



International recruitment in the ICT sector in Finland

Kristian Riihelä

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

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Abstract

Author Kristian Riihelä
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<p>Workforce shortage in Finland is a challenging phenomenon in many industry sectors. These challenges have been acknowledged at the government level as well while companies are doing their best to find skilled workforce for their needs. The ICT sector in Finland is a huge and important sector which needs skilled talents for business growth and development. Situations where skilled labour are not found nationally the focus turns to the talents abroad.</p> <p>This qualitative thesis examined international recruitment in the ICT sector in Finland. The purpose of this research was to increase knowledge about international recruitment in the ICT sector and understand how international recruitment is used in the ICT sector in Finland. To understand this phenomenon more in depth, first the desktop research was conducted to build the theoretical framework and the survey questions. Electronic survey was conducted in February 2024 through LinkedIn platform. There were 42 recruitment professionals who responded to the survey. The survey data was analysed with the thematic analysis method.</p> <p>The results of the research revealed three main topics related to the current situation of international recruitment, to the challenges and benefits of international recruitment, and how recruitment professionals see the future of international recruitment in the ICT sector.</p> <p>First, the results related to the current situation of international recruitment in the ICT in Finland was two-sided when half of the respondents thought that international recruitment is not used enough while a quarter thought the opposite. Secondly, several challenges and benefits related to international recruitment were discovered. Some of these challenges can be tackled through companies' own actions and some of them need political intervention. For, example bureaucracy related challenges can be tackled through political decision making and companies' own improvements with the recruitment and relocation processes. The benefits of international recruitment were discovered to have many positive impacts on companies. These include increase of diversity in the work community and increase of new business opportunities. Thirdly, recruitment professionals gave several recommendations related to international recruitment activities and recruitment channels for the future, which could foster international recruitment activities among ICT companies in Finland.</p>
Key words International recruitment, ICT sector, international recruitment process, international talent, labour shortage,

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1 Introduction

This is a research type of a bachelor's thesis for the Degree Programme in International Business in the major specialization of Human Resource Management for Global Business in the Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. This chapter introduces the thesis topic, background of the topic with an international perspective, research questions, delimitation of the research, benefits of the thesis, and the key concepts.

1.1 Background to the topic

Digitalization and new technologies will change the work life and the ways how businesses operate in the future (Teknologiateollisuus 2018). New technologies can generate new business and new products which can affect Finnish economy positively. If Finland aims to be successful in business related to information and communication technologies (ICT) at national and global levels, more ICT professionals are needed to work at companies and organizations in Finland.

Every year more employees leave the working life than new ones join in the workforce in Finland. Finnish working age population will decrease by approximately 76 000 by 2040 which is 2% less than 2021 (Tilastokeskus 2021). The whole technology sector in Finland (including ICT jobs) needs around 13 400 new professionals annually, while only 9200 students graduate from the universities and vocational schools (Teknologiateollisuus 2018; Teknologiateollisuus 2023). These figures clearly demonstrate that educating technology students in Finland is not enough to fill the gap in the workforce need in the ICT sector. Lack of employees in Finland impacts the ICT sector negatively and therefore companies cannot expand their businesses and launch new production as fast as they could with a full capacity of employees.

ICT jobs are important and crucial for any country and business that wants to keep up with development. ICT professionals can work with technologies including Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning, Internet of Things (IoT), Autonomous Driving, Blockchain solutions, and Cloud solutions for example (Skouby, Gyamfi & Williams 2019, 1). All these technologies can improve businesses and citizens' everyday life. For example, with IoT in smart homes citizens can manage their home and home devices through smartphone or businesses can use AI in smart production like 3D printing or laser-cutting robots (Skouby & al. 2019, 1-2).

Issues in the Finnish labour market have been acknowledged at the government level as well, through the previous and the current Finnish governments. The previous Finnish government planned to promote labour migration by streamlining the work-based residence permit procedures and attracting international talents in Finland (State Council 2020). The current Finnish government

is planning to strengthen positive landscape of work-related immigration especially among the highly educated professionals, social and health care sector professionals, and with seasonal and export sector workers (State Council 2023a, 75).

International recruitment is one way to tackle this workforce challenge in the Finnish ICT sector. It is also a good sign for international recruitment professionals that Finnish government and technology leaders want to promote work-related immigration as well. There is a huge ICT talent pool in the European Union (EU) alone. In 2022, there were over 9 million ICT professionals working in the EU region (Eurostat 2023). It may be possible to attract and recruit some of these specialists to Finland. Because Finland is an EU member state, ICT professionals from another EU state could be hired and relocated to Finland quite easily because they already have a permit to live and work in Finland as EU citizens (Finnish Immigration Service 2023).

The purpose of this research is to increase knowledge about international recruitment in the ICT sector for industry use. This information is useful for companies and professionals who want to attract and recruit international ICT professionals to Finland.

1.2 Research question

The research question (RQ) of this thesis is: How is international recruitment implemented in the Finnish ICT sector?

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

IQ 1. What is the current situation of international recruitment in the Finnish ICT sector?

IQ 2. What are the challenges or benefits of international recruitment in the ICT sector?

IQ 3. How do recruiters see the development of recruitment methods and tools in the future in international recruitment in the ICT sector?

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

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative questions	Theoretical framework	Research methods	Survey questions	Results chapters
IQ1	2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5	3	6	4.1, 4.2
IQ2	2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5	3	7, 8	4.1, 4.3
IQ3	2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5	3	9	4.1, 4.4

1.3 Delimitation

This research has been limited to international recruitment and the Finnish ICT sector. This thesis focuses on international recruitment in technology companies in Finland. The ICT sector is one of the fields where professionals can work remotely and occasionally the working language can be English. Therefore international ICT professionals form a very interesting employee group to study from the viewpoint of international recruitment.

Finnish ICT professionals are excluded from this research because the main focus of this thesis is international ICT professionals and international recruitment. Other sectors and professional groups have been excluded from this research as well. Narrowing the research will increase the author's focus on the core topics and demarcation will ensure that all the irrelevant had left outside of the research (San Miguel 2021, 46, 50).

1.4 Benefits

This thesis gives insights about the current challenges and benefits of international recruitment in the ICT sector in Finland. Therefore, this study is beneficial for the technology sector in general and especially for the ICT companies and professionals who wish to gain more knowledge about the international recruitment in Finland. Recruitment professionals and companies who are working in the technology sector who aim to hire international ICT professionals to Finland can benefit from this research as well.

Through this research, the author will also gain more knowledge about international recruitment and information regarding professionals in the ICT sector. This knowledge is very important and useful for the author's professional growth as an HRM professional in the field of international business. This research is also one way to expand the author's professional network and create new connections with professionals who work with international recruitment matters.

1.5 Key concepts

International recruitment means hiring employees from anywhere without any geographical barriers (Multiplier 2023). According to a Finnish International recruitment guide book, international recruitment refers to hiring persons from abroad or international professionals who already live in the country (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 4-5).

International recruitment process is a process of searching, selecting, and hiring overseas employees to work in an organization (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 12; Multiplier 2023).

A recruiter searches qualified candidates for an open job to meet the demands of both the employer and the employee during the recruitment process. The recruiter is the key person to contact for all stakeholders in the hiring process. The recruiter is responsible for the candidate experience. (Smartrecruiters 2023.)

The ICT sector is defined by OECD (2002) countries as “a combination of manufacturing and services industries that capture, transmit and display data and information electronically. This definition, based on an international standard classification of activities (ISIC Rev. 3), was considered to be a first step towards obtaining some initial measurements of ICT sector core indicators.”

2 Theoretical framework

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework of this thesis which is illustrated in Figure 1 below. The main concept of this research is international recruitment and therefore it is the center of the theoretical framework. Other concepts beside it are connected to it and connected to each other directly or through international recruitment. Finnish labour market, international employees' residence permit, Finnish ICT sector, international ICT professionals are linked to each other through job markets in the ICT sector. Two remaining concepts, recruitment professional and international recruitment process are also linked to these concepts. Recruitment professional search and attract ICT professionals for open vacancies while international recruitment process is one piece of the solution to solve the work force needs in the ICT sector.

It is important to study and understand the background, concepts and terminologies which are related to international recruitment in Finland. This theoretical framework also helps to design the survey questions for the empirical research stage and analyzing the research data. Understanding the theoretical framework also helps to assess the validity, reliability, and the results of this research. (San Miguel 2021, 65.)



Figure 1. Theoretical framework

2.1 International recruitment and recruitment professionals

Globalisation, growing digitalisation, international competition and changes in working life challenge companies and organisations. For employers, it means that they need to find skilled workforce for their business development and growth. Finding employees with the right competencies and skills can be a challenging task especially when there is a shortage of workforce in the regional or national labour market. (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 7.) According to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2023) the Finnish labour market has a shortage of skilled workers and therefore Finland needs to attract and maintain international professionals in the Finnish job market.

International recruitment is one option to tackle the labour shortage when there is a need of competent workforce. One example of this is from Germany's health care sector where one of their key strategies is to use international recruitment to recruit nurses to maintain a sufficient workforce in the field (Kordes, Pütz & Rand 2020). Another example is the Finnish Government's programme, the Talent Boost Programme, which aims to provide to Finland the needed skills, strengthen economic growth, and employment and innovation activities through international recruitment and work-based and education-based immigration (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland 2023).

International recruitment refers to the process of sourcing and hiring candidates from different countries to work for an organization. International recruitment can involve various strategies and methods to attract, assess, and hire candidates from around the world. International recruitment is a process of hiring employees from anywhere without any geographical barriers (Multiplier 2023). According to Korhonen and Malo (2021, 4-5) international recruitment refers to both hiring persons from abroad and recruiting international professionals who already live in the country.

Recruiters' role and tasks can be versatile, challenging and vary depending on the organisation. Recruiters search for qualified candidates for an open vacancy to meet the demands of both the employer and the employee during the recruitment and hiring process. The recruiter is the key person to contact for all the stakeholders in the recruitment process. To be successful in the role the recruiter should know the company's culture, strategy, and hiring needs. Recruiters have various educational backgrounds and there are no standardised education or qualification requirements for the role of recruiter. Therefore, there are many career paths to become a recruiter. Recruiters should have skills in organizing tasks, interacting with stakeholders, and networking and creating good relationships with applicants and company's managers. (Duunitori 2024; Smartrecruiters 2023.)

A human resource specialist is a recruitment specialist who gives advice and support to hiring managers with the recruitments during the whole recruitment process. Recruiters can create job descriptions and post job advertisements. Recruiters can answer the questions of job applicants and screen and process job applications. Recruiters can arrange the interviews and conduct interviews alone or with the hiring manager. Recruiters can also assess the suitability of job applicants or select partners to conduct recruitment tests to applicants. Based on the job interviews, collected documents and references, the recruiter can advise the hiring manager with the hiring decision, but the final hiring decision is made by the hiring manager. (Joki 2018, 87.)

2.2 The Finnish labour market

Finland's population reached 5.6 million people at the end of 2023. During the recent years the increase in population growth has been the result of migration from abroad. In 2023 the number of births was 15 020 lower than that of deaths. (Statistics Finland 2023a.) The current trend is that in the years to come more employees leave the working life than new ones join the workforce due the increasing rate of retirement (Statistics Finland 2023b). The Finnish working age population will decrease by approximately 76 000 by 2040 which is 2% less than in 2021 (Statistics Finland 2021). At the end of 2023, Finland had 2 602 000 employed persons and 190 000 unemployed persons (Statistics Finland 2023b). Majority of the workforce in Finland worked in the service sector. The largest employers were operating in sectors like commerce, transport, hotel and catering services, education, and social and health services. (Eures 2023.)

According to the European scoring board 2023, Finland was in the third place in research and innovation performance after Denmark and Sweden (European Commission 2023). The capital area of Finland, the Uusimaa region, produced 39% of the total GDP of Finland. In 2020 Uusimaa was ranked tenth in the European Regional Competitive Index. Finnish is the main working language, although English is used as a working language in many international jobs especially in the research and ICT sectors. (Eures 2023; Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council 2021.)

At the national level, most of the available job vacancies in Finland are in the social and healthcare service sector, the construction sector, and the service and retail sectors. The lack of skilled workforce is a challenge for growth. The Confederation of Finnish Industries and Employers barometer has highlighted the need of skilled employees, and almost two fifths (37%) of the companies expected it to impact their growth negatively. In Uusimaa, the growing IT sector has a high demand for skilled employees, and some of the employees already working in the field will need to update their skills. (Eures 2023.)

2.3 International employees' residence permit

Citizens of an EU member state, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, or Switzerland do not need a residence permit for Finland, but they need to register their right of residence in Finland if they stay over 3 months. Citizens outside of these countries generally need to apply for a residence permit if they work in Finland over 90 days. (Finnish Immigration Service 2024a). However, there are some exceptions due to the different residence permit applications with different requirements.

International employees coming from outside the EU who belong to a certain job category can work without a residence permit for 90 days if their residence is legal in Finland with a valid visa, they have been invited to work in Finland or signed a contract to work in Finland, and they work as a teacher, a specialist, a referee or professional who belong to a certain job category by the Finnish Immigration Service. If they intend to work over 90 days, they must apply for a residence permit. (Finnish Immigration Service 2024b.) International employees who intend to work in expert duties in Finland and have a special expertise through higher education or work experience and a salary of at least 3638 euros per month can apply for a residence permit which is valid for 2 years. Specialist like IT professional can apply for a residence permit through the fast-track service and have a permit in two weeks. (Finnish Immigration Service 2024c.)

International employees who do not belong to a certain job category according to the Finnish Immigration Service can apply for a residence permit if they are employed by a Finnish employer or other employer operating in Finland, they have a sufficient qualification and education to carry out the job, and they have a sufficient income in Finland during the whole residence period. The amount of sufficient income is based on the relevant collective agreement or, if there is no collective agreement in the field, the minimum salary must be 1399 euros per month in 2024. When an international employee applies for a residence permit, they need to provide colour copies of their passport and a document where they show that they are legally staying in the country where they submit the application. After the application and the application payment has been made, the employer must supplement the application where employer add the terms of employment and other required documents for the international employee. After this, the employee must identify her/his identity in the Finnish embassy or consulate abroad or in a service point if they are already in Finland and wait for the decision. The expected processing time for this application is usually two months. (Finnish Immigration Service 2024d.)

2.4 The Finnish ICT sector and international ICT professionals

In 2021 there were approximately 9 600 companies in the ICT sector in Finland. During that year alone, the ICT sector employed approximately 121 000 employees in Finland and produced 6.74%

of the Finnish GDP. In 2022, the ICT-sector generated 6.29% of the Finnish GDP (Ficom 2023a.) In addition, Finland's share of the ICT professionals of the total national workforce was the third highest in the EU when 7.6% of the total workforce in Finland were in the ICT sector after Sweden (8.6%) and Luxembourg (7.7%) (Eurostat 2023). Below in Figure 2 you can see the proportions of ICT specialists in the EU compared to Finland and other member states.

The majority of the Finnish ICT companies (7 849 out of 9 653) in 2021 provided computer programming, consultancy, and related activities. Information service activities was provided by 831 companies. 554 companies manufactured computers, electronics, and optical products, and 419 companies provided telecommunication services. (Ficom 2023b.)

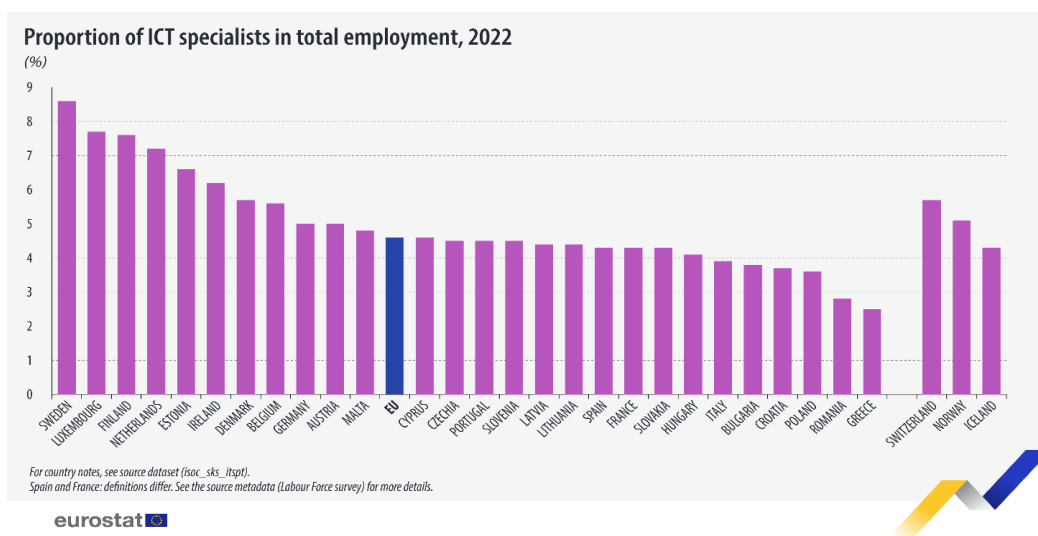


Figure 2. Proportion of ICT specialist in total employment, 2022 (Eurostat 2023)

It was estimated in 2019 that full-time employment in the ICT sector worldwide will reach 55.3 million employees in 2020 and 62 million in 2023. IT professionals are one of the most in-demand professional groups in the labour force when companies across industries increase adopting new technologies in their businesses. Three major roles in the ICT industry are software developer/engineer, user support specialist and systems analyst. (Statista 2024.)

India as one of the largest countries by population, has approximately 10 million employees in the IT industry alone (International Labour Organization 2022). Indian IT professionals form the largest group of foreign experts in Finland who work on a short-term period (Finland Abroad 2024). India with the Philippines, Brazil and Vietnam are countries to where Finland's current government wants to direct the recruitment activities among these countries' special talent groups like ICT professionals (State Council 2023a, 205).

According to Eurostat (2023), it was estimated that in 2022 there were 9.4 million people in the EU who worked as ICT specialists which is 4.6% of the total work force in the Union. In 2022, majority of the ICT specialists in the EU were men with 81.1% of the total share (see figure 3 below). In addition, highest proportion of women employed as an ICT specialist were in Bulgaria with 28,9% of the total share, while Finland had the 4th highest proportion among the EU member states when 23,8% of the ICT specialist were women. Lowest shares of women among ICT specialists were in Czechia with 10,9% of the total share.

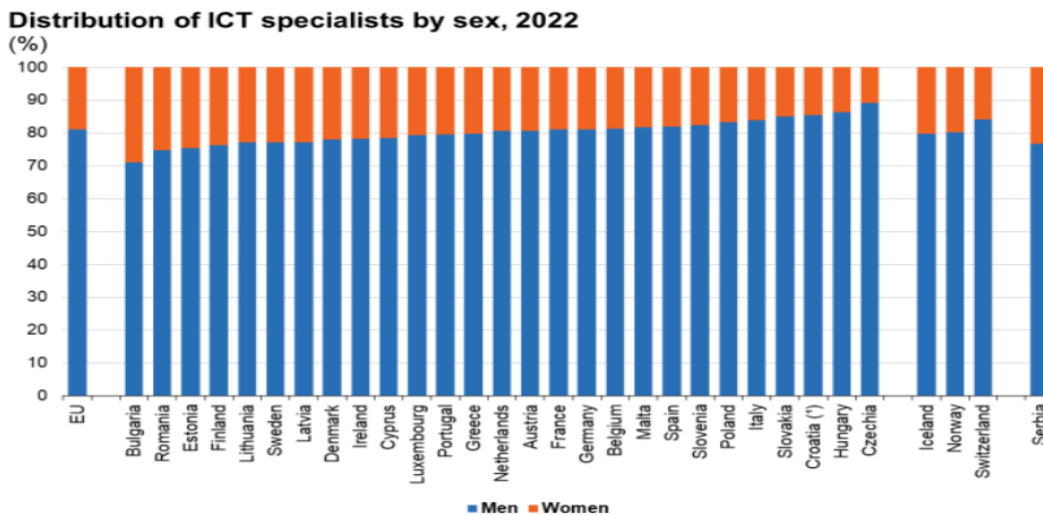


Figure 3. Distribution of ICT specialist by sex, 2022 (Eurostat 2023)

The majority of the employed ICT specialists in EU were 35 years or older (63,3%) in 2022. Highest share of the employed ICT specialist (see figure 4 below) who were 35 years and over were in Italy with 71,8% of the total share while Finland had the third highest share with 66,9%. On the contrary, Baltic countries had the highest proportion of employed ICT specialist aged 15-34 years when 54% in Lithuania, 53,4% in Estonia, and 53% in Latvia among the total share were in this age group. The proportion of ICT specialists aged 35 and over increased by 1,5% between 2012 and 2022 in the EU. This may reflect changes in the age structure of the EU population and increasing share of younger people who extend their stay and studies within the education system.

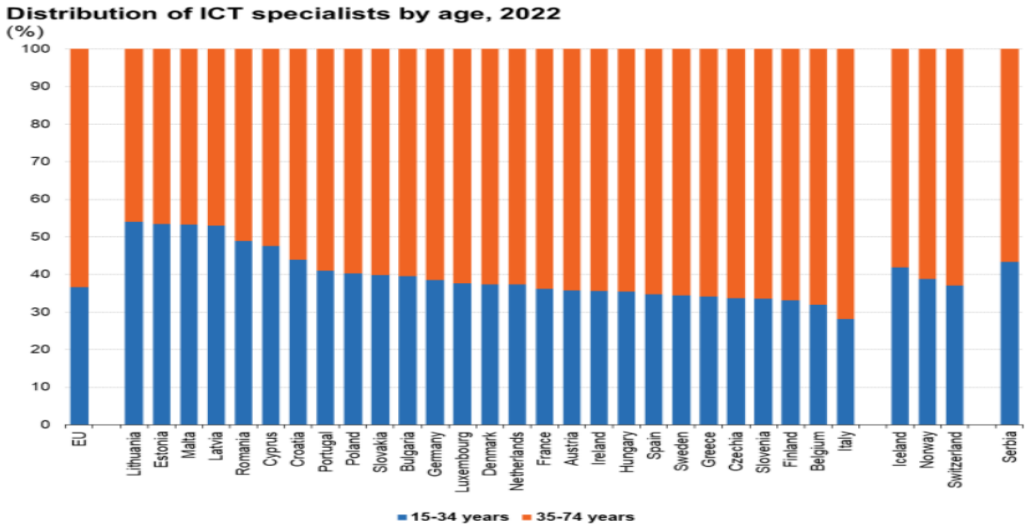


Figure 4. Distribution of ICT specialist by age, 2022 (Eurostat 2023)

In 2022 approximately two-thirds (65,4%) of the ICT specialist who had reported their educational level had completed tertiary level of education in the EU. Among the EU member states the highest proportion of ICT specialist with a higher education were in Cyprus, Spain, Ireland, France, and Belgium when over 80% of the total share had completed a tertiary education in these countries. Italy had the lowest proportion of ICT specialist with a higher education (39,6%). Below in figure 5 is demonstrated the figures of the ICT specialist and their education level in the EU with Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, and Serbia. (Eurostat 2023.)

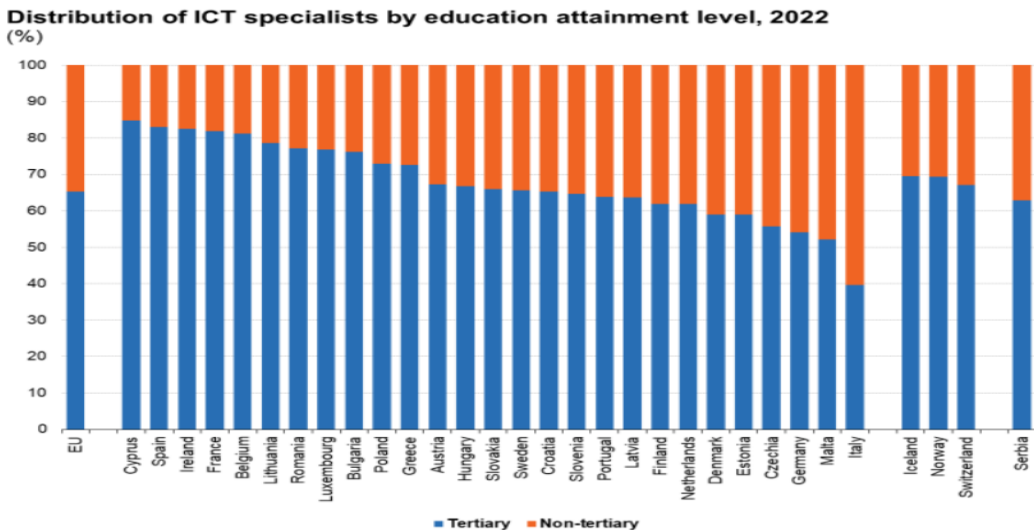


Figure 5. Distribution of ICT specialist by education attainments level, 2022 (Eurostat 2023)

2.5 International recruitment process

Recruitment process and stages of the recruitment can vary between the organisations depending on the recruitment process which is implemented in the organisation. In general, the recruitment

process should be fast and efficient. If the recruitment process is too slow, applicants may make their own judgements about the company based on the recruitment process. The applicant may have job applications to other companies as well and the company who manages its recruitment process more agilely can be the most attractive organisation and win the recruitment “competition”. (Korhonen & Malo 2021,11; Salli & Takatalo 2014, 10.) Figure 6 below illustrates the international recruitment process according to Korhonen and Malo (2021).

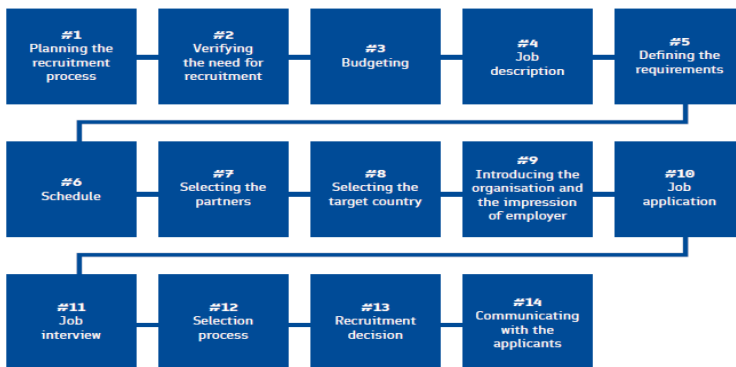


Figure 6. Recruitment process (Korhonen & Malo 2021)

Planning the recruitment process will help all the stake holders involved in the recruitment process to be prepared for the different stages of the process. During the planning stage the recruitment team should define the recruitment schedule, ideal candidate, job description, publication channels of the job advertisement, salary and benefits, applicant communication, and division of recruitment tasks. (Joki 2021, 65-66; Korhonen & Malo 2021, 11, 22.)

Verifying the need for recruitment is one of the most important stage in the recruitment process. A poorly defined recruitment need can lead to recruitment failure. (Joki 2018, 106.) There can be many reasons for the need for recruitment. For example, the company may want to expand their market or there is an open vacancy due the maternity leave or employee turnover. Whatever the reason is, it is important to evaluate what the benefits of recruitment are for the company. It is important to identify the tasks in the open role and the skills and competences needed to carry out the tasks. Is there a specific education or work experience which is needed for the role? Is the needed vacancy fixed-term or permanent? Is it a full-time or part time role? Also, it is important to evaluate if there is an existing employee who could take the role. If there is an employee who is leaving the position, this employee should be interviewed to get more insight about the role and tasks, and to get information about the possible development needs. This is useful information for the recruitment process. (Brown 2011, 113-228; Joki 2021, 66; Kaijala 2016, 27; Korhonen & Malo 2021, 11.u)

Setting the budget for international recruitment and assessing the overall costs of the recruitment process is important for the future recruitments. Budget information allows the company to assess whether the recruitment process would be more cost-effective to do through an inhouse recruitment team or to outsource the recruitment activities. International recruitment budget may include for example administrative costs, salaries allocated for recruitment, processing fees of the work permit and residence permit, employee's moving expenses, plane tickets, language and culture training etc. (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 13-14.)

Job description should be based on the job role, tasks and ideal candidate profile. It should briefly describe the company and the industry, and give information which attracts applicants' attention towards the company and the role. If the job description gives wrong kind of information about the requirements or it draws a picture of too versatile and demanding tasks, there is a risk that people apply with a wrong kind of expectation which can lead to wrong recruitment decisions when the hired employee discovers later that their qualifications and skills are not in line with the actual job tasks. (Brown 2011 113-228: Joki 2021, 69-70: Salli & Takatalo 2014, 27.)

Defining the requirements for the role can be a crucial stage, since many jobs in Finland and abroad require a certain education or certification. When defining the requirements recruiters should evaluate what competences and skills are must have and what skills can be learned through the job or training in the company. It is also important to acknowledge that sometimes it can be time consuming for applicants to gather these official documents abroad depend of the country. Therefore it is important to allocate enough time for these stages. Some certificates and education requirements can be new information to international applicants and therefore it is important to mention clearly these requirements in the job advertisement. (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 15-18; Salli & Takatalo 2014, 16.)

Schedule of the recruitment should include considerations of at least the application time, the application reviews, the interviews, the document and reference checking, and the decision making. When the recruitment is done internationally, the application period should be approximately 3-4 weeks. If there is a competition in the market for certain professionals it may be beneficial to try to reduce time with the recruitment process and other formalities like the immigration and residence permit applications for to attract applicants. (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 19.)

Selecting partners outside of the company can be reasonable if the company does not have experience of international recruitment. The company should decide whether they will use external recruitment agencies in some cases/locations or inhouse recruiters. Company can use insourcing or outsourcing methods in their recruitment strategy. Insourcing means that the company manages

its recruitment operations internally through their own recruitment staff or through external agencies which their internal recruitment team manages. Outsourcing means that the company use external recruitment agency for company's recruitment activities. (Brown 2011, 92-101.)

The advantages of the insourcing include control and cost efficiency. The company has full control of its recruitment activities, and it can be more cost-effective than outsourcing these activities completely to an external recruitment company. On the downside, when a company uses an internal recruitment team it may have limited resources, experiences and it can be inflexible. Also, if the recruitment needs increase, the company must recruit more staff to the recruitment team. Vice versa, if the need of the recruitments decrease, workload in the recruitment team may be too low. (Brown 2011, 92-93.)

If the company decides to use a recruitment partner, it is important to have a clear agreement what the recruitment includes and what it does not include, and what all these services cost to the company. Also, detailed discussion should be conducted with the recruitment partner about the ideal applicant and the role in the company for successful recruitment. An external recruitment partner may have other services as well (e.g., personality tests and skill tests) which can be an advantage. When choosing a recruitment partner, it is advisable to ask references for to get an understanding what kind of services other customers have used and how satisfied they were. If the company uses a recruitment partner abroad, it is important to make sure that they use ethical recruitment policies. (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 20-23.)

Selecting the target country or region is based on the industry, job tasks, and requirements of the applicants (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 23). For example, if the company needs an employee who speaks German or Japanese and knows the local market in the country, then it would be a good idea to search applicants from Germany or Japan. The company could ask support from its own networks or EURES experts to get more clarity which country would be the most suitable considering the company's needs. Local recruitment companies in the target country can also help to promote the vacancy (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 23). When choosing the target country for recruiting employees, the company should acknowledge that employee mobility between Finland and another EU or EEA country is smoother than mobility between Finland and a country in another region (European Parliament 2023; Korhonen & Malo 2021, 23; Tulli 2023). The EU and the EEA countries have also similar education standards to those in Finland (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 23). Therefore, employees from the EU and the EEA countries may get recognition for their education and qualification much more smoothly in Finland than employees from other countries which can make the recruitment process faster.

Introduction of the organisation and employer image should be included in the job advertisement. It is advisable to give a clear picture of the company, the work community and the job tasks. Including the company's internet address helps applicants to search more information about the company. More specific details about the company's work culture and working methods can be clarified during the interview. Employer image is very important especially in the competitive international labour market. Highly skilled ICT-professionals have an advantage to choose the jobs they want and therefore it is important to create an attractive employer image. Job descriptions should be meaningful and attractive for to get applicants' attention. For example, flexible work arrangements, good compensation, organisations's values and operating culture are aspects which can attract applicants' attention. (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 23-24.) In addition, one study revealed that an interesting job, good corporate image, and generous salary can enhance job seekers to apply for the job. Therefore, it would be advisable that the company would research the interests of the ideal applicants to understand what an interesting job means to them before the recruitment process starts. (Hsingkuang, Hueryren & Tingwei 2018, 75.)

Job application generally includes a CV and application letter in Finland. However, according to Korhonen and Malo (2021, 24) in many other countries only CV is used in applications. Job applications can be sent to the employer through many channels. The employer should consider how they want to receive the applications. Some employers want to receive the applications through the recruiter's email or through the company's recruitment system which can be connected to external job boards. A recruitment system may include questions related to certifications, education, work permit, skills, language, work experience and other relevant information. The employer should consider what information is meaningful considering the role and job tasks because then it is faster to assess applicants' suitability for the role by the recruiter when there are clear requirements. Job advertisements should be specific and informative regarding the role to avoid overlapping applications from applicants whose education, skills, and work experience are not right for the role. (Kaijala 2016, 59; Korhonen & Malo 2021, 24-25.)

Application screening and evaluating is an interesting stage because the recruiter can examine all the applications together and see the differences between the applicants and their answers. Advantage with a recruitment system is that all the applications is stored in the same place. (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 25.)

Job interview stage is an opportunity to get deeper understanding about the applicants and applicants' suitability for the role. It is also an opportunity for the applicants to get more details about the company, work culture and understanding whether the role is interesting considering the applicants' career goals. Invitation for the job interview should include time, place, duration of the

interview, and topics of the discussion. International applicants need to know which time zone is used because of the time differences. Duration of the interview is advisable to be mentioned since Finnish interview duration time may differ from applicants' home country. Generally, invitations will be sent by email and interviews are done online. (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 25.) Sometimes the first interview round is done by the recruiter and the following interview rounds by the recruiter and hiring leader together. It is recommended to use two interviewers. This way one interviewer can make notes while the other asks questions and discuss with the applicant. Two interviewers can observe the interview situation and the applicant better than one and this way the assessment of the applicant can be more objective. (Joki 2018, 98.)

Generally, the job interview is done through structured interview which is especially good if the interviewer has not conducted many interviews before. During the interview or right after it is good to write notes about the feelings and main points about the applicant. At the end of the interview, it is good to ask easier questions and let the applicant ask additional questions as well. Furthermore, the interviewer should inform the applicant how the recruitment process will proceed and where to contact if the applicant has any questions. It is also recommended to ask referees for the applicant. Although, the recruiter should not contact to referees without the applicant's consent. The recruiter and hiring leader can get the final confirmation for hiring decision from the applicant's referees. (Joki 2018, 99-105.)

Selection process in international recruitment may include many rounds. The first round may be based on the official qualifications, education, and work experience while the second round focuses more on the applicants' competencies and skills which could be beneficial in the role. The selection process may include personality tests, skill tests, and a psychologist's evaluation, or other tests. The employer should ensure that these tests can be done in applicants' location and therefore pay attention to the test provider partner, and their services and costs if the company decides to use an external test provider. These tests are meant to support the hiring manager's hiring decision, and these are only one source of information. Hiring decision should not be based only on the test results. (Joki 2018, 104; Korhonen & Malo 2021, 28.)

Recruitment decision can be challenging when there are good applicants with the right competences and skills. In addition to the applicant's competences and skills the employer could consider for example how the new employee would fit into the team and how flexible the applicant is with regarding to traveling if the role requires it. (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 28-29.) The final success of recruitment will be seen in the next months after the employment. Failure of the recruitment usually happens because of poorly defined recruitment needs and goals. Also, if the tasks and role are not defined clearly applicants may have a wrong expectation regarding the new role which may lead to

employee turnover. In addition, if the onboarding and orientation is neglected or are not clear, the new employee may have difficulties to fit into the new role and understand the tasks. Therefore, the employer should invest time in good onboarding and orientation because it helps employees to find their place in the company. (Joki 2018, 106.)

Communication with applicants during the recruitment process is an important aspect, and it also affects the employer image. Communication from the recruiter's side should happen during the whole recruitment process and be concise and respectful (Salli & Takatalo 2014, 10). All the applicants should be informed how the recruitment process proceeds and when the vacancy is filled. Answering questions and communicating effectively during the recruitment process impacts the employer image and brand positively. (Joki 2018, 94.) At the beginning the recruiter should inform applicants when their applications have been received (Salli & Takatalo 2014, 12). It is important to thank all the applicants even if they were not selected for the interview stages. Applicants who were on the final stages of the selection process and final interviews should be contacted by phone and inform them about the hiring decision. In addition, it would be advisable to give feedback and justification of the hiring decision to the applicants who were not selected for the position in the final selection process. Practicing good applicant communication enhances good candidate experience which more likely leads to positive feedback about the company by the applicants. All the applicants have the right to ask for recruitment notes and data concerning their own application process. Applicants' consent is needed also if the company desires to keep and store applicants' application documents and contact details for future vacancies. (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 30-31.)

3 Research Methods

This chapter explains how the research has been designed. Also, the reasons and justification of the research methods are demonstrated.

The research design is based on a qualitative approach which is excellent when the aim is to understand phenomena more in depth. In other words, qualitative research aims to understand the situations in the specific context, and interactions and connections there (Merriam & Tisdell 2015, 16; Puusa, Juuti & Aaltio 2020). In addition to this, the survey of this research includes additional questions related to recruiters' background. The aim of this research is to understand how the Finnish ICT sector is implementing international recruitment in the organisations. The three investigative questions related to the research question aim to get more in-depth understanding to the research question. Therefore, the qualitative method is the best way to get more specific in-depth understanding of the ICT sector in Finland and the current state of their practices related to international recruitment.

This qualitative research is based on the information presented in the theoretical framework which gives understanding regarding the research topics and concepts. This helped to design survey questions for the research stage which was empirical data collection through a qualitative survey. After the empirical data was collected, data analysis was conducted through a thematic analysis. The thematic analysis created themes related to the research topics and gave answers to the investigative questions (Merriam & Tisdell 2015, 196-197).

The empirical data was collected randomly and anonymously through an electronic survey from recruitment professionals (n=42) who were working with ICT companies in Finland. Recruitment professionals are individuals who work with international recruitments and therefore they are the best information source for this research. The author of the thesis contacted recruitment professionals through the LinkedIn platform where he has a wide professional network. According to InterQ (2023), a general recommendation for in-depth interview sample size is 20 to 30 but in some cases it can be 10. Because the time to conduct this research was limited the author conducted a qualitative survey instead of interviews. The research design is demonstrated in Figure 7 below.

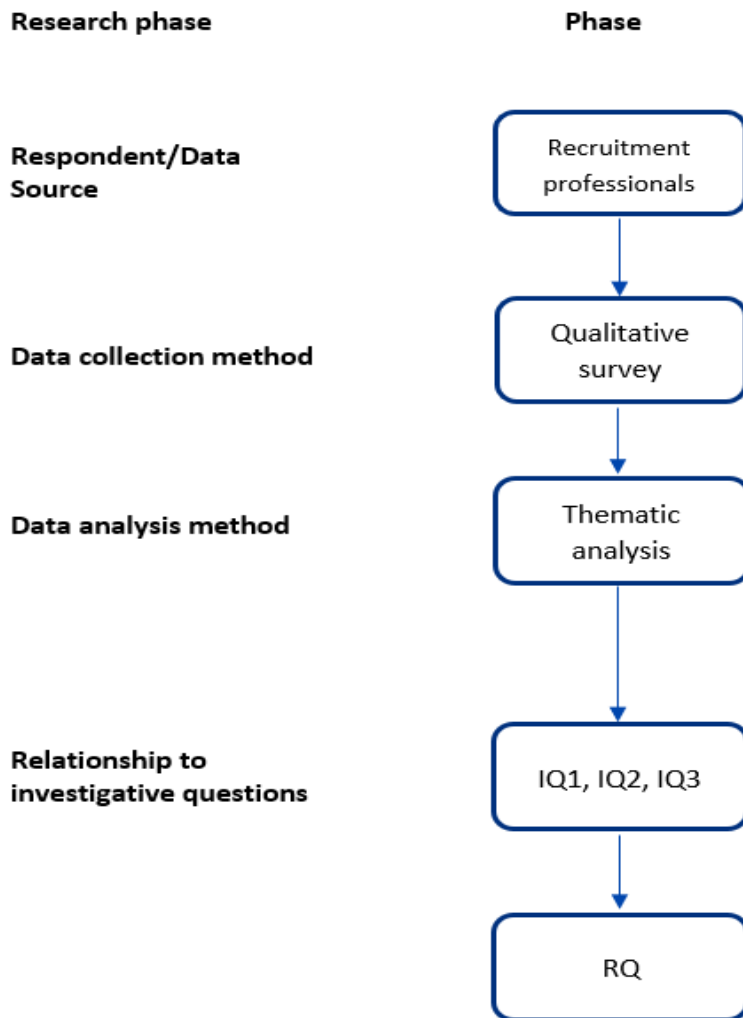


Figure 7. The research design

The research design started with the empirical data collection through an electronic survey among recruitment professionals from different companies ($n=42$) in February 2024. The open ended questions in the questionnaire provided material to IQ1, IQ2, and IQ3. In addition, the survey included additional questions related to the recruiters' background. After the survey was conducted the author used a thematic analysis to get more clarity to the research phenomena.

During the thematic analysis process, the first stage was to read the survey data material. At the second stage the raw text material was categorized, and in the third stage categories were separated into themes which were frequently occurring typical features and central to the research task. After the themes were created, they provided answers to the investigative questions IQ1, IQ2, and IQ3 which together form an answer to the research question (RQ). (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 174–180; Puusa & al. 2020.)

4 Research findings

This chapter introduces the research results and how they are related to the investigative questions. First is introduced the survey content, question by question, and explained how these are connected to the investigative questions in this research. After the survey questions are introduced, the investigative questions and the result of the thematic analysis follow.

4.1 Survey questions

The survey included ten questions which is attached in Appendix 1. The first five questions were related to the background of the respondents. These five background questions were closed-ended questions. Answers to these questions gave understanding of the respondents' background and helped to assess any clear differences between the respondents' opinions based on their backgrounds. For example, is there a different opinion between the recruitment professionals based on the company size or amount of work experience in the field? The next four questions were open-ended questions related to the international recruitment in the ICT sector in Finland. These four questions aimed to find answers to the investigative questions which finally formed the answer to the research question. The tenth question was about the respondents' contact information which was also voluntary.

All the respondents (n=42) were working with recruitments in the ICT sector in Finland. Majority of the respondents had pursued a master's degree (25) while more than a quarter (14) had a bachelor's degree. The survey question related to the study field of the respondents revealed that most respondents had a bachelor's degree or master's degree in business (27). Seven respondents had a bachelor's or master's degree in social sciences. Furthermore, there were also respondents who had a bachelor's degree in mathematics (1), a vocational qualification in business (1), a master's degree in teaching (2), a bachelor's degree in hospitality management (1), a bachelor's degree in social services (1), a bachelor's degree in humanistic/theological field (1), and two had a bachelor's degree, but they did not specify the fields of their studies. In addition, one of the respondents had a secondary education and one respondent did not specify the educational field of the studies. Results related to the respondents' education confirmed the information obtained from the literature that recruiters can have various educational backgrounds since there is no standardised education or qualification for the role (Duunitori 2024; Smartrecruiters 2023).

When question was about work experience with international recruitment, majority of the respondents (28) answered that they have worked 1 to 5 years in the field. Four of the respondents had worked under one year while ten respondents had worked 6 to 10 years. There was no one among the respondents who would have over ten years of work experience with international recruitment.

The final closed-ended question related to the respondents' background was about the company size of their employer. Company size was divided into small (under 50 employees), medium (50-249 employees), and large (250 employees or more). Over half of the respondents worked in a large company (24), thirteen respondents worked in a medium-sized company, and five respondents worked in a small-sized company. The results were similar among the respondents and there were no significant differences in the survey answers regardless of the respondents' background in terms of length of work experience, company size or education.

The next four open-ended questions aimed to provide answers to investigative questions IQ1, IQ2, and IQ3. All the 42 respondents answered to all the survey questions except to the last open-ended question #9 where four respondents did not leave an answer. Survey question #6 "What is your view on the current state of international recruitment, and do you think it is used sufficiently in the ICT sector in Finland?" aimed to find answers to IQ1 about the current situation of international recruitment in the Finnish ICT sector.

Survey questions #7 "In your opinion, what challenges the ICT sector has in relation to international recruitment?" and #8 "In your opinion, what is the benefit of international recruitment in the ICT sector in Finland?" aimed to find answers to IQ2 about the challenges and benefits of international recruitment in the ICT sector. Survey question #9 "Which measures, and recruitment channels should be strengthened, or which new ones should be implemented in international recruitment in the ICT sector?" aimed to find answers to IQ3 about how recruitment professionals see the future of international recruitment methods and tools. The next sub-chapters 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 introduces the results of the thematic analysis.

4.2 The current situation of international recruitment in the Finnish ICT sector

Based on the results of the conducted thematic analysis, there were three main themes related to IQ1. First, majority of the respondents (21) answered that international recruitment is not practiced enough in the ICT sector in Finland, and it could be used more. On the other hand, the second theme indicated that international recruitment is already used sufficiently in many companies or that there are not enough work opportunities for international talents who are already in the country, when over quarter of the respondents had this opinion. Thirdly, nearly a quarter of the respondents answered that international recruitment would be used more if there would not be challenges with the bureaucracy, laws and regulations regarding immigration and if the relocation process of international talents would be easier. In addition, Finnish language requirements were also mentioned to be one of the reasons why international recruitment is not used as much as people would desire. Below are two citations from the survey answers which author has translated from Finnish to English. Other citations in this chapter are also answers from the respondents.

“In my opinion, international recruitment is not used enough in the ICT sector in Finland.”

“International recruitment would be used more if the legislation and bureaucracy would allowed it.”

The three themes depicted in Figure 8 demonstrate what is the current situation of the international recruitment in the Finnish ICT sector from the perspective of the recruitment professionals according to the respondents. Half of the respondents thought that international recruitment is not used enough in the ICT sector while approximately a quarter of the respondents thought the opposite. Almost a quarter of the respondents answered that challenges with the regulations of immigration and relocation processes are the reasons why international recruitment is not used as much as professionals would like.



Figure 8. Themes related to IQ1

4.3 Challenges and benefits of international recruitment in the ICT sector

The results regarding to IQ2 revealed 8 themes related to challenges and 5 themes related to benefits of international recruitment in the ICT sector.

Challenges:

- Finnish language requirement.
- Bureaucracy related to relocation of the international talents.
- Lack of clear processes and knowledge regarding the international recruitment.
- Cultural challenges.
- Prejudices and negative attitudes.
- Financial issues and market conditions.
- Salary and tax issues.

- Finnish politics and laws.

Benefits:

- Alleviating the labour shortage and gaining new talents.
- Increase of knowledge and innovation.
- Strengthening competitiveness and growth.
- Acquisition of senior-level specialists.
- Increase of diversity.

4.3.1 Challenges

Over three quarters of the respondents mentioned that Finnish language requirement is an issue, or it should be assessed more broadly if it is a necessary requirement for international talents in the ICT sector if the tasks can be done in English. Some of the respondents mentioned that the language requirement often comes from customer organisations and this requirement is especially highlighted in the public sector. Some respondents suggested that the language requirements should be relaxed in Finland.

"Requiring Finnish language skills in many organizations. I think that is the number one challenge."

"Also, Finnish workplaces, has still a view that one should speak Finnish, even though the work can be completely done in English. Too often I hear from employers that "we only speak Finnish in the office."

Twelve of the respondents mentioned that the bureaucracy related to the relocation of international talents is a challenge in international recruitments since it is time consuming. There are many things to consider in the relocation process. For example, work permit, visa application, moving arrangements to Finland, and opening the bank account with many other things as well which all can be time consuming and challenging tasks to do. Companies do not necessarily have experience of these requirements, which can be an obstacle to start international recruitment activities.

"The challenge in recruiting is often that the residence permit processes, and other "paper-work" often last several months, and this also causes a lot of additional work and clarification for the recruiting company."

The third theme related to the challenges in the survey results was the lack of clear processes and knowledge regarding international recruitment. Companies may not have clear and structured processes related to international recruitments. Also, they may not have experience or knowledge of how the international recruitment should be done or where to find assistance for the process.

The fourth and fifth themes were cultural challenges, prejudices and negative attitudes. Approximately a quarter of the respondents raised these as challenges in international recruitment in the ICT sector in Finland. The cultural challenges and cultural integration were mentioned to be a challenge. Also, cultural differences between the Finnish company and the international talent's cultural background could be seen as a challenge for international talent to adjust to Finnish culture. Customer organisation may also have a culture where they are used to hire only Finnish talents as they may think that it is easier for language reasons for example. Prejudices and negative attitudes in general towards international recruitment in customer organisations were mentioned to be a challenge for international recruitment as well.

“In some companies, cultural differences have also been brought up as a challenge in international recruitment.”

“In general, customers' attitude towards the matter or managers thoughts that it is difficult to join the team if you don't speak Finnish.”

Financial issues and market conditions were some of the emerging issues as a sixth theme. Financing the international recruitment was described to be an organisation-based challenge for some companies. International recruitment requires more resources which has a financial price, and if companies would like to outsource these activities to external recruitment agencies, they may lack financial resources to implement it. Also, the market condition in general was mentioned to be a challenge for international recruitment. In addition, salary and tax issues were the seventh theme based on the results of the thematic analysis. Some respondents wrote that Finnish companies have a lower salary level compared to companies abroad. In addition, taxes in Finland are high which may not be an attractive factor to the international talents in the ICT sector.

“The challenge of international recruitment is its costs.”

“The readiness of the Finnish market to receive and genuinely hire non-Finnish speaking persons is still at a stage.”

Finnish politics and laws were the last theme related to the challenges in international recruitment. These were mentioned to be a challenge according to five respondents. Challenges were related to the latest political decisions and laws in Finland regarding immigration policies which may not attract international talents to move to Finland according to the respondents. Although, these decisions and laws were not specified in detail in the survey answers.

4.3.2 Benefits

Over half of the respondents described that benefits of the international recruitment are alleviation of the labour shortage and gaining new talents to Finnish organisations and labour market. The second theme was related to senior-level specialists as a quarter of the respondents mentioned it

in their responses. According to the respondents, Finland has a shortage of labour force in the ICT sector and therefore international recruitment could relieve this challenge especially with the senior-level positions and in more specialised roles which are hard to fill.

“According to the technology industry, in the next 10 years Finland will need approximately 130 000 more ICT experts. To reach this goal, we need international recruitment.”

“The biggest shortage is specifically with the senior-level specialists. These roles require 5 to 10 years of work experience.”

Increase of knowledge and innovation were the third theme related to the benefits of international recruitment in the ICT sector. Approximately a third of the respondents described these benefits in different ways. According to them, international talents bring knowledge and new perspective to the organisation, which enriches the organisation and the work community. New knowledge and perspectives may create new processes, business operations, and innovations in the company. Furthermore, international talents can also expand and strengthen organisations’ international network which can lead to new business opportunities abroad. All these benefits can lead to the strengthening of organisations’ competitiveness and growth which were the fourth theme of the benefits. Nearly a quarter of the respondents described that international talents could affect companies’ competitiveness and growth positively. In addition, general economic growth in Finland was mentioned to be a benefit as well.

“With the help of international recruitment, Finnish companies can attract the best talents from the global market. This helps to improve companies’ competitiveness in both domestic and international markets.”

“International employees bring different experiences, perspectives...which enriches the activities of our Finnish organizations and work communities. This can possibly also help organizations to develop new innovations and solutions.”

The fifth theme according to the results was the diversity. Nearly a quarter of the respondents described how international recruitment create or increase diversity and multiculturalism in the work communities. Thus, diversity was seen as a benefit of international recruitment. Diversity was described to be beneficial for the quality of solutions and products. It was also mentioned that teamwork in multicultural environment promotes cooperation and creativity.

“The improvement of diversity, the diversity of innovations and design, which would also guarantee more versatile products and services for Finnish exports.”

“The special skills of international employees can also complement the skills of employees. For example, teamwork in a multicultural environment promotes cooperation and creativity.”

4.4 Future developments of international recruitment in the ICT sector

The results related to IQ3 revealed seven themes which are demonstrated in Figure 9 below. Four of the respondents did not answer to survey question #9 related to IQ3 and two respondents

answered only briefly that they do not know an answer to this question. Therefore, the seven themes related to the future developments of international recruitment in the ICT sector are based on the answers of 36 respondents.

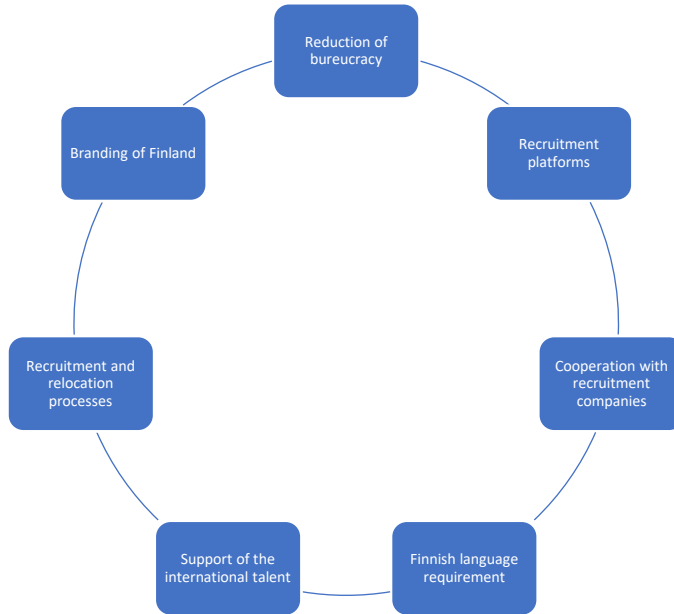


Figure 9. Themes related to IQ3

The first theme was the reduction of bureaucracy. Nearly a quarter of the respondents suggested that bureaucracy of the labour-based immigration should be reduced, and the processes related should be made faster. The respondents described that immigration processes now are time consuming and very bureaucratic. If this were not the case, then companies would have a lower barrier to hire international talents from abroad. Therefore, legislation should be simplified and reformed for faster and easier labour-based immigration processes. It was also suggested that cooperation between state institutions and organizations should be increased.

"The immigration of skilled workers should be simplified and accelerate (currently a very bureaucratic and time-consuming process), so that companies would also have a lower barrier for hiring skilled workers."

Recruitment platforms was the second theme related to IQ3. Approximately half of the respondents mentioned the different recruitment platforms which could be used for international recruitment. The most common was LinkedIn. Many respondents find it to be the most suitable for international recruitment purposes and widely known. Other platforms mentioned were Indeed, Glassdoor, and AngelList (Wellfound) even though they are not very known in Finland according to the respondents. Kit Hub and Google were mentioned as well. In addition to these platforms and recruitment channels, organisations' internal job sites and services are used as well to attract international talents. Cooperation with local universities and attending career and recruitment events related to the

ICT sector could be helpful as well. Some respondents also mentioned Finnish local job service sites which could be helpful for international talents to find jobs in Finland as well, though not all of them are in English.

”Cooperation with the local universities, utilization of international recruitment platforms and participation to industry events...”

“Among recruiting channels, LinkedIn certainly works best for the international recruitment purposes.”

The third theme was cooperation with recruitment companies and around a quarter of the respondents mentioned it. If the ICT-companies do not have knowledge related to international recruitment and relocation processes, then it would be advisable to train their own staff in these matters or cooperate with recruitment companies. Recruitment consultants can attract and engage international talents to the company in Finland. Companies could also do cooperation with relocation companies and with partner organisations abroad to attract international talents to Finland.

The fourth theme was related to Finnish language requirement. Many respondents mentioned that the Finnish language requirement should be assessed, and discussion should be made about its necessity in the IT sector for example. A respondent suggested that work communities should be encouraged to use English since we cannot expect international talents to learn Finnish language especially in the situation where work language is something else. Around a quarter of the respondents mentioned the importance of the English language and how it should be used as more widely as an organisational language in the ICT companies. This could help to attract more international talents to Finland. On the other hand, emphasising the Finnish language course for the international talents in advance was mentioned as well. This could help international talents and their families to integrate in Finnish culture.

“As I mentioned earlier, switching the working language to English is a measure that practically would enable the recruitment of foreign experts.”

Support of the international talent was the fifth theme that emerged from the answers. Around ten percent of the respondents wrote about this in their survey answers. Two of the respondents described that there should be support for the international talents and their families for better integration to Finland. Another respondent mentioned that more financial resources could be allocated to integration programs for highly educated international employees.

Recruitment and relocation processes was the sixth theme among the results. The respondents emphasized the importance of clear processes related to recruitment and relocation processes. There should be specific and clear processes for practical matters related to recruitment and relocation processes in the companies. Also, there should be clear roles inside organisations, which

could clarify the roles and responsibilities among professionals regarding international recruitment activities.

“I would see that a more strategic role of recruitment and longer-term planning could help to schedule the recruitments so that a possibly longer recruitment process can be realistically handled and still meet the company's need for a new employee...”

Branding of Finland was the seventh and final theme related to IQ3. Increasing the knowledge about job opportunities in Finland for international talents abroad could attract new employees to Finnish work force. Branding the opportunities in Finland abroad in the recruitment events, educational institutions, and through marketing channels and embassies of Finland were seen as a good practice now and in the future.

These seven themes, which emerged from the results, demonstrated the matters and actions which recruitment professionals in the ICT sector would like to strengthen and see generally in Finland and in the international recruitment practices. A more in-depth discussion about the research findings and conclusions will be presented in the following chapter.

5 Discussion and conclusion

Conducting and writing this thesis was an interesting and rewarding task for the author who gained more knowledge and insights related to international recruitment in the ICT sector in Finland. The 42 survey respondents shared interesting insights and knowledge through their answers. The results of the thematic analysis revealed interesting themes which should be taken into consideration when practising international recruitment. This chapter contains discussion of the results and conclusions based on the results and literature.

5.1 The current situation of international recruitment

The results for IQ1 revealed that half of the respondents thought that international recruitment is not used enough currently in the ICT sector in Finland, while approximately a quarter of the respondents thought the opposite. The first of these two opinions correlate with the factor that there is a need for international recruitment in Finland according to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (2020). The need for international recruitment can be seen as well in the program like the Talent Boost Programme established by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, and the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland. The programme started in 2019 and was renewed for the period of 2023 to 2027 under the government of Finland. One of the aims of the programme is to increase and boost international recruitment activities in Finland and make it easier for the employers by changing and smoothing work-based immigration processes. The programme also aims to increase the attraction of Finland for international experts and students. (State Council 2023b.)

The results also revealed that challenges with the regulations of immigration and relocation processes are reasons why international recruitment is not used as much as it could. The mentioned Talent Boost Programme aims to smooth the work and residency permit procedures through digital solutions and shorten the average processing time for work and education-based permits to a maximum of one month processing time. They also create a one-week fast track for international professionals who earn over 4000 euros per month in Finland. In the development work of the state's international recruitment, the public and private sectors are strengthened, and common service production will be promoted. (State Council 2023b.)

In conclusion, the results related to IQ1 discovered that there is a need for international recruitment in the ICT sector according to half of the respondents, which is supported by the fact that Finnish political leaders are also recognizing this issue. Although, around a quarter of the respondents gave an opposite answer regarding is it used enough or not in the ICT sector. Finnish government is trying to tackle issues related to international recruitment through political decision making,

which was discovered in this research as well. A good example of this is the Talent Boost Programme for example.

5.2 Challenges and benefits of international recruitment

Results related to IQ2 issued several challenges and benefits with the international recruitment activities in the ICT sector. The most agreed challenge was the Finnish language requirement in the ICT companies in Finland when over three quarters of the respondents were of this opinion. Language requirement is challenging because it can close job opportunities for international talents who do not speak fluent Finnish. Although this is a challenge, there are also workplaces and roles which do not require the Finnish language. For example, international talents can search jobs for English-speaking professionals at the Work in Finland webpage which was created during the Talent Boost Program (Work in Finland 2024). As the benefits highlighted, international talents were seen as an answer for workforce shortage in the ICT sector in Finland through international recruitment, especially when it concerns the senior-level positions. Therefore, if companies and organisations relaxed language requirements, they would have a bigger talent pool through international recruitment (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 60). It is interesting to follow, whether the English-speaking roles increase or not in Finland and what organisations will do with the requirement of Finnish in the future as the need for work force is obvious.

Bureaucracy and lack of clear processes and knowledge related to international recruitment and relocation of the new employee were seen as a challenge as well. The Finnish government has seen this challenge, and it is trying to decrease the bureaucracy with the work and residency permits among other matters as well through legislation and other measures, for example through a faster application time with work permit applications (State Council 2023b, 21). Although, the government is trying to smooth international recruitment processes, the renewed Talent Boost Programme started last year (2023) and therefore the effects may not be seen yet in the field.

There is still work to be done for cooperation between the public and private sector, and the mentioned programme is still in progress and not all the decided measures have been implemented yet. For example, some of the legislation changes have not yet been presented to the Finnish parliament (State Council 2023b, 24). In addition, as the results indicated, companies should implement clear processes for smoother international recruitment activities, and roles related international recruitment should be clear in the company. When the roles in the recruitment process are clear, then the communication between the company and the applicants could be smoother as well. Good applicant communication has a positive effect on the candidate experience, which more likely leads to positive feedback regarding the company. (Korhonen & Malo 2021, 30-31).

Cultural aspects, prejudice and negative attitudes were seen as a challenge in the results. These three factors can be a barrier for international recruitment. Companies may have prejudice or worries how a new employee from a different culture adjusts to Finnish work culture, and therefore they postpone international recruitment activities, or they do not implement them at all. According to Korhonen and Malo (2021, 60) international talents should be supported with language and cultural training because this would give them a better chance to succeed in their new workplace in Finland. As the results indicated in chapter 4.2, some of the respondents mentioned that there are not enough work opportunities for international talents who are already in the country, when over a quarter of the respondents were of this opinion. Perhaps if the companies in the ICT sector would ease with the language requirements in some roles and would give cultural training to international talents, they could benefit from these unemployed international talents in Finland.

When speaking about cultural challenges, we must also discuss the benefits of the diversity in the workplace. The results highlighted the benefits of diversity in the companies and companies' work community in the form of new solutions and creativeness among other benefits. Perhaps, if the companies would give a chance for international talents, they could see the benefits in the results of new business opportunities and expand their international network as this research indicated.

According to the study, companies' financial issues and general market trend can be a challenge as they can impact companies' international recruitment plans and growth negatively. The recent years have been challenging globally, and it has influenced Finland's market conditions as well. There are many factors which have impacted companies' operations. First there was the Covid pandemic, then the Russian war in Ukraine began and is still going on, the global inflation, increase in the interest rates, and now Finnish economy is in recession. The Bank of Finland has forecasted that the recession will ease slowly next year, and maybe then companies in the ICT sector can boost their operations. (Bank of Finland 2024.) Furthermore, even though there are costs related to international recruitment activities, some services can be free for companies. For example, the government's Talent Boost Programme created the Work in Finland services which give guidance related to international recruitment and work permit processes for free of charge to companies and recruiters (State Council 2023b, 16).

The results highlighted the benefits of new knowledge and innovations which companies can gain through hiring international talents into their organisations. This in turn can create competitiveness and business growth. Therefore, international recruitment could be seen also as an investment and not just as a cost. Recruitment should be strategic and based on long-term goals as one of the respondents mentioned. The benefits of the recruitment may not be seen instantly but in the long run

along with the business growth (Joki 2018, 106). Therefore, companies should carefully assess the benefits and possibilities of international recruitment in their companies.

High taxes and low salaries in Finland compared to some other developed countries were mentioned to have a negative impact on the attractiveness of Finland as a work destination country. Also, Finnish politics and laws were seen as a challenge as well. These are matters which only can be changed by the political decision makers and managers of the companies. Therefore, the public and private sectors should do closer cooperation with political decision makers to make right decisions and implement practices which could meet these challenges better. The Talent Boost Programme is a good example towards better cooperation between stakeholders in international recruitment activities.

In conclusion, this research showed that there were several challenges and benefits related to international recruitment. Some of the challenges can be tackled through companies' own actions and some of them need political intervention. The benefits of international recruitment had also many positive impacts on companies and therefore companies in the ICT sector should assess their own stand related to international recruitment.

5.3 The future of international recruitment

The recruitment professionals who answered to the survey of this research had many opinions related to the future of international recruitment in the ICT sector. They also gave recommendations for the future regarding the recruitment channels and activities. The author was able to discover seven main themes based on the thematic analysis. The respondents hoped for less bureaucracy and easier work permit processes for the future since this could help to smooth relocation process. This in turn would help with workforce shortage challenges. Companies should also assess and reform their processes and roles related to international recruitment and relocation. Clear processes, roles and more strategic planning regarding international recruitment would benefit the companies in the future as the company could be more efficient with the filling of the roles in need.

According to the survey respondents, companies could also do more cooperation with the recruitment companies in the future if they are hesitating to hire international talents by themselves. Like the Talent Boost Program is aiming, cooperation with the public and private sectors should be strengthened. There is a better chance for business growth for companies and Finland in general if different stakeholders do cooperation for the common cause, tackling the workforce challenge in Finland.

It was also suggested that more support for the international talents would be needed in the companies for help them to adapt the new culture in Finland and keep them employed in the company.

Broader discussion related to language requirement would also be needed in the ICT sector and in general in Finland. If the aim is to tackle workforce challenges, it is important to assess these factors as the results indicated.

Branding Finland was seen important for the future of international recruitment. It is easier to attract international talents to Finland when professionals abroad know the opportunities in Finland and what advantages Finland has to offer. For example, Finland is one of the safest among the developed countries, the education system is one of the best in the world, social and health services are for everyone, nature is present and close to cities with easy access, public transport is efficient and quite affordable, infrastructure is developed, starting a business is quite easy, and much more (InfoFinland 2023; Nordic Co-operation 2024).

The results related to recruitment channels and platforms revealed that LinkedIn was the most recommended for recruitment purposes according to the respondents. It was seen as a great tool for international recruitment and the reason for this is clear. LinkedIn is the biggest professional network in the world, and it had over 930 million users in May 2023 and the number is increasing. This recruitment platform is available in 26 languages. In 2023, there were 61 million people looking for work in LinkedIn every week, and 16% of the LinkedIn members used it every day. (LinkedIn 2023.) Although, there were other recruitment channels and platforms as well they are not as popular as LinkedIn. Other suggested recruitment platforms like Indeed, Glassdoor and Wellfound have fewer users than LinkedIn. Indeed has approximately 350 million users per month, while Glassdoor has 55 million monthly users, and Wellfound has around 10 million job seekers (Glassdoor 2024; Indeed 2023; Wellfound 2023).

In addition to digital recruitment platforms, live events like career days and other professional events related to the ICT sector were mentioned in the respondents' answers. Events like this are a great way to increase network and attract new talents to organisations. Therefore, live events should be used for international recruitment purposes too because they can be a good chance to build new relationships and find new talents. Events are also great places to promote companies' brand.

In conclusion, the results of this research related to IQ3 featured seven main themes related to international recruitment channels and activities for the future. All these themes were recommendations which could help to foster international recruitment activities in the ICT sector and thus help to tackle workforce shortage issues in Finland. Therefore, companies and recruitments professionals in the ICT sector should consider these recommendations and assess if they should implement them in their recruitment activities.

5.4 The reliability of the research

Reliability in research means that author convinces of his own abilities to conduct the research, and gives reliable reasons for the chosen approach and research methods. All the stages of the research process must be described clearly and step by step so that the reader would know how the research has been conducted, where and how the results came from, and how the author made his conclusion so that the reader is convinced. (Puusa & al. 2020.)

In this research the author conducted the research step by step by following the Haaga-Helia's thesis guide lines through the course book by San Miguel (2021) and other relevant qualitative research books. The author also gave reasons for the chosen theoretical approach and research methods. For the theoretical framework, the author used scientific research databases of peer reviewed articles in addition to academic books related to the study field. In addition, the author used up-to-date information for this research and tried to avoid using information which was over 10 years old when possible. The author formed the survey questions based on the literature and the theoretical framework with careful consideration and asked feedback from the thesis advisor.

During the thematic analysis stage, the author used the Excel programme for creating the themes to answer the investigatitive questions. The themes were selected based on their frequencies in the survey answers and their relevancies against the investigative questions and research question. The author has reported the research stages step by step and has tried to be as self critical as possible.

In addition, the author has already experience of conducting research through two university degrees from 2014 and 2020. Through the whole research process the author has asked advice and feedback from the thesis advisor frequently to get academic guidance for this research.

5.5 Recommendations for future research

Although the research data included several comprehensive answers from the 42 survey respondents it would be worth studying this topic even further through in-depth interviews. Collecting data through in-depth interviews would make it possible to ask more detailed questions during the interviews which could clarify this research topic even further. Another interesting topic to study would be international talents' experiences related to recruitment activities and relocation processes.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Survey questions

1. Do you work in Finland or abroad?
 - Finland
 - Abroad

2. What is your educational level?
 - Vocational level
 - Bachelor level
 - Master level
 - Something else

3. What field of education do you have?

4. How much work experience do you have in international recruitment?
 - Under 1 year
 - 1 to 5 years
 - 6 to 10 years
 - Over 10 years

5. What size company do you work for?
 - Under 50 employees
 - 50 to 249 employees
 - 250 or over employees

6. What is your view on the current state of international recruitment, and do you think it is used sufficiently in the ICT sector in Finland?

7. In your opinion, what challenges the ICT sector has in relation to international recruitment?

8. In your opinion, what is the benefit of international recruitment in the ICT sector in Finland?

9. Which measures, and recruitment channels should be strengthened, or which new ones should be implemented in international recruitment in the ICT sector?

10. Fill your email or other contact details (voluntary).