

# Survey on experiences of international members of Tampere universities



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## ORGANISED BY

INTERNATIONAL MEMBERS OF TAMPERE UNIVERSITIES (TATTE WORKGROUP)  
IN COLLABORATION WITH THE PROFESSOR UNION'S LOCAL CHAPTER

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# SUMMARY

This survey reveals significant issues that affect international members of Tampere universities—from questions around language to the practicalities of banking to anxieties about the precarious structure of academic careers. While not affecting all international members in the same way, it also highlights important accounts of exclusion, harassment, and discrimination that people face in their work and life in Finland—ranging from subtle forms of differential treatment to more overt kinds of discrimination and harassment.

The results of the survey indicate that language continues to be a fraught question for many international members. Respondents described ways that language barriers prevent them from equally participating in university life and governance, as well as how not speaking Finnish (well or at all) can be an obstacle to their own careers and broader lives in Finland. Many expressed desires to develop their Finnish language skills, but they also noted a lack of concrete support for language learning and discussed how the nature of short, fixed-term contracts and the constant competition for positions and funding could make it difficult to set aside the time and energy needed for language learning.

The survey also reveals significant differences among the experiences of international members. Racist forms of discrimination will impact some people far more than others—at a complicated intersection of race, gender, class, sexuality, language, and citizenship. Staff working on short, fixed-term contracts may have different concerns than those with more secure positions. Moving to and living in Finland as a citizen of another EU/EEA country has some practical differences compared to coming to Finland as a ‘3rd country national’. The list could go on. Thus, while we continue to see some practical utility in ‘international’ as a category, we also think it is vitally important to understand the diversity within this category.

It is also critically important to understand that the problems faced by international members are inextricable from the broader challenges facing Tampere universities and the university sector in general. The difficulties of short, fixed-term contracts are front and centre for many international members, particularly those, like many of our respondents, who are earlier in their careers—and this widely shared difficulty can have specific pernicious effects on international members as it can render precarious

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not only their careers but their right to reside in Finland. Similarly, questions around university democracy (or the lack thereof) continue to be vexing, but language barriers can further alienate many international members from these processes.

Above all, we think that the survey reveals a need to understand and to treat international members of Tampere universities as precisely that, as full members of the university community. While we take heart that some of the issues raised in the survey—regarding lack of access to information, for example—may be relatively straightforward to address with concrete, targeted measures, we recognize that many of the issues raised are more challenging. There is almost certainly no single solution to the thorny questions and practical difficulties of a multilingual university community, but it is clear that more thoughtful practices and resourced accommodations are needed. Similarly, many of the challenges and anxieties faced by internationals will not be solved as long as the precarious nature of academic careers remains unaddressed. Yet, these difficulties should not stop us from trying. This is necessarily the work of the entire university community, and we hope that the results of this survey can productively inform this work going forward.

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# SURVEY BACKGROUND

This report presents results from a survey on the experiences of international members of the Tampere Universities community in Tampere, Finland. The survey was organised by the [Tampere University Association of Researchers and Teachers \(TATTE\)](#) in cooperation with the [Tampere University chapter of the Finnish Union of University Professors](#). We also acknowledge and appreciate feedback on the survey design from the [HEI LIFE](#) project and the relevant coordination units at Tampere Universities. Tampere University (TAU) and Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) have granted permission for conducting the study.

The survey was designed to better understand the experiences of international researchers, teachers, and staff. In order to encompass the diversity of these experiences and colleagues affected by them, we promoted the survey for self-identifying *international members of Tampere universities*, understood broadly to include persons with international backgrounds affiliated with the universities, including researchers, teachers, and administrative staff (including doctoral researchers, whether or not they are currently employed by the university, but not including master's and bachelor's students, whose experiences we felt would require a different survey to meaningfully approach). We hope that the survey results can be used to develop actionable understandings of the positions and needs of international members that can inform policies and practices of the universities and improve how the interests of international members are represented by trade unions.

The survey contains 42 questions, out of which 10 were open-ended (see survey questions in the Appendix). The language of the survey was English. Participation in the survey was voluntary and based on principles of informed consent. A total of 74 completed responses were collected from October 4, 2021 to October 31, 2021. By "completed", we mean that the respondent reached the end of the survey and submitted their responses, but no questions within the survey were mandatory. In practice, this means that the number of responses to each question varies. Thus, reported percentages in this report refer to the number of responses to the individual question rather than the number of all survey participants.

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It is difficult to determine with certainty how representative our results are of the broader community of international researchers, teachers, and staff. In its own data reporting, Tampere University indicates that 702 staff members, or approximately 18% of its staff, are citizens of a country other than Finland. For TAMK, the number is 15 staff, or 2%. While a useful point of comparison, this citizenship-based count of university staff does not directly correspond to our broad definition of 'international member'. Nevertheless, we believe that the responses we gathered highlight significant challenges facing international members and raise important questions about their status and experiences within and beyond the universities.

Readers who wish to situate the survey results in the context of who our respondents were are advised to consult section 6, where we outline the data on participants' demographics and affiliations with the universities. It is important to note at the outset that only 3% (N 2) of the survey respondents are affiliated with TAMK, while 92% (N 68) replied that they are affiliated with TAU. Therefore, the higher representation of respondents affiliated with TAU should be taken into account when reading the survey results.

The survey results are organised into 6 sections. In the first section, we present the results of a series of questions about careers and working life at Tampere universities. In the second section, we discuss questions about professional participation in broader academic and non-academic institutions in Finland. In the third section, we highlight broader questions and problems of life and work in Finland. In the fourth section, we present the results of a series of open-ended questions about internationality and internationalization in the university. In the fifth section, we compile additional comments that were left by respondents. In the sixth and final section, we present data on the background of our respondents.

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SECTION 1:  
CAREER AND WORKING LIFE  
WITHIN THE UNIVERSITIES

**(Q11) As an international member of Tampere universities, I experience that:**

I can fully participate in decision-making processes (e.g. faculty council, university board, university/faculty working groups)



I can easily access information about collective agreements and workers' rights and protections



I have access to information about university's internal processes and decisions (e.g. development projects, strategies, actions plans, administrative changes)



I can easily access information about Finnish employment laws and regulations



I have access to professional development and training opportunities



I can fully participate in the activities of my immediate work community/team (e.g. unit, research group, teaching team, etc.)



I am treated fairly in relation to work agreement and negotiated tasks



I was supported at the beginning of my work at the university



I can fully participate in the activities of my faculty/school (e.g. faculty/school meetings, curriculum work, developing research or teaching collaboration)



My current work position is secure enough for me to be able to plan my career path



I have opportunities for career advancement



■ Strongly disagree   
 ■ Disagree   
 ■ Agree   
 ■ Strongly agree   
 ■ I do not have an opinion

Communication, access to information and rights, as well as participation are increasingly limited when considering wider organisational structures instead of the immediate working environment, such as a research group. On the other hand, the majority consider they were appropriately supported immediately after joining the community and that the work expectations are fairly fair and clear.

Importantly, 39 (53%) respondents disagreed with the statement that they can easily access information on Finnish work laws and regulations. Somewhat more positive situation is when it comes to the collective agreements and the universities' internal processes and decisions 39% N 29.



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There seems to be a strong, although not universally shared, sense of being an outsider either due to the language barriers or lacking intergration in the wider universities' communities. In particular, some international members reported not being able to perform their core duties appropriately or at all due to lack of information in English or even having to completely operate in Finnish. Lack of awareness or access to relevant information is also seen in, for example, finding funding opportunities. On the other hand, some had positive comments about their environment and inclusion, mostly pertaining to their immediate research surroundings.

**(Q12) Please reflect on your answers regarding the statements above. How does being an international member of Tampere universities affect your work?**

*"It doesn't. There is no visible evidence of a "status" as international member. Apart from some emails or other messages in Finnish which I still understand everything is prepared and presented in English or, in the case of electronic services, even in my mother tongue. Work communication is in English anyway due to the presence of international short-time group members."*

*"With my immediate work community I feel that there is no problem, we hold all our meetings smoothly and I feel the communication is clear. However, sometimes I don't feel comfortable enough to participate in meetings and activities of the university/faculty because my Finnish level is elementary and I don't want to force people to switch to English."*

*"I sometimes feel I do not belong to the wider TAU community, but it does not affect the quality of my work, it only affects my wellbeing."*

Quite often respondents assessed that their work conditions and expectations are fair and were positive about their communication and collaboration with immediate colleagues. Negative reflections most often focused on higher organisational structures and inclusion, support in long-term development and claiming own rights, cultural sensitivity, and appreciation of the potential of international members as members of the universities as a whole.

**(Q13) How do you experience the expectations of your work community? Do you feel they are fair, communicated clearly, and take into account the different background knowledge that international members of Tampere universities may possess? (e.g. the formal and informal expectations, assumed or explicitly stated, etc.)**

*"I was expecting clear communication with regard to office space and equipment. I have no idea right now whether I have any of them."*

*"They seem to be fair but when it comes to everyday practice they do not see how I do not understand or know things. They assume I do and that is not the case at all."*

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***"Expectations are low for international students. I don't think they are communicated early, or in a culturally appropriate manner."***

***"I think there are no expectation on me, if not finish the phd and leave."***

***"For doctoral students the funding and salaries are a black box. DC are forced to find information on their own and fight for their rights on their own, which is a particularly sensitive issue when you still have a close immediate supervisor while doing a PhD and not wanting to rock too many boats."***

From the respondents' reflections, there seems to be a very wide range and even polarised experiences on language practices. Moreover, international members working in administration, in particular, emphasised that internationalisation at the universities focuses on research & teaching staff but disregards administrative and leadership positions. Whereas some praise the increasing use of English or at least providing bilingual information, others see that language practices hinder their work and integration alike. Here, management bodies and teaching seem to be a particular issue. On multiple occasions, it was emphasised that efforts in language inclusion are sometimes made unnecessarily difficult. Finally, similarly as at other points of the survey, some participants expressed their negative feelings including shame for not being proficient in Finnish, while at the same time acknowledging that the institutional support and available time for learning the language often do not leave much room for improvement.

**(Q14) How do you experience the language practices in your work community (in relation, for example, to teaching, curriculum development, research, job supervision, administrative tasks, societal impact...)?**

***"Usually it is very good and geared towards English. However, there are numerous instances when translation to English is just made horribly and stupidly difficult. It does not have to be perfect, as long as the message is conveyed. I remember during the crisis times of the pandemic, there were mentions that the English version is always late because they need to proof the translations. Really? Really. We don't care."***

***"I feel comfortable and confident to communicate because everything is in English. I would like to follow the Finnish courses but I feel I need to focus more on my research."***

***"Administrative tasks are disproportionately affected by Finnish proficiency. As I said before, I think this is totally fair for a Finnish university, but the efforts to "internationalise" and bring in people from abroad to improve rating should also be reflected on the organisational level. (...)"***

***"As this is academic sector and I am in the international doctoral programme, Finnish language is not a barrier for me to learn, work or communicate with colleagues and University members."***

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**(Q15) What is your primary working language?**

a) Finnish    b) Swedish    c) English d) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**(Q15b & Q15c) Do you feel that your current position or future career prospects require you to learn Finnish?**

a) No    b) Yes    c) I am not sure

If "yes" or "I am not sure", please elaborate: \_\_\_\_\_

**(Q16) Do you feel that the university provides the time and resources needed to learn Finnish?**

a) Yes    b) No    c) I am not sure

The vast majority of participants, 86% N 64, reported primarily working in English, 5% N 4 in Finnish, and 3% N 2 in another language. In particular, staff working in the administration were more likely to choose Finnish. However, over half of the respondents were unsure (27% N 20) or positive (38% N 28) about being required to learn Finnish in order to progress in their careers.

Aspects identified as the most deciding were participation in administration and management, acquiring funding, and building personal and professional networks. Several respondents expressed their sentiments surrounding career progression and language and while some considered it positive and necessary when living in Finland, others expressed feelings of uncertainty due to short contracts leading to doubts about return on investments. In this sense, it was emphasised that the institutional support in developing language skills might be lacking. Indeed, the responses to Q16 echoed and pronounced these notes, with only 24% N 18 believing the support is adequate.

*"If I wanted to move into management role, yes. Also, if our leadership changes and decides it is all in Finnish, yes, but as explained above: how is one supposed to learn Finnish on top of more than 40 hr working week, with no courses for staff (eg in evenings, weekend at a steady pace etc)? Staff cannot be expected to learn Finnish without support structures (In Belgium duties are reduced for 3 years and language training is provided specifically to learn Dutch for example)."*

*"If I want to be a genuine part of the community"*

*"My career goal is obtaining a tenure-track position someday in Finland, which means I need to learn the language in the long run. And I am motivated to learn the language, but finding a good (and in person) course is not an easy task."*

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**(Q17) How do you feel about your position as an international member of Tampere universities?**

- a) Mostly positive (such as excited, proud, energetic etc.)
- b) Neutral
- c) Mostly negative (such as dissatisfied, disappointed, frustrated etc)

**(Q18) Do you ever feel frustrated as an international member of Tampere universities?**

- a) No
- b) Yes

**(Q18a) How often do you feel frustrated?**

- a) Rarely
- b) Sometimes
- c) Frequently

**Please share some experiences of feeling frustrated as an international member of Tampere universities: \_\_\_\_\_**

Only 9% N 7 of international members who replied to the survey feel negative about their position as an international member. The situation is somewhat less clear between feeling neutral (46% N 34) and positive (39% N 29). Regardless, even 65% N 48 reported feeling frustrated as an international member, with 16% N 12 stating the feeling is frequent, 39% N 29 sometimes, and 9% N 9 rarely. In the open-ended answers, they describe an array of aspects that elicit frustration. Some of these refer to various contextual problems outside of universities' control, such as the pandemic or personal issues, although some criticism was pointed towards the apparent blaming of "internationals" for bringing the virus to Finland, or for receiving information emails only in Finnish or with vague information. Moreover, the language barrier is seen as a tipping point in various situations for participation, engagement with the community, and career opportunities. Finally, some participants described situations when they directly or indirectly felt like they are perceived as outsiders or only temporary part of the community.

***"There are constant microaggressions, my skills and expertise are underestimated, I am often put "in a box". When it comes to advancing my career, I often feel like I have to work twice as hard than a Finnish employee to get to half where they will get."***

***"Apart from those above, although expected, and to a degree understandable, Finns like Finns and those similar to them. A lot of these hush hush stories in hiring processes and such. Seems like it is not purposeful discrimination or maliciousness, but damaging to the uni (and individuals) nonetheless."***

***"(...) I also sometimes feel (though I can't usually know for sure) that people sometimes just assume that my stay in Finland will be temporary in way that might limit their interest in working with me or that might cause them to assume that I would be uninterested in being involved in certain ways at the university."***

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SECTION 2:  
PROFESSIONAL PARTICIPATION IN  
BROADER ACADEMIC AND NON-  
ACADEMIC ORGANISATIONS IN  
FINLAND

**(Q19) As an international member of Tampere universities, I experience that:**

I can apply for grants and other kinds of project funding from Finnish organizations



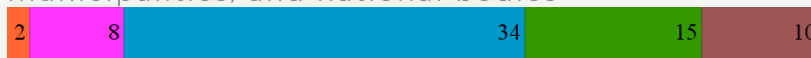
I can fully participate in all relevant Finnish scientific organizations and conferences



I have access to academic opportunities in Finland beyond my current university, as appropriate to my career stage (such as docentships, positions of trust in scientific societies, editorial roles, etc.)



I can build relations and networks with local organisations, companies, municipalities, and national bodies



■ Strongly disagree   
 ■ Disagree   
 ■ Agree   
 ■ Strongly agree   
 ■ I do not have an opinion

The provided reflections often considered (the lack of) building professional networks in Finland, both in academia and industry. A common issue is being contained to collaborating only with one's own research group or unit. Barriers again sometimes stem from the language but also the assumed unwillingness of the industry to interact with international members or in English. Related is the problem of securing external funding, whereas information on these sources of funding is not visible to everyone. Foundations might only accept applications in Finnish, or even be available only for Finnish citizens. However, others note that they feel supported and provided with sufficient information, and even that their opportunities have improved since joining Tampere universities. Interestingly, the questions of who is an "international member" and how "internationalism is built" were also considered.

**(Q20) Please reflect on your answers regarding the statements above. How does being an international member of Tampere universities affect your ability to build professional relations and obtain funding in Finland? Please elaborate or provide examples.**

*"There is a regular mailing about opportunities. Also, my supervisors always tell me something about funding opportunities. Thus, all this keeps my opportunities at high level."*

*"Positively affects these abilities. (I am a bit unsure: are researchers who are "born Finns", 'international members' intended in this survey, if they participate multinational research themes, or is the expression reserved to "non-Finns"?)"*

*"(...) I feel that to advance internationality, there also needs to be a focus on administrative and leadership staff. The experiences of international academic staff and international students would be much more positive if there would be other internationals in the administrative side working with them, understanding their needs and perspectives, etc. The university would be a more welcoming environment and it would be international from within."*

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The most prominently recognised broader aspects in which academic and non-academic organisations - but primarily Tampere universities - could provide support to international members were related to obtaining funding, lowering employment precariousness, improving language skills, and in facilitating international members' academic and societal outreach.

**(Q21) In what ways could the university, or other academic and non-academic organisations in Finland, support your efforts to make scientific and societal impacts in Finland?**

*"I don't know if something like this already exists, but maybe it would be a good idea to organize some kind of event to link international academics with local organisations and companies where they can meet each other and explore future collaborations. Similar to a job fair, but without the part of looking for a job."*

*"Have a better outward facing online presence and ideally a PR department that showcases researchers' work and 'sells it on' to local and national media. they are not going to find us - university needs to advocate."*

*"Translation services, but also serious language support- not 5 cr courses we take with undergrad students on top of our working hours."*

*"Allowing us to show what we already do. I have participated in international conferences representing TUNI and no one knows about it! I am an ambassador of Finland wherever I travel to, speaking about the country and its people... and no one knows about it. There are no spaces to project and share our experiences. Also, this should not only be about impacts in Finland. My societal impact is done abroad (international research) but enabled by Finnish institutions."*

Indeed, as was already outlined in answers to Q20, it would seem that the lack of networks and outreach presents a particular problem for international members. This is however perceived as something that the universities could relatively easily improve together with the members of the university community. Furthermore, it has been noted that the key for improvements is a wider understanding of problems international members face as well as how to ease them is in fact in wider internationalisation of the community.

*"So, in lack of a better wording, I would wish for Finland to be very active in terms of enabling and supporting citizens in their efforts to spend time abroad and even more, to "push" people to do so. In my opinion, this will counteract nationalistic and radical trends by increasing understanding for "other-than-Finnish" ways of life and also improve acceptance of crucial and imminent events such as climate change or refugee situations, not only for the refugees but also how the situation came to be. In other words, help people thinking outside the box."*

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## SECTION 3: LIVING IN FINLAND



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**(Q22) Do you have family (or other significant relationships) that accompanied you to Finland?**

a) Yes    b) No

**(Q22a) Has your family (or other significant relationships) experienced challenges, such as lack of job opportunities or difficulty adjusting to Finland?**

a) Yes    b) No

If "yes", please elaborate: \_\_\_\_\_

*"Siblings with degrees acquired in Finland are overlooked for employment."*

*"Language, type of available work, difficulty adjusting to Finland because most people in Finland despise her nationality."*

Of the 34 participants (46%) who have a significant relationship accompanying them to Finland, exactly half have reported that they experienced challenges in Finland. The single most common source of difficulties seems to be the language and finding jobs due to lack of language skills. Others are the overall job precariousness in academia and integration in cultural and working circumstances, but also racism.

**(Q23) While in Finland, have you or your family (or other significant relationships) experienced any of the following challenges? (multi-select)**

a) Difficulties with residence permit	15%	N 11
b) Difficulties with accommodation	12%	N 9
c) Difficulties with accessing banking services	29%	N 21
d) Problems with taxation	11%	N 8
e) Problems related to social security system	17%	N 12
f) Problems related to healthcare system	21%	N 15
g) Financial insecurity	29%	N 21

Apart from reiterating issues of employment, language, and integration, respondents reported a variety of challenges related to administrative matters. Although international HR has often been praised for their responsiveness and help, some noted that the information was missing or incomplete. Awareness and knowledge about bureaucratic processes, conditions, and timelines were particularly highlighted as important aspects of exercising rights and fulfilling obligations related to residing in Finland. These include a registered phone number, apartment, residence permit, tax card, ID, bank account, e-identification, and Kela card. A number of these and other issues that instigated feelings of insecurity were exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

**(Q23a-g) Please elaborate on the challenges you or your family (or other significant relationships) have experienced.**

*"Some private renters do not want to rent to 'foreigners'. The difficulties with banks are very common, well-documented (even Yle-Areena did a podcast on this recently), and it is surprising that the university does not seem to want to help with this at all."*

*"It is sometimes hard to get appropriate healthcare support without speaking Finnish. Sometimes it is even impossible. It is a big problem."*

*"My residence permit application was denied based on not having enough money in June 2020. India was having a strict lockdown which prevented my money to be assembled in one place in my bank account. (...)"*

*"It takes too long time to get an appointment with a bank. I have had problems getting first salary, and have to use my credit card to survive. I have also now problems with parking my car, it is very much info in Finnish, so it is hard to figure out."*

**(Q24) When you first moved to Finland, were you able to establish an official 'municipality of residence'?**

- |                  |     |      |
|------------------|-----|------|
| a) Yes           | 87% | N 64 |
| b) No            | 8%  | N 6  |
| c) I am not sure | 4%  | N 3  |

**(Q24b & Q24c) Do you currently have an official municipality of residence in Finland?**

- |                  |     |     |
|------------------|-----|-----|
| a) Yes           | 29% | N 2 |
| b) No            | 42% | N 3 |
| c) I am not sure | 29% | N 2 |

**(Q25) When you first moved to Finland, were you eligible for the full range of coverages and services provided by KELA?**

- |                  |     |      |
|------------------|-----|------|
| a) Yes           | 47% | N 34 |
| b) No            | 33% | N 24 |
| c) I am not sure | 19% | N 14 |

**(Q25b & Q25c) Are you currently eligible for the full range of coverages and services provided by KELA?**

- |                  |     |      |
|------------------|-----|------|
| a) Yes           | 62% | N 23 |
| b) No            | 11% | N 4  |
| c) I am not sure | 27% | N 10 |

**(Q26) Are you a member of an unemployment fund granting you access to earnings-related benefits if you become unemployed?**

- |                  |     |      |
|------------------|-----|------|
| a) Yes           | 58% | N 43 |
| b) No            | 24% | N 18 |
| c) I am not sure | 18% | N 13 |

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**(Q26b) What is the reason for you not to participate in an unemployment fund granting access to earnings-related benefit?**

a) I am not interested in this benefit	0%	N 0
b) It is too expensive/I cannot afford it	0%	N 0
c) I do not know enough about it	48%	N 13
d) I do not think I am eligible for the benefit	22%	N 6
e) I do not know if I can take advantage of the benefit	19%	N 5
f) Other _____	11%	N 3

Surprisingly, almost a fifth of the respondents (18% N 13) are not sure whether they are a member of an unemployment fund which indicates that their knowledge and understanding of how the system functions are lacking. Interestingly, none of the respondents who are not members of an unemployment fund marked that they are not interested in this benefit or that it is too expensive. However, reasons for not being a member include working from outside of Finland, receiving financing from a private source, and not having gainful employment since arrival to Finland.

**(Q27) While in Finland, have you experienced (in work or in everyday life)...? (multi-select question)**

a) Language barriers	82%	N 61
b) Feeling of being an outsider	68%	N 50
c) Discrimination and/or harassment	35%	N 26

**(Q27a-c) Please elaborate on the challenges you have faced.**

Challenges described by the participants span across different institutional levels as well as public and social life. Language barriers were again featured prominently in the answers, albeit not always due to institutional practices and systemic exclusion but reflecting individuals' efforts to participate in activities in Finnish. It is worrying that a significant number of participants have experienced some form of discrimination at the workplace and/or in the public. The respondents reported experiencing at least one of the following: microaggressions, racism, harassment and even assault.

***"People have shouted in the street to speak Finnish, and also shouted to go back home. Using another language in public will often cause negative reactions. My ethnicity, and the ethnicity of other international staff has also been ridiculed multiple times by Finnish colleagues in superior positions. There is a feeling that nothing can be done about this and international colleagues will just mostly accept this as part of living in Finland."***

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*"People in Finland are fairly racist towards non-Fins. I have been sworn at in the streets, abused in public and have even been assaulted since being here.*

*My partner is constantly overlooked for work opportunities that they are more than qualified for as the employers would prefer a Finnish employee. This includes even low level jobs such as cleaning. There are also native Fins at Tampere who are fairly rude to International staff and refuse to interact, even saying that technical concepts in my field are too difficult to explain in English and I wouldn't understand."*

*"When one doesn't have access to basic services (like banking or transport card or healthcare) one feels like a second-class citizen. (...)"*

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SECTION 4:  
INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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The question of who is or should be considered an *international member* is one of the central ones in this survey. Even if we recognise that there is a group that might have different experiences of working at the universities it is still problematic to consider it as homogeneous and in opposition to "non-internationals". The findings here point to a need for an open and pluralistic perspective.

When respondents were asked about their views, the most commonly mentioned criteria were nationality, language, ethnicity, education and/or work outside of Finland, and perspectives into different cultures and ways of working. However, some participants further problematised the attempts at conceptualisation and "counting" of the international members. Some pointed out that Finnish-born members can still be international members, and vice versa.

Overall, there seems to be a need for more careful consideration of different populations that could be considered as *international members*, their overlaps, and the resulting experiences.

**(Q28) In this survey, we use the term 'international members of Tampere universities' in a broad sense. In what sense do you consider yourself an international? In what ways should the university measure/count who is international (e.g. nationality, working language, something else)?**

***"I'm neither a Finn nor international. I'm nobody; myself. The concept of "international members" is problematic (if not slightly offensive), as it assumes a clean-cut separation, treating every non-Finn as the same. Here's a question you should reflect on: Why do you think the university should measure/count who is international?"***

***"Local - national - international? As a born-Finnish researcher I have felt (participated) international (teams) since 1990s; on the other hand, I feel local (Tampere researcher) - perhaps not so often "national" (Finnish). In some forums I consider myself being "more national" but usually also "local" (e.g., researcher representative of "Tampere tradition" - as opposed to Helsinki). - "Internationalism" takes place in contexts which are beyond "solely national"?"***

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A prominent umbrella suggestion for improving the international aspects of the university working environment was to encourage, support, and facilitate networking and collaboration. This refers both to the "local" context of the universities themselves and wider Finnish academia, as well as fostering wider connections brought by the international members. Some respondents emphasised the internationalisation of managing bodies, promoting true inclusion and agency in the universities' structures. A number of respondents further emphasised developing the soft skills and integration of international and non-international members as the way where everyone would benefit the most.

**(Q29) In what ways could international members of Tampere universities (individually and/or jointly) improve the international aspects of the university working environment?**

*"By actively participating and being visible in their faculty and university meetings and events. By expressing their concerns about practices that exclude international staff members and together with management devising more inclusive practices at the university"*

*"International members could be stimulated to bridge connections between students in different countries, plan joint international courses in different languages, give insights beyond the national context to issues researched as "Finnish issues"."*

*"Tight cooperation is needed between international and non-international members. I think seeing the two clusters separate does not work."*

*"It's not up to non-Finns to change Finland. It's up to Finns, if they want to be serious and honest about the whole thing."*

*"International staff can always make suggestions about how the university is run, what kinds of courses to teach, and apply for grants outside of merely the limited Finnish sphere. But this is difficult when these situations are rejected by supervisors, coupled with the problem of international staff being on limited contract positions. There is little point in investing time and energy improving Tampere university if your contract is up and you are leaving anyways."*

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Participants' opinions on whether they felt included in the internationalisation agenda were highly polarised. A part of the respondents reported being quite satisfied with the support and initiatives that the universities support, while others reported that they were not aware of such an agenda nor activities and that they do not feel seen or heard at all. Furthermore, there is a strong sense that there either is not a common understanding of what is *internationalisation*, or that it is not meaningful and misrepresents international members as is convenient at the time. Moreover, a strong emphasis was again put on the lack of international members in managing structures of the universities and bodies that work on the internationalisation issue specifically.

**(Q30) To what extent do you feel included in the internationalisation agenda of the university? Have you felt addressed by or included in existing university programmes for international staff?**

*"I feel addressed by those programs, but I feel like a token "international figure" while the university continues work in Finnish."*

*"I have generally felt fairly supported by international HR, particularly when I first arrived in Finland. Beyond that very important point, I'm not sure what consistent programmes there are for international staff."*

*"I feel that there is no transparent understanding of internationalization means, and what actions should be developed or enhanced. When I hear people raising the issue of international staff in the framework of internationalization , leadership always seems to be caught in surprise, as if there are other priority discussions being held, with a certain frame of internationalization, and that is not explicitly communicated. Feels that speaking of possibilities of internationalization sparking from international staff is a waste of time."*

When asked about the ways in which the university could improve the position of its international members, many respondents have primarily reiterated various issues and suggestions they reflected on in previous questions in the survey. Language-wise, this primarily entails providing support for learning Finnish, translation services for publication in national venues, and being as open as possible to working in English. However, there seems to be a deep need for recognising international members in all their diversity and potential for the universities and wider society. At the same time, it would be necessary to map, recognise, as well as address specific obstacles and harassment they might face in Finland.



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(Q31) In what ways could the university improve the position of its international members?

*"Perhaps by doing more to celebrate the diversity among the international members."*

*"Include them in decision-making process."*

*"There is a deeply embedded nationalism in Finland. The university does nothing to critique or counter this."*

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**SECTION 5:  
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

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(Q32) If you have anything else you would like to share about your experiences, please do so here.

*"Please, hire more internationals! We are also great workers. Many of us can speak very good Finnish and very good English. We actually are sometimes even more hardworking than the Finns. We always do our super best and never disappoint you, because while other Finns can easily change working places, for us it is very hard to find a new one. So the stakes are very high for us."*

*"I found the working environment is relaxed and comfortable and I did not face any harassment or distinguish because I am not Finnish, I share the work area and the university facilities equally with everybody else. Tampere University is nice and peaceful.*

*I think opening more research funding channels and include foreign nationalities in Finnish funding agencies and organizations will increase the opportunity for the researchers to find jobs and further their work and contribute more to the Finnish scientific community."*

*"Being an academic in Finland for many I understood that international collaboration with other professionals and academics worldwide has been more difficult than in other countries. This is so because they (the potential collaborators) often think that there is little or no interest in international collaboration in Finland due to the low numbers of foreigners and other minority (e.g. gender) groups almost in every work place."*

*"(...) For example, I was not aware I am entitled to COVID-19 vaccination (...)"*

*"No, thank you! If any ideas or requests about FIN language I think we have to be super careful what is proposed and demanded as it takes years and so much time and energy and many research staff simply would not have that time ( how is one supposed to learn a language when working 10-12 hr days and at weekends?) It is just not possible, so let's also not demand this of our staff. )"*

*"I feel that my potential is not used completely. It is hard to be unused having chances to do more for the host university and the country both during stay in Finland and continue working on distant mode."*

*"If the research manuscript blueprint exists and its ideas are good (enough), it is quite likely that "internationalization" by asking non-national experts to join the paper will succeed. This should not mean "formalistic" beyond-national cooperation, but it should also bring valuable fresh ideas. Connections may facilitate future cooperation opportunities, for example, in making project funding applications. Someone has to make the first step."*

*"I love Finland. And Fins too. You do many things very well. But the way towards realisation of your own bias towards mahanmuuttajat, if still long. Good luck though!"*

*"Felt too sad about the situation to continue with the survey. Sorry, I tried."*

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**SECTION 6:  
BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE  
RESPONDENTS**

As part of the survey, we collected participants' basic demographic information as well as their affiliation and formal status at the universities. Due to the difficulties of measuring the total number of 'international members' of the universities, we again caution against reading this data as statistically representative of a broader population. Nevertheless, we believe the obtained sample of N 74 shows a few clear trends which, in conjunction with the qualitative data, raise important questions about the population, their status, and experiences.

**(Q1)** Which institution(s) are you affiliated with? (multi-select question)

a) Tampere University (TAU)	97%	N 68
b) Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK)	3%	N 2

**(Q1a)** Which faculty/department are you affiliated with within Tampere University? (multi-select question)

a) Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences (ITC)	34%	N 24
b) Faculty of Management and Business (MAB)	11%	N 8
c) Faculty of Education and Culture (EDU)	16%	N 11
d) Faculty of Medicine and Health Technology (MET)	3%	N 2
e) Faculty of Built Environment (BEN)	3%	N 2
f) Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences (ENS)	6%	N 4
g) Faculty of Social Sciences (SOC)	24%	N 17
h) Other _____	3%	N 2

Both administration and research & teaching staff were welcome to participate. In terms of their academic career (Q2a), about half of the respondents reported being in Stage I (N 34 52%), whereas about a quarter identified belonging to Stage II (N 10 15%) or Stage III (N 11 17%). Only six respondents responded as being in Stage IV (9%). From the administrative side, a total of five colleagues participated (8%).

**(Q2) Which option best describes the primary focus of your work?**

a) Teaching/research    b) Administration    c) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**(Q2a) How would you define your current career stage?**

- a) Stage 1 (e.g. doctoral researcher, project researcher, research assistant)
- b) Stage 2 (e.g. postdoctoral researcher)
- c) Stage 3 (e.g. university researcher, university lecturer)
- d) Stage 4 (e.g. professor, research director)

Regarding their current work situation and/or university affiliation, the vast majority reported having an employment contract with the universities and primarily as a doctoral researcher/student. The latter is not unexpected considering the high prominence of Stage I researchers who participated.

**(Q3) What is your current work situation or affiliation with the university? (multi-select question)**

a) Employment contract with the university	68%	N 50
b) Employment contract outside university	1%	N 1
c) Doctoral researcher/student	32%	N 23
d) Visiting researcher / teacher / professor at the university	4%	N 3
e) Personal grant	5%	N 4
f) Project grant	4%	N 3
g) Unemployed	4%	N 3
h) Other _____	1%	N 1

**(Q3a & Q3b) Which option(s) best describe the type of your employment contract (e.g. fixed-term full-time contract)?**

- a) open-ended/permanent    b) fixed-term    c) full-time
- d) part-time    e) hourly based

**(Q3c) Are you pursuing your doctoral studies**

- a) full time    b) part-time

**(Q3d) What is the total length of your current visit?**

years \_\_\_\_ months \_\_\_\_

**(Q3e & Q3f) What is the total length of your current grant?**

years \_\_\_\_ months \_\_\_\_

**Do you have a resource agreement with the university?**

- a) Yes - regular    b) Yes - Extended    c) No

**(Q3g) How long have you been unemployed?**

years \_\_\_\_ months \_\_\_\_

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Only seven respondents reported working with a support of a grant (4 with a personal grant and 3 with a project grant). Four grant-funded researchers have either a regular or extended resource agreement with the university. The duration of the project grants was approximately double that of personal grants.

The most frequent type of contract with the universities was reported as fixed-term (65% N 31) and ranging from 3 months to 5 years. The remaining 35% (N 17) held an open-ended contract. Only one respondent reported holding a contract outside of universities, with it being a full-time fixed-term one. A total of 20 respondents (87%) reported pursuing doctoral studies full time. Three respondents are currently unemployed with an unemployment period ranging from 34 to 76 months. Three respondents are in a position of a visiting researcher, teacher or professor.

The results related to grant-funded researchers cannot be interpreted without official statistics on the whole population. However, the number of survey respondents who work with a support of a grant is rather low considering the fact that we have a high representation of doctoral researchers who are more likely to work with a support of a grant (Torkkola & Tyni, 2020). Similarly, according to the internal statistics of the Tampere universities, at least 30% of doctoral researchers work with a support of a grant (TUNI reports, accessed in April 2022). Thus, our results raise the question of whether there are indeed so few international grant-funded researchers in the whole population. A possible explanation could be that they do not consider themselves members of the university community and thus have not responded to the survey, or that the question was misunderstood.

Torkkola, S., & Tyni, P. (2020). Sisällä ja ulkona. Kyselytutkimus Tampereen yliopistossa apurahalla tutkimusta tekeville.

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**(Q4) Which option best characterizes your level of proficiency with the Finnish language?**

a) None	23%	N 17
b) Beginner or elementary language learner (A1 or A2)	39%	N 29
c) Intermediate proficiency with independent language use (B1 or B2)	14%	N 10
d) Functionally or fully proficient (C1 or C2)	19%	N 14

**(Q5) Have you worked as an international researcher or teacher somewhere other than Finland?**

- a) Yes b) No  
If "yes", please elaborate: \_\_\_\_\_

More than half (62% N 46) of the respondents assess their proficiency with the Finnish language to be on the beginner's level or none. Furthermore, approximately 42% (N 31) of the respondents have worked as a researcher or teacher outside of Finland. They reported working as teaching assistants, doctoral students, and postdoctoral researchers in a number of European countries as well as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States of America. Over half of the respondents have lived in Finland for at least three years.

**(Q6) How long have you lived in Finland in total?**

Respondents' reported lengths of stay in Finland varied greatly. With a minimum of 4 weeks and a maximum of 57 years, the average length of stay was 6.8 years. Twenty and one participants (30%) have lived in Finland between 5 and 10 years, and twelve for over 10 years (17%).

Somewhat over one quarter of our respondents hold a Type A residence permit, which is also granted on the basis of conducting doctoral research in Finland. 29 respondents reported being a citizen of Finland or another country that does not require a residence permit to live in Finland. It is worth noting that this encompasses citizens of any and all member states of the European Union.

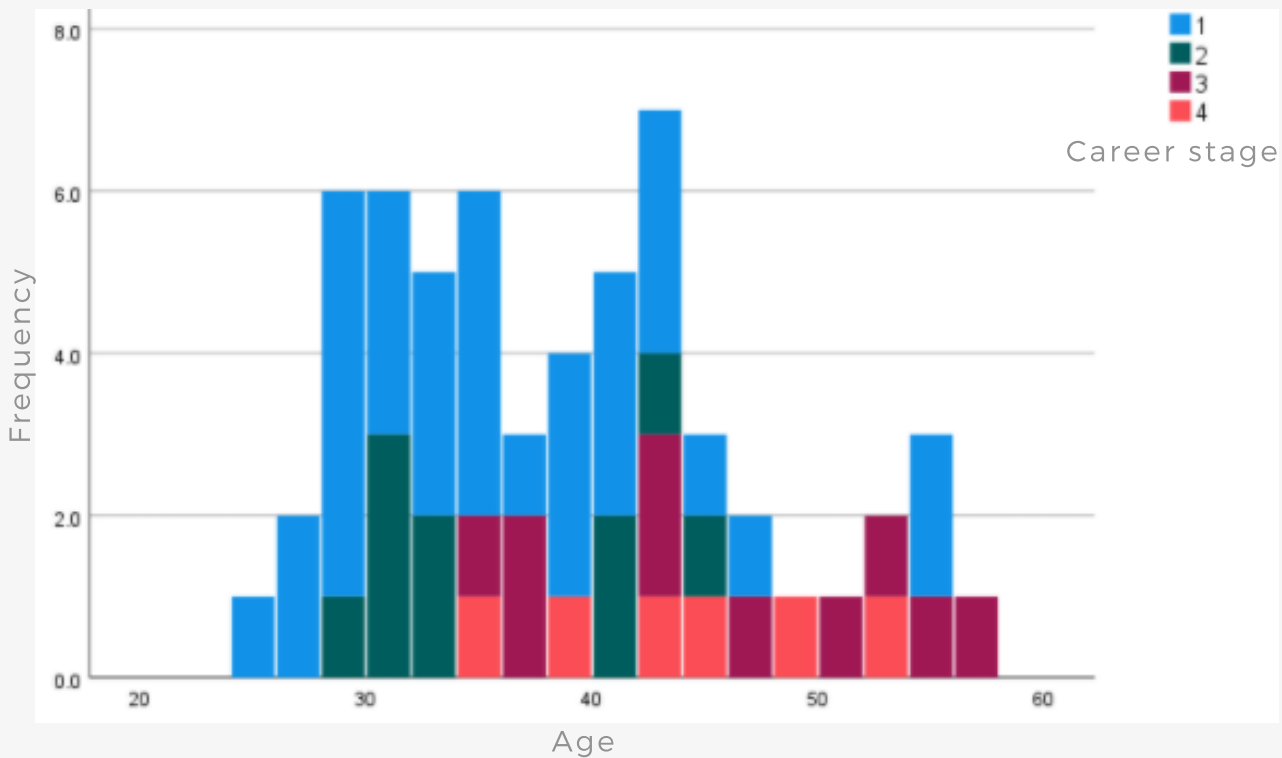
**(Q7) Which option best describes the current basis of your residence in Finland?**

a) Citizen of Finland or other country not requiring a residence permit to live in Finland	39%	N 29
b) Temporary residence permit (Type B)	5%	N 4
c) Continuous residence permit (Type A)	27%	N 20
d) Permanent residence permit (Type P)	16%	N 12
e) 'Brexit' permit	1%	N 1
f) Other kind of permit or visa	1%	N 1
g) Prefer not to answer	5%	N 4



**(Q8) What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_**

Interestingly, both the mean and median age was placed at approximately 38 years, with a significant prominence of those between 25 and 35 of age. This appears to be due to the majority of early career researchers belonging to that age group.



**(Q9) What gender do you identify with? \_\_\_\_\_**

**(Q10) Do you have significant caring responsibilities (e.g. children, older parents, other dependents)?**

a) Yes    b) No

With 43 respondents, the gender distribution strongly favours those identifying as one of the following: female, woman, female-ish, or female (non-binary), whereas 16 identified as male.

Taking into account their immediate social and domestic circumstances, a significant number reported having some caring responsibilities, such as children or older parents (46% N 34).

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## APPENDIX: SURVEY QUESTIONS

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## CAREER AND WORKING LIFE WITHIN THE UNIVERSITIES

(Q11) As an international member of Tampere universities, I experience that\*:

- a) I have opportunities for career advancement
- b) My current work position is secure enough for me to be able to plan my career path
- c) I can fully participate in the activities of my faculty/school (e.g. faculty/school meetings, curriculum work, developing research or teaching collaboration)
- d) I was supported at the beginning of my work at the university
- e) I am treated fairly in relation to work agreement and negotiated tasks
- f) I can fully participate in the activities of my immediate work community/team (e.g. unit, research group, teaching team, etc.)
- g) I have access to professional development and training opportunities
- h) I can easily access information about Finnish employment laws and regulations
- i) I have access to information about university's internal processes and decisions (e.g. development projects, strategies, actions plans, administrative changes)
- j) I can easily access information about collective agreements and workers' rights and protections
- k) I can fully participate in decision-making processes (e.g. faculty council, university board, university/faculty working groups)

\* Statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale with the following anchors: "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Agree", "Strongly agree", and "I do not have an opinion"

(Q12) Please reflect on your answers regarding the statements above. How does being an international member of Tampere universities affect your work? \_\_\_\_\_

(Q13) How do you experience the expectations of your work community? Do you feel they are fair, communicated clearly, and take into account the different background knowledge that international members of Tampere universities may possess? (e.g. the formal and informal expectations, assumed or explicitly stated, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

(Q14) How do you experience the language practices in your work community (in relation, for example, to teaching, curriculum development, research, job supervision, administrative tasks, societal impact...)? \_\_\_\_\_

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(Q15) What is your primary working language?

- a) Finnish    b) Swedish    c) English    d) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

(Q15b & Q15c) Do you feel that your current position or future career prospects require you to learn Finnish?

- a) No    b) Yes    c) I am not sure

If "yes" or "I am not sure", please elaborate: \_\_\_\_\_

(Q16) Do you feel that the university provides the time and resources needed to learn Finnish?

- a) Yes    b) No    c) I am not sure

(Q17) How do you feel about your position as an international member of Tampere universities?

- a) Mostly positive (such as excited, proud, energetic etc.)  
b) Neutral  
c) Mostly negative (such as dissatisfied, disappointed, frustrated etc.)

(Q18) Do you ever feel frustrated as an international member of Tampere universities?

- a) No    b) Yes

(Q18a) How often do you feel frustrated?

- a) Rarely    b) Sometimes    c) Frequently

Please share some experiences of feeling frustrated as an international member of Tampere universities: \_\_\_\_\_

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## PROFESSIONAL PARTICIPATION IN BROADER ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC ORGANISATIONS IN FINLAND

(Q19) As an international member of Tampere universities, I experience that\*:

- a) I can apply for grants and other kinds of project funding from Finnish organizations
- b) I can fully participate in all relevant Finnish scientific organizations and conferences
- c) I have access to academic opportunities in Finland beyond my current university, as appropriate to my career stage (such as docentships, positions of trust in scientific societies, editorial roles, etc.)
- d) I can build relations and networks with local organisations, companies, municipalities, and national bodies

\* Statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale with the following anchors: "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Agree", "Strongly agree", and "I do not have an opinion"

(Q20) Please reflect on your answers regarding the statements above. How does being an international member of Tampere universities affect your ability to build professional relations and obtain funding in Finland? Please elaborate or provide examples. \_\_\_\_\_

(Q21) In what ways could the university, or other academic and non-academic organisations in Finland, support your efforts to make scientific and societal impacts in Finland? \_\_\_\_\_

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## LIVING IN FINLAND

(Q22) Do you have family (or other significant relationships) that accompanied you to Finland?

- a) Yes    b) No

(Q22a) Has your family (or other significant relationships) experienced challenges, such as lack of job opportunities or difficulty adjusting to Finland?

- a) Yes    b) No

If "yes", please elaborate: \_\_\_\_\_

(Q23) While in Finland, have you or your family (or other significant relationships) experienced any of the following challenges?

- a) Difficulties with residence permit
- b) Difficulties with accommodation
- c) Difficulties with accessing banking services
- d) Problems with taxation
- e) Problems related to social security system
- f) Problems related to healthcare system
- g) Financial insecurity

(Q23a-g) Please elaborate on the challenges you or your family (or other significant relationships) have experienced: \_\_\_\_\_

(Q24) When you first moved to Finland, were you able to establish an official 'municipality of residence'?

- a) Yes    b) No    c) I am not sure

(Q24b & Q24c) Do you currently have an official municipality of residence in Finland?

- a) Yes    b) No    c) I am not sure

(Q25) When you first moved to Finland, were you eligible for the full range of coverages and services provided by KELA?

- a) Yes    b) No    c) I am not sure

(Q25b & Q25c) Are you currently eligible for the full range of coverages and services provided by KELA?

- a) Yes    b) No    c) I am not sure

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## LIVING IN FINLAND

(Q26) Are you a member of an unemployment fund granting you access to earnings-related benefits if you become unemployed?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) I am not sure

(Q26b) What is the reason for you not to participate in an unemployment fund granting access to earnings-related benefit?

- a) I am not interested in this benefit
- b) It is too expensive/I cannot afford it
- c) I do not know enough about it
- d) I do not think I am eligible for the benefit
- e) I do not know if I can take advantage of the benefit
- f) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

(Q27) While in Finland, have you experienced (in work or in everyday life)...?

- a) Language barriers
- b) Feeling of being an outsider
- c) Discrimination and/or harassment

(Q27a-c) Please elaborate on the challenges you have faced: \_\_\_\_\_

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## INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

(Q28) In this survey, we use the term 'international members of Tampere universities' in a broad sense. In what sense do you consider yourself an international? In what ways should the university measure/count who is international (e.g. nationality, working language, something else)?

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(Q29) In what ways could international members of Tampere universities (individually and/or jointly) improve the international aspects of the university working environment?

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(Q30) To what extent do you feel included in the internationalisation agenda of the university? Have you felt addressed by or included in existing university programmes for international staff?

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(Q31) In what ways could the university improve the position of its international members?

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

(Q32) If you have anything else you would like to share about your experiences, please do so here. \_\_\_\_\_



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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

(Q1) Which institution(s) are you affiliated with?

- a) Tampere University (TAU)
- b) Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK)

(Q1a) Which faculty/department are you affiliated with within Tampere University?

- a) Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences (ITC)
- b) Faculty of Management and Business (MAB)
- c) Faculty of Education and Culture (EDU)
- d) Faculty of Medicine and Health Technology (MET)
- e) Faculty of Built Environment (BEN)
- f) Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences (ENS)
- g) Faculty of Social Sciences (SOC)
- h) Other \_\_\_\_\_

(Q2) Which option best describes the primary focus of your work?

- a) Teaching/research b) Administration c) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

(Q2a) How would you define your current career stage?

- a) Stage 1 (e.g. doctoral researcher, project researcher, research assistant)
- b) Stage 2 (e.g. postdoctoral researcher)
- c) Stage 3 (e.g. university researcher, university lecturer)
- d) Stage 4 (e.g. professor, research director)

(Q3a & Q3b) Which option(s) best describe the type of your employment contract (e.g. fixed-term full-time contract)?

- a) open-ended/permanent b) fixed-term c) full-time
- d) part-time e) hourly based

(Q3c) Are you pursuing your doctoral studies

- a) full-time b) part-time

(Q3d) What is the total length of your current visit?

- a) years \_\_\_\_ b) months \_\_\_\_

(Q3e & Q3f) What is the total length of your current grant?

- a) years \_\_\_\_ b) months \_\_\_\_

Do you have a resource agreement with the university?

- a) Yes - regular b) Yes - Extended c) No

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(Q3g) How long have you been unemployed?

a) years \_\_\_\_ b) months \_\_\_\_

(Q4) Which option best characterizes your level of proficiency with the Finnish language?

a) None

b) Beginner or elementary language learner (A1 or A2)

c) Intermediate proficiency with independent language use  
(B1 or B2)

d) Functionally or fully proficient (C1 or C2)

(Q5) Have you worked as an international researcher or teacher somewhere other than Finland?

a) Yes b) No

If "yes", please elaborate: \_\_\_\_\_

(Q6) How long have you lived in Finland in total? \_\_\_\_\_

(Q7) Which option best describes the current basis of your residence in Finland?

a) Citizen of Finland or other country not requiring a residence permit to live in Finland

b) Temporary residence permit (Type B)

c) Continuous residence permit (Type A)

d) Permanent residence permit (Type P)

e) 'Brexit' permit

f) Other kind of permit or visa

g) Prefer not to answer

(Q9) What gender do you identify with? \_\_\_\_\_

(Q10) Do you have significant caring responsibilities (e.g. children, older parents, other dependents)?

a) Yes b) No

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