

On the way to developing integration and learning paths for immigrants

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The immigrant population in Finnish Lapland is younger on average than the population at large, but the labour market has yet to take full advantage of this favourable age structure. Immigrant job applicants in Lapland tend to have a rather limited educational background, and immigrants throughout the country face considerable challenges in finding employment with what are limited or unrecognised educational qualifications. The means for addressing these shortcomings include a good knowledge of Finnish, an educational qualification earned in or recognised by Finland, and work experience in the country's private, public or third sectors.

The University of Lapland and the Lapland University of Applied Sciences have joined their efforts for improving the employment possibilities and the recognition of knowledge of immigrants as well as offering possibilities for higher education in the Lapland area as well as creating information, guidance and counselling service practices for immigrants with two ESR-projects: Step2Job: Spotting skills - starting careers (1/6/2016-31/8/2018) and Higher education for immigrants – a path to a degree (1/1/2015-31/12/2017).

Higher education for immigrants – a path to a degree

The aim of a path to a degree project is to raise the educational level of immigrants living in Lapland through open UAS studies and thereby to enable them to apply to higher educational

degree programmes and in that way increase immigrants' know-how and improve their employment possibilities. Another aim is to create higher education information, guidance and counselling service practices for immigrants in Open Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences that have been found useful during the project, and develop the business collaboration taking place during the open US studies. In the long run, the project facilitates immigrants' integration into Lapland and advances Lapland's business life by enabling immigrants to get jobs or to start and run businesses. Furthermore, it decreases immigrants' alienation from society. The target group of the project are immigrants who are ready to study in higher education and who have a sufficient level of the required language.

The project selects 16 immigrant students to study in the Open University of Lapland and in Open University of Applied Sciences. In cooperation with the pilot group, the project creates and pilots a model of counselling for immigrants. Working together with the students, the project will create an individual study plan for each student, arrange orientation to higher education, offer the preparatory studies and organise the orientation and visitations to working life. In addition, the project will ensure that the target group has access to sufficient counselling and support services during the studies to ensure the smooth progress of studies.

Step2Job: Spotting skills

As an ESR project, Step2Job seeks to promote the employment prospects for immigrants in Lapland by providing recognition of their current skills, which is an aim also seen as furthering educational equality in the region. Within the project, the aim is to construct an innovative model for recognising and improving immigrants' competencies. The target group of Step2Job are the immigrants in the Lapland area, who may have either a university level degree or university level skills and competencies.

The model first charts the gaps in the immigrants' job skills and the challenges facing them in finding employment. The main difficulty of immigrants with a foreign university degree seems to be either the translation of the certificate of the degree or the comparison of the degree to the Finnish legislation; an obstacle for many immigrant customers of the Step2Job project that has been supported by providing official translations or recognition and international comparability of qualifications. In addition to aiding with the certificates and legal issues, the immigrants are supported by offering the possibility to attend university level studies. Especially the immigrant customers of Lapland University of Applied Sciences have

actively used the possibility to attend the studies offered through Open University of Applied Sciences.

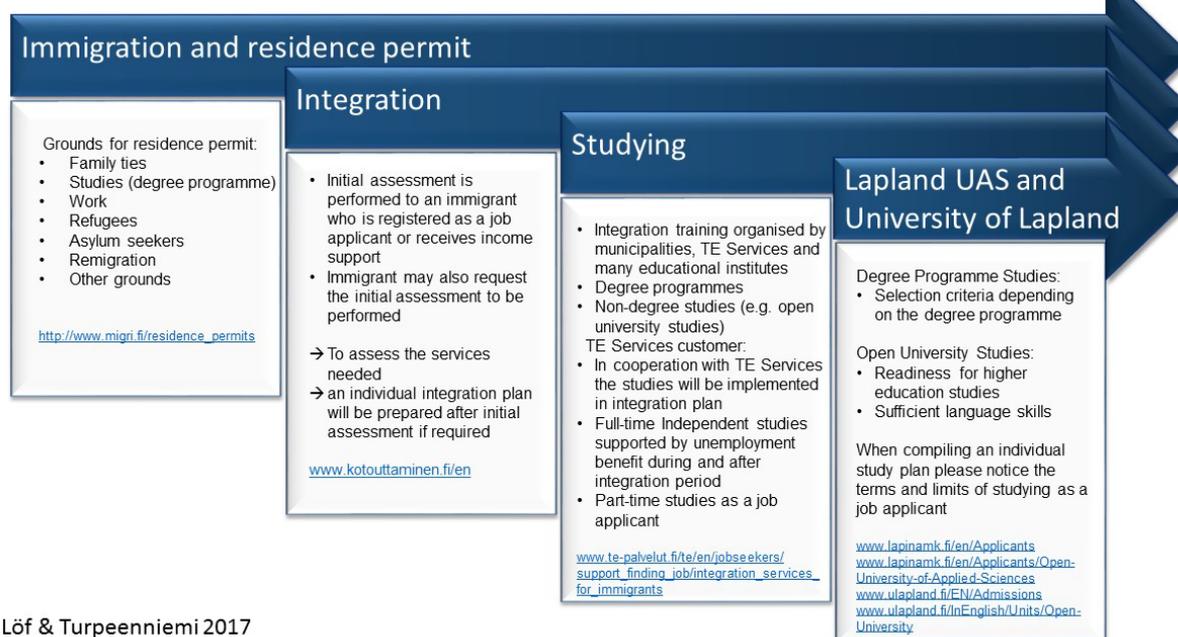
The project will use digital badges to bring front and centre the competencies immigrants have, in particular those currently in demand on the job market. Digital badges will provide prospective employers with a tangible indication of job seekers' skills. The project also provides a series of three Finnish courses that will help immigrants improve their Finnish language skills and master the terminology needed in professional contexts. Finnish is important for the immigrants from the point of view of employment. That is why the first digital badge offered through Step2Job project also focuses on Finnish skills.

The Step2Job project is in the way of highlighting the processes of and opportunities offered by the recognition of previous learning in the University of Lapland and the Lapland University of Applied Sciences, for both immigrants with university-level competencies and for consortium personnel who provide information, advice and guidance to students. The project will introduce new tools to support the recognition processes of the universities in Lapland tailored to immigrant clients.

The integration and learning pathway for immigrants

Both projects have seen the importance of promoting the equal status of immigrants in relation to the native population by supporting the integration and participation of immigrants in both education and working life. From the point of view of immigration, it is essential that the immigrant integrates into their living area, and through various employment-related services and support measures it is possible to create working life contacts and networks. The projects have gained lots of expertise and know-how. The experience and knowledge gained during the project has been utilised for making the immigrant's integration and learning pathway description.

The Integration and Learning Pathway for Immigrants



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The above figure describes the path of immigrant integration and learning from granting a residence permit, integration-related measures to terms, conditions and alternatives to study at the University of Lapland and at the Lapland University of Applied Sciences. The description can be used to guide potential customers as well as to support the work staff of the University of Lapland and the Lapland University of Applied Sciences. The description of an immigrant's integration and learning pathway has been presented in workshops for teacher tutors in both institutions. To support the work of teaching and guidance staff, the description also includes a guidance checklist. The checklist contains important information about the terms, practices and policies relating to the studies of immigrants within those two higher education institutions.

The main focus of both projects is to help immigrants integrate into Finnish society. One way to integrate is through education followed by employment. University of Lapland and the Lapland University of Applied Sciences offer higher education in the vast area of Lapland which also means that the institutions have to pay attention to the immigrants' and the special aspects of their integration process. Hopefully, the produced counselling material will help the institutions' staff to work with immigrant students in an even more adequate way.



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