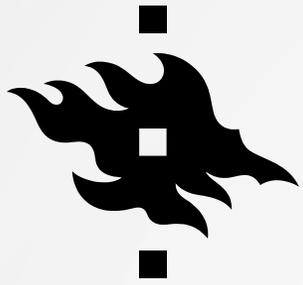




SIMHE – SUPPORTING IMMIGRANTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN FINLAND AND IN UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

NUAS 13.-16.6.2023 Uppsala, Sweden



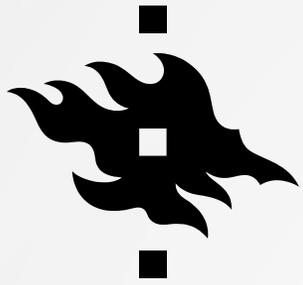
NOTE FROM THE SPEAKERS

- We primarily work with **highly educated immigrants** as they seek guidance for studies and careers (non-degree students)
- In this presentation we however use the word **internationals** as many international degree students and second generation Finns do face the similar challenges and have similar needs for support. Majority of the SIMHE services are also addressed to this wider audience.



AGENDA

- SIMHE services – a short description
- Structural challenges faced by internationals
- SIMHE services are created
- SIMHE at University of Helsinki
- Future needs and challenges in SIMHE



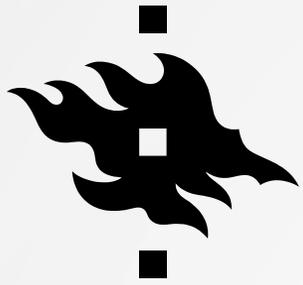
WHAT IS SIMHE?

Supporting immigrants in higher education –services aim to

- streamline the **identification and recognition of the prior learning** of highly educated migrants
- facilitate their **access to higher education**, completion of degrees and **employment in the Finnish labour market**

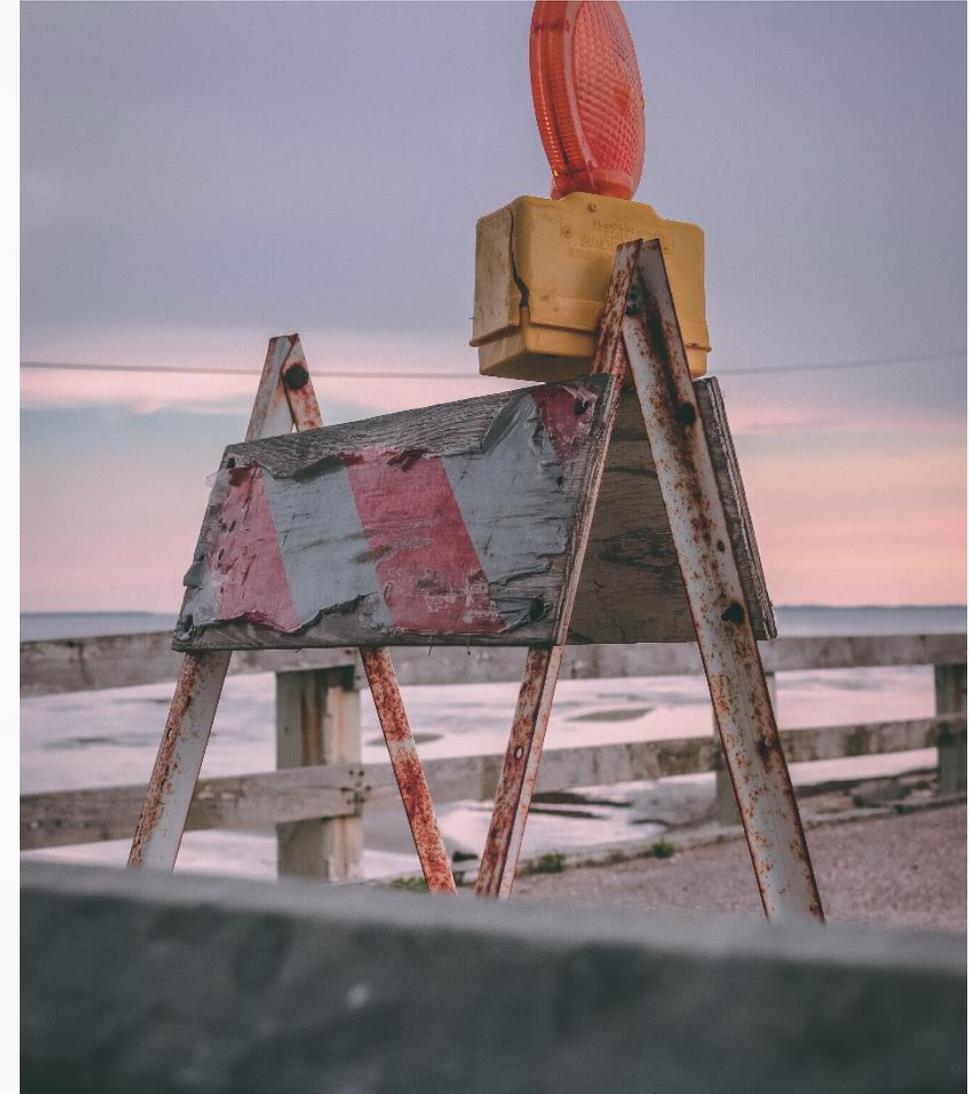


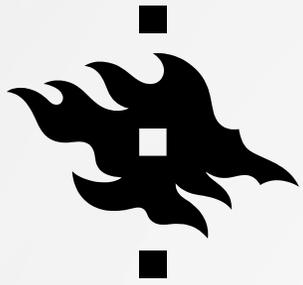
STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES



WHY INTERNATIONALS NEED SUPPORT?

- There are structural challenges for people with a foreign background to get into higher education and work markets in Finland
 1. Finnish integration process not meeting the needs of highly educated
 2. Degrees and work experience from abroad are not always recognized and/or appreciated. Official recognition of degrees is very regulated, and it is a slow and costly process
 3. Access to higher education is difficult and competition is hard
 4. Language barriers and prejudices in the work markets, and limited number of jobs in Finland





INTEGRATION PROCESS

- Integration is always a unique and individual process, but the services provided have not been tailored enough
 - By the end of the integration process the language level has often not met the criteria for studies in higher education, 1/3 reaches the level B1.1 (CEFR levels)
 - There has been a lot of criticism also for the fluctuation in quality as there are many educational institutes providing integration courses
 - A comprehensive reform on Integration Act will enter into force in 2025 and municipalities will bear bigger responsibilities.





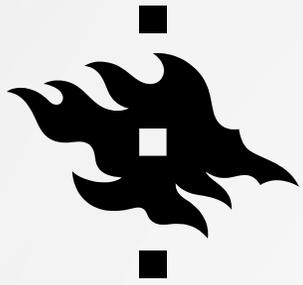
APPRECIATION & RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

- One fourth of the degree students with an international background already have a degree. Reason for starting degree studies for them is that their original degree from their home country
 - ❖ has not been officially recognized or
 - ❖ has not landed employment even after getting recognized.
- The authority for the recognition of degrees is Finnish National Agency of Education (Opetushallitus - OPH)
- Right to practice professions in social and healthcare fields are regulated and licensed by Finnish National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (Valvira)
- Recognition process for non-EU degrees often include excessive amount of supplementary studies, learning higher level of Finnish/Swedish language and process takes several months to complete and costs a fee as well.



DIFFICULT ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

- The language requirements for programs conducted in both Finnish and in English are very high, with each university having specific criteria. In general, starting from **at least level B2 and go up to C1** (near native level)
- There is a lot of discussion and actions on accessibility and inclusion when it comes to different learners in Finnish HEIs but learners with an immigration background are not seen as part of this pool needing special support and guidance
- Five years after starting the studies 41% of the students with an immigration background have terminated their studies (being employed, unemployed or something else) signals also of low attachment to studies and low sense of belonging to the community



LANGUAGE BARRIERS AND PREJUDICES AT WORK MARKETS



- The unemployment rate of foreign speakers is on average about twice that of natives.
- E2 survey: 40 percent of foreign specialist respondents face discrimination in Finnish work places
- In some professions the need for the local language(s) is obvious (nursing, teaching etc.) but the demand seems to exist sometimes in jobs where language is not really an issue
- Hot topic in the Finnish media now for a quite a few years – **how much Finnish is needed or is it just an excuse to not to recruit a person with a foreign background?**
- Work places / teams need to adapt to the changing situation



INTEGRATION IS A TWO-WAY STREET



THINKING RESPONSIBLY

What does that sentence mean: Integration is a two-way street?

- The process where mutual efforts are required from both internationals and host society and achieved through active engagement, understanding and collaboration.
- It means that responsibilities are shared and onus is not solely placed on the internationals.
- Successful integration requires a balance between internal cohesion and external collaboration. Recognize the need of fostering a culture of collaboration and engaging with external stakeholders.
- Society is changing and that requires continuous update on the processes and adaptation to the diverse challenges.



FIRST SIMHE STEPS IN 2016

- Amidst these structural challenges, aging population and a significant surge in refugee numbers in 2015 (3,000 a year to 30,000), the state recognizes its responsibility to offer services which help internationals integrate better in Finnish society.
- SIMHE initiative was established in 2016 based on the proposal by Ministry of Education and Culture. It aims on identifying the competences of highly educated internationals and to guiding them towards suitable study and career paths – governmental mandate
- In establishment of SIMHE was spearheaded by Jyväskylä University (JYU) and Metropolia University of Applied Sciences





SIMHE GOALS



Increase

the participation in higher education

completion of degrees

employment in the Finnish labor market



Develop

accessible models of higher education

the models to identify and recognize previously acquired competences

preparatory courses



Strengthen

the existing models for speeding up the identification of skills

the path of education and employment and make sure that the path is easier





SIMHE IN 2023

- Currently, the national wide SIMHE network comprises of ten responsible HEIs.
- SIMHE counselors regularly meet in network meetings focused on benchmarking, sharing best practices, promoting collaboration and continuous improvement.
- **"Everybody serves everyone"** - a customer can get guidance from any HEI irrespective of their location in Finland. HEIs are independent to create their set of services.
- Finnish National Agency for Education is the steering national authority
- Activities are supported through strategy-based funding allocated to higher education institutions by the Ministry of Education and Culture





Third sector

Adult education institutes

Other projects like Kielibuusti, field-related training, etc

SIMHE
Target audience: internationals living in Finland and want to study or work in Finland

Talent Boost

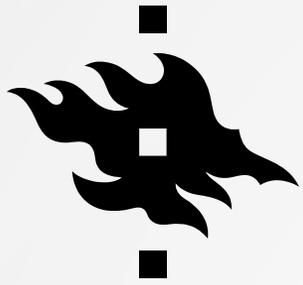
Governmental bodies like Ministry of Education and culture and The Finnish National Agency for Education (OPH)

Finnish HEIs (admission services, HR, career services, students services, international office, etc)

Employment office

Cities

SIMHE ECOSYSTEM



SIMHE WORKING ALONG WITH THE TALENT BOOST PROGRAMME

Talent Boost – cross-administrative program designed to boost the immigration of senior specialists, employees, students and researchers

Talent Boost goals:

1. Finland becoming an internationally attractive place to work, study, carry out research, and invest.

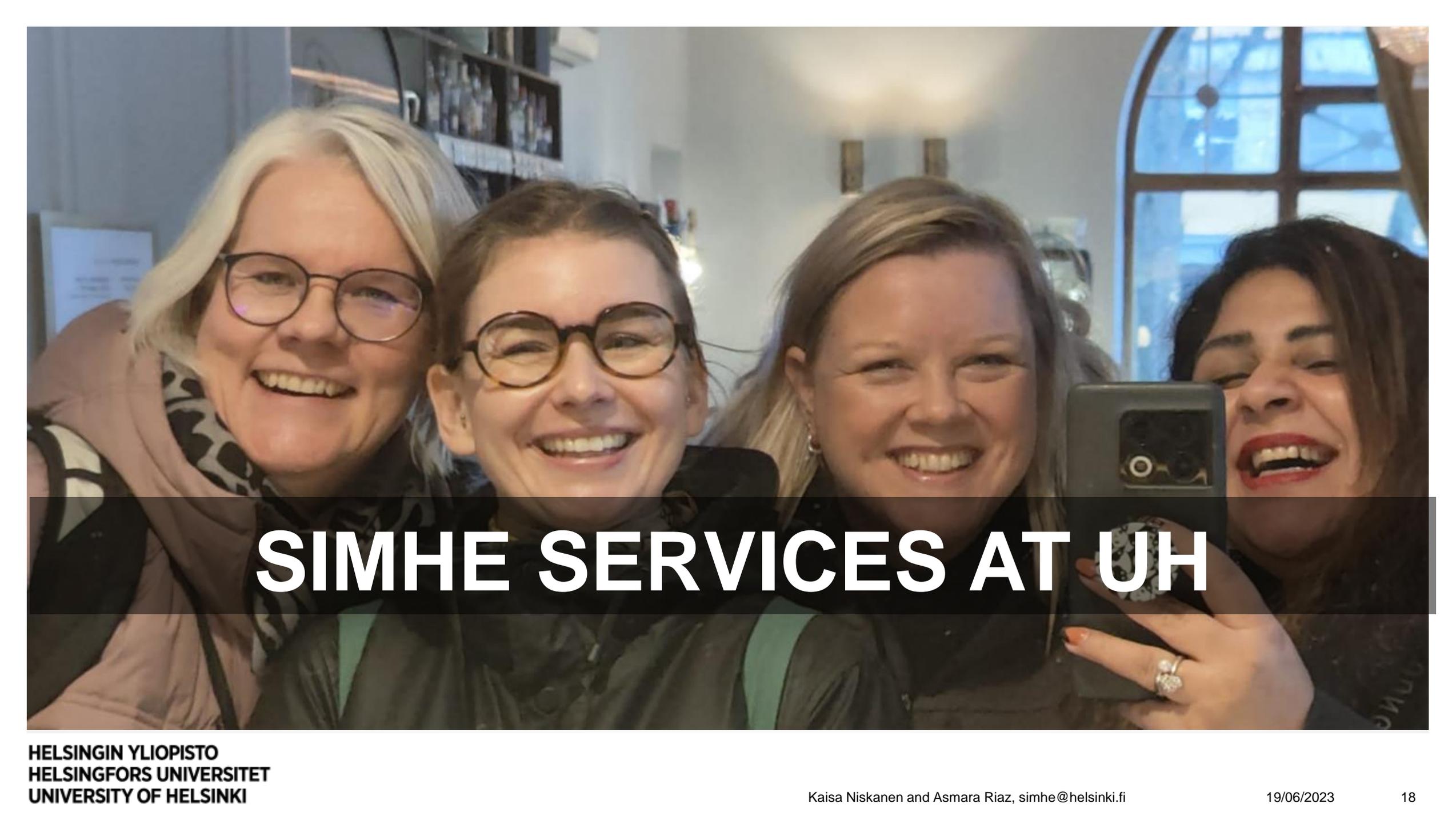
2. Employers willing and able to recruit international talent.

3. The expertise of international specialists driving the internationalization and renewal of Finnish companies and organizations.

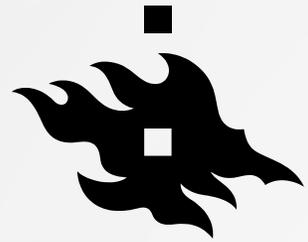
Attraction, settling in and employment of international talent is also strongly included in the **government programme** – by 2030 the goal is to:

Triple the number of international students to 20 000 students per year

Reach a 75% rate of international graduates staying in Finland to work

A photograph of four women smiling and taking a selfie together in what appears to be a bar or social setting. The woman on the far right is holding a smartphone. The background shows shelves with bottles and a large arched window.

SIMHE SERVICES AT UH



SIMHE ACTIVITIES IN UH

At UH SIMHE services started in 2017, with education guidance. In 2022 career counsellors joined the team.

Education
guidance

Career
counselling

Events and
lectures

AKVA preparatory
course

Supplementary
programs



EDUCATION GUIDANCE

- Education guidance for those who are interested in studying in Finnish Universities or Universities of Applied Science or to supplement their studies, provided in personal meetings via Zoom or face-to-face
- Spreading awareness about SIMHE in different webinars, seminars and other forums
- Info sessions on admissions and studies in HEIs

Recurring questions:

- How to supplement my studies to complete a qualification?
- How to prove my language skills and what level is required?
- Where can I study specific field?





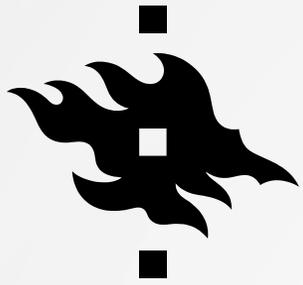
CAREER COUNSELLING

- Career counselors cater to a very diverse target group who are on different levels of integration, language learning, understanding the local work culture etc.
- Some have very clear career paths in mind but most of the people are struggling to find best option in a foreign country
- We have to change a lot of hats.

Recurring questions

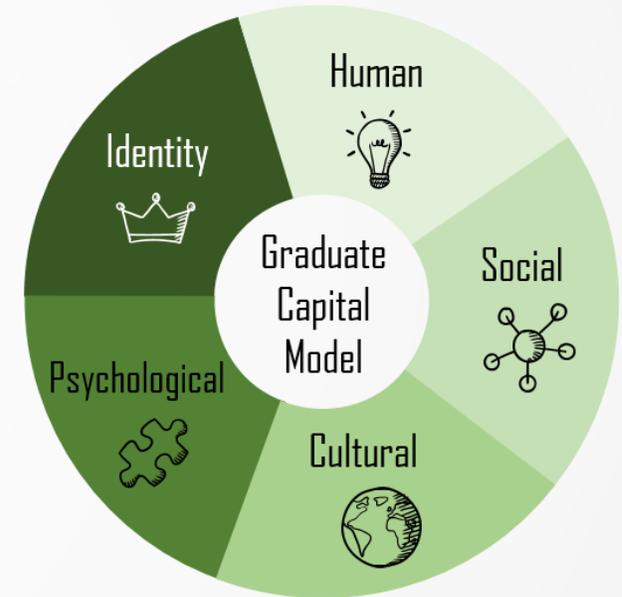
- ❖ I was a doctor in my home country, I tried following the path of getting license but now I want to change my field, what are my options?
- ❖ I am sending so many CVs but not getting any interview calls. Or got interview call, how can I prepare myself? Is my Finnish language level would be acceptable/enough?





GOALS FOR CAREER COUNSELLING

- recognizing strengths, values and development needs (**identity**)
- recognizing the importance of networking and forming own professional networks in Finland (**social**)
- familiarizing with the Finnish education system and work culture, job search process (**cultural**)
- preparing job search documents suitable for the Finnish labor market and their own professional fields (**human**)
- Strengthening self-efficacy and ability to handle stress (**psychological**)



Michael Tomlinson, Forms of graduate capital and their relationship to graduate employability, 2017.



Events and Lectures

Guest speakers

- Give stage to work-life experts in Finnish society
- Provide opportunity to interact with organizations which are difficult to reach otherwise
- Always in English
- Open for all international talents



Own lectures/workshops

- Create awareness of Finnish job market and work culture
- Practical tools for recognizing skill, writing documents etc.
- Info sessions on admissions and studies in HEIs
- Both in English and Finnish



AKVA, AKATEEMISET VALMIUDET (ACADEMIC PREPAREDNESS)

- AKVA is a preparatory course to bridge the way to studies in HEIs and to work markets for highly educated migrants
- 10 months of part-time studies, 49 ETCS
- Strong emphasis on Finnish language, other areas: English (and or Swedish skills), IT-skills, study skills, information about Finland, courses from student's own field (or future field)
- Students are selected based on their Finnish skills (minimum B1) and motivation, they need to have at least upper secondary education
- Two pilots are done, 3rd is starting in August 2023 and will last till May 2024, with appr. 40 students





COUNSELLING IN AKVA

- Personal counselling sessions (3+) is the core of AKVA counselling
- Students have the opportunity to meet both study advisors as well career counsellors, in the first personal counselling jointly
- In addition to personal meetings students are provided with group counselling at Cafe AKVA, guest lectures and workshops and mentoring
- Mentoring was piloted in 2022-2023



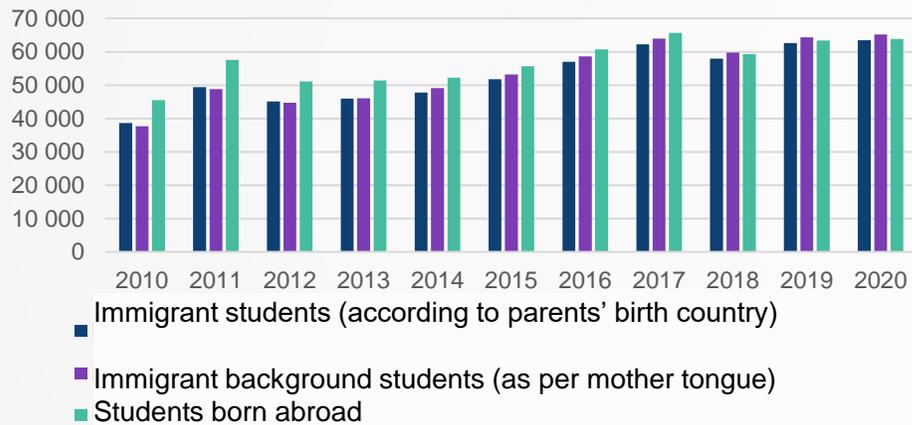


TRACKING PROGRESS

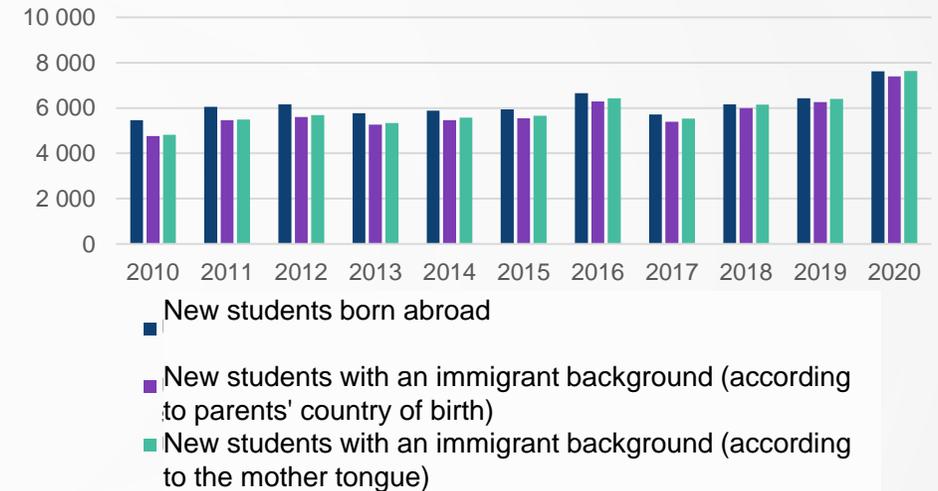


STUDENTS WITH IMMIGRANT BACKGROUNDS

New students, students and graduates with an immigrant background



New students with an immigrant background



Number of new immigrant background students admitted to HEIs doubled in ten years 2010-2020



PREPARATORY PROGRAMS

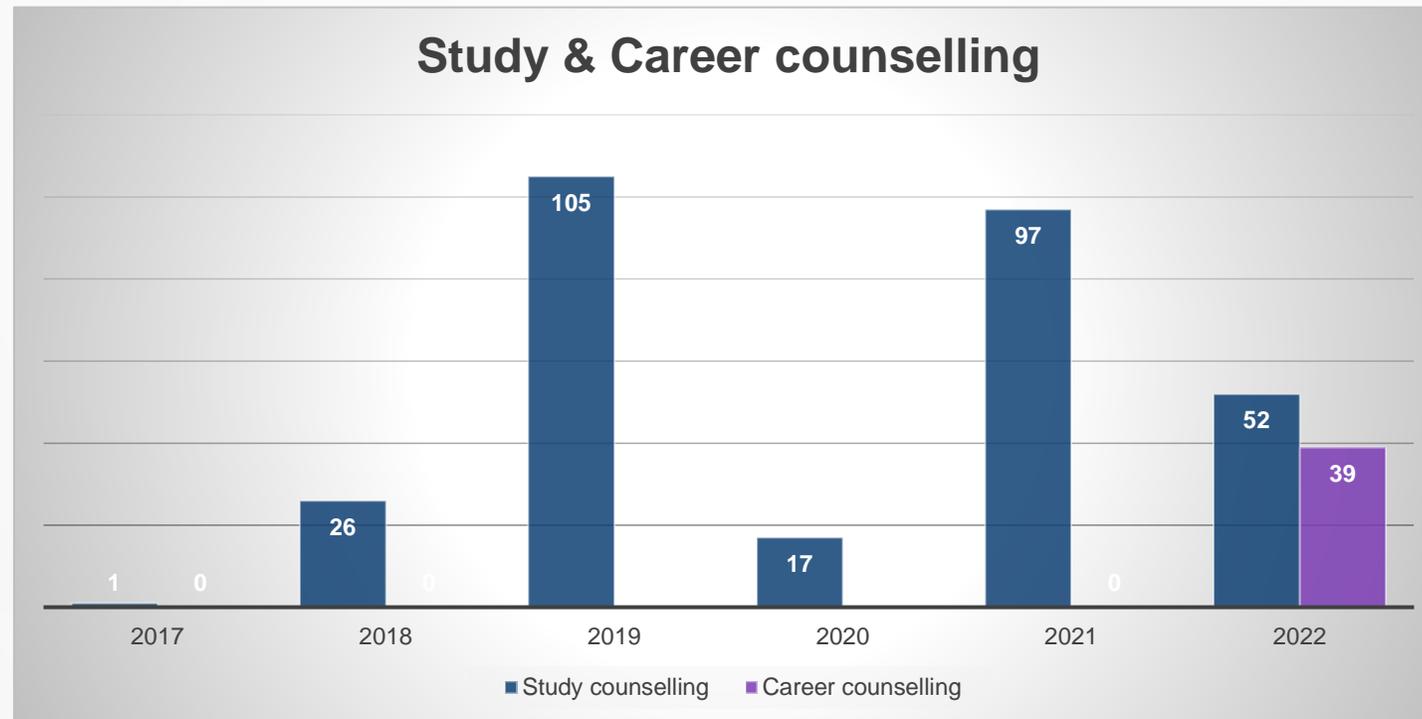
- Number of participants in various preparatory programs rose sharply after 2015
- Women are more active
- 100 participants started in 2015 but from 2017 onwards 250 started education every year
- In 2021 264 international background participants started preparatory education out of which 219 were women and 45 were men





CUSTOMER FLOW IN UH

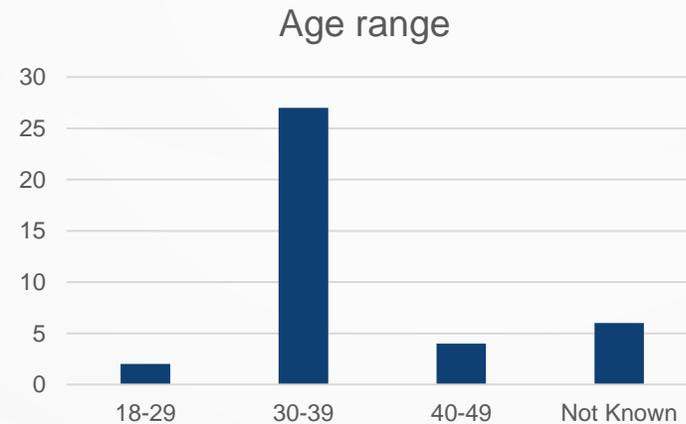
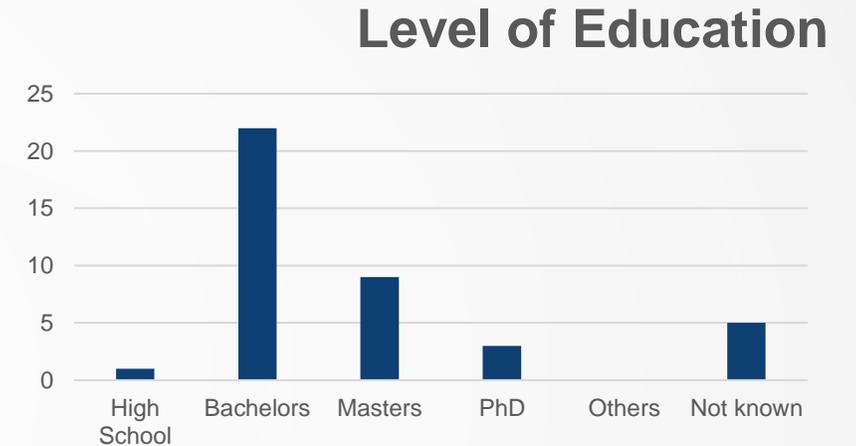
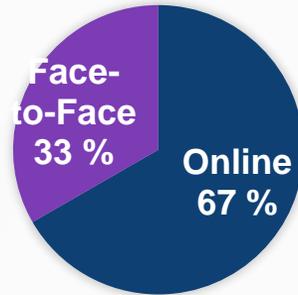
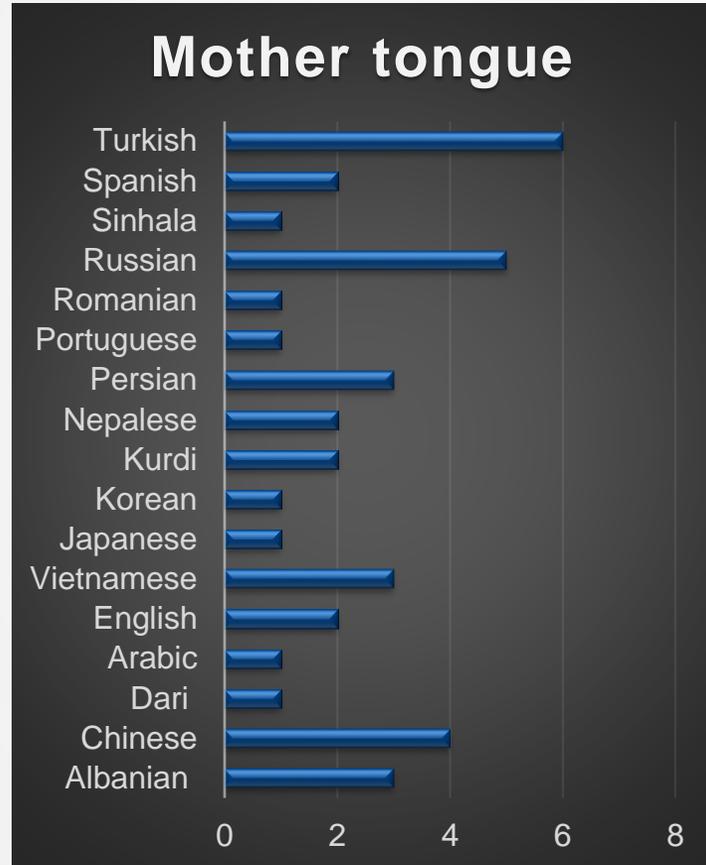
- Till 2022 study counselling has been done via email. Now it is available online as well.
- Demand of study and career counselling is quite close as visible in the year 2022.



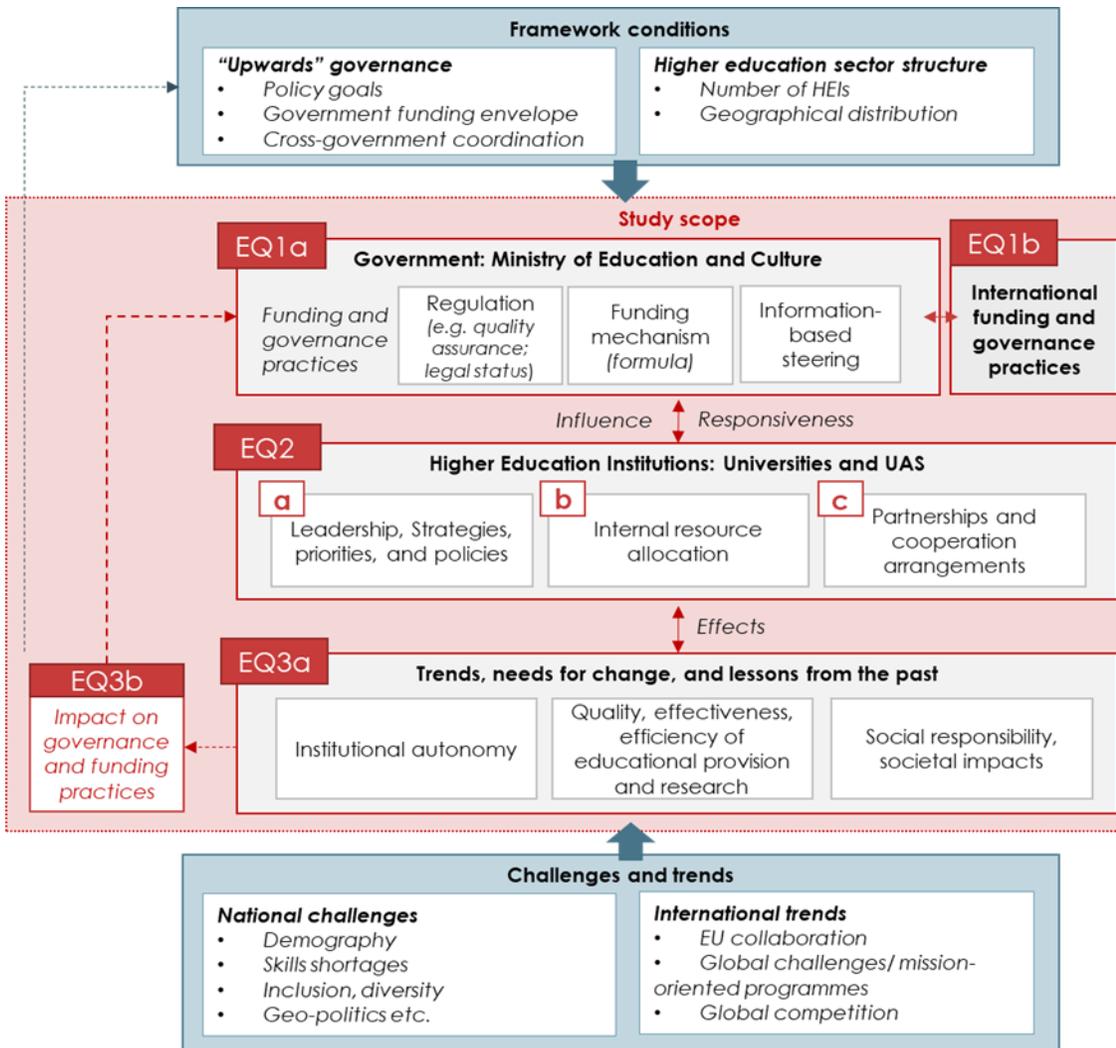


DEMOGRAPHICS IN UH

MODE OF GUIDANCE



EVALUATION OF THE GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING PRACTICES USED BY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE FOR STEERING FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS



- Review of data on the Finnish system
- International literature review
- Exploratory stakeholder interviews (15)
- Survey implementation
- Interviews (35) and visits (10)
 - HY, AYO, JY, ISY, LY,
 - Metropolia, TAMK, TuAMK, Novia, XAMK
- Workshop (online)
- Reference country reports
 - SWE, IE, GE/Bavaria, NL
- Analysis
- Final report

Publication seminar 16.6.2023



DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS



DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS

- We need to reach to the target group more effectively and widely
- Targeting a diverse audience requires customized solutions to cater to their specific needs and preferences. We need diversity in our SIMHE teams as well.
- SIMHE network should indulge more in advocacy work and raising awareness on creating equal opportunities for internationals, especially for internationals who are living in Finland.
- Stability and continuity of resources need to be established. There is uncertainty regarding funding beyond December 2024, challenging political situation in Finland and around the globe, etc.
- **Finnish society is getting more diverse, and it will grow even more in coming years. And we need to be ready for it.**



GROUP DISCUSSION

FLINGA:

<https://flinga.fi/s/FKSLGY6>

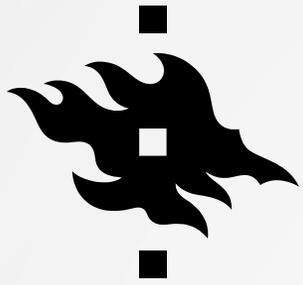
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Choose one developmental goal from previous slide and discuss in the group **how we can reach that effectively.**

In your discussion explore potential strategies and plans for that.

Suggest something!



INDIVIDUAL WORK

Are you familiar with services or projects whose goals are similar to SIMHE in your country or in your HEI?

If yes please let us know the name and country of that initiative or project, and if no what can be the reason?



SOURCES AND MORE INFO

- [About integration process in Finland](#)
- [Summarizing video of SIMHE by OPH](#)
- [More about the preparatory course AKVA](#) (scroll down for an English summary)
- [SIMHE services at UH](#)

Publications and articles:

- Marginaalista valtavirtaan, University of Jyväskylä, 2021: https://movi.jyu.fi/fi/kehittamistyo/integra/jyu-integra_marginaalista_valtavirtaan.pdf
- Taustalla on valilla – Ulkomaalaistaustaiset opiskelijat korkeakoulupolulla, KARVI, Tiivistelmät 2:2020. https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/KARVI_T0220.pdf
- E2 Research on specialists facing discrimination <https://yle.fi/a/3-12666816>
- EK statistics on immigrants' employment (in Finnish) <https://ek.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/20211017-tilastoja-maahanmuuttajien-tyollisyydesta.pdf>



THANK YOU!!

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