

## Growing internationalisation calls for a skilled workforce

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The goal of the Chambers of Commerce is to build a free, prosperous, open and competitive Finland. In the activities of the Lapland Chamber of Commerce, this vision materialises in supporting the Nordic success, building networks, active influencing, and being an expert in Nordic business life.

During the coronavirus pandemic, Lapland has been able to strengthen its position in international exports. Lapland is a central region in the Arctic and a logistics hub in the Barents region. Lapland is the fifth largest export region in Finland, with the value of goods exported from Lapland being EUR 3.4 billion in 2020.

Businesses experience positive development in Lapland. Lapland has invested and is investing significantly in the forest, wood processing, mining and metal industries. The total revenue of industrial sectors in Lapland was EUR 9.5 billion (in 2019), accounting for two thirds of the total revenue of companies. Metal processing is the single largest sector in Lapland with a revenue of EUR 4.6 billion. The size of the forest sector is EUR 1.5 billion.

Lapland is the driver of international travel in Finland. Before the pandemic (in 2019), more than 3.1 million international overnight stays were registered in Lapland. The recovery of tourism from the coronavirus pandemic is looking promising. Lapland is expecting more than 140,000 travellers by the end of 2021. To help tourism recover, the region also needs competence and workforce.

Business sectors have a positive outlook: significant investment projects are underway in the region, such as Metsä Fibre's major investment in Kemi. Currently operating mines are developing their activities, and investigations for new mining projects are making good

progress. Lapland is a diverse region, with its various strengths helping the whole region to develop.

However, post-pandemic growth threatens to remain at halfway without appropriate competence. The Central Chamber of Commerce conducted a survey for its member companies in August 2021. More than half of the Lapland-based companies that responded to the survey said that they are looking for moderate growth, while one fifth of all respondents are even seeking significant growth. At the same time, two thirds responded that the shortage of a competent workforce threatens to restrict growth slightly or significantly. Positive economic trends boost the activities of export companies, and order books are looking strong in industrial sectors.

According to the survey results, the shortage of a workforce is not expected to improve in the near future. The majority of the Lapland-based respondents stated that the need for a workforce will increase from the current level during the next six months, and long-term estimates, extending two to three years into the future, are along the same lines. The talent shortage is also accelerated by the major investments to be launched in Northern Sweden, such as the H2 Green Steel and Hybrit projects.

The availability of a skilled workforce cannot be allowed to halt economic growth, and action must be taken quickly.

In addition to increasing domestic and local competence, Lapland-based companies need to make every effort to attract international talent. This calls for the engagement of higher education institutions, the authorities and business life. Any obstacles related to arrival in Finland and residence permits must be eliminated. To attract an international workforce, we not only need joint marketing, but also practical measures to increase affordable housing, for example.

Finland must evaluate the sufficiency of study places and engage in closer cooperation with northern parts of Sweden and Norway to secure sufficient competence in the Nordic.

In this as well, the best results are achieved by working together.