



Uudenmaan liitto
Nylands förbund



Christine Chang
Senior Advisor, Uusimaa Regional Council

RETAINING INTERNATIONAL TALENTS IN HELSINKI-UUSIMAA REGION

“Immigration is Europe’s past, America’s present, but everyone’s future”. To date, immigration as the means of transport for skills, knowledge and resources is deemed an asset for regional development.

With the increasing mobility of global talents in the world and in addressing demographic changes and the internalisation of industry, labour migration has a key role to drive economic development in the long term for a flourishing and competitive future. The Helsinki-Uusimaa Region is Finland’s most international region which hosts half of the foreign born who live in Finland. Moreover, the number of international residents who live in Finland will grow to half a million by 2030 based on the projection made by the Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy.

In order for the region to best benefit from the immigrants who come to Finland to work or study (hereafter refers as “internationals”), it has to offer an accessible and liveable environment to welcome and accommodate them. According to various studies and the Expat survey, internationals who settled in the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region mostly long for a better social connection with the society both personally and professionally. In react to that, Helsinki Region has to take a holistic approach and develop a talent

retention strategy which combines strategies in cultivating the human capital in strengthening innovation and benefiting from the immigration.

Internationals call for better social integration

Successful and efficient measures to support the settlement of the newcomers will ensure the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region to benefit from its incoming internationals in the best way. While placing soft-landing services on the basis of their functions in the immigration ecosystem, the services offered in Helsinki Region consists of the public, non-profit and private services which are widely distributed at the different levels of Maslow’s hierarchy.

In general, the settling-in services, networks and advisory services in the region cover many of the needs of internationals but the internationals’ awareness of the existing services varies a lot. It is indicated that the region



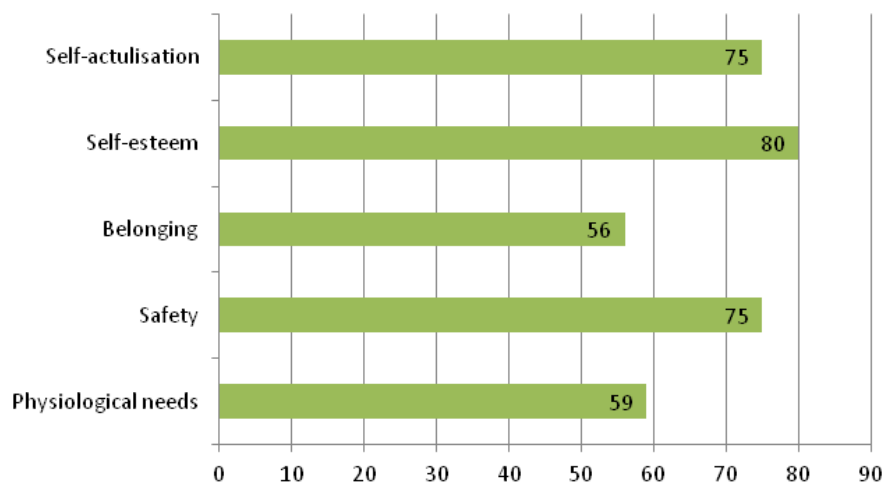


Diagram 1: Results from Expat perception survey in Helsinki_Uusimaa Region

will need more targeted events and innovative tools to share information, and consequently, making social contacts and general settle-in services more accessible.

However, while asking the internationals to evaluate the attractiveness and liveability of Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, the identified obstacle preventing them from settling in the region was, more often than not, social integration. Rating from scale one to a hundred, the general satisfaction of life in regarding the issue of belonging was rated with 56 which is the lowest score rated in all level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Diagram 1). A lack of local networks and social events, as well as a weak sense of belonging to the local community, hinders the integration of internationals.

Cultivating human capital of Helsinki-Uusimaa Region – next steps in demand

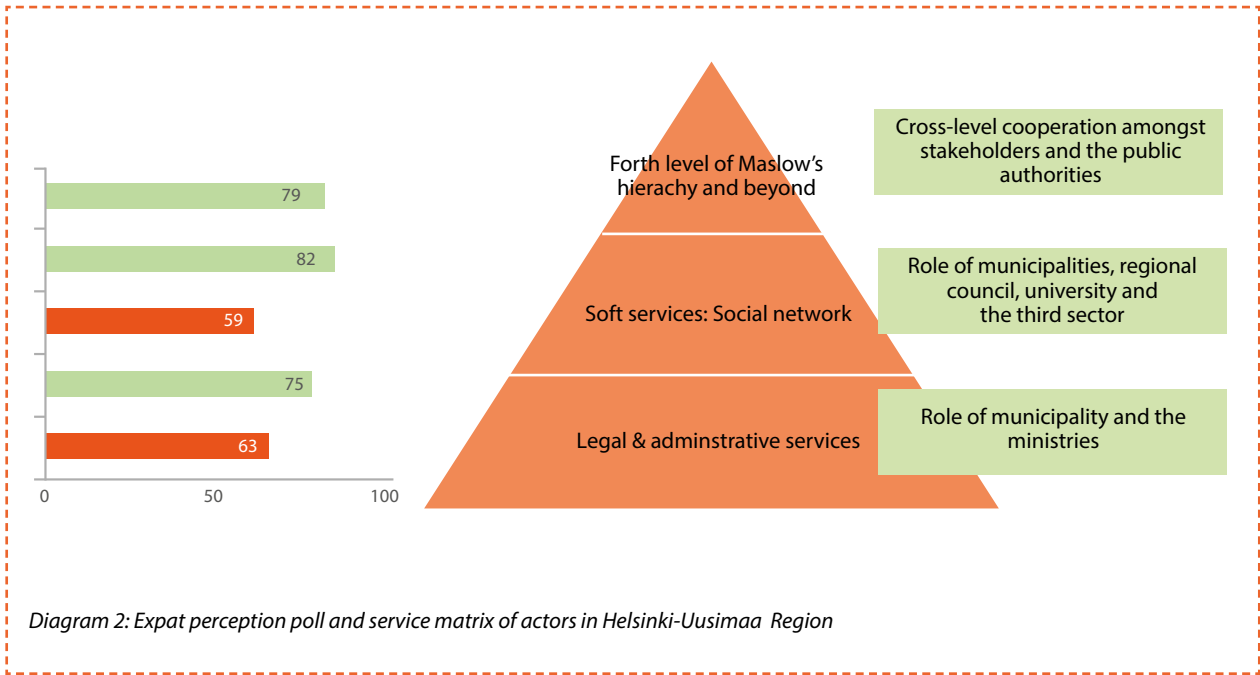
An inclusive society is a place where its citizens can be what they wish to be socially, politically, culturally and economically. In making Helsinki-Uusimaa Region an attractive region for its international residents, it relies on both the willingness of the local society to welcome new arrivals and the commitment of those arrivals to establish a life in the region. The overall observations from the survey suggest that residential expats require more support in building social capital than students or entrepreneurs do, especially a network for working professionals with children.

Empowering integration through social connection

In the survey, respondents have graded their social connections to the community poorly, meaning they feel left out of the society. While reviewing the service matrix of the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, it became apparent that the social needs sector also is an area in which the public is rarely involved. Most services and activities are initiated on a voluntary basis and, in addition, there are also social entrepreneurs who are eager to contribute to the public good. But, in most cases, life span of those activities was short and the scale marginal. To improve the situation, the region can better support networking organisations and the possibility to combine their activities with public services, as the Hague International Center has done, to create a meeting place for internationals and increase the interactions of internationals' with the locals through hobbies and sporting services.

Leveraging over glass ceiling: integration support in employment opportunity

The common challenges for working internationals are the possibilities to learn Finnish and a life-long learning in order to cope with the labour market demands. In addition, the lack of professional networks also seemed to hinder their career development. While in Finland, the Employment Office only provides integration plans and services to those



who are unemployed. Therefore, integration support for working expats should be offered in an equal manner in order to create a life-long learning opportunity.

The rather poor labour market position might be due to either a lack of human and social capital or discrimination and it appears that both of these components play a role in Finland. On the one hand, despite educated immigrants bringing their professions with them, their experience was hardly recognised. It is necessary to develop a smooth employment bridging programme designed for expats and international students to help them land their first job in the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region and support employers so they can develop the capacity to employ and accommodate the internationals.

Championing success – positive expat image in making

Immigration is increasingly referred to as one of the solutions that will sustain and enhance the growth of global economy. In Finland, the topic itself remains controversial and negative in the public debate due to economic and political reasons. In order to remove the barriers, stereotypes and even discrimination from an international's daily life and working life, the cultivation of cultural

intelligence should be on the agenda of governmental immigration programmes which receive funding support.

Conclusion

The aforementioned steps can serve as building blocks in retaining internationals in the region. Interestingly, the results of the perception poll pinpointed out that different immigrant groups (academia, students and working professionals) demand for a more tailored-made service as their needs in the integration process vary a lot (table 1). In addition, the service matrix in Helsinki Region (diagram 2) also concludes that the more the internationals who wish to achieve to a higher level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the greater efforts and services they demand from the host society.

In regard to the role of governmental bodies and other actors who devote their services to talent retention, the study also suggests the region should establish not only a labour migration policy and services in response to the mentioned issue but also an international liaison offer/ office who facilitates and streamlines their existing and future efforts in the field.

Table1: Expat perception poll, results from Helsinki Region by current status

(scale 0-64=needs improvement,65-74=good, 75-100=excellent)

Question	Student	Academic/ scientist	Professionals
Evaluation of local language skills	30	36	34
How easy it was to register with the police	68	71	59
How easy it was to get a residence permit	72	65	45
How easy it was to get a work permit	77	76	45
How easy it was to get a personal identification number	70	72	61
How easy it was to get a social security number	72	72	65
I have to study the local language or languages	65	65	52
I have opportunities to study the local language or languages	78	71	59
Establishing my company was easy	-	-	64
Information on finding accommodation was easily accessible	59	55	58
Finding accommodation was easy	50	44	44
I can use the system of the health insurance in the country of residence	59	79	83
I know where to go in order to get medical aid	55	73	79
I feel safe in public	87	91	91
My income is sufficient for living in a residence country	60	71	76
Childcare and school services are appropriate for my family's needs	-	81	83
Local law enforcement authorities are impartial	-	56	-
It is easy to find local friends in the residence country	45	39	37
It is easy to find foreign friends in the residence country	73	66	67
I have an opportunity to engage my hobbies	66	71	64
It is easy to find information about leisure time activities	66	71	65
I am satisfied with the quality of the social events in my native language	48	59	61
I am satisfied with the quality of the social events in the local language	74	75	81
I am satisfied with the quality of the social international events in English	70	68	67
I feel I am a part of this society	51	55	56
There are enough activities where I could learn about this country and its customs	28	44	38
There are enough activities where I could express my culture	40	47	53
There are enough physical gathering places for meeting other foreigners	31	45	45
There are enough physical gathering places for meeting locals	19	33	31
I am completely satisfied with the service provided by my support person	90	87	85
I feel that I have been treated with respect in public	80	78	79
My workmates/professors treat me with respect	86	88	84
I feel that living in this residence country is an important stage of my life	89	87	83
I feel that I can fulfill my goals in the country of residence	75	73	65
All Questions	62	65	62

This article is based on the Expat-project (2012-2013): *Innovative services for internationals - easier access to the Central Baltic Sea Region*. It is co-financed by EU Central Baltic Interreg IV A Programme and led by Uusimaa Regional Council.

The Expat perception survey was conducted in autumn 2012. It received 771 responds from Finland, Estonia, Sweden and Latvia. 153 out of 771 responds were collected from Helsinki-Uusimaa Region of which 45 were academia, 24 students (including exchange and degree students) and 84 working professionals. The survey was not conducted in a scientific fashion, but the number of the answers constituted to a solid indication for policy analysis.

Useful sources:

[Expat-projektin poliittiset suositukset: Cultivating the human capital of the Central Baltic Sea Region](#)
[Inventory report of the Expat-project](#)
www.expatriationproject.info

