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”We’re still at the beginning, but we’re trying”: Employees’ perspectives on the accessibility of social and health services for people who have moved to Finland

As the diversity of Finnish society increases, the work of social and healthcare professionals is also changing, and the need to consider multilingualism and the diverse backgrounds of service users is greater than ever. This article examines the views of social and health service professionals regarding the accessibility of the services for immigrant service users in Finland. The data consist of online questionnaire data from 172 respondents. The respondents evaluated the attitudes in their workplace relatively positively. In their opinion, there was nevertheless a need to develop the practices of the workplace. In our analysis, we employ and adapt the framework for dimensions of accessibility of services for alcohol and drug abusers originally developed by Vanjusov (2022). The needs for the development of services and the work of service professionals identified by participants mainly represented: a) the institutional dimension of accessibility, i.e. the resources of the service system, such as time, money and the number of personnel, and competence; and b) the informative dimension of accessibility, i.e. issues related to multilingual communication. Attitudes (which may be linked to both dimensions of accessibility) were also a key focus. Challenges related to institutional accessibility were prevalent in the responses of respondents working in the social services, whereas respondents working in the health services stressed challenges related to informative accessibility. Overall, the variety of development needs identified by participants was wide. There was also a mixed understanding of who is responsible for developing accessibility.

Keywords: accessibility, social services, health services, employees, immigrants