas (2008, p. 4), suggests that people migrate to locations with higher salaries to maximize their earnings. While wages are higher in Finland, the survey results show that some respondents remain unsatisfied with their salaries. This could mean that the cost of living may reduce the financial advantage of migrating to Finland. The survey results already indicated that the respondents see living costs as higher than in Estonia, and if living expenses continue to rise, the appeal of Finland as a work destination for Estonians might be affected.

As mentioned before in this thesis, remittances have traditionally been a significant aspect of labour migration, but the survey results suggest that this trend might change, with fewer respondents mentioning sending money home regularly. The decline in remittances may suggest that Estonian migrants would rather settle in Finland for the long term than work temporarily and send earnings back home. Given the sample size, these results should be interpreted with caution as they reflect only a tiny portion of the Estonian migrant community in Finland.

According to the survey data, Estonians who answered work in construction, cleaning, and healthcare fields. Giving a sense that these job sectors still provide stable employment options, aligning with previous discussions and research suggesting that Estonians predominantly work in these job sectors in Finland, but it raises some questions about whether migrants are working below their skill levels. It is important to

mention that the survey did not explicitly measure whether the respondents worked in roles that matched their qualifications. However, if highly educated migrants worked in low-skilled jobs, this could indicate barriers such as foreign credential recognition or language proficiency.

Many respondents recommended moving to Finland, but some respondents expressed hesitation in recommending Finland as a work destination. Their hesitation could suggest that migration patterns may start to change and that the number of Estonian migrants seeking employment in Finland could decline. Finland's rising living costs could influence the decline in comparison to salaries and the potential if Estonia's economic position starts to improve. This highlights how important policies are in improving job accessibility, career mobility, and cost of living conditions for migrants coming to Finland.

The results of the survey confirm that the dominant economic motivations for Estonian migration to Finland remain higher wages and better job stability. However, additional trends spotted in the survey results, such as the decreasing role of remittances and rising concerns about living costs, suggest that migration patterns may evolve. The hesitation among some respondents to recommend Finland as a work destination raises questions about whether Finland will remain an attractive option for Estonian migrants in the long term, specifically if economic conditions in Estonia improve. These findings reflect the opportunities and challenges labour migration faces, this opens room for further discussions on how Finland could support migrant workers more effectively and remain an attractive market for migrant workers. The following chapter will provide a final reflection on these findings and discuss their broader implications.

6 Conclusion

This study examined the economic motivations influencing Estonian migration to Finland, focusing on different areas such as employment sectors, wages, cost of living, and remittance trends. The findings do confirm that higher wages and better job opportunities remain the primary drivers of migration, aligning with the neoclassical migration theory (De Haas, 2008). During the study, other insights emerged from the survey, particularly regarding migrant dissatisfaction with living costs, a potential decline in remittance practices, and questions about whether migrants work below their

qualifications. For the future a deeper study into the career progression of Estonian migrants could help analyse whether skill underutilization is a noteworthy issue.

The survey created for the research aimed to determine whether economic factors remain the dominant reason for Estonian migration to Finland. Results from the survey strongly indicate that financial considerations, particularly wage differences and job stability, remain key motivators. Noneconomic factors, such as family ties, also played a role, and some respondents hesitated to recommend Finland as a work destination, suggesting that rising living costs and potential economic improvements in Estonia may impact future migration habits.

Given the notable shifts that are present in migration patterns, Finland and Estonia may need to adapt their labour market policies. Finland has the possibility to explore strategies that help to ensure its attractiveness to foreign workers. This could be as simple as improving career development opportunities for migrants or easing integration challenges. On the other hand, Estonia might want to seek ways to encourage skilled workers to return, particularly in industries likely to experience labour shortages.

Even though the study's results delivered some good practical insights, specific limitations must be considered. While the sample size of 45 respondents was informative, it does not represent the entire Estonian migrant population in Finland. Future research with a larger-scale survey would provide a more representative view of migration patterns, particularly in relation to gender differences, career mobility, and remittance behaviours. Additionally, a longitudinal study tracking the career advancements of Estonian migrants could help determine whether they achieve upward mobility in Finland or remain in lower-paying job sectors. Exploring these topics in greater detail would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Estonian migration dynamics.

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