
RESOURCE Project

Refugees' contribution to Europe

Country Report: **Finland**

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I Introduction to RESOURCE

This report will illustrate the positive contribution that refugees can make to current and projected labour market needs. Most refugees come from urban settings and have a good level of education. Many hold academic or professional qualifications and have considerable work experience. They are highly motivated and employers who recruited refugees report being very satisfied with their work performance.

The report is part of a European wide research project called RESOURCE (Refugees' Contribution to Europe), carried out by a partnership of fourteen agencies¹ and funded by the European Refugee Fund. The project analysed elements, practices and policies, which have contributed to refugees' participation in the European labour market from refugees' point of view. It focussed on how refugees' prior skills, qualifications and working experience are being utilised in sectors of the labour market that are currently experiencing skills shortages.

Through desk research and in-depth interviews with employed refugees in EU member states², the project gives insight into the various factors that have contributed to (or obstructed) refugees' integration in Europe. Considering the high levels of unemployment and under-employment among refugees, it is clear that refugees' potential is at present under-utilised by employers. To tackle this waste of human resources the project will describe successful pathways to employment and show how the many barriers refugees encounter can be overcome.

The results are presented in fourteen country reports and one overall publication. We hope that our findings will be an inspiration for:

- Employers to recruit refugees and to take into account the skills, qualifications and work experience they brought with them in exile.
- Refugees to take initiative, build their confidence, and find suitable employment.
- Educational institutes to improve refugees' access to their programmes and develop tailor-made programmes that take into account refugees prior learning.
- Registering bodies to adopt more flexible rules for recognition of refugees' qualifications.
- NGOs and mainstream organisations to provide better support for refugees.
- Policy makers at national and European level to implement more successful integration policies that will create real opportunities for refugees to become self-sufficient.

Because of demographic developments Europe will increasingly be in need of foreign labour to sustain economic growth. Across Europe employers are experiencing difficulties recruiting staff at both skilled and unskilled levels. At the same time the European Union (EU) receives over 350,000 asylum applications per annum. It makes good economic and social sense to better utilise this huge potential.

¹ RETAS (UK), UAF (the Netherlands), OCIV (Belgium), ETC (Austria), Finnish League for Human Rights (Finland), France Terre d'Asile (France), ProAsyl (Germany), Social Work Foundation (Greece), SPIRASI (Ireland), ICS (Italy), ASTI (Luxembourg), Portuguese Refugee Council (Portugal), CEAR (Spain), CARITAS (Sweden).

² The RESOURCE project is funded by the European Refugee Fund. Denmark does not participate in this programme.

2 The Finnish context

Historically, Finland has been a country of net outward migration as Finns emigrated in search of work in the post-World War II period. Compared to other European countries, Finland has traditionally had small indigenous and foreign minority populations. Immigration to Finland remained negligible until the 1990s, when it began to increase, especially with the arrival of the first quota refugees. At present, about 104,000 (or 2%) of Finland's 5.2 million residents are foreign citizens. Of these, an estimated 22,250 have emigrated to Finland as refugees since 1973.³ In the last decade the number of people applying for asylum has varied considerably from year to year.⁴ During 2002, 3,443 people sought asylum in Finland. In addition to individual asylum seekers, Finland is one of ten countries that accepts an annual quota of UNHCR-declared refugees. Since 2001, the quota has been set at 750. In 2002, 569 refugees were accepted under the quota system.⁵

Since 1991, a total of 20,185 refugees have been placed in municipalities across Finland. Of these, the largest single group has been Somalis (4,881 people or about 25%). In order of size the next largest groups are from Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia (3,586), Iraq (3,345) and Iran (2,336). A total of 1,214 refugees from Afghanistan have been received, 95% of them arriving from 1999 onwards. Between 1998 and April 2003, 1,326 refugees from Serbia and Montenegro were also received. The next largest refugee group is Vietnamese, but all of these were received before 1999.⁶

All official statistics on population structure are taken from the national Population Register. This only records one citizenship for each person, regardless of dual citizenship. Naturalised Finnish citizens are recorded as Finns, and there is no indication of their previously held citizenship. Thus, no general statistics used in this report take account of those refugees who have acquired Finnish citizenship.⁷

Further, statistics based on ethnic background or immigration status are generally not collected because this is forbidden by privacy laws. As a result, it is somewhat difficult to locate differentiated data about the refugee and asylum seeker population. In Finland, official immigration terminology defines an immigrant as a person who has moved to the country to live permanently (i.e. longer than two years). An asylum seeker is a person who is applying for refugee protection in Finland, whereas a refugee who has received protective status under the provisions of the Geneva Convention. However, in spoken language the terms 'immigrant', 'foreigner' and 'refugee' are often used interchangeably, resulting in the use of the term 'immigrants' to include refugees, asylum seekers, labour migrants, international students and all other persons of non-Finnish citizenship. In practice, therefore, data on refugees is combined with that of other immigrants. To study asylum seekers and refugees as a separate group, we must look at national statistics collected on the basis of citizenship and mother tongue. This isolates nationality groups that most typically comprise refugees, such as Iraqis, Somalis and so on. Of course, not all members of these national groups are refugees and this must be kept in mind when drawing conclusions based on the data presented.

The state is responsible for asylum seekers when they arrive in Finland. They are placed in reception centres, where they remain until a decision has been made on their asylum applications. There are 15 reception centres across Finland, with each having a capacity for 100-150 people, as well as about 15 staff personnel. Reception centres are run by the state, municipalities and the Finnish Red Cross. They offer temporary accommodation, urgent medical services, interpreter services and leisure activities. Residents receive a subsistence allowance and are responsible for their own meals and household expenses. Children under the age of 16 attend nearby public schools and adults may be

³ Statistics Finland 2003

⁴ In the pre-1990s era, there were very few asylum seekers in Finland. In the early 1990s, there was a relative peak in asylum seeking, partly due to the initiation of the quota refugee scheme. In the years 1990-1993, an average of 2,600 asylum applications were submitted annually. By contrast, the years 1994-1997 saw an average of only 850 applications annually. Since 1998, the annual rate of asylum seeking has risen again, and there have been an average of 2,500 applications per year.

⁵ Ministry of Labour 2003a

⁶ Ministry of Labour 2003b

⁷ However, we did not exclude people of refugee background who have Finnish citizenship from the interviews.

offered language and integration classes. Asylum seekers are allowed to leave the reception centre premises for work or other reasons. On average, asylum seekers live in reception centres for one year, but the period can be longer.⁸ If asylum seekers have friends or relatives in Finland, they may also live with them. In practice, many asylum seekers choose this option and many others wish to move to bigger cities away from the rural areas where reception centres are often located. Once an asylum seeker receives a positive decision, he or she is offered municipal housing and continues to receive subsistence allowances.

⁸ Ministry of Labour 1998:8-9

3 Employment policies and schemes for refugees

3.1 Numbers of refugees per status category

As mentioned earlier, there were 3,443 applications for asylum in Finland in 2002.⁹ Of these, a total of 591 (17.2%) received a positive decision of some sort. Only 14 applicants (0.4%) received full asylum, 250 (7.3%) a residence permit based on need for protection, and 327 (9.5%) a residence permit for other reasons, including family ties. Although there were only 591 positive decisions amongst asylum applicants, the total number of refugees placed in various Finnish municipalities was 1,558. About one third (569 people) were so-called quota refugees selected via the UNHCR and the Finnish state in their home countries for settlement in Finland. In addition to quota refugees and those who received positive decisions, there were also 427 (27.4%) people accepted through family reunification programmes. Of the 11,369 refugees received since 1995, almost half (5,394) have been quota refugees, almost one third (3,569) received positive decisions, and the remaining one fifth (2,379) have been accepted through family reunification programmes.¹⁰

In recent years, a number of organisations have criticised Finland for the low number of recipients of full asylum.¹¹ Finland has also initiated an accelerated procedure for processing asylum applications that are suspected of being unfounded. This procedure was used in the last couple of years especially to assess the cases of relatively large numbers of Roma asylum seekers from Bulgaria, Slovakia and Romania. In addition, there are 'safe country of origin' or 'safe third country' provisions in place. The terms of the Dublin Convention, which determine where an asylum application is handled, are also applied in Finland.

It is important to remember that there is no information available about those refugees who have changed their status or citizenship after receiving asylum or a residence permit for other reasons. This is because only one citizenship is recorded in the population register. Once a person acquires Finnish citizenship, his or her previous citizenship is no longer recorded. Since June 2003, it has been possible to have dual citizenship in Finland, but it is not yet clear how this change will affect the recording procedure.

3.2 Refugees' entitlements to work

Compared to some European countries, refugees and asylum seekers have fairly good entitlements to work in Finland. However, relatively free entitlements to work do not necessarily mean that refugees and asylum seekers have good levels of participation in the labour market. Those applying for asylum are allowed to work after the first three months of submitting their application, provided that a decision on the case is still pending. In practice, the assessment of applications takes one year or more so most asylum seekers going through the normal application procedure, rather than the accelerated process, are entitled to work. Those given a positive decision on their application (full asylum or residence permit for protection or other reasons) are allowed to work freely without having to apply for a separate work permit. They are also entitled to receive unemployment and other labour market benefits, such as allowances, courses and training from the Employment Office.

3.3 Unemployment rates among refugees

Finland has the second highest national unemployment rate in the EU. In October 2003 Finland recorded a national unemployment rate of 8.3% and an employment rate of 66%. There were 210,000

⁹ Directorate of Immigration 2003

¹⁰ Ministry of Labour 2003

¹¹ Including by the head of the Baltic and Nordic office of the UNHCR.

unemployed people in the country at the end of October.¹² Foreigners in Finland have traditionally had much higher unemployment and much lower employment rates than the total population. In 1994, for example, the unemployment rate amongst foreigners stood at 53%, compared to 17% for Finns. The employment situation of foreigners has improved considerably since then, and in 2002 the national unemployment rate was 9%, while it was 29% for foreigners.¹³ Nonetheless, an overall unemployment rate of 29% is very high and variation by gender and nationality group is also considerable.

As mentioned above, it is difficult to locate data about refugees as a separate group because they are often classified together with other immigrants or foreigners in the statistics. Looking at the unemployment and employment rates of national groups that tend to be made up of refugees, we find that unemployment rates are high and labour force participation (LFP) is low.

For example, amongst Somalis, Iraqis and Iranians, who are some of the biggest refugee groups, we find some of the highest unemployment rates and the lowest labour force participation rates. In 2002, Iraqis had an LFP of 6.5% and Iranians 11%. Similarly, the Ministry of Labour has estimated a 2002 unemployment rate of 74% for Iraqis, 62% for Iranians, 58% for Somalis, 52% for former Yugoslavians and 43% for Bosnians. By contrast, estimated unemployment rates for other nationalities are much lower – for example, 33% for Turks, 12% for Poles, 10% for French and 8% for Chinese. The nationality groups with the highest unemployment rates are also those that most often comprise refugees and asylum seekers. It appears, therefore, that unemployment is more common amongst nationality groups that tend to have many refugee members than those who comprise other types of immigrants.

There is a pattern of marginalization in which refugees and immigrants are over-represented in low-skill, traditionally feminised employment sectors, such as cleaning and maintenance work, as well as relatively low-skill health and social sector jobs.¹⁴ These are jobs that the Minister of Labour, Tarja Filatov, has described as: 'Jobs, which do not attract people; which are for passing-through. They often have low salaries, hard tasks and short-term contracts and the content of work might not be very fulfilling'.¹⁵ The problem is that, for refugees and immigrants, these jobs typically are not for passing-through, but form a chain of low-skilled work experience.¹⁶

What might be a passing-through period for native youths easily becomes a permanent status for immigrants who enter the Finnish labour market as adults. Immigrants and refugees typically move from one short, fixed-term job to the next in a vicious circle, which is hard to break without purposeful interference by the employment authorities. For immigrants and refugees, it is important to find any kind of employment when entering the Finnish labour market, since getting a proper foothold is often based on previous work experience in Finland.¹⁷

3.4 Government efforts to tackle unemployment amongst refugees

We have not been able to locate any government schemes aimed specifically at reducing unemployment levels among refugees. However, refugees can normally participate in various schemes and initiatives generally aimed at alleviating unemployment amongst 'foreigners', including immigrants, particular nationality and language groups and so on. Similarly, refugees are included as part of the target group in almost all government schemes and initiatives aimed at foreigners, immigrants or ethnic minorities.

The 1999 Integration Act (*Kotoutumislaki*) forms the backbone of Finland's official integration policy. The law promotes equal opportunities for immigrants and refugees, while encouraging and facilitating their integration into the mainstream society and preserving their own culture and language.¹⁸ Ac-

¹² Statistics Finland 2003: www.stat.fi/tk/tp_tied/tiedotteet/v2003/243tym.html

¹³ Ministry of Labour

¹⁴ Forsander 2002

¹⁵ In a major daily newspaper *Helsingin sanomat*, 1 June 2003

¹⁶ Forsander 2002

¹⁷ Forsander & Alitolppa-Niitamo 2000

¹⁸ Integration Act 493/1999

According to the Integration Act, municipalities are responsible for providing registered immigrant and refugee job-seekers services such as training in language and job skills, as part of their specially developed integration programmes. Immigrants and refugees (in practice mostly the latter) are entitled to these provisions for the first three years after their arrival in Finland. The refugee draws up an integration plan in co-operation with municipality officials and/or the employment office. The plan identifies the best measures to help the refugee's integration, with employment and education being central elements. At the same time, an integration plan may also be drawn up for the refugee's family and children. Education in Finland's national languages is considered the key feature of the integration plan as lack of language skills have repeatedly been identified as major obstacles to employment and integration. However the integration plan may also include vocational or academic education. Although the integration policy focuses on employment, it also encourages non-employment activities, such as community work and social clubs, in order to improve social integration with the majority culture. If a refugee complies with the integration plan, he or she is eligible to receive financial support in the form of an 'integration allowance'.¹⁹ The Integration Act has faced criticism from immigrants and observers because it applies only to those who are active in the labour force (so it excludes youth, women caring for families, pensioners and so on). Further, the integration programmes and plans have been criticised for being one-sided because immigrants face sanctions for lack of participation, whereas there are no penalties against the authorities if they fail to provide adequate guidance or training according to the plan.²⁰

The government has also implicitly included refugees in its Action plan to Combat Ethnic Discrimination and Racism. With respect to employment, the Plan aims to increase ethnic diversity in the Finnish work place, and to protect the rights of ethnic minorities in work-related issues. Specifically, the Plan calls for the provision of counselling, resources, and measures to integrate immigrants and increase their levels of employment. Employment centres are required to work cooperatively to improve the training given to public authorities dealing with immigrants and refugees. The Plan also identifies apprenticeship training, employment subsidy work, practical training and job seeking training aimed as concrete measures to achieve its goals. Furthermore, it recommends the creation of European Social Fund projects to provide language and vocational training, practical training and employment subsidy work to immigrants and refugees.

In recent years, there have been many government and EU-supported initiatives, projects and schemes to improve the employment situation of immigrants and ethnic minorities in Finland. These include the European Commission funded MATE project, which the Ministry of Labour ran for two years between 1999 and 2000. Through five sub-projects dealing in different ways with immigrants and working life, the project aimed to:

- Improve immigrants' expertise and skill.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the employment services.
- Provide guidance and information to young immigrants.
- Improve employers' attitudes towards immigrants through an information campaign.²¹

Although the project did not have a specific focus on refugees, the target group of immigrants was assumed to include those who have come to Finland as refugees. Similar projects are continuing. A few are described in the following section on the role of NGOs because there are both governmental and non-governmental actors involved in their realisation.

An example of a project more clearly aimed at asylum seekers is *Becoming Visible*, a current ESR project run by a coalition of reception centres. Whereas projects on integration and diversity are normally aimed at immigrants, including refugees, who have already gained legal status in Finland, this project aims to create new possibilities for asylum seekers to work and study in Finland while waiting for the decision on their asylum applications. Another goal of the project is to promote interaction between the general public and asylum seekers. It is hoped that an exchange of ideas and experiences

¹⁹ Ministry of Labour 2000

²⁰ Streng 2003:8-9

²¹ More information about the MATE-project can be found in the Ministry of Labour publication *Uutta osaamista työpaikalle*, (New expertise in the work place), Maahanmuuttoasiaa nro 7.

will positively influence the attitudes of Finnish people and create tolerance. The project is being carried out in five locations (Tampere, Turku, Perniö, Punkalaidun, and Joutseno Reception Centres) and will continue until the end of 2004. Although it was contacted in the search for suitable interviewees, there were no cases that matched the requirements of this research. Project staff informed us that most of the participants were employed in low-skills sectors or were mainly attending courses. The impact of the project on employment of asylum seekers has not yet been evaluated.

3.5 Role of NGOs in assisting refugees

NGOs in Finland are very active in promoting refugee and asylum seeker issues, usually in conjunction with the government and international actors, such as EU agencies. The two largest NGOs working mainly on refugee issues are the Refugee Advice Centre (RAC) and the Finnish Refugee Council (FRC). There are also smaller projects aimed at immigrants and refugees, such as MORO (Multicultural Recruitment and Learning) and Majakka-Beacon, which are currently working specifically on employment-related problems.

According to an agreement with the state, the RAC has the main responsibility for organising legal aid and advice for asylum seekers and refugees in Finland. The RAC principally provides legal aid and advice to asylum seekers, refugees and other foreigners in Finland. The RAC relies on both public and private funding, and also works to promote the legal rights of asylum seekers and refugees. Although there are currently no initiatives aimed specifically at assisting refugees in employment, the RAC is often consulted as an expert in refugee affairs and is heard in Parliament on laws concerning immigration and foreigners are drafted and passed.

A large part of the FRC's activities are directed at asylum seekers and refugees outside Finland, mostly in host countries in the developing world. However, it also works in Finland, where its main tasks include providing training and information on refugee-related issues, raising funds for refugees in need, and influencing national and European refugee policies. There is also a significant public information component in the work of the FRC. At the moment, there are no projects focusing directly on employment of asylum seekers and refugees, but a three-year project called TUKENA was initiated in the spring of 2003. It aims to strengthen and support the integration of refugees by improving their social support networks. It is not clear what role employment and recruitment will have in this project.

The Majakka-Beacon project aims to improve the social inclusion of people facing language and cultural barriers, as well as social and health problems. This is to be achieved through a rehabilitation and employment service that is suited to the special needs of the target groups, which include immigrants and refugees at severe risk of social exclusion. The project also designs and organises a training program for trainers, runs publicity campaigns focusing on employers, unions and immigrant communities. The project is a joint effort of the Rehabilitation Foundation (*Kuntoutussäätiö*), the Cities of Helsinki, Espoo, and Vantaa, an adult vocational education institution, a university research centre, and three refugee community organisations.

MORO's goal is to act as an intermediary between employers and immigrants or refugees. It also promotes multiculturalism in personnel policies, recruitment and work culture. Like this research project, the MORO project focuses on sectors in which there are labour shortages. In practice, the project offers vocational training, opportunities for participants to meet potential employers, and the development of common working methods. It is run by three regional vocational adult educational centres and the Helsinki-based Adult Education Coordinating Unit (AIKE), and will continue until the end of 2004. When asked about potential interviewees in the summer, the project staff was able to provide some contacts but were not able to locate refugee participants in the MORO project at the time.

3.6 Recognition of prior qualifications

In Finland, recognition of foreign qualifications varies according to the country in which they were gained, the field of study and the level of qualification. Studies completed and qualifications gained

within the EU generally have a high level of comparability and are recognised easily. This includes, for example, the possibility of transferring academic credits acquired under the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), which has been widely adopted and accepted in Finland. Similarly, medical and higher professional qualifications from within the EU are generally considered equivalent to Finnish qualifications in the same field. This means, for instance, that doctors and medical professionals who have diplomas from an EU country do not need to go through a special legalisation process. By contrast, the recognition and legalisation process for medical professional from countries outside the EU is lengthy and complicated. It is described in detail in chapter 5 of the report.

In general, the National Board of Education (NBE, *Opetushallitus*) is responsible for determining the equivalence of foreign qualifications. The applicant must usually submit foreign documents, along with an official translation in Finnish, to the NBE for evaluation and approval. The NBE may request further proof or documentation from the applicant, and may also contact the home institution for verification or details on documents. If the documents are approved, the applicant receives formal recognition and, if applicable, an equivalence of the qualification with the corresponding Finnish one. However, credit transfer procedures for inclusion of previous studies into new Finnish educational transcripts are carried out by the individual departments or faculties of each higher education institution. Another exception is that recognition of medical diplomas is handled by the National Board of Medicolegal Affairs (*Terveystieteiden tutkimuskeskus*). Finally it is worth mentioning that foreign teaching qualifications are generally not accepted as it is compulsory to obtain the formal Finnish requirements for teaching at various educational levels, ranging from day care and kindergarten to university.

3.7 Main barriers to employment

There are a number of barriers preventing refugees gaining employment in Finland. For the most part, refugees' problems are similar to those other immigrants and foreigners face. The barriers described below are grouped together by theme, not order of importance.

3.7.1 *Racism and discrimination*

Discrimination in the Finnish labour market usually takes an indirect form, often through formal competence demands that might be irrelevant to the job. The most typical example of this is the demand for flawless skills in the Finnish language. Although both employers and foreigners agree that knowing Finnish well is important in the Finnish workplace, many immigrants and refugees feel they are treated unfairly when it comes to language requirements for a job. Prejudice and racism are also commonly reported reasons for not getting a job. According to one survey study, 81% of Somali (most of whom are refugees) and 64% of Arab (including refugees from Iraq and Iran) participants experienced discrimination when looking for a job.²²

3.7.2 *Language skills are necessary and hard to acquire*

Apart from the use of language requirements as an indirect discriminatory filter to keep jobs from immigrants and refugees, the real necessity for adequate knowledge of one or both of Finland's national languages – Finnish and Swedish – is another barrier refugees must overcome before they can enter the workplace. In practice, knowledge of Finnish is considered adequate for most jobs. However, due to the shortage of language courses for refugees and immigrants, as well as the complexity of Finnish as a language, non-native speakers of Finnish usually make slow progress. In some cases, refugees must wait up to a year before receiving their first language course. In others, foreigners who have lived in Finland for a number of years have made so little progress in learning the language that they cannot function in a Finnish-speaking work environment. In Swedish-speaking or bilingual municipalities, both Finnish and Swedish are required for jobs in the public sector or with a customer service element. Knowledge of both Finnish and Swedish is generally required from public servants regardless of

²² Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2002

where they are stationed. Acquiring sufficient language skills can, therefore, be a bigger obstacle for refugees in Finland than elsewhere in the EU.

3.7.3 Overall high unemployment levels

As mentioned earlier, Finland has one of the highest national unemployment rates in the EU (9-12% for 2002, depending on the scale of measurement). Unemployment rose significantly following the economic depression of 1993-94 and has remained a problem since then. The problem of so-called long-term unemployment and dependence on social welfare is especially a topic of debate. In recent years, the decline in the IT and telecommunications industries has also had a significant negative effect on the labour market in a technologically advanced country such as Finland. Within such a structural context of unemployment and labour market instability, the situation for refugees has become even more uncertain.

4 Labour needs and skills shortages in Finland

4.1 Present and future labour market trends

In the EU, the demand for workers in service industries and the demand for secondary and higher educated workers has increased in the period 1995–2000. However, the demand for less educated workers has fallen in most industries. Finland is no exception to these trends.

Finland had the second highest increase in the demand for highly educated workers in the EU (9.7%) from 1995 to 2000. This development is also reflected in unemployment. The unemployment rate for the highly educated in Finland (4.3%) was slightly below the EU average (4.5%), while the unemployment rate for those with secondary education was three percent above the EU average, and the unemployment rate for those with only primary education was seven percent higher.²³

An economic depression occurred in Finland in the early 1990's, caused, among other factors, by the fall of the Soviet Union, which had a dramatic effect on Finnish exports. Unemployment shot up at this time and employment is still often discussed in the light of this event. Employment levels since the depression have risen by 300,000 jobs (35,000 a year) according to macroeconomic accounting. In 1999 the increase in employment rose to 74,000 people, but fell gradually, until it approached zero growth in summer 2002. Before the depression in 1990, the rate of employment was 74.3%, falling to its minimum of 60% in 1994. In 2002 the rate of employment rose to 67.5%.

Employment in the service sector grew by 240,000 between 1994 and 2001. Over half of this occurred between 1999 and 2001, when growth became more home market oriented. Strong growth continued, especially in services to business, social services and the financial sector. Employment in industry grew by 75,000 between 1994 and 2000 (with emphasis on the electronic industries and other metal production industries, as well as industries producing for the construction sector). Despite a strong increase in production, employment in forestry has not increased.

Similar trends are expected for the future. In its summary of Labour Policy Studies, the Ministry of Labour reports that industry will retain its position as a significant employer, with the significance of the metal industry and the electrical and electronics industries further increasing. 'In primary production, employment will still decrease. In the service sector, employment will grow... Employment in the teaching sector will remain high, since the position of training and education will be central in the employment strategy based on competence'. In the occupational structure 'the increase in managerial and expertise duties and the training needs leading to them is emphasised. The proportion of technical performance work and office work in employment will decrease. The exit of certain big age groups from working life will, however cause a considerable number of job openings in these duties, too. The competence requirements will also grow in these duties'.²⁴

The report itself divides the employment sector into three parts, according to what the number of employed people is predicted to be at the beginning (2000) and by the end (2015) of the period for which estimates are made. These are summarised below.

Sectors of growing employment:

- Executive and expert work in manufacturing.
- Executive and expert work in finance.
- Health care and social work caused by changes in the age structure of the population, increase in life expectancy and the need to ensure the well-being of children and families.
- Teaching and cultural work, especially information and communications and different artistic work (caused by the growth of the cultural field).
- Transport work.
- Work in the protection sector (the majority of the growth being caused by the increase in guarding of public and private areas and property).

²³ Employment in Europe 2001

²⁴ Ministry of Labour 2002

Sectors of decreasing employment:

- Agriculture and forestry - due to changes in the structure of the agricultural sector, although the strong decrease in employment will even out in the long term.
- Office work - due to the decrease of traditional office tasks and the effects of the rationalisation of the banking and insurance sectors, which are still being felt. In office work, the trend towards more varied, challenging and independent tasks is continuing.

Sectors where employment will stabilise:

- Work in industry.
- Work in services.
- Work in construction.

It is also necessary to look at wastage to determine what the demand for labour might be in order to consider the possible shortages of labour. (Natural wastage here means those people who move away from the labour force permanently).

Wastage from the employed workforce will be 894,000 people during the next fifteen years, equivalent to 40% of the workforce of employees in 2000.²⁵ The peak of the rate of wastage will be reached in 2011 and 2012, when about 71,000 people will be leaving work annually. The amount and timing of wastage varies between the sectors, caused chiefly by the different age structures of the sectors. In the table below wastage is examined by occupational sector.

There is also predicted to be wastage of the unemployed workforce. In 2001, there were 238,000 unemployed people in Finland, of whom it is estimated that 90,000 people will leave by 2015. Using this information, the report estimates that the number of unemployed people available to the job market is about 147,000, with the largest workforce reserves being in service work, industrial work and social and healthcare work.

According to the report's basic scenario, in the period between 2000 and 2015 there will be 63,600 employment openings a year. Clearly, the largest proportion of these will come up around the end of the decade, primarily due to the large amount of wastage occurring at this time, as well as the increasing demand for labour.

²⁵ If the proposed pension reforms, designed to encourage people to stay at work for longer, take place this may be reduced by 13,000.

Table 1: Size of wastage and its share of the employed workforce in Finland

Occupational sector	Employed 2000	Wastage 2000 – 2015	
	People	People	%
Agriculture and forestry work	99,600	50,900	51.2
Industrial work	408,200	157,900	38.7
Construction work	84,500	40,200	47.6
Transport work	78,000	33,800	43.3
Executive and expert work - manufacturing	186,700	68,800	36.8
Service work	414,400	152,700	36.8
Office work	231,400	86,700	37.4
Executive and expert work - finance	156,100	60,300	38.6
Care work	287,900	123,400	42.9
Teaching and cultural work	139,800	53,000	37.9
Work in protection	36,600	15,800	43.1
Unknown	113,300	20,200	44.6
Total	2,236,500	894,000	40.0

Source: Labour Policy Studies No.234: Työvoima 2020, Loppuraportti tammikuu 2003 (Workforce 2020, Final Report January 2003)

In the basic scenario, 495,000 employment opportunities will open in industry, services and social and healthcare work, which is over half of the total amount of employment openings. In the sectors requiring a high level of education (executive and expert positions in finance and administration, teaching and cultural work) this number will be 340,000.

It is not possible to estimate the long-term effect due to lack of advance information about population statistics. Production and transport, along with financial and administration executive and expert work, make up about half of the job openings, in addition to which the wastage in these sectors is growing. The number of people employed in social and healthcare work and education will also grow, but over 60% of the job openings are caused by wastage. In other occupational sectors employment will remain close to its present level or decrease, in which case all the new employment opportunities will be brought about by wastage. The only sectors in which employment will clearly decrease are agriculture, forestry and office work. The estimated 147,000 unemployed who will still be available to the labour market in 2015 could fill roughly 15% of the employment opportunities that will open according to the basic scenario.²⁶

4.2 Responses by employers and the government to labour shortages

The debate on changes in the workforce, labour policy and employment in Finland is complex and cannot be covered in sufficient detail in the scope of this report. Instead of going into details on the opinions, arguments and standpoints of the various actors involved, we will present a brief outline of the main lines of thought concerning these issues. The position of immigrants, refugees and labour migrants is fairly important in the debate but suffice it to say that although these groups are clearly on the agenda, there has been no concrete policy formulation on the role they will play in questions of labour shortages and workforce replacement.

Responses to the labour market changes described above are multiple and varied. The problem of high national unemployment rates is the main concern for government bodies such as the Ministry of Labour, which tends to support the line that unemployed Finns should be integrated into the labour market before labour is imported from elsewhere. This view is also commonly held by the general public, including by some members of minority groups, such as immigrants.

On the other hand, Finnish educational institutions, as well as the Ministry of Education, have joined other Western European countries in supporting measures aimed at increasing the immigration of highly skilled labour in the form of university and polytechnic students. This is also regarded as a means to stave off the sudden decline in workforce numbers, which is predicted to begin as soon as

²⁶ Työvoima 2020

2007. To this end, the Ministry of Education has, for example, formulated an internationalisation strategy according to which, the number of foreign students in Finnish universities should be more than doubled by 2010. The main setback to the implementation of the strategy has been the universities' funding problems.

Employers' reactions have been somewhat mixed, with some industries clearly opposed to the idea of importing labour and others, such as the IT industry (which has already been recruiting skilled foreign workers for some time), supporting it. There has also been discussion about the possible role unemployed immigrants and refugees, who already live in Finland, can play but it is often subdued under claims to prioritise the reduction of unemployment amongst the majority population. On the whole, there has been no specific policy action to address structural changes in the workforce or labour shortages by using the skills and resources of the immigrant and refugee population. However, there are ongoing attempts at the local level to improve the labour force participation levels of these groups. Such initiatives have been discussed earlier in this report.

5 Presentation and analysis of interview results

5.1 The interviewees

The Finnish sample consists of 22 interviews, conducted between 16 June and 28 November 2003. The Quantitative Data Sheet for Finland contains some basic information about the refugees interviewed. Men are slightly over-represented with 13 men and 9 women. The sample is a young group, and almost three quarters of interviewees are under than 40 years of age. This is in line with the general trend among the foreign population in Finland, which has a younger average age than the native population.²⁷

The majority of interviewees are from the Middle East, most of these being Kurdish refugees from Iraq and Iran, although there are also a few Arabic-speaking Iraqis and Farsi-speaking Iranians. The next largest group is Somalis, who make up about a third of the group. The remaining two refugees are from Bosnia and Vietnam, both young people who arrived in Finland at the ages of 17 and 10 years, respectively. Somalis comprise the largest refugee group in Finland, followed by Bosnians and former Yugoslavians, Iraqis and Iranians. In terms of being representative, the sample's three largest groups are among the top four refugee groups. However, we were not able to locate more than one Bosnian interviewee even though they are second largest refugee group. This might be because Bosnians and former Yugoslavians are less visible amongst the population than refugees from the other groups. The time spent in Finland may also play a role, and this is discussed further later in the report.

More than half of the interviewees, most of whom represent 'success stories' in some way, arrived in Finland between 1980 and 1994. Only three refugees out of 22 have arrived less than five years ago. Although the intent of the research was to locate refugees who have quickly and successfully integrated into the Finnish labour market, it was virtually impossible to locate any success stories of employment amongst recently arrived refugees. This confirms the earlier observation that labour market integration is generally a slow process for refugees in Finland and recent arrivals easily become stuck in the cycle of short-term, low-skill jobs. On the other hand, it makes the cases of the nine refugees who arrived in Finland less than ten years ago interesting because they may indicate factors contributing to more rapid labour market integration than usual. This issue will be discussed further when the individual cases are described.

In terms of legal status, the Finnish interviewee group is interesting in that almost half are people who originally came to the country as refugees but have now acquired Finnish citizenship. Another large group maintain their refugee status.²⁸ There are only two people with humanitarian status and no asylum seekers in the group at all. The absence of asylum seekers strengthens the observation that those who have recently arrived in the country are usually not successful in labour market integration, even though asylum seekers are allowed to work three months after entering the country. The large number of Finnish citizens also points to the slow labour market integration process. Successful refugees appear to be those who have lived in Finland a number of years and become settled enough to have acquired Finnish citizenship.²⁹

²⁷ There are proportionally more working-age foreigners in Finland compared to the majority Finnish population (75.7% of foreigners are of working age, compared to 66.6% of Finns). Looking at the populations of foreigners and Finns as a whole, there is very little difference in the proportion of children under the age of 14 (17.8% of Finns and 17.9% of foreigners are children under the age of 14). However, almost 30% of Africans and 25% of Asians are under the age of 14, compared to only 16% of Europeans. This indicates that while the overall foreigner population is not much younger than the Finnish majority, there populations of Africans and Asians in Finland are younger than others (Source: Statistics Finland).

²⁸ For most of these people, refugee status was granted by selection under the UNHCR quota refugee scheme shortly before their arrival in Finland. In Finland, refugee status entitles the recipient to a permanent residence status, as well as the right to unlimited employment.

²⁹ A new Finnish citizenship law, which allows dual citizenship, came into effect in June 2003. According to the old law, one could apply for Finnish citizenship after having lived in the country continuously for 5 years on a permanent status (which includes refugee status). The major change with respect to refugees is that the time requirement has now been lengthened to 6 years of continuous residence, or 7 years of interrupted residence. The requirements are shorter in the case of spouses of Finnish citizens, who require only 4 years of continuous or 5 years of interrupted residence.

The interviewees generally comprise a highly educated group, with just over half arriving in Finland with some higher education, whether academic or professional. Similarly, the interviewees are multilingual, and more than three quarters of them currently know at least four languages. However, the level of diploma equivalence or recognition of studies in Finland is quite low. Only three people believed their previous studies were fully recognised and about a third felt their previous studies were not recognised at all. Another third did not bother to apply for recognition, sometimes because they felt they had only low vocational or secondary school qualifications, or because they did not believe it was worth the effort of getting their studies recognised. For those with higher medical qualifications before arrival (a doctor, a dentist and a nurse), the recognition procedure took an average of 28 months, though they claimed that this was relatively fast, compared to most of their colleagues.

The interviewee group has also actively pursued further education in Finland. Those who arrived with only a secondary or vocational school education have risen to the higher education level and some have also completed university degrees. Amongst the entire group, there is not a single person who has not pursued any further education in Finland. The most popular course of study, for this group, is a professional qualification, such as social and healthcare services practical nurse (*lähihoitaja*) or a Bachelor's degree in IT from a polytechnic. These study choices will be discussed in more detail later.

In terms of employment, more than three quarters of the group was not working in the three specified sectors of the research in their home countries. Almost a third of the interviewees were students and over a third were employed in another sector such as teaching, business and farming. Similarly, less than half had participated in any kind of practical training in their home country. However, all but one of the interviewees has participated in a practical training in Finland.³⁰ Half the interviewees are currently employed in the social and healthcare sector. This includes a doctor, a dentist, a nurse, an x-ray technician, four social and healthcare services practical nurses who work in homes for the elderly, public day care centres, hospitals or as social workers, two special teachers working with immigrants and refugees, and an interpreter working with refugees and municipal authorities. There are also three students who intend to work in the healthcare sector and will be obtaining their upper vocational level qualifications within a year.

There are five refugees employed in the IT sector, including a software engineer and a senior systems engineer in the telecommunications industry, an IT systems analyst, an IT multimedia coordinator and researcher, and a business information technologist (*datanomi*). There is also one student who has almost completed his vocational qualification in electronics and telecommunications technology, but has not yet managed to find work in a related field. None of the group members works in the engineering sector, and we have been surprised by the difficulty of locating refugees employed as engineers in Finland. Nonetheless, there are some group members who have training in such a field from their home country but all are now working in the social and healthcare sector. They include, for example, an Iraqi woman statistician who now works as a childminder in a day care centre, an Iranian electrical engineer who is now an interpreter, and an Iraqi woman with a Bachelor's Degree in physics who used to work as a hospital equipment technician and has recently completed a social and healthcare services practical nurse diploma in a related field.

Finally, there are two interviewees who are not currently employed in any of the three sectors studied in this research. They include a trade policy counsellor and a factory worker. One of them used to work in the social sector and has not been able to find similar work since that job and the other was included in the study because he works in the forestry industry, which is a major employment sector in Finland and, therefore, interesting to look at. On the whole, the correlation between current jobs and the skills, abilities and knowledge acquired before arrival in Finland is quite low. This will be discussed further below.

³⁰ The person who has not participated in any practical training has not done so because he found a part time job soon after completing a Finnish language course and, therefore, felt he did not need to participate in any practical training. His employment later became full-time and he is now working and studying at the same time.

5.2 Match between current job and skills and abilities acquired in country of origin

About a third of the interviewees feel their work does not correspond at all to the skills and abilities they acquired in their home countries. Most often, this is because the current job is completely different from the one in the home country, as many have changed fields and started a new career. These interviewees were usually not disappointed in the career change although there were some feelings of frustration over the loss of time and experience.

In my home country I did a completely different job. It [the current job] does not correspond at all. It [job in home country] was still service work but now I do completely different work, it's healthcare work and [before] it was office work. (Shirin, Iran, health & social care)

A further third say the correspondence between the old and new jobs is only partial. This is the case for Said, who studied and worked as an electrician in Somalia but is currently employed as a systems analyst in the IT sector.

Electronics, IT and electricity work are related to each other. It [the current job] corresponds to some extent, but not a lot. [Interviewer: Why not a lot?] The field is completely different. You can't say that electronic engineering and the IT fields are the same. But at least technically, they are the same. [Interviewer: So there is something related in your current job to what you did before?] Yes, something. (Said, Somalia, IT)

In some cases, interviewees felt the question was difficult to answer or irrelevant because they have changed their career completely and acquired new skills in Finland, which they cannot compare at all with their previous work. This is also because the refugee may have been quite young when he or she left the home country and, therefore, did not have a chance to establish himself or herself in any career. In such cases, the skills and abilities of the home country are often irrelevant in the new career field.

Only two refugees felt their current jobs fully reflect the skills and abilities gained in their home country. Both are young men from Somalia. The first studied only until secondary school in his home country but was always interested in technology and engineering-related subjects. Even in Somalia, he had some trainee experience in a laboratory and as an assistant teacher of physics and mathematics. Now that he is working in the telecommunications field, he feels the job is very clearly related to what he studied in his home country, and would have continued to study had he remained there. The second completed a Bachelor's Degree and a diploma course in economics and business administration before coming to Finland and is now working in trade policy. He feels his current job is clearly related to the studies he completed before coming to Finland. After arrival, he has also completed a Master's Degree in the same field from a Finnish university.

On the whole, however, it appears that refugees' current jobs do not make use of the skills and abilities they have learnt or used in their home countries. Most often, the interviewees have abandoned their old careers and fields of interest to start something completely new after they arrived in Finland. The reasons for this trend are discussed further below.

5.3 Relation between educational and work background and current employment

The interviews suggest that there is a low correlation between refugees' current jobs and studies or work in the home country, but a high correlation between their current jobs and studies or work in the host country. This means that most of the refugees interviewed said their current jobs have little or nothing to do with what they studied or did in their home countries. However, the study and employment track in Finland is more consistent, and many interviewees have found jobs in the field of studies or practical training started and completed in Finland.

In some cases, the field chosen in Finland was the person's 'back-up' career plan in the home country. Often the career choice in Finland was made pragmatically, with a view to its usefulness and applicability in the Finnish context. For those working in the IT sector, for example, the decision to go into this field was quite clearly related to its prominence and good performance in the Finnish job market. Others chose the health and social care sector because they thought it would bring job security in Finland.

Well, that's a good question because I had plans in Somalia and I had never thought that I would be working in Finland. So while I was in Somalia I was thinking about studying agriculture and also the second option was IT. [...] I was planning to graduate secondary school and go to the army [military service] and after that, apply for agricultural university in Somalia. But the plan has changed and I had also this second option, which is IT. And Finland is also a good place to study IT so I have continued. [...] In Somalia, agriculture is much preferred than IT or something else. But when I came to Finland studying agriculture didn't come into my mind because the environment is so different. So I continued studying IT. And the other thing is that these training places and all these things have helped me to continue with IT. (Hassan, Somalia, IT)

A few refugees had already planned to start a new educational field or career, even before they arrived in Finland. This was the case with a Kurdish refugee who had decided that he would give up his career as a teacher and begin studying IT, while in a refugee camp, waiting for the decision to be sent to Finland. He did not apply for any recognition of his teaching diploma and instead began studying to be a printing technician. He later changed his study field to IT and multimedia communications and gained Master's level qualifications. He currently works as a multimedia coordinator and researcher in a polytechnic. Such patterns of conscious career change may also explain why there is an overall low correspondence between the skills and abilities acquired in the home countries and the current jobs, but a very clear correspondence between the studies and skills acquired in Finland and the current career.

This also suggests that successful refugees are able to make a good transition from studies to working life in Finland. Especially in vocational fields, such as healthcare, many refugees pointed out that the compulsory practical training periods are a good pathway to securing a job, sometimes in the same hospital or healthcare unit. In the IT sector also, the transition from summer trainee to thesis worker and finally permanent employee was a secure track to employment success. In general, it appears that those who are successful are able to make a smooth transition from the practical training stage of their studies into a job in the same field they have studied.

With respect to qualifications, most refugees felt education from their home countries was not enough to get them a job. They believed they had to continue their studies in Finland, whether or not their diplomas were recognised. Perhaps the point that stands most clearly out in the interviews is the refugees' feeling that further education in Finland is necessary for entering work life. Almost all of the refugees believed that their success would not have been possible if they had not continued their studies in Finland, whether in the same field as before, or a completely new area. The importance of further education in Finland is also discussed later in this chapter.

5.4 Impact of recognition procedures on employment

Because many of the interviewees came to Finland as teenagers or young adults, they did not have educational qualifications beyond secondary school when they arrived. The youngest had not even completed their secondary schooling upon arrival, and were simply admitted into Finnish primary or secondary schools a few years below the level they had been at in their home country. For these people, recognition of qualifications was not an issue. One of them is Alina, a Bosnian refugee who came at the age of 17 but did not get recognition for the two years of secondary school studies she had completed in her home country.

I had to go to primary school for just one year. ... They didn't accept them [school documents]. ... They said that in principle one has to go through primary school in Finland and then vocational school or secondary school. [...], I got to the entrance exams and they had told me in the paper that I can bring all the certificates but then when I went to the exam they said that my certificates don't affect my acceptance because in principle they don't accept them because I hadn't been to school here in Finland. So then I had to go to primary school for one year, in the 9th grade.

(Alina, Bosnia, health & social care)

For slightly older people, who had completed secondary school in the home country but had no further studies or work experience, secondary school diplomas were sometimes simply added to their school records. Some, especially those who had no documentary evidence of completing secondary school, received equivalence of their previous studies only after they had taken some additional courses.

For those who have studied at university, either completing a degree or just having some course credits, there is the option of getting credits transferred into a new Finnish degree. However, the credit transfer process varies considerably from one university to the next and even from one department to the next. A few were fairly successful in getting credit for studies completed before coming to Finland but others have spent many years trying to get their university credits transferred and have yet to succeed. Study documents, such as diplomas, certificates and university transcripts, play a central role in this process.

One example is the case of Hussein, who had been studying electrical engineering for three years in Baghdad University when his studies were interrupted because he had to flee Iraq. After he arrived in Finland in 1990, he spent many months trying to get recognition for the studies he had completed, or to get admission in an institution to study the same field. Because he had fled his home country suddenly, he had no certificates at all and this proved to be the main obstacle in his path. He was told that, without any documents to prove his university studies in Iraq, he would have to begin as a first-year student at the university. He would also have to get through an entrance exam. He explains the situation with his study documents:

I don't know what the background was but generally in Finland certificates are emphasised, or written diplomas and documents. It's the only way a person can prove that he has studied something. But when I didn't have any documents with me then ... I have tried to get my certificates from Iraq. One of my brothers went there to the university in Iraq, to Baghdad University to get my documents but he was told that they can't give them to anyone. I have to go myself and get them. But, of course, it was impossible to go there then during the time of former regime, of Saddam Hussein was a dangerous government and then I have this political background that's why it was too high a price for me. That's why it was impossible to get that certificate. (Hussein, Iraq, health & social care)

Hussein's case suggests that failure to get recognition of previous qualifications, rather than personal choice, may also be the cause a complete change of career. In the first few years of being in Finland, he tried hard to follow his intended career path, but later strayed from it because it proved too difficult. For financial reasons, he began to accept work as an interpreter and later obtained certification to work as a professional interpreter. This is quite in line with the idea that refugees are often forced to accept whatever work they can in order to earn a living in Finland.

As I said, in 1992 I tried hard to get into university to study but I didn't get the place. I mean, I failed in the competition. And the next year, I tried again somewhat but I thought that now I have to work a bit. And then after that came all kinds of things, for example, it's difficult, and it's expensive. These two things have prevented me until now. If I start studying, I'll have to study anyway continuously and the whole day and night too. On the one hand it's very expensive, I have to take a loan from the bank and then if it takes four or five years, then [I'll still] have to pay the loan back. And it affects life a lot. I thought, no, a normal life is better.

(Hussein, Iraq, health & social care)

Another refugee, Said, studied electrical engineering in Somalia but changed to IT in Finland. He also believes the change, although not as drastic as Hussein's, was necessary because his previous studies were not recognised. Nonetheless, he is now happy with the change because he has been successful in employment.

In the beginning, in Somalia, I studied electrical engineering and in Finland IT, it is a kind of career change but I didn't see it as any career change. But it was almost mandatory for me to study something different from what I studied in Somalia because ... if the certificate is not ... it doesn't function in Finland at all. I didn't start from the point that I'll study the same subject I studied in Somalia and ... as further education, I would have studied the same field. But it didn't happen at all. [Interviewer: Are you satisfied that you changed fields?] Yes I am.

(Said, Somalia, IT)

An Iranian refugee, Samran, has also had problems getting recognition for his interrupted studies in Persian classical music at Teheran University. In his home country, he used to teach music and intended to become a performer and teacher. In Finland, he has been working as a special teacher for immigrant and refugee children in primary and lower secondary schools. He feels his current job partly reflects the skills and knowledge he gained in his home country because he is still working with young people and is very satisfied with teaching, although he has not been able to teach Persian classical music in Finland. In addition to teaching full time, he is also completing university studies to get formal teaching qualifications. For two years, he has been trying to get his Iranian studies recognised in Finland, but, without any documents, this has been impossible. He remains hopeful that he will one day get credit for his studies, which would enable him to complete his Finnish university degree faster and, therefore, receive a better salary and get a permanent teaching contract (*virka*). His case suggests that recognition procedures can also have a negative impact on the speed or ability of refugees to gain the formal qualifications needed for upward mobility and salary advances in their careers in Finland.

5.5 Impact of recognition procedures on healthcare professionals

Recognition procedures may be especially complicated for those wishing to continue an earlier career in the health field. Most of the interviewees currently working in the health sector had no experience of this sector in their home countries so their stories do not tell us much about the recognition of health qualifications. However, there appears to be a general belief that getting recognition for prior medical qualifications can be difficult and can cause more frustration than simply getting new qualifications in Finland.

After a person is able to study and get education in Finland it's not so hard but when ... education and qualifications that a person has from his home country are not accepted, ... [experience] gets lost. ... Luckily I didn't have a higher education or university education, but I have seen people who have university education and they have to go through everything over again or partly go through it again, like doctors. I have seen Iranian doctors who have had education and they have a degree but they have to go partially through the all education again, at least the language skills have to be so good that he is able to cope as a doctor.

(Reza, Iran, health & social care)

There are only three interviewees who had medical qualifications before coming to Finland. One is a woman who qualified as a nurse in Russia before coming to Finland as a refugee. She explained that her recognition procedure took about three years, during which she was not allowed to work, but had to study, sometimes repeating the coursework she had already completed, to re-qualify in a Finnish polytechnic and receive a licence to practice nursing. She also believed the process was lengthened and more complicated because she had been placed in a rural municipality in northern Finland, where officials had little experience dealing with foreign qualifications, even those from neighbouring Russia.

The re-qualification process for people with higher medical qualifications from outside the EU consists of recognition of prior degrees, followed by legalisation and obtaining a Finnish licence to prac-

tice. The whole process is conducted by the National Board of Medicolegal Affairs (*Terveydenhuollon oikeusturvakeskus*), in conjunction with some university medical and dentistry departments. The recognition of prior degrees involves verification of the authenticity of the applicant's documents and its acceptance as proof of education in the relevant field. The legalisation process is lengthier and applicants must meet various requirements to receive a licence to practice, for example, medicine or dentistry. Doctors are required to have a recognised medical degree, sufficient Finnish language skills,³¹ and a compulsory training period of six months. In addition, they must pass three exams, the first on theory, the second on social and legal issues and the third practical. The exams are arranged by the University of Tampere and are scheduled at intervals of three to four months. In total, the legalisation process can take a year or longer, from the time the degree is recognised, provided the applicant passes all exams on the first try. In general, a doctor is not allowed to treat patients until a licence is granted. However, it is possible to treat patients if a senior doctor gives permission for the applicant to work under his or her supervision. The legalisation process is fairly similar for dentists, except that the compulsory training period is called an orientation phase and is completed in the six months between the two stages of the third and final exam. The exams for dentists are currently held by the University of Helsinki. There are also differences in the scheduling and order of examinations, although their structure is fairly similar to those for doctors.

The two interviewees who had medical and dental qualifications before coming to Finland were successful in re-qualifying, and were able to begin treating patients about two and a half years after their arrival in Finland. Their story is described in the case study section of the report. Although Mona and Mustafa are ideal interviewees for the purposes of research because of their very successful stories, they seem to be exceptional in this aspect and are aware that the process is generally much longer and more difficult than it was for them. They explain, for example, that their colleagues have often had problems re-qualifying and that it is not unusual to take the examinations more than once, or spend many years on the re-qualification process.

5.6 Pathways to employment

An important aim of the research was to examine the factors and pathways contributing to success in employment. In Finland, interviews were conducted in such a way that interviewees were first asked to spontaneously think of three success factors. Their spontaneous responses were marked on the interview form and they were asked to discuss them further. If the interviewee was not able to come up with three factors, or after they had given their own responses, they were told the factors listed on the interview form and were asked to give comments or feedback on what role the listed factors had played in their experience. The three most common pathways identified, including both the spontaneously given responses and those prompted by the interviewer, are listed below. Some other commonly mentioned pathways are also discussed briefly.

5.6.1 *Personal skills and competence*

Almost unanimously, the interviewees believed that their own skills, competence and personality helped them most in finding suitable employment. The characteristics mentioned include: motivation, determination, self-confidence, expertise, occupational skill, patience, persistence, initiative, being a natural self-starter, activeness, the desire for self-improvement, a sense of sacrifice, dedication, tenacity, dynamism, a strong work ethic, industriousness, having a positive attitude, pleasant personality, open-mindedness, diplomacy, politeness, social skills, language skills, flexibility and cooperativeness. There was a strong general feeling that they had wanted to 'do something' with their lives, build a new future, or, in some cases, regain the social position they had lost in the process of becoming a refugee. Often they described themselves as the kind of people who don't give up, or are determined

³¹ Sufficient language skills can be proven by obtaining a minimum level of 3 out of 8 in the national Finnish language test scale.

to change and shape their own destinies. Usually, they felt it was quite natural for them to have succeeded, as this was their part of their personality in their home countries too.

One's own skills help ... it helps when a person does work from the heart and likes the work he does, he does it for himself, so, really from the whole heart, and, yes it helps a lot when others notice that this [person] wants to do work, and knows how to work. So when I had learnt everything that I have been taught during the school time so well that I have gotten a real good certificate, so all my marks are really high, and it definitely shows in the work too, when a person knows the work. Skill and knowledge is real important. (Reza, Iran, health & social care)

It's like investment, you have to, in fact not investment only, even you have to make sacrifices. There are two months I remember I was going to [practical training], walking some kilometres, there was no bus and I didn't receive any money. [In fact] I was paying for transportation, but I was just expecting that I will get some kind of paper, a certificate, and experience and I got it really [...] it opened all the doors. (Ahmed, Somalia, IT)

Yes, I think I'm a good model for them, those who are just at home. I would say that in Finland there is an opportunity for everyone to educate themselves, or participate. Much, much better than, for example, than in my home country, they are there, and there are no opportunities. And people who are here they should use it to their advantage. Others don't have it, and they try to go study elsewhere, how can I get there, how can I study, how can I pay? And here it is offered, and they just sit at home. I would anyway say that they should see that as an example it is possible to survive here, if you want to. (Aasha, Somalia, health & social care)

Tenacity, me myself. I am ... when I decide something, I do my best. I didn't wait for anyone else to help me. I went myself. In February, I always started looking for summer jobs. So I didn't sit and wait that someone would come and say to me 'come to work'. I just went in and asked myself. ... I found my summer job from the hospital, although I was still a student, as an x-ray technician, because they told me, I didn't say this myself, but I was told I am an open person and I get along well with people. (Shirin, Iran, health & social care)

5.6.2 Language skills

The importance of knowing Finnish has already been mentioned as a barrier to entering the labour market. Therefore, it may seem quite natural that those refugees who have been successful in finding jobs have also credited their success to their good skills in Finnish. Contrary to expectations before the interview stage of the research, the majority of refugees were interviewed in Finnish and not in English. This already indicates, to some extent, their good linguistic integration – many of them feel that their Finnish is stronger than their English. The same comfort and skill in using Finnish was important for most interviewees in getting their current jobs. This is particularly true in the health and social sector, which involves a lot of interaction with clients or patients.

Of course [language courses have been useful]! Without language lessons, how would I have managed then with elderly people because they don't know anything but Finnish? ... Learning the language is the most important thing of all in Finland. Many ... many think they can cope with using English. Yes they cope in everyday life but not in working life. So in working life [one] needs Finnish language instruction, [unless] they find these kinds of private jobs where only English is used, but that's very rare. I don't know how one can cope in that but if someone wants in Finland to do work and be in typical work life, it's essential to learn Finnish. (Reza, Iran, health & social care)

For most of the interviewees, language courses were the first step in education and re-qualification in Finland and were often mentioned as an important pathway to success. In many cases, the refugees continued to study Finnish, after the first course, as part of other studies to gain qualifications or to add to their previous qualifications. A number of interviewees pointed out that their own motivation and effort helped them to learn the language quickly or well enough to be able to apply for a job. Leila, an

Iraqi woman, gave the example that she had spent a few hours every day with her Finnish books in her determination to learn the language, study and find work. Although she used to work as an accountant in her home country, she has now qualified as a basic caregiver and has a job as a child-minder in a public day care centre. Eziz describes being able to communicate in Finnish as being an active member of the larger Finnish-speaking family.

To be honest I learned very quickly, the Finnish language and when you speak with a Finn in Finnish. It feels good for everybody [...] because that shows that I have some kind of respect for you, that I learned your language. [...] It depends on the attitude, if you have the attitude that you have decided to be successful and you have decided to be part of the society, you have to learn the language. Because you cannot be part of a family where you don't talk to the family members. (Eziz, Iran, IT)

Except for the interviewees from the IT sector who also use English, most refugees use Finnish in the workplace and feel that being able to interact with their colleagues in Finnish has helped their integration and has also been a necessary condition for getting the job.

5.6.3 **Education and practical training in Finland**

Many of the interviewed refugees believed further education in Finland, especially in combination with practical training periods, had been one of the keys to success in employment. Almost all interviewees felt it is impossible to find work without obtaining some kind of Finnish educational qualification after arrival. Some interviewees believed this was because foreign qualifications are not esteemed in Finland. The general feeling was that further education in Finland, or some kind of updating of previous qualifications, was one of the most important steps to being able to compete on the job market.

[Education in Finland helped] quite a lot, because only Finnish education is valued here. No other education is valued. It was essential [to have Finnish educational qualifications]. Quite essential because if you have a certificate from somewhere else, however valuable it may be, the Ministry of Education won't accept it and employers won't value it either. You can't get work on the basis of that certificate at all. (Said, Somalia, IT)

A number of refugees also pointed out the logical fact that Finnish employers are simply more familiar with and trusting of local educational qualifications. For refugees who came to Finland as teenagers and so completed all their higher education in Finland, this was a clear benefit. As Ahmed explains, for example, his employer could trust his qualifications and did not have to make an extra effort to investigate them.

Yes, definitely yes [further education in Finland was important], because I remember other people [who did not have Finnish educational qualifications]. They could question them, their education, or they could send them to go back, something like that. But my case was just like straightforward. They knew the books and teachers and it wasn't difficult. (Ahmed, Somalia, IT)

The views of Said and Ahmed might also explain the high level of participation in education or training amongst the interviewee group. As mentioned earlier, every single interviewee had successfully completed at least one educational programme in Finland, even if language studies are excluded. More commonly, they had been studying almost continuously since their arrival in the country, alongside their employment. Such a 'life-long learning' approach is common in Finland and refugees do not seem exceptional in their attitude towards it.

In the most successful cases, the refugees had arrived in Finland as teenagers or young adults and after about a year of language studies or time spent in reception centres, had taken admission in a Finnish vocational secondary school or polytechnic and completed a short vocational diploma course. After this, they had pursued further academic studies at the polytechnic or even university level and had gained good local educational qualifications, as well as language skills.

Especially in the IT and health sectors, the studies normally involved compulsory trainee periods (usually six weeks at a time for health sector and a few months for IT) which enabled the refugees to

make a relatively smooth transition to employment once their studies were completed. For those in the IT sector, there was often a direct transition from being a trainee to a full-time employee once the thesis or final report of the academic programme had been written for the company. The interviews suggest, therefore, that unpaid trainee periods which are part of the study programme are an important stepping stone to work life. Some refugees commented that because trainee periods are unpaid (except in the IT and engineering sectors where they may be paid), it is perhaps easier for a Finnish employer to take the risk of accepting a refugee worker. Once they are satisfied with the performance of the worker, it is easier to get a prolonged employment contract.

Though you have any kind of education – higher education, university education – if you don't have work experience, you won't necessarily get a job. Work experience is the most important of all. (Said, Somalia, IT)

The biggest help was the work placement, I was there and I got to know [working life], during my studies, I was there as a trainee and that helped quite a lot. I got to know people and the workplace and ... and they were satisfied with my work during the work placement. Then I went to ask for a job, where it was possible for them, they took me to work then. (Reza, Iran, health & social care)

[During the training], I have seen the way they work and it was like, it encouraged me a lot. It gave me motivation and even also the direction and I have seen also how things there are actually. So although its only two months, it was very useful. And the three months I got also from Nokia. The three months as a trainee was also a very useful tool because it was like getting first into the training and finding a position afterwards. So it was very useful too. (Ahmed, Somalia, IT)

Well, for example when I was doing my practical training, I was good, competent and eager to work. Then, just where I was working, at a private dentist's clinic, as a trainee, the dentist noticed how I worked well and all that. Then he recommended me to other dentists, if they needed a substitute or something. (Alina, Bosnia, health & social care)

It [practical training] was actually a really good thing because it developed my Finnish a lot. You know that in the courses they just teach book language and in life, spoken language is a different thing. So the practical training was a really good thing, it develops your language skills. (Mona, Iraq, health & social care)

5.6.4 **Other pathways**

5.6.4.1 **Contacts**

A few refugees brought up personal contacts as an important pathway to employment. Usually, contacts were made during the short practical training period, in which the refugee was able to make a good impression on the future employer. In general, it is believed that being 'known' amongst local actors in the field helps build trust and confidence on the part of the employer. Familiarity with the refugee is especially important in getting over the hurdle of instant rejection caused by having a foreign-sounding name.

Contacts are the most important of all [...] in the sense that if you apply for a job and no one knows you in that company, then maybe the employer will not trust that you can do the job. It's enough just if someone knows you, or the employer can ask what kind of person you are. Then it's easier. (Said, Somalia, IT)

So here in Finland, when you are known somewhere you get a better job and faster. When no one knows you, it's hard to explain how good you are. [...] Sometimes when they see that there's a foreign name, they don't ask you to the interview at all. [...] I myself have noticed it. I certainly say this that I know that when a work application is sent, somewhere, when they see a foreign name and certainly there you have to write which country you are from and how long you've

been in the country [Finland], they read it and don't ask you to an interview. Not in all places, I have been asked to many places but I have noticed it and I have seen it that the employer looks and says no, this is an immigrant, this is a foreigner. It makes a difference when people know you in the way that they know that you know how to speak and know how to do work. It's just the same for Finns too, they have, when they are known somewhere they are accepted better into jobs than when they are not known. (Reza, Iran, health & social care)

5.6.4.2 Family support

A few refugees said that support from their family was crucial in their employment success. This took the form of encouragement and psychological support, as well as more literal assistance in sharing of tasks and duties. For women especially, support from the family, in taking care of household issues, for example, was important because it allowed them to devote time to their studies and job search. In some cases, family support was also financial in nature, enabling refugees to concentrate on gaining the educational qualifications that later led them to successful employment. Financial issues are discussed further in the section on barriers to employment.

Well, encouragement from my family. They encouraged me, my relatives and everyone, siblings, they all encouraged me. It is my mother and father, my factor. They are the factor why I am here. They gave me opportunity and support. (Aasha, Somalia, health & social care)

I have two children and they were small then [when I came to Finland]. No, I tried to manage everything at the same time, many things at the same time. I succeeded. In our culture there is equality between men and women, so my husband helped a lot. I mean, like in Iran too when we both worked. We did housework together. (Shirin, Iran, health & social care)

5.6.4.3 Qualifications and work experience from home country

Although many of the refugees have changed their careers after arriving in Finland, there is still a general feeling that qualifications and work experience from the home country were a pathway to employment success. However, because of the low level of recognition and appreciation of studies and work experience acquired outside Finland, the refugees did not feel their education and work history were directly responsible for success in employment. Rather, they felt that the personal skills gained from their previous education and work, such as maturity, confidence, stability, background knowledge and so on, were valuable assets in work life in Finland. Simply having an occupation before arrival was seen as an advantage in getting a job in Finland. Similarly, one refugee describes that he was offered a job simply because the employer felt that, having gone through the refugee experience, he would be able to handle any kind of work.

The fact that I had been only in one job the whole time in Iran was a big credit, because I hadn't changed my job all the time. I am the kind of person that I stay with the job. That's a good credit. It always looks good when a person doesn't change his job all the time.[...] If there's a good reason, it's a different thing. (Shirin, Iran, health & social care)

The skills were useful because if you learn something new and you have the basics to it, the techniques, it makes it easier to study or work. But if you don't have any kind of education, then starting from the beginning is difficult, for everyone, not just immigrants. I had the background, although they don't value it here in Finland if you have certificates from another country. If you show all your certificates, some interviewer in the job interview just looks at it and then puts it aside. [Interviewer: Has that happened to you?] Yes, many times. They were only interested in how it looked but it's content, no one asks what kind of certificate this is. [Interviewer: But you would still say that the qualification you got from Somalia was important?] Yes, it was important. [Interviewer: in what sense was your work experience useful?] It was useful for me, the experience I got from it. How to do the work, although it's different from here but if you know how to do the work and you are able to evaluate how much time it will take and how to carry it out, that's important. For myself. (Said, Somalia, IT)

5.6.4.4 Good social integration and acceptance of Finland

Many refugees partly attributed their success in work life to their overall positive attitude towards Finland. A number of times, interviewees said that they had made a conscious effort, almost from the moment they arrived, to be tolerant and accommodating towards the new culture, society, language and way of life. They were also surprisingly comfortable with their place in society and felt that they had integrated well into social and work life. Many interviewees were socially very active, both with people of their own cultural or linguistic background and with Finnish colleagues and friends. Very few complained of problems in their communities and no one currently had any personal problems at work. Competence and comfort using the Finnish language was a common feature among these refugees, as well as a clear and confident conception of their membership in both their own ethnic and religious communities and the Finnish society at large. The term 'respectful' was often used to describe the attitude they had taken towards Finnish society. In turn, they also expected that others would be respectful of them.

I have accepted Finland, even the cold summers, do you understand? The good and bad things. I haven't compared or said, I've never said to Finns 'hmf? What is this, your summer?' I have accepted it. Although I have said 'oh no, it's a cold summer this year!' but I've never said 'what cold summers you have here' because I've also had. I've never thought that even. I mean this is my second ... or my home country. Although many Finns don't accept me as a Finn, but I have accepted it myself. I live just like a Finn here. This is my home country, good and bad sides, I've accepted it. (Shirin, Iran, health & social care)

5.7 Barriers and the steps refugees have taken to overcome them

5.7.1 Language barriers

One of the three barriers refugees most commonly talked about was language. The question of language has been mentioned above, both as a barrier to labour market integration and as an important pathway to success for those who are able to master Finnish. Language also has a central position because some researchers have found that demands for formal competence in Finnish are used as a means of indirect discrimination in hiring.³² In practice, most jobs require some knowledge of Finnish. In a few fields, such as research, IT and technology, foreign workers with no knowledge of Finnish are recruited. At the other extreme are jobs in the health and social sector, which require extensive contact with Finnish-speaking clients, and in some cases Swedish-speakers. In this sector, knowledge of Finnish is a very fundamental barrier to access. In the IT and engineering fields, as mentioned, exceptions may be made, but this is usually only in the case of workers specifically recruited from abroad. Job seekers of foreign background who are already resident in Finland must compete with the native Finnish-speaking population and often lose out.

Most IT companies at the moment function in English, all the employees. And the documents are written in English. But, nevertheless let's say that if you don't know Finnish well, you won't get a good job, although in principle you don't need it at all. (Said, Somalia, IT)

For many of the interviewees language was a barrier in the first few years after arriving in Finland because it prevented access to education, and again when it was time to find their first job. Most interviewees were able to get Finnish language courses within a few weeks or months after arriving in the country. However, some commented that this was because the situation was better in the early 1990s with the arrival of the first refugees. Also, they felt they had been able to get courses relatively soon because, as quota refugees, their refugee status had already been decided before they arrived. Today the language-training situation amongst refugees and asylum seekers is quite different and there is often a long wait before the first courses start. For example, Mariam, who arrived as a quota refugee

³² Forsander (2000), Forsander and Alitolppa-Niitamo (2000).

from Iraq in 2000 had to wait eight months before she received her first Finnish lesson. For asylum seekers, whose legal status is not yet definite, the situation can be even harder.

Most of the refugees felt they overcame the language barrier through their own initiative, determination and commitment to learning Finnish. Especially in the early stages, they took the studies seriously, and a few commented that they were the best pupils in their course group. Many interviewees had a positive relationship with their language teachers, and were able to get assistance in finding suitable educational programmes, completing application forms, getting a trainee position and so on. Some of them used teachers' recommendation letters about their language skills in getting their first trainee positions.

I went to courses, I studied and I didn't speak English. And I made friendships with Finns, not just with Iranians. That's important that you make friendships with Finns. Social life is important.
(Shirin, Iran, health & social care)

5.7.2 **Prejudice and indirect discrimination**

Another commonly mentioned barrier to employment was prejudice on the part of Finnish employers. Although the interviewer asked whether the refugees had experienced discrimination, most described their experiences as prejudice or indirect discrimination. Nonetheless, there were some instances in which clearly discriminatory behaviour had occurred. None of the interviewees had taken any formal legal action against it.

The most common site of discrimination is the job interview, rather than the job itself. This is the barrier of prejudice or discrimination that denies refugees access to the labour market. Eziz, for example, explained that potential employers have routinely asked him inappropriate questions about his personal background, where he is from, why he came to Finland, what his religion is and so on, in the interview. Most of the interviewees felt there had been instances of hidden racism in the job search. Some had been questioned about their ability to work in Finnish, even though their language skills had been deemed sufficient for being called to an interview. Said described his biggest barrier to employment as the difference of his own name:

If you send a letter and the person just looks at the name, what kind of name you have, and on the basis of that, you are sent a [negative] response [...] And sometimes, I've been told straight out that 'you have a long name, a difficult and long name'. ... I think it's also one reason that sometimes when you don't get a response to an application, it could be because of that. It has to be [discrimination] because I remember once, [...] there was one job ad on the school notice board, was it that 20 or 25 people would be taken? And when I called, the person just, we talked for 5 minutes and he said 'you aren't Finnish'. I said 'I'm not', and he said 'I've noticed from your accent that you're not Finnish' and then I said where I'm from and he said 'no, there are no openings at the moment, all the positions have been filled'. And my classmate called and he was told 'next week you can come to work'. The same job. He [classmate] was Finnish. They didn't ask him anything else, just 'when are you able to start?' That says a lot, I think.
(Said, Somalia, IT)

Such experiences in job interview settings were fairly common amongst the interviewees, both those from Somalia and those from Iran or Iraq, although they were more prominent in the narratives of the Somali interviewees than others. A few interviewees said they knew the questions were inappropriate but felt they had no option but to answer them because of the job interview context in which they were asked. Only one interviewee, Hassan, said he walked out of a job interview when the employer started asking about his name and ethnic background. He said that the behaviour was discriminatory because the employer 'has no right to ask me what kind of name I am using'.

In general, when asked about discrimination and prejudice in the workplace, refugees spoke about lack of tolerance towards ethnic difference, lack of trust, unfriendliness amongst colleagues and so on. There were also a few cases in which there was prejudice and racism from co-workers once the refugee had been accepted for the position.

When I was at the women's clinic in the hospital, there was a little conflict always, fights with them and [...] it was a big problem because I had to change the whole department. Go to another department to work. [Interviewer: Why?] Because the atmosphere wasn't good. And the staff was infected and they didn't like me any more and there was conflict and I said, I don't want to be in a place where they don't want me and then I changed place. [Interviewer: Do you think it was because of discrimination and prejudice?] Yes. (Aasha, Somalia, health & social care)

When asked how they were able to overcome prejudice and indirect discrimination, most refugees found it difficult to respond. They felt there was not much they could do about it themselves. None of the refugees mentioned reporting acts of indirect discrimination or seeking legal help. However, one interviewee said that, years later, he understood that he could have reported his employer but did not how to do so at the time, and was not now willing to report something that had happened so long ago. The most common reaction to such events was to simply continue with the job and try even harder to show people, especially employers, that they were good workers. However, a few male and one or two female interviewees said they had confronted co-workers about their behaviour and had been able to resolve the problem through dialogue. In such cases, the experience of changing the views of a Finnish person was seen as very positive and building the refugees self-confidence.

I don't know. I just tried my best all the time. ... Anyway, I can't change people's minds. When the door closes, you have to try another door, knock on it and see if it opens. (Said, Somalia, IT)

As a foreigner, you have to do a very hard job to change your environment, to do the work, you have to make people to accept you and be part of the work community. And for being part of the community, you have to be quite, quite active. [...] It's a known fact that you are the minority and they are the majority. You cannot change the majority according to your world. You have to be part of them. [...] And when you have tried to find your place, after that it's very easy. After that you can participate in the work and you can actually, try your best to change the work culture as well. [...] Finding your place means that you are equal as a person and as an employee, a co-worker and people listen to you as they listen to the other ones. (Eziz, Iran, IT)

5.7.3 **Lack of Finnish education, qualifications and work experience**

A third commonly mentioned barrier to integration in the labour market was the lack of Finnish expertise in the form of Finnish educational qualifications or work experience. For those in the health sector, the lack of Finnish educational qualifications was perhaps more clearly an obstacle. This was the example of Aasha, who came to Finland with a Russian nursing diploma but was not able to practice until she had re-qualified from a Finnish school and had worked in a Finnish hospital. For others, educational qualifications such as vocational secondary school diplomas in engineering were not recognised at all, even after numerous attempts to get equivalence for them. The fact that some interviewees did not even bother to apply for recognition of their studies indicates that there is a fairly low level of confidence in the success or usefulness of recognition or academic equivalence of previous studies. Most interviewees also seemed to believe it was essential to get Finnish educational qualifications in order to enter working life, even though this often meant starting over from the beginning.

My qualifications were not recognised. It's a big barrier because ...they don't look at your work experience in Somalia or abroad, or you education either, what you've gained from it. ... You started from zero in Finland and they look at the Finnish experience and qualifications. (Said, Somalia, IT)

Similarly, lack of work experience in Finland can be a major obstacle to getting the first job after completing studies. Some refugees commented that years of work experience in their home country are not at all important to potential employers – they look only at what the applicant has done in Finland. This is frustrating, especially for older refugees, because they feel their knowledge and expertise from another context are being completely ignored and going to waste. One example of this is Reza, who is happy with his new career in Finland, but still regrets that he had to give up his old job and feels he has lost ten years of work experience in the process.

I would say that when I have done work for ten years, a change of career means that I have lost the experiences of those years [...] I mean I haven't lived ten years. [...] I [hadn't wanted] to change my career when I had there ten years of experience and I was a director in my own job and it was very difficult for me. I didn't want to change it [career] but I'm not dissatisfied either in that way. I mean yes, I have different experiences, different kind of work, a different kind of life here, so I'm satisfied with that. I have a safe life here and good education, which I like and a good job and good co-workers. It just bothers me that those ten years have been lost, but otherwise the change of career in one way has been quite good. I've gotten a job in which I work with people more and I like that – helping people and being with them.
(Reza, Iran, health & social care)

However, because most of the interviewees are young and arrived in Finland as teenagers or young adults, this problem cannot be studied in sufficient depth in this research. Perhaps it also indicates that refugees more likely to succeed are those who have little work experience in their home countries and are, therefore, able to build a completely 'Finnish' CV and enter the labour market relatively easily. Even for these people, though, gaining work experience in Finland is essential and gaps in one's CV can cause a problem when looking for a job because employers expect potential employees to have extensive experience.

At least in some interviews they [employers] have noticed that, they've asked that in some years you haven't had any practical training periods or haven't managed to get any work. They ask 'why haven't you done anything in that summer, you haven't done anything? Or you haven't had any practical training or job?' So they just mention that 'why? Were you just lazy? You didn't want to do anything?' Something like that, they just hint at it. 'Why weren't you at work that year during the summer, you had holidays, and you didn't do any work?' (Said, Somalia, IT)

For those starting out in the first job, the problem can be quite cyclical because they naturally have no formal work experience, and need a job to gain it. At the same time, a requirement for getting the job can be having some previous work experience. One solution, as Ahmed explains, is to accept unpaid work as the first experience-building step.

They [employers] ask about the experience you have and when you tell them you are starting now to get experience, it is really difficult to... it's like I mean, chicken and egg situation. You are trying to get experience and they are asking for experience. [...] So that was the reason that [...] I accepted this to go anywhere, to do anything to acquire the experience. After the certificate or education or whatever, the second thing is experience. (Ahmed, Somalia, IT)

Other interviewees also commented that they had to be very flexible and open to accepting any kind of work experience, including unpaid training periods, in order to 'fill up' their employment record in Finland and add 'value' in the eyes of Finnish employers. One refugee said he simply took one step at a time and tried to have realistic goals rather than huge dreams about the future.

To overcome the lack of appropriate educational qualifications, the interviewed refugees have been especially keen students and many have studied for a number of years in Finland, almost continuously since their arrival in the country. Many of them also have hopes to continue their studies and improve their academic qualifications, thus improving their chances of upward career mobility. For example, Alina, a young Bosnian refugee, has graduated as a dental assistant and been working in the field for a few years. Nonetheless, she has plans to attend university in a couple of years and qualify as a dentist. She has already begun studying for the entrance exams to the university. As Shirin, an Iranian refugee, puts it, education is the most effective solution to the problem:

I got a good education so I would get the right job for me. If you have the right education, you get a good job. (Shirin, Iran, health & social care)

5.7.4 *Other barriers*

5.7.4.1 **The bad labour market situation in Finland**

Just as those in the IT sector partly attributed their success in employment to the good labour market situation in that sector in the mid to late 1990s, some felt poor labour market conditions, especially high unemployment levels, were a barrier to success. The economic depression of the early 1990s seriously affected the entire country and some sectors have still not recovered from it. Certainly, the high overall unemployment rate in Finland is a sign that the economy, especially the labour market, is still facing problems. In some sectors, there are simply no jobs to be had. For refugees, this has severe consequences because they believe they are more dispensable than other employees. In a way, the interviewees felt they belonged to the group that is the last to be hired and the first to be fired.

The majority of Finns, at those times, in 1990s they thought that instead of giving a job to a foreigner we would like to, prefer to give it to a Finnish [person]. There were about half a million Finnish people who were unemployed so when it came to the priority they have to choose the priority and this priority was Finnish. (Eziz, Iran, IT)

5.7.4.2 **Being a refugee**

The fact of being a refugee was also perceived as a barrier to finding employment. Although few refugees described it directly as a barrier, a number of them explained that the negative labelling of refugees in the media and general public has been troublesome in the job search process. For example, Elmi, who is still a student of IT and has no work experience in Finland, believed that the bad reputation that is unfairly given to Somali refugees is an obstacle preventing him from finding a practical training position, which is a compulsory part of his academic programme. Similarly, Eziz explains that interviews have stronger prejudices against refugees than other foreigners or minority groups.

Being a refugee is much more difficult [than an immigrant] because when they ask you, are you a refugee? Automatically they think you are a refugee because you are hungry. They never try to think that you are a refugee because maybe you have a political problem. [...] When they ask why you came to Finland, so it's not easy to answer. Because when you say I came as a refugee, it's the first minus thing that you get from them, the employer. (Eziz, Iran, IT)

5.7.4.3 **Frustration and loss of hope**

Repeated failure or rejection on the job market can be frustrating and demoralizing for anyone, and the interviewees were no exception. Although many of them were exceptionally optimistic and energetic in their job search, they explained that the process was extremely tough. Almost all the interviewees described moments of frustration, despair, anger and hopelessness at some point in pursuing their careers in Finland. For most, the first year after arrival was especially difficult, sometimes as a result of trauma or depression caused by the refugee experience. Yusuf describes, for example, that after many years of uncertainty he dreamt of a perfect new life when he finally left the refugee camp for Finland, but was devastated when he realised he had to start his life over again from nothing. Long periods without employment also create feelings of frustration and despair. One person described waiting and not knowing whether he would get the job as the most difficult aspect of the job search.

Another source of dissatisfaction was the lack of job security, which seems fairly common amongst refugees, even those who are considered successful. There is quite a lot of variation in the employment histories of the interviewees. Like Hassan, a software engineer who has been working at a major telecommunications company since he was a student, some have very stable employment records. However, job security is more elusive for others, like Aasha, a nurse who has had six positions in the last ten years. Especially in the health and social care sector, it appears very difficult to get a permanent position (*virkka*). This is also the sector in which short, temporary work contracts, rather than permanent employment, are becoming increasingly common. Periods of unemployment interspersed with

one short-term job after another was a common source of frustration and disappointment. It also created the feeling that there was no real development or growth in the career.

5.7.4.4 Financial instability

As refugees, most of the interviewees were entitled to social support but many of them used it for a relatively short time, because they tried to find employment as soon as possible. In addition, most of the interviewees have lived and worked in Finland for a number of years so their financial situation is currently quite stable. However, they did describe financial difficulties as a barrier to career development in the early stages of their lives in Finland. Some felt, like many immigrants and refugees in Finland, that they had to accept any kind of work they could get, in order to be financially secure and begin working towards their long-term career goals. For a few others, there were financial difficulties during the student period, when student grants were not sufficient to cover the expenses of job searching.

I did work so I could get money. I did anything. When I was studying, I did any kind of job, although I didn't like those jobs. You don't have to like it. When you get money then you can build your future. You get some financial stability. I didn't have anything when I came to Finland. I had to have a house, I had to have food for my children, I had to have toys for the children, proper clothes, so they would be the same as other children. I worked and I educated myself. Welfare was important. If you don't have basic welfare, you can't study. (Shirin, Iran, health & social care)

Yeah, of course [there were some financial difficulties]. Not in finding a job directly but the movement and spending money in order to find a job like even travelling to the interview. I was mostly also studying in the North and you have to come to the South either Helsinki or Tampere area. So it really affected. (Ahmed, Somalia, IT)

5.7.4.5 Family responsibilities

Women were more likely to mention family responsibilities as a barrier to employment success than men. Although many of the refugees were young adults when they came to Finland, most of the women were already married or had small children upon arriving in the country. Many of them described the difficulty of looking after their children and trying at the same time to attend language courses and gain occupational qualifications. As in the case of Mona and Mustafa, where both husband and wife spent the first year studying to pass compulsory exams in dentistry and medicine, childcare and family responsibilities often have to be balanced carefully with studies and job searching.

In the interviewee group, there were also a couple of single mothers, for whom the problem of childcare was especially acute. One of them, Mariam, is trying to gain qualifications as a nurse but finds it hard to arrange day care for her six-year-old daughter. This also interrupts her studies and creates further pressure and stress. Perhaps because the women interviewed were very confident and strong-willed, they have been able to manage with the multiple pressures of family, education and career. However, many women acknowledged that the process has been difficult and that many refugee women do not succeed as well as they have. For example, some women mentioned that refugee women, in particular, have to be very determined to attend language and other courses in addition to keeping up with their family responsibilities.

5.7.4.6 Underemployment in Finland

Although this particular group of refugees has been quite successful in finding work that corresponds to their studies and interests, this is not always easy to do. Further, the problem of underemployment is difficult to define because it can be subjective and depends on the individual's own satisfaction with his or her work. For example, Leila is a qualified statistician who used to work as an accountant in her home country but now works as a childminder. Nonetheless, she does not consider this to be downward career mobility. She is happy with the career change and has made it consciously.

Many interviewees, at some point in their employment history, have experienced lack of correspondence between their studies or interest and job. Most of them tried hard to keep such periods as short as possible. Ahmed's solution was, for example, to plan his studies carefully. In fact, he changed his field of study a number of times, starting with marketing and later switching to electrical engineering, and finally to computer science and engineering. He claims that this was a process of narrowing down his interest in which he made priorities and diversified his knowledge by choosing minor subjects, such as software design, that complemented his major subjects of telecommunications and engineering. Similarly, he selected his thesis subject in such a way that it would be a stepping stone into his eventual career in mobile telecommunications. This awareness and long-term planning has been a major pathway for success in being employed in a field that he says matches exactly with his academic interests.

5.8 Impact of other factors on the job seeking process

5.8.1 *Legal status*

There are no asylum seekers in the sample and it was practically impossible to locate successfully employed asylum seekers, even though many reception centres were contacted. This suggests that those awaiting a decision on their asylum applications have poor possibilities of finding employment that reflects their skills and abilities, even though they are allowed to work. The response from many reception centres was that if asylum seekers are employed at all, they usually work in low-skill manual jobs, often as cleaners or restaurant workers. By contrast, people with refugee or other permanent immigrant status appear to have better chances and motivation of finding work.

5.8.2 *Age*

Refugees who arrive in Finland at a relatively young age, especially in their teens or younger, appear to have better chances of integrating into labour market because they acquire language skills faster, adjust to the country faster and have better knowledge of the job market. They also seem to have better chances of receiving career guidance and assistance from schools and work experience through compulsory practical training periods in the field of their studies. This helps put them on the path to a career in a field they are interested in and improves their chances of finding employment that matches their education and skills. Training periods are especially important in the health and social sector, as well as in the IT sector.

5.8.3 *Gender*

All nine female interviewees work in the health and social sector. Although there is also a national pattern of more women than men employed in this sector, the gender division is sharper amongst refugees and immigrants. Based on the interviews, it appears that refugee women are especially encouraged to go into this sector or feel that it suits them better than others. There is even a special programme aimed at helping women immigrants to integrate into health and social sector so there seems to be a special attention to recruiting ethnic minority women in this sector.

5.8.4 *Career guidance*

Although the research did not investigate this question deeply enough to make conclusive remarks, the interviews suggest that guidance received in the final stages of educational programmes and at the beginning of the job search period have considerable influence on career choice. For example, some interviewees commented on the tendency of educational and employment authorities to direct refugees towards the vocational qualification of social and healthcare services practical nurse (*lähihoitaja*). The popularity of this vocational programme is, indeed, surprisingly high amongst refugees and immigrants in Finland. One interviewee believed this is because the qualification is broadly appli-

cable to a number of occupations (ranging from social work to childcare and hospital work) and is relatively easy to get admission in.

Of the interviewees with this qualification, only Mariam, who will complete her studies in 2004, has doubts about her career choice. She has a BSc in a business field from an Iraqi university and has previously worked as an economics teacher and a bookkeeper. After she came to Finland as a single mother in 2000, she had nothing to do for the first eight months, and was not even able to get into any language courses. This experience was very difficult and disappointing for her. She admits that she would rather have studied business or IT but took admission in the social and healthcare services practical nurse vocational programme because she was admitted easily and it enabled her to be active in some way. She is now applying for recognition of her Iraqi degree and hopes she will be able to return to studying what she feels is her 'own' field. However, she is under financial pressure to complete her studies as soon as possible and find a steady job, which the practical nurse diploma can get her.

5.9 Case studies

5.9.1 Case study in IT sector

Ahmed is a Somali refugee who came to Finland in 1991, at the age of 17. He speaks Somali, Arabic, English and Finnish. In Somalia, he had completed secondary education, receiving a secondary school certificate from a general secondary school in 1990. When he came to Finland, he had his secondary school certificate with him, and although he did not seek formal equivalence for it, he was allowed to include it in his Finnish study transcript once he had supplemented it with some other courses. The procedure took about two years but during this time, Ahmed was not prevented from carrying on with his studies. When he first arrived in Finland, Ahmed studied Finnish language and culture in various adult education centres for about a year. In 1992, he applied to Tampere Technical University but was not accepted. For the next year and a half, he studied marketing at the Business College in Vaasa. However, he did not complete the course and changed to studying for a Bachelor's Degree in Electric and Electronic Engineering at Vaasa Polytechnic. He graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering degree in 1997 and in the following year was admitted to the Helsinki University of Technology. He began studies for a Master's Degree, originally choosing the Department of Electrical and Communication Engineering but later changing to the Department Computer Science and Engineering.

Like many students of technology, Ahmed worked during his studies. In Somalia, he had no experience of paid employment, but had participated in two practical training periods, in which he had worked for two weeks as a laboratory assistant at his secondary school, and as an assistant teacher of physics and mathematics for half a year. In Finland, Ahmed's first contact with work life was some months after he arrived, when he worked as a trainee in a public school for two months. A year later, he worked as an interpreter at the immigration office of the City of Vaasa. While completing his Bachelor of Engineering degree, he also worked for one month as an electronics laboratory assistant at his polytechnic. In his own words, the turning point came in 1996, when Ahmed was accepted as an unpaid trainee at a small private firm as a hardware designer for two months. He remembers having to try very hard to get this position, even though it was unpaid, because he had to convince the employer of his competence. In this work placement, Ahmed claims he got important first-hand experience in practical design installation and his own field of study. The year after this, in 1997, Ahmed made another important breakthrough when he got a position as a summer trainee at Nokia in Helsinki. In these trainee periods, he claims that he received 'first hand technical training' in practical matters in his field.

In terms of employment, he has been at Nokia ever since summer 1997, in various positions in the mobile telecommunications sector. He started as a summer trainee, then became a thesis worker.³³

³³ In Finland, large companies often accept technology students in the final stages of their degrees to work on projects that also serve as the students' theses or final reports

Once he had completed his thesis research at Nokia and obtained his Bachelor's degree, Ahmed moved permanently to Helsinki and began working at Nokia as a software engineer. In 2000, he took two years study leave from Nokia and concentrated on his Master's Degree studies in Engineering and Computer Science at the Helsinki University of Technology. During those two years, he was a Research Assistant at the University's Telecommunications Software and Multimedia Laboratory. In 2002, he returned to Nokia to his current post of Senior System Engineer. However, Ahmed is still working part time, one day a week, at the University laboratory in order to complete his Master's Degree. He expects to graduate in May 2004.

For Ahmed, the main pathways to employment success were Finnish language skills, good educational qualifications and the market situation in Finland at the time he began searching for a job. Ahmed believes that being competent in Finnish is the first step to successful employment in Finland because it enables one to actively participate in the work community and develops the personal skills necessary for success. He also explained that because there is a general market preference for Finnish educational qualifications, his specialized and well-balanced studies matched the needs of potential employers very well, giving him an advantage on the job market. Finally Ahmed also suggests that luck and good timing played a role in his career because he entered the labour market in 1996, when there was a high demand for his qualifications and skills in the IT sector. In terms of barriers, Ahmed's main challenge when starting out was lack of work experience, which he felt lowered his competitiveness

in the job search. To overcome this, he decided to accept the challenge, set realistic goals and be open to any trainee position that would improve his employment record. He also initially had problems with Finnish language and tried to overcome this by studying his courses in Finnish rather than English, and also by communicating with fellow students to improve fluency.

5.9.2 *Case study in health and social care sector*

Mona and Mustafa are Iraqi refugees in their mid thirties who came to Finland with their two daughters in September 1999. They were settled in a medium-sized town of about 50,000 residents. They both speak Arabic, Turkish, Finnish and English. Mona received a degree in dentistry from Baghdad University in 1990 and practised as a dentist in Iraq for seven years, both in a public health centre and in a private clinic she ran with her husband. Mustafa received a medical degree from the same university in 1988 and practised medicine in Iraq for nine years, like Mona, in a public hospital and also in their private clinic. Both also worked for two years in Turkey (1997-1999) in the private sector, after they left Iraq.

After coming to Finland, both husband and wife began the recognition and re-qualification process to be able to practice their professions. They waited two months for their first Finnish language course, which lasted about 5 months and comprised 3 levels. After the language course, in May 2000, both Mona and Mustafa started unpaid practical training periods of about six months in which they focused on professional terminology and language in their fields. Mona did her practical training at a private dental clinic and Mustafa at the central hospital of a large city. Neither was allowed to treat patients at this stage. For Mustafa, six months of training were part of the requirements for re-qualification. Mona did not have any compulsory training requirements.

Mustafa and Mona were also preparing for the series of re-qualification exams. The first step was getting their Iraqi medical and dental degrees recognised. According to the couple, this was not difficult and after sending their documents to the National Board of Medicolegal Affairs (*Terveysturvakeskus*), they received a positive response within a few weeks. In January 2001, Mustafa began a ten-month long updating training course, for which he travelled to Helsinki twice a week. The course covered hospital functions, social issues and patient care in the Finnish context. The other three days of the week, he continued working in his position as unpaid trainee doctor at the central hospital. In September 2001, Mustafa took the first of three re-qualification exams, which was the theoretical part. He was one of the 22 participants out of 60 who passed the exam. He says he was lucky with the exam schedule and was able to take the second exam, covering social and legal issues, two months later in November 2001. After this exam, in January 2002, he extended his traineeship in

the inpatient department of the main medical health centre (*terveyskeskuksen vuodeosasto*) and also received special permission from a head doctor to begin treating patients. In March 2001, after Mustafa successfully passed the final practical exam, he received his Finnish medical licence and the title of Health Centre Doctor. He passed all three exams on the first try, which he was told is quite unusual. He remained employed at the central hospital until the end of 2002 and in the beginning of 2003, changed to outpatient healthcare, where he now works full time as a Health Centre Doctor.

Mona's path to receiving her dentist's licence was slightly different from Mustafa's but equally successful. Soon after she arrived in Finland, the National Board of Medicolegal Affairs (*Terveydenhuollon oikeusturvakeskus*) informed her that the University of Turku, which had until then been responsible for the re-qualification process of foreign dentists, had stopped offering re-qualification exams. Mona had to wait until the summer of 2000, when she was told that the new exams would be arranged at the University of Helsinki in the autumn of 2001. In November 2001, she took the first exam on theory. Out of the ten participants only four passed, and Mona was one of them. Soon after that, in December 2001, she took the second exam, which was a practical test. After passing that exam, Mona had to complete the final social and legal exam, which had two stages. She completed the first stage in February 2002, after which she had a six month orientation phase in which she worked as a dentist. The orientation phase is also compulsory for all recently graduated dentists in Finland. At the end of the orientation phase, Mona was able to take the second part of the social and legal exam. She then also finished up a smaller exam she had left from the theory part. In October 2002, she received her Finnish dental licence and has been working as a Health Centre Dentist at the main health centre of their home town since then.

At the moment, the main career concern for Mona and Mustafa is that they are not eligible to apply for permanent positions (*virka*) in their fields because they are not Finnish citizens, nor have they worked in the country for more than five years. At Mona's workplace, a permanent dentist's position is open but, legally, she cannot apply for it. Instead, she has applied for a similar permanent position and will hear about the decision in spring 2004. Similarly, there are two permanent positions open in Mustafa's health centre but he cannot apply for the same reasons. Both husband and wife feel disappointed and frustrated about this legal limitation.

Among the most important pathways to success, Mona and Mustafa both mentioned the experience and qualifications they obtained in Iraq. They believe the education they received in their home country was of a very high quality, especially in terms of theory and foundational concepts. Similarly, they agreed that their extensive work experience in Iraq and Turkey was another important pathway. Like the other interviewees, they were also eager to point out that their success was partly due to their own personalities, work ethics, open-mindedness and interpersonal skills. For example, both husband and wife had been invited to continue as employees in the centres where they did their training, which they believed was partly due to their personalities and ability to build good working relationships with their colleagues. Language courses were also important for the couple in making a solid start and they pointed out that they were not able to begin on the path to re-qualification without language skills, which can only be acquired from courses. Correspondingly, language had been the biggest barrier for the couple and both commented that reading books and taking exams in Finnish seemed 'impossible' to them at some stage. They overcame it by self-confidence, hard work and practice. Studying for re-qualification exams was also a challenge the couple had to face, and they described their lives as an eternal cycle of studying, up to 12 hours a day for months at a time.

6 Summary

This report has described the main findings of qualitative and desk research on the labour market integration of refugees in Finland. There are about 20,000 refugees in Finland, who have arrived since 1991. The largest nationality groups are Somalis, Bosnians and former Yugoslavians, Iraqis and Iranians. The rate of asylum seeking is very low in Finland and very few people receive full asylum status on an annual basis. However, Finland accepts a few hundred quota-refugees annually. Refugees are allowed to work in Finland and asylum seekers may work three months after their arrival in the country. In practice, however, it is very difficult for asylum seekers and refugees to find employment. Amongst the largest refugee groups, unemployment rates are from 40% to 75%, compared to the national average of about 12%. There is also a fairly clear pattern of employment marginalisation, in which asylum seekers, refugees and other immigrants become stuck in a cycle of low-skill, short-term employment. Typical jobs for these groups are in the cleaning and low-skill health and social care sectors.

Although there are few employment programmes aimed specifically at refugees, they are generally included as a target group of initiatives aimed at immigrants or foreigners in general. These include, for example, the integration plan system, which is defined in the Integration Act and deals mainly with refugees, as well as elements of the government's Action Plan to Combat Ethnic Discrimination and Racism. There are also a number of EU-supported and NGO-run projects that include refugees as a target group. Nonetheless, the role of both the government and NGOs in promoting successful refugee employment could be improved.

Recognition of qualifications is fairly straightforward for those coming from EU countries, but more complex for those with qualifications obtained outside the EU. This has also been identified as a potential barrier to success for refugees. Other main barriers include racism and discrimination in work-related settings, especially at the recruitment stage, language skills, and overall high unemployment in Finland.

In Finland, labour needs and skills shortages will become an especially acute problem within the next five years. It is predicted that about 40% of the current workforce will leave the labour market within the next fifteen years due to retirement. Labour shortages have been predicted in the health and social sector, especially in teaching and caring for the elderly and children, but also in other sectors. Until now, there has been no concrete policy action to address the structural changes in the workforce and labour market through using the skills and resources of the refugee and immigrants population. However, a central issue of the debate is the reduction of current unemployment, in addition to preparing for the future demographic change.

The qualitative research portion of the project was realised through 22 interviews carried out between June and November 2003. The interviewees are a group of 12 young men and 9 women originally from Somalia, Iraq, Iran, Bosnia and Vietnam. More than half of them arrived in Finland before 1994, and almost three quarters are below the age of 40 years. Almost half of them are Finnish citizens and there are no asylum seekers in the group. They are generally well educated and all have pursued some studies in Finland. When in the home country, less than one quarter of them were employed in the sector they currently work in. Half of them now work in the health and social care sector, five in the IT sector, and the rest are students or work in another sector.

The level of correspondence between the current job and skills and abilities acquired in the home country is fairly low. Similarly, the level of correspondence between the current job and studies in the home country is also fairly low. However, the level of correspondence between the current job and studies or practical training in Finland is fairly high. Complete change of career is quite common, often because of non-recognition of previous qualifications or work experience. In addition to influencing choice of career, difficult recognition procedures also create frustration and a sense of failure. For those with prior medical qualifications, re-qualification and recognition can be especially problematic, although the two interviewees with medical qualifications had an exceptionally positive experience in this respect.

The three main pathways to employment are personal skills and competence of the refugees (their own attitudes, strengths, perseverance and so on), their strong language skills and confidence in the

Finnish language, and their strong educational qualifications and positive work experience in Finland. Other pathways include personal contacts and networking, family support, qualifications and work experience from the home country (especially for medical professionals), and good social integration and acceptance of the new Finnish home and culture.

The main barriers to employment are the lack of sufficient Finnish language skills, especially in the first few years after arrival, prejudice and discrimination on the part of employers, especially in job interview settings, and lack of Finnish educational qualifications and work experience. Other barriers include the bad labour market situation and overall high unemployment levels in Finland, negative labelling as a result of being a refugee, frustration and loss of hope after repeated failures at getting employment, financial instability caused by the lack of a job or the need to gain new academic qualifications upon arrival, family responsibilities, especially for women refugees, and underemployment of refugees in general. Factors such as legal status, age, gender and career guidance may also influence the job seeking process. There is need for greater attention to the specific problems faced by women refugees, which have also come up in this report.

The case studies chosen in the report are those of Ahmed, a Somali senior system engineer working at Nokia, and an Iraqi dentist and doctor couple, Mona and Mustafa. All three have very positive stories although Ahmed represents the group of refugees who arrived in Finland young and have managed to succeed well on the basis of Finnish educational and employment experience, in spite of the barrier of the prejudice. Mona and Mustafa, on the other hand, have been able to make very good use of the skills and knowledge they brought with them by going through the recognition and re-qualification process exceptionally fast and successfully.

7 Conclusion and recommendations

The aim of this research project and report has been to illustrate the positive contribution that refugees can make to current and projected labour market needs in Finland. In the process of carrying out the 22 interviews, it became evident that the refugee community is comprised of talented, motivated, committed and sociable people, whose skills and attitudes are a valuable resource for the country they choose to live in, whether that is their original home country or their more recent host. In the process of coming to Finland, refugees bring with them new and different, but equally valuable experiences to those they will have in Finland.

Unfortunately, it appears that the skills, knowledge and experiences refugees bring with them are, for the most part, ignored by Finnish employers, and society at large. These are resources such as knowledge of four or five languages, cultural sensitivity, strong academic skills, years of work experience and the ability to adjust to new and challenging environments, which would be valuable in any job or in any employment sector. In addition to this, refugees bring specific skills and knowledge related to fields such as business, engineering, medicine, accounting, administration, agriculture, music and arts.

After arriving in Finland, most refugees and asylum seekers are, sooner or later, confronted with the dilemma of unemployment and the threat of becoming trapped in a vicious circle of low-skill, short-term jobs that correspond neither to their skills and qualifications nor to their career goals. Many of the refugees whose 'success stories' have been described in this report have been through this cycle but have managed to break through into a better and more satisfying career. Many of them consider this initial period of career instability as a necessary trial period in the Finnish context. The phase is tough, often comprising long hours of work in a low-skill, low-paying job, with ongoing studies to gain the Finnish qualifications needed to make the breakthrough. Some of the interviewees are still in this phase of short-term jobs that do not necessarily correspond to their skills or career wishes, and still hoping and trying to get into the right educational or training programme that will take them into a more suitable or desirable career. Those who have gone through the hard times and succeeded are important role models for these and other refugees.

However, the research has also uncovered some cases of success that appear to be the exception to the norm. Some refugees are, indeed, able to enter a new career track or continue their previous careers very smoothly and quickly in Finland. Like their counterparts who have taken the long route to employment success, these fast movers can equally serve as role models, not only for the refugee community, but also for the rest of society, which may be too hasty to judge or undervalue the potential of refugees. Based on the comments of the interviewed refugees, we would like to make the following recommendations for positive change in this field:

Recommendation 1: Language courses

Almost all the interviewees asked for improvements in the language training system currently available to refugees. There were a number of comments about deterioration in the provision of language courses, which means that now it is not uncommon to wait months or even up to a year before receiving a Finnish language lesson. This is thought to be far too long, as language is the first step in participating in society and must, therefore, be addressed immediately after the refugee arrives in the country.

More language courses, ... because they wait a long time to go to language courses and get depressed because they just wait and wait and then hope. They should get fast courses when the person is eager. ... You see when these people come, fresh, then they should start. ... The local [authorities] should organise the courses, for example in the housing areas, neighbourhoods. ... Competent teachers, immigrants who have been here long and know what an immigrant really needs and wants. (Aasha, Somalia, health & social care)

I don't know the availability now [of Finnish language courses] but what I feel is that maybe the Finnish language is not available enough. And maybe it's available in the evening schools, the

Open University, but refugees are far away from these services. They don't understand the educational system. So we should have ... courses that are dedicated to the refugees, which focus only on them. Maybe even the teachers should also be successful people who have been refugees, who know the language, something like that. The refugees could find that easy and comfortable also for them. I think what the government should do is go to the refugees... and tell them, 'now you should come out and study the language'. Not only telling them that 'in that place we have a Finnish course, go to there'. It's not maybe a good way that time. Most of the refugees they don't want to give this kind of effort, they don't realise that language is very important. So that will be beneficial for the government in the future and the more refugees understand the language, the society, the history of Finland, knows these things, the more it helps the country. (Hassan, Somalia, IT)

Language courses. In the beginning ... no one is interested after a year or two in studying Finnish although he has lived in Finland. The motivation doesn't last that long, if you have to wait a year or two and then after that you can start studying Finnish. (Said, Somalia, IT)

Recommendation 2: Role models

There was also some consensus on the fact that there are too few positive role models for refugees. For this reason, we recommend that there be a more clear effort to present positive role models, especially to refugees themselves. This could be done through mentoring programmes in which successful refugees could be paired with those who have recently arrived in Finland for the purpose of guidance and moral support in finding pathways to employment success.

People think that we are exceptional but I don't think so. I think there is generally in Finland a negative view of refugees and especially Muslims. I want to show that Muslims can be well educated and open minded and successful. To me, that's very normal. There aren't enough positive examples of these people in Finland. (Mona, Iraq, health & social care)

They could show someone as a model, show, go and talk to that person. I also got through like this. I haven't always easily got work, I've worked hard and cried and hopped about and gone about and still I achieved what I wanted. You can also achieve it. (Aasha, Somalia, health & social care)

Recommendation 3: Job search techniques and approach

Although there are job search courses available to refugees, surprisingly few of the interviewed refugees made use of formal channels such as courses and training from the employment authorities. However, many of the interviewees had tried and tested ideas and good practices on how they were able to successfully get a job. Particularly for newly-arrived refugees many practices and standards in job hunting in Finland might be unknown because they are uncommon or irrelevant in their home country. Therefore, we recommend that the employment authorities make use of such informal advice channels, perhaps in combination with the above-mentioned role model concept, to gather information on job search techniques and approaches that have been successful for refugees who are already employed. An example of such a technique, based on personal experience, was given by a refugee who works in the IT sector.

It could be that some employers think that if you send an application by e-mail and you don't make any other contact, that you aren't so interested in the job. But if you call after the application and ask how it's going and when you'll come to the interview, these kinds of questions. Then they could say that someone else has been taken if they don't want [you] or they could promise a day when you can come to the interview, or something like this. It's the same for everyone but if you make contact as soon as possible, what is the situation, you just ask. That helps a lot. (Said, Somalia, IT)

Recommendation 4: Attitudes of refugees

A very important and common recommendation from the interviewees was about the importance of having the right attitude. This was used broadly to describe ideas as diverse as being tolerant and accepting of the new life and culture in Finland, being realistic about career and other goals, being optimistic and having a positive outlook on life, being perseverant and thick-skinned in the face of repeated rejection, trusting in one's own ability to succeed and so on. A number of qualities that make up the right attitude were the same ones listed as personal competences and skills that were a major pathway to success. The interviewed refugees advised other refugees to make a conscious effort to develop and maintain the right attitude. Once again, the importance of networking between recently arrived refugees and their well-established counterparts comes up as a means to ensure the transfer of this kind of advice.

I knew somehow how to close the back door. Yes, I remember and I still have nightmares, even still, that I am in Iran and they won't let me get away. But, no, I closed that door behind me. It's important [to do that]. You have to start again. If a person just mourns the past, there is no future either. The past is gone and this is a new beginning. I believed that here I would have a good life. I thought that this is a new stage in my life and I put a big full stop on the past. Just positively and smilingly I started life in Finland. Although it wasn't easy; it was terribly difficult.
(Shirin, Iran, health & social care)

I would say anyway that if today they are told no, they shouldn't get depressed. They should try again tomorrow and then again. Yes, some day some door will open. (Said, Somalia, IT)

Recommendation 5: Finnish attitudes should be improved

Like refugees, Finnish authorities, employers and work colleagues were also urged to have to right attitude. In this case, it referred to recognising and accepting the skills and diversity that refugees bring to the workplace, being free of prejudice, being willing to trust the potential and intentions of refugees, being open to new cultures and ways of interacting, and welcoming refugees' efforts to participate in Finnish work and social life. This extended to areas such as language, social interaction, work relationships, and general outlook. On the basis of these comments, we suggest that there be more clearly targeted efforts and campaigns to reduce prejudice in the workplace, as well as, for example, efforts to the share experiences of Finnish employers who have positive views of refugees as employees with others. The direct involvement of employers and labour unions is key to the realisation of such a recommendation.

In order to learn the language, I think there are some factors that would help to learn the language in every country. The most important factor is the community itself. It should be an open community, so that when you talk to them, you feel comfortable and don't see that you don't know the language. So that was something I haven't found in Finland.
(Hassan, Somalia, IT)

Recommendation 6: Relevant practical training

The importance of practical training has been shown at various points in this report. In terms of recommendations, refugees were eager to point out that practical training should, as far as possible, be related to the field of study or interest of the refugee in his or her home country. This would decrease loss and wastage of prior skills, and would also improve career continuity and personal satisfaction for the refugee. Practical training is also seen as a key to entering the job market because it is a relatively low risk option for the employer, especially if he or she is wary of hiring a refugee or immigrant.

If the person has studied abroad, he should get practical training here so he can learn how work is done here in Finland. Because there are a lot of companies whose employees don't accept that foreigners come and work there. But sometimes they will accept someone who just comes

for practical training. That also helps because immigrants can into positions and they can see their work in the company where they wouldn't be accepted as employees. (Said, Somalia, IT)

There should be a one year buffer period after arrival, in which the refugees are able to update or renew their skills and knowledge, followed by a practical training in the same field, which serves as a way to localise their occupational skills to the Finnish context, as well as introduce the person to Finnish work life. The practical training must be focused and relevant to the long-term career goals of the refugee, not just work in any job. (Ahmed, Somalia, IT)

Recommendation 7: Better use of existing skills

Related to the need for practical training in a relevant field, is the need to make use of existing skills, rather than acquiring a completely new career just because it gives the refugee something to keep occupied with. Many interviewees felt that wastage of skills is a major problem that needs to be addressed through better assessment of the skills refugees possess on arrival, and development of ways to update or renew those skills for the Finnish context. In some cases, the skills acquired in the home country were of high quality and can be useful even in the Finnish context.

If you've studied as a nurse and it's your profession and you go to the post office or a cleaning company on a practical training, it doesn't help at all your profession. It can be in the future too, if you apply for work and you say I've been a trainee in the cleaning industry and you're a nurse, no one will give you a job because they just see that you don't have the skills for the job. It's essential that [further education] should be in the same field [as your previous studies]. (Reza, Iran, health & social care)

Corresponding education in Finland. ... If you have a profession from abroad, you should get credit, ... you shouldn't have to complete the whole studies, maybe just a few months of theory or what you should know about Finnish working conditions, or how you should act here in Finland. Updating training, yes. (Aasha, Somalia, health & social care)

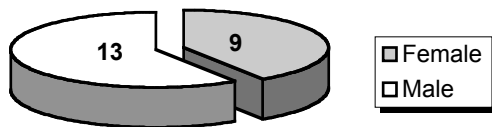
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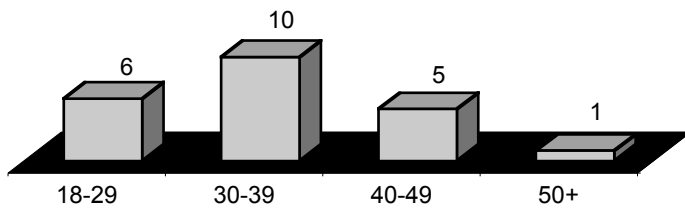
9 Appendix: quantitative data

The 22 interviewees had the following characteristics:

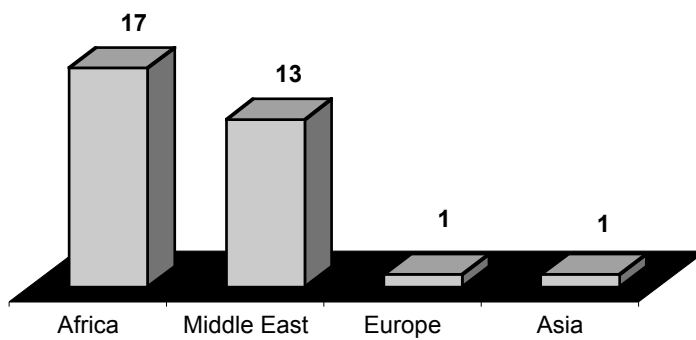
1a Gender



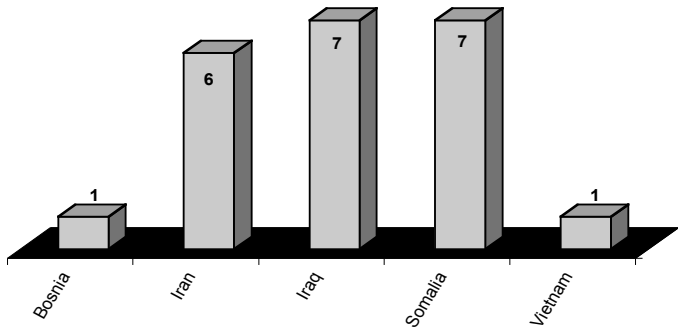
1b Age



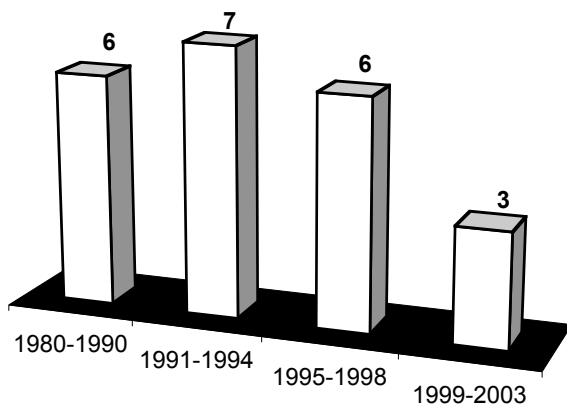
1c Region of origin



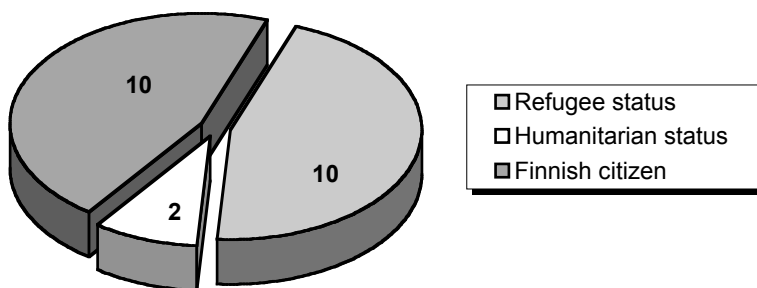
ld **Country of origin**



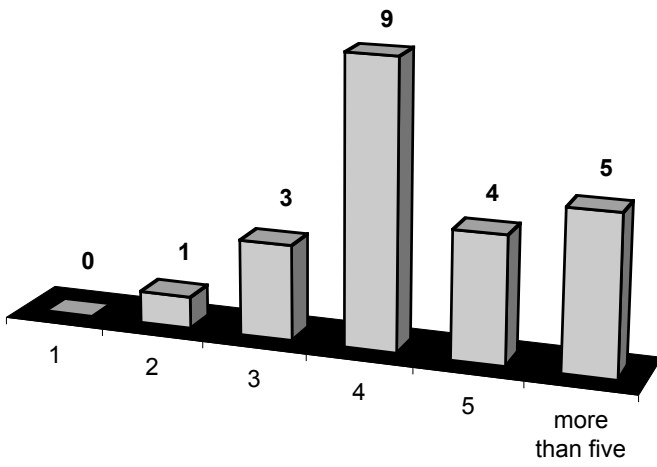
le **Date of arrival in Finland**



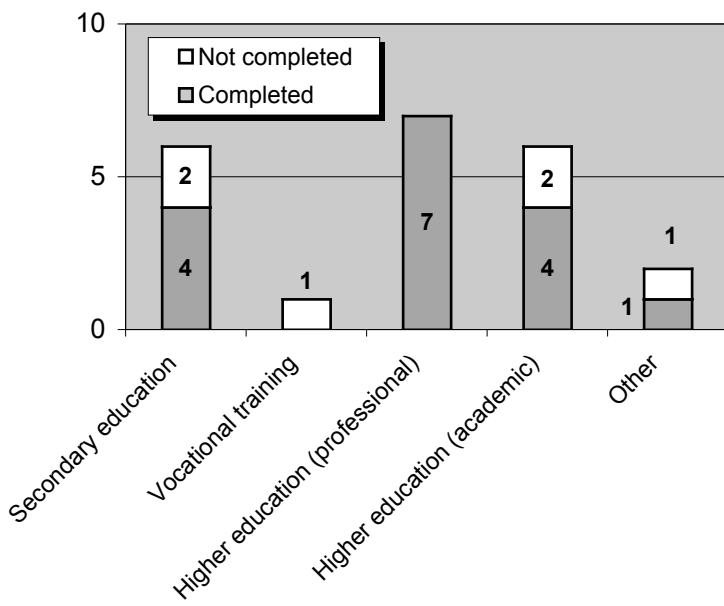
lf **Status**



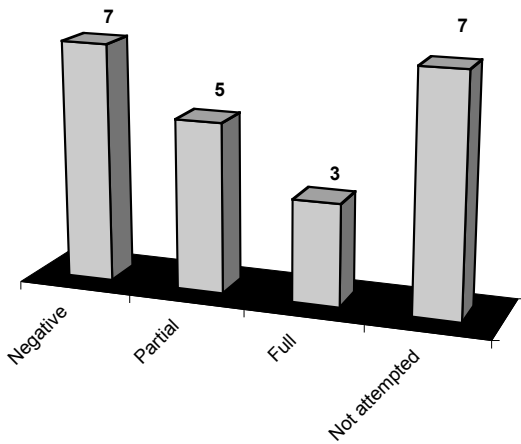
2 Knowledge of languages (including mother tongue)



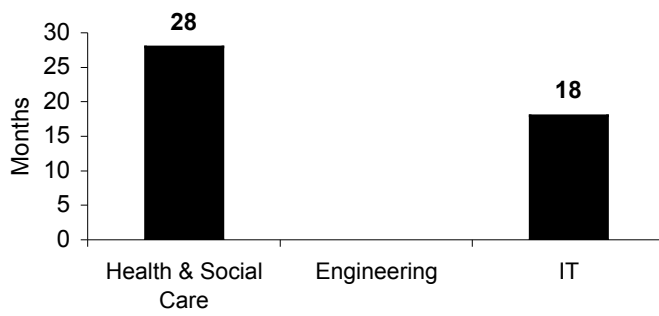
3a Highest level of education before arrival in Finland



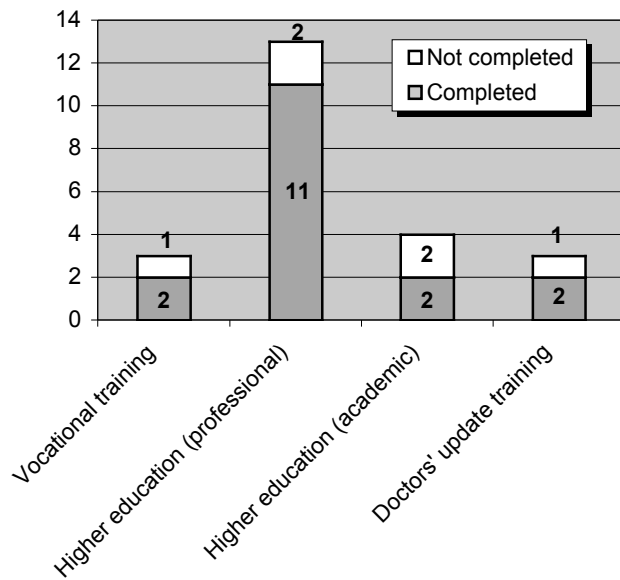
3b Diploma/equivalence recognition in EU country

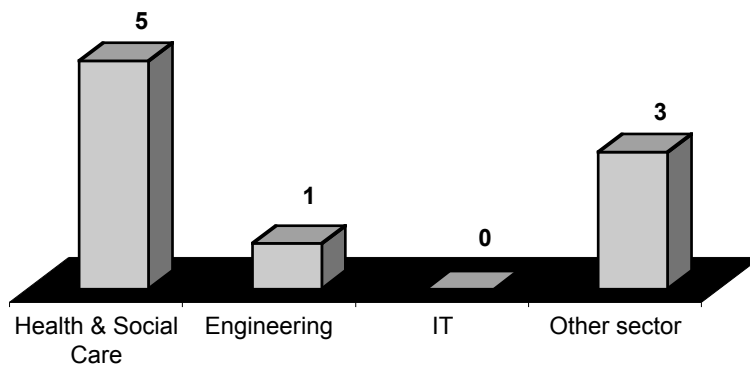
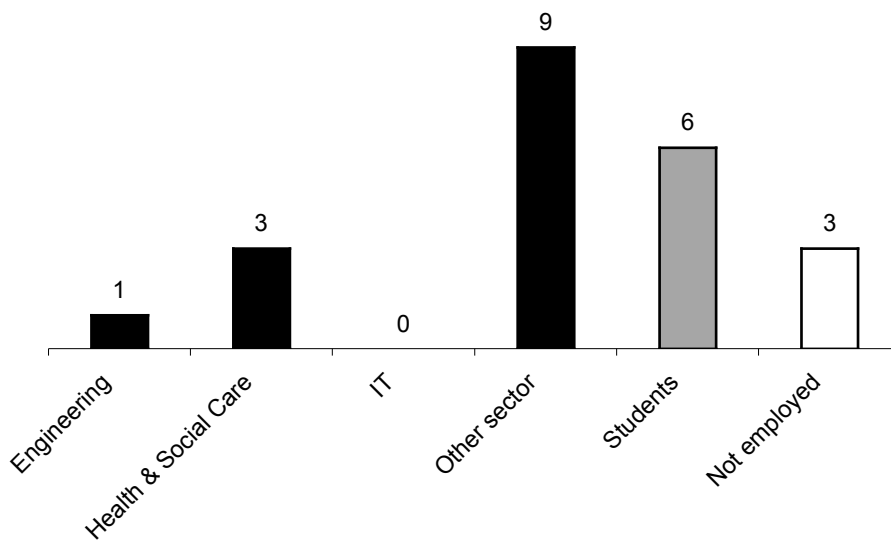


3c Average length of recognition procedure per sector

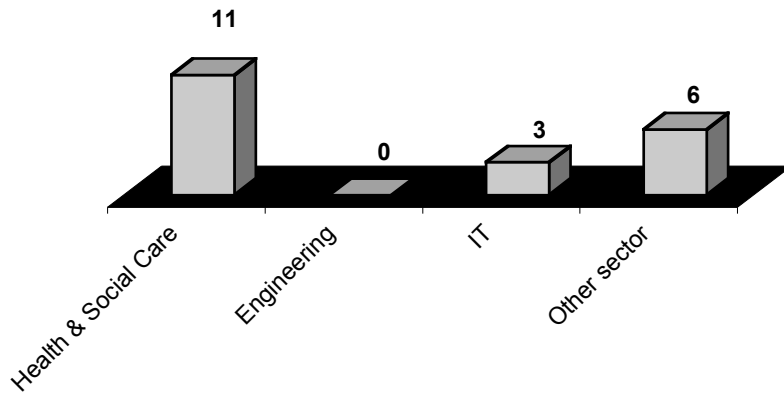


3d Highest level of education in Finland



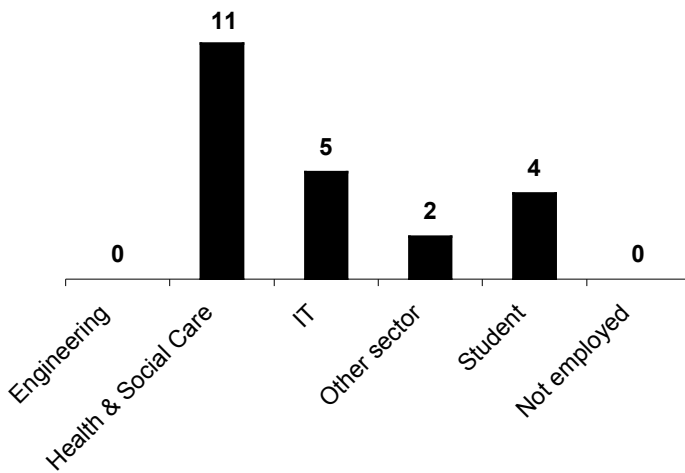
4a **Number of refugees who followed practical training before arrival in EU (per sector)**4b **Number of refugees employed before arrival in Finland (per sector)**

4c Number of refugees who followed practical training in Finland (per sector)



(Total people: 20)

4d Number of refugees employed in Finland (per sector)



5 To what extent do refugees' current jobs reflect the level of their skills, abilities and knowledge acquired before arrival in Finland (per sector)

