

**Name:** Ruta, 49 years old

**Home country:** Lithuania

**Education:** Degree in History

**Occupation in home country:** Worked in customer service and HR

**Moved to Finland:** In 2009 to live with her husband

**Intercultural relationship:** Ruta has been married to a Finnish man for 10 years

**Languages:** Lithuanian, English, Russian, a bit of Finnish

**“MY PATH”:** my story before Finland, in Finland, my goals and hopes

Ruta’s path in Finland started almost 10 years ago, when she moved to Helsinki to live together with her Finnish partner. The couple met thanks to acquaintances they had in common and became good friends. However, after some time, they both realized that the feelings they had for each other were more than a friendship. After approximately one year, they decided that Ruta would move to Finland to her partner.

### **INTERCULTURAL FAMILY/COUPLE**

Ruta admits that she and her partner have a lot in common and sometimes she forgets that they come from different cultures. She points out that for these 11 years together, they have not had arguments or fights, and that “chemistry” between them is still there. Perhaps it is something to do with the fact that they respect each other’s hobbies and interests and show support by participating in them. For example, the couple started singing along with songs on the radio while driving a car, as Ruta’s husband is keen on music. Although she did not listen to music much before meeting him, singing in the car became their little tradition. In turn, he started spending more time outside walking with her, as well as eating healthier.

The woman says that she can rely on her partner in terms of support he gives her, no matter what happens. She feels much happier to overcome difficulties in a new country side by side and is happy to give support in return. Ruta’s parents and friends from Lithuania love her husband and have always been enthusiastic about their relationship. These attitudes from people who are close to them encourage the couple and cheer them up, especially Ruta’s husband.

*Ruta’s tip № 1: Being involved in your partner’s hobby and showing your genuine interest can help you discover new common ground and strengthen your relationship.*

### **FINNISH LANGUAGE**

The couple mostly speaks English, as they believe this language is enough to explain themselves. At the beginning, they tried speaking Finnish at home but Ruta did not feel comfortable because the lack of vocabulary prevented her from expressing emotions and telling jokes. She had a feeling that speaking Finnish made their communication limited and eventually they switched to English. Indeed, sometimes speaking one’s native language to a partner can become a burden, which leads to getting negative impressions about the language, learning process, and communication with the partner. It is normal if someone in a couple does not feel like explaining and teaching their native language. In this case, it is possible to try alternative ways of learning the language together, such as watching movies with Finnish subtitles or reading books written in a simplified language. Ruta personally highlights that being surrounded by Finnish speaking people helped her improve the understanding of the language.

*Ruta’s tip № 2: Try to surround yourself with a Finnish speaking environment, be it a university, workplace, themed events, seminars, workshops or discussion clubs. Listening to Finnish people speaking and a need to interact can activate your language speaking skills.*

## RELATIONSHIPS AND NETWORKS

Previously, Ruta traveled to Finland many times as a tourist. Thus, she felt that the country was familiar, expected an easy integration process and no major life changes when she considered moving to Finland for permanent residence. However, the first challenges came quite soon.

For Ruta, the most difficult aspect to cope with was the impossibility of belonging to any society, as her personal and professional networks were left behind in Lithuania. Like many immigrants, she knew only a few people in Finland and had to build her networks from scratch. What helped her not only to get to know other people but stay in a good mood was going to a gym and taking part in group activities there. She especially enjoyed group dancing, as it involved energetic music and moves. Besides, she could chat with fellow dancers after training.

She also finds walking, jogging, and swimming to be helpful in keeping a good mood. Apart from that, she joins her partner for different events every now and then, where she can get to know other Finns and participate in activities together with them. She is convinced that without her Finnish partner, she would not be aware of these events.

*Ruta's tip № 3: A good way to meet new people and at the same time take care about yourself is doing group sports or activities, such as dancing, zumba, ballet classes, yoga, etc. They allow you to stay healthy and energetic and get to know others who have the same interests as you.*

## EMPLOYMENT

Ruta's first job interview happened quite soon after moving to Finland. It was a big international company that she applied to and the role did not require Finnish skills. Unfortunately, she did not get a job due to the high competition among candidates for English speaking positions. Since then, the woman has done several internships and temporary jobs, which supported her confidence as a job seeker. Even though some of the internships were unpaid, Ruta gained new connections, practical experience to put on her CV, and a taste of Finnish working life. The woman has heard of some of these opportunities through her husband's connections who let him know about open positions that could be of interest to Ruta.

She also recommends volunteering in an industry that one would like to be a part of in the future. Quite often when companies need to hire a new employee, they tend to first think of volunteers or interns whom they already know and can trust.

Besides, Ruta tries to find events for immigrants on Facebook and attend as many of them as possible to get to know people. This was how she found Familia and the Partner's Path project. She felt that the project's content and activities resonated with what her situation and applied for participation. Eventually, it led to getting an internship at the association. One never knows where opportunities can come from!

*Ruta's tip № 4: Be optimistic and don't blame yourself for slow progress in language learning or not being able to find employment yet. Integration comes with time and it is important to take care of yourself and appreciate what you are doing and what has already been done on the path to integration.*