



**The brain waste phenomenon in Finland.
Factors preventing inclusion of highly educated women with
immigrant background into Finnish workforce.**

Ket Kristelstein-Hänninen

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

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Abstract

Author

Ket Kristelstein-Hänninen

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The global competition for talent and challenges imposed by ageing population prompt Finnish government and companies put efforts into attracting international talent to Finland. However rapid growth of international population creates new challenges and utilization of skills and qualifications of people with foreign background is one of them. Immigrant women are one of the most disadvantaged groups in Finnish labour market, every second woman is currently unemployed despite many of them are highly educated.

This thesis investigates the brain waste phenomenon or underutilization of skills in Finland focusing on experiences of highly educated women with immigrant background and issues slowing down or preventing their inclusion. The research takes qualitative approach and the data for this thesis project was collected through interviews. The research results provide an overview of challenges that highly educated women with immigrant background face when trying to join Finnish workforce which is further condensed to create a short list of factors that lead to brain waste.

The findings indicate that relatively little research has been done on topic in Finland and the research results can be used to enhance the understanding of brain waste phenomenon and as a basis for further research. It can also be used to develop more balanced and consistent approach to reduce brain waste.

Keywords

Brain-waste, immigrant, inclusion, exclusion

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1 Introduction

Labour shortages in various industries and fields have been widely discussed in Finnish media for years. According to research results published in 2021 by Finnish Chambers of Commerce about 75% of Finnish companies reported moderate to high levels of difficulty finding skilled workers (Valtonen 2021).

CHOOSE HAPPINESS, WORK IN FINLAND

COME AND WORK IN THE HAPPIEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD.

FINLAND OFFERS ATTRACTIVE WORK OPPORTUNITIES AND A HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE.

Figure 1. Business Finland (2021) advertisement slogan.

To alleviate labour shortages Business Finland (2021) puts an effort attracting international talent using images of Nordic nature and promising attractive work opportunities and high quality of life (Figure 1). At the same time employment rates in Finland are lower than in other Nordic countries. While low employment rate among those over 55-year-old is considered to be the main contributing factor here (Confederation of Finnish Industries 2020) there is also another group that stands out in this regard. Employment rate among women with immigrant background in 2018 was 55 percent, which is 17 percent lower compared to employment rates of native female population, that was 72 percent.

More so even higher education does not improve employment rates of women with immigrant background and when they work positions that they occupy are often lower than their education level would suggest and in such fields that may have nothing to do with their qualifications (Toivonen 2021). This situation is a clear underutilization of a skill or a brain waste and is detrimental to both country's economy and individual.

Negative impact of brain waste on economy is discussed widely but what is the perspective of a person whose skills are underutilized? What challenges they face when integrating into society and workforce? Is there a reason beyond their control or is it their own choice?

1.1 Objectives and research question

This thesis aims to determine and investigate the factors behind brain waste phenomenon among highly educated women with immigrant background in Finland, focusing especially

on attitudes, experiences, and sense of belonging to gain a more in-depth understanding of issues preventing or slowing down their inclusion into Finnish workforce.

The main research question is:

- What factors prevent highly educated women with immigrant background from fully utilizing their professional potential in Finland?

The research question was divided into investigative questions (IQ) as follows:

IQ 1. What factors prevent inclusion into workforce on the level of society?

IQ 2. What factors prevent inclusion into workforce on the level of organizations, groups and teams?

IQ 3. What factors prevent inclusion on individual level?

Table 1 below presents the investigative questions, theoretical framework components, research methods and results chapters for each investigative question.

Table 1. Overlay matrix.

Investigative question	Theoretical Framework	Research Methods	Results (chapter)
IQ 1	Brain waste	Qualitative interview of women with immigrant background, literature review	4.1; 5.1.1
IQ 2	Brain waste	Qualitative interview of women with immigrant background, literature review	4.2; 5.1.2
IQ 3	Brain waste	Qualitative interview of women with immigrant background, literature review	4.3; 5.1.3

1.2 Demarcation

In this study brain waste phenomenon is limited to experiences of an individual and the destination country and other broader impacts, for example implications for immigrant's home country, are not considered.

Furthermore, the study was limited to personal experiences of individuals who experienced or are experiencing brain waste and their perceptions of labour market conditions. The aim is to focus on their immediate perceptions of Finland and Finnish labour market, to see host country society and host labour market through their eyes and find out how they see themselves, their challenges, and opportunities within this context. Thus, study is

not aiming to research in depth any particular services, practices or aspects of integrational processes but rather explores attitudes and experiences associated with these factors and also levels of importance assigned to them by research participants themselves.

For that reason, perspectives of host society (employers, governmental institutions etc) are used as a point of reference and contextual information but are not discussed any further as this is not relevant for the purposes of this research.

Ethnical background of research participants is also excluded from the main discussion, because study does not aim to compare neither evaluate experiences of different ethnical groups of immigrants. But additional background information may be provided when necessary for clarification purposes.

1.3 Key Concepts

The purpose of this chapter is to provide definitions of the key concepts and terminology used in this paper.

Brain waste according to the glossary of European Commission is defined as the non-recognition of the skills (and qualifications) acquired by a migrant outside of the EU, which prevents them from fully using their potential.

However, in general sense brain waste is globally known phenomenon, which is not tied to geographical location and refers to underutilization of skills and qualifications as such. Most commonly term is used to describe a situation where educated immigrants due to wide range of reasons are not able to fully utilize their potential in the receiving country and work in low-skilled jobs or cannot find jobs at all. (European Commission s.a, Batalova & Fix 2021, 4; Schiff & Özden 2005, 25.)

Highly educated in this study refers to a person who has acquired tertiary education. Used interchangeably with “highly skilled”.

Individual with immigrant background in this study, if not mentioned otherwise, refers to individuals, who were born abroad (not in Finland) or whose parents or one of parents were born abroad.

Diversity is a representation of multiple identity groups and their cultures within the same social system, organization or workgroup. To clarify, diversity is typically viewed as differences in race, ethnicity, language, culture, gender and age. But in broader sense diversity

includes all characteristics that define individuals. From those that are evident on the surface, like physical appearance, to those that are deeply personal, like beliefs and values. (Ferdman 2014, 3; Mor-Barak 2017, 118-124.)

Inclusion is a way of working with diversity, that gives a key to diversity's benefits (Ferdman 2014, 5). Inclusion involves recognizing and appreciating diversity, creating conditions where differences serve common good. In its essence inclusion can be described as a sense of belonging and participation. In inclusive environment despite the differences individuals can participate, contribute, have a voice, and feel that they are connected and belong, without losing individual uniqueness or having to give up aspects of themselves. (Ferdman 2014, 12-13.)

Exclusion the opposite of inclusion. Can be described as a sense of being left out or blocked from participation. An excluded person is left out of decision-making process, has low access to informational networks etc. (Mor-Barak 2017, 147.)

Underemployment in this study refers to "scientist working as a taxi driver" scenario or a situation in which individual is working in a low-paid and low-skill job where their qualifications are not utilized.

2 Brain waste phenomenon

This chapter presents the theoretical background for the thesis. First, implications of workforce mobility and increasing diversity a general overview of the brain waste phenomenon as observed in different parts of the world: typical factors that lead to brain waste, negative impacts of underutilization of skills and also presence of gendered brain waste is highlighted.

Further situation in Finland is presented featuring brief overview of immigrant backgrounds in Finland, factors that can be associated with underemployment or unemployment risk for a person with immigrant background, followed by overview of the research focus group or highly educated women with immigrant background and their situation.

2.1 Increasing workforce diversity and its implications

Due to demographic trends and economic evolution workforces worldwide are becoming increasingly diverse. Even though workforce migration is not a new phenomenon the scale of current diversification is unseen especially when it comes to migration of highly educated workforce (Kone & Özden, 2017, 1-6).

Typically, international migrants tend to move primarily in search of economic opportunities to countries with which they share an historic relationship or geographic propinquity. Migrant workers depending on their background and the receiving country usually fulfil seasonal labour demands, make up for shortages of appropriate native workers or supply special in demand skills. (Mor-Barak 2017, 96-110). Therefore, they are an important resource and positively contribute to host country's economy.

Optimistic expectations overall associate diversity with increase in the variety of perspectives and approaches brought to a problem-solving, opportunities for knowledge sharing, skill transfer facilitation, greater creativity and therefore improved performance and competitive advantage to organizations with diverse workforce (Ferdman 2014, 7; Bratton & Gold 2007, 225; Apatov & Sundaram 2020, 51).

However, evidence implies that increasing diversity by itself does not necessarily lead to increase in positive outcomes for groups, organizations (Ferdman 2014, 8) and society at large. Recent OECD (2020) report states that "the business case for diversity is not particularly strong". Findings discussed in the report suggest that there is no direct evidence of significant positive economic impact of diversity. On contrary great variety of differences in an organization, group, or society is likely to create social divisions (Ferdman 2014, 7) and are often characterized by the lack of fairness and discrimination based on stereotypes

and prejudice. For international migrants this means that they are highly susceptible to employment consequences due to their visible or invisible differences from whatever is considered “mainstream” in the host society. (Mor-Barak 2017, 114-115.) As a result, there are high numbers of skilled immigrants all over the globe, who are underemployed or cannot find work at all. This situation can be described as a waste of human capital, waste of skills, waste of potential or a “brain” waste.

2.2 Brain waste or underutilized potential

Brain waste is a rather colloquial term. It is widely used in the United States but can be encountered in publications worldwide and is also included in the glossary of European Commission and has official translation into all official European languages.

Brain waste refers to non-recognition and underutilization of qualifications of a highly educated person with immigrant background in the destination country. A person experiencing brain waste is underemployed or even unemployed, because for one or another reason they cannot find a workplace where their skills and full potential would be utilized. Brain waste is a waste of human capital that is especially evident in fields that suffer from labour shortages.

For example, Romero (2020) brings up the case of physician from Cuba with seven years of work experience, who despite the shortage of healthcare workers in the United States, physicians in particular (Patlak & Levit 2009, 3-6), has spent six years working low-skilled “survival” jobs and had to jump through many loops to be licenced as a doctor in the United States. While he eventually managed to get past barriers, there are others who never succeeded and stay in low-skilled jobs or cannot find work at all and their skills and education remain unutilized.

Then, Tallet (2021) describes the case of teacher with more than ten years of experience from El Salvador who despite her diploma was authenticated and recognized in the United States and there is a demand for workers with such qualification, was not successful finding employment that would correspond her level of education and runs a small restaurant instead.

Another similar case presented by McGuire (2021) describes the struggles of Chilean architect and project manager, who works as painting contractor and was not able to find a job corresponding to his education level since he has moved to the United States in 2013.

All these stories above represent the most typical cases of brain waste scenario. Each case of that kind has own external and internal contributing factors and has a negative economic and social impact on both individual and the host society. These aspects of brain waste are discussed in the following chapters.

2.2.1 Brain waste factors. What leads to skill underutilization?

Brain waste is caused by multitude of factors that vary from country to country and depend on immigrant individual backgrounds. In other words, a factor or a combination of factors that contribute to skill underutilization the most might have unique features depending on variables.

Countries have different migration related approaches and strategies, therefore policies vary and acquiring all needed work permits, licences and recognition of academic qualifications might become long and tedious process which becomes an insurmountable obstacle in some cases and might lead to significant difficulties integrating into workforce.

However, as with the case of a teacher presented in sub-chapter above, de jure recognized diploma does not necessarily open the door to job opportunities that correspondent migrant education and qualification level and there are other factors that play a significant role. Deloitte Australia (2018, 8) points out that many skilled migrants were able to have their academic qualifications recognised only to find this made little difference to their job search and there is a growing understanding that formal recognition of skills is far from synonymous with utilisation of those skills.

According to Batalova, Fix and Bachmeier (2016, 9-17) and their study conducted in the United States, real or perceived differences in the quality of domestic and foreign education played a significant role: foreign-educated immigrants experienced more brain waste than natives and immigrants educated in the United States. Fluency and literacy in the host-country language were found to be strongly related to immigrant labour market success. Unauthorized immigrants were quite predictably more likely to experience brain waste and regardless of place of education naturalized citizens of the United States were less likely to be underutilized. Time spent in the United States did not have substantial effect on employment rates of men, but employment rates of women are improving with time spent in the country. It was also noted that probability of brain waste scenario depends on place of origin, race or ethnicity and gender. More so, study has found that immigrants with the level of educational degree higher than bachelor-level were less likely to be unemployed or underemployed and degree field also plays a role: immigrants experienced

higher levels of brain waste compared to natives across all degree fields with the exception of biological, computer and physical sciences.

According to Webb (2014, 20-22) and research conducted in Australia as factors contributing to brain waste were named lack of local work experience and modes of entry or legal status in Australia, which plays a role in access to education for example. Presence of social and professional networks were found to be an important factor, that helps to reduce brain waste scenario. Research findings point out as well gendered brain waste and discrimination by race and ethnicity and a role of Australian Vocational Education and Training courses organised by Registered Training Organisations that channel migrants into low-paid jobs.

Deloitte Australia (2018, 8-9) highlights that employer's hiring practises favour local references and experience, which becomes a barrier in finding skilled job and the role of governmental institutions and organizations in developing approaches and systems that are transparent, fair, coordinated, and easy to navigate despite cultural and language differences to make recognition of qualifications and job seeking easier.

In short, as discussed above general brain waste drivers and factors contributing to skill underutilization can be listed as follows:

- Migration and workforce integration practices in the destination country
- Legal status or citizenship of an immigrant
- Time spent in the destination country
- Place of education
- Local work experience
- Social and professional networks in the destination country
- Local language proficiency
- Place of origin, race/ethnicity, and gender
- Discrimination and prejudice
- Level of educational degree
- Degree field

2.2.2 Negative impact and costs of brain waste

The brain waste has an economic and social impact on both society and individual level. In some cases, costs of the brain waste can be determined and monetised, in other cases only estimated and there are also costs that are intangible and qualitative in nature and therefore non-monetizable (Deloitte Australia 2018, 14).

Most typically the cost of brain waste among people with immigrant background is described and evaluated by forgone earnings and the loss of taxes that would have been

paid if immigrants had earned the wages that correspond their qualification instead of working in low-skilled jobs or being unemployed (Batalova & al. 2016, 20-22).

For example, according to Migration News (2005) brain waste is estimated to cost the Canadian economy 2 billion of Canadian dollars a year, which means that immigrant earnings would be 2 billion higher if they worked in the occupations for which they are educated.

The value of annual earnings that highly skilled immigrants lost due to their employment in low-skilled jobs in the Michigan state in the United States during the period 2009-2013 amounted to 510,5 million dollars as a result loss in taxes was 48,6 million dollars (Ruiz Soto, Batalova & Fix 2016, 4).

Table 2. Costs of skill underutilization (adapted from Deloitte Australia 2018, 14).

	Cost	Type
Economic costs	Personal income foregone	Monetisable
	Government income/ tax revenue foregone	Monetisable
	Superannuation*	Monetisable
	Public housing expenditure	Monetisable
	Transfer payments**	Monetisable
	Foregone productivity	Monetisable
Social costs	Health and mental health	Monetisable***
	Impact on family and or dependents	Non-monetisable
	Community cohesion	Non-monetisable
	Increased cost to fill skills shortages	Non-monetisable
<p>* A compulsory system of placing a minimum percentage of an income into a fund to support own financial needs in retirement. (AustralianSuper s.a.)</p> <p>** Transfer payments include any payment from the government, ex. unemployment benefits, rental assistance, and Family Tax Benefit payments.</p> <p>*** The direct cost of foregone productivity is captured as foregone personal income and not double-counted.</p>		

However, in a broader sense economic costs of underutilization of skills (see Table 2) besides loss of potential income and forgone tax revenue, include also possible support measures for low-income individuals or families offered by governmental institutions that could be avoided if educated immigrants would do the job for which they are qualified. Due to underutilization of skills labour shortages persist and costs to fill skill shortages increase. Brain waste has an impact on health and mental health of individuals, which results in costs for individual and government, and as well increases the risk of unemploy-

ment. Poor employment outcomes have an impact on relationship with family and dependants and may also have a negative impact on parenting, with higher parental stress levels linked to a reduction in nurturing behaviours. Children of households, with reduced income are more at risk of lower educational attainment. Moreover, brain waste and individual frustrations associated with it coupled with reduced perspectives to improve financial situation may lead to marginalization and it has an impact on community cohesion overall. (Deloitte Australia 2018, 14-17.)

Systematic underutilization of skills in destination country might reduce the chances to attract skilled international workforce (Garcia Pires 2015, 2) in the future and lead to outflow of immigrants back to their country of origin or to other countries, which is a setback considering increasing global competition for talent (Ghani 2018).

2.2.3 Women and brain waste

Studies conducted worldwide suggest that women compared to men are the most susceptible to brain waste scenario.

Based on data collected in 2009-2013 in the United States women were more likely to be out of the labour force regardless of nativity or place of education, with the highest shares among female immigrants educated abroad (Batalova & al. 2016, 7).

According to Deloitte Australia (2018, 12) based on survey conducted in 2016, 58% of female respondents with immigrant background were likely to underutilize their skills compared to 42% of male counterparts. Another survey conducted in Australia shows that while 72% of employed mainland Chinese women who migrated worked in highly skilled occupations in China, only 30% achieved similar work status in Australia, even after more than three years of residence (Ho 2004).

As it can be seen from examples above women with immigrant background face significant challenges integrating into workforce of the host country.

2.3 Brain waste phenomenon in Finland

Finland is a relatively homogeneous country, that has seen a rapid growth of international population during recent decades. In 2020 in Finland there were 444 031 persons with immigrant background or 8% of the population, which is a relatively low number compared to other countries (Statistics Finland s.a.-a; Confederation of Finnish Industries 2021, 2; Ministry of Interior 2021). However due to ageing population and labour shortages Finland needs more foreign workers and invests in labour migration to boost own economy.

Therefore, issues related to immigrant workforce integration into Finnish labour market are gaining more attention and various aspects have been researched recently to improve existing integration practices. Based on previous experience, new integration project launched in 2016 was developed with different backgrounds of immigrants in mind and brought more attention to utilization of skills of highly educated immigrants. (Lindström 2018.)

At the time of writing “brain waste” (*aivotuhlaus* in Finnish, according to the glossary of the European Commission s.a.) as a term is not used in Finland much and majority of publications featuring that terminology belong to recent years. However, partially phenomenon itself has been studied and is quite often referred to as “overqualification” or *ylikoulutus* in Finnish.

Overqualified is a person, who has more education, skills or experience than needed for their current job (Luukko 2017, 5-6). In other words, it is as well a skill underutilization issue and while there is a difference between “brain waste” and “overqualification” both revolve around the same problem viewed from slightly different perspectives. “Overqualification” is focusing on those, who are underemployed, while “brain waste” considers unutilized potential of both underemployed and unemployed.

According to Kauppalehti Fakta (2018), one of four persons with immigrant background in the age group from 20 to 64 among about 140 000 working in Finland perceived themselves overqualified for their current job.

People with immigrant background in Finland are more often underemployed than native population and this phenomenon is not temporary in nature, in other words time spent in country, improved language skills and gained cultural knowledge do not tend to change the situation. (Larja 2018, 2)

2.3.1 Brief overview of immigrant backgrounds in Finland

The largest groups of residents with immigrant background in Finland in 2020 were from former Soviet Union, Estonia, Iraq, Somalia, former Yugoslavia, and China (see Appendix 1 for details).

According to Statistics Finland, Nieminen, Sutela, & Hannula (2015), overwhelming majority of immigrants as reported by immigrants themselves (see Figure 2) moved to Finland due to family reasons or 54% in total. Second largest group (18%) moved to Finland for

work related purposes, another 11% and 10% consist of refugees and international students respectively and 8% of respondents had other reasons for immigration.

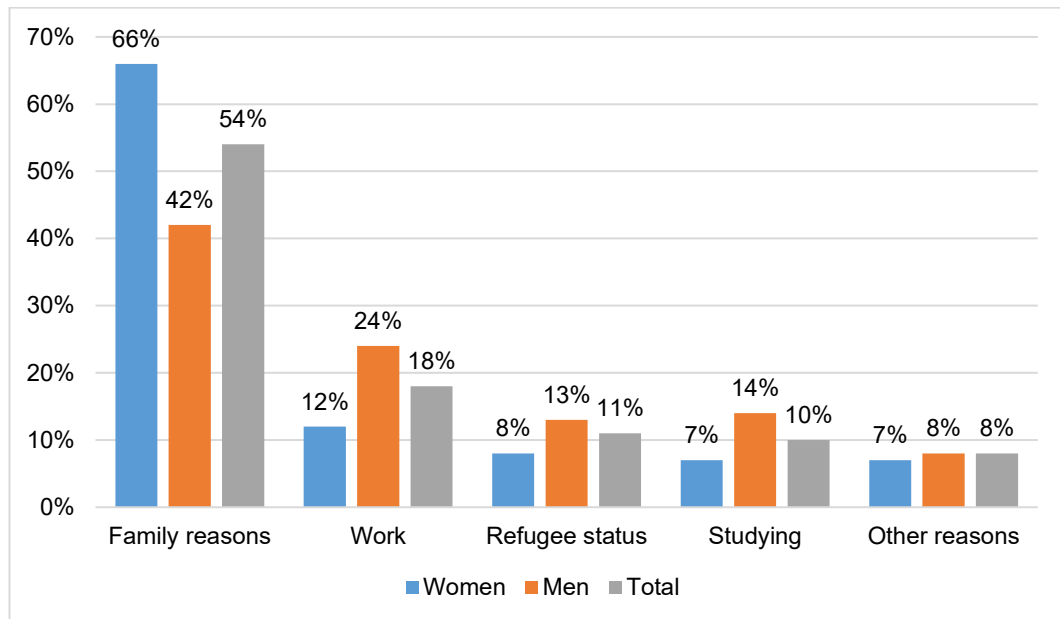


Figure 2. Main reason for immigration among population aged 15 to 64 with foreign background in 2014, by gender (Statistics Finland & al. 2015, 16).

According to Finnish Immigration Service (2021) majority of residence permits in 2020 and in 2019 were granted based on work, family ties and studies.

There is no exact information regarding the level of education of immigrants in Finland. The first research aiming to gather that data was conducted in 2014-2015 and according to the results 24% had basic level education or less, 42% had secondary level education and 34% had tertiary education (Sutela & Larja 2015). Another research was conducted in 2019, and according to preliminary results 7% of respondents had no basic education, 23% had only basic education, 25% - upper secondary level and 45% had tertiary education (Witting 2019).

Employment rates of immigrants are lower than among native population and unemployment rates are higher. Labour market success is uneven and there is a division which correlates with immigrant background: country of origin, reason for immigration and time spent in the country. (City of Helsinki 2019.)

2.3.2 Brain waste factors in Finland

The factors attributed to lower labour market success of persons with immigrant background in Finland generally correlate with those that were discussed in the Chapter 2.2.1 and were found to play an important role in other countries. However, not all factors are

equally researched in Finland and there are also own unique features and levels of importance assigned to different factors. Below are presented most of the most common reasons or factors that can be associated with unemployment or underemployment of individuals with immigrant background in Finland.

Insufficient Finnish language skills – is probably the most mentioned reason why immigrants have difficulties finding a job in Finland. According to recent research results recruiters consider Finnish language skills as very important. Only 23% of companies were ready to hire a person without fluent Finnish language skills. Almost half (48%) of recruiters representing different fields believed that immigrant language skills should be close to native level to be able to complete job tasks successfully and more than half (62%) of respondents who were not ready to hire employees directly from abroad, justified their position stating that candidates likely have no Finnish language skills. (Taloustutkimus Oy 2020, 5.)

According to the same research people with immigrant background are also perceived to have difficulties integrating into Finnish work-life and getting accustomed with work related practices. Those difficulties were attributed to cultural differences. Therefore, **place of origin** played a significant role and companies were likely to consider recruiting foreigners from neighbouring countries like EU, Estonia, and Nordic countries due to their perceived diligence, good language skills and cultural similarities. The **time spent in the country** was also considered as an important factor which makes it possible for a foreigner to get accustomed to local culture and therefore improves the chances to successfully overcome cultural differences in the workplace and other research findings and statistics also show that employment rates increase with time spent in the country. (Taloustutkimus Oy 2020, 6; Eronen & al. 2014, 38.)

As an important factor **formal recognition of qualifications** is mentioned mostly in relation to certain vocations and professions, which are highly regulated and formal recognition is compulsory, for example in case of healthcare professional and teaching qualifications. But overall, it seems that this aspect has not been researched enough and it is hard to say if the formally recognized diploma practically improves employment possibilities in other less regulated fields. For example, according to Ekhol, Huttunen, Rinas, Tuokkola & Haapakorpi (2018, 25-37) recognition of qualifications is one the less visited pages in Infopankki (informational portal for foreigners about Finland) and research respondents evaluated that information regarding qualification recognition is overwhelmingly more often requested by those with teaching qualification and health care professionals.

According to Eronen & al. (2014, 39) higher **level of education degree** can be linked to better labour market success to a degree but due to absence of reliable and complete data about education acquired abroad by immigrants - there is not enough information to draw a conclusion. For that reason, possibilities to analyse reliably how **place of education** affects employment possibilities are limited and according to existing data, **degree field** does play a role. The lowest rates of underemployment can be observed in health and welfare field, whereas, for instance those with degrees in service field or with teaching qualifications are more often underemployed (Toivanen, Väänänen, Kurki, Bergbom & Airila 2018, 39-40).

There are also clear signs of **gendered brain waste** in Finland, women with immigrant background are more susceptible to brain waste scenario. This question will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Age and marital status correlate with employment rates of immigrants in Finland. Married and divorced have lower employment rates than single persons, at the same time married men are more likely to be employed while married women are more likely to be unemployed. It was also noted that employment rates of immigrants tend to decline after the age of 37, which is much earlier than it happens for native population (Eronen & al. 2014, 38-39).

Lack of work experience in Finland is also a common issue. Employers tend to be reluctant to offer a job to someone without local work experience, and the job seeker is thrown into a loop where they cannot find a job, because they do not have local work experience, which they cannot gain, if they do not get a job. (Maow 2018, 42.)

Social and professional networks were also found to be an important factor in labour market success, which significantly improve chances to find and land the job in Finland, where in case of highly educated immigrant non-native connections are likely to help with opportunities in low-skilled sector and Finnish connections can help to land the high-skilled job (Ahmad 2005, 138-145). A lot of vacancies are hidden or not publicly advertised (Tariku 2020) and these positions are filled using employee referrals, which also makes social networks important.

Studies suggest that timing or a time when immigrant moved to Finland plays a role. Those who came to Finland during periods when Finnish economy experienced downturns had experienced more difficulties integrating into labour market (Busk, Jauhiainen, Kekäläinen, Nivalainen & Tähtinen 2016).

Inclusion of immigrants into Finnish society is supported and promoted through various services offered on different levels: from governmental to non-governmental organizations. Integrational training for unemployed immigrants usually includes Finnish or Swedish language studies as well as an introduction to Finnish society, culture and working life. In addition, individuals may be offered other types of training or education and financial support (InfoFinland 2022). **Integrational programmes** keep developing with ambitious goals to increase employment rates in mind, however, effectiveness of integration programmes is not monitored neither measured in Finland well. Only one research on topic has been completed so far. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2022.) Effectiveness of integrational programmes has been criticized for example for taking on assimilationist approach when immigrants are expected to dissolve in predominant culture adopting local patterns of behaviour while minimizing or hiding own cultural background instead of being a two-way process, where both sides adopt, recognize differences, and learn to be part of one whole community. In addition, integrational programmes were criticized for being too slow as a process especially for asylum seekers that takes years or that programmes do not take well into account different backgrounds of immigrants, for example basic level language courses that are offered through integrational programmes are not enough for highly educated immigrants who need advanced courses, if they would like to continue working in their field but such courses have very limited availability. (Lempinen 2019; Todorova & Kallio 2021.) Thus, existing limitations of integrational programme may contribute to skill underutilization.

Studies also link unemployment and social security system with lower activity of immigrants, part-time and short-term employment possibilities may not always be attractive because accepting such jobs might lead to losing welfare benefits, cause a great deal of paperwork (Busk & al. 2016).

Discrimination is one of the broader reasons that might influence other factors.

Attitudes towards work related migration in Finland are not especially positive, though they were changing over time: in 1990 - 70% of research respondents were against the idea that foreign workers could relieve labour shortages, whereas in spring 2021 the numbers decreased and 45% shared that point of view, therefore there is a change towards more positive perception of work-related migration. (Kurronen 2021, 1-2).

However, immigrants are often falsely perceived or referred to as a homogenous group with oftentimes negative stereotypes attached to those perceptions and acknowledged or unintentional discrimination might take place.

For example, high Finnish language skill requirement in job postings can serve as an excuse to dismiss foreign job seekers. While there are tasks that without a doubt require excellent or even native level of language skill this is not always the case, therefore, language skills, should not be given such a high level of importance when they are not an essential part of professional skillset needed for the job. According to Kubota (2013) professional skills and mutual ability and willingness to communicate in multicultural work environment can compensate for the lack of language skills – “language is only a tool”. However, as evidence suggests, strong Finnish language skill is considered very important by employers but in some cases even good language skills can be labelled as insufficient “because a foreigner is a foreigner” (Ahmad 2005, 37) and considering that employer has full right to set own requirements, language requirement can become a tool which allows to exclude undesired candidates.

Experimental investigation made by Ahmad (2020) revealed presence of ethnic discrimination in the Finnish Labour market. For the purposes of this research 5000 of fake job applications were sent; five per each vacancy with different but equivalent data under different name representing people with Finnish, English, Iraqi, Somali and Russian backgrounds. All fake applicants possessed excellent Finnish language skills and obtained their education in Finland. Vacancies that were tested varied from unskilled to skilled jobs, like cleaner, kitchen worker, cook, shop assistant etc. According to the results applicants with Finnish name (39%) were the most successful in obtaining job interviews, followed by English (26,9%) and Russian (22,8%) applicants. Less successful were applicants with Iraqi (13,4%) and Somali (9,9%) name. Which shows ethnical preference and inequality on labour market, where people with equivalent skills have different chances to succeed in their job search only due to their ethnical background and perceived qualities associated with it.

2.3.3 Highly educated women and brain waste in Finland

Women with immigrant background in Finland face more challenges integrating into Finnish workforce than men. After one year spent in the country men’s employment rate is 60%, while women’s employment rate is only 31%. (Confederation of Finnish Industries 2021, 5).

Based on available data 43% of women with immigrant background in Finland are highly educated, which is a higher percent than in native male population (36%). However as can be seen from Figure 3 higher education does not improve employment rates of women with immigrant background as it does in case of native men and women and also men with immigrant background. (Larja 2020, 30.)

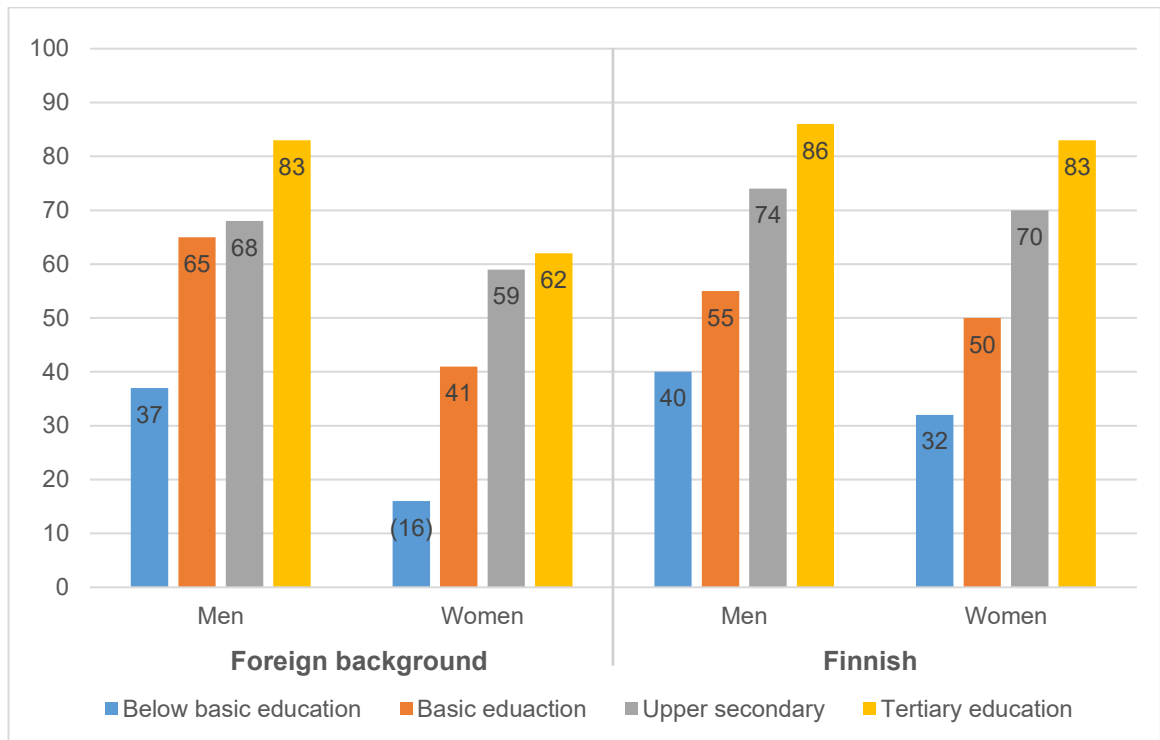


Figure 3. Employment rate by education, gender and origin in the age group 20-64 in 2014. ()= data in parentheses is unreliable due to low number of observations. (Adopted from Larja & Sutela 2015.)

Though employment rate of women improves over time it gets closer to men employment rate only after a very long period of time, that tends to be at least 15 years (Larja 2020, 32).

At least 23% of working women with immigrant background consider themselves over-qualified for their current position (Larja 2020, 39). And while oftentimes this situation is explained by insufficient language skills and the fact that foreign education is not always comparable to Finnish one - it proves to be true only partially because even those who have acquired education in Finland and evaluate their Finnish language skills as advanced or close to native are significantly more often underemployed than natives. (Toivanen & al. 2018, 32-35.)

The reasons contributing to such disadvantageous position of women with immigrant background in the Finnish labour market are unclear. Majority of women (66%) moved to Finland based on family ties (see also Figure 2, page 12), for that reason they do not have a workplace when they move into the country and those who have a little child or children or give birth to a child in Finland are likely to stay outside of workforce for a longer periods of time and even when children go to school 36% of mothers remain out of workforce, which is a very different scenario compared to Finnish mothers: 86% of Finnish women

return to work when their youngest child is 3 to 7 years old. However, Finnish women often return to workplace they left for maternity leave or find a new job based on their previous job experience, whereas immigrant women more often have no workplace to return to, neither have previous job experience in Finland, so they do not return but rather enter Finnish labour force for the first time. Thus, starting points for Finnish mothers and mothers with foreign background are different, but this difference alone does not explain why workforce integration of foreign women and mothers especially takes such a long time or why they remain outside of workforce. (Larja 2020, 32-37.)

One of the factors influencing low employment rates can be in labour market segregation; there are male dominated fields and female dominated fields. Jobs in female dominated fields quite often require extensive language skills, which may become an obstacle, because excellent proficiency cannot be obtained quickly. (Larja 2020, 30.)

There are also signs of ethnic discrimination that reduces chances to find a workplace. On the positive side, it was found that women with immigrant background face less discrimination than their male counterparts. (Ahmad 2020, 9-10.)

Furthermore, difficulties finding a job in own field may as well make idea of working for highly educated women who has kids less attractive and role of stay-at-home mother more fulfilling and honourable (Larja 2020, 38). Which may explain low participation in labour outside of home until kids become relatively independent, when help and close supervision of a parent is not necessary.

3 Research methods

This chapter presents research methods used in this study and explains why they were selected and how they are applied in this study. The aim of this chapter is to help the reader understand the research process.

3.1 Methodological approach

Research methodologies are often grouped into quantitative and qualitative approaches, it is also possible to use mixture of both (Matthews & Ross, 140).

Quantitative research method is focusing on gathering and working with structured data which can be represented numerically, and research question can be answered using statistical analysis (Matthews & Ross, 141-142). Qualitative approach on contrary gathers data which is constructed by research participants in their own way and is interpreted and structured by researcher. The research question can be answered by describing and explaining events and gathering participants understandings and experiences. (Matthews & Ross, 147.)

Considering that this research aims to investigate data that can be described as subjective, consisting of research participant's beliefs and experiences, personal interpretations - qualitative research method is the best option for this research because it is best suited for working with subjective and unstructured data.

Beside that qualitative approach enables the researcher to explore concepts in depth and allows for greater flexibility. Researcher may have only general idea of what he is looking for and research strategy may be more fluid and evolve in the process. (Matthews & Ross, 142-145.) Which also resonates with objectives and nature of the research.

Mixed method approach was not considered for this project due to time constraints.

3.2 Research design

The research design means setting out a framework for the research (Matthews & Ross, 110) and in this chapter research design processes are explained, and research framework is presented.

3.2.1 Conceptual framework

Considering that this research takes rather holistic approach it was important to structure this research based on the theory that would allow to investigate questions from broader perspective without losing the big picture. For that reason, Diversity and Inclusion theory was selected as the most comprehensive and suitable.

On one hand according to Ferdman (2014, 8-9) it is not the diversity itself that leads to positive outcomes but rather how it is addressed. Therefore, diversity must be managed, and inclusive practices are essential to gain access to potential benefits. Brain waste on the other hand can be linked to failure to adopt or implement inclusive practices, because brain waste as a phenomenon is one of the consequences of social and economic exclusion. In other words, inclusion can be linked to benefits, whereas exclusion can be linked to brain waste.

As can be seen from Figure 4 components of inclusion can be visualized as a system, which is composed of multiple layers and each underlying layer serves as a base or environment for the next one.

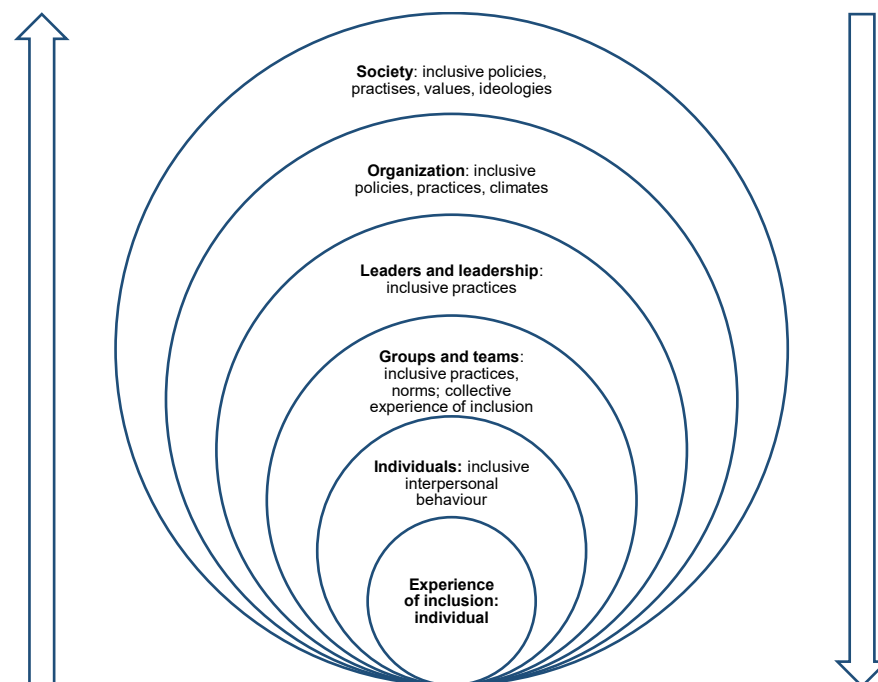


Figure 4. Systems of Inclusion: A Multilevel Analytic Framework (Ferdman 2014, 17)

Heart of the inclusion is in an individual experience of inclusion, which is achieved through immediate interpersonal interactions, then on the broader level through the interactions with groups and teams where individuals belong, which in turn can be supported by inclusive leadership approach, that is enabled and promoted on the level of organizations and

the level of society at large. All the levels are interdependent and inclusive practices and attitudes on all levels create and promote the sense of inclusion for individuals.

Brain waste factors discussed in the chapters 2.2.1 and 2.3.2, can all be distributed under categories presented in Figure 4: Level of society, level of organization, level of leaders, level of groups and individual level, which is summarized by individual evaluation of personal experience of inclusion or exclusion.

Thus, presented this way brain waste can be seen as a complex phenomenon that has broad implications and all the separate factors can be logically grouped which provides necessary structure and framework for research analysis. However, due to the time limitations determined by the project type it was necessary to reduce the number of categories. As a result, three categories were created: level of society, level of organizations, groups and teams and individual level. Where the level of society would focus on the society at large and as well governmental organizations, existing policies, and practices. The level of organizations, groups and teams would focus on labour market, job search and workplace practices, interactions with extended groups of people based on common interest etc. And individual level would focus on individual perceptions of own place within society and individual evaluation of contributing factors.

3.2.2 Research framework

Research framework (Figure 5) developed for this research is using the following data sources: theoretical literature and data collected from research participants.

Investigative questions IQ1, IQ2 and IQ3 break research question into three categories, whereas IQ1 and IQ2 aim reveal different aspects of the issue on broader external levels and IQ3 explores more personal level and serves as summary of investigative questions IQ1 and IQ2.

All IQ's will be analysed using thematic analysis and compared to the data collected through literature review. Based on findings conclusions will be formulated.

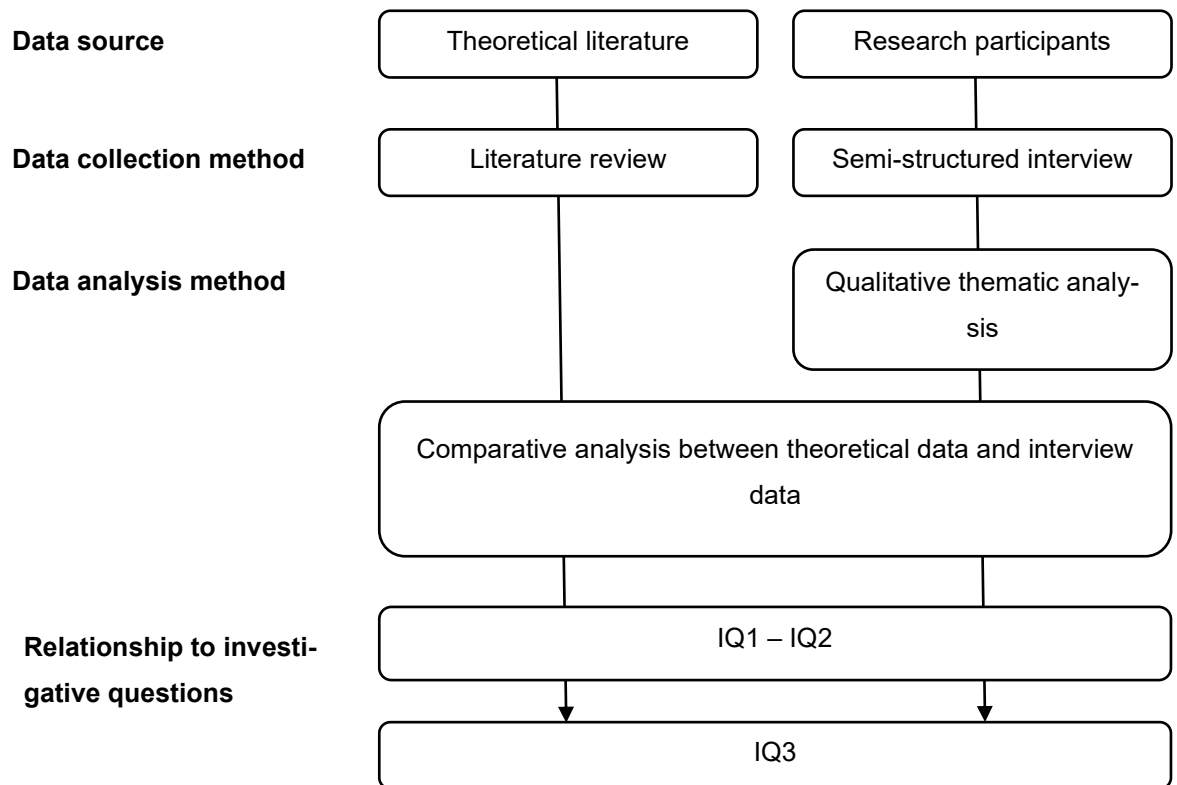


Figure 5. Research framework

Division into phases in this research is rather conditional: during the first phase theoretical background information is collected, during the second - interviews are conducted and during third – analysis is done.

3.3 Data collection

There are two types of data used in this research: theoretical data based on literature review and the data collected from the research participants through the series of semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews are characterized by common set of questions for each interview, which may be introduced in different ways as appropriate for each interview and where participants are allowed to answer the questions in their own way (Matthews & Ross, 221). Which makes it more suitable than more structured or less structured interview types because set of questions creates a framework that directs interview, which is necessary to reach objectives of this research but at the same time interview participants have possibility to share their thoughts and experiences freely and tell their own story within given framework.

3.3.1 Interview design

Due to sensitivity of the topic investigated in this study interviews for this research are anonymous.

Considering that brain waste as a term has rather negative meaning and may influence the research respondents to share only certain type of experiences it was not used during interviews. Instead interview questionnaire was based on conceptual framework and inclusion-exclusion theory and followed the “Russian doll” principle as described by Clough & Nutbrown (2012, 41) where each question represents a layer of complications surrounding the main question, from outer circumstantial and general to inner more personal perceptions.

First questions are reserved to gather general background information that would allow to describe the research participants. Interview participant profiles are presented in the following chapter and the gathered data includes reasons to move to Finland, period of residence, educational background, Finnish language skill level etc.

Questionnaire itself contains five main questions and additional notes with the most important topics for additional questions (see Appendix 2 for details). Five main questions in given order are the same for each of the participants, whereas additional questions and possible explanations are meant to be adjusted according to the situation.

During the interviews main questions were formulated following the model presented in questionnaire and additional explanations and questions were rather individual for each interview.

3.3.2 Interview participants and data

For the purposes of this research three interviews were conducted during autumn 2021 and spring 2022. All interviews were conducted online using Zoom and some additional questions were asked later after the initial interview via WhatsApp application and answers received in written form and as a voice message. Information regarding purposes of the research, anonymity of the interviews and interview questions were explained and presented verbally and as a written summary.

Before the interview research respondents were informed that no data, that would allow to identify them will be disclosed and were advised not to mention details, that may reveal their background: ethnical, cultural or the country of origin. Each interview on average

took 40 minutes and in two instances discussion continued after the formal interview was over, these conversations were not recorded.

Research participants were found through different channels and all of them are highly educated women who have moved to Finland more than five years ago from different countries and are currently living in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. Total time of residence in Finland in each particular case does not exceed 10 years. None of research participants has a citizenship of Finland, however all have legal rights to live and work in Finland. When it comes to skills and qualifications of participants, none of them had a degree in highly regulated fields, degrees were versatile and transferability of skills should not play a role, considering that two of participants earned their degrees in Finland.

Participant 1. Age group: 30-35. Single and has no children. Came to Finland to study and stayed after graduation. The main reasons to choose Finland were tuition-free studies and close personal connections in the country. Social connections also played a role in decision to stay. This participant completed master's degree from Finnish University, speaks English fluently and has passed intermediate level YKI test (National language proficiency test) in Finnish. She has been searching for a job in her field for over six years with no success and has been underemployed in a completely different field most of that time.

Participant 2. Age group: 35-40. Married and has children. Moved to Finland with a family and based on family ties. Has had long parental leave when she moved to Finland. She attended integrational Finnish language courses and studied in one of the Finnish Universities. Speaks English fluently and evaluates Finnish language skills as fluent. She has been searching for a job in her field for six years with no success, experienced difficulties finding internship during studies. Is currently studying, but when studies will be over will likely register as unemployed.

Participant 3. Age group: 35-40. Married and has children. Moved to Finland with a family because her husband has found a workplace in Finland. Has had long parental leave when she moved to Finland. This participant's tertiary education has been acquired prior to relocation to Finland. She speaks English fluently and has passed upper intermediate exam in Finnish. In Finland she attended integrational Finnish language courses and took additional courses to expand her skill set. She has been searching for a job for more than seven years until she has found her current a job in the field that corresponds her education. Communication language in this company is English.

3.4 Data analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to describe, discuss, evaluate and explain the content and characteristics of data that has been collected for the research purposes (Matthews & Ross, 317).

This research takes inductive approach (Figure 4), it begins with data collection and aims to formulate a theory based on research findings.

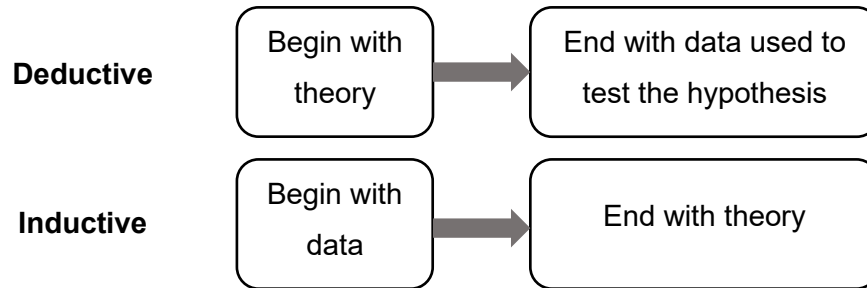


Figure 6. Deductive and Inductive research approaches (Adapted from Steinberg & Steinberg 2015, 66)

Qualitative data collected for this research were analysed using thematic analysis, which enables to identify the main themes within the data and to use the data to identify typologies and look for relinking of aspects, similarities, and differences (Matthews & Ross, 372-373). After the thematic analysis research findings were compared to theoretical data to define emerging themes or patterns and to develop a theory.

4 Research findings

In this chapter summary of research findings is presented thematically divided into three categories. First are presented general experiences on the level of society that include perceptions and expectations of Finland, interactions with officials and integrational programmes.

The social level is followed by the level of organizations teams and groups which includes perceptions of Finnish labour market, job search experiences and challenges associated with that process and direct interactions with employer, colleagues and other organizations and groups of interest.

Final category is individual level, which includes personal perceptions and motivations, thoughts about own place within Finnish society.

4.1 Level of Society

According to research participants Finland as a country has a positive image known for high quality of life, equality, nature. Two of research respondents were also expecting to get multifaceted international experience based on the impressions they had of Finland.

Availability of information for foreigners online was evaluated as quite comprehensive and initial bureaucracy procedures that had to be done before and after relocation were not mentioned especially and it seems that certain challenges were expected as one of interviewees said:

“Yeah... it's not overly complicated but you know if you must do so many things at once... I mean, register here and there and get all these papers... (...) it's just confusing because you know, you don't know who is like... like, names of all institutions are new and unfamiliar, you don't know who is responsible for what exactly and what you must do and in which order. So, just too much stuff at once.”

All the research participants received some help with relocation from personal connections, employer or other organization and initial interactions with Finnish society were generally described as positive experience. Especially were praised availability of services in English and also possibility to use help of official translator in interactions with officials when needed.

However, when it comes to integrational processes interviewees faced more challenges. One of interviewees who attended integration training in 2013-2014, described own experiences:

“There are different service providers for this integration training, so it's not the same for everyone because of that, you know. Mine was very good, great teachers... like the Finnish language course was very good but work-related part of it was frustrating, to be honest... Waste of time.”

And when asked to clarify pointed out that:

“It was like for... like I don't know how to say, we joked there in our group calling each other future “bussikuski” (Finnish - bus driver), you know. It was like for us only certain types of jobs exist. For example, one course or training for immigrants was presented so that it looked like next step, like continuation of integration training. I later realized it was for people who have no vocational education. Maybe not even basic school... So, no use for me. I really needed some help to figure out what to do with my diplomas, what can I do with my skills in Finland, um... they just shrank shoulders.”

In relation to that it was also mentioned that language skill level after the integrational language course is rather basic and there is no developed path for those, who need more advanced language skills to work in their field. Quality of language courses was described as uneven and research participants evaluated availability of intermediate and advanced courses differently, where one interviewee was satisfied, and two other experienced more challenges.

According to one of research respondents TE-palvelut (Employment Services) can be described as having quite passive approach:

“My experience with TE-palvelut is... robotic? Um... think TE-palvelut is very unapproachable organization. I feel like I got some help only when it was a standard procedure. As a foreigner here, I have not so many places to go and ask for help, TE-Palvelut is a logical place to ask about own career opportunities, but they don't seem to be interested to help.”

Another interviewee also wished TE-palvelut to be more “open” and “passionate” to help, as she also experienced difficulties communicating with organization and hoped for more consistency and desire to ensure that offered services indeed produce positive results.

It is also interesting that on contrary third research participant was quite satisfied with services provided by TE-palvelut and considered that organization helped her a lot.

As a significant disadvantage was named the lack of services that aim to prevent unemployment or help to improve existing situation and enable sustainable career development.

One of the interviewees asked for help from TE-palvelut after she initially moved to Finland and while being an international student, organization refused to help because based

on her legal status, she was not eligible for services. When she asked for help to find opportunities in her field after graduation, meanwhile taking a survival job in a completely different field, she received similar response:

“(...) they said I have a job already, so they refused to help me out at that time also.”

Analogue situation was also pointed out by another research participant:

“I think one of the only possibilities I have... to find a workplace in my field would be through some programme or project. But the trouble is like... I must be unemployed, like officially unemployed to be eligible for most of them. For example, there's in Espoo a special service for highly educated immigrants (see Appendix 3 for details), it's stated there that you must be unemployed otherwise you just can't become their customer.”

The services promoting employment that are available for immigrants were also described as insufficient:

“Whoever trying to help me they just come, and they just give me suggestions to correct my CV... they just suggest... however they feel like in their opinion it's good. (...) There were no help other than just editing my CV, and they think that their part is done and... yes, the job is readily available to me.”

All interviewees thought that if there would have been more efforts put in practical cooperation between officials and employers, joining Finnish labour force would have been easier.

4.2 Level of Organizations, Groups and Teams

All research participants had job search experience in Finland and despite the differences in their personal situation there were common general themes. All considered that finding job advertisements and applying for jobs does not in itself present any challenges, however they all have seen little to no success finding a suitable job simply by applying to open positions. All considered that their first attempts failed likely due to insufficient Finnish language skills, however as time passed and language skills improved, they thought that there were likely other factors involved as well. For example, research participants linked their challenges to lack of social networks and references:

“For me it has been hard because I have a kind of strong feeling that in Finnish system there is a strong reference system that is working at the moment. And if you get lucky - you get lucky. Otherwise, they have a belief... they prefer strong references only.”

“I have no recent job experience in my field here, nobody who would recommend me. Back in my home country jobs have found me through people, through

invitations and recommendations. I think it's no different here, personal recommendations matter."

All interviewees had at least some work experience gained in Finland, and they did not mention any challenges adapting to Finnish work culture. All interactions and relationships in general were evaluated positively.

Further interviewees were asked how Finnish language requirement influences their possibilities to find a workplace. All shared an opinion that Finnish language is needed for working in Finland, except for companies where some other language, English for instance, is used for communication and without any Finnish language skills possibilities to find a workplace are very limited.

Two of research respondents believed that language requirements are not always dictated by objective needs:

"(...) it feels like language skills are tight to professionalism. Like if you don't speak it well enough you can't have professional skills. I mean if Finnish person knows how to use Microsoft Excel and knows how to create Pivot tables, they know it not because they speak Finnish, but because they took time to learn how to use Excel. Someone from Congo, France, Brazil, or Taiwan can do the same, learn to use Excel and have the same skills. You know, it feels like foreigners are treated like people who have no professional skills, like someone will have to explain them how to do their job."

Another participant pointed out that, there should be no language barrier because English is widely spoken in Finland. And especially considering that both Finnish and English can be used for communication and supplement for the lack of skills in one of the languages there should be no barriers in communication.

One of the interviewees also shared her experiences describing situation, where she was denied promotion because her supervisor was against that mostly due to her insufficient language skills. She put a lot of effort into improving her language skills and after a while she was still denied promotion this time with a statement that "learning language is not an achievement; everyone can learn language". It must be noted that she was promoted by different supervisor later and her professional qualifications were not the issue, but rather personal attitude of her supervisor. This case illustrates how language skill requirement can possibly be used as a seemingly valid reason to justify the exclusion of a person with foreign background and to cover up other motivations.

It is also worth mentioning that none of the participants has used the word "discrimination", but it was first used by the interviewer and participants seemed to be not sure if they could link their experiences directly to discrimination, however, all interviewees thought

that they have lower chances to succeed in their job search in general because Finnish candidates are preferred over them for one or another reason. According to one of the participants:

” (...) I have tried all my channels. I have tried my personal references, I tried professional help, I also struggled by myself, and... I tried to improve everything that was needed. But the thing is, the Finnish society will always gonna prefer Finnish people over foreigners.”

4.3 Individual Level

All interviewees described their social life as very satisfying, however it should be noted that, in general, all were closer with people from own ethnic group (mostly family members) or other people with foreign background:

“Uh, like I’m very happy with my social life, I have friends, and everything is fine but (...) I am kind of living in alternative reality. My social circle consists of other foreigners, not from my country, if that matters, but all kinds of people...”

Interviewees also thought that making Finnish friends is not easy. One of them attributed it to the fact that age group she belongs is currently busy with career and family life, and Finns who already have established relationships are less motivated to put some efforts in developing new ones. Whereas foreigners naturally have fewer social connections in a new country, therefore they are more open and readily invest their time in new relationships.

Despite interviewees considered their close relationships fulfilling difficulties finding a job in their field that correspond their skill level were causing a lot of negative feelings and experiences, which were described as personal failure in life, depression, sense of loss of time and negative expectations of future, financial worries including worries about retirement. One of interviewees thought that her current difficulties have negative impact on her children:

“I want to show them that they can achieve their dreams. But how? For example, how can I prove that it is worth putting efforts in studies? They already have own challenges, because they study in Finnish, not in their mother tongue. So, how can I prove that it is worth the effort if they would study harder? I have a degree... and skills, and experience. All seems to be worth nothing here. So, why they should bother?”

One of interviewees said that she did not have a clear career plan when she moved to Finland with her family but did not expect finding a workplace to be such a challenge. Similar experiences shared another interviewee, who knew, that she would have difficulties finding a job without Finnish language skills, because her profession revolves around

communication, but she was also negatively surprised, that even when her language skills improved nothing changed and she is facing the same challenges.

When it comes to motherhood and influence it has on job search activity and motivation. Two participants who had kids considered long parental leave rather natural choice. One of them was not sure if their family will stay in Finland longer than for a couple of years and active integration did not seem to be reasonable. Another one considered that it would be better for kids, if she would stay at home because her family has nobody in Finland, who could help with kids. She thought as well that due to language barrier her kids were facing it was important to support them.

Research participants were asked a provocative question, if they would have possibility to turn back time would they choose to move to Finland again. And one of interviewees thought that she has experienced personal growth, which she evaluates as a very positive experience but feels professionally unfulfilled:

“I would want to change my decision. Maybe some English-speaking country would have been a better choice for me. (...) The thing, is I have no success in job search here.”

Another one thought, that it would be better to move to Finland earlier, when she had no family and just to study with a plan to stay in Finland only temporarily. And the participant, who succeeded in finding a suitable workplace, was more positive, but due to challenges she experienced, said that she “would think twice” before making the decision to move to Finland.

All interviewees at some point considered moving elsewhere: back to homeland or some other country. And two of interviewees are likely to do that, “if there will be no progress” in finding a suitable workplace. Both evaluated the decision to move away as tough, because it would have negative impact on their family members and relationships with them, and they would most likely lose their social circles here.

Two of interviewees said that they feel less interest in Finnish society than before and don't feel motivated to further develop their language skills, for example, because it does not seem to make any difference. And prefer to focus on their immediate life:

“I started like just be who I am but not be what they want me to be.”

Another one said that she is “tired of proving my worth” and described her feelings as helplessness.

5 Discussion

This chapter presents the research results and conclusions based on the summary of research findings and theoretical background data presented in previous chapters. After that further research suggestions are given.

5.1 Research results

This study aimed to find an answer to the research question:

- What factors prevent highly educated women with immigrant background from fully utilizing their professional potential in Finland? (From the perspective of highly educated women with immigrant background)

The research question was conceptually divided into three investigative questions, that represent different levels of inclusion and investigate brain waste factors on each of them.

5.1.1 Factors on the level of society

On the level of society were gathered general experiences of Finland and interactions with officials.

Factors associated with that level based on literature review:

- Migration practices
- Integration practices (employment services)
- Formal recognition of qualifications
- Legal status and citizenship

Research participants did not mention formal recognition of qualification, which may be because none of research participants has a degree in highly regulated field. Neither legal status nor citizenship were mentioned. Migration practices, initial interactions with officials in Finland were evaluated positively.

Integration practices is the only factor that interviewees considered significant.

Interviewees pointed out that they would like to receive more personalized help, and all hoped for more practical help akin to matchmaking, service that would connect job seekers with employers, who are ready to offer work opportunities for people with immigrant background. Registered unemployment as prerequisite to receive help received negative feedback.

In short, according to research findings gaps in integration practices make it the main the factor preventing inclusion into workforce on the level of society.

5.1.2 Factors on the level of organizations, groups, and teams

Factors associated with that level based on literature review:

- Time spent in the country
- Social and professional networks
- Local work experience
- Local language proficiency
- Discrimination and prejudice
- Place of origin, ethnicity, gender
- Place of education
- Level of education degree field

The time spent in the country as a factor is based on employment rate statistics, which shows that as time passes employment rates of immigrants improve, because with time individuals have better chances to improve their local language skills, build social networks and integrate into labour force. However, all research participants despite they gained professional working proficiency in Finnish, improved, or updated their education and spent reasonable amount of time to do that, kept facing difficulties finding a suitable workplace way longer. They all mentioned time as a negative factor, that reduces their chances to improve their life. Which suggests that individuals measure their success differently than employment rate statistics does and in case of individuals time does not necessarily improve chances to achieve own personal goals; what statistics describes as success may be perceived as failure by individual. So, from individual perspective cannot be considered a factor, at least not the same way as it is seen through employment rate statistics.

All research participants clearly considered **social networks** and personal references as one of the most important factors of successes in job search. **Local work experience** was also perceived as a factor that is valued by local employers.

According to research findings Finnish **language proficiency** was considered important; interviewees shared an opinion that without Finnish language skills chances to find a workplace are reduced significantly. They also associated their initial difficulties finding a workplace with insufficient language skills. But since they have improved Finnish language skills and other qualifications, interviewees (especially two of them who still struggle to find a workplace in their field) were not able to define what prevents them from finally finding a workplace, their job applications are rejected for no clear reason.

Interviewees did not directly link challenges they face with their particular country of origin, ethnicity, gender, place of education, level of degree or a degree field. However, they described situations when they were not treated fairly and did feel that natives are favoured and preferred over them and had some circumstantial evidence of that. Considering that according to Ahmad (2020) solely a foreign name may make a candidate less desirable to employer and job seeker alone rarely has a possibility to identify or reliably prove cases of **discrimination** in hiring process it is possible that research participants were discriminated against because of their foreign background, but there is no direct proof of that and, generally interviewees themselves used rather neutral terminology. According to them **Finnish job market is not open** to foreigners and is lacking grounds for their development.

It could be mentioned as well that degree field was mentioned during one of the interviews as a side note, that people with certain qualification may face more difficulties finding a workplace in Finland, because their skills are not needed here due to specifics of specialization or low demand.

To sum it up, on that level the main factors that prevent inclusion into workforce are the lack of social networks and local work experience and language proficiency. Furthermore, research participants thought that foreigners are locked out of job market and are possibly discriminated against. Degree field could be added here as well, because from individual perspective it might have a significance, even though research participants themselves were not considering their own situations to be influenced by that factor.

5.1.3 Factors on the individual level

Factors associated with that level based on literature review:

- Age
- Marital status
- Parental status (especially for women)

Two of research participants were married and had children and one was single and had no children and their workforce integration paths correlate with statistical data. Single research participant has never been registered as unemployed in Finland, keeps searching for a job in own field, but meanwhile accepted low-skilled jobs with irregular schedules. Two other participants who had families took long parental leaves and spent significantly more time outside of workforce. Therefore, based on research findings especially parental status could be named as factor, that influence activity on labour market.

Age as a factor generally refers to statistical data, which shows that employment rates decline with age. Interviewees were in the age group from 30 to 40 years and were not mentioning their age as an obstacle to find a workplace but rather felt pressure to find a desired workplace as soon as possible.

Research findings also revealed some details regarding personal circumstances or motivations. For example, people not necessarily move to Finland permanently and there will be no strong motivation to actively integrate.

Families with children face own challenges. They lack support networks and may have nobody who could occasionally help with parenting duties, arranging childcare may be not possible. An important point was also that kids as well face language barrier and, for example, external family support services may not be much of a help because if a child does not speak English language as their native language there will be a language barrier. Therefore, it is rather natural for women to focus on children at least during the first years of their lives. Both research participants who had kids became more active as kids grew older.

All research participants consider professional fulfilment important and made a lot of efforts to adjust and develop their skills to fit the needs of Finnish labour market and they clearly hope to advance in their professional field and are motivated to work in that direction. As a result, they prioritize opportunities that would help to achieve that goal.

To conclude, on the individual level the main factor is parental status because it certainly does influence personal choices and imposes certain limitations. Great importance has as well personal motivation and circumstances, which is a very individual factor, but may significantly influence labour market activity of the person.

5.1.4 Conclusions

Overall, it may be said that factors leading to brain waste in Finland from the perspective of officials and employers are slightly different compared to factors that individuals themselves consider important. Biggest part of factors discussed in theoretical framework are based on statistical analysis and comparison of big amounts of data, while individuals do not have a possibility to generalize and rely mostly on anecdotal evidence or own previous experience. Therefore, quite naturally certain factors were never mentioned by interviewees. For example, individual has very little possibility to evaluate what role their ethnicity

may have, especially if that ethnical group in Finland is very small and individual knows only a handful of people with that ethnical background in Finland, if any.

It must also be noted that concerns related difficulties or inability to find a suitable workplace were following the same patterns as discussed in chapters dedicated to negative effects and costs of brain waste. Research participants were worried about their future, felt depressed, experienced financial worries, and felt that their situation may negatively impact their family, especially children. In two cases, there were also signs of growing apathy and disinterest and considerations to move away.

There may be factors that have greater significance than this study findings might suggest, because research participant group was rather small and additional quantitative research could provide more details. Then, in this study cultural background was not considered, but culture certainly may have a decisive role in some cases. For example, marital status could be an important factor depending on the cultural background; in some cultures, married women are expected to stay at home. So, culture may influence decision to choose a role of stay-at-home wife and mother, and in this case brain waste scenario is rather personal choice or result of cultural pressure depending on how this situation is perceived.

To come to the point, the most significant discovered factors leading to brain waste among highly educated women with immigrant background in Finland could be listed as follows:

- integration practices
- social networks
- local work experience
- language proficiency
- degree field
- openness of labour market (discrimination)
- parental status
- individual factors

When observed through multilevel inclusion framework most of these factors are distributed across middle levels. Based on research findings participants evaluated positively their initial interactions with Finnish officials for example and felt that they have access to all needed services. On the broad level society is open and approachable and in the role of a customer participants did not experience challenges, they were also content with their immediate interactions, but they faced a wall when they tried to enter labour market. Most of the factors generally describe difficulty being recognized by employers as professionals. While language proficiency and degree field are rather practical issues and have clear

solutions, getting attention from employer is way more complicated. Participants experienced Finnish labour market as closed, felt that they need connections and recommendation or work experience in their field in Finland to be recognized and considered accountable. Participants also hoped that Employment Services would offer more services that would help to practically bridge that gap and connect them with employers' who are ready to offer them an opportunity. In essence, the main issue that participants face is being locked out of labour market with very little chance to get past barrier, which directly leads to brain waste: long periods of time outside of workforce in fruitless attempts to find a workplace or underemployment. It can be said that inclusive practices do not spread consistently throughout all levels of society in Finland, which suggests that something has to be done to improve that situation.

The notion of exclusion is supported by other findings. Social circles of research participants are consisting mostly of other foreigners, the access to information and opportunities that social connections typically enable is naturally limited to that circle. Research respondents who were currently experiencing brain waste had negative thoughts and generally felt stuck in their situation: they did not know what else they could do to improve situation.

In closing, findings have shown that more research is needed to gain better understanding of brain waste phenomenon in Finland. Brain waste as a phenomenon has a negative economic impact on both society and individual, it influences social cohesion and multitude of other aspects and should not be taken lightly. Brain waste scenario that highly educated women with immigrant background are facing in Finland can be associated with a variety of factors. For example, parental status, based on research results seems to greatly influence labour market activity. But it cannot be explained only by individual motivations and activity, considering that participants improved language skills and qualifications to better fit the needs of labour market and were actively searching for a workplace but there seems to be an obstacle beyond their control and to reduce brain waste holistic measures are needed.

5.2 Further research suggestions

Diversification of population is a new phenomenon in Finland, and it is not surprising that there is relatively little research on topic and even official statistics has gaps. For that reason, this study could be conducted again, and data could be collected from a larger group of participants and all factors of brain waste discussed in this study could be explored in

more detail using both qualitative and quantitative methods, which would contribute to better understanding of the phenomenon in Finland. Also, cultural influences could be included.

Besides that, research participants also pointed out that there is no consistency in the services they received (integration training and help from Employment Services), which raises a lot of questions: Why there is no consistency? What makes for a good service? What effect quality of service has on integration process?

Another interesting aspect was time spent in the country and why it takes so long especially for women to join workforce in Finland. And what they themselves consider an optimal time to learn the language and find a workplace.

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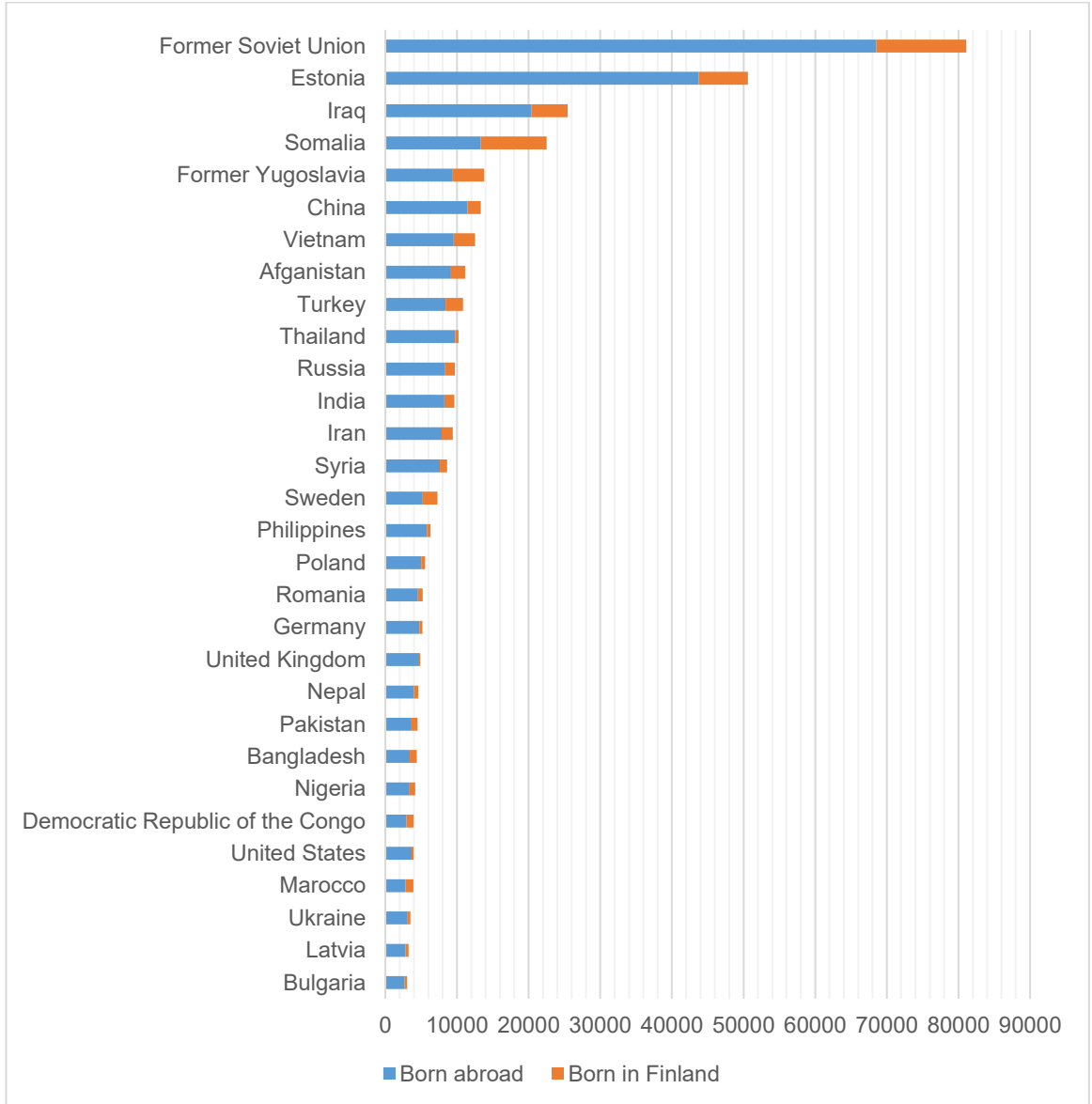
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Appendices

Appendix 1. Persons with foreign background in Finland in 2020, by country



Population structure in Finland: Biggest groups of persons with foreign background in 2020 by background country (Statistics Finland s.a.-b).

Appendix 2. Interview questions

1. What did you know about Finland before moving here? What were your expectations?
2. What were your first experiences? Who supported you and have you faced any challenges?
 - Officials (Migration office, Employment Services etc)
 - Integration
3. Have you searched for a job in Finland? What do you think of the process?
 - Job boards (availability of information)
 - Recruitment practices
 - Finnish language
 - Employment services
4. How would you describe your situation right now?
 - Workplace and its practices
 - Relationships with colleagues
 - Relationships with other groups of interest
 - Access to various important services
5. Are you satisfied with your decision to move to Finland? Would you do this again if you could turn back time? Why?

Appendix 3. Services for highly educated immigrants in the city of Espoo

Mentioned during interview Competence Centre for Highly Educated Immigrants in Espoo at the time of writing (April 2022) offered:

“(...) career counselling, various trainings in job hunting, language courses, studies in the clients' field of expertise, workshops, peer support groups, mentoring, job openings with our partner companies, recruitment events and more.”

And requirements to become their client:

“We are looking for you who:

- are a **registered unemployed jobseeker**
- live in Espoo
- are born abroad
- have a university degree
- speak and write Finnish at level B1.1 or
- have a fluent command of English, if you want to work in English
- are looking for a full-time job”

(City of Espoo s.a.).