



SUOMI
FINLAND

CURRENT THEMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN FINLAND & SOUTHERN AFRICA

Science and Higher Education Counsellor Veera Virmasalo | Embassy of Finland in Pretoria
Webinar on Team Finland Knowledge Funding Call, 5.3.2026

TEAM FINLAND KNOWLEDGE NETWORK – our science and HE counsellors



OUR HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPES

FINLAND

Population ≈ 5.6M
15 – 24 population ≈ 0.62M
Share of youth ≈ 11%

38 Higher Edu Institutions
14 universities
24 unis of applied sciences

HE students ≈ 320 000
PhDs / year ≈ 1900

“SOUTHERN AFRICA”

SADC + Rwanda & Burundi = 18 countries

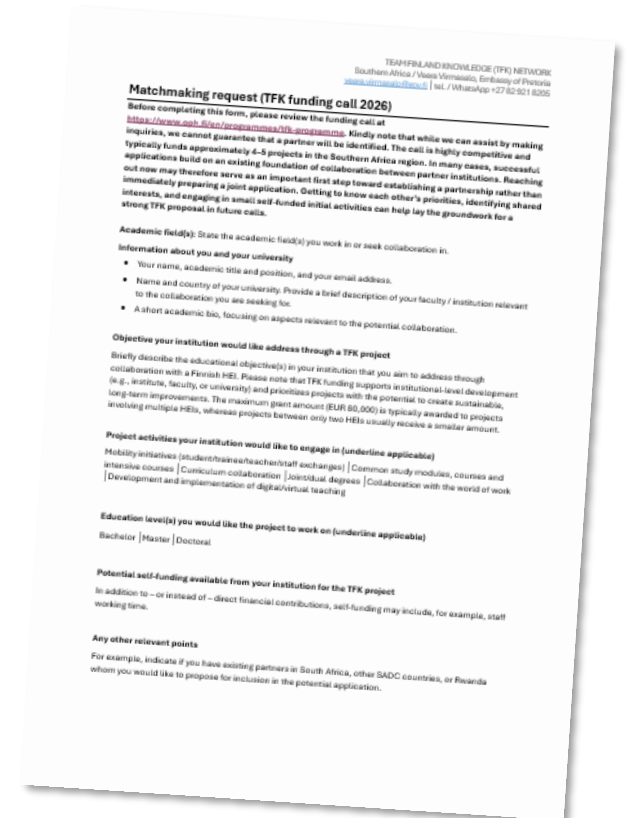
Population ≈ 434.6M
15 – 24 population ≈ 86.7M
Share of youth ≈ 20%

~ 130 public universities
250+ private universities



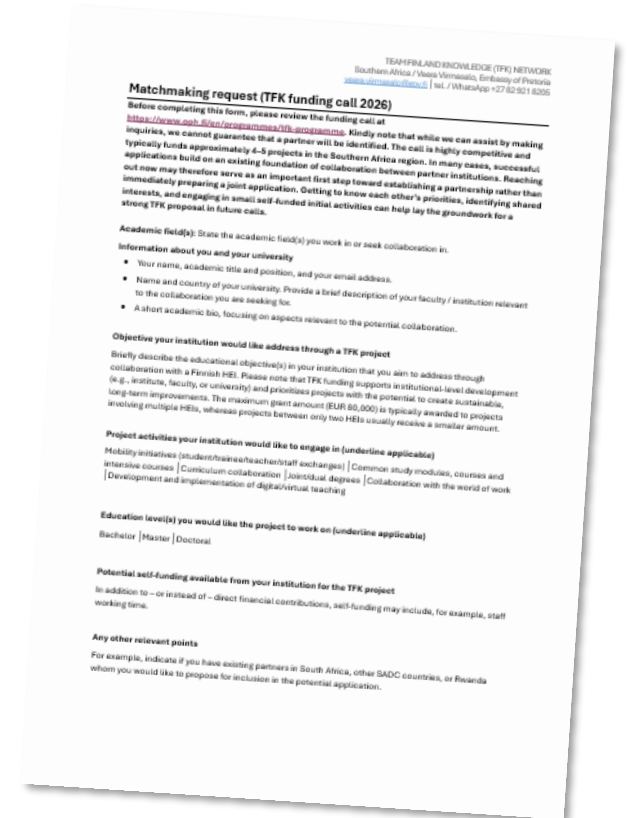
Make a matchmaking request

- The call is highly competitive
- Typically has funded approximately 4–5 projects in the Southern Africa region.
- In many cases, successful applications build on an existing foundation of collaboration between partner institutions.
- Reaching out now may serve as an important first step toward establishing a partnership rather than immediately preparing a joint application.
- Getting to know each other's priorities, identifying shared interests, and engaging in small self-funded initial activities can help lay the groundwork for a strong TFK proposal in future calls.



Requests received so far

- **UNISA (South Africa):** Early Childhood Education
- **Female Academic Leaders Fellowship (South Africa):** Previously disadvantaged female leadership in academia
- **University of Pretoria (South Africa):** strengthen teaching and research capacity in engineered timber and timber construction.
- **Zambia High Commission to South Africa:** Inclusivity in education, particularly disabled students' rights in education – with potential focus on AI training.



Communication channels

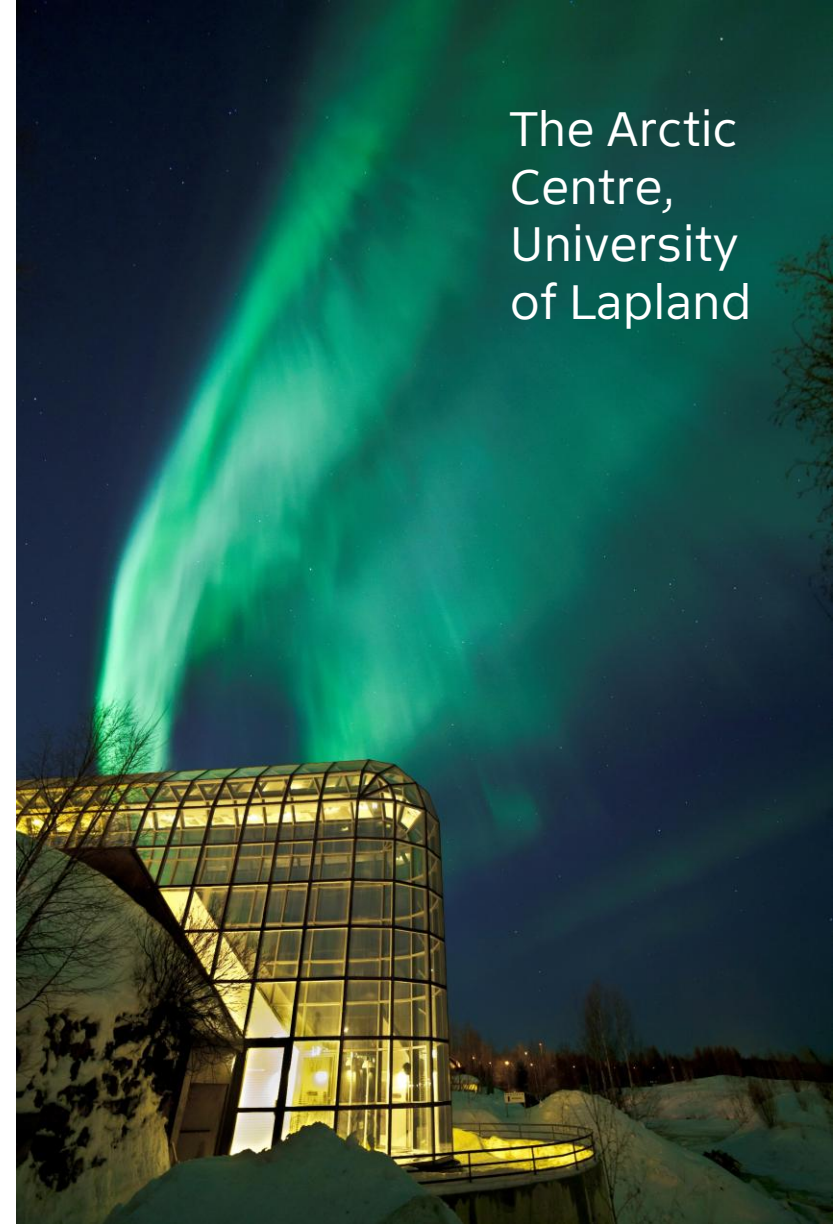
- **Leave a message in the Chat** (your name, university, faculty, collaboration interest)
- **Request matchmaking form (TFK call or other collaboration interests)**
veera.virmasalo@gov.fi
- **Join mailing list (TFK call & other news, updates & enquiries):**
email veera.virmasalo@gov.fi
(your name; academic title; position; university; faculty; any additional information you would like to share)
- **Send info / request to mailing list**
email veera.virmasalo@gov.fi
(keep messages brief)
- **LinkedIn** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/team-finland-knowledge-southern-africa>



Good to know about each other

Finland: Current themes in HE development

- **Increase tertiary attainment** among young people (target ~50% by 2030)
- EUR 255M **doctoral education pilot** (2024–2027) to modernize training, strengthen research talent development, strengthen collaboration with private sector.
- Equality & Equity Development Programme (2025–2027) to **strengthen inclusion**, incl. stronger support for international students and staff; integration into Finnish society and labour markets; multilingual and inclusive campuses.
- **Planned Funding Cuts and Efficiency Reforms (2026–2029)**: Significant cuts will require streamlined operations, alternative revenue sources, and reorganised structures.
- More flexible, blended, inclusive and low-carbon **mobility models**.
- Building **equal, long-term alliances beyond Europe**
- Creative use of EU, private sector and other **external resources for international collaboration**.



The Arctic
Centre,
University
of Lapland

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Southern Africa: Current themes in HE development

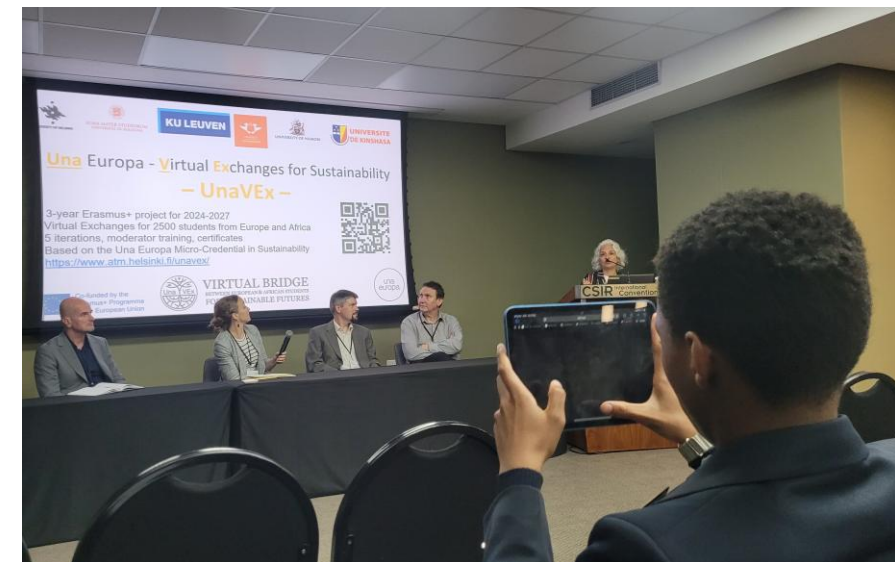
Based on implementation plan of the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA) 2024 – 2034

STEM & TVET Talent Development: Joint programmes to enhance STEM/engineering teaching capacity, curriculum modernisation, and transdisciplinary skills training.

Digital Education Capacity: Collaboration on digital learning platforms, online/hybrid teaching models, OER development, digital literacy, and skills for managing digital education infrastructures.

Institutional Leadership & Governance: Training and exchanges on HE administration, strategy, quality assurance, accreditation systems, and innovation ecosystem governance.

Research & Innovation Management Skills: Capacity development in research administration, impact assessment, data management, and science/innovation policy literacy. >>>



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.... Southern Africa: current themes in HE development

Emerging Technologies Education: Competence building in teaching AI, robotics, data science, digital safety, and other frontier technology subjects within HE curricula.

Climate & Sustainability Education: Joint curriculum strengthening and staff mobility to support teaching in climate adaptation, environmental governance, and sustainability leadership.

Gender Inclusion in HE: Programmes supporting women in academic leadership (esp. in STEM) through mobility, mentorship, academic development pathways, and inclusive pedagogy.

Regional Networks & Centres of Excellence: Strengthening HEIs' participation in continental and regional networks for shared training, mobility, and capacity-building initiatives.



Finland's trade relations priorities in Southern Africa

The TFK funding call is open to all academic fields and all fields are equally valued. However, it is good to know that economic collaboration between Finnish Embassies, national governments and private sector focuses on the sectors mentioned on this slide.

**Embassy of Finland in Zambia
(serving also Malawi, Zimbabwe, Congo DRC):**
Mining and critical raw materials

**Embassy of Finland in Namibia
(serving also Angola):**
ICT & digital solutions;
Clean energy & clean tech; Circular economy

**Embassy of Finland in South Africa
(serving also Botswana, Lesotho, and Mauritius):**
ICT & digital solutions;
Mining and critical raw materials;
Water in the framework of circular economy;
Country branding; Science and research

**Embassy of Finland in Tanzania
(serving also Burundi & Rwanda):**
ICT & digital solutions;
Mining and critical raw materials;
Forestry

**Embassy of Finland in Mozambique
(serving also Madagascar & Eswatini):**
ICT & digital solutions

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Tips for proposals

- **Communicate the *educational need / objective* clearly.** What is the educational need / objective this project aims to address? How do you aim to do that? (Too many proposals focus on describing broad societal challenges instead of zooming in the higher education.)
- **Sustainability.** How do we ensure we are together from the early stages to the end? How will the fruits of the project become embedded in the higher education institutions that are involved?
- **Include different kinds of HEIs as partners.** How does the proposal benefit not the already strong but also those up and coming?



Thank you.

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