



South Ostrobothnia Immigration Programme



ETELÄ-POHJANMAAN LIITTO

Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia



Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia

South Ostrobothnia Immigration Programme, B:104, 2022

ISBN 978-951-766-446-2, ISSN 2670-2266

www.eplitto.fi



Contents

1 Introduction.....	3
1.1 Background and need for an immigration programme	3
1.2 Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration.....	4
1.3 Drawing up an immigration programme	5
2 Immigration in South Ostrobothnia in the light of statistics	7
2.1 Demographic trends challenge the future of South Ostrobothnia	7
2.2 Migration in South Ostrobothnia	9
3 Vision and main objective	11
3.1 Vision.....	11
3.2 Main objective.....	11
4 Themes and content of the immigration programme.....	12
4.1 Employment.....	12
4.2 Education.....	14
4.3 Health, wellbeing and housing.....	15
4.4 Two-way integration.....	17
5 Implementing and monitoring the programme.....	19

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and need for an immigration programme

South Ostrobothnia is a vibrant region in many respects. Its employment situation is very strong, and the shock of the covid 19 pandemic has been quickly overcome, at least in terms of unemployment.

Region's economy and business scene are vibrant. In terms of population, South Ostrobothnia has the highest number of enterprises of all the regions of Mainland Finland, immediately after Uusimaa. The region also has a strong position on many socio-economic and well-being indicators. Although the education level of the population is low, the employment rate in the province shows that the skills of the current workforce serves well the region's business activities.

Thanks to the main railway, South Ostrobothnia is strongly connected to the Helsinki-Tampere-Seinäjoki growth corridor, formed around the main line. Seinäjoki city has developed exceptionally well as a medium-sized city by almost all indicators.

In terms of the proportion of foreign-language speakers, statistics show that South Ostrobothnia is the laggard among Finnish regions. In 2021, only 2.6% of the population spoke a non-native language (Finnish, Swedish, Sami) as their mother tongue. South Ostrobothnia is the least affected by immigration of all Finnish regions. Net immigration is also the lowest among the regions. Determined and comprehensive actions are needed to change this situation.

South Ostrobothnia Regional Strategy brings together the South Ostrobothnia Regional Plan 2050, the Regional Programme 2022-2025 and the Smart Specialisation Strategy 2021-2027. The Regional Strategy recognises concerns about the demographic development of the region. The long-term goal of the strategy is to adapt to declining demographics and to stabilise the demographic structure on a sustainable basis. The regional strategy proposes doubling net immigration compared to 2019 levels as one of the solutions.

This Immigration Programme is therefore centrally linked and contributes to the implementation of the objectives of the Regional Strategy.

1.2 Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration

During the preparation of the South Ostrobothnia Immigration Programme, the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration was in the process of being consulted and was about to be discussed in Parliament. The aim of the amendment is to speed up the integration and employment of immigrants. The amendment increases municipalities' responsibility for promoting integration. In future, integration services would be organised as part of a new individual integration programme for immigrants in the municipality, which would include:

- assessment of skills and integration service needs
- integration plan
- multilingual social orientation
- training
- other services to promote integration and employment
- guidance and counselling
- follow-up guidance at the end of the programme

Currently, integration plans are made for immigrants who are unemployed jobseekers in the TE services (Employment and economic development services), whose residence permit has been issued up to three years ago, and who are able to participate full-time in measures and services to promote integration and employment. The aim is to bring immigrants into services earlier, by having municipalities carry out a skills and integration service needs assessment and integration plan for both unemployed and inactive immigrants. The inactive population includes beneficiaries of international protection, home care support and victims of human trafficking. Assessments can be carried out in cooperation between municipality and wellbeing services county.

Integration training is included in the integration programme, which is in the responsibility of the municipalities. Integration training will in the future include a final test of Finnish or Swedish language skills. In addition, integration training will be more closely linked to other employment and training services. With the reform of labour services, employment promotion services will also become the responsibility of municipalities in 2024, so municipalities will have a significant role in supporting immigrants' integration, skills development, and employment.

Sudden changes in the world could mean that unexpectedly large numbers of people seeking international protection may arrive in Finland. Therefore, in the

long term, we need to prepare for the increased localisation of services for migrants enjoying international protection.

1.3 Drawing up an immigration programme

The preparation of the immigration programme for South Ostrobothnia started in late 2021 and was approved by the executive board of the regional council in September 2022.

The South Ostrobothnia immigration programme was based on, among other things, a survey on immigration strategy conducted by the regional council in autumn 2021 (13 responses). In the initial phase of the work, a statistical background analysis of the regional profile and immigration in South Ostrobothnia was prepared, which was used as a basis and input for other phases of the work and for defining the thematic content of the programme. The statistical data was updated in August 2022 with the figures for 2021. The statistical dataset will serve as an annex to the programme and contribute to highlighting development needs in immigration in the region.

A questionnaire sent to representatives of the TE Office, the municipal employment experiment, the ELY Centre, the University of Applied Sciences, vocational and liberal education institutions, municipal management groups, organisations, entrepreneurs, and party leaders was also used as background material. The questionnaire was sent to 143 people and 38 (27%) responded.

In addition, 27 representatives of municipalities, employment services, education, business, and lobbying organisations were interviewed.

Surveys and interviews were used to formulate key themes for the programme. Two workshops were held to brainstorm on the objectives and content of these themes. First workshop, in April 2022, was attended by 46 participants and the second, in June 2022, by 38 participants from a wide range of stakeholders.

The preliminary contents of the programme were presented at a meeting of the Regional Cooperation Group in May. The vision, objectives, themes and initial proposals for action of the migration programme were validated in four thematic workshops in June. The validation workshops were attended by representatives of employment, education and municipal integration support, in line with the content of the programme. The draft programme and its main content were

presented to the executive board of the regional council at its June meeting. In August, a workshop on monitoring and evaluation of the programme was held, with the participation of the steering group and a representative of the educational institution.

The preparation of the programme was also supported by a steering group, which met four times during the preparation. The steering group was chaired by Mikko Savola, Member of Parliament and President of the Regional Council.

2 Immigration in South Ostrobothnia in the light of statistics

This chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the statistical analysis on the prospects for the near future in South Ostrobothnia, especially from the perspective of immigration and the foreign-language population.

The statistical analysis is a separate annex to the programme and is available from the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia.

2.1 Demographic trends challenge the future of South Ostrobothnia

The development of South Ostrobothnia has faced in past decades and faces especially in the future one major challenge: demographic development. Although the region's situation and development are strong in almost all other indicators, the demographic development of South Ostrobothnia has been weak. Throughout the 2010s, the region's demographic development took a sharp negative turn as a result of a decline in the birth rate and large migration losses within the country. In the 2010s, the birth rate almost collapsed in Finland and this trend has also taken its place in South Ostrobothnia. Maintaining the current population would require very large migration gains either from within the country or from abroad. Within the region population trends are very uneven: Seinäjoki is still growing strongly, while the rest of the region is experiencing very rapid population decline. Although the demographic situation in the region is not exceptional compared to other regions, the current and future demographic situation in the region must be seen as a serious challenge for the vitality of South Ostrobothnia.

The demographic problems of the region are particularly visible in the development of the working age population. Between 2010 and 2021, the population aged 15-64 in the region fell by as many as 15 000, i.e. by more than 12%. The decline in the working-age population is due to several demographic factors and phenomena, but the main factors that reduced the population were the large internal migration losses, especially to Pirkanmaa and Uusimaa, and the

age structure of the population. In the 2010s, the baby-boomers moved into retirement, taking with them 32 600 people of working age.

The working age population will continue to decline significantly also in the future. According to MDI's 2021 population forecast, the working-age population in South Ostrobothnia will decrease by almost 18 000 persons (-16%) by 2040. A significant part of this development is also based on the age structure of the working-age population alone: during the 2020s, 23% and during 2021-2040, 44% of the current working-age population of the region will reach retirement age and will be replaced by much smaller age cohorts. At the same time, the region risks losing working-age people to internal migration to other parts of the country.

The decline in the working-age population will have a significant impact on the region's economic activity, dependency ratios, the organisation of services and the wider vitality of the region. The strong increase in the employment rate in the 2010s compensated for much of the impact of the decline in the working age population, but the activation of labour reserves within the region will no longer be sufficient to ensure even a moderate decline in the employed labour force in the future. At the same time, the demographic development of the neighbouring regions is considerably stronger than in South Ostrobothnia. In Pirkanmaa, the Tampere urban area in particular is expected to grow strongly in the future, while the working-age population of Ostrobothnia and even Central Ostrobothnia will develop more favourably than in South Ostrobothnia. This is partly due to immigration. In particular, the position of Ostrobothnia in international migration is considerably stronger than that of South Ostrobothnia. As the immigrants are mainly young people or young adults, immigration will have a long-term impact on the development of the working-age population in the region and, more broadly, on the population as a whole.

During the 2010s, immigration was the only dynamic demographic factor in the region of South Ostrobothnia and in most municipalities in the region. The same applies to population forecasts. Despite net immigration, South Ostrobothnia's position in international migration remains weak. The region receives the lowest level of immigration in relation to population of all Finnish regions, and its capital Seinäjoki has the weakest position in international migration of the C23 cities. The region has also had the lowest net immigration of all regions in the 2000s.

If South Ostrobothnia wants to meet the challenges of future demographic and labour force development, the strengthening of South Ostrobothnia's position in immigration must take centre stage alongside the country's internal pull and holding power. Although increasing the birth rate has also been presented at national level as a solution to labour force development, it is important to note that over the next 20-25 years the labour force can only be increased through migration, as a child born in the early 2020s will not enter the labour market until the 2040s.

2.2 Migration in South Ostrobothnia

The statistical and data analysis behind the South Ostrobothnia immigration programme reveals three key weaknesses in the region's immigration dynamics, which will be key to address in the 2020s and 2030s:

1. **Low immigration.** South Ostrobothnia lags significantly behind in immigration and in attracting immigrants, especially compared to neighbouring regions. At present, South Ostrobothnia has the lowest level of immigration in relation to population of all regions. Immigration to the region needs to rise significantly above the current average level to substantially improve for example labour force development.
2. **Holding power of migrants within the country.** South Ostrobothnia loses a significant proportion of its immigrants to internal migration. The migration behaviour of the foreign-language population in internal migration differs from that of the native language groups, and foreign-language migrants are more concentrated than native language groups, especially to Uusimaa. South Ostrobothnia has a relatively strong attraction for the foreign language group (within the country), but the fourth lowest holding power for the foreign language group of all regions. Therefore, strengthening the holding power in the foreign language group is as crucial as increasing immigration to meet demographic challenges.
3. **Integration and employment of immigrants.** In South Ostrobothnia, the employment situation of non-Finnish nationals is significantly worse than that of Finnish nationals. The reasons for this are manifold and partly a statistical bias, but the successful integration of immigrants and their employment in the region is key to strengthening both the holding power and the vitality of the region.

By the 2030s, the population of the country is at risk of falling and competition between regions for residents, labour, students, talent, resources and investment will intensify. **South Ostrobothnia's position in this competition is strong in principle, but the future is overshadowed by poor projected population growth.**

Like the rest of the country, South Ostrobothnia has become more internationalised in the 2000s, and the importance of immigration will become even more pronounced in the 2020s and 2030s. **Immigration can partly solve South Ostrobothnia's current and future problems.** The region's shared knowledge and understanding will be used to formulate solutions to future challenges and seize future opportunities. The aim of this Immigration Programme is to enable the region and the municipalities in the region to identify and find these solutions.

3 Vision and main objective

3.1 Vision

South Ostrobothnia is a safe home for immigrants.

The region, municipalities, educational institutions, companies and organisations enable smooth integration, permanent employment and a good life.

3.2 Main objective

The main objective of the South Ostrobothnia Immigration Programme is to balance the demographic development of the region by doubling net immigration compared to 2019.

The programme will strengthen the region's holding power among foreign-language speakers, ensure the availability of a skilled workforce and improve the employment and education levels of immigrants as well as their overall well-being.

4 Themes and content of the immigration programme

The South Ostrobothnia Immigration Programme has four content themes, which are in line with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment's national monitoring system for integration, integration promotion and ethnic relations. The content themes are also in line with the OECD and EU frameworks.

The themes of the Immigration programme are:

1. Employment
2. Education and training
3. Health, welfare and housing
4. Two-way integration.

For each theme, objectives and indicators were defined and examples of possible measures to implement the programme were listed.

The following subsections present the overall content of the programme and provide a brief background to each of the themes.

4.1 Employment

In South Ostrobothnia, the employment situation of people with an immigrant background is worse than that of Finnish citizens, but still better than in most other regions. The province's strong employment situation offers employment opportunities regardless of nationality and language.

In 2022, there will be labour shortages in almost all sectors (including public and private). The demographic development of South Ostrobothnia and its forecasts show a big gap by 2040, especially for the working age population. From the perspective of acute labour shortages and longer-term labour market exit, labour migration and employment of immigrants are key prerequisites for the region's survival.

Objectives:

- Increasing the employment rate of migrants

The employment rate of immigrants in South Ostrobothnia varies according to their nationality. The employment situation of immigrants is worse than that of Finnish citizens, but still better than in many other regions.

- Closer cooperation between municipalities, educational institutions, businesses, personnel service companies, the ELY Centre and the TE Office

Many actors are implementing measures to promote employment for a heterogeneous group of immigrants. Closer interaction, better information flow and coordination of measures are seen as key means of clarifying the service mix.

- Smoothing and speeding up the employment pathway for immigrants
From the point of view of immigrant integration, employment is the surest way to root people in Finnish society. Rapid and smooth employment is in everyone's interest.

Indicators:

- Employment rate of foreign speakers (ELY-keskus, Etelä-Pohjanmaan työllisyyskatsaus)
- Share of self-employed in the foreign-language group (kotoutumisen tietokanta)
- Placement of educated non-nationals (OPH, Vipunen)

Examples of possible actions:

- Experiments to boost international recruitment (including measures in the country of origin, business visits and encouraging companies to hire foreign language speakers, anonymous recruitment).
- Increasing employers' knowledge of diversity and its impact on employer image, recruitment and induction skills and diversity management, for example through Image training.
- Strengthen skills in advising and guiding immigrants through a regional Welcome Office.
- Increase business mentoring for immigrants.

4.2 Education

Education plays a key role in the integration of immigrants. Education is understood in a broad sense, covering not only language training but also vocational training and higher education.

Statistics show that around 60% of graduates from other countries still live in South Ostrobothnia one year after graduation. The share of graduates from vocational education is about half. The immigration programme aims to speed up access to studies for immigrants and strengthen their attachment to the region.

Objectives:

- Developing a comprehensive range of qualifications and language training for migrants
In South Ostrobothnia, the need to develop degree and language training for immigrants has been identified. A particular focus is seen on the availability and accessibility of education, taking into account different life situations and starting points. There is also a desire to diversify the content and delivery of other forms of education and training for immigrants.
- Developing cooperation between educational institutions and workplaces (e.g. guidance, mentoring and coaching)
The region has identified challenges in finding work placements for migrants during their education and training and as part of their studies. The Immigration Programme aims to improve interaction and mutual understanding between educational institutions and the workplaces. Immigrants need personalised guidance and counselling to support their training and post-training employment.
- Development of S2 (Finnish as a second language) teaching and Finnish-language education (e.g. forms and content of education)
Knowledge of the Finnish language is particularly important for integration and integration into working life. South Ostrobothnia sees a need to develop more varied forms of S2 teaching to enable immigrants with different backgrounds to develop their language skills.

Indicators:

- Finnish or Swedish language skills (kotoutumisen indikaattori 2018, 2025)
- Educational structure of the foreign-language population aged 15 and over by mother tongue and municipality of residence (Vipunen)
- Number of degree students whose mother tongue is a non-native language

Examples of possible actions:

- Increase language support and job training in the workplaces
- Launch a regional project to develop language training (diverse forms and content)
- Establish a broad steering group for the exchange of good practice on the training theme of the migration programme (including the use of the regional Talent Hub network)
- Provision of scholarships, e.g. for the completion of a general language qualification

4.3 Health, wellbeing and housing

Health, wellbeing and housing services are part of a smooth everyday life and integration. In South Ostrobothnia, there are challenges, for example, in accessibility of services in languages other than the national language. Access to services also requires mobility between the place of residence and the service points, and not all immigrants have equal opportunities for mobility.

South Ostrobothnia also has a lot of potential in how various leisure events and networks can contribute to integration. Sports clubs, associations and organisations organise a wide range of activities in which participation not only boosts integration but also increases the overall well-being of immigrants.

Objectives:

- Establishment of national guidance and counselling services (low-threshold, one-stop-shop services for employers and jobseekers)
Immigrants have identified a need for a low-threshold service that can provide both employment-related issues and services related to their daily lives more broadly. It is important to establish and consolidate the needed guidance and counselling services at county level, so that municipalities can meet their obligations under the renewed Integration Act.
- Support for the integration of families
Immigrants come from different backgrounds: some alone, some with their families. Family integration and dealing with family members in one go has been identified as an important part of a smooth integration process.
- Developing a comprehensive migrant coordinator service
There are significant differences between municipalities in terms of integration services. The region sees it as important to succeed in developing equal services for all immigrants, regardless of their municipality of origin. The coordinator function and its development play an important role here.
- Strengthening integration into leisure structures (e.g. hobbies, clubs and associations)
The public service system handles immigrants' affairs and integration as defined by law. To speed up integration, immigrants should be involved more quickly and more widely in activities such as clubs, associations and societies, through which they develop natural contacts with the rest of the population. At the same time, new members can be activated in the third sector.

Indicators:

- Families by nationality and family type (kotoutumisen tietokanta 2006-)
- Perceived state of health (kotoutumisen indikaattori 2018, 2025)

Examples of possible actions:

- Developing and improving accessibility of health services (e.g. languages, channels, interpretation assistance)
- Strengthening social and organisational activities and improving the conditions for organising events
- Strengthening activities to attract and settle spouses and relatives in countries of origin
- Improving the mobility of migrants through cooperation between the public sector and businesses

4.4 Two-way integration

In South Ostrobothnia, it has been recognised that the successful integration of immigrants and their integration into the local community requires a significant change of attitude also from the native population. South Ostrobothnia does not generally appear to the rest of Finland as an open and tolerant region.

The Immigration Programme wants to see integration as a two-way process. At least as important as the provision of services for migrants is the success of shaping local attitudes towards greater tolerance of diversity and acceptance of different cultures and languages.

Objectives:

- Accelerating integration and strengthening holding power
South Ostrobothnia suffers from significant internal migration losses in the foreign-language group. In other words, immigrants are not taking root in the region, but are moving elsewhere.
- Strengthening the role of organisations and parishes in integration
Integration is a cross-cutting issue. To support the successful integration and rooting of immigrants, a broader involvement of different organisations and churches is needed. The third sector as a whole could play a much more significant role in building a smooth everyday life for immigrants.

- Developing peer support activities for migrants

Peer support has also been identified as a very important and concrete support for immigrants in the integration process. The Immigration Programme aims to strengthen the peer support provided in the context of integration by immigrants who are rooted in the region.

Indicators:

- Participation in organised activities (kotoutumisen indikaattori 2018, 2025)
- THL inclusion indicator (survey conducted in the region)
- Sense of belonging (kotoutumisen indikaattori 2018, 2025)

Examples of possible actions:

- Strengthening positive communication on migration (e.g. news, social media, stories)
- Reinforcing municipal support for activities organised by the 3rd and 4th sectors
- Launching a regional inter-municipal integration competition

5 Implementing and monitoring the programme

The key role in the implementation of the South Ostrobothnia Immigration Programme is played by the actors in the region: companies, municipalities and joint municipal authorities, the region, educational institutions, organisations and associations, and all people living in South Ostrobothnia.

No specific funding has been earmarked for the implementation of the programme. Instead, the programme will be implemented with the resources available, either through project funding or self-financing by the participants.

The programme has defined indicators to monitor the progress of the content themes. The key starting point for defining the indicators was the availability of data and the automation of monitoring. Therefore, only a limited number of indicators are included that can be collected separately.

The MDI proposes that the monitoring of the implementation of the programme be entrusted to the executive board of the regional council. As a starting point, a report on the implementation of the programme and progress towards the objectives will be presented annually at a date to be agreed during the regular meetings. The officials of the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia are responsible for collecting and reporting the indicator data to the provincial government.

A key element in the implementation of the programme is to intensify the joint work of the actors in the region. The MDI therefore proposes that the programme monitoring group (the executive board of the regional council) should carry out an annual self-assessment of the implementation of the programme and the effectiveness of cooperation between the various organisations. Key stakeholders could be invited to discuss the implementation of the programme and cooperation: what works and what does not, what has been done and what has not. This would help to focus the joint efforts of the actors involved towards the objectives of the programme. At the same time, if necessary, refinements could be made to the objectives and implementation of the programme.

The table on the next page summarises the indicators, their baselines and objectives of the immigration programme.

Table 1. Indicators, starting points and objectives of the Immigration Programme

Content topic	Indicator	Starting point (year)	Objective
Employment	Unemployed foreigners	271 (unemployed, June 2022)	number decreases
	Number of foreign language employed persons	1972 (employed, 2020)	number increases
	Share of entrepreneurs among employed persons (in the group of foreign-language speakers)	202 (2020)	number increases
	Placement of educated non-nationals 1 year after graduation	Vocational schools 51,3 % SeAMK 32,2 % (2015–2020)	number increases
Education	Finnish or Swedish language skills	Average/Excellent 72,9 %	increasing share
	Educational structure of the foreign language speaking population aged 15 and over by language of mother tongue and municipality of residence	No post-primary education 2040 (2020)	number decreases
	Number of degree students whose mother tongue is a non-native language.	1 787 (2020)	number increases
Health, wellbeing and housing	Families by nationality and family type (= both adults or only adult in the family are foreign nationals AND the other adult in the family is a foreign national)	1 297 (2020)	number increases
	Experienced health status (= experienced good health)	62,2 % (2018)	increasing share
Two-way integration	Participation in organised activities (=participates at least once a month)	78,1 % (2018)	increasing share
	THL Inclusion Indicator (=10 statements)	Percentage of somewhat or fully agree	increasing share
	A sense of belonging (Finnish or dual identity)	73,0 % (2018)	increasing share



www.epliitto.fi

Kampusranta 9 C / PL 109 / 60101 Seinäjoki



ETELÄ-POHJANMAAN LIITTO

Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia