

RESOURCE Project

Refugees' contribution to Europe

Country Report: **Netherlands**

By Wies Kalsbeek & Kees Bleichrodt

The RESOURCE project
received funding
from the
European Refugee Fund



Published January 2004

This study was carried out by UAF as part of a European-wide research programme funded by the European Refugee Fund (ERF). Special thanks goes to the interviewees without whom this study could not have been achieved.

By Wies Kalsbeek & Kees Bleichrodt
Also thanks to Ingrid van den Elsen and Julia Groothuis

University Assistance Fund

www.uaf.nl

Wilhelminapark 38,
Postbus 14300,
3508 SK Utrecht

Telephone: +31 30 252 0835

The RESOURCE project is a joint initiative of the following agencies:

The Spanish Commission for the Aid of Refugees (Spain) – www.cear.es

Education Action International – RETAS (United Kingdom) – www.education-action.org

University Assistance Fund (the Netherlands) – www.uaf.nl

Overleg Centrum voor Integratie van Vluchtelingen (Belgium) – www.ociv.org

European Training and Research Centre (Austria) – www.etc-graz.at

Finnish League for Human Rights (Finland) – www.ihmisoikeusliito.fi

France Terre d'Asile (France) – www.france-terre-asile.org

ProAsyl (Germany) – www.proasyl.de

Social Work Foundation (Greece) –

Spiritan Asylum Services Initiative (Ireland) – www.spirasi.ie

Italian Consortium of Solidarity (Italy) – www.icsitalia.org

ASTI (Luxembourg) – www.asti.lu

Portuguese Refugee Council (Portugal) – www.cpr.pt

CARITAS (Sweden) – www.caritas.se

Contents

1	Introduction to RESOURCE	5
2	The Dutch context.....	6
2.1	Dutch Asylum policy and new Aliens Act	6
2.2	Objection and Appeal	6
2.3	Only two permits	6
2.4	Rights and provisions	6
2.5	Statistics	7
2.5.1	<i>Arrivals</i>	7
2.6	'Accelerated procedure'	8
2.7	Recent developments in reception and the welfare system	8
2.8	Proposed changes in the Integration policy	8
3	Overview of employment policies and schemes for refugees	10
3.1	General employment policy for ethnic minorities	10
3.2	<i>Agenda voor de Toekomst</i> (Agenda for the future)	10
3.3	Covenants with large and medium sized companies	10
3.4	Characteristics of recently arrived refugee populations	11
3.5	Members of ethnic minority groups with higher education	12
3.6	Refugees with higher education	12
4	Labour needs in specific sectors	14
4.1	The European dimension	14
4.2	The impact of demographic change on employment	14
4.3	Labour shortages	15
4.4	The Dutch context	16
4.4.1	<i>Healthcare</i>	16
4.4.2	<i>Engineering and IT</i>	16
5	Refugees' contribution to the Netherlands	18
5.1	Pathways to employment	18
5.1.1	<i>Refugees' own perceptions of the match between their current job and the skills and abilities acquired in their country of origin</i>	18
5.1.2	<i>The relationship between refugees' educational and working background and their current employment</i>	19
5.1.2.1	Health and Social care	19
5.1.2.2	Engineering	19
5.1.2.3	Information Technology	19
5.1.3	<i>The impact of recognition procedures on finding employment</i>	20
5.1.3.1	Introduction	20
5.1.3.2	Recognition - formal diploma validation	20
5.1.3.2.1	Health and Social care	20
5.1.3.2.2	Engineering and IT	20
5.1.3.3	Recognition – until the moment of full re-qualification	20
5.1.3.3.1	Health and Social care	20
5.1.3.3.2	Engineering and IT	21
5.1.4	<i>The three most common factors that helped refugees find suitable employment</i>	21
5.1.4.1	Qualifications obtained in the country of origin	22

5.1.4.2	Work experience in the country of origin	22
5.1.4.3	Additional studies in the host country	22
5.1.4.4	Registration with the relevant professional body to be able to work	22
5.1.4.5	Work experience in the host country	22
5.1.4.6	Complete change of career	22
5.1.4.7	Language courses	23
5.1.4.8	Employment support from governmental organisations/employment services	23
5.1.4.9	Employment support from voluntary organisations/refugee/community groups	23
5.1.4.10	Personal skills/competences	23
5.1.4.11	Other	24
5.1.5	<i>Barriers faced and the steps that refugees have taken to overcome the three most common</i>	24
5.1.5.1	Obtaining recognition for existing qualifications	24
5.1.5.2	Language	24
5.1.5.3	Lack of work experience in the Netherlands	24
5.1.5.4	Lack of references	24
5.1.5.5	Lack of knowledge of the labour market and of opportunities granting access to the labour market	24
5.1.5.6	Legal status	25
5.1.5.7	Discrimination and prejudice	25
5.1.5.8	Family responsibilities	25
5.1.5.9	Financial Barriers	25
5.1.5.10	Difficulties due to trauma and experience of exile	25
5.1.5.11	Other	25
5.1.6	<i>The impact of factors like age, gender, legal status and family responsibilities</i>	26
5.1.6.1	Age	26
5.1.6.2	Gender	26
5.1.6.3	Status	26
5.1.6.4	Family	27
5.2	Case studies ('success' stories)	27
5.2.1	<i>Health and Social care</i>	27
5.2.2	<i>Information Technology</i>	28
5.2.3	<i>Engineering</i>	28
6	Conclusions and Recommendations	30
6.1	Recommendations	30
6.1.1	<i>Testing of knowledge and skills acquired in the country of origin</i>	30
6.1.2	<i>Expansion of language courses and tailor-made refresher programmes in relevant fields of expertise</i>	30
6.1.3	<i>Creation of binding verification criteria for the re-qualification of doctors</i>	31
6.1.4	<i>Coaching and counselling by professionals with knowledge of refugees with higher education</i>	31
6.1.5	<i>Specialised training programmes to empower refugees</i>	31
6.2	Conclusion	31
7	Appendix: quantitative data	33

I Introduction to RESOURCE

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

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

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

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

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

Because of demographic developments Europe will increasingly be in need of foreign labour to sustain economic growth. Across Europe employers are experiencing difficulties recruiting staff at both skilled and unskilled levels. At the same time the European Union 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 Dutch context

2.1 Dutch Asylum policy and new Aliens Act

The new Dutch Aliens Act came into force on 1 April 2001. The most important changes of the act concern asylum procedure. These changes are:

- The introduction of one permit for a fixed period, if necessary, followed by a permit for an indefinite period after three years.
- The abolition of the objection stage.
- The introduction of an appeal to the Council of State and the introduction of a more comprehensive rejection of the application also stipulating that no further reception shall be provided and that the rejected asylum seeker must leave the Netherlands. In some situations, it is also possible to extend the decision period regarding an asylum application by one year.

Just as under the old Aliens Act, asylum seekers may be eligible for a residence permit on the grounds of international obligations (including the Geneva Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights), for urgent humanitarian reasons, or on the basis of the policy that the return to the country of origin would be especially harsh in view of the situation there.

2.2 Objection and Appeal

Under the old procedure, an asylum seeker could lodge an objection against the rejection of his or her application and request a new assessment. This objection stage has been abolished. An adverse decision must be rendered within six months and can only be appealed in court. While awaiting a decision an asylum seeker can remain in the Netherlands. A separate decision is no longer required in this respect.

The rejection of an asylum application has a number of automatic consequences:

- The asylum seeker must leave the Netherlands within a certain period.
- Reception is terminated.
- Eviction becomes possible.
- The power to deport is granted.

Separate court procedures against this are no longer possible.

2.3 Only two permits

Any asylum seeker whose application is granted receives the same permit for a fixed period, combined with a package of provisions. Only one type of refugee status is available. Before 1 April 2001, there were three different types of status, each with a different package of provisions. Under the new Act, a person with a residence permit for a fixed period cannot take any further legal action, as there is only one status. However, after three years, the holder of a residence permit for a fixed period may be eligible for a residence permit for an indefinite period. There will therefore be two permits: one for a fixed period, possibly followed by a permit for an indefinite period after three years.

2.4 Rights and provisions

All asylum seekers whose application for admission is granted have the same rights and provision in this system. To a large extent, these provisions are determined by international obligations. Holders of

a fixed period permit may perform paid work. They are also eligible for student grants, loans and accommodation. By law, family reunification is possible for status holders, but solely for those with an independent income at 100% of the national assistance benefit level, which is in some cases a 70% increase on the previous requirement. The person concerned must still submit the application from abroad. If necessary, the family relationship is determined by means of a DNA test.

The Act provides the possibility of extending the usual decision period of six months by one year (a total of 1.5 years) by ministerial order with respect to certain categories of aliens. This possibility may be used if it is expected that there will be uncertainty with respect to situation in the country of origin for a short period or if it is expected that the situation in the country of origin will improve on the short term, or if the number of application is such that the IND is unable to render a decision with the six-month period.

2.5 Statistics

The introduction of the New Aliens act had an immediate impact on the number of arrivals of new asylum seekers in the Netherlands. This restrictive Dutch asylum policy combined with major international developments led to a remarkable decrease in the number of asylum applications, especially the due to the high percentage of rejections in the accelerated procedure and the strict policy for unaccompanied minors.

2.5.1 Arrivals

Table 1: Total number of individual asylum seekers, with monthly breakdown and percentage variation between years

Month	2001	2002	Variation +/- (%)
January	3,697	2,377	-35.7
February	2,805	1,972	-29.7
March	3,086	1,950	-36.8
April	2,781	1,767	-36.5
May	2,549	1,590	-37.6
June	2,219	1,479	-33.3
July	2,475	1,419	-42.7
August	2,462	1,350	-45.2
September	2,551	1,432	-43.9
October	3,401	1,374	-59.6
November	2,399	1,037	-56.8
December	2,154	920	-57.3
TOTAL	32,579	18,667	-42.7

Table 2: Countries of origin (with percentage variation)

Country	2001	2002	Variation +/- (%)
Angola	4,111	1,891	-54.0
Sierra Leone	2,405	1,620	-32.6
Afghanistan	3,614	1,077	-70.2
Iraq	1,329	1,022	-23.1
Iran	1,519	665	-56.2
Turkey	1,400	638	-54.4
Nigeria	401	556	+38.7
China	703	541	-23.0
Others	17,097	10,657	-37.7
TOTAL	32,579	18,667	-42.7

Source Table 1 & 2: IND

The numbers of asylum seekers from Angola, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan decreased dramatically in the period from May to December 2002, as the general protection policy for Afghanistan and Sierra Leone ended in the summer of 2002.

Table 3: statuses accorded as an absolute number and as a percentage of total decisions

Status	2001		2001		2002		2002	
	First instance		Appeal		First instance		Appeal	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
No status awarded	30,385	89.8	26,036	89.2	31,361	85.3	30,210	90.0
Convention status	176	0.5	566	1.9	244	0.7	644	1.9
'Humanitarian protection'	3,282	9.7	2,591	8.9	5,161	14.0	2,696	8.0
TOTAL	33,843	100	29,193	100	36,766	100	33,550	100

2.6 'Accelerated procedure'

As in 2001, in 2002 more and more cases were determined by the 'accelerated procedure'. In 2001 it involved 22% of all asylum cases, while by early 2002 it was already at a level of 45%. During the last three months of 2002 more than 60% of cases were determined in this manner, and the number continues to increase. The Minister of Alien and Integration affairs announced that he strives to reach 80%.

2.7 Recent developments in reception and the welfare system

In 2002, after years of growth, the capacity of the reception system had reduced from 84,000 in January to 74,000 by the end of December. After June it was no longer possible for new asylum seekers to use the 'self care arrangement', which had involved asylum seekers finding their own accommodation with friends or family. Asylum seekers already using the self-care arrangement were offered a place in the centres, but at the end of 2002 10,000 asylum seekers were still living outside the centres. In November 2002 the COA (Central Organisation for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) announced a projected reduction of the total capacity by a half within two years, and that they would be shedding 2,000 workers.

There is growing concern about the financial allowance for asylum seekers. Their benefits have not risen since 1997, and proposals for an indexation of their allowance have not yet reached Parliament.

Last year a positive decision was taken with regard to working permit policy. It was decided to abolish the requirement for an employer to demand a permit from a holder of asylum status as a prerequisite for employment. This decision must become part of the alterations to the Law of the Employment of Aliens before it can be implemented, which is should have taken place by the end of 2003.

2.8 Proposed changes in the Integration policy

The public and political climate continued to change throughout 2002 due to the events of 11 September 2001, the rise of a new political party under Pim Fortuyn and the debate surrounding the elections of 15 May 2002. The result was that discussion concerning the integration process became a political issue. Within this climate, the participation of refugees became a major topic, and the new govern-

ment, that held power for just eighty-five days in 2002, issued a number of new initiatives to promote the integration of foreigners, including refugees. Most of these measures amounted to stricter demands on the integration of all newcomers, but many of these plans have been stalled until a new government can be formed:

- Newcomers must pay a contribution to their integration programme.
- Newcomers must successfully complete their integration programme in order to be eligible for a permanent status.
- The duration of the new residence permit will be five years instead of three, after which time it may be replaced with permanent status ('for an indefinite period').
- Information on Dutch history and 'norms and values' will be taken up in the compulsory integration programme.

In 1998, the Integration of Newcomers Act (WIN) came into force, and the law was due for evaluation after four years. Due to the fact that the last government fell after a very short time and new elections were held on 22 January 2003, and that the formation process takes a long time, all the above-mentioned plans will likely be part of the political debate on the evaluation of this law later in 2003.

Finally the government decided to abolish the 'three years policy'. The Minister of Alien and Integration affairs decided to abolish the policy relating to those asylum seekers not having received a decision on their asylum request after three years being entitled, under certain conditions, to a permit on the grounds of the so-called 'three years policy'. According to the Minister, the policy didn't suit the theme of a restrictive alien policy in which a short and swift status determination is central. The heart of the restrictive asylum policy is, according to the Dutch government, that protection is only given to those who need it. However, the fact that the length of the asylum procedure rather than the flight motives are of importance for a grounded appeal on the three years policy is not consistent with this argument. The 'three years policy' no longer applies to cases in which the three-year procedure time will be completed after 1 January 2003.

3 Overview of employment policies and schemes for refugees

3.1 General employment policy for ethnic minorities

Employment policy for refugees is an integral part of the overall employment policy for ethnic minorities. This policy has shown an improvement over the past few years. Following a 10% decrease in the unemployment rate amongst these groups between 1994 and 1998, recent figures show a further fall from 16% unemployment in 1998 to about 10% in 2000. Although there has been a substantial improvement in the position of ethnic minorities in the labour market, it is not yet possible to refer to a proportional rate of labour participation. This shows the necessity of ensuring that the participation of ethnic minorities in the labour market is made sustainable, so that any increase in unemployment does not lead to a disproportionate increase in ethnic unemployment and consequent increase in dependency on benefits.

The policy that has been implemented and recently intensified was laid down in the *Policy Document on Labour Market Policy for Ethnic Minorities: Plan of Action 2000-2003* document. This policy is based on the principle that the specific labour-market policy primarily constitutes a supplement to the general labour-market policy. Ultimately the general policy will need to address the various target groups; the supplementary policy will be deployed only in situations in which there are still impediments to the employment of ethnic groups, or when lower rates of employment are an issue. However, it should be noted that the general policy measures also devote attention to the special position of the ethnic minorities in an endeavour to improve the reach and effectiveness of the general labour-market tools amongst these groups. The endeavours focused on implementing an all-encompassing approach to the influx of the newly unemployed and the passivity of life among the long-term unemployed.

3.2 *Agenda voor de Toekomst* (Agenda for the future)

Within the context of the *Agenda voor de Toekomst* concluded by the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment in September 2000, agreements have been reached with the four major cities and the twenty-six largest cities pertaining to the proportionate participation of ethnic minorities in the all-encompassing integration chain. The municipalities will endeavour to provide for a proportional decrease in the numbers of the ethnic minorities receiving benefits pursuant to the National Assistance Act. The municipalities of the four major cities and the twenty-six largest cities will develop dual programmes for the group of oldcomers. Each municipality will work out the administrative agreements in more detail; the agreements with Utrecht and The Hague have now been completed. On the basis of a joint plan of approach, administrative agreements to be concluded with each municipality amongst the twenty-six largest cities will give tangible shape to the *Agenda voor de Toekomst*. The realisation of and strict compliance with agreements of this nature will result in the full implementation of the policy.

3.3 Covenants with large and medium sized companies

On 21 June 2000 the Minister for Social Affairs and Employment and the Minister for Urban Policy and the Integration of Ethnic Minorities concluded a framework covenant with a number of large companies pertaining to the implementation of a multicultural personnel policy and the influx and promotion of members of the ethnic minorities. Since then covenants with almost 90 Dutch companies have been concluded, which encompass issues such as:

- The introduction of selection tests independent of culture.
- The training of personnel officers, the design of trainee programmes for people with higher education.
- The introduction of a mentor model.
- The use of dual programmes.

Individual implementation agreements are being concluded with all the participating companies. To this end a temporary 'Ample Scope for Ethnic Minorities'³ project bureau has been set up to provide support to companies in their implementation of the provisions of the covenant. During the course of its activities the bureau also assesses whether bottlenecks arise in practice, and appraises the relationship between policy and the actual situation.

In April 2000 the Government concluded a covenant with the small and medium-sized enterprise sectoral association, the MKB, and the employment offices with the objective of placing people from ethnic groups in jobs in small and medium-sized enterprises. The intention of this covenant is to link the large number of vacancies at employers in this sector to the many members of the ethnic minorities capable of immediate mediation. A special project bureau coordinates the national implementation of the covenant, and a methodology has been developed for the intensive mediation (on a one-to-one basis) of candidates from ethnic groups. This approach has since proved to be successful. According to the covenant 20,000 people should have been placed by 1 May 2001. In fact, by the end of 2001 more than 38,000 job seekers had been helped to find employment; of these more than 32,000 were from ethnic minorities. On 18 December 2001 the Minister for Social Affairs and Employment and the Minister for Urban Policy and the Integration of Ethnic Minorities once again renewed the covenant, now until the end of 2002, whereby it was agreed that the MKB would give notification of 30,000 vacancies. The Centre for Work and Income (CWI) would place 23,000 members of ethnic minorities, of whom 20,000 fall within the framework of the MKB covenant.

3.4 Characteristics of recently arrived refugee populations

In 1999 three ministers⁴ requested the Institute for Applied Social Sciences (ITS) to carry out a survey amongst five groups of people with a refugee status, namely Vietnamese, Ethiopians and Eritreans, Iranians, Somalis, and Afghans.⁵ The ITS report offers an initial insight into both the societal position of refugees in the Netherlands with respect to their position in the educational and labour markets, and the various factors that play a role in the integration of refugees. In 2001 the Minister for Urban Policy and the Integration of Ethnic Minorities requested the ITS to carry out the same study on a group of 100 Iraqis with refugee status.

The greatest difference between the 'traditional' labour migrants and the new ethnic groups is related to the reason for coming to the Netherlands and the average initial profile on arriving in the country. Labour migrants who had opted for the Netherlands were usually issued a residence permit immediately, and could start work at once. However asylum seekers usually end up in the Netherlands by chance, and on the basis of the opportunities that happen to be available to them. Many originally have no idea where they are, or how long they may or will wish to stay in their country of reception.

Many invest in their future in the Netherlands only once they have come to realise that they will probably stay for a longer period of time.

Asylum seekers are forced to wait until a decision has been reached about their request for asylum. Under the previous Aliens Act this procedure could take many years, a time that had to be spent at an asylum-seekers' centre, offering them privacy and few opportunities for development. Moreover, once a residence permit has been issued, this long period of waiting in uncertainty and inactivity often con-

³ Ruim Baan voor Minderheden

⁴ The Minister for Urban Policy and the Integration of Ethnic Minorities, together with the State Secretary for Justice and the State Secretary for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment.

⁵ Tillaart, H. van den, et al. (2000) 'New ethnic groups in the Netherlands: a study of refugees and people with a residence permit from Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Iran, Somalia, and Vietnam' ITS Nijmegen.

tinues to exert an influence on their everyday life, whilst their psychological well-being may well already have been diminished by the effects of past traumas they have yet to come to terms with. Consequently the respondents attached great importance to the acceleration of the asylum procedure.

There is an evident difference in the average profile of the two groups. The majority of immigrants in the traditional groups come from rural communities, and have a low level of education. Conversely, refugees usually come from urban regions, and on average have completed a secondary or higher level of education in their country of origin. This indicates that on average asylum seekers originate from a different segment of society compared to traditional labour migrants.

In general, it can be concluded from the results of the studies that although in many instances new ethnic minorities will benefit for the facilities offered by the regular integration policy, they will also be in need of individual attention as a result of specific factors that play a role only for refugee groups. The most important factors are the (until now) lengthy duration of the asylum procedure and the concomitant societal isolation that complicates their later integration, if asylum is granted. Attention is also required for their higher average level of education, which results both in a different approach to education in the Netherlands and the assessment of their opportunities in the labour market.

3.5 Members of ethnic minority groups with higher education

Members of the new ethnic groups with higher education find it difficult getting a job in the Netherlands compatible with their ambitions and capabilities. It is not easy to compare the value of schooling or work experience acquired in the country of origin with Dutch qualifications or the levels of experience and capabilities required by employers. Consequently immigrants with higher education often end up in jobs below their capabilities. There are other issues as well. The long duration of the asylum procedure has already been mentioned, which can result in people losing their working skills and routine. Refugees have an initially restricted orientation on the Dutch labour market, which can be exacerbated by their possible weakened psychological and physical condition due to their flight. The limited familiarity of employers with the labour potential amongst new groups can also play a role.

A number of measures have been implemented to improve the position of refugees in the labour market, including:

- A customised approach to integration.
- The promotion of dual programmes.
- Sector-oriented projects.
- The deployment of intermediaries.
- The improved assessment of qualifications obtained elsewhere (EVC).

A bottleneck is created by the absence of a standardised appraisal system for educational qualifications and work experience acquired in other countries. However many sectors already make use of EVC procedures that result in the recognition of formal qualifications. The activities of the EVC Knowledge Centre include the further development of standard procedures for the recognition of capabilities acquired in other countries. In the longer term these will also need to be applicable to refugees with higher education.

3.6 Refugees with higher education

A more specific policy is being developed for refugees with higher education, within the framework of labour market policy focussing on ethnic minorities. This is because in practice such refugees are often not able to find work that suits their level of education and work experience. The new policy aims at improving the integration process from the point that they apply for asylum until they have found a job which, whenever possible, suits their background and ambitions.

The main activities are as follows:

- During the asylum procedure a dossier is formed, with relevant information on educational background and working experience that can be used as input for their further integration once refugee status has been obtained.
- The system needs improving to allow a thorough, early assessment and recognition of qualifications and competencies to determine what preparations are required to get a job (such as, learning Dutch and learning about Dutch culture and labour market possibilities).
- This obligatory, preparatory phase needs to be more closely tailored for highly educated foreigners, in terms of the level and speed of Dutch language courses as well as linking language learning to work by teaching specific vocabulary for different employment sectors.
- Through projects at a local government level, efficient and effective strategies to avoid long-term unemployment will be developed. Major companies in the Netherlands are also willing to participate in projects aiming at providing help such as working experience and mentors.
- So far, NGOs and projects have built up expertise with highly educated refugees. This expertise will be made available to mainstream policy makers and other relevant institutions.

4 Labour needs in specific sectors

4.1 The European dimension

On 3 June 2003 the European Commission issued a Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment. This stressed that, while immigration should be recognised as a source of cultural and social enrichment (particularly by contributing to entrepreneurship, diversity and innovation), its economic impact on employment and growth is also significant, as it increases labour supply and helps cope with bottlenecks. In addition, immigration tends to have an overall positive effect on product demand and therefore on labour demand.

Studies from across the world (for example, the ILO, the IMF and the OECD) generally confirm that immigration has a number of positive economic effects. For instance, it is now acknowledged that immigration into the US represents one of the explanations for the long boom period in the 1990s, where average annual employment growth stood at 1.5% and overall economic growth at more than 3%. Furthermore, it seems that the large waves of legal and illegal immigration into the US since the late 1980s are the main reason why the ageing trajectory of the US has markedly improved in comparison with Europe, and is now substantially different.

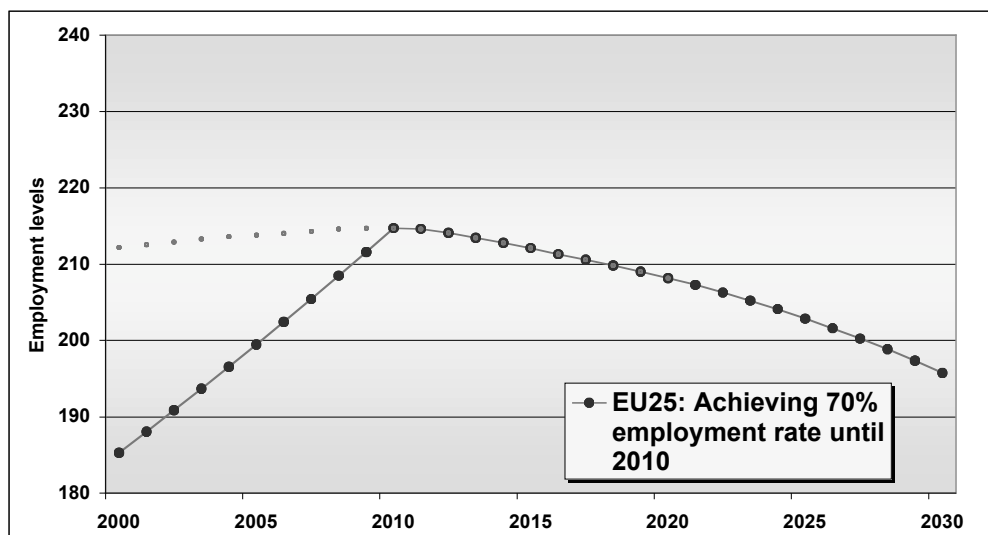
The working age population would already have begun to shrink in some EU states had it not been for the inflow of immigrants.

4.2 The impact of demographic change on employment⁶

The significance of demographic developments for employment growth can be illustrated through a projected scenario. This incorporates the Lisbon target of a 70% employment rate by 2010 and a constant rate of employment afterwards. In such a scenario, an overall decline of employment could be expected after 2010 (see graph below) and the fall in the number of employed people between 2010 and 2030 would be in the order of 20 million workers for the expanded 25 country EU (EU-25). In an alternative scenario where the employment rate rose above the 70% target after 2010 to reach 75%, the decrease in the volume of employment would occur anyway, but at a later point in time and it would be smaller. The fall in employment expected in these scenarios with constant employment rate as of 2010 or 2020 cannot be reversed by (unexpected) increases in fertility rates, as it would take more than two decades for 'new baby boomers' to reach their working age and contribute to the growth of total employment.

⁶ European Commission Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment Com (2003) 336 final

Figure 1: Total employment (in millions) assuming an employment rate of 70% in 2010 and for the following period until 2030



The decline in the total volume of employment implies a negative contribution of employment to economic growth since the latter is the combined impact of employment and productivity growth. The negative contribution of employment to economic growth could be compensated by increases in productivity growth.

4.3 Labour shortages

Some effects of the changing demographic and skills structure of the working-age population are already noticeable⁷. Although they are difficult to measure and to monitor, labour shortages have increasingly been reported over the recent economic cycle and they tend to remain in the recent period of economic downturn. To respond to these challenges the EU must first and foremost mobilise its current human resources, including migrant workers residing in the EU. However, as the problem of labour shortages tends to increase, this will put into question the ability of EU labour markets to deliver jobs in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of the labour demand.

In the short run, labour migration may help reduce the labour shortages experienced notably in information and communication technologies (IT), in advanced technologies or in health care. The experience of the recent past, where some sectors have constantly reported labour shortages (such as IT, health services and construction), shows that it is not necessarily easy to solve these shortages by tapping into the local labour force. In the medium run, labour shortages are going to be reinforced and needs may well develop across the board, including highly skilled jobs. The main challenge will be to attract and recruit migrants suitable for the EU labour force to sustain productivity and economic growth. In the context of increasing skills gaps and mismatches, which require time to be overcome, it is becoming recognised that economic immigration can play a role in tackling labour market imbalances, provided the qualifications of immigrants are appropriate.

Governments should increasingly recognise that a more pro-active and forward-looking approach to immigration is needed to facilitate integration into employment. Indeed, unless a more open approach is taken to legal immigration, the EU may be faced with increasing pressures, running the risk of increased illegal immigration. Several EU countries have already initiated specific programmes or introduced changes in their regulations to facilitate access to their labour markets for skilled immigrant

⁷ See *Employment in Europe 2002* for an analysis of structural changes in the European labour markets

workers, in particular for high skilled workers such as researchers and software engineers. Some countries are also considering selective employment-related immigration policies to alleviate labour shortages, although the objectives and procedures may differ significantly from one country to another.

It will be of great importance to realise the potential benefits of immigration and to facilitate the integration of immigrants through better policies on immigration and integration at local, regional, national and EU level.

4.4 The Dutch context

There is an increasing awareness that demographic developments may substantially influence Dutch society, and more specific the Dutch economy. Although there is no general sense of urgency, a growing number of official reports do address this subject. Unemployment in the Netherlands rose sharply in the first half of 2003, reaching an average of more than 400,000. This is 5.4% of the Dutch labour force.⁸ In 2002 this figure was 4.3%

Despite these unemployment figures, there will be labour shortages in the medium term. Demand for labour is becoming increasingly skill intensive due to technological changes.

According to a leading research institute attached to Maastricht University,⁹ annual employment growth will be 1.2% up till 2006¹⁰. This is lower than the 2.7% for the period 1996 to 2000. The fastest growing sectors are expected to be the services and catering industries.

4.4.1 Healthcare

Because of demographic developments, by 2010 some 1.1 million people will be over 75 years old. This simple figure explains why there will be a tremendous pressure on the healthcare system in the Netherlands.

At present some 500,000 people work in the healthcare system. The approximate numbers in the main professions are as follows:

- 420,000 nurses.
- 38,000 doctors.
- 7,600 dentists.
- 3,000 pharmacists.

It is expected that in ten years time there will be a shortfall of 10,000 general practitioners. Both in general practice and some specialist sectors shortages are expected to rise to 20%. Due to the increasing demand for care and an expected steady outflow of present practitioners (due to a trend of early retirement), new policy measures are needed.

It was decided to substantially increase the capacity of Dutch Universities in recent years. Over the past four years here was a 42% increase in the number of students training in medicine (2,550 started in 2002). The number of students following specialist branches of medicine also grew over the same period by 64%.

Despite these dramatic changes in education policy, further initiatives are necessary to deal with expected developments.

4.4.2 Engineering and IT

In a recent study¹¹ the Dutch Education Council expressed its concern that it is high time to invest in producing more graduates in sciences such as mathematics, technology or the physical sciences. It

⁸ According to Statistics Netherlands the official Government Agency.

⁹ The Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA)

¹⁰ Arbeidsmarkt naar opleiding en beroep tot 2006 –ROA –R-2001/8 Maastricht

¹¹ 'European Benchmarks for Dutch education', Dutch Education Council – The Hague May 2003

considers that the Netherlands, as one of the EU countries signing the Lisbon Declaration, aspires that Europe will have the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economies in the world by 2010. Fulfilment of this ambition will require major efforts in the area of education. To achieve the Lisbon objective The Netherlands should give priority consideration to raising the number of graduates in the sciences. According to the Education Council it will not be easy for the Netherlands to come top of the list.

The Dutch Government has set an absolute policy priority to fight the upcoming Labour shortages in the field of the technical sciences. In the Speech from the Throne,¹² Her Majesty the Queen announced that 'the productivity of the Dutch economy will be strengthened structurally through investment in education, knowledge and innovation. To stimulate the country's knowledge economy, the government has established an innovation platform where members of the government will meet with influential experts from the business, research and education sectors to develop ideas together.'

It was noted that the number of technical science students has considerably decreased, which will undoubtedly have an impact on the Netherlands economic development. It was projected that in the coming 3 to 5 years 120,000 technicians more will be needed than are currently available. One of the policy-initiatives is to allocate €185m for the Innovation Platform, which is chaired by the Prime Minister himself. One of the suggested measures to increase the number of students in this field was to reduce the study-fees for those subjects where substantial shortages are expected.

According to the Education Council it would be useful to conduct further research into the question of how interest in science may be enhanced, especially among girls and women.

In the development of measures aimed at increasing the number of science students and science practitioners, emphasis should not only be placed on financial incentives but also on image enhancement and social relevance. However, if the Netherlands aspires to rank among the top three countries, further investments and actions will be required.

¹² Speech from the Throne, 16 September 2003

5 Refugees' contribution to the Netherlands

This section covers interviews held with 25 successful refugees with higher education, who are currently working in the sectors of Health and Social Care, IT and Engineering in the Netherlands.

The quantitative analysis is in the Appendix. This section is an overview and analysis of the following parts of the interviews:

- The relation between education and work experience in the country of origin and the current job of the interviewed.
- Re-qualification, both through the formal evaluation procedure as through the complete path to re-qualification.
- Which factors have been important when trying to find a job and which barriers have occurred, according to the refugees.

The candidates willingly shared their experiences and their personal opinion of the long way to recognition in the Netherlands.

5.1 Pathways to employment

5.1.1 *Refugees' own perceptions of the match between their current job and the skills and abilities acquired in their country of origin*

All those interviewed expressed an opinion on the relation between their theoretical knowledge, acquired in the country of origin or elsewhere and the functioning in their current job. It is noticeable that physicians and psychologists use a lot of the knowledge, acquired in their home countries, in their current jobs. Nevertheless, they feel that their acquired knowledge is underestimated in the Netherlands. Technicians and IT professionals feel their acquired knowledge is a good basis for their further education and work in the Netherlands.

I learned the basics in Sudan. The education over there is better; one also starts practical work in an earlier stage. This basis is a daily support factor. The specific knowledge of my specialty I have learned in the Netherlands. (Refugee who has worked in medicine in Sudan and the Netherlands)

All the interviewees have realised that the culture they have ended up in is different from what they are used to and that this affects their current job. It can be an advantage if someone has studied and lived in two different cultures, especially in a multi-cultural country like the Netherlands. It can also be a disadvantage when someone isn't used to dealing with patients who are critical and speak their minds. The physicians and psychologists mainly talked about the different way of communicating with their patients. The technicians say their working environment has less hierarchy than that in their country of origin, but mostly place the accent on a different legislation in the Netherlands.

About half of the knowledge I use in my job is what I learned in Bosnia. The theory is exactly the same. In the Netherlands there's more training and job experience and therefore more experience before you really start work. The legislation in the Netherlands is different, as well as the culture. (Refugee who has worked in engineering in Bosnia and the Netherlands)

The vast majority of the interviewees emphasised that their personal qualities are important in doing their job properly. For the most part these were formed in their country of origin. The quote below shows that they think this is crucial in the way they perform in their job in the Netherlands.

You were formed elsewhere; the main part of your life was over there, not here. So a lot of what I use wasn't learned here. (Technician in the Netherlands and Bosnia, currently working in the Engineering sector in the Netherlands)

Based on the interviews it is evident that the interviewees believe they use a lot of knowledge and skills acquired in their home countries in their current jobs. The different working methods in the Netherlands and the recent developments in their field of expertise convince the interviewees that a kind of switch from skills and knowledge in their country of origin to the skills and knowledge in the Netherlands is necessary.

5.1.2 *The relationship between refugees' educational and working background and their current employment*

Referring to the interviews and the above-mentioned quotes, one can notice a difference in the perception of refugees in relation to the three sectors.

5.1.2.1 **Health and Social care**

There is a strong link between education and work experience elsewhere and the current job. It is notable in the interviews that medical doctors value theoretical training, undertaken outside the Netherlands, more than the medical studies in the Netherlands. They said that more in-depth knowledge is demanded in their countries of origin. Also the structure of the theoretical education elsewhere is better than that in the Netherlands. Those physicians and psychologists who are currently working use knowledge acquired elsewhere. The clinical rotations that the physicians have done in the Netherlands have been important for most of them. In any case they have been necessary for registration as a doctor in the Netherlands.

The main reasons for doing clinical rotations have been the following:

- Getting to know the Dutch health care system (10 interviewed).
- Culture and communication - dealing with patients and colleagues (10 interviewed).
- Recent developments in the specific specialty (8 interviewed).
- Building up a network (4 interviewed).

5.1.2.2 **Engineering**

There is a reasonably strong link between education and work experience elsewhere and the current job. The five technicians currently working think that the theoretical part of their specialty in the Netherlands corresponds with the theory in their country of origin. To them this means they have a good base to start with. Education in the Netherlands gives them a recognised qualification, which makes it easier to find a job. Three of interviewees said that in the Netherlands there are more financial means available for advanced instruments and specialised research because of investment by the Government and sponsoring.

Education is still necessary, mainly for the following reasons:

- Acquiring knowledge of recent developments.
- Practicing acquired skills.
- Staying up to speed on developments in IT.
- Rules and regulation in the Netherlands.

5.1.2.3 **Information Technology**

There is hardly any relation between education and work experience elsewhere and the current job. This is a sector that has undergone enormous growth in recent years. As far as can be told (from sources including the UAF clients database), very few refugees who are currently living in the Netherlands studied IT in their country of origin. In this sector four people have been interviewed who are currently working in this sector. Only one of them studied computing before coming to the Netherlands.

5.1.3 *The impact of recognition procedures on finding employment*

5.1.3.1 **Introduction**

In the Netherlands there are two ways of recognition of education. The pathway most refugees take is simply to re-qualify, however there is an alternative of seeking formal diploma recognition. It is important that 'unknown' qualification is transferred into a straightforward document. For protected groups, such as in health and social care, there are formal registration demands. Below the formal diploma recognition is explained and next the route to re-qualification.

5.1.3.2 **Recognition - formal diploma validation**

5.1.3.2.1 *Health and Social care*

The impact of validation for qualifications from abroad turns out to be high amongst the interviewed doctors, for several reasons:

- The amount of time the procedure takes.
- The outcomes of the evaluation.
- The method in which diplomas are assessed and validated and the final judgement.

The formal validation of diplomas of physicians and psychologists is a long and complex procedure. The 14 qualified physicians who were educated elsewhere have all had their diplomas validated. However, the merit that is granted to their acquired knowledge and experience doesn't correspond with the candidates' own perception. Five doctors and two psychologists have appealed against the outcome of their diploma validation. Based on this appeal discussions were held both with them and the organisation that valued the diplomas. In no case did this lead to a different outcome. The discussions paid attention to the method of diploma validation. Most doctors, and especially those who have specialised elsewhere, are frustrated and irritated by having an individual judging their acquired skills and knowledge.

5.1.3.2.2 *Engineering and IT*

The impact of diploma validation didn't seem to be very high among technicians and information technologists. Such professionals don't usually have to deal with compulsory registration, and most of those interviewed hadn't attempted to get their qualifications formally validated. Their diplomas and grade lists have been translated to Dutch and the school or university, in accordance with the refugee, set up a custom-made study plan. This meant negotiating with the study advisors and teachers. Generally the interviewees find this a logical and acceptable method.

Two of the technicians who graduated in their country of origin did have their diplomas validated officially. Their university diplomas were declared equal to a Dutch Higher Education certificate. For one of the two this was sufficient to find a job. For the other the validation of the diploma didn't affect the study programme he was following.

5.1.3.3 **Recognition – until the moment of full re-qualification**

The following factors are important in the re-qualification process, although the pathways that have to be followed depending on different professions:

- The asylum procedure - because of the uncertainty, the amount of time it takes and limitation on work and study during this period.
- Formal diploma validation.

5.1.3.3.1 *Health and Social care*

Three of the 15 interviewees were re-qualified as doctors within four years of arrival. For four of them the procedure took five years, for three of them six years and three doctors had needed seven years to proceed through all the different phases and procedures. These figures were supplied by the inter-

viewees and are only meant to give an indication of the problems. Also, the figures are hard to interpret, as the initial level of qualification wasn't the same for all 15 interviewed.

In the health care sector the following specific problems (apart from the long asylum procedure) are often encountered when re-qualifying:

- The difference in acceptance procedures and valuation of diplomas by universities.
- The sense of underestimation of acquired knowledge and experience.
- The long waiting time.

Diploma validation is done by The Ministry of Health, advised by the university. However, the universities don't deal with formal validation equally. The interviewed doctors all think their theoretical knowledge is better than the knowledge of their Dutch colleagues. According to most of them, the clinical rotations also didn't meet their needs. This turns out to have an enormous impact. Another reason for the 'long road' according to four doctors is the amount of time they lose waiting for a placement. Those who haven't yet graduated elsewhere and begin their training in the Netherlands can't always be immediately placed at a university. Two interviewees have had to wait a year before they were placed at a university, after successfully following Dutch language classes. Two others said the waiting period for clinical rotations were the reason for delay in their programme.

5.1.3.3.2 *Engineering and IT*

One of the 10 interviewees felt he was re-qualified within two years, one within three years, four within four years, two within five years, one within six years and one within seven years.

It appears from the interviews that, aside from the impact of the long asylum procedure, the re-qualification of engineers and IT specialists usually takes less time than that for doctors and psychologists. The possible reasons for this are:

- The recognition procedure.
- The possibility to retrain while working.
- The acceptance procedure.

Five of the interviewed technicians were in the final phase of their studies in the country of origin, but hadn't yet graduated. This meant they had to repeat an important part of their study in the Netherlands. Two of them thought this was disappointing, but three thought it an advantage. Repetition is, especially looking back, not a problem, as it helps to acquire of Dutch diploma. For both technicians, as IT specialists there is a possibility to study part-time or follow special courses, which makes it possible to re-qualify while working. While there were labour shortages in the IT sector, people were hired after having followed a specialist course or just based on general knowledge and skills. The employers were usually willing to offer refresher courses. The impact of the re-qualification route therefore isn't as high in these two sectors.

5.1.4 ***The three most common factors that helped refugees find suitable employment***

During the analysis of the different pathways the interviewed candidates have been asked to indicate which factors have been important to find suitable employment. In the second instance, the person conducting the interviews named several aspects that could have played a role. Finally the candidates were asked to name the three most important factors when finding a job. The most frequent answers to that last question by the 25 interviewed refugees were:

- Personal skills (21 times)
- Support of a refugee group (13 times)
- The language course (12 times)

5.1.4.1 **Qualifications obtained in the country of origin**

Two interviewees named this factor. When asked about the importance of qualifications from their country of origin to their current job, this turns out to be a matter of course for the others. Of course they see this as an important basis for their current role, as has been mentioned before.

5.1.4.2 **Work experience in the country of origin**

The 13 refugees who have acquired experience in their country of origin all think that universities and employers underestimate this experience. The 10 Doctors and two psychologists currently working in the Netherlands see their work experience mostly as an advantage to themselves and not so much as an important factor for their employer. Work experience that may not seem very appropriate, is an advantage for the employee. The four engineers emphasised the advantages of work experience in the country of origin; work experience means more self-confidence, easier communication and being more skilful at tasks.

5.1.4.3 **Additional studies in the host country**

Language and study in the Netherlands is important. Almost all the interviewees listed education gained in the Netherlands as crucial in getting their current job. Both for protected professions such as doctors and psychologists, and for engineers and IT specialists the knowledge and diploma's acquired in the Netherlands have been of major importance. Only two of the 25 interviewees have found work without further training in the Netherlands; the other 23 needed language courses, training within their profession or a full education programme to find work. Re-qualification through studying makes sure the refugee gets to learn the Dutch sense of a profession and makes their knowledge easier to recognise for Dutch employers.

5.1.4.4 **Registration with the relevant professional body to be able to work**

Ten of the 11 doctors and two of the 3 psychologists were re-qualified and registered in the Netherlands. For the doctors this meant a re-qualification as general doctor. For them this was a long road, which eventually led to success. All of them place question marks at the necessity of the several steps and long time the procedure takes. Without exception the interviewees agree that there should be a more flexible pathway.

5.1.4.5 **Work experience in the host country**

According to the doctors work experience in the host country is necessary to become familiar with the health care in the Netherlands, but also because recognition as general doctor is insufficient. The doctors find themselves successful only when specialised. Six of the interviewed doctors are currently in training to become a specialist. The others see this as their goal.

Half of the interviewed technicians and IT specialists have changed jobs or roles within the company they are currently working in the Netherlands. They got promotion through gaining work experience and training and are currently growing in their profession. The others have found a better job outside of their previous field of activity, also based on their experience in the Netherlands. Working experience in the Netherlands is recognisable and therefore much appreciated.

5.1.4.6 **Complete change of career**

Twenty percent of the interviewees have chosen a complete change of career, which means that five interviewees were able to find an job at their level fairly quickly. Their choice was based on the following individual choices:

- Ability to qualify for a job in a reasonable amount of time.
- Interest in a specialty.
- Not wanting to undergo a long medical re-qualification pathway.

5.1.4.7 Language courses

According to the interviewees, knowledge of Dutch is essential for success in the Netherlands. They couldn't think of finding a job at a reasonable level without sufficient knowledge of the language. Besides, a certificate showing that a national Dutch exam has been passed is compulsory for acceptance at a training institute. Learning the language as fast as possible is therefore the first step to integration and work according to all those interviewed. Controlling the language is mentioned as one of the three main factors of success.

5.1.4.8 Employment support from governmental organisations/employment services

Responding to the question about which support they received from governmental organisations, seven of the refugees with higher education said they had been allowed to study three years in order to re-qualify while keeping their social benefits. Four said their advisor at the job centre played an important role in order for them to find work. According to 11 interviewees the governmental organisations:

- Don't have enough insight in the value of their diplomas and the pathway/procedures to follow.
- Have insufficient knowledge of refugees with higher education as a group, since they are mainly familiar with the larger group of immigrants, who are not usually well educated.
- Have a strict attitude with regard to rules and regulations, often not designed for the target group.
- Show hardly any possibilities for integration, due to the long asylum procedure;
- Show lack of initiative.

5.1.4.9 Employment support from voluntary organisations/refugee/community groups

The Dutch Refugee Council was important for six interviewees when arriving in the Dutch society. Providing information, passing on to other organisations and personal contact were the main reasons mentioned. For six other interviewees the Refugee Council was mainly an obstacle as wrong advice was given, little hope or confidence was expressed and sometimes there was even lack of co-operation. The other candidates didn't get in contact with the Refugee Council; four of them mention that family and fellow countrymen received them. For a refugee, building one's own network can be of high importance.

The organisation for refugee students, the UAF, was named as an important organisation helping with re-qualification. For three of the UAF clients their service wasn't sufficient, as not enough information was provided in the earliest phase and they didn't receive enough personal guidance. One interviewee was rejected by the UAF because of insufficient knowledge of Dutch. For the others the UAF was an important switch between work and study because of the following:

- They provided the possibility of study during asylum procedure.
- Knowledge of the several routes that can be taken.
- A counsellor who showed them the right directions and provided coaching.
- The possibility of financing their studies.
- The Job Support department (which turned out to be important for 14 interviewees when trying to find a job).

5.1.4.10 Personals skills/competences

It is clear, both for the interviewer and the interviewees, that people's character and personality are the basis for their success. It takes a lot of qualities to re-qualify in a completely different country. Flexibility, initiative, enormous perseverance, patience, communicative skills, a positive attitude, being able to at least partially letting go of their own culture and self confidence are all necessary. Also mentioned as important factors are: grabbing opportunities and setting goals for yourself. The interviewees name their personal skills and competencies as the most important factor to success.

5.1.4.11 **Other**

Other factors named by the interviewed, which have played a positive role, are:

- The 'social network'. Dutch people have helped them providing information, housing, mental coaching, both during the earlier phase as well as while searching for a job. The personal network has been the guarantee for a job in seven cases (mentioned nine times).
- The safety and support of the family (four times).
- Accepting and investing from both sides; the refugees' and the society's (three times).
- The labour shortage in all three sectors (three times).
- 'Being a refugee' turned out to be an important drive; after a long period of fear, insecurity and feeling unsafe people are motivated to grab opportunities with both hands (three times).
- The love and motivation for their profession (twice).

5.1.5 ***Barriers faced and the steps that refugees have taken to overcome the three most common***

5.1.5.1 **Obtaining recognition for existing qualifications**

The recognition procedure has caused a lot of frustration for refugees in the registered professions, because of the amount of time it takes, the method and the outcome of the procedure. Appreciation or validation has been disappointing for most of the interviewees.

The technicians and IT specialists usually don't see this procedure as a barrier. They generally find the procedure suitable, as often the education institute and teachers can make a lot of personal arrangements. They usually receive the custom made programme, which doctors are asking for!

5.1.5.2 **Language**

The Dutch language is named by almost all as the main barrier. Apart from the fact they find Dutch to be a difficult language, other matters are:

- Language training isn't always provided.
- People often can't start learning the language during the long asylum procedure.
- The large difference between formal and informal language.

Dutch is still seen as an obstacle, making people insecure and vulnerable. Four interviewees have an executive role and often don't feel capable. The two psychologists and two social workers name the language as the most important instrument needed to be able to carry out their profession.

5.1.5.3 **Lack of work experience in the Netherlands**

Not often mentioned by the refugees.

5.1.5.4 **Lack of references**

Having to take the initiative, finding the right people and right direction is seen as a barrier by at least of the interviewed. In the country of origin they had an extensive network and were able to build up good contacts by being familiar with language and culture. When the interviewed were able to build up contacts, for example through help of the Refugee Council, the road to re-qualification has been easier and faster.

5.1.5.5 **Lack of knowledge of the labour market and of opportunities granting access to the labour market**

Six candidates name the lack of knowledge of the labour market as one of their main barriers when trying to find work. The use of the Internet has been important in this area. Also personal contacts and the support of a refugee group have helped the interviewed to find work.

5.1.5.6 Legal status

Six interviewees mentioned the period spent waiting for refugee status as one of the main barriers on the road to re-qualification. The waiting, uncertainty and the fact that family members couldn't come to the Netherlands were named as obstacles. The asylum procedure only lasted a few months for five people, who therefore don't see this phase as a barrier. Six interviewees have had to wait more than three years for refugee status. Four of them were able to re-qualify fully during this period. Two have followed an education while threatened by deportation, which was hard and took determination and a positive attitude.

5.1.5.7 Discrimination and prejudice

In first instance the refugees didn't mention discrimination or prejudices as a barrier. Once the interviewer asked them about this some frustrations and despair were let out. Most of them have to deal with prejudice in daily life; some called it an ongoing frustration, both at work as in their private lives. Six interviewees named it one of the most important barriers. At least five people find the attitude of some Dutch people understandable. They think the media contributes to a negative image and the happenings of 11 September 2001 have also contributed to a worse climate.

5.1.5.8 Family responsibilities

Four interviewees mentioned being responsible for a family as the main barrier. Five refugees have left their country of origin without their spouse and children. Apart from homesickness this led to feelings of guilt and fear. Anxiety about their family, but also the need of warmth and safety of family is mentioned as a barrier. Not having the family around in the Netherlands drains a lot of energy. Families often expect money from the refugee, especially in Sudan and Somalia. Worry about their families has caused two interviewees to (temporarily) give up their studies.

5.1.5.9 Financial Barriers

Financial barriers were hardly mentioned by the refugees. Nobody has named this as the most important barrier.

5.1.5.10 Difficulties due to trauma and experience of exile

'There is no choice, you have to, this is your last chance. This is hard and tough but also motivating'. This is a reflection of what at least half of the interviewed refugees said. This barrier also includes an identity crisis and sense of despair, loneliness, impatience and uncertainty. Twelve interviewees see what they have gone through and experienced and the consequences this had for them as an important barrier.

5.1.5.11 Other

Many factors were raised, including: the rules, the system, the bureaucracy, the insurance papers and loans. People mentioned the rules and regulations, and general bureaucracy to be important barriers. This includes the formal re-qualification procedure.

The 25 interviewees all have listed three of the main barriers, of which the outcome is as follows:

- Language (17 times)
- War and trauma (12 times)
- Rules and bureaucracy (10 times)

Suggestions as to how to overcome the language barriers include the following:

- Simply start to learn.
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes.

- Work on it every day, it's your passport to respect.
- Accept.

Reactions as to how to overcome the barrier of war and trauma:

- Try to obtain insight.
- Find ways to deal with it.
- Find a goal.
- Find help.
- Close your eyes and ignore it.
- Try to carry on.
- Try to forget.

Reactions as to how to overcome the barrier of rules and bureaucracy:

- Never take no for an answer.
- Knock on every door.
- Get organised with other people in the same situation.
- Learn from each other.
- Take action.
- Find help.
- Pay a lot of attention.
- Go for it.
- Believe in yourself.
- Not much can be done about it.

5.1.6 ***The impact of factors like age, gender, legal status and family responsibilities***

The interviewees had diverse reactions to factors that impact on the job seeking process. This has to do with individual circumstances, the specialty, personal qualities and the targets set. Yet some corresponding features can be mentioned. These are partly described below.

5.1.6.1 **Age**

According to UAF figures on average refugees are eight years older than Dutch students when starting work or an education in the Netherlands. This has an impact when trying to find work.

5.1.6.2 **Gender**

Women usually deal with specific factors that also have an impact when trying to find a job. They concern matters that don't correspond with the situation in the countries of origin of refugees:

- According to UAF figures, also showing from the interviews, more refugee women choose technical studies compared to Dutch female students. Refugee women in technical educations or jobs feel they have to prove themselves three times more. This is also the case with medical specialisations, such as surgery. For two female doctors this was the main reason to choose a different specialisation.
- Culture and gender. Most refugees living and working in the Netherlands originate from 'Islamic cultures'. The transition most women (and men) have to go through leads to frustration and lack of understanding, as well as to relief and liberty.

5.1.6.3 **Status**

Waiting for the Ministry of Justice to decide the asylum procedure, is a period of fear and uncertainty. The waiting time varies from several months to six or seven years. The government consciously doesn't offer any tools to make a start with the integration process, following the idea of a discouraging

policy they have chosen for a 'sober but humane reception policy'. For the target group of higher educated refugees this waiting period is not just a phase of standing still, but also moving backwards.

5.1.6.4 Family

Part of the involuntarily flight from their home country is the leaving behind of friends and family. Sometimes refugees are able to bring their family to the Netherlands; sometimes they arrive by themselves. There is always a range of sentiments when talking about family. Both the material and immaterial aspects of family play a role in the integration process and therefore in the search for work.

5.2 Case studies ('success' stories)

5.2.1 Health and Social care

'I have four reasons for discrimination: black, woman, glasses and headscarf'

She took off her headscarf as it was holding her back. Now patients think she is from Surinam, though people from Surinam think she's from Dutch Antilles. Never mind. Better this than the patients thinking: 'That cleaning lady is going to stitch my wound!' She's from Sudan, Secretary of the Board of the Sudanese Doctors Association in the Netherlands, African storyteller at schools, a mother and training to be a gynaecologist.

In Sudan Mrs T was one of the few selected students allowed to study medicine. According to her, the training in Sudan was better than in the Netherlands; clinical rotations start in the third year, which makes more sense. In the Netherlands people are taught where to find information, rather than learning by heart. 'That's usually not the solution'. The good theoretical basis she got in Sudan is for Mrs T a daily support. 'In the Netherlands super-specialists are being trained, which is good, but without the basis... one needs teachers'.

In April 1994 Mrs T arrived in the Netherlands. She arrives by herself; her husband and children had to be left behind. She hates looking back at that period. During the asylum procedure her son in Sudan caught malaria. It was hard to be in the Netherlands and not able to do anything.

'It was like breaking an arm, it's in plaster and you can't do anything, even though you want to'. After a year and a half Mrs T receives a refugee status and is able to start the procedure to have her family join her in the Netherlands.

Luckily Mrs T got the chance to start a language course during her asylum procedure and she also sought information about the route she had to take to become a doctor in the Netherlands. This brought her in contact with the UAF. To her this was important, she says: 'the UAF believes in you, they fight for you and show you the way'. By working hard she passed the conditions of entry to university within a year but unfortunately she wasn't able to get placed anywhere. This meant a year of doing 'nothing'. Even though the Ministry had advised differently in the meantime, she had to repeat two years of theory before entering the second phase of the study. During this theoretical phase she proved to have enough knowledge to be allowed to skip some parts and was able to finish this first phase in eight months. Two years of clinical rotations followed. She graduated with credit, but didn't receive this acknowledgement; to this day she doesn't know why not.

In Sudan Mrs T dreamt about becoming a surgeon, but while doing clinical rotations in the Netherlands she realised that the work environment and the atmosphere didn't correspond with her way of life. She would either, as she put it, have to become 'macho' or feel bad all the time. She chose to specialise in gynaecology, as advised by some colleagues. Before starting this she worked for three years as a doctor assistant in several hospitals in different departments. The Job Support department of the UAF supported her during the procedure to start a specialist education.

What has helped Mrs T mostly on her path to this job is her perseverance. 'I have four reasons to be discriminated against: black, woman, glasses and a headscarf. Luckily I am stubborn, "No" doesn't mean "No" to me. In Sudan this could be a bad quality, in the Netherlands it's a good one'. Mrs T is also communicative and the fact that she had a dream has helped her.

Mrs T says she's felt obstructed by the random policies of universities, the fact that she couldn't do anything for a full year, the language lessons, which she calls primitive, and problems with her family. Both the family situation in the Netherlands and worries about her family in Sudan have taken up a lot of time and money.

The advice Mrs T gives the fellow refugees still having to take the path to re-qualification is to keep going, keep going, keep going and keep going again. It takes a lot, but you'll get there, believe in yourself even in nobody else does!

5.2.2 **Information Technology**

'At first, you communicate like a child!'

Ms G works as a web designer at a large commercial company. She studied computer skills for six years in former Yugoslavia but hadn't yet graduated. She took her study documents to the Netherlands and translated them herself. She then sought contact with an institute for Higher Technical Education and after speaking to several teachers she received an individual study programme. During her final project at a large Dutch company she was offered a job, even before receiving her diploma. Ms G's sister, a statistician, had fled to the Netherlands earlier and as Ms G's guide. This gave her a jump-start.

A lot of the knowledge Ms G had acquired in her country of origin is of no use now: *'everything chances rapidly, up-to-date knowledge which you need can't be taken with you'*. Her level of thinking has helped her. During her education she studied a lot of mathematics, the computer skills education was hard and technical, not practice based. This turned out to be a good basis for her next study Information Technology in the Netherlands. Ms G was able to start studying during her asylum procedure, partly owing to financial support received from the UAF.

Her personal qualities have been a great help in the Netherlands. She says: *'during the interview people look at who you are and what you can do. They appreciate you studying in the Netherlands, but I was hired based on a test and personality and my ambition'*. Her parents have always prepared Ms G for an independent existence and have emphasised the importance of study and career. This image has always stayed in her head, despite the uncertainty, and has helped her to persevere.

Language was one of her biggest obstacles, she says. *'At first you communicate like a child. The language is frustrating, I couldn't express myself and was afraid to talk'*. She also used a lot of study material written in English and started working with people from India. Only now, many years later, she's become used to communicating in Dutch. Another large barrier for Ms G was being homesick. She missed her family and country. This was intensified by the war that went on, the images of Srebrenica on television and the fact that her parents lived in air-raid shelters while she studied in freedom.

Her most important advice to fellow refugees is: *'Make sure you don't lose your self-confidence. Put your emotions aside and start working towards your goal. Take all the help you can get, but try to do as much as possible yourself!'*

5.2.3 **Engineering**

'Over there everything revolved around roads, over here everything revolves around water!'

Mr N wanted to enter the University of Delft and the UAF offered him this possibility. However, his age and family situation stopped him. He wanted to start working as quickly as possible. Through a labour exchange he was offered a job at the first company he spoke to. Seven years later he is still working for the same company. During the interview he was told the following: *'I don't know what you can do, I haven't seen your work. I know where Iraq is but that's about it. You come start working here, but I will evaluate you and will only pay you as a newcomer at the labour market'*. Mr N accepted the job and quit studying. He likes to prove he can do something.

Six months after arriving in the Netherlands Mr N received his refugee status. Because of this he got in contact with the job centre fairly quick. With their help his diploma was valued as equal to a Dutch Higher Technical Education diploma. Being afraid that this diploma wouldn't immediately help

him to find work, he started a part-time civil engineering study, after finishing a language course. The job centre also offered him an 'Autocad' technical drawing course.

Mr N works at a large master builder company. The company's turnover is €220m. He started a job as general foreman and, owing to internal and external training, he now works as a cost manager. In Iraq Mr N studied civil engineering and worked as a project engineer and later ran his own company. About the difference in education and his work he says: *'the theory is exactly the same. In the Netherlands more work experience is gathered during the education period, which is helpful when starting a job. The rules and regulations here are different and more complex. I mean for instance the environmental laws. This is new to me but also good as it's a sign of democracy'*.

What most helped Mr N to achieve his goal is the basis of experience he built in Iraq. The key to integration is language! He started the integration process on his second day in the Netherlands. Language to him is more than just grammar. Being able to communicate well isn't enough; the dialects, technical terms and the speed are important as well. He says: *'You have to be able to react immediately, if you are told to do something when 20 people are listening and you don't understand it, it's terrible'*. Language can make you feel uncertain and he lost a lot of his confidence through this. Mr N feels he's a mix of two cultures. It took him four or five years to find a balance. The fact that he's here with his family and the safety and support he receives is very important to him.

To his fellow refugees he would like to say: *'if you want to work alone, that's possible, but if you would like to get ahead, for instance into management, you have to go for it. You need to learn how to feel Dutch and therefore understand the culture'*.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

All 25 refugees questioned for this study had qualifications and competences that were relevant for areas of the Dutch labour market with shortages of skilled labour, such as the health care sector. Nevertheless, all have had an education or part of an education in the Netherlands, despite their diplomas and work experience obtained in their home countries. Only a couple of them were able to find work without re-education. But all the interviewees mentioned that their knowledge and work experience acquired in their home country plays an important role in their current jobs.

Generally the switch to work in several fields of expertise is made in different ways. The physicians find that, unlike engineers and IT specialists, not only they but also the rest of society would benefit if better investment were made in their knowledge and qualities. According to them this can be done more efficiently, better and cheaper. All those interviewed make a plea for tailor-made programmes. It is desirable that refugees can follow the pathway to re-qualification through a personal training program, if possible, with a personal budget and organised through one specific desk. It is also vital that intense coaching and empowerment are available throughout the re-qualification period. It's also desirable that people from the same country fulfil a guiding role, through support networks.

6.1 Recommendations

6.1.1 *Testing of knowledge and skills acquired in the country of origin*

The recognition of education and qualifications from home countries are a great problem. This is a particular obstacle for people working in the health and social sector. The formal validation of medical qualifications is a long and complex procedure. It took most of the doctors interviewed approximately five years to re-qualify as a general physician. This turns out to have an enormous impact on the interviewees. They felt that the equivalence that was given to their acquired knowledge and experiences did not correspond with their own perception. All of them needed to go back to the university for two or three years to re-qualify as a general practitioner.

Another factor that was highly frustrating to all refugees was the long asylum procedure, because of the uncertainty, the amount of time it takes and the limitations on work and study during this period.

Individual knowledge and skills acquired in the country of origin could be tested, for example by assessments, personal training programs and portfolios. On top of this the re-qualification process should start as soon as possible, preferably during the asylum-procedure.

6.1.2 *Expansion of language courses and tailor-made refresher programmes in relevant fields of expertise*

One of the most frequent problems mentioned was inadequate knowledge of Dutch. Beyond finding Dutch to be a difficult language, there were other barriers as well. These include:

- The fact that good language training was not always provided.
- Often they could not start learning the language during the long asylum procedure.
- The large difference between formal and informal language.

Having insufficient knowledge of Dutch makes people insecure and vulnerable.

For all of them it would not have been possible to obtain a job without sufficient knowledge of Dutch. Language and study in the Netherlands is seen as important. For almost all those interviewed education in the Netherlands is the basis of their current job. Only two of the 25 interviewees found work without further training in the Netherlands; the other 23 needed language courses, training within their profession or a full education programme to find work. Re-qualification through studying makes sure the refugees get to learn the Dutch sense of a profession and makes their knowledge easier to recognise for Dutch employers. Because of the fact that the resources for further education and quali-

fyng possibilities were provided by the UAF, all 25 interviewed refugees were able to follow a kind of tailor-made programme.

Expansion of language courses and professional language courses, and tailor-made refresher education programmes in the relevant fields of expertise.

6.1.3 *Creation of binding verification criteria for the re-qualification of doctors*

With regard to the labour shortages in the Dutch labour market it can be stated that the sector of Health care provides a potential labour market for many refugees. But although these shortages still the Ministry of Health, who is responsible for the diploma validation for physicians thinks that doctors out of refugee countries all need a re-education at the university of at least 3 years. They only look at the diploma, they don't take into consideration their work experiences and they don't do an assessment or knowledge test.

The interviewed doctors all think their theoretical knowledge is better than the knowledge of their Dutch colleagues, and they feel very much underestimated.

Most of them share the opinion that the work-experiences they had acquired in their country of origin is an advantage to themselves and not so much of an important factor to their employer because their diploma is not recognised as such. For themselves it means more self-confidence, easier communication and being skilful.

Creation of binding verification criteria for the re-qualification of medical doctors diplomas and a short national tailor-made programme provided by the medical institutes of the universities and faster permission for work as a medical doctor.

6.1.4 *Coaching and counselling by professionals with knowledge of refugees with higher education*

The interviewees also mentioned the importance of good guidance and counselling. It was felt that the governmental organisations and employment services did not offer adequate guidance. They had insufficient knowledge of refugees with higher education and lacked insight into the value of their qualifications and what procedures should be followed to verify them. Other complaints included wrong advice being given, little hope or confidence and even lack of co-operation and initiative. The organisation for refugee students, the UAF, was named as an example of good guidance and knowledge of re-qualification procedures.

Coaching and counselling by professionals who have enough knowledge of the group of refugees with higher education to advise them in their process of re-qualification and integration into the labour-market, in co-operation with the local and national governmental organisations.

6.1.5 *Specialised training programmes to empower refugees*

Other barriers mentioned by the interviewees were related to cultural differences, prejudice, regulations and lack of references. It was clear for the interviewees that people's character and personality are the basis for their success. It takes a lot of qualities to re-qualify in a complete different country. They require: flexibility, initiative, enormous perseverance, patience, communication skills, a positive attitude and self-confidence. You have to learn to take the opportunities and setting goals.

Specialised training programmes to empower the refugees, teach communication skills, rules and regulations in the relevant field of expertise, Dutch culture, networking in the Netherlands would help with these issues.

6.2 Conclusion

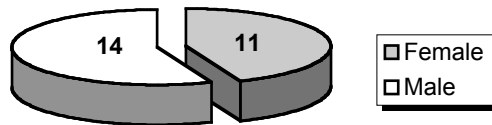
Many aspects have an impact on the road refugees need to follow when re-qualifying in the Netherlands. This report has attempted to provide an insight into the refugees' perception of the process they have to undergo. It soon became apparent that their own perception plays an important role in how

they feel about the path they have to follow. It is clear that as well as learning the language, a course or study is preferable, and in many cases absolutely necessary. Some aspects in the re-qualification process could use some modification, such as more tailor-made programmes. All the interviews show the importance of coaching, guidance and support from society. Apart from that all interviewed refugees have said that without perseverance, taking initiative and self-confidence the road to success is not possible.

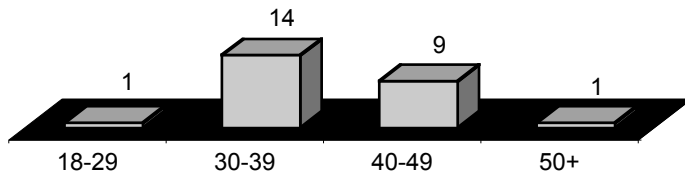
7 Appendix: quantitative data

The 25 interviewees had the following characteristics:

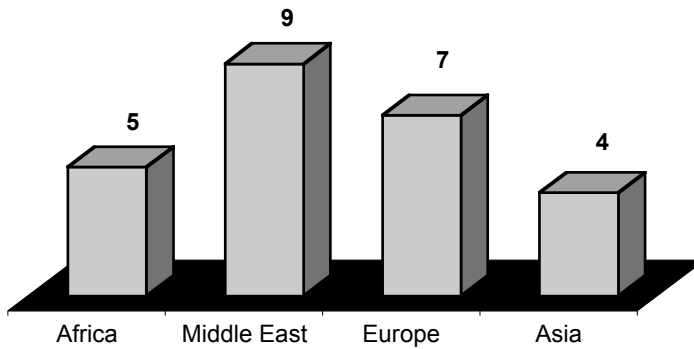
1a Gender

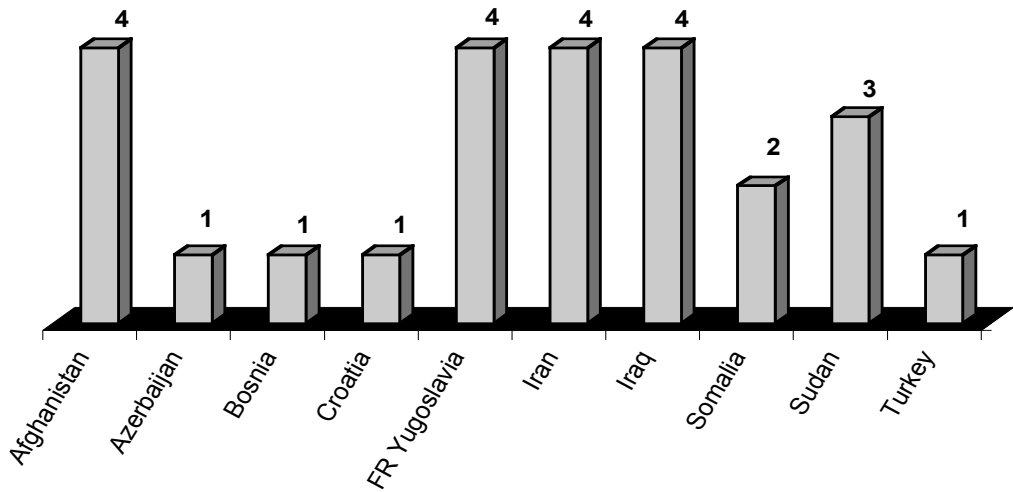
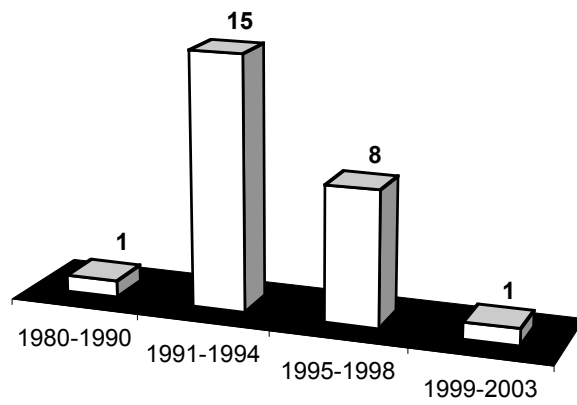


1b Age

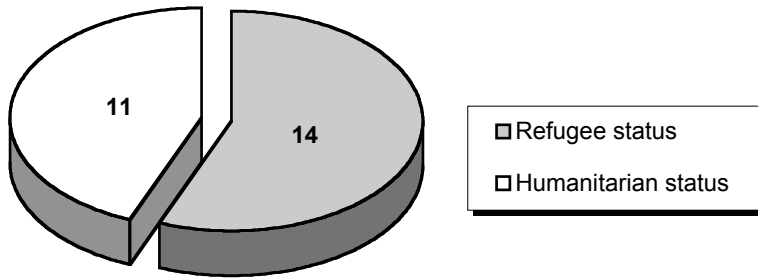


1c Region of origin

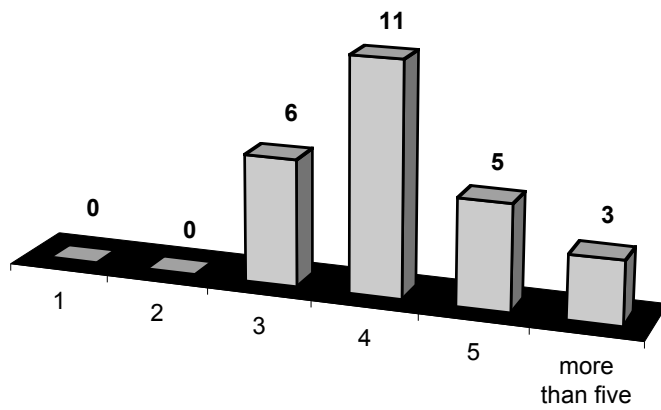


ld **Country of origin**le **Date of arrival in The Netherlands**

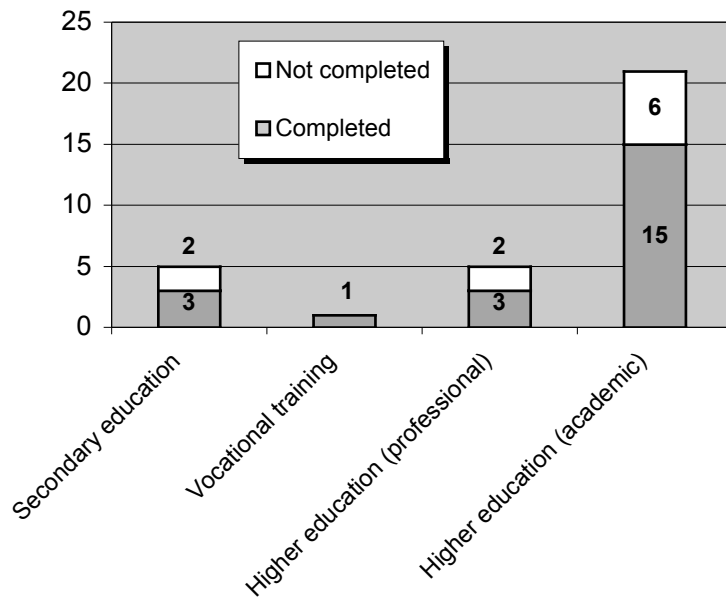
If **Status**



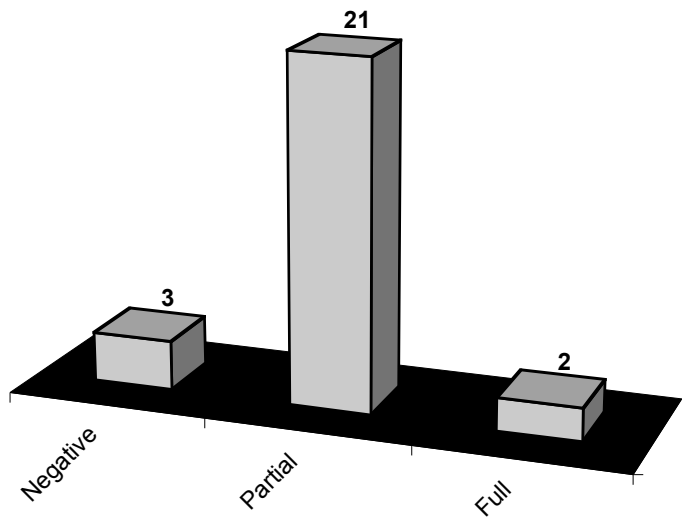
2 **Knowledge of languages (including mother tongue)**



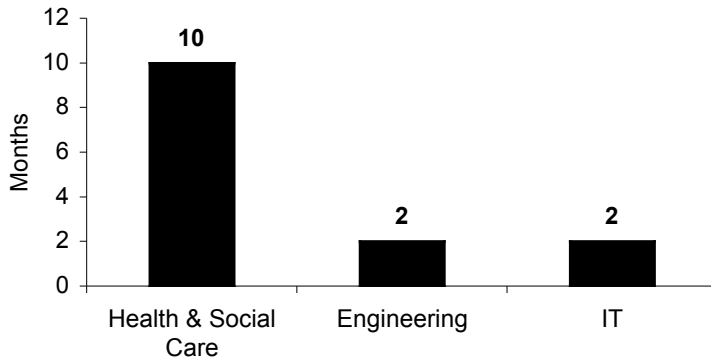
3a Highest level of education before arrival in The Netherlands



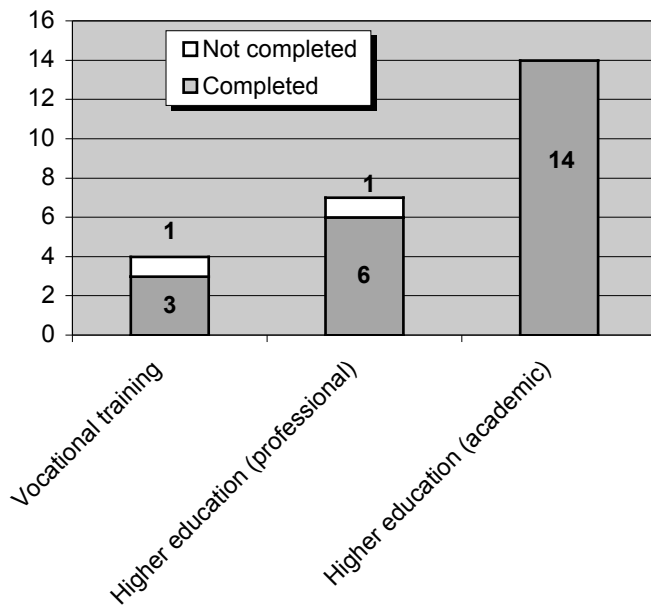
3b Diploma/equivalence recognition in EU country



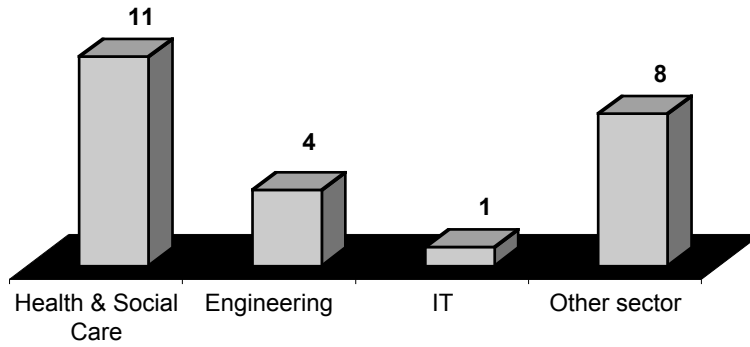
3c Average length of recognition procedure per sector



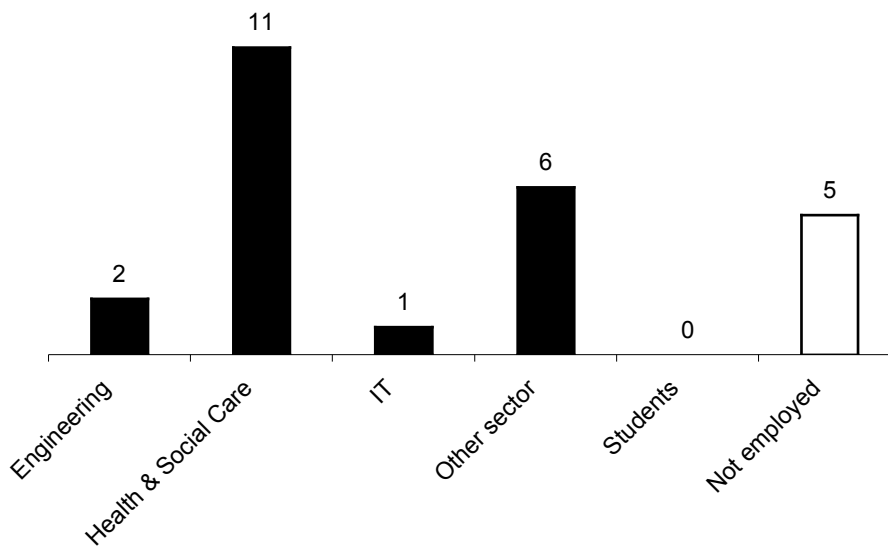
3d Highest level of education in The Netherlands



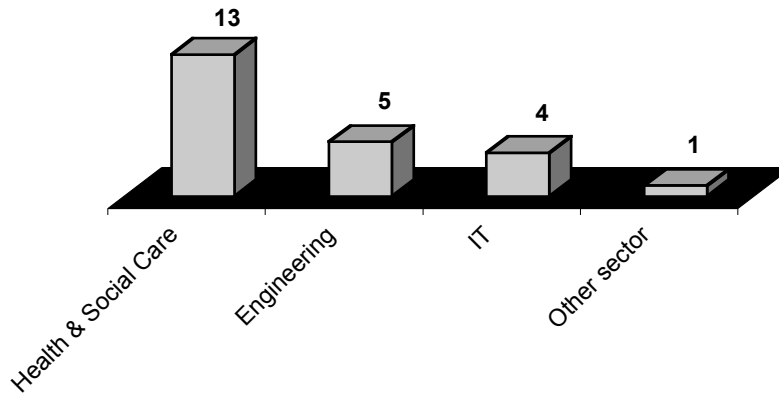
4a Number of refugees who followed practical training before arrival in EU (per sector)



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

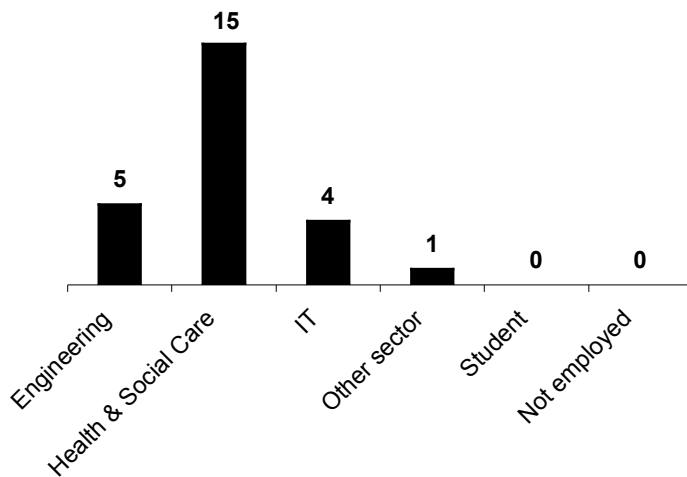


4c Number of refugees who followed practical training in The Netherlands (per sector)



(Total people: 23)

4d Number of refugees employed in The Netherlands (per sector)



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

