

Handbook for the recruitment of foreign born employees

Recommendations, tools, and tips based on our experiences from the Immigrated Competence Programme – an initiative to increase the recruitment of newly arrived engineers.



AFRY
AF PÖVRY

Preface

The war in Ukraine has affected us all, but most of all, the Ukrainian residents – those who are still fighting and those who have been forced to flee the country and are now seeking refuge. Innocent people have been hastily forced to leave their homes, family members and jobs, to, under an indefinite period of time, build a new existence, without actual influence over where and how it will take place. A single employer cannot do everything, but we are determined to do something.

The refugee crisis we are now facing is the fastest growing one in Europe since the Second World War. In addition to financial and humanitarian assistance, AFRY has increased the pace of what we call Immigrated Competence Programme, whose purpose is to recruit and integrate refugees who have come to Sweden. The programme was initiated in 2016 after the war in Syria broke out. The ambition was to recruit and integrate foreign-born engineers who had been forced to flee their homeland. Immigrated Competence has developed enormously since its launch and has been effective thanks to the tireless work of individual employees, a lot of courage and grit from those who came to Sweden and joined AFRY, and not to mention our well-functioning collaboration with hiring managers.

Over the years, we have learned that situations and challenges can arise that, in advance, can be difficult to predict. For those who are new to Sweden, for the immediate manager and for the organisation as a whole. Today, we have found ways of working and routines that work and we are proud to have recruited nearly 700 colleagues within the framework of Immigrated Competence Programme, since it was launched.

Through this programme, we have not only found jobs for the newly arrived – but we have also helped families to establish a functioning everyday life, to find a home, and to learn the language. We know that work is an important way into society, and a prerequisite for a safe start in a new country. Our ambition with this handbook is to share valuable experiences from our work with the Immigrated Competence Programme, so that more people can dare to take the step and initiate their own ways of accepting refugees into their organisation. We're not perfect, but we are happy to share what we have learned, so that more people fleeing war can find a safe haven – and a workplace that values their skills.

Jonas Gustavsson
CEO, AFRY



Table of contents

About the programme

- Purpose and Target group
- Competence and application
- Statistics

Lessons Learned

- Interview with Amir Nazari

Stories

- Raya Zamil
- Abdulrman Mouhish
- Daniel Sletteberg Løveryd

Supporting Tools and Materials

- Checklist for recruitment managers
- Apply as a newcomer
- Useful Links

Contact and more Information

- Inclusion and diversity at AFRY
- Contact us

About the Programme

Purpose and target group

Immigrated Competence is an individual coaching and matching programme with the aim to attract and recruit more foreign born and newly arrived engineers in Sweden. The programme is available to engineers who have recently arrived in Sweden, foreign-born engineers who lived in Sweden for a long time, exchange students, and candidates who currently live in other countries but who want to work in Sweden.

In addition to our need for competence, the development of our company is a driving factor for this initiative. Having a workplace where people have different backgrounds and perspectives is important to us – it generates more creative ideas and creates a more dynamic organisation. In 2016, Amir Nazari, Inclusion & Diversity Manager, was hired and under his management, the Immigrated Competence Programme has grown and developed.

– There is a lack of experienced engineers and the great need for recruitment was the decisive factor for the programme to start. Amir Nazari says it is an absolute necessity to look beyond Sweden's borders and find competence in other countries if we are to be able to meet the needs

A portrait of Amir Nazari, a middle-aged man with short grey hair, wearing a red V-neck sweater over a white collared shirt. He is smiling slightly and looking directly at the camera. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some geometric shapes.

Amir Nazari has been the Inclusion & Diversity Manager at AFRY since 2016. Since the start he has been the one to thank for the Immigrated Competence Programme.

Competence and application

The most important thing is to understand the competence of each individual candidate, regardless of which country the person in question comes from and moves to. To interpret foreign merits and experiences, tools from the University and Higher Education Council are available. Having a common programme for foreign-born engineers facilitates the work, as there are previous cases to learn from and people with similar backgrounds to consult.

It is also important to know that it is the competence that must be the main focus. We know that competence comes in all forms – that’s what creates an innovative workplace and makes life at AFRY fun and dynamic. We work hard to ensure that we are, in all respects, a workplace where everyone feels that they fit in, regardless of origin and ethnicity. Inclusion and diversity are focus areas for AFRY and are included in our strategy and our sustainability goals.

The application process within Immigrated Competence, follows AFRY’s general process created by the organisation’s HR function. It is important for us to be able to ensure that recruitment is structured, inclusive and fair. To be included in the Immigrated Competence Programme, it means access to extra support when, for example, applying for a permit. AFRY’s vacancies are advertised on Platsbanken at Arbetsförmedlingen, which also offers targeted support for people who are new to the country. The support through Nystartjobb, which is a financial compensation for employers, has made it possible for us, and other companies, to offer internships to people who have recently arrived in Sweden. [Read more at the Employment Agency’s website.](#)

Statistics

The war in Syria caused the number of asylum seekers in Sweden to double in 2015 compared to 2014. Over 160,000 people applied for asylum in Sweden in 2015 – the highest number of asylum seekers ever¹ In connection with the war in Ukraine, the UNHCR states that 13 million people are seeking shelter within Ukraine and that 5.5 million are seeking shelter outside the border.² Migrationsverket estimates that around 76,000 people will seek protection in Sweden up until June 2022, but in a greater scenario, the figure is 212,000.³ At the time of writing (May 2022) there are around 14,000 Ukrainian refugees that have already arrived in Sweden and applied for a residence permit.

Regardless of the exact number, a huge amount of people are fleeing war, and some of them will end up in Sweden. There are no reliable figures regarding the amount of asylum seekers that have technical competence, but Sweden’s Engineers recently estimated that around 500–2,000 engineers could arrive in Sweden from Ukraine.⁴

1 [SCB \(Swedish only\)](#)

2 [UNHCR \(Swedish only\)](#)

3 [Ministry of justice \(Swedish only\)](#)

4 [Sveriges Ingenjörer \(Swedish only\)](#)

The engineering shortage in Sweden

There is a shortage of trained engineers in Sweden. SCB has calculated that in 2030 there will be a shortage of around 50,000 engineering graduates on labour market.⁵ Around 80% of Swedish employers believe that the need for a workforce with an education in electricity, electronics, computer science, automation, energy and electrical technology will increase during the next few years.⁶ Reports from many other countries also show a future lack of qualified engineers in several industries, which can lead to significant financial losses.

Immigrated Competence in numbers

Over 670 people have started at AFRY within the framework of Immigrated Competence since the programme was launched (until the beginning of June 2022). Many of them have continued to work at AFRY. The pressure increased in connection to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In total, we employed almost a hundred people via the Immigrated Competence programme during the first quarter, and in the first three weeks of March alone, nearly thirty people were employed.

The newly arrived engineers who contact or get contacted by AFRY and participate in the programme usually attain a regular work schedule within 5–6 weeks. This is usually when they have received help with authority contacts and all the necessary permits.

This can be compared to the programme's project manager, Amir Nazari's own journey when he fled to Sweden from Iran in 1986 as a trained engineer. Before he had the opportunity to look for work, he was forced to renew his education in Sweden to be considered competent, which meant that it took him 6 years to start an employment that matched his skills. Immigrated Competence accounts for an increasingly large part of AFRY's new hires in Sweden. In 2020–2021, the proportion was 5%, which then increased to 5.7% between 2021–2022.

Between January and May of 2022, Immigrated Competence accounted for 7.5% of new hires. The trend is positive, and we expect to be up to 10% within a year (May 2023).

5 SCB
6 SCB (Swedish only)

50,000

The number of engineers that will be needed on the Swedish labor markets 2030, according to SCB

670

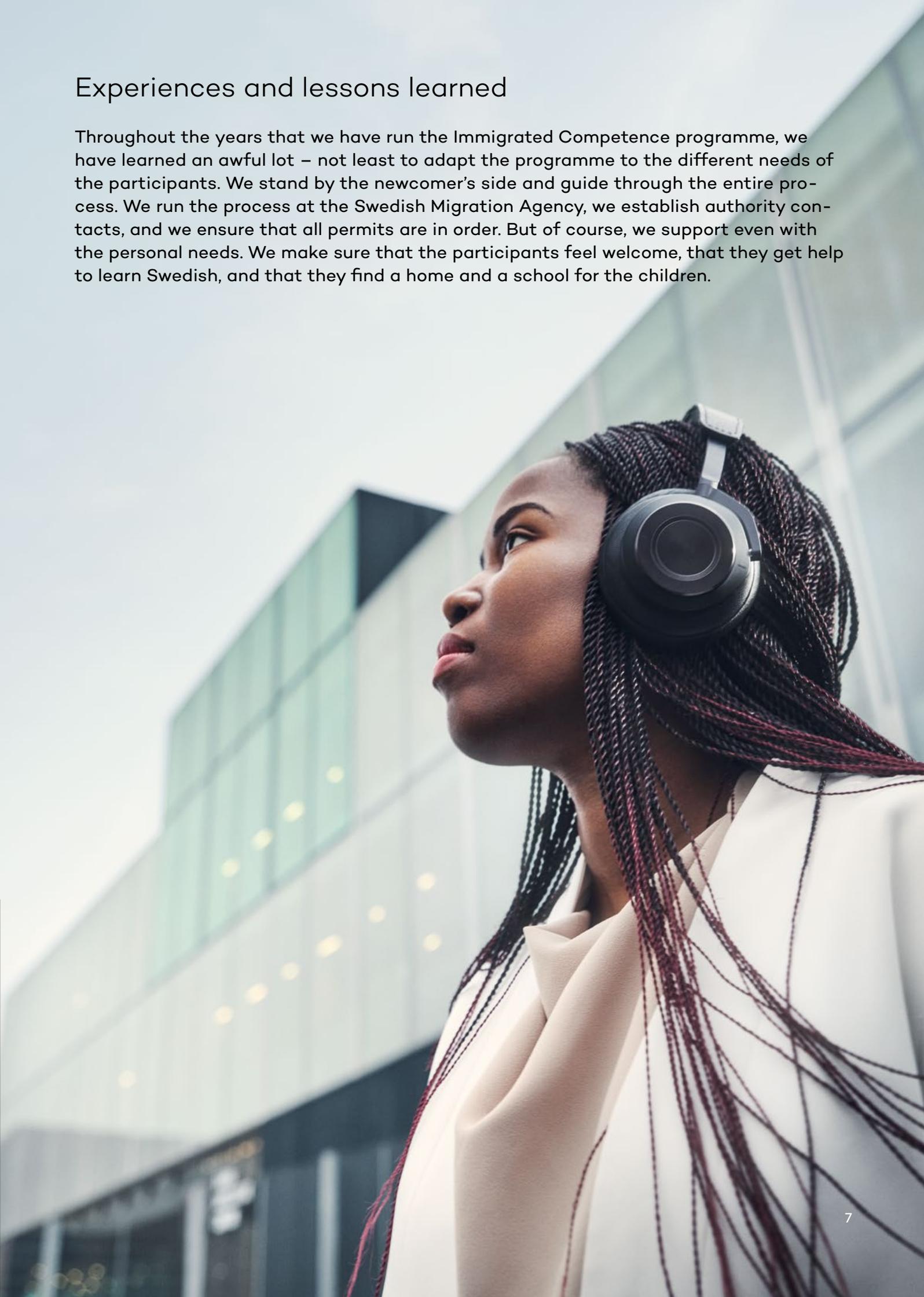
Number of employees who started at AFRY via Immigrated Competence since the programme was launched

7.5%

Percentage of new hires that were hired through the Immigrated Competence programme January–May 2022

Experiences and lessons learned

Throughout the years that we have run the Immigrated Competence programme, we have learned an awful lot – not least to adapt the programme to the different needs of the participants. We stand by the newcomer's side and guide through the entire process. We run the process at the Swedish Migration Agency, we establish authority contacts, and we ensure that all permits are in order. But of course, we support even with the personal needs. We make sure that the participants feel welcome, that they get help to learn Swedish, and that they find a home and a school for the children.

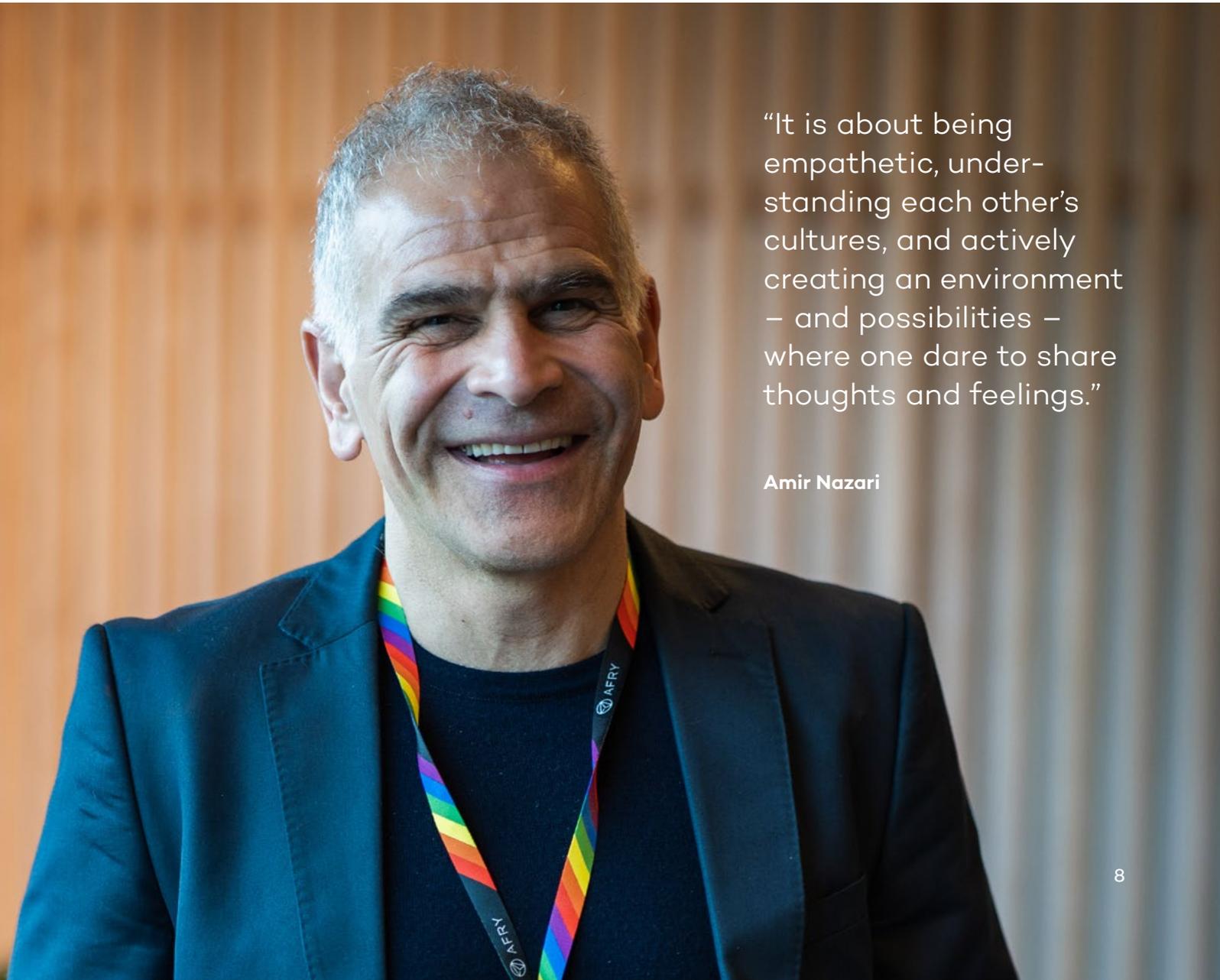


Interview with Amir Nazari

Amir Nazari is responsible for the Immigrated Competence Programme. In the 1980s, Amir was newly arrived in Sweden, fleeing from the war in Iran. Today he is Inclusion & Diversity Manager at AFRY and works daily to help foreign-born engineers find their place in Sweden.

Can you name some things you've learned from working with the programme that you couldn't imagine in the beginning?

– Something that was a high priority in the beginning was finding and verifying evidence (such as diplomas and certificates) to prove the applicants had the qualifications they said they had. This became time and resource consuming and there were few who managed to bring original documents with them from home when they were forced to flee. What we know now is that these documents are not as important as we thought at first. With us, there has not been a single case where certificates, grades or information in CV did not align. In cases where it is uncertain whether the applicant will be able to cope with the work, it is better to let the person start working, alternatively start an internship period or start with a probation period. In this way, we save time and resources, while the applicant gets the confidence to start working and can quickly enter the working life.

A portrait of Amir Nazari, a middle-aged man with short, graying hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a dark blue blazer over a black t-shirt. A rainbow-colored lanyard with the AFRY logo is around his neck. The background is a soft-focus wooden wall.

“It is about being empathetic, understanding each other’s cultures, and actively creating an environment – and possibilities – where one dare to share thoughts and feelings.”

Amir Nazari

Is there anything that the company should consider when accepting new arrivals?

– It is important to remember that the applicant or new employee will not necessarily be comfortable expressing their needs or opinions. This could be because of cultural differences, but above all, those who come here have experienced traumatic events, while they are now in a completely new country. The desire to do a good job and to come across as ambitious can sometimes get in the way of a clear communication. Therefore, it is important that both managers and employees make it as easy as possible for the newly arrived colleagues to speak up if something does not feel quite right, or there is something they don't understand. It's about being empathetic, understanding each other's cultures, and actively creating an environment – and possibilities – where you dare to share your thoughts and feelings. It is our task to build trust so that all newcomers feel welcome and safe enough to talk openly and honestly about potential problems.

What mistakes were made in the beginning? What should other companies avoid?

– At the beginning of the project, we wanted to achieve results quickly. As a project manager, I rushed to prove to myself, to the managers, and to the company that the project was profitable and that it would benefit society, the company, and the individual. Therefore, not much time was given to reflection or opportunity for the new arrivals to familiarise themselves with their new work and new colleagues – in a completely new country. After a while, I felt that maybe they didn't feel as included in their workplace as we had wished. In retrospect, I think we should have reduced the level of ambition somewhat, and let things take more time. Now we know that the process involves a big change, not only for the individual, but also for the company and the existing employees, and that more time and care is needed to succeed.

Amir together with
Sofia Klingberg, Inclusion &
Diversity Manager at AFRY,
during the annual event
Inclusion & Diversity Week.



Do you have any concrete tips for companies that want to get started with similar initiatives?

– Appointing coaches or supervisors. However, it is important to remember that support, only at work, is not enough – it is also needed for their social lives. We noticed quickly that the new arrivals often took on too much and worked too hard because they wanted to prove themselves. This could lead to them not feeling that they could prioritise their social lives, getting to know their colleagues over lunch instead of working, for example. It is our responsibility as an employer to be clear about our expectations and to invite to social happenings. Another tip is to hold courses and briefings about how the workplace works and what the work culture looks like for example. It can be difficult to know which questions to ask, and some do not dare to ask any questions at all, so it is important that the employer is proactive and is informative about the workplace.

What three qualities would you say are most important when embarking on this type of project?

– Empathy, being understanding and helpful at the same time as being aware that the employment should be for the good of the company, as per usual. As a coach or supervisor, it is important to be ready to, in addition to helping with work situations, help with all the other issues that come with being in a new country. It can be anything from authority contacts to advice about finding a home. You need to be humble, generous, and of course curious.

Amir Nazari and Jonas Gustavsson raising the rainbow flag at AFRY's headquarters in Solna.



Stories

Raya Zamil

Raya Zamil was born in Iraq, and her family is from Palestine. Raya fled to Syria at a young age because of the armed conflict in her homeland. During her time in Syria, she trained as an engineer in petroleum technology. Now she lives in Sweden where she did her internship at AFRY through Jobbsprånget, a programme where newly arrived graduates get in contact with employers on the Swedish labour market.

– As a woman, it is difficult to enter the engineering industry and the situation in Syria didn't make it any easier. In the end we had to move again, this time to Kiruna, Sweden's northernmost municipality. I was shocked when we arrived – the difference in climate and culture was huge. But in the end, we were relieved to find ourselves in a calm place, where we didn't have to worry about whether we would survive to live another day, says Raya.

After moving to Sweden, Raya studied a master's degree in environmental chemistry at Umeå University, and after her degree she applied to Jobbsprånget via their application portal. She was then contacted by AFRY and began her internship. During the internship, Raya had the opportunity to work with research technology at the Life Science company, Cytiva, that AFRY collaborates with. A typical workday consisted of being in the lab analysing chemical data. The journey from the war in Iraq, to the internship at AFRY, is remarkable and far from simple. It was only later, when Raya had time to reflect on her experiences, that she realised that she wanted to be able to inspire people in similar situations.

– My best advice is to be positive and never give up. It's been a long road for me to get to my current position, but now I can say that I am at peace and happy. It feels like a fresh start, says Raya.





Abdulrhman Mouhish

In 2016, Abdulrhman Mouhish came from Syria to Harmånger in Sweden. With an academic degree as a mechanical engineer, the goal was to find a job in the profession and to establish myself in Sweden. But finding the right information and the right person to talk to was not entirely easy, especially not in a small village like Harmånger.

Through Jobbspråget, the mechanical engineer Abdulrhman Mouhish quickly got in touch with AFRY's Diversity coach and, thereby, acquired an internship with us. Today, he is working as a HVAC designer at AFRY and he makes various types of drawings and calculations. Abdulrhman says that he contacted many different organisations and companies, including Jobbspråget. The benefit of Jobbspråget, says Abdulrhman, is that they help newly arrived academics enter the Swedish labour market.

The journey began at AFRY after the interview with Amir Nazari. Abdulrhman began his practice in 2016, and five months later, he signed a permanent position at AFRY in Bollnäs. Learning Swedish was another challenge – it's not entirely easy to learn a new language.

– The language has almost been the most difficult: pronunciation, melody, short and long vowels, and dialects... It is difficult to find the right way to express yourself in Swedish.

But Abdulrhman quickly felt included at the new company and feels that he ended up at the right place. The colleagues at AFRY became important for a feeling of community and support.

– The first thing I associated AFRY with was diversity. There are many different nationalities and cultures here. Since I started at AFRY, my colleagues have meant an enormous amount to me, and I feel that everyone gets to share their ideas and opinions despite AFRY being such a big company. There is so much competence and knowledge here and there always is someone to ask, says Abdulrhman.

In November 2019, he took the next step within AFRY. He left Bollnäs and moved to Malmö. Abdulrhman has set new goals and wants to continue developing: the sights are set on becoming a project manager, and on becoming even better at mastering the Swedish language.

Daniel Sletteberg Loveryd

Daniel Sletteberg Loveryd works as section manager within embedded systems at AFRY. Since 2021, he has expanded his team from two people to a group of eighteen employees from a variety of countries including: Ukraine, India, Egypt, Brazil, Pakistan, Iran, China and Sweden.

Do you have any concrete tips for companies that want to get started with similar initiatives

– First of all, I think recruiting is fun. That I recruit employees primarily from other countries is not relevant, because I hire people based on skill. If I were to search for software developers only in Gothenburg, where I am based, I would never manage to find enough people with knowledge in embedded software and infotainment. By recruiting candidates globally, it enables me to find the best candidates, regardless of origin, gender, or culture.

Finding the right person when you have candidates from all over the world is not always easy. Daniel tells us that he found most of his employees via his network on LinkedIn, but that he also received a lot of support from AFRY's Inclusion & Diversity Manager Amir Nazari.

– Without Amir's help, I would not have been able to recruit so many developers so quickly. He has given me a lot of support in this, says Daniel.

In addition to the fact that recruitment outside Sweden's borders is a necessity to meet the skills needed, Daniel emphasises that diversity is crucial to driving innovation.

– It is super important not to recruit people who are similar to yourself. By recruiting talent with different backgrounds, genders, experiences and cultural heritage we can gain new perspectives.



“By recruiting candidates globally, it enables me to find the best candidates – regardless of origin, gender or culture.”

Daniel Sletteberg Loveryd



Supporting tools and materials

To support recruiting managers, AFRY has produced a checklist of what is needed to be checked off when hiring via Immigrated Competence. The manager has the biggest influence on how fast the hiring process will be. The more complete and accurate the documentation submitted is, the smoother the application process will be.

When hiring people with citizenship outside the EU, a Swedish work permit application is required for the new employee, and in many cases also for accompanying persons and family members. This means that the process is often complex and that many documents need to be produced and collected as attached documents in the application.

The purpose of the checklist is to provide concrete guidance through the process and to bring together all the steps that must be completed in order for the employment to go through.

In addition to the checklist, we have produced various types of supporting material for job seekers and listed some external resources that may be helpful. The material can be found on the next page.

Checklist for Recruitment managers

As a manager, you need to go through this checklist as soon as the candidate is considered for employment from abroad. Please note that rules may be adjusted – review the latest information from relevant authorities and websites to supplement this list.

- Note that a job advertisement on Platsbanken must have been published for at least 10 days, and no longer than 3 months, before the contract is signed.
- Find out if the person is alone or has co-applicants in the form of a partner and children.
- Find out if they all have valid home country passports available that are valid for the contract period as a minimum.
- Please note that as a rule, couples must be married and have their marriage certificate translated to English. If the couple is not married, it must be stated that they live together, for example, through a national registration certificate in their home country.
- Please note that birth certificates for any children must be translated into English.
- How the applicant is compensated for application and relocation fees is entirely determined by the hiring manager. There is no common policy or central budget which covers the candidate's extra expenses.
- The contract period must be at least 12 months from when the person arrives in Sweden. This is so that the employee can get a Swedish social security number.
- The recommended contract period is at least 13 months, so that there is a one-month margin for possible delays.

Applying as a newcomer

It can be challenging, to say the least, to look for a job in a new country. For support, we have produced materials that gives concrete advice in areas such as CV writing, job interviews, and how to search for jobs using LinkedIn. We have also created a short film titled: *Three useful tips when seeking job as a newcomer.*

The material can be found in our Job Application Guide at afry.com.

Useful Links

[Svenska Institutet – Moving to Sweden](#)

[Skatteverket – Moving to Sweden](#)

[Skatteverket – New in Sweden](#)

[Jobbsprånget](#)

Contact and more information

Inclusion and diversity at AFRY

It goes without saying, that all people have equal value and the right to the same opportunities. Inclusion and diversity are key elements in our business strategy and workplace culture. AFRY works with inclusion and diversity in different parts of the business, daily – through the Immigrated Competence Programme, through trainings and workshops, through supporting materials, through internal and external events, and through and different types of partnerships. [Learn more about what we do in inclusion and diversity here.](#)

Contacts

Do you want to know more about the Immigrated Competence Programme, or get in touch with one of our Inclusion & Diversity Managers? We are happy to tell you about our experiences and lessons learned, and regularly participate in panels, conferences, and meetings.

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