

THE EMPLOYABILITY OF REFUGEES IN CYPRUS

A skills profiling report

DECEMBER 2021

CYPRUS REFUGEE COUNCIL



CYPRUS
REFUGEE
COUNCIL

Acknowledgements and Methodology

This report was produced by Manos Mathioudakis, Senior Social Advisor, and Integration Officer, and Annagrace Messa, Integration Advisor, at Cyprus Refugee Council.

The Cyprus Refugee Council (CyRC) is an independent, non-for-profit organization, that strives to safeguard, support and advocate for the rights of vulnerable groups in Cyprus, promoting their effective integration into the host society. Focusing on refugees, asylum seekers, detainees, trafficking victims, and survivors of torture, we work closely with the local society to provide quality services at the individual, community, and policy level. Within the wider range of its activities, CyRC places particular focus in social integration of its beneficiaries, and especially through access to the labour market.

The information presented in this report was collected between 2019-2021, through the cooperation of the HelpRefugeesWork team with asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, regarding employability issues.

Contents

Acknowledgements and Methodology 2

Introduction 4

Section 1: Legal status of refugees and the right to employment. 5

 What are the different legal statuses associated with refugees? 5

 What are the employment rights of International Protection holders?..... 5

 What are the employment rights of Asylum Seekers? 5

 Asylum Seekers have restricted access to the labour market and special procedures and criteria apply in order to be hired. They can work in specified sectors (see Table 1) regulated by the relevant decree of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, one month after lodging their asylum application. The allowed sectors for asylum seekers are the following. 5

 What is the procedure to employ an Asylum Seeker?..... 6

Section 2: Refugees as employees. Highlights on their educational and professional background. 7

 Demographic information of the dataset..... 7

 Observations on the academic profile of refugees..... 7

 Observations on the language skills held by refugees 10

 Observations on the work experience of refugees..... 11

 What kind of work do refugees find in Cyprus? Does it match their skills? 12

 What is the situation with Asylum Seekers? 13

Section 3: Engaging refugees in the workplace 15

 How can a business engage a refugee? 15

 Integration of refugees in the workplace: How can a business receive support 15

 Fostering Diversity and Inclusion in today's world..... 15

Section 4: Further reading 17

Introduction

Work is essential for refugees to rebuild their lives and integrate into the economic and social fabric of the host society.

Yet, employment outcomes for refugees in Cyprus are not the desired. Despite high levels of qualifications and work experience, many refugees in Cyprus encounter serious difficulties finding jobs that match their skills, often having to undertake informal, short-term, low-paid jobs. This situation can exacerbate their sense of marginalization and hopelessness while local societies are hindered from harnessing the wealth of skills and potential offered.

For refugees to be able to effectively exercise their legal right to work as enshrined in the Cyprus Refugee Law, they need support to access quality, sustainable jobs allowing them to develop and give back to their new home.

This report aims to highlight key areas of interest for employers, labour market stakeholders and policy makers regarding the employability of refugee population in Cyprus. Information often requested on behalf of businesses in relation to refugees' employment rights and procedures is provided. In addition, insights derived from data collected between 2019 and 2021 are presented to illuminate the professional and educational assets carried by refugees.

Section 1: Legal status of refugees and the right to employment.

What are the different legal statuses associated with refugees?

Asylum Seekers are persons who have applied for asylum, but they are still waiting for a decision. International Protection holders (from now on referred as IP holders) can either be Recognized Refugees or Subsidiary Protection holders. These are persons who applied for asylum in Cyprus and received a positive decision.

Often, in both official and unofficial settings as well as in the media, the terms “refugee” and “asylum-seeker” are used interchangeably. In terms of their rights, including access to work, the distinction between the different statuses of residence is important.

What are the employment rights of International Protection holders?

According to the national Legislation¹ IP holders enjoy equal treatment as Cypriot citizens regarding paid work, in accordance with the regulations governing each profession and of public administration. IP holders have the exact same rights as Cypriot nationals regarding remuneration, access to social security benefits, and other conditions of employment and their right comes in effect immediately upon receiving their International Protection status.

Is there any special procedure to employ an International Protection Holder?

No. The procedure is the same as with any Cypriot employee.

What are the employment rights of Asylum Seekers?

Asylum Seekers have restricted access to the labour market and special procedures and criteria apply in order to be hired. They can work in specified sectors (see Table 1) regulated by the relevant decree of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance², one month after lodging their asylum application. The allowed sectors for asylum seekers are the following.

Permitted sectors and posts for asylum seekers (Table 1)	
Sectors of labour market	Permitted occupations
Agriculture-Animal Husbandry-Fishery-Animal Shelters and Pet Hotels	-Agriculture Labourers -Animal Husbandry Labourers -Poultry Farm Labourers -Fishery Labourers -Fish Farm Labourers -Animal Caretakers
Processing	-Animal Feed Production Labourers -Bakery and Dairy Production Night-Shift Labourers -Loading / Unloading Labourers -Poultry Slaughterhouse Night-Shift Labourers

Waste Management	-Sewerage, Waste and Wastewater Treatment Labourers -Collection and Processing of Waste and Garbage Labourers -Recycling Labourers -Animal Waste and Slaughterhouse Waste Processing Labourers
Trade-Repairs	-Petrol Station and Carwash Labourers -Loading / Unloading Labourers -Fish Market Labourers -Automobile Panel-Beaters and Spray-Painters
Service Provision	-Employment by Cleaning Companies as Cleaners of Buildings and Outdoor Areas -Groundskeepers -Loading / Unloading Labourers -Pest Control Labourers for Homes and Offices
Food Industry	-Food Delivery Persons
Restaurants and Recreation Centers Hotels	-Kitchen Assistants, Cleaners
Other	-Advertising Material Delivery Persons -Laundromat Labourers

Note: Unofficial translation by Author

What is the procedure to employ an Asylum Seeker?

To hire an asylum seeker, an employer needs to submit the following documents at the Public Employment Service (PES): Individual employment contracts, proof of settled obligations to Social Insurance Services, Employer's Liability Insurance and operating license or a certificate from the Ministry of Tourism for Restaurants/hotels and leisure centers. Employment may commence right after the approval granted by the Labour Department. Information about the procedure can be found in Greek on the relevant page of the Department of Labour³. As of October 2021, employers who apply for a permission to hire asylum seekers may submit a declaration of temporary employment, until a final decision to their application is granted. Under this procedure, employment of asylum seekers may commence immediately, and employers have a week to submit all necessary documents to the Labour Department⁴

¹ ar. 21(A) of the Refugee Law (6(I)/2000), http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/enop/non-ind/2000_1_6/full.html

²[https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/gpo/gpo.nsf/All/0DA97787A60F2A75C2258764004B2A17/\\$file/5608%204%2010%202021%20PARARTHMA%203o%20MEROS%20I.pdf](https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/gpo/gpo.nsf/All/0DA97787A60F2A75C2258764004B2A17/$file/5608%204%2010%202021%20PARARTHMA%203o%20MEROS%20I.pdf)

³ http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/page5j_gr/page5j_gr?OpenDocument

⁴[https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/gpo/gpo.nsf/All/0DA97787A60F2A75C2258764004B2A17/\\$file/5608%204%2010%202021%20PARARTHMA%203o%20MEROS%20I.pdf](https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/gpo/gpo.nsf/All/0DA97787A60F2A75C2258764004B2A17/$file/5608%204%2010%202021%20PARARTHMA%203o%20MEROS%20I.pdf)

Section 2: Refugees as employees. Highlights on their educational and professional background.

An official skills-recording system of the refugee population for purposes of planning and policy making, is yet to be implemented in Cyprus. Until a thorough mapping of the skills that refugees hold is possible, information gathered by organizations offering services to refugees can provide valuable insights.

For the purpose of this report, Cyprus Refugee Council analyzed data from a pool of app. 1900 persons with refugee background⁵ and present the findings on refugees' skills in the following section. The findings indicate that that refugee population in Cyprus comprises of individuals with diverse skills, cultural backgrounds, and professional experience, out of which local societies can benefit. Providing opportunities to motivated people to develop and succeed reinforces social cohesion and creates an environment that promotes inclusion and productivity.

Demographic information of the dataset

In our dataset, the top 5 ethnic origins of IP holders are: Palestinians, Iraqi, Syrians, Somali and Kurds. IP holders reside all over Cyprus with Nicosia being the district of residence for most, and Famagusta being the place of residence of the fewest.

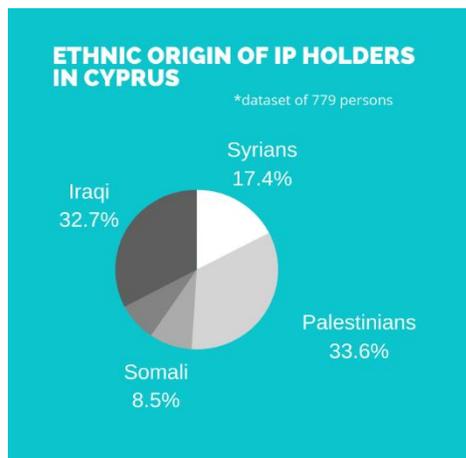


Chart 1: Ethnic Origin of IP holders in Cyprus

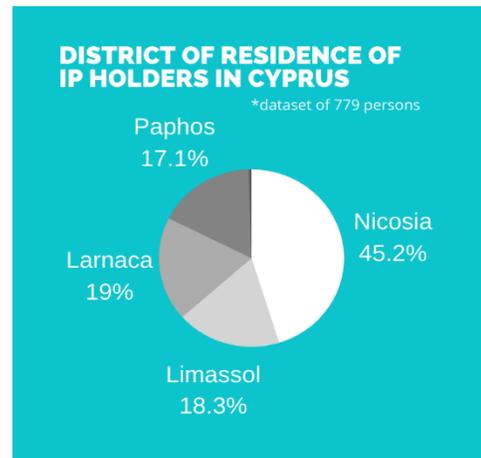


Chart 2: District of Residence of IP Holders

Observations on the academic profile of refugees.

A significant segment of International Protection Holders' dataset is educated. Out of 799 persons, 36% have completed College or University studies, 38% have finished high school and only 4% have never accessed formal education.

⁵ The number of 1900 persons corresponds to the size of the total dataset. The exact size of available data for each variable examined, varies. The dataset concerns info accumulated over a period of 2,5 years and the sample was drawn out of a pool of CyRC beneficiaries and not through a randomized sampling procedure. Findings are indicative and generalization of findings to the whole refugee population should be cautiously performed.

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF IP HOLDERS

*dataset of 799 persons

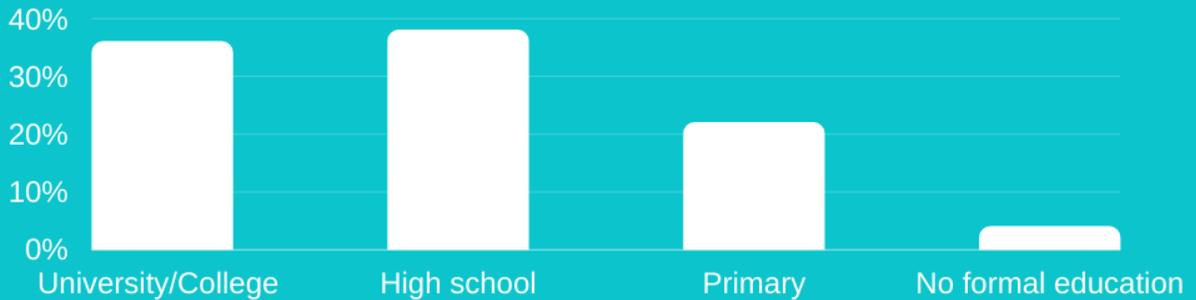


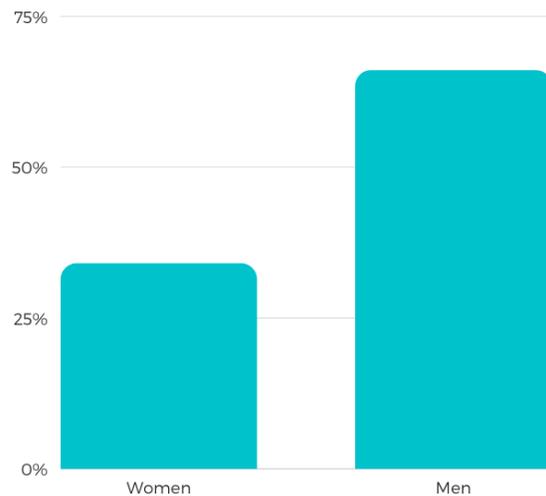
Chart 3: Educational Level of IP Holders

IP holders hold a variety of qualifications. Among 218 persons with postsecondary studies, Business, Engineering/technology, and Humanities are the subjects studied most frequently. Among those holding college or universities degrees, 66% are men and 34% are women (255 persons).

Chart 4: College/University graduates by gender

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY GRADUATES BY GENDER

*dataset of 255 persons



The three most preferred fields of studies of women (86 persons) are: Business⁶, Natural Sciences⁷ and Social Sciences⁸.

⁶ In Business Studies have been included the following fields: Business, Accounting, Finance, Marketing, Hospitality, Secretarial Studies, Human Resources, Management Science

⁷ In Natural Studies have been included: Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Studies, Geology, Medicine and Health

⁸ In Social Science have been included: Archaeology, Economics, Education, Geography, International Relations, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, Women and Gender studies

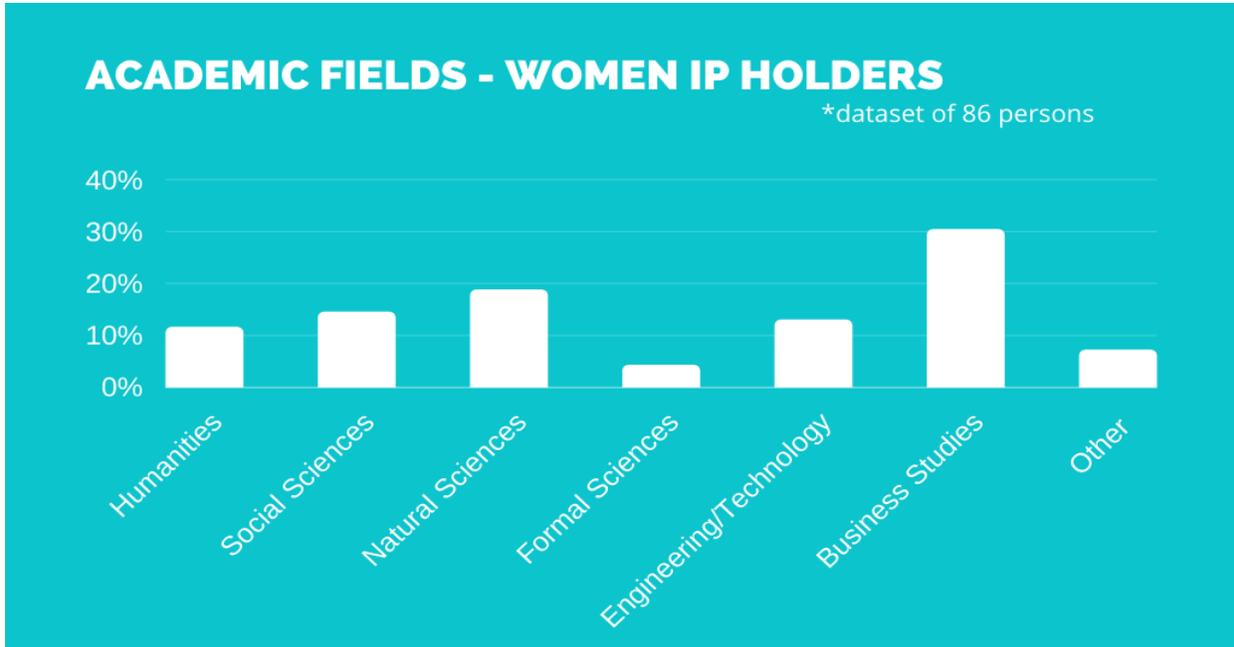


Chart 5: Academic Fields – Women IP holders

The three most preferred fields of study of Men IP holders (169 persons) are: Engineering and Technology, Business, and Humanities⁹.

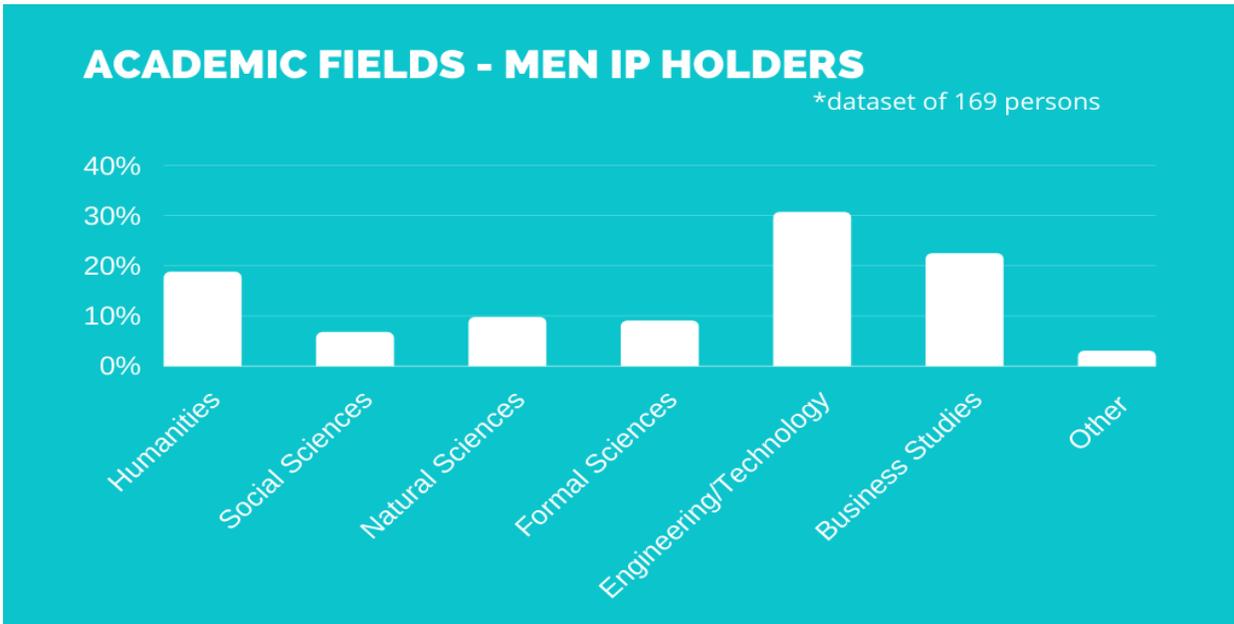


Chart 6: Academic Fields – Men IP holders

⁹ In Humanities have been included: Arts, History, Languages/Linguistics, Law, Philosophy, Theology and Architecture. In Formal Studies have been included: Computer Science, Mathematics, Physics, Statistics

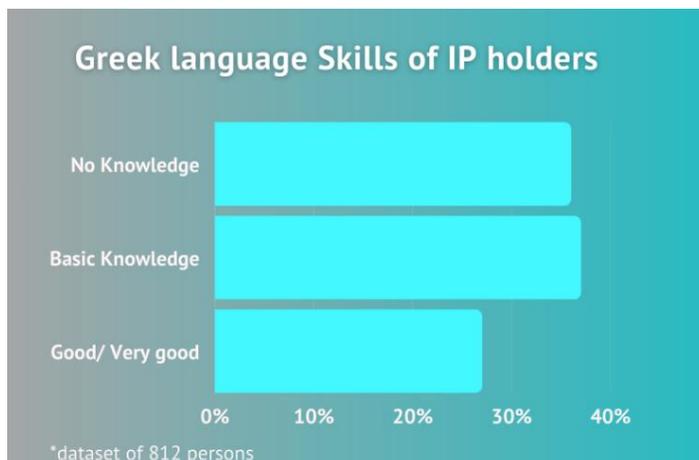
All refugee communities in Cyprus include persons with postsecondary studies. The percentages of those persons within each of the three most frequent ethnic groups of our sample (770 persons) are: Palestinians: 58.5%, Iraqis: 57%, and Syrians: 30.3 %.

The two most preferred fields of study within the five most frequent ethnic origins in our dataset are: Humanities (28,6%) and Business (25%) for Syrians, Business (40%) and Humanities (20%) for Somalis, Engineering/Technology (36,4%) and Natural Sciences (15,9%) for Iraqis, Social Sciences (66,7%) and Business (33,3%) for Kurds, Humanities (31,6%) and Engineering/Technology (26,3%) for Palestinians.

Observations on the language skills held by refugees

Refugees want to learn Greek to integrate and their interest for such classes highly surpasses available offers. Language classes provided systematically and as early as possible to newcomers can enhance long-term integration outcomes ¹⁰

Overall, IP holders in our sample (812 persons) report better use of English language compared to Greek.

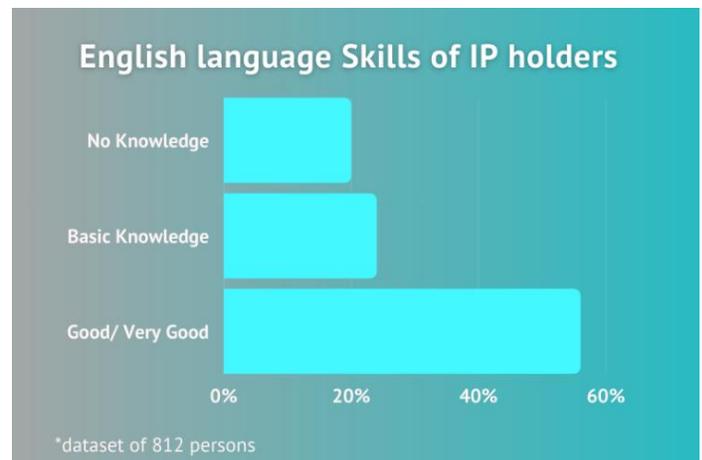


Regarding **Greek language use**, 812 IP holders indicated that 36% of them have no knowledge of Greek, 37% have basic knowledge and 27% have a good or very good use of Greek.

Chart 7: Greek Language Skills of IP Holders

Regarding English language use, 20% reported no knowledge of English language, 24% reported basic understanding and 56% reported good or very good use.

Chart 8: English Language Skills of IP holders



¹⁰ Arendt, Jacob. (2022). Labor market effects of a work-first policy for refugees. Journal of Population Economics. 35. 1-28. 10.1007/s00148-020-00808-z. found at https://pure.vive.dk/ws/files/4974591/Early_labor_market_entry_language_acquisition_and_labor_market_success_of_refugees_A_sikret.pdf

Data indicate that higher competency in English language is only loosely related with higher competency in Greek, and vice versa. The finding highlights the differences in the pathways for acquiring the two languages as a refugee in Cyprus. As shown below, it is suggested that better command of Greek is more related to actual engagement with employment, whereas using better English is more closely related to higher academic backgrounds. Further research can shed more light on the exact pathways/methods of Greek language acquisition in the Cypriot context.

Interesting notes on language skills:

- ❖ IP Holders with work experience have overall better command of English and Greek language, compared to people who have not worked at all.
- ❖ English language use is related to person's educational level. Persons with tertiary education tend to report higher levels of English language than those with lower academic qualifications.
- ❖ For Greek language use the situation is different. Greek language skills are much closely related to whether someone has worked or is currently working in Cyprus, irrespectively of his or her educational level. Greek language acquisition is particularly linked to employment experience in the local society, a finding which is in line with evidence from other countries' reports on host-country language acquisition¹¹.
- ❖ Within IP holders with secondary or lower education titles, men report better Greek language skills compared to women, who in turn report better English language skills. For tertiary education graduates, there is no difference between men and women in regard to their Greek and English language skills.

Observations on the work experience of refugees

Refugees need to feel safe and struggle to build a new steady life in the host country. This is to the benefit of all. The recipe towards this goal, is simple and proven: The more opportunities refugees have to familiarize with the labour market and access dignified and steady employment that matches their skills, the better the integration outcomes for them and the local societies are. This is particularly true for women refugees, whose participation in the labour market poses additional challenges, due to the gender-related social constraints imposed by social norms.

The analysis of a sample of 756 persons indicated that most refugees hold professional experience as 81% out of the 756 IP Holders have either worked in the past or are currently working. Still, a considerable segment of the sample appears to struggle. A 19% stated that they have never worked before.

A glimpse in the gender dimension of participation in the job market reveals that women IP holders are in considerable higher risk of exclusion from labour market, compared to men (see Chart 7 below).

¹¹ Gazzola, M. (2017). Language skills and employment status of adult migrants in Europe. In J. Beacco, H. Krumm, D. Little & P. Thalgot (Ed.), *The Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants / L'intégration linguistique des migrants adultes: Some lessons from research / Les enseignements de la recherche* (pp. 297-302). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110477498-040>

GENDER GAP IN ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

A glimpse in the gender dimension of participation in the job market reveals that women IP holders are in considerable higher risk of exclusion from labour, compared to men.

37% of women of the sample has never worked, whereas the respective figure for men is 8%.

*dataset of 756 persons

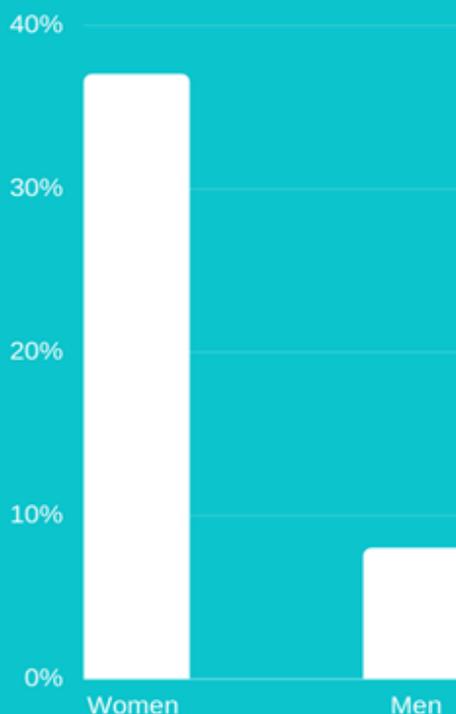


Chart 9: Gender Gap Regarding Access to the Labour Market

What kind of work do refugees find in Cyprus? Does it match their skills?

Underutilization of employment skills is of Europe-wide concern. Migrants and refugees face significantly higher risk of performing jobs which do not correspond to their skills, compared to nationals.¹² Underutilization of human resources deprives economy and businesses from valuable skills and talents, narrowing local societies' margins for sustainable development and social cohesion.

The findings suggest that this is also the case in Cyprus: 75% out of a sample of 248 IP holders with tertiary education are currently employed or were employed in jobs that require lower qualifications.

IP holders in Cyprus face higher risk of skills underutilization compared to all non-EU citizens in the country, for which the rate is estimated at 55,9%. The finding is even more alarming when compared with overqualification rates of Cypriot graduates, which is estimated to be app. 31 %, and rate for EU-born citizens which is app.20%¹³.

¹² <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210126-1>

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant_integration_statistics_-_over-qualification&stable=0&redirect=no#Introduction

UNDERUTILIZATION OF SKILLS IN CYPRUS

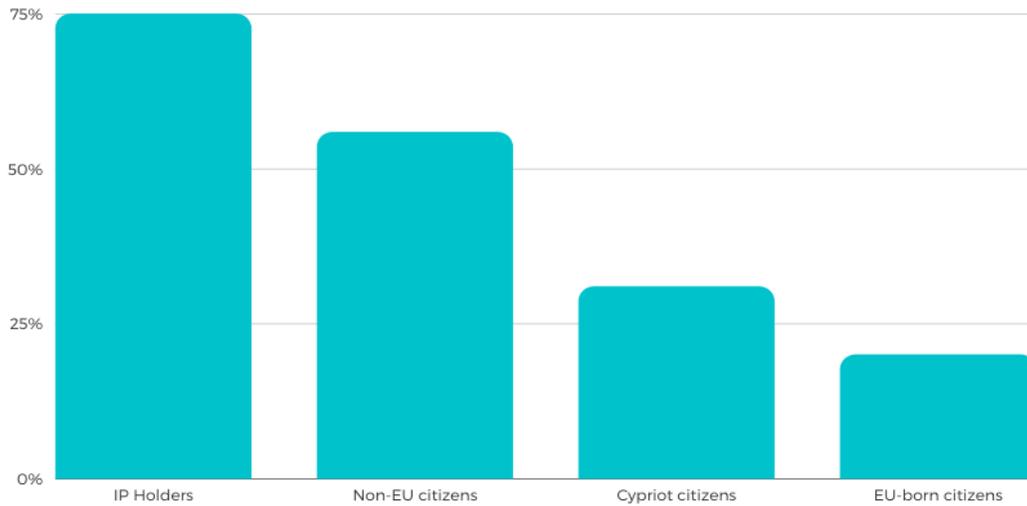


Chart 10: Underutilization of Skills in Cyprus

What is the situation with Asylum Seekers?

Asylum seekers' inclusion in the labour market is particularly important, as some of them will become IP holders. Enjoying effective and timely access to employment enhances their familiarization with local labour market, facilitates social mingling and networking, enhances language learning, and sets the foundation of their successful integration. Those who will not be granted International Protection are still able to support the economy, fill-up existing vacancies, enjoy a dignified living and contribute to economic growth.

The most frequent countries of origin in our dataset of 891 asylum seekers, are Cameroon and Nigeria.

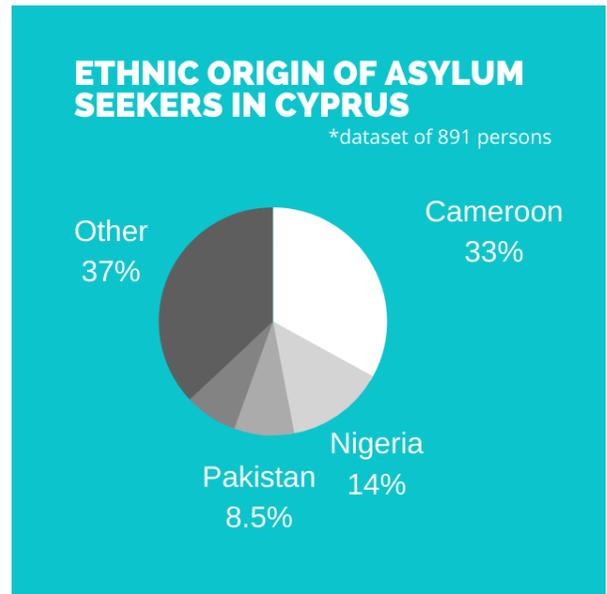


Chart 11: Ethnic Origin of Asylum Seekers

Concerning their skills, professional experience and qualifications, asylum seekers demonstrate a diverse background, like IP holders. Regarding their education background, approx. 60% of the total respondents (856 persons), hold a college or university degree, approx. 36% have completed secondary education and only 4% have received very little or no formal education.

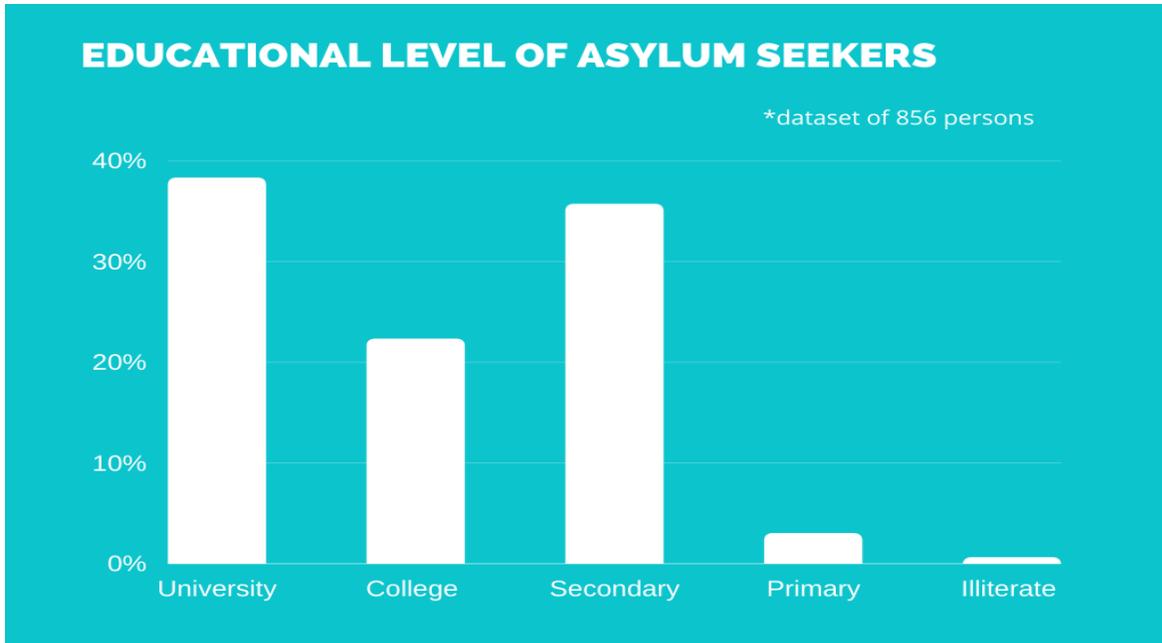


Chart 12: Educational Level of Asylum Seekers

As far as the field of studies is concerned, Asylum Seekers with college or university level studies, (395 persons) hold a variety of qualifications, with Business, Engineering/technology and Humanities being the subjects studied most frequently (see chart 13).

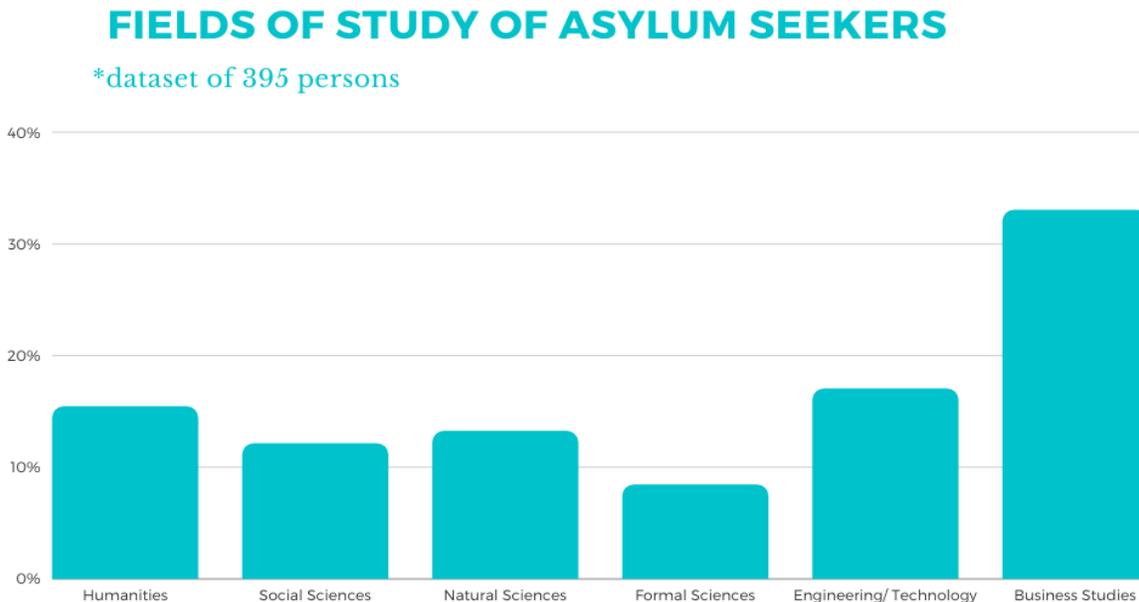


Chart 13: Fields of Study of Asylum Seekers

Section 3: Engaging refugees in the workplace

How can a business engage a refugee?

Persons with refugee background constitute a steadily growing segment of the local workforce and the need for securing jobs is continuous. Many refugees reach out to companies for work and many businesses are already engaging employees with refugee background.



A very effective way for businesses to reach refugees is through the online platform HelpRefugeesWork.org. This is a completely free and user-friendly tool developed by [Cyprus Refugee Council \(CyRC\)](#)¹⁴ with the support and collaboration of the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\) in Cyprus](#).

The platform assists job-seeking refugees, employers, and training providers to interact directly. It allows businesses to increase their application rates, by ensuring that hundreds of International Protection holders are timely informed and able to respond to advertised jobs, internships, and opportunities for gaining practical experience. More than 160 well-known companies from a wide range of business activities in Cyprus already trust HelpRefugeesWork platform. You can find a list of companies [here](#).

Integration of refugees in the workplace: How can a business receive support

Receiving refugees in the workplace is typically a smooth process. Sometimes, a short period of familiarization of an employee with the language, the culture and the realities of a particular workplace is required. In other occasions, businesses may seek ways to handle issues related to cultural norms and diversity, creating a welcoming environment, linking refugee staff with support channels in the community, or simply receiving accurate and timely information on administrative and legal aspects. Resolving such issues is key to unlocking the potential of a good collaboration.

CyRC can assist refugee employees and employers to address those issues by providing advice and guidance to both. Businesses who want to invest in a diverse and committed personnel can benefit from our legal, psychosocial, therapeutical and integration services offered to refugees, through a dedicated team of in-house professionals.

Fostering Diversity and Inclusion in today's world.

Consumers today expect companies to demonstrate their commitment to promoting diversity taking seriously into consideration businesses' efforts to foster an inclusive workplace, when choosing products and services. Therefore,

¹⁴ All CyRC services are free of charge.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities proudly encompassing diversity are becoming a benchmark of a business' contribution to eliminating discriminations and building a culture of utilizing every talent and skill.

This is particularly relevant to refugee population. Providing opportunities to integrate them in the workplace and including them in a business' CSR strategy, allows members of a particularly diverse community to give back to the local society and overcome social barriers. Members of LGBTQI+ community, persons with disabilities, young adults seeking protection in the country while still being minors and separated from their families, single-parent households, can be often found among refugee population.

Numerous international and local examples attest that companies which adopt a welcoming attitude and take proud in engaging refugees enjoy positive business outcomes. Tangible opportunities of expanding the pool of clients emerge, reinforcing brand trust among the local communities, further attracting talents and consumers. At the same time, actions that cultivate the sense of inclusion for diverse groups can drastically improve the experiences of the whole workforce, leading to a stronger and more connected organization.

Section 4: Further reading

There has been an increasing number of publications around the globe on the positive outcomes of the integration of refugees in the workplace. A brief list can be found below.

- **Hiring refugees - What are the opportunities and challenges for employers?** <https://www.unhcr.org/594b824a4>
- **The growing role of the private sector in mobilizing vital resources to support millions of refugees worldwide:** <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2019/12/5df7ba8d4/private-sector-pledges-us250-million-refugee-assistance.html>
- **Danish private sector hires refugees - because it's good business:** <https://www.unhcr.org/news/videos/2017/6/594b89064/danish-private-sector-hires-refugees-because-its-good-business.html>
- **Global Business and Refugee Crises - A Framework for Sustainable Engagement:** <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/global-business-and-refugee-crises.pdf>
- **Talent Beyond Boundaries - connecting refugees to international job opportunities:** <https://talentbeyondboundaries.org/s/TBB-Data-and-Analysis-Report-September-2017.pdf>
- **Migrants and refugees are good for economies** <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-05507-0>
- **Hidden Talent: Skilled refugees and migrants and the labour market** <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cc7d5c277b903ed3206ff77/t/619c7fc7ba678d4a55233603/1637646361666/Hidden+Talent+v10+-+released+231121.pdf>
- **Deloitte: An employer's guide to fostering inclusion for refugees in the workplace** <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/value-of-diversity-and-inclusion/refugee-workers.html/#endnote-1>
- **IKEA: TOOLKIT Labour market integration programme for refugees** https://media.ikea.ch/filemanager/2017/06/RefugeeToolkit/IKEA_Toolkit_E.pdf
- **The Tent Partnership for Refugees is a non-profit organization launched in 2016 to mobilize the global business community to include refugees. Guidebooks: How Helping Refugees Helps Brands: Europe** <https://www.tent.org/resource/guidebooks/>
- **How companies can mentor LGBTQ refugees** <https://www.tent.org/resources/how-companies-can-mentor-lgbtq-refugees-2/>
- **The labour market integration of refugees' white paper – A focus on Europe** https://www.groupe-adecco.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/LivreBlanc_refugiens_VersionUk-VersionPpP.pdf
- **Engaging Business in Refugee Employment, the employers' perspective** <https://www.sydney.edu.au/content/dam/corporate/documents/business-school/research/international-business/engaging-business-in-refugee-employment.pdf>
- **UNHCR, OECD, ENGAGING WITH EMPLOYERS IN THE HIRING OF REFUGEES A 10-point multi-stakeholder action plan for employers, refugees, governments and civil society** <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/livelihoods/5adde9904/engaging-employers-hiring-refugees-10-point-multi-stakeholder-action-plan.html>
- **Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion (UNHCR awareness video)** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWBIs4pLIm8>