

Central Finland Multicultural Forum

Date and time: Wednesday, 15 April 2026, 17:00–19:00

Venue: Työntalo, Hannikaisenkatu 11–13, Jyväskylä

Organisers: Wellbeing Services County of Central Finland and City of Jyväskylä

1. Opening of the meeting

The Chair, Nina Peränen (Wellbeing Services County of Central Finland), welcomed the participants.

2. Impact of previous forums on the work of the Wellbeing Services County of Central Finland

Nina Peränen explained how previous multicultural forums have influenced the work of the Wellbeing Services County of Central Finland (HyvaKS):

- Work on the wellbeing programme of the Wellbeing Services County is currently underway, and ideas raised at previous forums are being incorporated into this process.
- The Wellbeing Services County has an international affairs working group. Those interested in joining may contact Nina Peränen or Recruitment Coordinator Johanna Savolainen.

3. Participation services of the City of Jyväskylä

Antti Rajala and Ella Lounasto from the City of Jyväskylä's participation services presented the services available to promote participation. The city is currently preparing its wellbeing programme and developing its participation programmes. One example of the impact of the previous multicultural forum is that the use of clear Finnish will be reflected in these programmes. The city is also developing its multilingual communications. Clear communication and an open administrative culture promote the wellbeing and everyday lives of all residents. They also support the theme of this meeting: employment.

4. Theme of the forum: working life, employment and job seeking

The Chair introduced the theme of this forum: working life, employment and job seeking. Representatives of the City of Jyväskylä and the Wellbeing Services County of Central Finland gave presentations on the topic.

Arja Aroheinä, HR Director, City of Jyväskylä

- Arja Aroheinä briefly outlined the responsibilities of municipalities and explained how jobs within the City of Jyväskylä are created.
- At the turn of the year, the city employed more than 4,500 people in employee and public official positions. The city's strategy describes Jyväskylä as a growing international city of education and culture. Its values — humanity and

accessibility, courage, openness, responsibility and safety — apply both to residents and to employees. The City of Jyväskylä wants its jobs and work opportunities to appeal to people from a wide range of backgrounds. Equality and non-discrimination plans are a statutory requirement, but an inclusive organisational culture is created through everyday work and the choices people make.

- Arja highlighted the following measures from the perspective of human resources:
 1. **Anonymous recruitment:** Anonymous recruitment is used as part of the recruitment process. Applicants must write their application letters so that their background cannot be identified from the text. The City of Jyväskylä's job advertisements include a diversity commitment.
 2. **Experiences of racism at work:** The city is preparing a staff survey on experiences of racism in the workplace. Previous staff surveys have already included questions about harassment and inappropriate treatment.
 3. **Pay transparency:** The Pay Transparency Directive is coming into force. Municipalities are already well advanced in ensuring equal pay for the same duties in employment and public official positions.
 4. **Digital working practices:** The city is taking various measures related to digital work, including addressing potential biases arising from the use of artificial intelligence.
 5. **Anti-racism and practical measures:** By participating in a national anti-racism campaign, the city demonstrates its commitment to taking concrete action against racism. Practical measures include introducing safer-space principles and actively offering work placements and work try-outs to international professionals across all municipal sectors. Trainee opportunities and language-learning placements are also offered. The city trains its staff and strengthens its knowledge base concerning diversity, equality and areas requiring further development within the organisation. It also defines the language proficiency levels required for different municipal jobs and communicates these requirements in recruitment advertisements. Recruitment practices are being developed to make them clearer and more accessible to applicants from diverse backgrounds.

Johanna Savolainen, Recruitment Coordinator, Wellbeing Services County of Central Finland

- The Wellbeing Services County of Central Finland employs more than 12,000 people.
- The organisation has implemented an international recruitment project through which principles and practical measures have been developed to support international recruitment.

- Workplaces encourage inclusion, appreciation of diversity and curiosity towards different backgrounds and perspectives.
- Employees whose first language is not Finnish are offered an extended induction process. They are also offered a Finnish-language course, and clear Finnish is used in the workplace.
- The Wellbeing Services County has support materials and induction resources for multicultural workplaces. A Moodle online course entitled Multicultural Work Community has been developed to support employees' independent learning.
- A development project on international recruitment piloted the involvement of a Finnish-as-a-second-language (S2) teacher in workplace learning. This was considered helpful both for performing work tasks and for completing studies.
- Managers are encouraged to promote diversity, and recruitment staff can use a functional language proficiency assessment tool. Teams with multicultural backgrounds are also supported in learning English to facilitate teamwork.
- Johanna concluded by emphasising that **language proficiency is not the same as professional competence.**

5. Small-group discussions and workshops

Satu Hovisalmi, Network Coordinator at Jyväskylä Employment Services, introduced the next part of the forum. Small-group discussions have previously received positive feedback because they enable participants to engage more deeply, encourage dialogue and bring out a wider range of perspectives than discussions in a large group. The participants took part in small-group discussions and workshops lasting approximately 35 minutes.

The discussion themes were:

- What ideas do you have for networking? How would you like to build networks in Central Finland?
- How can we work together to overcome barriers to employment?
- What kind of support do you need when looking for a job? What important employment services are missing? What kind of training is needed?
- What positive experiences have you had in Finnish working life, and how could these experiences be replicated?
- What would encourage you to stay in Jyväskylä or Central Finland?
- Structural racism and ways to address it.

Participants chose the groups that interested them. Each group was asked to identify three key points for the overall summary.

Discussions were held in the languages agreed upon by each group. Materials were available in Finnish and English. A Microsoft Forms survey had also been created on the discussion themes, and participants were encouraged to submit their responses. The summaries of the discussions were reviewed from 18:45 to 19:05. The main points from the workshops were included in these minutes. In

addition, the facilitators prepared a more detailed summary of all the small-group discussions and the issues raised (Appendix 1).

6. Discussion on the theme of the next forum

The participants discussed the topic of the next meeting. Responses collected at the first forum had highlighted experiences of racism. The following issues emerged in the current discussion:

- How can the issues raised at the forum be taken forward, and how can the discussions influence actual decisions and practices?
- There was support for organising a meeting focused on entrepreneurship and engagement with employers.
- Other proposed themes that received support included the feeling of safety.

The Chair collected contact details from participants who wished to take part in planning the next forum.

The meeting ended at 19:20. Thank you to everyone who participated!

Number of participants: 49

Meeting notes written in Finnish by Sari Miettinen, City of Jyväskylä, Employment Services, International House Jyväskylä

Summary of the key points from the small-group workshops prepared by: Nina Peränen, Wellbeing Services County of Central Finland

The notes and summary were translated into English by ChatGPT and translation checked by Annika Sibomana

Key Points from the Small-Group Workshops

Structural racism and ways to address it

- How can awareness of different cultures be further strengthened? This includes the terms we use and their meanings. What responsibilities do parents and, for example, the education system have in influencing racist behaviour? Do we blame young people and teenagers, the system, or someone else?
- The constant feeling of being different affects self-esteem and mental wellbeing. How can racist attitudes be reduced, and what practical methods could be used?
- How can immigrants be genuinely accepted as part of society?
- Who is the problem?

How would you like to build networks in Central Finland?

- Networks are important, but people often wonder what they actually achieve. Are they intended for sharing information, exchanging messages, providing peer support or creating genuine opportunities to influence decisions? Interest in participating depends greatly on the purpose and content.
- Networking strengthens employment opportunities and helps immigrants and employers connect. However, networks must not be the only route to finding a job. "It is not who you know, but what you can do."

How can we work together to overcome barriers to employment?

- Municipalities should lead by example, as should wellbeing services counties, and increase cooperation.
- Employers should be encouraged and supported to recruit people with immigrant backgrounds.
- Networks and hidden job opportunities should be made more visible.
- There are surprisingly many jobs that are never publicly advertised.<

What support is needed for job seeking? What important services are missing? What kind of training is needed?

- Professional vocabulary should be practiced before starting a job. This practice should begin even before applying for work.
- How can people find hidden job opportunities? Many jobs are sought online, but how can applicants communicate their personality through online applications?

Positive experiences of Finnish working life and how they could be replicated?

- The work community matters. A well-functioning team contributes to job satisfaction. The way people are welcomed and treated makes a significant difference.
 - Low workplace hierarchies contribute to a well-functioning work community.
 - Both managers and employees should understand their roles, responsibilities and the skills required for effective cooperation.
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Appendix 1:

15 April 2026 Multicultural Forum — Work and Working Life

Detailed summary of the main findings of the small-group discussions and Forms survey responses organised by theme.

Structural racism and ways to address it

The discussions highlighted that racism manifests itself in many ways, both visibly and in less obvious forms, including in relation to language proficiency. These issues are not discussed sufficiently in Finland. Adults have an important role in ensuring that racist practices and comments are not accepted in everyday life under any circumstances. Addressing racism requires active and concrete efforts. Everyone has a responsibility to ensure equal treatment and to make sure that each person has the opportunity to be seen and heard on their own terms. Systematic training and support pathways are needed to identify, prevent and address racism, both at the structural and individual levels.

What ideas do you have for networking? How would you like to build networks in Central Finland?

The discussions highlighted the importance of supporting international interaction within local communities. Participants called for more opportunities to meet, such as workshops and networking events where businesses and immigrants can meet and talk directly with one another. Organizations and hobbies also serve as important networking channels. Work try-outs were seen as useful ways to build professional networks and develop skills. Participants emphasized that it is important to be treated as a person, regardless of language proficiency or employment status. Employers' knowledge and skills concerning the recruitment of immigrants should be strengthened. Recruitment practices should also become more transparent and equitable so that employment is based primarily on competence rather than networks and personal connections. Participants suggested that trade unions and the public sector could act as bridges that bring people together and facilitate networking.

How can we work together to overcome barriers to employment?

The small-group discussions identified several ways to address barriers to employment. These include strengthening financial incentives and increasing jobseekers' awareness of the financial support available to employers for recruitment, as well as improving cooperation between municipalities to facilitate labour mobility. Participants emphasized the need to address prejudices and unnecessarily high language proficiency requirements, encourage employers to recruit international professionals and offer placements to international trainees, and improve the fair recognition and assessment of skills and qualifications. Participants also highlighted the importance of increasing access to networking opportunities and hidden job markets by organizing practical events where employers and jobseekers can meet. European Social Fund (ESR) projects were

identified as one possible way to obtain additional resources for employment initiatives. It is essential to strengthen cooperation between employment services, businesses and third-sector organizations, and to encourage experimentation and diverse recruitment practices.

What support is needed for job seeking? What important employment services are missing? What kind of training is needed?

Participants emphasized the importance of gaining work experience. More practical opportunities are needed, including work try-outs and internships, also for people who have already graduated. Personal interaction, such as job interviews, was considered important because a CV alone does not provide a complete picture of a person's skills and personality. Support is needed to find hidden job opportunities and build professional networks, particularly in creative industries. There is also a need for training focused on professional Finnish-language skills before job seeking begins. Entrepreneurship was considered a promising employment option, but participants noted that the administrative requirements involved can make starting a business challenging. Support for entrepreneurship is therefore needed.

What positive experiences have you had in Finnish working life, and how could they be replicated?

Participants identified well-functioning and equitable work communities, competent management and low hierarchies as key positive features of Finnish working life. A good work-life and free time balance was also highlighted. Informal workplace cultures, the ease of approaching managers and direct communication between colleagues were seen as factors that support inclusion and job satisfaction. Punctuality and respect for other people's time were also considered important workplace skills. Participants acknowledged, however, that these experiences are subjective. Some people may experience the same ways of working as unnatural or undesirable. These positive practices can be replicated by strengthening the skills of managers and employees and by consciously maintaining open, equitable and welcoming work communities.

What would encourage you to stay in Jyväskylä or Central Finland?

No separate small-group discussion was held on this theme. In the Forms survey, participants highlighted family and employment, as well as a sense of connection and belonging. Safety and opportunities to engage in meaningful activities were also identified as reasons to stay in Jyväskylä and Central Finland.