

Akava's proposal for a faster track to a permanent residence permit

Akava's primary message as the parliamentary elections approach is "Without expertise, Finland will come to a halt". A high level of competence and education are the cornerstones of economic growth and employment, but we can't discuss these without also touching on the topic of immigration. For example, the Bank of Finland (2025) has assessed Finland's long-term growth outlook as being weak without additional investments in, for example, foreign experts. An Akava Works report examining the need for work-related immigration (*Mihin työperäinen maahanmuutto kannattaa suunnata?*, 2022) states that an aging Finland needs work-based immigration for all occupational groups and sectors in order to maintain sufficient economic growth. According to ETLA Economic Research (Etla) (2026), Finland needs greater net immigration, because the shrinking of the working-age population will weaken the labour market, productivity and the sustainability of public finances. The Government budget proposal (2026), for example, also states that work-based immigration is important for Finland's economic growth and the safeguarding of services, and according to the sustainability calculations of the Ministry of Finance, an increase in work-related immigration of 10,000 people per year would reduce the financial pressure on public finances by approximately EUR 1.4 billion. The Economic Policy Council (VATT Institute for Economic Research, 2024) has stated that, as the population ages and the birth rate decreases, Finland will need immigrants in the coming years as well, and Etla's recent report (2026) says that without immigrants, the total number of employed persons in Finland would have already dropped significantly.

Although the need for immigration is obvious, the debate on it continues to be highly vulnerable to polarisation. As a result, the implemented immigration policy also tends to oscillate. At the same time, fewer than half of foreign experts would recommend Finland as a place of residence and increasingly fewer intend to stay permanently in Finland, as can be seen from the International Technology Experts 2025 study conducted by the Union of Professional Engineers in Finland and Academic Engineers and Architects in Finland, TEK.

Finland needs a stable and predictable immigration policy, so that people dare to build a life here. Akava's main parliamentary election objective with regard to immigration is to improve the integration of international experts in Finland. Akava emphasises that Finland must improve the conditions that enable immigrants to establish a stable life, such as psychological safety, by, for example, creating a faster route to a permanent residence permit. One means would be to implement a points system that assesses integration and competence potential.

Immigration as a tool for nurturing Finland's future growth

Different points systems are occasionally mentioned in the media and in politics, but upon closer examination, the details of the systems are often unclear. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment is currently working on a project with a special focus on models for immigrant scoring, as well as the related goals and impacts. The Ministry presented preliminary results to stakeholders during the spring, and the

report recognised that there is no single unified system of points but rather several possible implementations. The scoring can be carried out as a path to permanent residence, i.e. a system whose strategic objective is to select experts that support long-term population and economic growth. It might also be used to complement the path of work-based immigration, whereby the points could lead to a residence permit that allows the applicant to look for work instead of requiring them to have a pre-existing job offer. A third option would be a points-based system that is a formality, in the form of a checklist to establish eligibility for a work-based residence permit rather than serving as an official selection mechanism.

Akava believes that any possible points system that is taken into use in Finland should be built as a tool that supplements the current system and facilitates a faster path to permanent residence for applicants with the most potential in terms of integration and employment. In our opinion, the strategic importance of immigration should be viewed more broadly as an economic, demographic and regional policy instrument that can support Finland's long-term growth potential rather than simply as a labour market policy instrument. Finland's current employer-driven immigration model responds to the competence needs of a specific time, thereby leading to cyclical dependency and short-sightedness. In order to realise Finland's growth potential, the matter should be examined in terms of decades. For example, the Bank of Finland (2025) states that children who have moved to Finland as a result of a parent's work or studies will contribute to the development of human capital and the dependency ratio in future decades.

Akava believes that a path for permanent work-based immigration would facilitate, alongside the employer-driven approach, a Government steering approach, whose objectives would be to harness this long-term growth potential.

Permanence as incentive for integration

The aim of Akava's proposal is not to change the current system or its conditions, but to supplement it. We propose that, alongside the existing pathways for immigration (work and study-based migration, family relations, humanitarian immigration), a new path for permanent work-based immigration should be built.

A permanent residence permit would serve as an incentive for integration and permanence for the most potential international experts who move to Finland via this route and those who already reside here. A points-based system connected to permanence would balance immigration by shifting the focus from risk prevention to potential identification. The same idea has already partially been implemented in Finnish immigration policy through the creation of a pathway to permanent residence for international students who have completed a higher education degree in Finland (excluding those who have completed a first-cycle degree from a university of applied sciences) on the condition of language proficiency.

Currently, third-country nationals who have moved to Finland for work and then find themselves unemployed have only 3 or 6 months to become re-employed if they wish to stay in Finland. This is a short time to find a new job or to uproot from Finnish society. Uncertainty undermines the ability to make big decisions about life choices during employment. Is it worth spending my free time studying a language or making

efforts to build friendships? Do I want to raise my children here, buy a home or try my wings as an entrepreneur? Decisions would be easier if the continuation of residence in Finland was not dependent on a certain employer or economic cycles.

Creating uncertainty for immigrants is not a sensible growth policy. The objective of permanence would expand the strategic importance of immigration to long-term growth and Government steering. At the same time, it would support a fairer labour market, since the dependence of international experts on a particular employer would decrease, thereby also lowering the reporting threshold in cases of exploitation. Employers could also react more flexibly to economic cycles, as the responsibility for an employee's life and residence in Finland would no longer be placed on them. At the same time, administrative, repetitive bureaucracy surrounding permit applications would decrease and the number of international experts living in Finland would increase.

Table 1: Advantages of Akava's model

International expert	Employer	Society
Psychological safety promotes decisions that support the putting down of roots Encourages participation in the local community and language learning Motivates financial attachment, such as owning a home Supports innovation: freedom to take risks during a career, e.g. entrepreneurship Reduces dependence on a particular employer, lowers the reporting threshold for exploitation	One alternative solution to a long-term skills shortage → The points systems favour highly-skilled immigrants, so it would establish a permanent pool of experts in Finland Reduces repetitive administrative bureaucracy related to permit processes Reduces responsibility for major changes in the employee's life, thereby allowing a more flexible response to economic cycles when needed	Gives the State control and administrative discretion over immigration → Approaching immigration as an instrument for growth policy as well as an aspect of labour market policy Possibility to steer migration to areas outside of growth centres and to specific sectors When the model targets factors predicting employment and income levels, the net impact of immigration on public finances is likely to be more positive The model promotes a fairer labour market

Scoring competence and integration potential

The debate on points models is often stopped short by the view that scoring applicants is an inhumane way of approaching immigration. All immigration systems require choices to be made, but scoring makes the criteria public and predictable. Akava's scoring criteria would assess an applicant's competence and integration potential rather than their personal traits. Most of the scoring factors are things that a person can influence themselves. This creates an incentive for integration already



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when an applicant sets out to apply for this route of immigration. The criteria are transparent in order to provide an equal opportunity to gain points.

Table 2: Akava's scoring criteria

General criteria in systems	Criteria relevant to the Finnish labour market
LANGUAGE SKILLS (Finnish, Swedish)	A small language country should consider points for English
AGE (more points for younger people)	Additional points based on the average age of family members (family positivity as part of image work, early participation of children in the education system promotes integration)
DEGREE More points for higher degree levels	Additional points: - Separately specified sectors - Completed in Finland
WORK EXPERIENCE Additional points for work experience in growth sectors/labour shortage sectors/RDI	Additional points: - Work experience in Finland, including internships - Work experience that corresponds to degree - Verification of competence in the EU (e.g., Europass)
EMPLOYMENT OFFER OR CONTRACT - Responsible employers (e.g., within scope of collective agreements, no notifications to occupational safety and health authorities, no convictions for owners) - Consideration also for investors and (start-up) entrepreneurs	Additional points: - Location outside growth centres - Job offer that corresponds to competence - More points as the salary level increases - Permanent employment contract - Guaranteed language training provided by the employer
	Additional points for NETWORKS in Finland (e.g., family ties, volunteer work or positions of trust in Finland)

The criteria proposed by Akava include elements that are the same as those of many countries that utilise points systems, such as age, language skills, competence and possible job offer. In addition, the points system takes into account the special characteristics of the Finnish labour market, which promote (a) employment in Finland (e.g., language skills and prior work experience in Finland), (b) integration (e.g.,

networks), (c) prevention of work-related exploitation (e.g., type of employment, wage level and responsibility of the employer) and (d) long-term growth conditions in Finland (e.g., sector emphases, regional perspective and family members).

In addition to general conditions, the current conditions for a permanent residence permit, depending on the application path, include a period of residence (6 or 4 years), work history in Finland (2–3 years), a language skills requirement (satisfactory or particularly good B1-C1) and an annual income requirement. An applicant must meet the requirements for a continuous residence permit (A permit). In addition, the applicant or their spouse may only have received social assistance or unemployment benefits for a maximum of three months throughout their work history.

The Akava model has similar elements with the exception of the period of residence requirement. It should be possible to grant a permanent residence permit even as the first permit for the most potential applicants in order to enable them to commit to integration from their first day. For those living in Finland under other permits, the model would accelerate the acquisition of permanent status once the applicant demonstrates their commitment to integration. Unlike the current permit conditions, Akava's scoring criteria would be flexible: it would enable one to compensate for some sub-area of the criteria with another sub-area.

Support for establishing roots also comes from society and communities

Akava's points-based model is founded on the assessment of integration and employment potential, and the realisation of these probabilities requires support from society and the Finnish people in addition to the actions of the individual. The creation of assessment criteria is useless if we do not have the capacity to assess them. A permanent residence permit alone does not lead to integration without support from society and working life. Therefore, the likelihood of integration into Finland should be strengthened by improving, in particular, the possibilities to study languages and assess language skills. More needs to be done to connect the needs of working life and the skills of immigrants, for example, by creating more comprehensive criteria and processes for identifying and recognising skills acquired abroad, and by updating the classification of occupations. In addition, the general atmosphere affects the integration and employment of immigrants, so each individual person, employer, organisation, municipality and social actor can also contribute to the realisation of Finland's future growth potential through their own actions.

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