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REFUGEE INTEGRATION CENTER

RESOURCE Project

Refugees' contribution to Europe

Country Report: **Greece**

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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 requirements. 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 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 Greek context

Since 1980, Greece granted political asylum to more than 6,300 people, the vast majority originating in Iraq, Turkey or Afghanistan. Of all asylum claims examined in 2001, about 11% were approved. However in 2002, only 0.3% of asylum applications were approved. Data from the last six years comparing the number of Asylum Seekers and the percentage granted asylum is shown in the table below.

Table 1: Number of Refugees in Greece (application for asylum and granting of asylum)

| Year | Number of asylum seekers | Percentage granted refugee status |
|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1997 | 4,376 | 5.5% |
| 1998 | 2,953 | 3.9% |
| 1999 | 1,528 | 8.5% |
| 2000 | 3,083 | 11.2% |
| 2001 | 5,499 | 11.2% |
| 2002 | 5,664 | 0.3% |
| 2003 (to July) | 5,228 | 0.1% |

Source: UNHCR, 2003: 3

Convention refugees are issued five-year residence and work permits, which can be renewed. They are also entitled to apply for reunification with their spouses, underage children, dependent elderly relatives and children with special needs. A revised presidential decree, enacted in June 1999, extended the time for a rejected asylum applicant to lodge an appeal up to 30 days from the day the rejection was issued. From the date an appeal is lodged until an answer is issued by the Ministry of Public Order, all measures taken by the Ministry to expel the applicants are suspended, thus granting them the right to reside legally in Greece pending for the answer for their appeal. Another important aspect of the new decree is that it allows rejected asylum seekers to appeal to the Ministry of Public Order for residence on humanitarian grounds (civil war or natural disaster). During 2000, approximately 400 people were granted temporary residence on such grounds.³

In 1998 and 2001 the government introduced two regularisation processes (amnesties), which granted legal status to a large number of irregular migrants. In both regularisations, approximately 750,000 irregular migrants received residence permits and legal status, thus guaranteeing them legal and social rights. In both regularisations many asylum-seekers or people with humanitarian status registered, thus eliminating their refugee status and acquiring an immigrant status.

³ UNHCR, 2002:1

3 Overview of employment policies and schemes

3.1 Labour market and the employment situation of refugees

Refugees are eligible to receive work permits from the Ministry of Labour, which will enable them to seek legal employment. Apart from convention refugees, asylum seekers are also able to obtain work permits and access to employment. However, the labour market structure of Greece is characterised by the considerable flexibility of the informal economy and foreigners have a direct link with non-reported jobs in the agricultural sector as seasonal workers in the construction and tourist industries.⁴ The informal sector makes up 30% of the total economy. Furthermore, given the fact that we are examining the skills of refugees, a wider picture must be given about the national situation that concerns the Greek citizens and their absorption into the labour market. The following table shows high levels of unemployment among the native population with secondary education. The relative levels of unemployment for those with tertiary education are also higher in Greece compared to other southern EU states. As we will see later in the research this puts the refugee population in a more vulnerable position, especially those who have secondary and tertiary levels of education.

Table 2: Unemployment and participation rates in Southern Europe, by gender and educational level, 1998

| Country | Rates of | Male | | | Female | | |
|------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------|---------------------|-----------------|----------|
| | | Incomplete upper s. | Upper secondary | Tertiary | Incomplete upper s. | Upper secondary | Tertiary |
| Greece | Unemployment | 5.5 | 6.6 | 5.3 | 13.7 | 17.3 | 10.3 |
| | Participation | 81.6 | 89.4 | 90.8 | 41.1 | 56.9 | 83.2 |
| Italy | Unemployment | 7.8 | 5.7 | 4.9 | 16.6 | 11.1 | 9.3 |
| | Participation | 75.2 | 85.7 | 91.8 | 32.6 | 66.1 | 81.3 |
| Portugal | Unemployment | 3.9 | 4.1 | 3.0 | 4.6 | 6.2 | 2.1 |
| | Participation | 89.0 | 90.5 | 95.9 | 69.0 | 82.4 | 90.9 |
| Spain | Unemployment | 10.5 | 7.8 | 6.9 | 22.8 | 19.8 | 16.0 |
| | Participation | 82.2 | 91.2 | 91.4 | 39.5 | 68.4 | 82.7 |
| EU average | Unemployment | 9.8 | 6.3 | 4.2 | 13.8 | 8.3 | 6.3 |
| | Participation | 77.8 | 86.9 | 91.4 | 46.3 | 72.0 | 84.3 |

Source: OECD (2001a: Table D, Statistical Annex)

Reflecting on the situation of migrants and refugees in comparison to other Southern European member states, of the permits granted in the regularisation in 1998, there tends to be a concentration in certain sectors. Table 3 shows some data:

Table 3: Foreign employment by economic activity 1998-9 (%)

| Country | Agriculture & fishing | Mining & manufacturing | Construction | Retail & wholesale | Health, Education, Social services | Households | Public admin | Other services |
|----------|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|------------|--------------|----------------|
| Greece | 3.5 | 19.3 | 26.6 | 19.0 | 5.9 | 19.9 | 0.8 | 5.0 |
| Italy | 6.0 | 29.0 | 9.4 | 17.7 | 11.1 | 10.4 | 3.0 | 13.4 |
| Spain | 9.0 | 11.6 | 8.8 | 26.1 | 14.2 | 16.4 | 1.3 | 12.5 |
| Portugal | 3.3 | 17.4 | 18.6 | 24.3 | 17.9 | 5.1 | 1.8 | 10.6 |

Source: OECD (2001a: Table 5.4)

⁴ Rhodes 1997

From the table above we can see that there is a high feature of high employment of housekeepers and a concentration of immigrant as well as refugee employment in construction and industrial manufacturing. Furthermore, the proportion of immigrant and refugee participation in white-collar jobs is 10% as opposed to 40% in Greece generally.⁵ We also notice that there is minimal participation of foreign labour in the health, education and social service sectors, especially when compared to the sectors of construction, mining and manufacturing.

There are no official data indicating the exact figure of unemployed refugees. This procedure, however, is currently being processed under the Equal Initiative where various databases are being created by various NGOs to record the employment activities of asylum seekers and refugees. However, empirical estimations by various NGOs that assist refugees and asylum seekers with reception and integration programmes state the following:

- The exclusion of refugees from the labour market is linked with the lack of a welfare policy that would provide adequate housing assistance to asylum seekers.
- Since a large number of refugees are engaged in the informal sector, they do not have social security entitlements. Being involved in the informal sector they are paid low wages and are working in hard conditions.
- A large number of refugees are engaged in seasonal work, namely in the tourist and agricultural industries and take time to re-integrate in the labour market.
- Refugees are also engaged in blue-collar jobs, which the Greek population don't want to do.⁶

3.2 Recognition of qualifications for the purpose of work

3.2.1 Higher Education

Two national bodies are responsible in this field, both operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

The Inter-University Centre for the Recognition of Foreign Academic Titles (DIKATSA) is a national centre dealing with University qualifications. The members of the Administrative Council are university professors nominated by their institutions and appointed by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. ITE deals with the validation of academic qualifications obtained from Technological Educational Institutes. Within their respective fields, these bodies:

- Evaluate foreign credentials: DIKATSA and ITE are competent for the academic recognition of qualifications which 'includes' professional recognition;
- Inform applicants about the correct procedures.

As DIKATSA and ITE are exclusively competent for the recognition of foreign credentials as well as for their equivalence to the Greek ones, their decisions are compulsory to third parties including tertiary education institutions. Both bodies have published a list containing universities and institutes of technology and their departments whose titles have been recognised as equivalent to Greek ones.

3.2.2 Vocational education and training

The competent body is the Organisation for Vocational Education & Training (OEEK). The work of this body includes:

- Development and provision of vocational training.
- The formal certification of vocational training.
- The harmonisation of vocational training with the educational system.
- The implementation of various national or EU vocational education and training programmes.

⁵ Baldwin-Edwards, 2001: 14

⁶ Tavri, 1998

Trade unions, employers' organisations and professional associations play an important role because of the participation of their representatives in the OEEK's Administrative Council and in assessment and examinations committees.

The OEEK, supervised by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, is the body responsible for the organisation, development and supply of vocational training in Greece.

3.3 Government schemes to tackle unemployment

The relevant Ministry on issues regarding work is the Ministry of Employment and Social Security. The Ministry, as part of its efforts to support socially at risk groups (including refugees) funds and co-ordinates a series of initiatives, which aim towards the integration of these groups into the workforce. These initiatives may address the issue of learning the Greek language, the development of skills and competencies in seeking employment, professional training to meet new challenges in the work area together with existing competencies and skills of the refugees. Participants in these programmes are often subsidized. These initiatives are periodical and are often implemented in conjunction with other governmental or non governmental agencies or organisations who are certified complementary support service centres or professional training centres.⁷

The Organisation for Employment and Workforce Resources (OAED) plays a key role in the implementation of such programmes, particularly in the area of employment promotion as well as that of general workforce issues. The organisation's fundamental aim is to support the country's workforce with specialised programmes, which promote professional training and combat unemployment.⁸ Parallel actions are demonstrated in the programmes of OAED as it promotes vocational seminars where refugees can participate. Tables 4 and 5 provide data on convention refugees and repatriated Greeks who completed training courses run by OAED and implemented at various Vocational Training Centres.

Table 4: Operational Programme: Combating Social Exclusion from the labour market 1999-2001

| Target group | New positions of Employment | New Business Ventures | New Positions of Employment & New Business Ventures |
|--------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Migrants | 190 | 139 | 329 |
| Repatriates | 123 | 234 | 357 |
| Refugees | 30 | 37 | 67 |
| Total | 343 | 410 | 753 |

Table 5: Community Initiative 'Employment' 1999-2000

| Target group | New Positions of Employment | New Business Ventures | New Positions of Employment & New Business Ventures |
|--------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Migrants | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Repatriates | 65 | 34 | 99 |
| Refugees | 52 | 3 | 55 |
| Total | 119 | 39 | 158 |

Source: OAED 2002.

⁷ International Social Service, 2002: 79

⁸ International Social Service, 2002: 79

3.4 NGO's initiatives to tackle unemployment

The Social Service of the Hellenic Red Cross operates a Labour Office where intervention with employers gives greater chances of employment for refugees and asylum seekers. The National Foundation of Youth played a major role in promoting employment to refugees and asylum seekers in 2000; its role was to find employment positions and mediate between the employer and refugee applicant in order to secure a position in the labour market. It managed to integrate 121 refugees in the work force, in the following fields: 19% in the construction industry as labourers; 16% became street traders; 13% became delivery workers; 11% got cleaning posts; 9% became tailors; 8% factory workers; 6% restaurant workers; and 6% were employed in the agricultural sector. The remaining 13% were promoted in other sectors.⁹ In terms of service delivery to refugees, two NGOs that solely and actively deal with the refugee population are the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) and the Social Work Foundation (SWF).

Language programmes to refugees are delivered in three-month courses, taking a total of nine months. Greek courses for asylum-seekers and refugees are mostly provided by NGOs. The teachers working at the GCR and at the SWF, like those at most NGOs, have consisted of paid staff and volunteers. However, recently, the GCR has collaborated with the University of Athens and the University teaching staff now provide the Greek language courses on GCR premises. This arrangement enables the language learners to be close to the centre of Athens (where GCR premises are) and therefore to reduce the amount of time it takes to combine courses with employment in the area.

A network of labour market promotion is being implemented for vulnerable groups including refugees within the Equal Initiative for the Combat of Discrimination and Inequalities in Relation to the Labour Market. The EU funds it, in cooperation with the Third Community Support Framework. Two examples of the Equal Initiative that is implemented by the Social Work Foundation (in connection with other organisations such as the National Foundation of Youth, Doctors of the World and the Greek Medical Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture) are the *Anadrasi-Istos* and the 'Forum for Social Cohesion'.¹⁰ Some of the actions that these programmes will target are:

- Increase awareness in the community of refugee issues, to eradicate racism and xenophobia.
- The creation of a database to record statistical information on unemployment rates among asylum seekers and refugees in Greece.
- Research regarding employers.
- Research on labour market requirements.
- A network for the promotion of refugee employment.
- Scholarships, training and seminars.

3.5 Main Barriers

The major barriers that refugees experience in terms of labour force participation are the following:

3.5.1 *Communication barriers*

A large number of refugees have not acquired a sufficient level of proficiency in Greek, and this acts as a major obstacle in gaining a job that reflects their qualifications, at least to some extent. The reasons why these people may have not have acquired great skills in the host language stem from lack of housing and meeting their basic needs.

⁹ National Youth Foundation.

¹⁰ The former is implemented under the sub-programme 5: Asylum Seekers and measure 5.1: Support of the Social and Employment Integration of Asylum Seekers and the latter is being implemented under sub-programme 1: Employability.

3.5.2 *Academic Recognition by relevant bodies*

The recognition of degrees at DIKATSA is a severely bureaucratic procedure resulting in many months of delay. Furthermore, in many cases only partial recognition is granted, which means that many applicants must sit for additional exams in order to become equivalent. Transfer of documents is almost impossible.

Most vocational training programmes demand a certain level of language acquisition and many programmes do not meet the expectations of the refugees and the demands of the labour market.

3.5.3 *Lack of trust by public opinion*

Public opinion finds it difficult to accept the skills and knowledge brought by graduates from an 'unknown universities in Africa and Asia'¹¹

¹¹ Tavis, 1998.

4 Labour needs in specific sectors

4.1 Introduction

In this section, we will examine the three major sectors of the Greek labour market with apparent shortages, especially at a regional level. These are health and social care, engineering and Information Technology (IT). We will see that in the medical field there is a large supply of medical practitioners in the two major cities of Greece but shortages in other cities of the country. However, there are predictions of positive prospects in these fields and especially in the IT sector, where severe shortages are apparent but show promising prospects.

To begin with, Greece produces a large number of graduates from tertiary institutions in relation to the total Greek population. However, in recent years this phenomenon in combination with the economic situation of Greece, has delayed their entrance to the workforce. For instance, inflation has risen to 3.8% and the unemployment level has risen to 11.1%.¹² Furthermore, the poverty level is fluctuated over 20%, which is considered high for the southern states of the EU.¹³

Tertiary education graduates do not integrate in the work force upon completion of their studies. Research shows that on average it takes male graduates 41 months and female graduates 36 months to enter the labour market after graduation. However, there are exceptions as far as the sectors of IT and the new technologies are concerned. We will now refer to the sectors of health and welfare, engineering, and new technologies.

The services sector is rather undeveloped in Greece. Both agriculture and the tourism industry are important parts of the informal economy, with likely massive under-reporting of employment. In the agricultural sector especially, heavy reliance on temporary seasonal labour has been a major factor in providing work for irregular migrants. Table 6 shows employment by sector for 1991 and 2000.

Table 6: Employment by sector, 1991 and 2000 [%]

| | Services | | Industry | | Agriculture | |
|-------------------|----------|------|----------|------|-------------|------|
| | 1991 | 2000 | 1991 | 2000 | 1991 | 2000 |
| Greece | 51.8 | 58.0 | 26.8 | 23.3 | 21.4 | 18.7 |
| Italy | 61.1 | 65.5 | 31.8 | 29.7 | 7.1 | 4.8 |
| Spain | 60.2 | 63.5 | 30.4 | 30.0 | 9.4 | 6.6 |
| Portugal | 53.5 | 58.0 | 34.0 | 31.2 | 12.5 | 10.8 |
| EU average | 62.7 | 68.8 | 31.3 | 26.9 | 6.0 | 4.4 |

Source: CEC (2001 : 110 *et seq.*)

Across the EU, higher GDP growth over the late 1990s has translated into higher employment rates; in all EU countries except Greece, the elasticity of employment growth to GDP growth has increased over the period 1995-2000. Whereas the EU average elasticity was 0.2 from 1980-90, Greece's was 1.5; now, with the EU average at 0.5 for 1995-2000, with Spain and Italy well above that, Greece's has declined to 0.2.¹⁴ This 'is a disturbing trend, which suggests lack of policy for job creation in Greece, along with the possibility of the informal sector [and particularly the work of illegal immigrants] making a significant structural impact on the Greek economy'.¹⁵

¹² Bouzas, 2002: 81.

¹³ Balourdos 2002: 66.

¹⁴ CEC, 2001:54.

¹⁵ Baldwin-Edwards (2001: 7).

4.2 Medicine

The overproduction of doctors and their unequal geographical distribution has created an excessive population of graduates in the field. Doctors who have taken many years to graduate from medical school are either unemployed or experiencing underutilisation of their skills. According to a recent study from the Medical Association of Athens, in the last few years there appears to be an increasing proportion of doctors in relation to the total Greek population. Specifically, there are 60% more doctors per 10,000 citizens than in 1980 and 38.8% more per 10,000 than 1994.¹⁶

In addition to this, three quarters of the doctors who train in Greece specialise in one of only 12 fields. Some of these oversubscribed fields that lead to under-employment and even unemployment are: pathology (12%), bio-pathology (10%), paediatrics (10%), gynaecology and obstetrics (8%) and cardiology (7%). On the other hand only 0.4% of the total number of doctors practice family medicine. In general terms, however, the scientific overpopulation expands the unemployment of these professions (8.5% of doctors are unemployed in Athens). This problem is more apparent when we compare it with other European capital cities. In September 1997, 0.5% of doctors were unemployed in London, less than 0.4% in Copenhagen and 2% in Stockholm.¹⁷

The unbalanced distribution of medical doctors in the field show that 70% of the working population resides and is employed in the capital region of Athens and the sub-capital Thessalonica in Northern Greece. This has resulted into unequal service provision in other regions of the country. This is illustrated by the table below:

Table 7: Number of doctors and proportion per 10,000 residents per region

| Region | Doctors | Doctors per 10,000 residents |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|
| Capital region | 20,351 | 61.90 |
| Central Greece & Evia | 2,328 | 17.91 |
| Peloponnese | 3,140 | 27.32 |
| Ionian islands | 498 | 23.24 |
| Epirus | 1,226 | 34.78 |
| Thessaly | 1,866 | 24.73 |
| Macedonia | 3,265 | 23.89 |
| Thessalonica | 6,136 | 58.61 |
| Thrace | 889 | 24.58 |
| Aegean islands | 1,101 | 21.96 |
| Crete | 2,230 | 37.09 |
| Total | 43,030 | 39.33 |

Source: Papaliou, O & E, Fagadaki (2002: 106)

In addition to this, even though there is a large number of specialist doctors in general surgery, there is a significant shortage of specialist pathologists (1.5% of the total medical profession).¹⁸

So far, the state has taken no measures to restrict the number of medical practitioners. The medical practitioners trade union is currently suggesting that there should be a dialogue between all concerned parties (the state, medical practitioners, students and political parties).

4.3 Welfare and paramedical professions

As welfare and paramedical professions are not homogenous statistical data on specific professions is not centrally stored. An exception to this is social work, which contains about 5,000 professionals. The University of Piraeus conducted an empirical study about the future of certain medical sectors in

¹⁶ Athens Medical Association, 1998: 9

¹⁷ Athens Medical Association, 1998: 7

¹⁸ Papouliou, Fagadaki, 2002: 94

Greece.¹⁹ According to the study, the broad field of paramedical professions and professions of social care are expected to increase and thus a significant number of graduates in these fields will be absorbed in the labour market. This is due to the increased psycho-social problems that contemporary society faces and lead to social exclusion or unemployment. Furthermore, the aging of the population is another factor, which will increase the number of professions required in social care, but also the state is obliged to become more aware of people with disabilities and to those who face marginalisation.

Technological professions in the field of health seem to provide promising prospects. These professions include in the fields of medical equipment Technicians and radiology technicians. The perspectives of graduates in the fields of nursing, social work and career counselling are also promising.²⁰

4.4 Engineering

The industrial and manufacturing sector to a large extent determined Greece's economic development in the post war era, and created the need for labour, from architects to builders. However, in the 1980s and 1990s there appeared to be an overpopulation of graduate engineers. A study published by the Technical Chambers of Greece (TEE) indicated 5% unemployment in the field. However, this percentage is not considered high in comparison to percentages of unemployed graduates from other fields of study. In addition, 33% of graduates were not able to integrate immediately after the completion of their studies. In other words, the job supply was negative up until the mid-1990s.

Job prospects for engineers began to look promising due to funding from the European Community within the Community Support Framework. In addition, the hosting of the Olympic games in Athens in 2004, created a series of construction projects in Greece, especially in the Attica region.

Statistical indicators show that civil engineers are the most predominant group among graduate engineers, followed by mechanical engineers and electrical engineers. Furthermore, 56.9% of engineers live and are employed in the Attica region while 13.1% are situated in Thessalonica and 6.1% in the remaining northern part of Greece. Most engineers (49%) are employed in construction (construction sites and public works) or in industry (6%). The metal industry, which belongs to the primary sector, only employs 1% of engineers.²¹ It is also worth noting that 22.2% of engineers are graduates from foreign universities. But these numbers do not show any degree holders who have refugee status due to the non-registration of the country of origin.

The following table shows the average waiting period of employment seeking according to the engineering field:

Table 8: Average waiting period for employment among engineers per engineering field

| Field | Average waiting period for employment in months |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Architect | 2.8 months |
| Civil Engineer | 2.6 months |
| Mechanical Engineer | 2.4 months |
| Electrical Engineer | 1.9 months |
| Chemical Engineer | 4.8 months |
| Metal Engineer | 5.9 months |
| Engineer in Shipping sector | 2.4 months |

Source: Research conducted by the Athens National Technical University in 1998 (Cited in Katsanevas, 2003: 137)

In table 9, we notice unequal distribution among engineers throughout the major regions of Greece. We see that the Attica region, which is the capital region of Greece, and Thessalonica, being the sub-capital, show a large percentage of professionals residing and working in the regions.

¹⁹ Katsanevas, 2003: 176

²⁰ *ibid*: 176

²¹ Katsanevas, 2003

Table 9: Regional distribution of qualified engineers who are members of the Technical Chambers of Greece

| Region | Percentage |
|----------------|------------|
| Aegean | 2.1% |
| Attica | 56.9% |
| Epirus | 1.9% |
| Thessaly | 4.5% |
| Thessalonica | 13.1% |
| Thrace | 1.6% |
| Ionian islands | 1.0% |
| Crete | 3.7% |
| Macedonia | 6.1% |
| Peloponnesus | 5.8% |
| Central Greece | 3.2% |

Source: Research conducted by the Athens National Technical University in 1998 (Cited in Katsanevas, 2003: 138)

4.5 Information Technology

There is no doubt that the field of information technology (IT) is progressing rapidly in all developing countries and technology is playing a huge part in people's lives. The 1990's was characterised as the decade of technological revolution in Greece. The market freedom, the creation of mobile phone companies and the establishment of computers in the public and private services, the introduction of the subject of Information Technology in secondary education and tertiary education have put the field as the most wanted field in Greece.

To begin with, in the 1980's there was not a single university level course that majored in the field of IT. Furthermore, the perception that an 'illiterate' person of the future would be considered a person without any sound knowledge in computer use had prompted the creation of seminars, which operated in private colleges and institutions. In the 1990's new computer courses are introduced in state universities and technological institutions notable in all levels in education.²² However, the rapid increase of university and technical education courses do not cover the total demand for professionals in the labour market. Therefore according to the Association of Information Technology Companies (SEPE), in the broad field of IT there are approximately 50,000 new posts, but the total education system is currently able to produce only 7,000 graduates per year. Thus some companies are in the process of inviting workers from other countries such as India and Pakistan in order to fill some of the vacant positions.²³

We would like to end this by providing details of the sectors that show positive perspective in the Greece in the years to come in Table 10.

²² Nanouris, 2003:26

²³ Katsanevas, 2003:151

Table 10: Perspectives for growth in coming years

| | Perspectives on a three point scale system |
|---|--|
| 14 categories of occupations | |
| A. PRIMARY SECTOR (AGRICULTURE) | |
| 1. Agriculture, Husbandry, Fisheries, Metals, Geology, Forestry | 1 |
| B. SECONDARY SECTOR (CONSTRUCTION AND INDUSTRY) | |
| 2. Construction | 2 |
| 3. Chemistry, Energy, Food, Drinks | 1 |
| 4. Engineering, Steel industry, Wood and Glass industry | 2 |
| 5. Clothing, textile, footwear | 1 |
| C. TERTIARY SECTOR (SERVICES) | |
| 6. Information Technology, Telecommunications | 3 |
| 6.1. Software | 3 |
| 6.1a. Computer programmer | 3 |
| 6.1b. IT technician | 3 |
| 6.1c. Telecommunications technician | 3 |
| 6.1d. Internet technician | 3 |
| 6.1e. Computer security technician | 3 |
| 6.1 f. Computer data base technician | 3 |
| 6.2. Hardware | 3 |
| 6.2a. Information technologist: Industry | 3 |
| 6.2b. Information technologist: management of information | 3 |
| 6.2c. Information technologist: Electronics-Engineering | 3 |
| 6.2d. Information technologist: Robotics | 3 |
| 6.2e. Information technologist: Designer | |
| 6.2 f. Information technologist: Industrial hardware technician | |
| 7. Economy, Administration, Banking, Insurance, Trading, Occupations in Law Sector | 2 |
| 7.1 Economics, Administration | 2 |
| 7.2 Banking, Insurances | 2 |
| 7.3 Trading | 1 |
| 7.4 Occupations in Law sector | |
| 8. Deliveries, Shipping | 2 |
| 9. Tourism, Leisure and Sports | 3 |
| 10. Information and Mass Media | 1 |
| 11. Arts and Applied Graphic Arts | 1 |
| 12. Health and Welfare | 2 |
| 13. Education and Theoretical Studies | |
| 13.1. Pedagogical, Literature and Foreign Language studies | 1 |
| 13.2. History, Archaeology, Ethnography, Geography | 1 |
| 13.3. Sociology, International Studies, Political Sciences | 1 |
| 13.4. Mathematics and Physics | 1 |
| 14. Military, Police, Ecclesiastical and Occupations in the Public Sector | |
| 14.1. Military and Police occupations | 3 |
| 14.2. Ecclesiastical Occupations | 3 |
| 14.3 Occupations in the Public Sector | 3 |

Source: Katsanevas, 2003: (125 & 152)

5 Refugees' contribution to Greece

5.1 Relationship between refugees' education and work background and current employment

Twenty-five participants were interviewed. Twenty-three participants came from urban settings, specifically the inner areas of Athens. Two participants resided in other areas of Greece. One resided in Thessalonica in Northern Greece and the other on the Aegean island of Ios. It took a massive effort to find participants who fitted or almost fitted the criteria set out by the guidelines of the project. The following obstacles occurred:

- No statistical data is provided by the government and departments about the qualifications refugees obtained or the professions they held in their countries of the origin.
- 12 NGOs were asked to provide some information about possible participants for the study and five cases were referred.
- The project was advertised in the English weekly newspaper *Athens News* that is widely read by the migrant and refugee population but only immigrants responded to the article.
- The Technical Chambers of Commerce (TCC) provided a list of foreign names of people who are qualified engineers and registered in the TCC but none were convention refugees. This was discovered as these individuals were contacted by telephone, informed about the research and were asked about their status.
- Many public hospitals of Athens were contacted and only five doctors who hold refugee status were discovered and interviewed.

Of the twenty-five interviewees, seven held qualifications in medicine. However, not all gained qualifications in their country of origin. In fact, four had completed their medical studies in Greece; two of the four had arrived in Greece with completed secondary education while the remaining two had completed military service before gaining scholarships to attend university in Greece. Three of the seven participants with medical qualifications had completed their studies in the country of origin. The three of the four participants who had completed their medical studies in Greece were employed at various state hospitals and were undertaking their specialisation in the fields of internal medicine and gynaecology. The fourth participant had recently opened a private medical clinic as a paediatrician on the island of Ios in the Aegean Sea.

Ten participants held qualifications in engineering. In particular, four held qualifications in civil engineering and five in electrical engineering. Also, a student chemical engineer from the Athens Technical University was interviewed. Of the ten participants, two had undertaken studies in Greece; one was employed as an electrician with some university knowledge applied to some of his daily tasks. The other, however, was employed as a shop assistant. Of the four civil engineers interviewed, three had completed their studies in their home country and one had not completed his degree due to persecution by the Iraqi authorities. He, however, managed to gain a position as an assistant civil engineer in Greece as his vocational and practical training in Greece helped him develop his knowledge further. The other two were unemployed, and the remaining two were employed in Social Care while another worked in a petrol station as a pump attendant. A factory that produced confectionery and ice cream employed the participant who had completed food engineering. The participant's academic studies were partly incorporated in her current position. Two participants with qualifications in IT were interviewed and one is currently employed as a computer-programming instructor at a private institute of computer studies. However, the other participant with the same qualifications is unemployed. In addition, three participants were interviewed in the sectors of economics and business studies. One of the participants held qualifications from the military academy of Rwanda and completed his degree in the Greece, but is now employed as a shop assistant and. Of the remaining two, one worked as an administration officer and the other became self-employed in the embroidery business. One biologist was also interviewed who has done post-graduate studies in the field and worked as a science

teacher in Iraq but was unemployed in Greece. Lastly, a mathematician who was not able to complete his studies in his country of origin was interviewed and is employed in Greece in the social care sector, assisting refugees with their social needs.

5.2 Pathways to employment

The major pathway to employment that facilitated the participants' entrance to the workforce in their corresponding field of studies and in other sectors was the knowledge of the host language. This knowledge was achieved by their participation in language courses arranged by the faculty of literature in the Universities of Athens or Thessalonica. Participants had also attended language instruction classes at various NGOs namely, the Greek Council for Refugees, the Social Work Foundation and the social services department of the Hellenic Red Cross. It is also worth noting that nine participants gained an official certificate from the university stating their proficiency in Greek. These people, however, were obliged to sit for the examination because it was a major prerequisite for continuation of their studies in Greece. The duration of language instruction at the universities varied from three to nine months. Some continued to be self-taught in the language by reading various books and integrating with the local society.

The second pathway to employment in the host country appears to be the studies or additional studies undertaken in the host country. As stated in the profile of refugees earlier in the report, four participants had not completed their academic studies in the country of origin due to persecution by the authorities, which led to the disruption of their studies. In addition, six participants had completed secondary education and arrived in Greece via student scholarships and were subsequently granted political asylum due to the development of political unrest and war in their country of origin while they were studying. What is more, seventeen of the participants interviewed followed practical training in Greece or in another EU country. Nine participants completed training in health and social care, whereas four participants completed training in social care and IT. The participants who undertook studies in social care through the National Employment Office (OAED) in conjunction with various non-governmental agencies such as the Greek Council for Refugees and the Technological Institute of Athens were engaged in employment at the Greek Council for Refugees, at the Social Services Department of the Hellenic Red Cross, at the Social Work Foundation under the EQUAL Initiative and at the Greek branch of the organisation Doctors of the World. Their main duties include operating the SOS telephone line, working with refugees and asylum seekers, informing them about their social rights in the host country and intervening in a crisis situation with the social worker. Case study 1 (below) illustrates the skills brought by one participant and how they have been utilised along with the studies undertaken in the homeland by a welfare organisation in Athens.

It is also important to note that few participants had the opportunity to develop their expertise gained in the country of origin further in Greece. Case study 2 (below) demonstrates the willingness to integrate by striving for further knowledge in the field but also demonstrates the acceptance of employers to hire and train an employee with refugee status, thus guaranteed satisfaction, dignity and self-worth. What is more, in the case of employment in the field of social care, the opportunity is given for some refugees to assist their compatriots since they share the similar cultural values and beliefs and in many cases the same traumatic experiences. On the other hand being employed with incomplete qualifications but to some extent, show demonstrated experience and vocational training in combination with increasing awareness among employers, can be considered as only a few but great examples of successful pathways to employment by refugees in the Greek labour market.

The third pathway to employment for the participants is the combination of contacts and personal skills and competences. Refugee communities inevitably gain a self-servicing character and therefore, many participants gained their current positions through different contacts in their refugee communities. Seven participants stated that contacts acted as a major role in gaining employment. These contacts were achieved by assistance from their compatriots or by providing volunteer services to various companies or NGOs such as Doctors of the World. In addition four participants stated that their personal competences and skills proved beneficial when requesting a job in the fields they desired. These

competences included demonstration of organisational skills, willingness to work as a team member, service oriented personality.

This section will end by reflecting on the experience of one participant who held qualifications in Computer Engineering. This example, Case study 3 (below), should act as an inspiration for all employers and sectors of Greek society. Furthermore, it introduces an alternative system of skill recognition.

5.3 Identifying and overcoming barriers

The most difficult barrier experienced by most participants was lack of knowledge of Greek and difficulty getting language instruction. None of the interviewees knew any Greek at the time of their arrival. Seventeen now speak Greek fluently, in most cases without the benefit of language courses. As mentioned in the communication barriers section (3.5.1 above), it took them three to six months to begin to understand and up to a year to feel comfortable speaking. However, as newly arrived asylum seekers they had poor language skills, and, as the Greek reception system offers either very little assistance or none at all, they were forced to go out and earn their living practically from the day they arrived. Consequently, they did not have time for language courses and learnt the language on their own. Seven participants did not attend language courses and four discontinued the course. In addition, seven participants did not feel comfortable speaking the Greek language. For instance, an interviewee who held Iraqi qualifications in electrical engineering, currently works as a petrol pump attendant in Athens and does not feel comfortable in speaking Greek. His functional level of Greek will suffice for his current position. Two further examples emphasise the point. A female asylum seeker, who graduated in civil engineering in Iraq, is currently unemployed and does not have sufficient knowledge of Greek to communicate. A female refugee from Turkey, who studied computer science, is in the same position. For these women family responsibilities have hindered their chances to participate in courses.

The second most difficult barrier to overcome was the lack of knowledge in the labour market and of opportunities granting access to the labour market. Eleven participants stated that there has been no organised effort to help those whose education and professional skills did not meet the needs of the labour market in Greece. They felt that in these circumstances they were left without guidance or assistance regarding vocational training opportunities that would enable them to find suitable employment based on their skills and move up the economic and social ladder in Greece. Such an opportunity would have met their needs quicker and would have made better use of their skills and resources in the host society. Instead, after three to four years in Greece, nine interviewees, regardless of their sex, age and family status, still have low paying jobs in their respective fields and other sectors, working six or even seven days a week, 10 to 12 hours per day. These numbers include the doctors who are currently undertaking their practice as specialist medical practitioners in their field and are underpaid. Nevertheless, the medical practitioners were forced to seek employment in private clinics as doctors or medical assistants. These extra hours of work, however, cause a major setback in their studies, since they do not have enough time to study. For instance, a doctor from the Democratic Republic of Congo who is currently undertaking medical training as a gynaecologist states: *'My salary as a trainee specialist is not sufficient to cover my basic needs. I work in a private clinic in order to meet my needs'*. This view was supported by two further medical practitioners, who rely on family networks for financial support or experience difficulties in their studies.

The third most difficult barriers were finance and discrimination. The financial problems were expressed in combination with the inequalities concerning labour laws especially in the field of medicine, family responsibilities and the lack of welfare response to refugees' needs in Greece. All participants felt that the underdeveloped social protection and welfare system resulted into minimal assistance and did not cover basic needs such as shelter and food. Those in need were assisted through self-help systems within refugee communities, which encourage them to be self-sufficient and independent (obtaining shelter and employment that provides enough for rent and a modest diet) in a short period. However, one participant who had qualification in the medical field in Afghanistan and arrived in Greece in 2001, benefited from the Nefeli programme of the Social Work Foundation. This programme

offers the immediate reception and initial settlement of asylum seekers through semi-autonomous living conditions in the inner suburbs of Athens. The beneficiaries of the programme do not pay for their accommodation and are allowed to reside in these apartments rented by the Social Work Foundation. This enables the asylum seekers to hasten integration and employability through specialised language acquisition and job-search skills development activities. However, a limited number of beneficiaries are offered this programme. One participant in the research was able to integrate in a short period of time by taking intensive courses in Greek, registering at the Athens Technological Institute as a student in the Medical Equipment Technician and working in a private hospital. This *'was possible because I benefited by living in an apartment rented by the Social Work Foundation and I was therefore able to concentrate fully on my Greek language courses and to take the necessary steps to achieve employment and academic integration after a few months upon my arrival to Greece'*.

Occupational downgrading seems quite evident as the doctors interviewed referred to low pay during their specialised training period. Their refugee status limits their formal medical practice in state hospitals because they do not hold Greek citizenship. As indicated in the research, five participants completed their medical studies in Greece. The four participants stated that their Greek qualifications have enabled their current employment. However, in the case of the medical doctors, some inequalities were discovered concerning their pay rates. For instance, the remuneration rate for specialist doctors ranges from €1,100 to €1,300 per month.²⁴ What is more, the waiting period for specialisation appointment in the gynaecology field by the Ministry of Health to a public hospital is five to seven years after the completion of the medical degree. It is a positive development for refugees and foreign doctors that their waiting period for a specialist position is only one or two years, however their pay will only reach €380 per month.

An electrical engineer from the Democratic Republic of Congo who studied in Greece is currently employed as an electrician at a tourist company. He stated that his qualifications are reflected in his current employment. However his skills do not reflect his remuneration since he did not report his degree when the company hired him. *'Getting a job was more important than getting a job with high technical skills such as engineering. However, due to my academic training, I am able to incorporate my knowledge in the current field of work but I am not paid extra salary for this expertise.'* A further comment by a food engineer who is employed by an ice-cream factory in Athens supported this trend. *'My boss is aware of my academic qualifications as a food engineer in Iran. For this reason I have been unofficially promoted as a supervisor over my colleagues and I conduct some tasting of food samples and some laboratory work. However, due to my non-recognition of qualifications so far, they are not willing to increase my salary.'*

These instances give us another indication on the treatment of refugees by the employers and the willingness to incorporate their skills without acknowledging their expertise. Furthermore, it is noticed that the price is too high to look for a job in the high-tech fields and they usually settle for low skilled jobs. It is important to note that two participants regarded a certain amount of downward mobility as part of the price of freedom. An electrical engineer and an economist, both from Iraq, stated complete satisfaction with their current position as a jewellery technician and as a self-employed worker in the embroidery business. *'Freedom from the oppression that I felt in my country of origin is of greatest value to me and I have achieved this in Greece.'* said one.

5.4 Impact of academic recognition procedures

As shown in graph 3b (Appendix), four of the 25 participants had gone through the procedure of recognition. Seven participants were not aware of the procedure and four did not have sufficient documents to submit the application for the recognition. Two of the participants who went through the procedure held university qualifications in engineering and the other two in medicine. The results of the procedure were successful for one doctor and he was able to work as an anaesthesiologist at a

²⁴ Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2003

private medical clinic in Northern Greece. The following statement provides a picture of the steps taken to complete the procedure.

I arrived in Greece as a post-graduate student to study for my doctorate degree in anaesthesiology. I had gone through the DIKATSA procedure and I initially received a certificate verifying the studies undertaken in my home country, Rwanda. However, when I was about to sit for my anaesthesiology exams in Greece, I was notified that I had not acquired recognition of my degree for the purposes of registering in the Medical Association and employment. Nevertheless, I began the process of recognition and received my equivalence a few months ago after undertaking some exams. Now I am able to work in a private hospital or clinic as a qualified medical practitioner from the Greek state.

5.5 Impact of age gender, legal status, knowledge of language and family responsibilities on the job seeking process

It is quite evident that the issue of age, gender, legal status and knowledge of languages created an impact in the job seeking process. Most of the participants were between 30 and 39 years of age. This group did not refer to any obstacles while seeking employment in Greece in their desired and any other fields because these ages were considered active working ages. However, it is important to note that a civil engineer with recognised qualifications by DIKATSA reported that being 50 limited his prospects of employment in the field. The legal status of convention refugees and asylum seekers enabled participants to gain legal positions in the labour market. However, the obstacle of legal status was more apparent in the medical field. The four medical practitioners could not work in state hospitals unless they had Greek citizenship. However, one Iranian doctor recently gained Greek citizenship and felt quite confident and more certain about the ability to gain equal access to the medical field with Greek citizens.

Family responsibilities created a huge impact on thirteen participants' quest for employment. Two engineers, who are currently working as electricians for a tourist company, and a shop assistant, with qualifications in economics, reported that their priority was to support their families. They were worried about frequent changes in employment in case they became unemployed. In particular, one civil engineer with recognised qualifications by ITE, who currently works as a social carer in an NGO reported the following: *'I have been offered short term projects in the civil engineering field but I do not want to risk leaving my current job to undertake short term projects without long term prospects. If I do, I run the risk of losing my current job and therefore it will be difficult to support my wife and eight year old son.'* As illustrated in the example, participants sacrificed their desire of making an effort to search or even accept jobs reflecting their qualifications.

The issue of gender requires special focus but conclusive remarks cannot be made due to the small number of female participants interviewed. Of the twenty-five participants interviewed, only five were female; specifically, one doctor, one civil engineer, two economists and one computer scientist. The doctor was about to complete her final examinations in her specialised field of internal medicine. The computer scientist was unemployed but provides volunteer services in computer programme design for her social club. One of the two economists worked until recently in a private employment office and was involved in job seeking for foreigners. However, both participants were single parents and were not able to search for jobs reflecting their academic experience. Another participant who completed studies in civil engineering reported that she did not have adequate work experience in her country of origin due to the cultural tradition of remaining at home and taking care of her family. In addition, her work experience in Greece and command of Greek is minimal. Therefore, conclusive remarks cannot be made but the vulnerable state of single-parenthood traditional values limited the workforce participation for these participants.

5.6 Overview of refugees' own perception on the match between current job and acquired skills

As noted in graph 5 (Appendix), ten out of 25 participants reported that their qualifications obtained in the country of origin and host country fully reflect their current positions. This was perceived by mainly those participants who had studied medicine in the host country and abroad, especially by the doctor who had gone through recognition by DIKATSA. The assistant engineer who had studied civil engineering at university in Iraq and felt that his current job fully reflected his studies in Iraq and practical training and development in Greece also perceived this notion. In addition, the four participants who were currently employed in the social care sector, derive from the academic fields of engineering and mathematical sciences. Even though participants' academic qualifications did not reflect current occupation field, these three participants reported satisfaction and fulfilment, as they were able to work on an equally important field and more importantly to be able to work with their compatriots.

Finally, those who perceived that their current jobs reflect their qualifications in part are mainly those who had partial recognition of their studies and those who had taken relevant practical training in their academic area, but not the exact of the field studied in the country of origin. One example was a doctor from Afghanistan but was accepted by the Athens Technical University to study as a medical equipment technician.

5.7 Refugees' recommendations on improving their chances to find employment reflecting their qualifications and skills

The following recommendations derive from refugees' responses as to what recommendations they would make to improve the prospects of refugee employment according to their qualifications.

5.7.1 *Specialised careers advice*

The lack of specialised career advisors to pinpoint labour market shortages in the sectors of employment that reflects their skills. For example, some engineers were not aware of the shortages in the field of engineering and were not aware of the existence of DIKATSA (The Inter-University Centre for the Recognition of Foreign Academic Titles). This means that even though they brought their documents to the host country, they did not know how to use them in anyway. Information should be given about the possibilities of incorporation of skills brought to the country of origin.

5.7.2 *Faster and wider ranging recognition of qualifications*

Speed the process of recognition of foreign earned credentials at DIKATSA and allow flexibility for vulnerable populations such as refugees. This should be done through collaboration of the NGO's that deal with refugees and the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

The official Statistical Service of Greece should provide data on refugees' background of academic and professional qualifications, allowing Registration of foreign earned credentials.

5.7.3 *Better pay for doctors in training*

The medical profession suffers due to the inequalities experienced by refugee medical doctors who undertake their specialisation training at public hospitals. Equal pay must be provided to doctors of any country during this practice. Doctors will not be able to complete proper training if they must search for alternative solutions for an income that can provide basic care, especially if it concerns families.

5.7.4 *General recommendations*

Willingness of refugees to succeed in their fields of study is an important factor. Refugees should be able to continue with language instruction and ask for orientation.

Development of specialised courses for professionals and the teaching of scientific terminology according to the fields studied in the country of origin.

5.8 **Case studies**

5.8.1 *Example 1: Social care – Mr S*

Mr S is 34 years old with Iraqi nationality and is of Kurdish origin. He currently resides in Greece on humanitarian grounds. He completed his academic studies at a university in Iraq and obtained a qualification in 'Electrical Engineering, Electronics and Communication' in 1994. He arrived in Greece in 1998 and applied for asylum to the Greek authorities. Mr S endeavoured to gain equivalence for his qualifications, but faced obstacles due to his non-refugee status at the time. However, when he received his humanitarian status in 2001, he applied to the Ministry of Education and was accepted at a university in Athens to study Political Science. He also obtained the Certificate of Proficiency in the Greek language at the University of Athens. He participated in a seminar funded by the European Refugee Fund in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour of Greece and Finland and the Hellenic Red Cross entitled: 'Empowering – training and staff exchange programme to build refugee community organisations and other NGOs'. He also participated in a vocational training programme within the framework of the operational programme 'Combating labour market exclusion' implemented at the Technological Institute of Athens entitled: 'Training refugees as social carers in social services'. His practical training enabled him to change his career prospects and enter the field of social care.

His professional experience in Greece included a post at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, providing telephone information about the 2001 immigration law to immigrants. He was employed as an interpreter at the Medical Centre, which assists refugees who were subjected to torture and is now employed by a refugee-assisting agency as a social carer. His duties include case management, counselling, accompanying beneficiaries to hospitals, state welfare departments and promotion of refugees and asylum seekers to the labour market as well as facilitating the communication process between the social worker and beneficiary through interpreting and translation. Even though Mr S holds a totally different academic background, he stated that his qualifications acquired in his homeland, partly reflect his current employment as the scientific foundations can be applied in every field of employment. Besides, he admitted satisfaction about assisting his fellow compatriots in the host country.

5.8.2 *Example 2: Engineering – Mr M*

Mr M is 36 years of age; he currently resides in Greece and holds refugee status. His nationality is Iraqi with Kurdish origin. He was accepted by the University of Baghdad to study civil engineering. Mr M had completed three years of academic study before the Iraqi authorities persecuted him. He was forced to disrupt his studies. In 1998, he arrived in Greece and was granted refugee status in 2000. Mr M took the opportunity to learn Greek by self-instruction and was quickly able to communicate functionally with the wider Greek society. However, his main aim was to work as a civil engineer. He partially achieved this as he currently works as an assistant civil engineer in a company and intends to apply to the Ministry of Education in order to continue his studies at a Greek university or a technological institution. He attended professional training seminars in engineering along with seminars in IT. He also searched for companies and worked voluntarily in order to develop his knowledge in the field. His previous employers referred him to the company where he is now employed. His current employer allows him to undertake major projects under his supervision. In addition, his willingness to integrate professionally with more aware employers enabled Mr M to consider himself as a successful assistant

civil engineer with excellent prospects in the future, especially if he completes his studies in the field in Greece.

5.8.3 **Example 3: IT – Mr O**

Mr O comes from Iraq and is of Arabic origin. He arrived in Greece in 2002 and he currently holds an asylum seeker status. He studied at the University of Baghdad where he gained a degree in computer engineering in 1992. He also studied for his Master's degree for two years but was forced to disrupt his studies due to persecution by the authorities for his political beliefs. After fleeing to Turkey, he arrived in Greece. Mr O was fortunate enough to be able to bring his degree and all documents relating to his studies. Apart from his qualifications, he possessed extensive experience in IT in Iraq by working in various software companies and in a car company, as head of the IT department. Mr O has been able to continue his professional career in Greece in a relatively short period of time since his arrival. He currently works in private Vocational Training Centres and he teaches computer programmes to adult students. Mr O was not aware of the procedure of recognition of academic qualifications at DIKATSA. What is more, he was not expected to go through the procedure with his previous and current Greek employers. Instead he was given a test of knowledge in the computing field and succeeded. He has not attended any language training in Greek and nor is he familiar with the language. He is, however, in a class with foreign students that is taught in English since his command of this is excellent. Mr O's next step is to go through the procedure at DIKATSA in order to recognise his academic qualifications.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

In this report we endeavoured to present cases and examples of refugees where they reported satisfaction or even success in their quest for economic integration. This was achieved for a large number of participants in this research but not everyone. The very successful cases were few but they make great examples for prospective employers and government organisations. To achieve successful economic integration it is of paramount importance to provide refugees with a framework for an active reconstruction of life.

A successful integration policy is yet to be developed for refugees, offering a legal, financial and institutional framework within which they are given space for functional adjustment of their attitudes and skills necessary for entering Greek society as social actors. The success stories illustrated in the report should make relevant professional bodies and employers to develop techniques in assessing refugee skills. This will provide new pathways for skilled refugees to work in the fields reflecting their qualifications.

The level of qualifications achieved by the interviewees is an important indicator of the job skills held, but is also disturbing, when considering the waste of potential within some participants' current jobs. As seen in the second part of this report, there is a steady growth in occupations that demand much higher skill levels. A whole new set of service, professional and technical knowledge based skills arise and replace unskilled and semi-skilled manual work. However, the question remains of how these skills are being utilised at national level, especially when we refer to skills transfer of refugees. Another factor is demographics. Greek people now live longer and have fewer babies than they used to. For instance the percentage of the population aged between 65 and 79 years increased from 10.9% in 1980 to 13% in 1998, whereas, the population aged 80 years and above, has increased from 2.3% to 3.5% respectively. The proportion of children aged between 0-14 years in the population in 1980 was 23.1% and in 1998 was 15.8%.²⁵ Therefore demographics and economics suggest that Greece might do better to open its doors wider in order to restore its structure and its workforce.

Finally in light of the research conducted, the following recommendations are provided which will hopefully be taken as positive steps to ensure economic and social integration of refugees and hope for full acceptance of the skills potential of refugees in Greece.

Steps should be taken to improve the provision of labour market information to refugees upon arrival in Greece. By encouraging refugees to go where their skills are needed, such measures might alleviate the very serious problems of social disqualification. Provision of labour market information should be linked to advice on housing and education. All sectors of Greek society should be aware of the shortages of certain fields in the labour market and the need to integrate foreign labour. This will increase the understanding towards this development and reduce discriminatory attitudes about the unemployment situation of the group.

Urgent measures are needed to improve and speed up the procedures for recognising overseas qualifications. A flexible system should be appropriately developed in order to accept a certain amount of documents and not all like economic migrants are able to submit.

Many refugees have not had the chance of learning Greek before entering the labour market or in the early stages of their residence in Greece. There is a need to improve the quality of teaching and materials and extending the coverage to take account of groups with special difficulties in attending.

The lack of integration strategy at the national level, supported by a corresponding financial and institutional structure, means that NGO's involved in refugee work in Greece continually deal with emergencies and try to meet at least some of the basic needs of the recently arrived. In such cases, their often-innovative integration initiatives aimed at the employment and educational needs of refugees in Greece, are small projects that are inadequate to meet the needs of the growing refugee population.

Unequal geographical distribution of medical practitioners and engineers in Greece may prove beneficial as further research is required into the ways refugees can be assisted in working in other cities of Greece.

²⁵ Papaliou & Fagadaki, 2002: 89

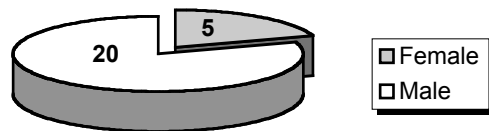
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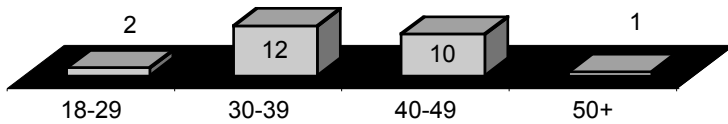
8 Appendix: quantitative data

The 25 interviewees had the following characteristics:

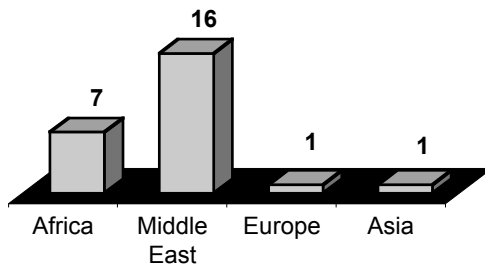
1a Gender



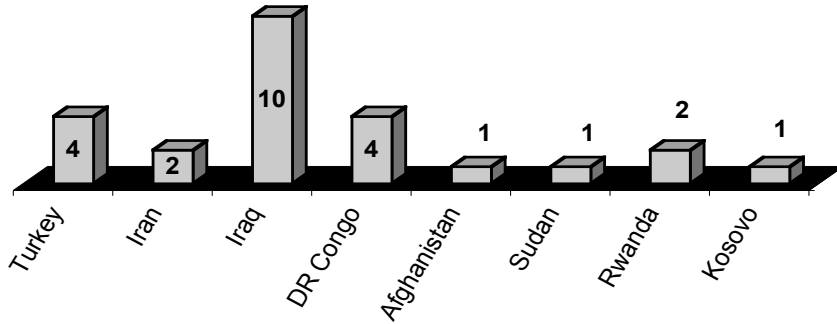
1b Age



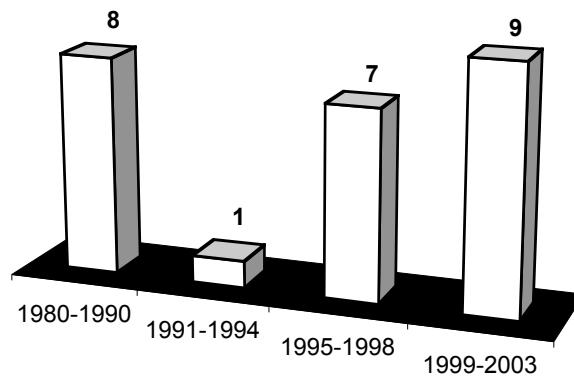
1c Region of origin



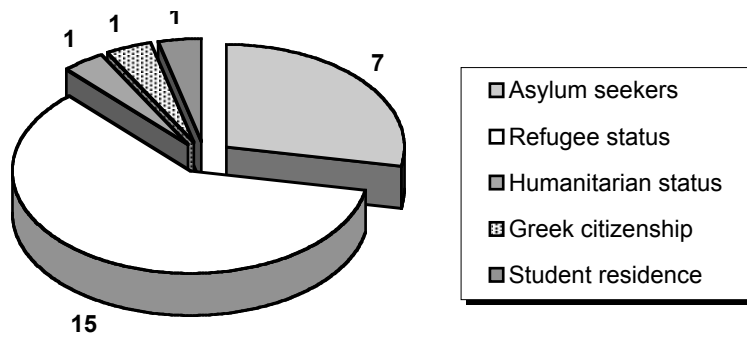
Id Country of origin



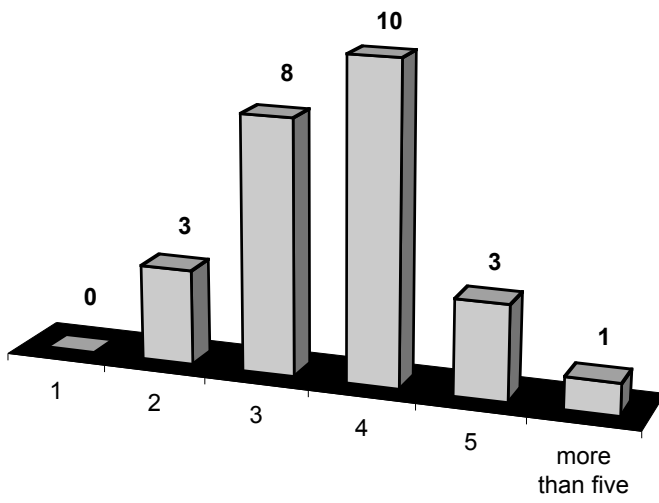
Ie Date of arrival in Greece



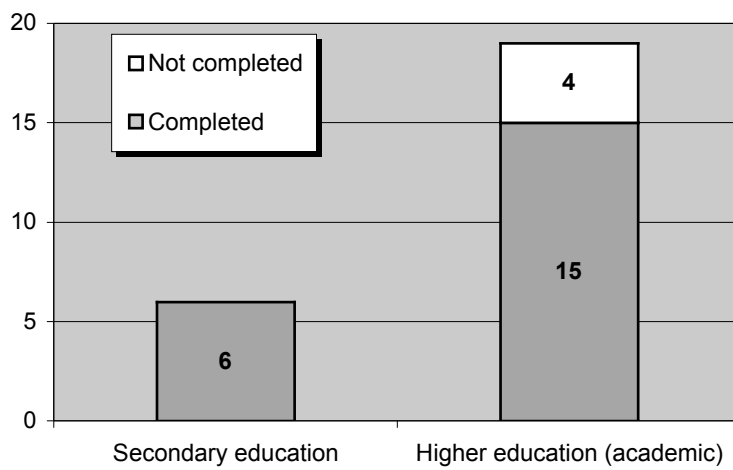
If Status



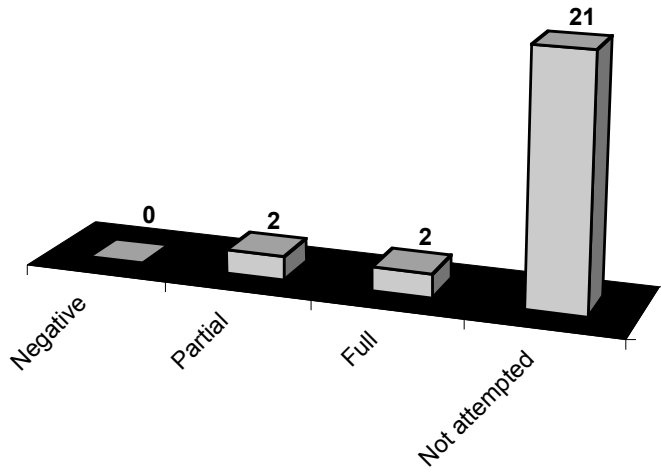
2 Knowledge of languages (including mother tongue)



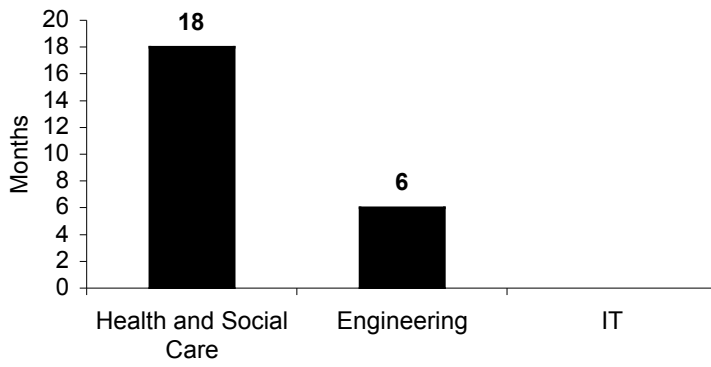
3a Highest level of education before arrival in Greece



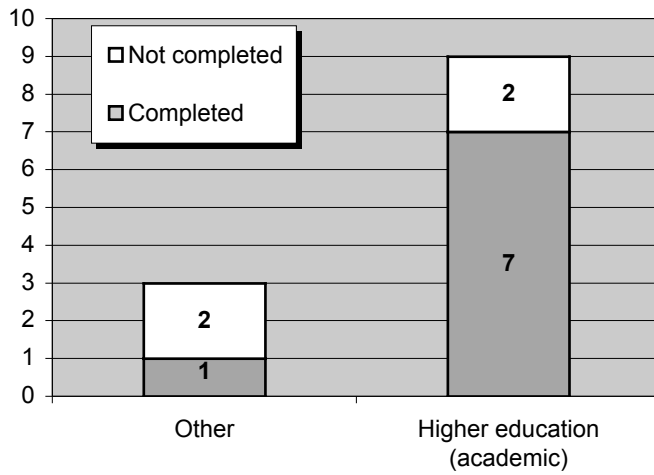
3b Diploma/equivalence recognition in Greece



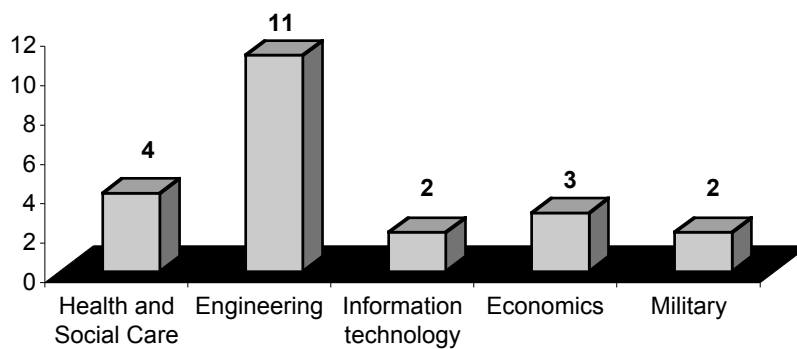
3c Average length of recognition procedure per sector



3d Highest level of education in Greece

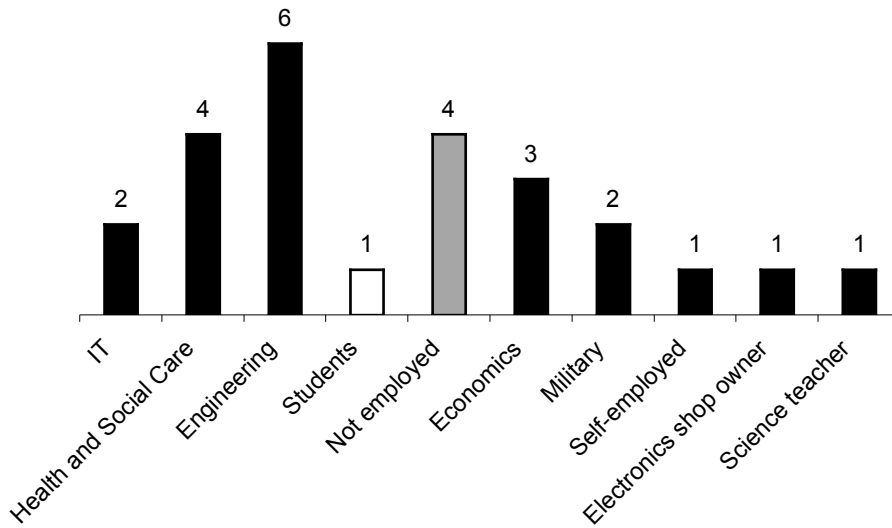


4a Number of refugees who followed practical training before arrival in EU (per sector)

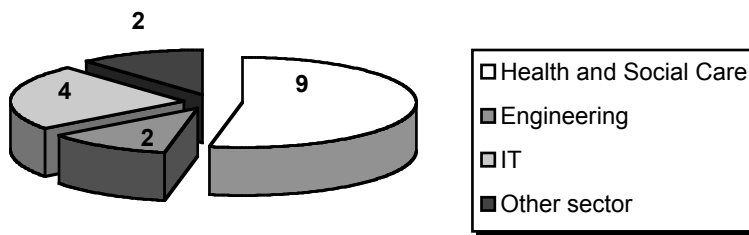


(Total number of people 22)

4b Number of refugees employed before arrival in Greece (per sector)

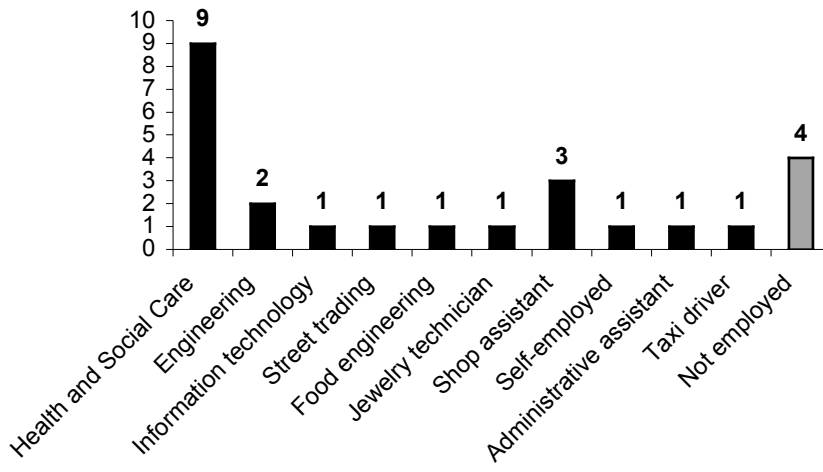


4c Number of refugees who followed practical training in Greece (per sector)



(Total people: 17)

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



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

