

# Norwegian growth companies' need for tech talent

and foreign employees' need for better  
onboarding when they relocate to Oslo

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Business Region

# Why this report?

Growth companies in Oslo often lack the staff needed to grow and expand. Many recruit from abroad to fill needs. This may be due to a shortage of people with the right competence in Norway or because the companies are actively seeking people with specific international expertise and experience.

The purpose of this report is to provide better insight into growth companies and the need for international expertise. We wanted to gather data on companies' need for and experience with international recruitment. In particular, we wanted to take a closer look at how foreign employees experience relocating to Oslo, who they are, how they experience Norwegian society, what support services they use, and what they felt was lacking.

This report examines the talent acquisition challenges faced by Oslo-based startups and the importance of international expertise for their growth strategies. By gathering data on companies' talent needs and recruitment practices, we sought to gain insight into international recruitment and how it impacts Oslo's business landscape.

We have:

- held one-to-one interviews with growth companies which need talent (primarily in the tech sector) and recruit from abroad.
- surveyed foreign employees who have relocated to Oslo from abroad for work.

This report has been prepared by Oslo Business Region AS, which is owned and funded by the City of Oslo.

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# Summary of our survey results

- Foreign employees who have relocated to Oslo for work report a high level of satisfaction. Nevertheless, there is substantial potential for improvement. There is a high demand for services by those who come here AND their employers.
- Competition for tech talent and higher Employer's National Insurance Contributions (NICs) were mentioned as issues the companies find challenging.
- It can be difficult to retain foreign employees in Oslo, particularly if they arrive with a partner/spouse who does not have a job and lacks a social network.
- Despite current downsizing in the tech sector, all the companies interviewed needed to hire new employees in 2023 in Oslo and at other offices.
- Foreign employees missed having a social network in Oslo. A lack of "community" was mentioned frequently, particularly among younger employees without children.
- 78% felt that it would have been beneficial to have help connecting with social networks and leisure activities when they first came to Oslo.
- All the employers offered social activities, but international employees would have liked to connect with networks not solely tied to their workplace, job or co-workers. In addition, there was a desire for the employee's partner/spouse/family to also be part of a "community".
- 69% of respondents said that a good "work-life balance" was what they appreciated most about working in Oslo.

# Summary of our survey results (continued)

Most of the employers would take part in an organized group to develop and offer services for international employees in Oslo. Some need recruitment assistance and a number need help to retain foreign employees. Such a group could coordinate activities such as:

- Language tuition and cultural acclimation
- Guide to Oslo and Welcome to Oslo programmes aimed at international tech talent
- Organised get-togethers for employees' children and their partners/spouses to help them establish a social network and "community" more quickly and easily
- A professional meeting place such as an "expat software engineer", etc.

- An employee onboarding programme, such as an organised monthly get-together to get to know Oslo and what the city has to offer (favorite cafes, hiking trails, kayaking, downhill/cross-country skiing, etc).

# Our evaluation of the results

- The growth companies state that there is a lack of job candidates in Oslo with the competence they need. The companies are open to where candidates come from as long as they have the required skills and can do the work. This means that they are often competing for candidates from the same talent pool. Despite turbulent times, all the companies are planning to hire new staff in 2023. Many companies would have liked to offer more social activities to their employees, but time is a constraint to making such arrangements.
- Foreign employees at the growth companies say they are happy to live in Oslo, and many attribute this to a good work-life balance. Many would have liked more help with required documentation when they relocated to Oslo, access to more social networks, and support services for a greater sense of inclusion in Norwegian society. Such support includes organised language **courses(?)**, for example.
- Several companies would like better coordination of services among employers. Our understanding is that the growth companies are too small to establish an extensive package of support services on their own and that the foreign employees would also like to engage in activities unrelated to the workplace.
- The majority of foreign employees (75%) want to stay in Oslo, while a majority of respondents (57%) said they considered other potential destinations before they moved here. This could be an indication that they enjoy living in Oslo once they have made the move.
- We know a bit more about the needs of the growth companies and their foreign employees. What we don't know is why those who decided not to relocate here made that choice. This survey reflects only the views of those who answered the questionnaire and isn't necessarily representative of the entire international workforce in Oslo.

# **One-to-one interviews with 10 growth companies in Oslo**

## **We spoke with 10 growth companies that:**

- employ more than 10 people and are scaling up**
- are located in the Oslo/Viken area**
- have employed, currently employ or have needs relating to foreign employees**



## We spoke with:

- Director of Diversity and Inclusion
- Chief Executive Officer
- Co-founder and Senior Vice President
- Head of Recruitment
- Chief Organization Officer
- Chief Operating Officer
- Director of People and Organization
- Head of Learning and Culture

# What do the growth companies say about hiring international tech competence?

All the companies have more than 10 employees. Several had over 100 employees, of whom around 35% were recruited from abroad. All the companies expect to recruit new staff in 2023.

- The general impression is that foreign employees enjoy living and working in Oslo.
  - ◆ Oslo offers a good work-life balance, proximity to nature, a good place to raise a family, etc.
- At the same time, it is difficult to establish social networks and find a “community”. It is easier for those with children. Younger employees struggle more and wish to establish a social network in Oslo that is not solely comprised of co-workers.
- All the companies offer various social activities in order to create a good psychosocial environment and create a company-wide “community”.
  - ◆ Examples: chess clubs, yoga, kiting, squash, Slack channels, hiking/skiing trips, etc.

# What do the growth companies say they need?

- The required competence is becoming increasingly specialised and niche. At the same time, there is a need for people who have the capacity to work cross-functionally. The competence needed is not restricted to technical expertise, but requires a certain type of personality.
  - ◆ For example, someone willing to take a risk by joining a less well-established company or one that is just starting to scale up.
- Need for different types of competence, including front-end, back-end, UX and JAVA, but also admin, marketing and product development.
- Where people come from is of little significance. The key is to get the right competence and the right “personality”. Employees drawn from many different countries and continents.
  - ◆ Pakistan, India, USA, UK and Spain, but also from Oslo, i.e. foreign employees who are already working in the city.

# What do the growth companies say about the challenges of hiring foreign employees?

- There is fierce competition for the best talent, not only between cities in different countries but also between companies in Oslo itself.
- Matching salary levels is a struggle. Candidates can work as consultants and make twice as much (like working for Sopra Steria). Silicon Valley salary levels are out of these companies' league. Rising Employer's National Insurance Contributions (NICs) are making things more difficult.
- Foreign employees contribute to exciting teams. It is enjoyable for other employees and good for the team dynamic. At the same time, it creates challenges, including:
  - ◆ uncertainty and the risk of miscommunication; things can take longer and misunderstandings may arise. The path can sometimes be rocky.

# What do the companies want from the ecosystem?

- Several of the companies were willing to take part in a process to develop support services for international tech talents.
  - ◆ As long as it did not take up too much time – a couple of workshops, for example, but not on a scheduled or monthly basis.
- Some companies would like to collaborate with other companies with which they compete for the same talents.
- Today, companies may feel they need to keep things close to their chests and are reluctant to talk to each other because of the competition for talent. Which is unfortunate.
- Would like a platform organised by a neutral, objective partner/body.

**We asked foreign employees who are living in Oslo and working for a growth company in the city what the process of relocating and settling in was like.**

**We sent a questionnaire to employees from abroad who are working at 10 growth companies in Oslo.**

**The following results are based on 85 responses (a 63% response rate).**

**The results give an *indication* of this group's composition, their opinions and experiences.**

# Where do they come from?

Many nationalities, countries, cities and continents are represented!

Podgorica, Montenegro; Ostrava, Czech Republic; Corinth, Greece; Singapore; Nairobi, Kenya; Camberley, UK; Tirana, Albania; Delhi, India; Cascais, Portugal; Vicenza, Italy; Santiago, Chile; Locarno, Switzerland; Advance, North Carolina, USA; Goole, UK; Berlin, German; Krakow, Poland, Hyderabad, India; Amsterdam, Netherlands; Wrocław, Poland; Aarhus, Denmark; Osaka, Japan; Paris, France; Almaty, Kazakhstan; Gdansk, Poland; Visby, Sweden; Lisbon, Portugal; Eindhoven, Netherlands; London, UK Moscow, Russia; Lima, Peru; Barcelona, Spain; Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India; Utrecht, Netherlands; Belgrade, Serbia; Bogotá, Colombia; Antwerp, Belgium; Copenhagen, Denmark; Emmen, Netherlands; Kosovo; Delft, Netherlands; Chandigarh, Punjab, India; St Petersburg, Russia; Munich, Germany; Jastrzebie-Zdroj, Poland; Provo, Utah, USA; Missoula, Montana, USA; Minsk, Belarus; Zaragoza, Spain; Mexico City, Mexico; Varese, Italy; Iceland; Tehran, Iran; Huddersfield, UK, Arkhangelsk, Russia, New York City, New York, USA

Question 6: Which city or town are you from? (85 responses)



# What do they think of Oslo?

88% of respondents said they were either **satisfied or very satisfied** with Oslo.

Favourite qualities were:

- Work life balance (68%)
- Close to nature (61%)
- Safety and justice (35%)

Question 21: How would you rate your satisfaction with living in Oslo? (84 responses)

Question 22: Satisfied or dissatisfied, what is your favorite thing about Oslo? (85 responses)

# Would they have remained in Oslo if they did not have their current job?

The majority would have remained in Oslo even if they did not have their current job. In other words, they would not have relocated to a different city if they were looking for a new job.

- Stay in Oslo (72%)
- Move to another city (19%)

Question 30: If you didn't have the job you currently have and were looking for another job, would you stay in Oslo or move to another city?  
(85 responses)

# What was relocating to Oslo like?

54% found relocating to Oslo fairly or very easy, while 24% found it difficult or very difficult.

- Somewhat easy, only a few bumps (41%)
- Difficult, not straightforward (20%)
- Very easy and straightforward (13%)
- Very difficult, not at all straightforward (4%)

Question 27: Think about when you first moved here. How would you describe transitioning to Oslo? (84 responses)

# This is the support they received when relocating to Oslo

48 % → Social network and activities through work or elsewhere (not organized by you)

43 % → Support on administrative questions (like UDI, work permit, bank issues, ID-card, etc.)

40 % → Norwegian language courses

33 % → Support on relocation issues such as finding a place to live

Question 28: Think about when you first moved to Oslo. Were you offered any support or services around the following? (85 responses)

# This is the assistance they felt would have been helpful

83 % → Support on administrative questions (like UDI, work permit, bank issues, ID-card, etc.)

77 % → Norwegian language courses

76 % → Social network & activities through work or elsewhere (not organized by you)

66 % → Seminars, courses or workshops on culture immersion

55 % → Recruitment services / job placement support and networks

Question 29: Think about when you first moved to Oslo. Would any of the following services have made your transition easier? (81 responses)

# Why did they choose to relocate to Oslo in particular?

► It is a nice size city, and I wanted to move to Norway ► The culture and work life balance in Norway  
► It is the capital with better work opportunities and it is a place matching my lifestyle ► Because it was a natural place to move with my wife ► I came for work and stayed because of culture, attitude towards life, people and nature ► Adventure ► "Exotic" country in Europe, one that functions really well and is thus worth learning from ► Oslo has most opportunities, and nice nature ► I moved for a job opportunity, but was planning to move to Oslo anyway, as I wanted to live here ► My partner found a great job here, we also moved to be closer to his family for a while ► Out of curiosity and it might have been on my bucket list ► I liked Oslo when I visited it, I appreciate the country's values and I'm sick and tired of political and social situation in Poland ► We live outside of Oslo near Kongsberg, but I work in Oslo and from home ► Through my work ► For a better opportunity ► I love the work balance that is here ► To grow professionally, and Norwegian nature ► Lovepat ► Trailing spouse ► To learn Norwegian and to live in Norway ► Searching for better work-life balance A better life and an exciting new job ► To work ► Norway is safe, provides a great work-life balance, and is socially progressive ► I want to live in a country that is safe to raise a family in, provides parental leave, vacation benefits, health insurance, and takes care of its people ► Because of a job opportunity ► I wanted to move to Norway, Oslo seemed to be the easiest place to start in terms of finding a job ► Work

# This is a group with many good suggestions, who appreciate being heard

*"The main thing is to teach the things that no-one teaches you. How to dress, winter shoes, how to survive the dark nights."*

*"I can thoroughly recommend B\*stard Burger, I went yesterday, and it was terrific."*

*"Good initiative about listening to what expat community says and need to thrive , I never got asked for such feedback in last 8 years."*

*"Norwegian system is hard to navigate, language is a must to get gainful employment, even then it's tricky."*

*"Thank you for conducting this survey. Hope it will benefit for future skilled immigrants to settle and contribute to this beautiful welcoming country."*

*"It would be good to take more supports as new one in Norway. For making networks, or supporting family and helping to buy an apartment (loan offering for foreigner)."*

*"I would say that if you're looking into how to keep internationals here, then help them make local friends! :)"*

# Who replied to the questionnaire?

**75%**

plan to remain in Norway permanently (over 4 years)

moved here with a Norwegian citizen / residence permit holder

**40%**

**31%**

have been in Norway 2–4 years

**51%**

own their own home in Oslo

**64%**

came here to work

**57%**

considered moving to a city other than Oslo



# Demographics

**58%**

Men

**40%**

Women

**48%**

are aged 25–34, while 38%  
are aged 35–44

**65%**

have a master's degree, while  
27% have a bachelor's degree

**80%**

have a  
spouse  
or live-in  
partner

are  
childless

**60%**

**41%** speak  
Norwegian\*

\*Indicated "fluent" or "proficient" in response to Question 14: Do you speak Norwegian? (85 responses)

# Some words about our method

The survey was carried out by Oslo Business Region AS.

The survey was divided into two parts and provides insight into:

1. Challenges foreign employees experience when relocating to and settling in Oslo
2. Challenges growth companies experience when recruiting foreign employees to work in Oslo

Quantitative and qualitative surveys were carried out in the period November/December 2022. Foreign employees were sent a questionnaire, with 85 responses being returned. In addition, one-to-one interviews with senior managers at 10 growth companies were carried out.

The term “Talent” is broadly defined in the context of the survey. The term is used internationally (talent/tech talent), **in multiple business sectors**, and includes occupations relating to, for example, software development and programming, computer support, database and systems administration, technology and engineering, and computer and IT systems management.

We spoke with executives at **companies located in the Oslo/Viken area that have recruited foreign employees, need to hire foreign employees and/or have needs relating to hiring foreign employees.** Our focus was not on startups but growth companies with at least 10 employees.

# What the survey does not tell us

We spoke only with those who have chosen to move to Oslo.

We did not speak with those who have chosen other cities or who have actively chosen not to move to Oslo.

We do not know if there is a difference between those who have lived here for a brief period (less than 1 year) and those who have been here longer (more than 1 year).

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We must be aware that the results encompass both extremely small companies (e.g. 15 employees) and those that are slightly larger (e.g. 300 employees)

# About Oslo Business Region AS

Oslo Business Region AS is a company owned and funded by the City of Oslo. The company works to promote innovation, green business transition and the creation of new jobs. It therefore gives priority to increasing the number of growth companies in the region, attracting and retaining competence and talents, encouraging more inward investment to Oslo and building the Oslo brand.

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