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# RESOURCE Project

Refugees' contribution to Europe

## Country Report: **Ireland**

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University Assistance Fund (the Netherlands) – [www.uaf.nl](http://www.uaf.nl)

Overleg Centrum voor Integratie van Vluchtelingen (Belgium) – [www.ociv.org](http://www.ociv.org)

European Training and Research Centre (Austria) – [www.etc-graz.at](http://www.etc-graz.at)

Finnish League for Human Rights (Finland) – [www.ihmisoikeusliito.fi](http://www.ihmisoikeusliito.fi)

France Terre d'Asile (France) – [www.france-terre-asile.org](http://www.france-terre-asile.org)

ProAsyl (Germany) – [www.proasyl.de](http://www.proasyl.de)

Social Work Foundation (Greece) –

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Portuguese Refugee Council (Portugal) – [www.cpr.pt](http://www.cpr.pt)

CARITAS (Sweden) – [www.caritas.se](http://www.caritas.se)

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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 agencies<sup>1</sup> 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 states<sup>2</sup>, 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

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

## 2 Methodology in Ireland

Initial contact was made with refugee and asylum support organisations in order to identify potential interview subjects. The organisations were the Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT), Integrating Ireland and the Irish Refugee Council (IRC). An advertisement was also placed in a multicultural newspaper, *Metro Eireann*.

In total 16 face-to-face interviews were conducted. They were carried out in Dublin, Athlone, Limerick and Galway. The interviewees were people with refugee status who are currently employed or are seeking employment in the areas of Health and Social Work, Information Technology (IT), Accounting, Management and Education.

A number of interviews and telephone discussions were also conducted with people working in refugee and asylum voluntary organisations, with staff of IILT and Integrating Ireland, and with personnel from governmental agencies (such as the Reception and Integration Agency) and semi state agencies such as the National Qualifications Authority.

## 3 Employment policies and schemes for refugees

### 3.1 Employment rates for refugees

At a recent Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE) conference<sup>3</sup>, the IRC quoted an unofficial statistic, which states that the level of unemployment amongst people with refugee status is between 30% and 40%. There is also 80-90% unemployment within the travelling community and 70% among people with disabilities. Although unemployment is the greatest single cause of poverty, data is not collected specifically about vulnerable groups. Data relating to a person's ethnic group or legal status is not currently collected by groups such as the Census of the Population and the Quarterly National Household Survey.

Of 46,200 immigrants to Ireland in 2001, 39% were Irish nationals; they continue to be the largest immigrant group. People seeking asylum are a fraction of the overall number of immigrants. In 2001, 10,325 people made applications for Declaration as a Refugee. In 1996, 1179 people made applications for asylum. In 2001, the Office of the Refugee Applications Commission (ORAC) granted status under the Refugee Convention Act to 10.7% of applicants. The Refugee Appeals Tribunal granted asylum to 25% of the applicants in received in 2001.

The number of work permits issued every year exceeds asylum requests and the number of people who receive Convention status is a fraction of those who apply for asylum (approximately 15% in 2001). In 2000, 18,000 work permits were granted, while in 2001 the figure rose to 32,000.

### 3.2 Refugees' entitlement to work

The rights of people granted refugee status in Ireland are provided for in section 11 of the Immigration Act, 1999 (which amended Section 3 of the Refugee Act 1996). This states that a refugee should:

*Be entitled to seek and to enter employment, to carry on any business, trade or profession and to have access to education and training in the State in the like manner and to the extent in all respects as an Irish citizen.*

Refugees are entitled to receive the same medical care and social welfare entitlements as an Irish citizen. They also have the right to be a member of or to form associations and trade unions.

Convention Refugees and Programme Refugees are entitled to seek and enter employment; to carry out business, trade or a profession; and to have access to education and training, in the same manner as an Irish citizen.

People granted Leave to Remain on Humanitarian Grounds have the right to the same social and economic rights as refugees.

### 3.3 Asylum Seekers and the right to work

Until 2002, asylum seekers had the right to work if they had submitted their asylum applications prior to July 1999 or had been in the state for twelve months.<sup>4</sup> The barriers faced by asylum seekers who had the right to work during this period have been assessed and are an indicator of the kinds of barriers faced by people with refugee status. In a report produced in 2000, The IRC concluded that they had lesser entitlements to various forms of training and support, and there was a general lack of recognition of their qualifications, skills and experiences. The issue of racism was also seen as a barrier.

In 1999 there were 2,100 asylum seekers who had the right to work. In 2000 this number increased to 3,241. By the end of 2000 the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs had registered

<sup>3</sup> Conference: 'Recognising Ability', The Marino Institute of Education, Griffith Avenue: Dublin 9, Thursday 4 September 2003

<sup>4</sup> Government Directive of the 26 July 1999

that 1,032 out of 3,241 asylum seekers had either found work or ceased to claim social welfare payments for other reasons.<sup>5</sup>

The IRC has put forward several recommendations. Firstly, that social inclusion and integration programmes should include the needs of asylum seekers as asylum seekers face similar barriers to people with refugee status. Secondly, that a coherent immigration policy is developed that recognises that non-nationals and present and participating in the labour market, to ensure that they receive the same rights as Irish citizens. Thirdly, that FÁS (*Foras Áiseanna Saothair* – The Training & Employment Authority) prioritises asylum seekers, refugees and people on leave to remain, before non-residents when attempting to overcome barriers to employment, as part of its National Action Plan.

An look at the experiences of Chilean, Vietnamese and Bosnian programme refugees from the 1970s onwards show that refugee communities still face marginalisation in Irish society. Despite a comprehensive resettlement programme put in place for Bosnian refugees a high rate of unemployment still exists.<sup>6</sup> In 2000, the IRC identified that a past lack of adequate employment training, language training, education and support for refugees had contributed to high unemployment rates.

### 3.4 Government schemes to tackle unemployment among refugees

The setting up of the Interdepartmental Working Group on the Integration of Refugees in Ireland (DJELR), in December 1999, was an important step in integrating refugees in Ireland and combating marginalisation. In 2000, it published a report that identified vocational training as essential in helping refugees to develop their own skills and move into employment. It also identified the need for training to reinforce and update previous skills and to provide for new trades or professions. Pre-vocational training has been successful assisting refugees access training and full-time employment.<sup>7</sup>

Refugees in Ireland have a generally high level of education, although lower levels have been found among Programme refugees from Vietnam and Bosnia<sup>8</sup>. A survey conducted by the Irish Business and Employer's Confederation (IBEC) found that people with refugee status are more likely to be employed in the Hotels and Catering, Electronics/Telecommunications and Retail sectors<sup>9</sup>.

The Government proposed the following measures to improve policy on asylum and education in the adult education White Paper, *Learning for Life*:

- Free access to adult literacy, English language and mother culture support.
- If over 21 and registered unemployed for six months, free access to active labour market programmes such as Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) or Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC). It proposes that fees should not be charged but that as non EU citizens asylum seekers should not receive maintenance grants.
- Access to free part-time Back to Education Initiative programmes. This includes people who have a PLC, but are receiving social welfare. Access to third level education only if they pay fees (no entitlement to maintenance grants as with non EU citizens).

In an IBEC report in 2000, both companies who had and who had not employed non-nationals identified the three main barriers to employment as language difficulties, uncertainty regarding legal requirements and lack of advice or information regarding the verification of qualifications.

The transferability of qualifications was regarded by 14% of those interviewed as a barrier to employing non-nationals. Two other main barriers to employment identified by non-nationals including by people who have refugee status in the IBEC survey were that of 'racism' and 'lack of skills'. Verifica-

<sup>5</sup> IRC 2000

<sup>6</sup> O'Regan C (1998) Report of a Survey of the Vietnamese and Bosnian Refugee Communities in Ireland. Dublin: Refugee Agency; Clann Housing Association (1999) From Bosnia to Ireland's Private Rented Sector: A Study of Bosnian Housing Need in Ireland. Dublin: Refugee Agency

<sup>7</sup> IBEC, 2000, ECRE, 1998

<sup>8</sup> IBEC, 2000, Begley et al, 1999, O'Regan, 1998, Zena Project, 1999

<sup>9</sup> IBEC 2000

tion of qualifications, cultural difficulties and lack of childcare facilities were highlighted by a third of the interviewees.

IBEC recommended that companies take a pro-active approach regarding racist treatment of refugees in the work place. However, they observed that in general, once refugees have gained employment, the situation with bullying and racism was reasonably satisfactory.

IBEC made a number of further recommendations, including the following:

- Documents explaining non-nationals' entitlements should be distributed to Irish companies.
- Refugees should be given clear guidelines on how to deal with interviews.
- Refugees should be given guidance on how to adapt to life in Ireland.
- More training should be provided for refugees.
- The Department of Social Welfare and Family should take into consideration the time that refugees have spent in Ireland during the asylum process, before gaining refugee status, when working out the 'Back to Work' allowance.

IBEC also noted the following:

- The majority of interviewees were not working in areas that directly related to their qualifications and experiences.
- In general, salaries were not commensurate with the relatively high level of qualifications.
- Membership of Trade Unions was low.

### 3.5 Role of NGOS and NGO schemes refugees

The Refugee Language and Training Project (RLTP) was originally set up in order to develop an English language project which would be linked to vocational training for refugees. It was a partnership consisting of the Refugee Agency, FÁS (North Dublin), the Refugee Council, the Bosnian Community Development Project and the Centre for Language and Communication Studies. In 1997 INTERACT replaced Refugee Support Language training and RLTP became a limited company with charitable status, its role being to promote the integration of refugees into Irish society. It achieves this through the development and provision of language training programmes which should aim to meet the vocational and community needs of people who are refugees.

In 1999, the INTERACT programme was merged with the Refugee Language Support Unit (RLSU) which was established by the Department of Education and Science as a two year pilot project. The provision of language training was through private schools in conjunction with FÁS and was delivered under the aegis of Trinity College Dublin. It expanded with an emphasis of the needs of refugees and the following organisations were represented on the Board:

- FÁS (*Foras Áiseanna Saothair* – The Training & Employment Authority).
- Refugee Agency.
- Refugee Language Support Unit.
- Irish Refugee Council (IRC).
- Irish Business Employers' Confederation (IBEC).
- Irish Congress of Trade Union (ICTU).
- Association of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ireland (ARASI).

The INTERACT project aimed to maximize access to employment for refugees and to promote a labour market. In 2000 IBEC highlighted that as a partnership INTERACT had an important role relating to inter-agency cooperation in developing new services for the refugee community.

In 2001, Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) replaced the RLSU. It now receives funding from the Department of Education and Science as part of the Human Resources Development Operational Programme (ERDOP) of the National Development Plan 2000-2006. It is currently responsible for providing English language training to adult refugees and collaborating with the Vocation and Education Committees in the provision of English language training.

The follow-on programme to Interact is Interact 2, which is run equally by SIPTU (Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union), IBEC and FÁS. It is aimed at migrant workers and does not cater specifically for refugees.

Integrating Ireland is an important, independent alliance of community and voluntary groups working in solidarity to promote human rights and the integration of refugees, people seeking asylum and immigrants. There are currently over 100 support groups throughout Ireland. Most of these groups offer asylum seekers English language courses.

### 3.6 Skills shortages & labour needs in the health, engineering & IT sectors

Since 2000 the medical profession has experienced shortages of general practitioners (GP), junior hospital doctors and consultants. Registration with the Irish Medical Council is a prerequisite of working as a GP in Ireland. In order to register a doctor is required to have a certificate of vocational post-graduate training in General Practice, which must be ratified by the Irish Royal College of Surgeons. Consultants must have an appropriate post-graduate qualification from the Royal College of Surgeons or an equivalent body abroad. Junior doctors need to register with the Irish Medical Organisation.

The FÁS Irish Labour Market Review of 2002 focused on the increasing size and quality of the workforce required to meet medium term growth potential. It noted that while unemployment had risen for the first time since 1993, immigration and earnings growth continued to be strong. The prospects for employment growth in the medium term are positive. Forfás, Ireland's National Policy and Advisory Board for Enterprise, Trade, Science, Technology and Innovation, noted that the Work Permit system enables employers to fill vacancies<sup>10</sup>. It also noted that the 18,000 permits issued in 2000 marked a substantial increase from the 1999 figure of 6,500. In 2000 a new Work Visa system was introduced for three designated sectors: IT, Nursing and Construction professionals. This was due to acute skills shortages in these three areas. There were 19,500 Engineering professionals in 2000 and 1,500 vacancies, giving an overall vacancy rate of 7%. In the IT sector there were 87,000 computer professionals and 900 vacancies. The overall vacancy rate was 9%.

In 2002 employment growth slowed down, reflecting the slowdown in GNP growth from 4.6% in 2001 to as estimated 1.8% in 2002. In the fourth quarter of 2002, there were 1.771 million people in employment, an increase of 1% (17,800) from 2001. This represents a slowdown from the 2.5% employment growth rate recorded in 2001. A contraction in the industrial sector was the main reason for the deceleration in the rate of employment growth. The employment growth that did take place in 2002 was largely attributable to increases in public service employment.<sup>11</sup>

The Department of Finance has forecast that Irish GNP will grow by a modest 2.25% in 2003. Employment expectations among manufacturing employers, especially in traditional sectors such as textiles, clothing and footwear are pessimistic. The chemicals sector is the only manufacturing sector where employers are expecting employment to increase in the short-term. As public service recruitment has been capped, the potential for future employment growth seems limited. FÁS is expecting employment growth to be negative by the end of 2003. It is forecasting that the average unemployment rate will exceed 5%, with the numbers unemployed reaching 100,000 by the end of the year.

In 2002 immigration from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) continued to be a significant contributor to labour force growth. 40,321 work permits were granted to non-EEA nationals, an increase of 10.7% on the 36,436 permits granted in 2001 (see Table 1 below). However, there was a reduction of 21.2% in the number of new permits from 29,599 in 2001 to 23,326 in 2002. Despite the annual decline in new permits and visas/authorisations, the number issued at 25,936, is still extremely significant, given that the overall increase in the labour force for the year was 29,400. It must be conceded, however, that a proportion of 'new' work permits have gone to existing permit holders who are switching employers and would therefore not have been contributing to the growth of the labour supply.

<sup>10</sup> Second Report of the Expert Group of Forfás

<sup>11</sup> FÁS Quarterly Labour Market Commentary, Spring 2003

**Table 1: Total Work Permits/Visas/Authorisations issued 1999-2002**

Year	New permits	Renewals of permits	Group permits	Total work permits	Visas & authorisations	Total
2000	15,434	2,271	301	18,006	1,383	19,389
2001	29,594	6,485	357	36,436	3,749	40,185
2002	23,326	16,562	433	40,321	2,610	42,931

Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

The majority of permits continued to be accounted for by services (37%), catering (26%) and agriculture and fisheries (15%). In recent years the catering sector has seen a dramatic increase in the number of work permits rising from only 694 in 1999 to over 10,000 in 2002.

**Table 2: Work Permits by Sector: 1999-2002**

Sector	1999	2000	2001	2002
Service	3,010	6,538	14,018	15,068
Catering	694	3,907	9,129	10,306
Agriculture/Fisheries	449	2,963	5,714	6,248
Industry	414	1,744	3,119	3,094
Medical and Nursing	721	1,353	2,252	2,883
Entertainment	452	650	1,021	874
Domestic	80	195	521	788
Education	304	364	480	610
Sport	60	118	121	153
Exchange agreements	60	72	61	297

Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

**Table 3: FÁS vacancies & Work Permit applications 2002**

Occupation	Vacancies	Work Permits	% Work Permits
Managers	3,252	1,162	36%
Professionals	3,989	1,435	36%
Associate Professionals	10,233	2,778	27%
Administrative / Clerical	14,334	1,725	12%
Services	26,072	12,712	49%
Agricultural	4,937	3,100	63%
Construction Craft	4,826	1,370	28%
Engineering Craft	3,471	1,165	34%
Other Craft	2,060	1,136	55%
Operatives	13,168	5,694	43%
Other	18,793	6,696	36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>105,135</b>	<b>38,973</b>	<b>37%</b>

The occupational profile of those working under the work authorisation/visa schemes is higher qualified than those working under the work permit scheme.

All the authorisations and visas were accounted for by occupations in the medical, Information and Communications Technology (IT) and construction sectors, with registered nurses accounting for 53%

of all work authorisations/visas issued in 2002. The high proportion of authorisations/visas accounted for by health professionals reflects the recent expansion of the sector. There has been a noticeable decline in the proportion of authorisations/visas accounted for by the IT sector. In 2002 only 24% of authorisations/visas were accounted for by IT occupations compared to 52% in the year 2000.

**Table 4: Work Authorisations/Visas issued by occupation**

Year	IT (Profess)	IT (Tech)	Registered Nurse	Architect	Construction Engineer	Quantity Surveyor	Building Surveyor	Town Planner	Medical	Total
2000	555	167	557	42	44	13	1	4	0	1,383
2001	1,117	130	2,034	135	259	41	11	22	0	3,749
2002	556	106	1,395	83	328	18	4	9	111	2,610

**Table 5: Percentage of Work Authorisations/Visas issued by occupation**

Year	IT (Profess)	IT (Tech)	Registered Nurse	Architect	Construction Engineer	Quantity Surveyor	Building Surveyor	Town Planner	Medical	Total
2000	40%	12%	40%	3%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%	100%
2001	30%	3%	54%	4%	7%	1%	0%	1%	0%	100%
2002	21%	4%	53%	3%	13%	1%	0%	0%	4%	100%

Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment ([www.forfas.ie/futureskills/reports/futureskills3/11\\_overview.html](http://www.forfas.ie/futureskills/reports/futureskills3/11_overview.html))

### 3.7 Equality provision

The Employment Equality Act of 1998 prohibits discrimination against anyone seeking employment, vocational training or promotion. People may not be offered inferior working conditions or pay. It also establishes that harassment in employment and in the workplace on the following nine grounds is illegal: gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, race and membership of the traveller community.

FÁS suggests that in relation to the skills profile sought by employers applying for non-EEA workers that in the medium term it is likely that there will be a reliance on professionals and skilled manual workers to alleviate labour shortages<sup>12</sup>. It proposes that the Work Permit system should be vacancy and not national skills driven and also that in the short term, as the demand for labour falls, a more targeted immigration approach should be used. This would focus on skilled immigrants working in occupations where shortages are critical and obvious. FÁS proposes that the number of Work Permits be reduced and that a new approach is developed to immigration policy aimed at meeting future labour market needs. It proposes that a point system would be a more effective way of alleviating skills and labour shortages in the medium term than the current work permit system.

The Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EHRDOP) of the National Plan (2000-2006) addresses the labour market and human capital needs of the Irish economy. EHRDOP's objectives include the promotion of employment growth and access to employment, the mobilisation of potential sources of labour supply and the promotion of social inclusion (reintegration of the socially excluded and the long term unemployed into the labour market).

<sup>12</sup> FÁS 2002

## 4 Refugees' contribution to Europe

We conducted a total of sixteen interviews in Ireland. Of these, ten are convention refugees, one is a programme refugee, three have humanitarian leave to remain, one has permission to stay relating to family re-unification and one is an asylum seeker who previously had a work permit.

Twelve interviewees are men and four women; eight are aged 30-39 and four 40-49. Eight came from Africa, four from Eastern Europe, three from the Middle East and one from Asia. The majority arrived in Ireland from 1999-2003 (nine people), while a further six arrived in the previous period, from 1995-1998. Nine interviewees have a higher education qualification that relates to a specific occupation; six have non-academic professional qualifications. Ten work or are qualified in the area of health and social work; two are qualified in IT; one in education; one in management consultancy; one in accountancy; and two are not employed.

Six people felt that their level of skills, abilities, and knowledge acquired in their countries of origin matched the level of their current jobs, three felt that their jobs fully or almost fully matched their level of skills, abilities and knowledge and three felt that their current jobs did not reflect at all their level of skills, abilities and knowledge (or they were unemployed).<sup>13</sup>

### 4.1 Interviewees' own perception of the match between their current job and the skills and abilities acquired in their country of origin

#### 4.1.1 *Not at all: 5/16 (31%)*

Thirty-one percent of the interviewees felt that their current jobs did not reflect at all their level of skills, abilities and knowledge acquired in their country of origin. On the other hand two interviewees had received their training in IT in Ireland.

#### 4.1.2 *Partly: 7/16 (43%)*

The majority of interviewees who felt that their current job partly reflected their level of skills, abilities and knowledge acquired in their country of origin are medical doctors who are presently employed as cultural mediators, programme coordinators or officers in peer led programmes or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They are all employed in the area of asylum seekers, refugees and ethnic minority groups. For example, one medical doctor now works in an NGO that responds to and builds awareness of the health needs of asylum seekers, refugees and people from ethnic minority groups. He is working as mediator relating to infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Another qualified medical doctor is working for the Northern Area Health Board as a cultural mediator, dealing especially with separated children. Another interviewee is working as a health information officer in Dublin's Reception and Integration (RIA) Reception Centres.

However, another interviewee was unhappy that he will have to retrain as a consultant psychiatrist before being able to work as a registrar, even though he has 20 years of experience as a medical doctor, clinical psychiatrist and as a registrar psychiatrist, and has had a temporary registration with the Irish Medical Council.

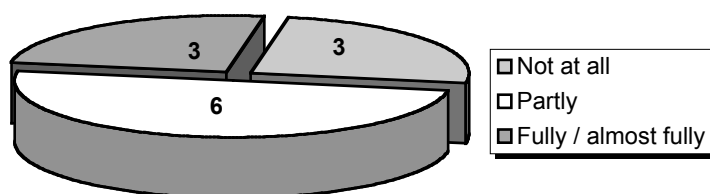
One interviewee is working for a refugee and asylum support organisation in a health information programme visiting asylum seekers in reception centres, but is a qualified medical paediatrician. In relation to IT one respondent is only partly utilising his skills as he is skilled in programme testing but is only using this skill 40% of the time. Another was a nurse who has to retrain totally to work in Ireland.

<sup>13</sup> The full data is presented in the Appendix.

#### 4.1.3 Fully/almost fully: 4/16 (25%)

Interviewees responded that they were or had training in skills that they would be or are presently using in order to achieve their career objectives. A good example is that of an Iraqi medical doctor, who initially trained in Physiology (MSc) at Oxford University. He then went on to study medicine at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin and received a Masters at University College Dublin. He worked as a consultant pathologist but has just retrained in IT and is currently working as a consultant in Medical Informatics. The interviewee has decided to retrain in his chosen career in order to achieve his career objectives.

Figure 1: Graph showing match



#### 4.2 Overall relation between interviewees' educational and work background and current employment

Thirty-eight percent of the respondents (six out of the 16) are medical doctors with work experience (mainly in their country of origin). They currently employed in NGOs as cultural, and health mediators, information officers or programme coordinators or officers. All expressed frustration with the lack of recognition of their qualifications and all would appreciate the same possibility of retraining that is available in the United Kingdom. All six wish to work in their professions.

Two respondents have had to retrain in areas that they were already qualified, being nursing and management. The interviewee who is an accountant stated that he is aware that he will have to retrain in order to work in his profession, as he has not been able to secure employment and therefore will not be able to be register with the Institute of Chartered Accountants.

The others were happy in that they received their training in Ireland and are now employed.

#### 4.3 The impact of recognition procedures on finding employment

As the responses to 4.2 show, doctors have specific difficulties. None are currently practising as medical doctors due to the lack of recognition of their qualifications by the Irish Medical Council.

One interviewee stated that the Irish Medical Council (IMC) will not recognise his 'Certificate of Success', awarded by his government as a replacement for his Diploma in medical studies. The interviewee explained that since the present government came to power they have kept all original medical diplomas awarded to recent medical graduates for 'administrative reasons'. The medical graduates were given what is called a 'Certificate of Success'. This Certificate is not recognised as a Diploma by the IMC.

The qualified consultant paediatrician has brought the original qualification documents, which are not currently recognised by the relevant body in Ireland. The interviewee has had to sit the Leaving Certificate and will have to train again in Ireland. The interviewee is currently working as a volunteer for an asylum seeker support group.

In relation to other interviewees in the health and medical field one respondent is a trained nurse with a 'National Certificate in Pharmacy' from her country of origin. Her qualifications have been recognised but she has had to retrain as a nurse in Ireland. The interviewee is happy to do so.

Another interviewee is qualified with a 'Diploma in Childhood Care' and a Bachelors of Medicine degree. Her qualifications have been immediately recognised, which she believes is because they were immediately recognised in the United Kingdom.

One interviewee, who trained in accountancy in North America and has experience as an accountant in his country of origin, has not had his qualifications recognised due to his inability to register with the Irish Institute of Accountancy. This is because he does not have all the original certificates from his university; he is in the process of trying to obtain them.

One interviewee, a medical doctor and Registrar Psychiatrist explained that his qualifications have not been recognised. He was registered (on a temporary basis) with the Irish Medical Council but he is under review until he gets his IELTS as he needs to improve his level of English.

Three interviewees received their training or education in Ireland, two in the IT sector and one in medicine in Ireland.

#### **4.4 The different pathways to employment and the three most common factors that helped refugees find suitable employment in Ireland**

(1) All of those interviewed who do not have English as a mother tongue found taking English classes to be very important in assisting them to find employment. Those who had fluent English found their knowledge of more than one language to be a factor that greatly assisted them obtaining employment.

(2) The majority of those interviewed found that their personal drive, commitment, flexibility and faith was what secured them employment.

(3) The majority of the interviewees found that NGOs and networks such as Access Ireland, Cairdre, IRC, Integrating Ireland, SPIRASI and asylum and refugee support organisations in the respective counties were helpful and especially supportive in relation to finding employment. For many experience gained as a volunteer in the voluntary and community sector, or with church based organisations was crucial to them gaining employment once they had the right to work.

Six of those interviewed (medical doctors) found their background in medicine and health, cultural sensitivity and knowledge of health issues in relation to asylum seekers, refugees and ethnic minorities as helpful in gaining employment in the voluntary sector as health and cultural mediators or information officers.

Three interviewees found FÁS helpful in relation to business and management and IT training. One respondent found the Galway City Partnership (City Council) as one of the main factors.

Three others pointed out the important role played by friends and contacts in securing employment. Another mentioned the friendship of families who gave him work.

The back to education allowance was important factor in securing employment for two interviewees.

One respondent found medical publications such as the *Irish Medical Journal* and *Medicine Weekly* to be of great assistance in securing employment.

#### **4.5 An overview of barriers and identify steps that refugees have taken to overcome the three most common barriers**

One interviewee spoke for many respondents in saying that coming to Ireland and applying for asylum was like '*starting from nothing...*' This was felt in many ways, including financially, career wise and educationally.

For the medical doctors and two others interviewed the main barrier was non-recognition of qualifications. None of the eight doctors interviewed have succeeded in overcoming this barrier. Nevertheless the majority have been advised to go back to university and obtain, for example, a Masters in Public Health. Many respondents have returned to third level institutions in order to gain employment in the health area. However, none of the medical doctors have commenced studies in the equivalent field of which they are qualified outside Ireland. Most have had an involuntary career change and therefore are studying areas in which match their current employment.

In relation to institutional barriers one respondent was requested by the Irish Medical Council to obtain a letter from the Ministry of Health of his country of origin. This has not been possible as he still fears persecution from the state authorities. The interviewee has not been able to overcome this barrier.

For the majority of those interviewed their level of English was a major barrier to obtaining employment. The majority have overcome this barrier by studying English and are content that they have obtained a high level of English. Most respondents feel that they would need to study specialised English.

Another major barrier was the difficulty for many in obtaining references from their country of origin. This was often due to general difficulties following civil war in their countries. Many encountered difficulties contacting past employers because the company they worked for no longer existed; many also encountered difficulties tracing the relevant people from their companies. Many of the respondents overcame this difficulty by contacting friends and other contacts in their country of origin. With perseverance the majority of interviewees had overcome this barrier.

Four of those interviewed found that major health problems due to pre-migratory traumas, such as multiple family bereavements, created a major barrier, but they have been able to overcome this by attending psychotherapists or counsellors with cross-cultural backgrounds.

For all of those interviewed the gap in their Curriculum Vitae (CV) is an issue and many found that working as volunteers in the voluntary sector was a method for overcoming it.

As stated many respondents felt that in many ways they when they arrived in Ireland they were '*starting from nothing*'. Many found that this was a barrier to gaining employment as expenses accrued travelling for interviews were an obstacle.

All respondents found that there are medium to long-term effects of being a recipient of the Reception and Integration Agency Direct Provision allowance (or social welfare), principally due to the fact that they are not allowed to work.

Many felt that refugees should be entitled to go onto 'Job Assist Programmes' when they receive refugee status. Normally a person must have been unemployed for 12 months before they can receive assistance under the job assist programmes. Many felt that the fact that one is receiving direct provision should count as being unemployed.

Many had long gaps in CVs due to the fact that they had not been entitled to work. All felt that their self-esteem was negatively affected by not being able to work while applying for asylum.

One interviewee's asylum process took three years. He was not entitled to seek employment during the three years his application was being processed by the Department of Justice. He felt that when he received Refugee Status he was faced with a gap in his CV of more than three years and this has been a major barrier.

Three respondents felt that racism and discrimination at local and institutional level was a barrier to gaining employment. One felt that adapting to Irish culture was a barrier that she overcame. One interviewee had felt culturally isolated on arrival in Ireland, but had overcome this barrier.

#### **4.6 Case study: Serge from the Great Lakes region in Africa**

Serge (not his real name) is from a country in the Great Lakes region. He is currently working in the Irish voluntary sector as a programme officer for a NGO, and he also works as a cultural mediator for the Northern Area Health Board. Serge arrived in Ireland in 2000. Serge speaks mother tongue is Kin-

yarwanda. He speaks fluent French, English, Swahili, Kikundi, Lingala and Xhosa. Serge completed his secondary school education and specialised in sciences. He went on to take a Masters in Sciences and Medicine, followed by a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) in Health and Society. He proceeded to take a Diploma in Sports Injury and Management. When he travelled to Ireland, Serge brought all his original University certificates. His qualifications have been partially recognised, Serge would be able to lecture at a University level but he cannot practice as a GP in Ireland.

Serge practised as a GP he worked with an independent humanitarian aid agency as a medical doctor for two years in his country of origin. He was forced to leave his home country due to persecution by the state authorities.

In Ireland, Serge studied cultural mediation with Access Ireland. He studied English with Integrate Ireland Language and Training and completed the IELTS certificates. When he received Convention Refugee Status he began working as a general operator for an international IT company. He then went onto to work for an NGO working with asylum seekers and refugees. He also worked with the Health Board as cultural mediator for autistic children, and non-national children in custody. He then went onto work with one of the CDVEC (City of Dublin Vocation and Education Committee) as a health and social information for separated children.

Serge feels that his current jobs partially reflects the level of his skills, abilities and knowledge that he acquired in his country of origin as he is involved with the health needs of minority ethnic groups through mediation and advocacy. He feels that his PhD in 'Health and Society' assisted him in securing the post with the Irish NGO and with the Health Board. He feels it is currently impossible for him to be able to work as a GP in Ireland, so he will have to opt for a career change and will specialise in cultural mediation.

He feels that the three main factors that have assisted him in obtaining employment in Ireland are self-motivation, knowledge of health and societal issues, and languages.

The biggest barrier that he has encountered in Ireland has been the non-recognition of his medical qualifications by the Irish authorities. He was required to obtain a letter from the Ministry of Health from his country of origin, which he is unable to do because he does not want to contact any governmental bodies as he feels that this could bring his family into danger. He still fears persecution, as the political situation has not changed since he arrived in Ireland.

Serge's main recommendations are that:

- People with refugee status should not be treated as migrant workers.
- There should be government assistance for people who get refugee status in assessing their knowledge and professional experience.
- Where necessary the government should assist people with refugee status to retrain.
- Benchmarks relating to recognition of qualification should be fair and transparent.

#### 4.7 Recommendations by interviewees

Many respondents recommended liaising with national refugee and asylum seeker support groups and with the voluntary sector.

Most of those interviewed responded that attending language training from the initial stages as an asylum seeker is vital, but the need for IELTS and specialised English training was highlighted by most.

Some recommended bringing as much documentation as possible from the country of origin, including newspaper articles highlighting the situation and original qualification certificates.

Some of the medical doctors have recommended that people with refugee status be given the opportunity to do what they describe as a 'transitional or adjustment training', in other words they feel that they should be entitled to retraining within the Irish medical context.

A number of medical doctors recommended that people with Refugees Status should go to the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) for assistance in approaching the national regulatory bodies regarding recognition of qualifications. However, a number of those interviewed were, unaware of the NQA.

#### **4.8 How sectors facing job shortages have utilised refugees' skills and experiences**

From the data collected it would appear that those interviewed who were the most qualified and with the most experience in their country of origin had experienced the biggest downturn in their careers. They have not been able to get recognition through the Irish regulatory authorities nor have they had an opportunity to retrain in the fields that they are qualified. Most are currently employed in NGOs and in some cases with Health Boards. They appear to be offering an invaluable service to the statutory and non-statutory agencies as mediators for ethnic minorities as they have health qualifications, medical experience and cross cultural knowledge. Furthermore, they have personal understanding of what it is to be an asylum seeker in Ireland.

On the other hand the interviewees that arrived in Ireland without qualifications and work experience in the areas of IT, engineering, health or social work have succeeded in getting an education, training and successfully gaining employment in these areas.

## 5 Recommendations & conclusions

### 5.1 Recommendations

#### *Recommendation 1: Recognition of qualifications*

The National Qualifications Authority has a role in facilitating the recognition of education and training awards made outside Ireland. The Interdepartmental Working Group on the Integration of Refugees recommends that a system for recognition of qualifications be established in co-operation with the National Qualifications Authority, Chambers of Commerce employers groups, FÁS and so on.<sup>14</sup>

SPIRASI in cooperation with the Reception and Integration Agency is currently liaising with those interviewed and the NQA. The NQA has said that it will liaise with the relevant regulatory authorities. They will also do as much ground work as possible regarding qualifications and the possible reasons that they are not being recognised.

There are a number of EU directives<sup>15</sup> regulating the recognition of European qualifications, but as yet there is no regulating body for non-EU qualifications.

#### *Recommendation 2: Systems of accreditation*

For many interviewed the major barrier to employment faced was difficulties obtaining original qualification certificates. It is therefore recommended that a system of Accreditation for Prior Learning such as APEL (Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning) be set up. IBEC has recommended that the APEL would be of benefit for people of refugee status who have not brought with them formal proof of certification.<sup>16</sup> The provision of training would supplement people's qualifications and skills in the Irish context. APEL is currently being utilised in many European countries in order to recognise education, skills and experiences.

The White Paper on Adult Education 2000 has reported that a number of providers and Certification bodies have piloted the development of such approaches (as APEL).

#### *Recommendation 3: Provision of refugee orientated career guidance as part of an overall training package for people with Refugee Status*

A number of interviewees were unable to acquire references or registration from state bodies because of various barriers such as displacement, state persecution and civil, ethnic or internal conflicts. They were unable to seek employment while their asylum cases were being processed. A person gaining refugee status is beginning from nothing, so it is important that future employers and regulatory authorities be aware of why they may encounter difficulties getting original certificates or letters from government departments in their countries of origin. The career guidance department in SPIRASI is assisting refugees in compiling letters to prospective employers outlining why a person may need to seek refugee status and why they are unable to seek employment during the time that their asylum cases were being processed.

IBEC has recommended an increase in the provision of work-based and work related English language training, orientation in relation to job preparation and interview skills, which is not unlike what is being offered by the job skills by the career guidance. The provision of job orientation and assistance with job preparation and interview skills specifically for the needs of people with refugee status is a third recommendation of this report. All those interviewed found the assistance they received from the voluntary sector in relation to job preparation was vital to securing employment.

<sup>14</sup> O'Regan, 1998, DJELR, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> The European Commission in the proposed Directive COM (2002) 119 final regulates automatic mutual recognition of medical qualifications between EU member states.

<sup>16</sup> IBEC March 2000

## 5.2 Conclusion

- Irish companies should take a pro-active approach in relation to racist behaviour towards refugees in the work place in line with recommendations made by IBEC in 2000.
- Explanatory documents about non-nationals and specifically people with refugee status (whether programme or convention) and people with humanitarian leave to remain should be distributed among companies throughout Ireland, explaining their entitlements.
- Refugees should be given clear guidelines on how to conduct interviews. Guidance should also be given in adapting to life in Ireland.
- The Department of Social Welfare and Family should take into account time spent in Ireland (while an asylum case is processed) when considering 'Back to Work' allowance.
- Training should assist refugees in developing their own skills and in moving into employment in the areas that they are qualified.

As the data shows, 14 out of the 16 refugees interviewed are highly qualified and trained and yet could not secure employment in the areas in which they are qualified. Training must reinforce and update previous skills that refugees have. Equally it should provide for new trades and professions. Research shows that pre-vocational training has successfully assisted refugees in gaining access to training and full-time employment.<sup>17</sup>

For example, there is the Interact EQUAL project, which aims to address some of the barriers at enterprise level and to ensure more effective support for both employers of non-nationals and Irish national employees. It has two related elements of language support and multiculturalism and diversity support. This type of project should be designed specifically for people with refugee status, as such people require specific assistance to overcome barriers to employment.

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<sup>17</sup> IBEC, 2000, ECRE, 1998

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### 6.1 Newspaper articles

- 'Foreign qualifications no longer an issue for professionals', Sandra O'Connell. *Sunday Business Post*, 17 December 2000

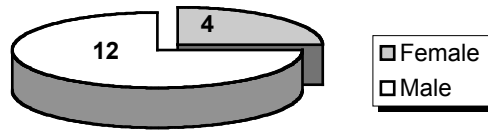
### 6.2 Websites used

<http://equality.ie>

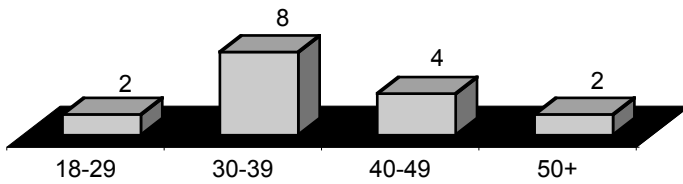
## 7 Appendix: quantitative data

The 16 interviewees had the following characteristics:

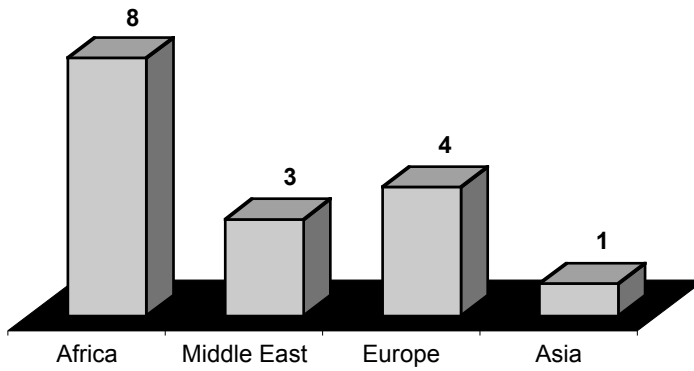
1a **Gender**



1b **Age**



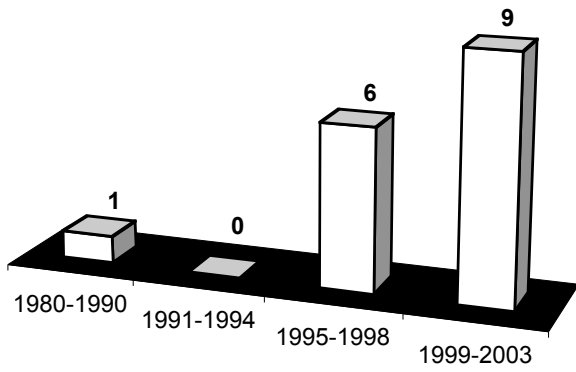
1c **Region of origin**



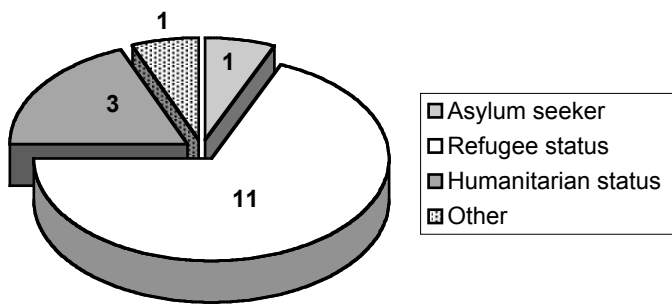
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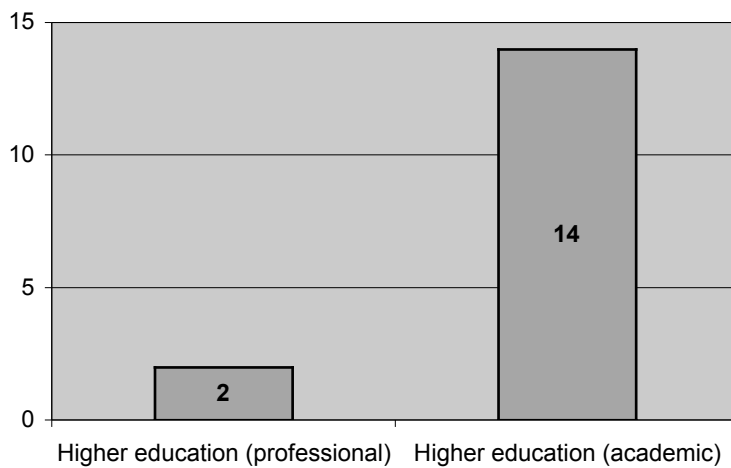
le **Date of arrival in Ireland**



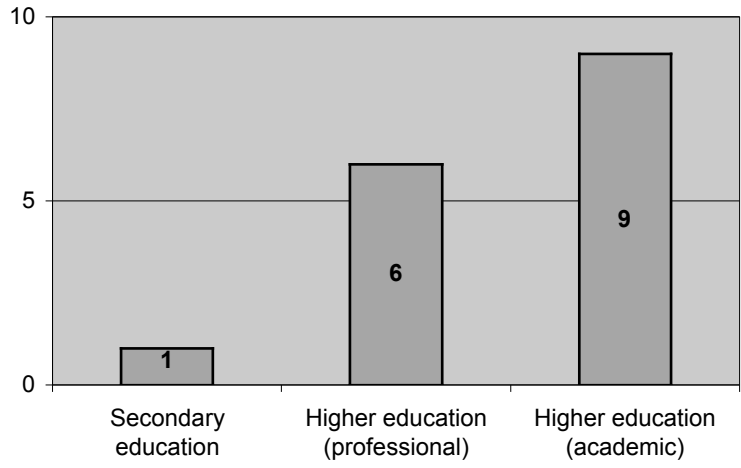
lf **Status**



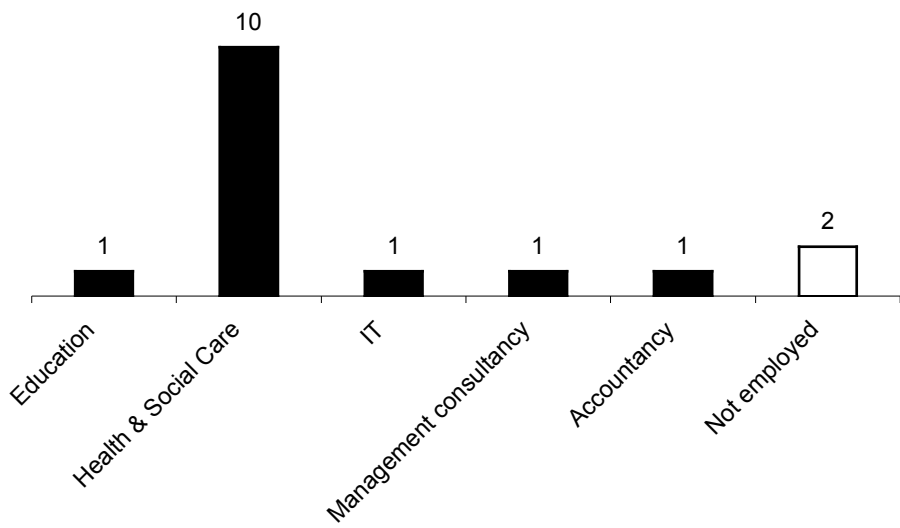
2a **Highest level of education before arrival in Ireland**



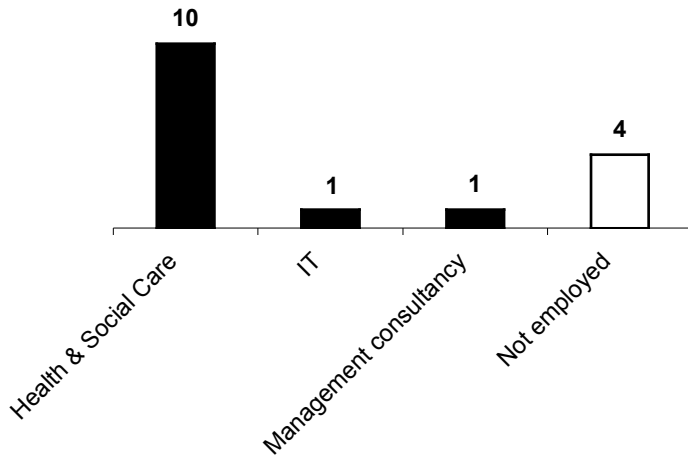
**2b Highest level of education in Ireland**



**3a Number of refugees employed before arrival in Ireland (per sector)**



3b Number of refugees employed in Ireland (per sector)



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

