

Unreasonable language skills requirements and challenges in finding housing complicate immigrant integration into Finland

According to the report by the European Migration Network (EMN), the limited training offering, the unreasonable Finnish language skills requirement and the lack of networks hamper immigrants' access to the labour market. Challenges for integration are also created by the increase in the homelessness of immigrants.

In the past few years, the offering of integration training implemented as labour market training has not been adjusted according to the increase in the number of immigrants. This has caused delay and interruptions in the transition of immigrants from initial services to integration training that contains language training. Long queues to integration training slow down the learning of the language and, consequently, the transition to the labour market, indicates the European Migration Network's (EMN) recent report. The *Integration of beneficiaries of international protection into the labour market* report analyses obstacles to and good practices of the employment of quota refugees, persons who have been granted asylum and beneficiaries of subsidiary or humanitarian protection.

The insufficiency of integration training has increased immigrants' pressure towards self-motivated studies, especially in vocational adult education. In this regard, the language skills requirement for immigrants is unreasonable, states the report.

In Finland, all vocational adult education is based on competence-based qualification and the Finnish qualification system is so demanding that passing the competence test requires very good language skills. The majority of especially upper secondary education and training is arranged in Finnish or Swedish, so if there are Finnish applicants available, an immigrant will have no chance of gaining admission. To remedy the situation, Finnish as the second language (S2) support should be increased in vocational training, suggests the report.

The significance of language skills in finding employment is great as insufficient language skills may become an obstacle to the employment of immigrants even when the person's earlier education and training are successfully recognised.

The lack of documents and networks is a challenge

The employment of immigrants is also affected by the lack of documents and by identity-related unclarity. Beneficiaries of international protection can rarely provide reliable documentary evidence of earlier qualifications, degrees and work experience. Recognition of skills is challenging also because the Employment and Economic Development Office personnel are not necessarily able to interpret documents provided by the customers. According to the report, the recognition of immigrants' skills is also hampered by some reservations of the employers and the counselling personnel.

The employment of immigrants may also be complicated by the inability to verify their identity. In this case, the person cannot open a bank account for the payment of wages, for instance. As services are increasingly electronic, the lack of a bank account and online banking credentials also prevents the use of many services that require these credentials for logging in.

According to the report, the lack of networks seems to emerge as the key obstacle to the employment of immigrants: immigrants do not have networks or connections and references gained from earlier jobs. Indeed, the employment of immigrants is promoted by linking education and training closely with working life, which requires cooperation with employers. For instance, the experiences of apprenticeship training targeted at immigrants have been good.

The risk of homelessness increases

In addition to finding employment, another challenge in immigrants' integration into society is finding housing, indicates the report. There is not enough agreement-based municipality placements for all those who are granted asylum. As the number of asylum seekers has increased exponentially, reception centres hardly have resources for assisting persons who are granted asylum in finding housing and moving.

The homelessness of immigrants is a growing phenomenon especially in major cities and the Helsinki metropolitan area. Large families are placed at the front of the rental housing queues in the cities and as a result, a particularly vulnerable group is young single men who constitute the majority of the asylum seekers at the moment. Often they end up living with acquaintances or relatives and face the risk of having to live on the street. Addressing this issue is important because homelessness and inadequate housing conditions have a negative impact on integration.

Link to the report:

More information:

Ms. Kielo Brewis, European Migration Network, tel 0295 433 021, kielo.brewis@migri.fi

Mr. Rafael Bärlund, European Migration Network, tel 0295 433 022, rafael.barlund@migri.fi

Ms. Ruut Tolonen, OS/G Communications, tel 040 196 4374, ruut.tolonen@osg.fi