



**EMPLOYMENT OF ASYLUM  
SEEKERS BY THE STARTUP  
REFUGEES NETWORK**

**2015 - 2018**

Startup refugees

2019

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# SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

Founded in 2015, Startup Refugees is a network of more than 500 companies, communities and individuals. Since its inception, Startup Refugees has collected the profiles of more than 3,700 asylum seekers and refugees, from reception centers and other places, in 23 cities around Finland. The profiles include information about educational backgrounds, work experience, skills, and the professional motivations of asylum seekers and refugees. Thanks to these profiles, we've already provided 820 jobs, offered more than 5,000 education opportunities and supported 120 business ideas get their start in Finland.

Startup Refugees has been actively involved in the employment and entrepreneurship of newcomers for over four years. In 2019, we decided to publish this report to make the profiles of 3,149 newcomers visible, to bring their skills and professional backgrounds to light, and to discuss some of the trends related to the employment of asylum seekers and refugees. In our

experience the best and fastest way to integrate newcomers into society is through work, and employment should happen sooner rather than later.

Based on our 3,149 skill profiles, we observed that asylum seekers bring a great variety of skills and educational backgrounds, which can benefit Finland and the Finnish society in many different ways. Our results show that people are highly motivated to work in sectors, where it's hard to find workers in Finland. The most common professional fields were construction, business, cleaning, mechanics, and food preparation. When it comes to those who got jobs through Startup Refugees, the most common professions were: cleaners, industrial labourers, waiters, food preparers, and logistic labourers. 32% of those employed were hired in the same fields they'd worked or studied in prior to coming to Finland.

Previous work experience of any kind, along with English language skills, were clearly the most important factors in a chance at employment for asylum seekers. Finnish language skills, education level and their profession were important as well. The number of highly educated people employed was lower than other professional groups. We also found that men had more work experience and better English skills than women, thus giving them a significant advantage in employability. Men also tended to have more convenient professions from the perspective of the Finnish labour market.

# 1 INTRODUCTION TO THIS REPORT

## 1.1 Background

In 2015, a total of 32,478 asylum seekers entered Finland as part of the so-called ‘refugee crisis’. Between 2000-2014, Finland had received between 1500 - 6000 asylum seekers each year, while on the busiest days of autumn 2015, hundreds were registered daily. Even though the numbers were relatively low compared to other European countries, Finland was in shock and the public sector overwhelmed. During this short period, new reception centers were established, while old centers worked beyond their capacities. The processing of asylum applications was jammed.

In September 2015, world travelers and documentary filmmakers Riku Rantala and Tunna Milonoff visited reception centers around Finland. They met lawyers, doctors, engineers, and many other professionals sitting around, waiting for the time to pass. In Finland, an asylum seeker has the right to work three months after

entering the country if they arrived with a passport or other travel document. Without a passport or identity document, they have to wait six months. Despite the right to work, no one was supporting this group in finding jobs nor starting companies.<sup>1</sup>

Rantala and Milonoff thought that immigration could be seen as brain gain, and so, it made no sense to waste newcomers' skills and motivation. They wanted to activate the newcomers and called together everyone who wanted to support employment or entrepreneurship of this group. What happened after the call out was a total surprise: in two weeks more than 200 organizations and individuals signed up, and the Startup Refugees network was born! Today, there are more than 500 companies, communities and individuals working together towards a common goal: fast integration of asylum seekers and refugees through employment and entrepreneurship.

Startup Refugees has been collecting newcomers' skill profiles since 2015. We adopted this data-driven approach to find out what kinds of educational backgrounds, work experience, skills, professional motivations, and needs asylum seekers and refugees have, and how they could best be supported towards their professional goals. Thousands of volunteers have participated in collecting data in reception centers, among other places, in 23 cities around Finland. The 3,149 profiles collected form the basis of this report. With these profiles, we've been able to offer custom-made opportunities matched to newcomers' goals and

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<sup>1</sup> In Finland, the immigration office is responsible for providing reception services, not helping with employment. Some reception centers, like the Red Cross center, have provided some support in employment and finding training places, but generally asylum seekers don't have access to these services. Employment support is provided by the unemployment offices, for which one needs a residence permit to be officially unemployed and therefore eligible.

needs. So far, Startup Refugees has provided 825 jobs, more than 5,000 education opportunities towards employment and entrepreneurship, and supported 120 businesses get their start in Finland.

As of November 2019, there are still thousands of asylum seekers waiting to find out whether they get to stay in Finland, have to return home, or seek protection from another country. Over the past four years, Startup Refugees has been working actively on finding employment and entrepreneurship for these newcomers.

With this report, Startup Refugees wants to bring to light four years' worth of results, experience and knowledge accumulated from the employment support we've provided. We hope it will be useful for those seeking solutions on how to integrate newcomers into receiving countries.

## **1.2 The Purpose of this Report**

Asylum seekers are easily alienated from both society and their careers while spending time at reception centers. The waiting time for a residence permit can take up to 3-4 years.<sup>2</sup> If asylum is granted, the traditional integration path can take an additional 6 month to 4 years. In the meantime, numerous Finnish companies are looking for employees, and some are even facing labour shortages. Tax money is being used to support asylum seekers and to integrate unemployed refugees without jobs.

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<sup>2</sup> In 2019, the average waiting time for a new application was between 6-8 months. If a person receives a negative decision on their asylum application, they have the right to appeal the decision in Administrative Court. At the time of writing in December 2019, there are still thousands of people who arrived in 2015, applied, were denied, appealed (once or twice) and are still waiting for the final decision.



A job makes it possible for someone to avoid the pitfalls of forced idleness, with no other choice than to spend time doing nothing in a foreign country. A job is a crucial part of life for almost everyone. It provides a way of expressing oneself, a sense of purpose in life, a chance to make a living, a place to belong, to socialize, to meet friends and to learn new skills. According to our experience, the best path for successful integration of newcomers is through work.

There are also cultural factors behind the importance of having a job in one's life. For men from the Middle East and North African countries, being able to lead a financially independent life is a sign of adulthood and being ready to start one's family. Without work, one is easily regarded as an inactive part of society, an alienated citizen whose life is not in order. People are usually also highly motivated to work right when arriving in the country, but this motivation seems to drop as time passes.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Yijälä, Anu & Luoma, Tiina 2019.



Especially in the beginning of integration, accepting social security benefits is often considered humiliating and people just want to earn their own money and be financially independent.

Over four years of supporting asylum seekers with employment, we at Startup Refugees have become convinced that employment is the way to improve the lives of refugees, speed up the integration process and its quality, and to ease the government's economic burden. Even if some, or perhaps most, of the asylum seekers end up leaving the country without a residence permit, there are still economic, and even security benefits, to supporting their employment and entrepreneurship. The new skills and experiences gained may also benefit their countries of origin. If people have to return, they do so better equipped than when they left.

The main goals of this report are 1) to bring the content of the profiles we've collected to light, and 2) to discuss some of the trends related to the employment of asylum seekers and refugees in certain professional fields. It's important to note that Startup Refugees is supporting newcomers' employment in other ways not covered in this report. Our network trains people in Finnish working life and professional skills, provides networking opportunities and mentoring in different fields, organizes interviews, helps check work contracts and permits, and follows up post-employment, when needed. This report does not cover any of these activities, nor the support we provide through the 'Startup Refugees Business Program,' for those starting their businesses in Finland.

This report is based on Kasper Kylmä's Master's thesis *Recognizing Barriers for Refugee Employment With Logistic Regression* (Aalto University 2019). Even though this report is not a scientific study, what makes our analyses especially valuable is the fact that this kind of model hasn't been tested anywhere else before. We want to separate fact from fiction, bring some statistics to the table, and share what we've learned along this journey with you. We would also love to thank the Kone Foundation for supporting this process and making the profiles of 3,149 newcomers visible!

***“[Work] enables [refugees] to contribute to the society that has welcomed them, start paying taxes and end their reliance on welfare – all of which neutralise the claim that they are a burden. Working with local colleagues also fosters trust and empathy, leads to friendships, improves language skills and helps refugees learn local norms – all of which dispel perceptions that refugees are a threat.”***

Philippe Legrain (2017)

### 1.3. Questions to be Answered

Startup Refugees has collected data on the skills of 3,149 asylum seekers<sup>4</sup> and refugees, who have filled in their professional profile via our online service: *Match Made in Startup Refugees*. The profiles include personal information, work experience, skills, education, language skills, background information, professional motivation and needs for support. The data was used to provide answers to the following questions and sub-questions:

1. What do the demographics of Match Made in Startup Refugees profiles look like?
  - a. Where do the refugees come from?
  - b. What languages do they speak and how well?
  - c. What is the male to female ratio?
  - d. How old are they?
  - e. Are there entrepreneurial spirits among them?

- f. What kind of professional background do they have?

- g. In what professional fields have they found employment with Startup Refugees' support?

2. Of the above, what are the critical factors affecting one's employment as a refugee?

For sub-question 2, we only had data for 220 of the people who've found employment with our support. The data gathered doesn't represent all those employed because 1) we only started tracking employment using individual's names in 2018 and 2) do so in order to update employers on any changes in the status of work permits. People not included in the data are those who, for example, are already employed or have a residence permit.

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<sup>4</sup> As of November 2019, the number of total profiles is over 3,700. The 3,149 profiles used in this report are from those who've given us permission to use to data for research purposes.

## 2 MATCHMAKING

### 2.1. Match Made in Startup Refugees

Startup Refugees has been collecting personal information, educational backgrounds, skills, professional motivation and needs for support of asylum seekers, refugees and other immigrants since 2015.

There are three main reasons behind this:

- 1) when asylum seekers arrived in Finland in 2015, no one had information on the skills and motivations they brought to the country;
- 2) Startup Refugees wanted to develop a sustainable approach to employment and entrepreneurship support, which could only be based on the real needs and motivations, and enable newcomers to build on their current professional experience;
- 3) Having a pool of professionals helps Startup Refugees efficiently match newcomers with network members, thus offering different kinds of opportunities related to employment and entrepreneurship. This is why the system was named: Match Made in Startup

Refugees (you can find it at [match.startuprefugees.com](http://match.startuprefugees.com)) or Match, for short.

At first, matchmaking between employers and employees was done by filling and searching through a huge Excel file, which quickly became tedious and clumsy. In 2016, a software company called Futurice decided to give us a hand through their Chilicorn Fund, dedicated to software projects for non-profit organizations. With Futurice's help, a platform for registering refugees and searching the database was created, and Match Made in Startup Refugees was born.

## **2.2. Data collection and limitations**

As of November 2019, we have profiled the skills of over 3,700 refugees and helped 785 refugees find jobs, which we consider a clear win-win-situation for both the employers and the newcomers. In this report, we

visualize different aspects of our data to give you the big picture on the demographics of our profiles.

This data was collected at Startup Refugees events, called 'Data Collections' or 'Match Clinics'. We invite refugees and asylum seekers interested in Finnish employment or entrepreneurship to these events, where our volunteers and staff help them fill out their profiles on Match Made in Startup Refugees.

Currently, Match is only available in English, and so isn't user-friendly enough for everyone to be able to fill out the profile by themselves. Volunteers and staff also help newcomers clarify their previous work experience, skills and professional motivation.

As one might expect, this way of collecting data also comes with drawbacks concerning its quality. First of all, we can't guarantee those registered are telling the truth about their work experience, skills, and education. Startup Refugees' staff does their best to

ensure that the information provided is truthful and employers occasionally skill-test before hiring. Employed people also participate in our 'Working Life in Finland' training, where the staff covers the meaning of honesty and professional reputation in a small country like Finland. It's good to keep in mind that the data is based on refugees' personal reporting, not absolute facts. The sample size of 3,149 people is also not big enough to make generalizations on the whole Finnish refugee population. The obvious segments of refugees missing from Match are children, people who already have jobs, and those with no trouble finding work by themselves.

Also, the employment data is slightly problematic. Startup Refugees has data about job contracts made by the network since 2015, and individual tracking since 2018. The data doesn't include job contracts found by newcomers, after getting support from Startup Refugees. For example, some highly educated

people and entrepreneurs have been indirectly employed through Startup Refugees by taking part in trainings, courses or mentoring programs, and we don't have data on these employments. Some people have also been directly employed through Startup Refugees, but not listed in the individual job contract list, because they've had a residence permit and therefore a continuous right to work. Nonetheless, this data can provide valuable information about the refugee population as a whole and on factors behind asylum seekers' employment, in certain professional fields.

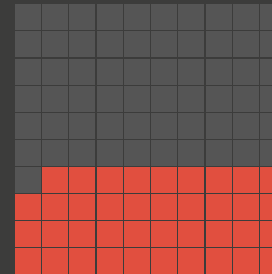
# MATCH DEMOGRAPHICS



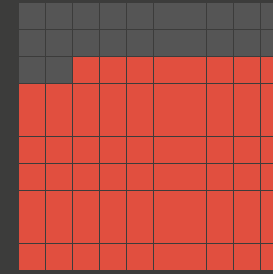
MATCH MADE IN  
STARTUP REFUGEES

If the background of the 3149 people in Match Made in Startup Refugees would be compressed into 100 squares, the basic demographics would look something like this.

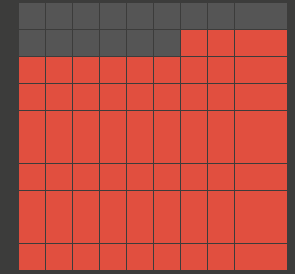
Want to start a company



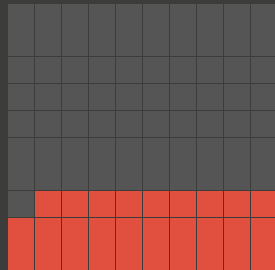
Were Asylum seekers



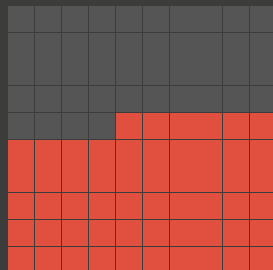
Were born in the 80s or 90s



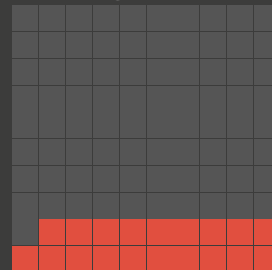
Speak sufficient Finnish



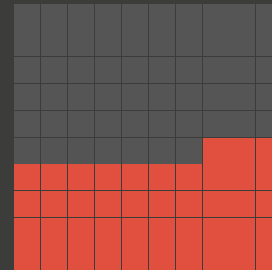
Speak sufficient English



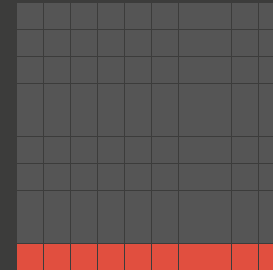
Employed through us



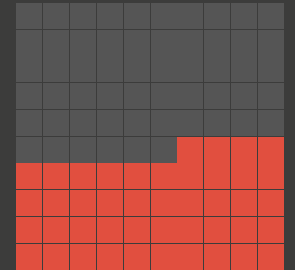
Are from Iraq



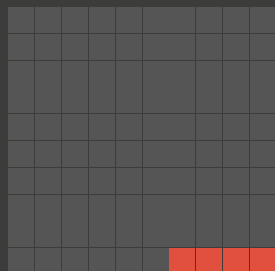
Have Dari as native language



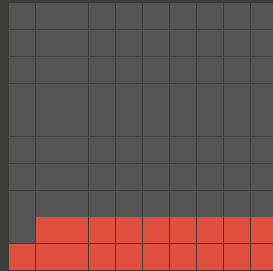
Have Arabic as native language



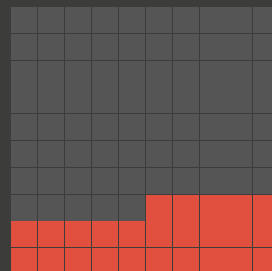
No education or experience



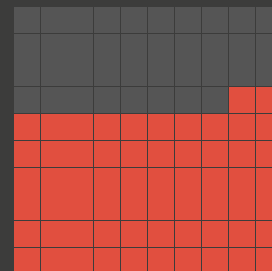
Are highly educated



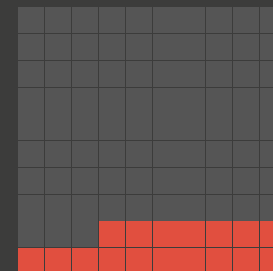
Have studied in a university



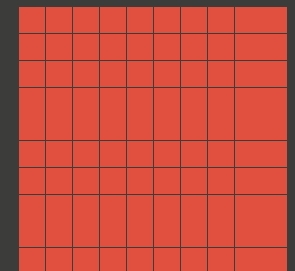
Have work experience



Are Women



Want to work



## 2.3. Demographics

First of all, the number of women in the profiles seems low: 17 %, but it's in line with the previous information by Joro (2019) and UNHCR (2019). The number of women is around 19% of all refugees in Finland, not 50% as one could expect. One can also see that people are surprisingly young (see age graph, below). However, this graph is incomplete, since it excludes children, who are around 30% of all the refugees arriving in Finland according to UNHCR (2019). It's likely that the average age of refugees is lower than our data implies. Our refugees are also clearly newcomers, since most of them arrived in Finland after 2014, and were still asylum seekers at the time they filled out their profiles.

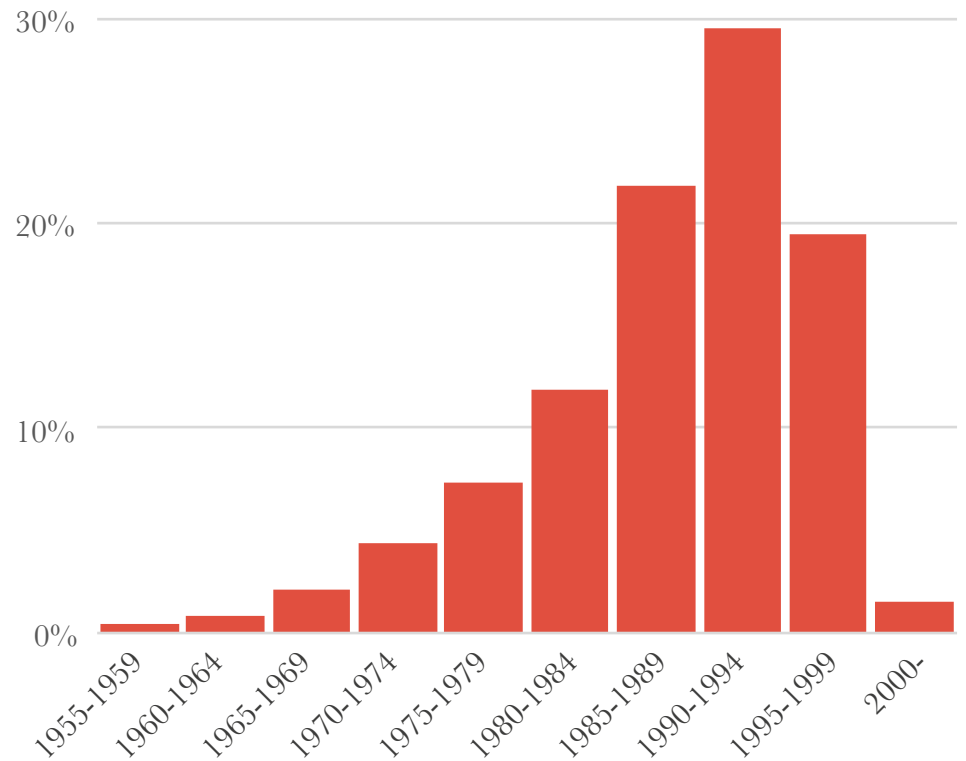
As the graphs above show, there are also a few people without any education or work experience, around 4% in total. These people have similar characteristics to

the entire population in our report, apart from not having a profession like the others. People without education or work experience tend to have lower chances of employment through Startup Refugees. It would certainly be interesting to know more about this group, but unfortunately our data doesn't offer more details about those in the most difficult situation in the Finnish labour market.



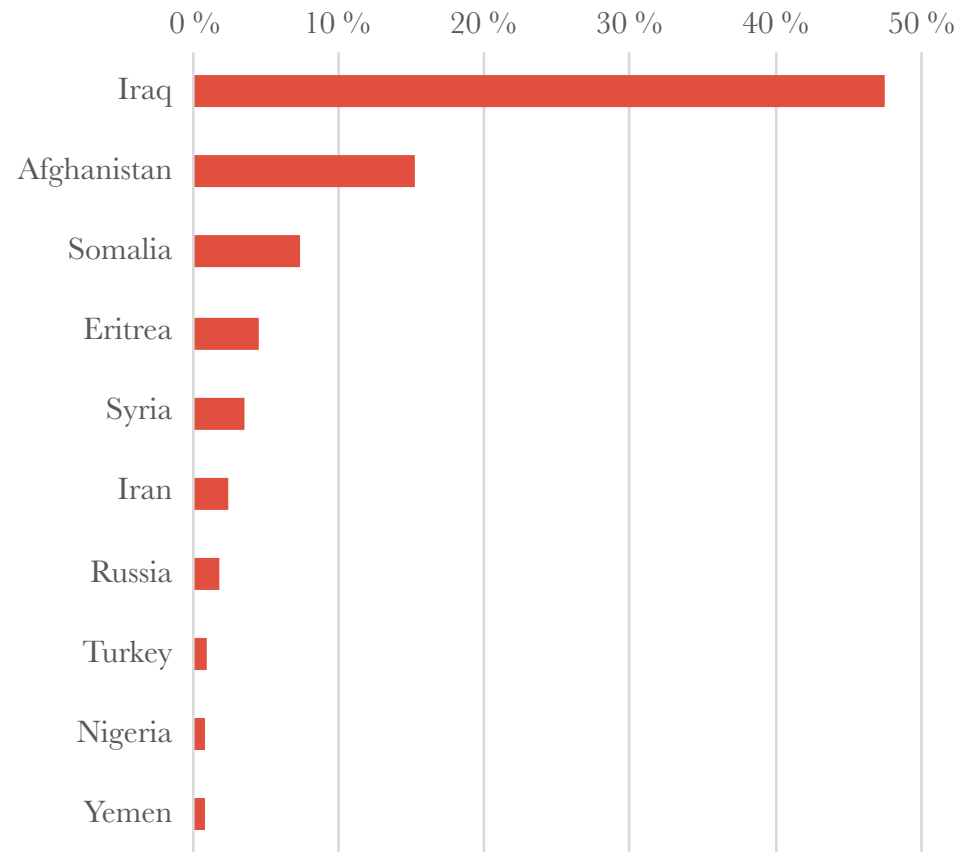
One can find the age distributions of the entire population in Match in the figure on the right. Here we can see that the people filled in Match profile are fairly young, a clear majority of them is born in the 80's and 90's. The same age distribution was also reached by Joro (2019) who says it to be balancing the Finnish age structure. Most of these refugees are in an optimal age regarding work life and their expected value for the society.

**Birth year distribution of Match profiles**



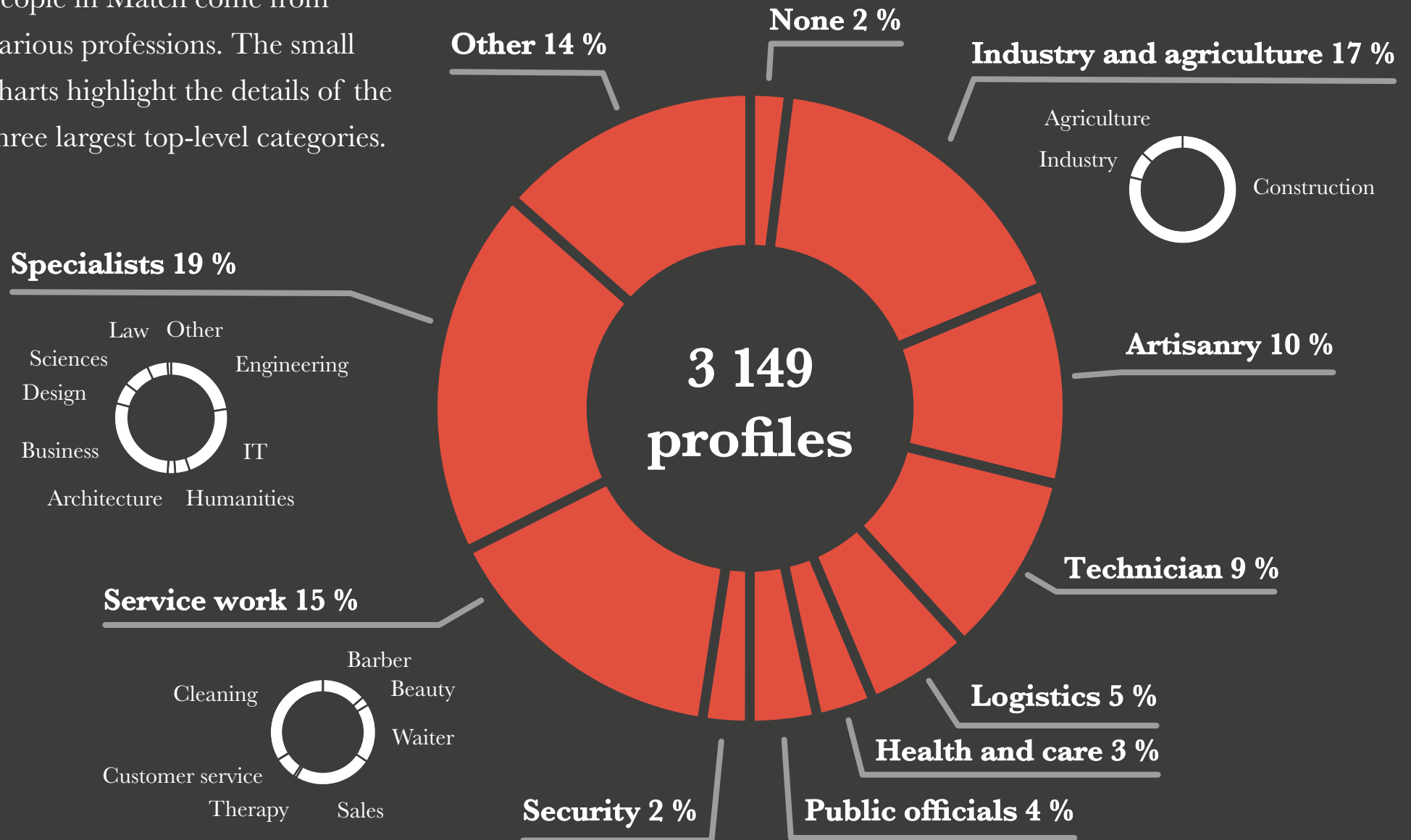
Also, what strikes us as surprising is the amount of people from Iraq, which is higher than one would expect. However, both UNHCR (2019) and Sarvimäki (2017) agree, that even though the 2015 conflict had its roots in Syria, most refugees to Finland came from Iraq. The graph below shows the nationalities of registered people: top three being Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia. The 10 countries listed in the graph below represent 88% of the total amount of the people registered in our talent pool.

**Match profiles by country of origin**



# PROFESSIONS IN MATCH

People in Match come from various professions. The small charts highlight the details of the three largest top-level categories.



As one can see from the figure above, the amount of construction workers is surprisingly high, over 75% of the biggest category: industry & agriculture. However, professional data was the most unclear kind we analyzed, since every person's profession is predicted by four components: what kind of job one would want, the education they have, their stated profession, if any, and their previous work experience. Construction workers seem overrepresented, since the majority of people without any specialized education or work experience described their preferred work as construction.

Here are the top 10 most common profession subcategories and their relative sizes.

**Top 10 subcategories in Match**



To clear up any confusion about the professional categories, though they all include some generalization, in this study we use the following terms to mean:

- ‘Construction’: regular workers, welders, and low-ranking supervisors
- ‘Industry’: factory and production line workers
- ‘Food preparation’: cooks, chefs, brewers, butchers, and food production line workers
- ‘Logistic labourer’: the workers of storehouses and shipyards, and delivery jobs like couriers and postmen
- ‘Cleaning’: business, household, industrial, and construction site cleaners
- ‘Clothing’: tailors, dressmakers, and shoemakers
- ‘Other’: students, entrepreneurs, artists, athletes, translators, journalists, media personnel, managers, and religious professionals
- ‘Artisanry’: carpenters, cloth makers, food makers, handcraft makers, and metal workers

Taking into account the current Finnish labour situation and our profile demographics, the refugee population can certainly fill some gaps. In 2018, drivers, salespersons, chefs, and cleaners were all in the top 10 professions that companies found difficult to hire for, and the Finnish refugee population seemed to have quite a lot of people with skills in those professions (Larja, 2019).<sup>5</sup> Also, construction and industrial fields lack workers, especially in some parts of Finland.

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<sup>5</sup> The job market situation is made even more complicated by the paradoxical fact that all the professions just mentioned also experienced significant unemployment, at least during summer 2019. This mismatch mostly exists because of geographical differences, welfare traps, and mismatched job details and specialized professions (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2019).

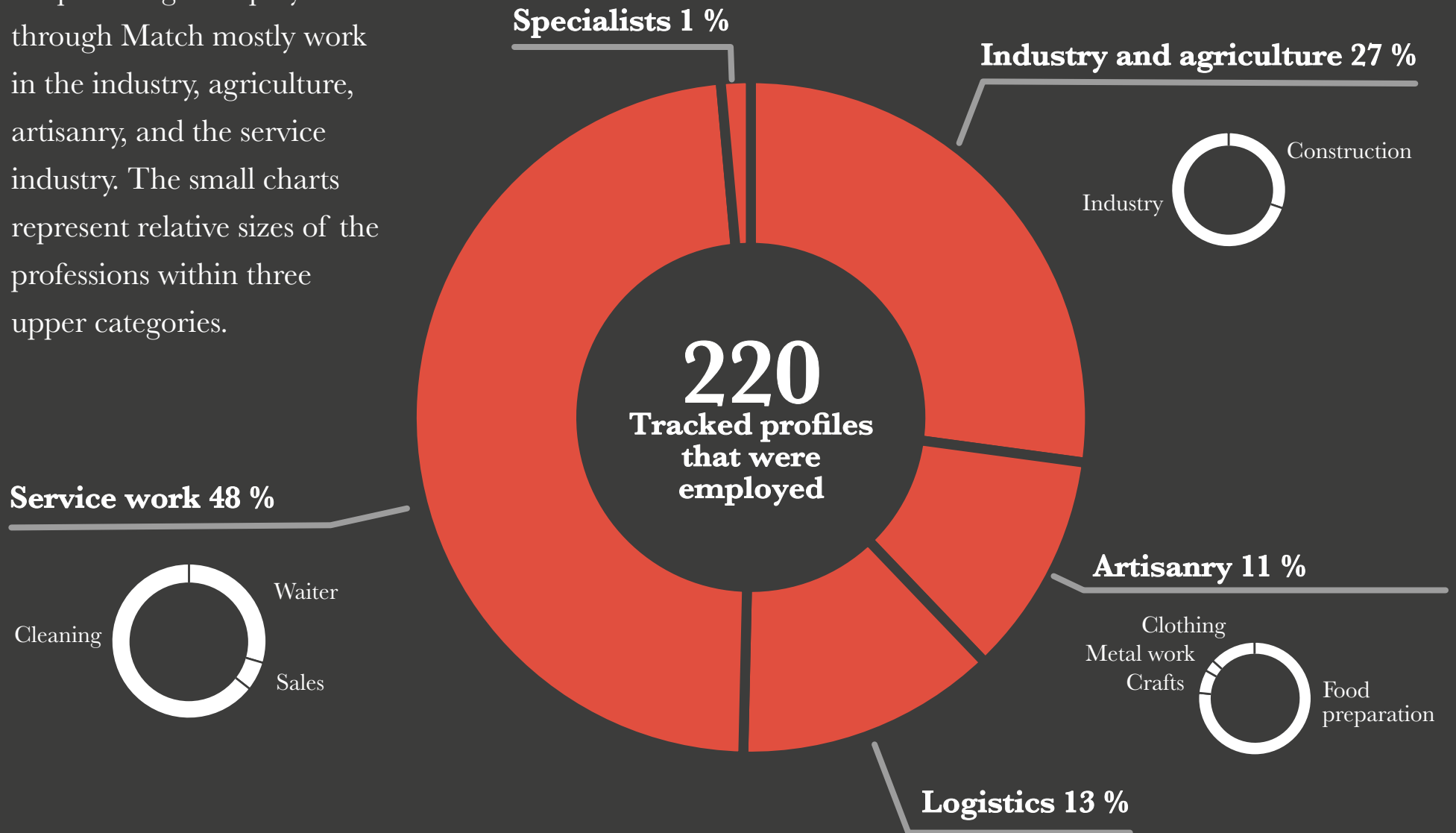
# 3 EMPLOYMENT RESULTS

## **3.1. People Employed by the Startup Refugees Network**

During Startup Refugees' four-year existence, over 800 employments have been facilitated through our network. The first operating years were for testing how the Startup Refugees employment model works. Back then, most of the jobs were temporary and the volumes smaller. Employment bureaucracy was also a lot more challenging than today: salaries were paid in cash, tax cards were more difficult to get, and working permits had to be picked up in person by each asylum seeker. In May 2019, there were around 350 permanent (versus temporary) jobs for which we have data. These jobs provide the information in this chapter. We've visualized the permanent jobs refugees have gotten through the Startup Refugees network, see next page, to compare with the profile figures in the previous chapter.

# EMPLOYMENT IN MATCH

People that got employed through Match mostly work in the industry, agriculture, artisanry, and the service industry. The small charts represent relative sizes of the professions within three upper categories.

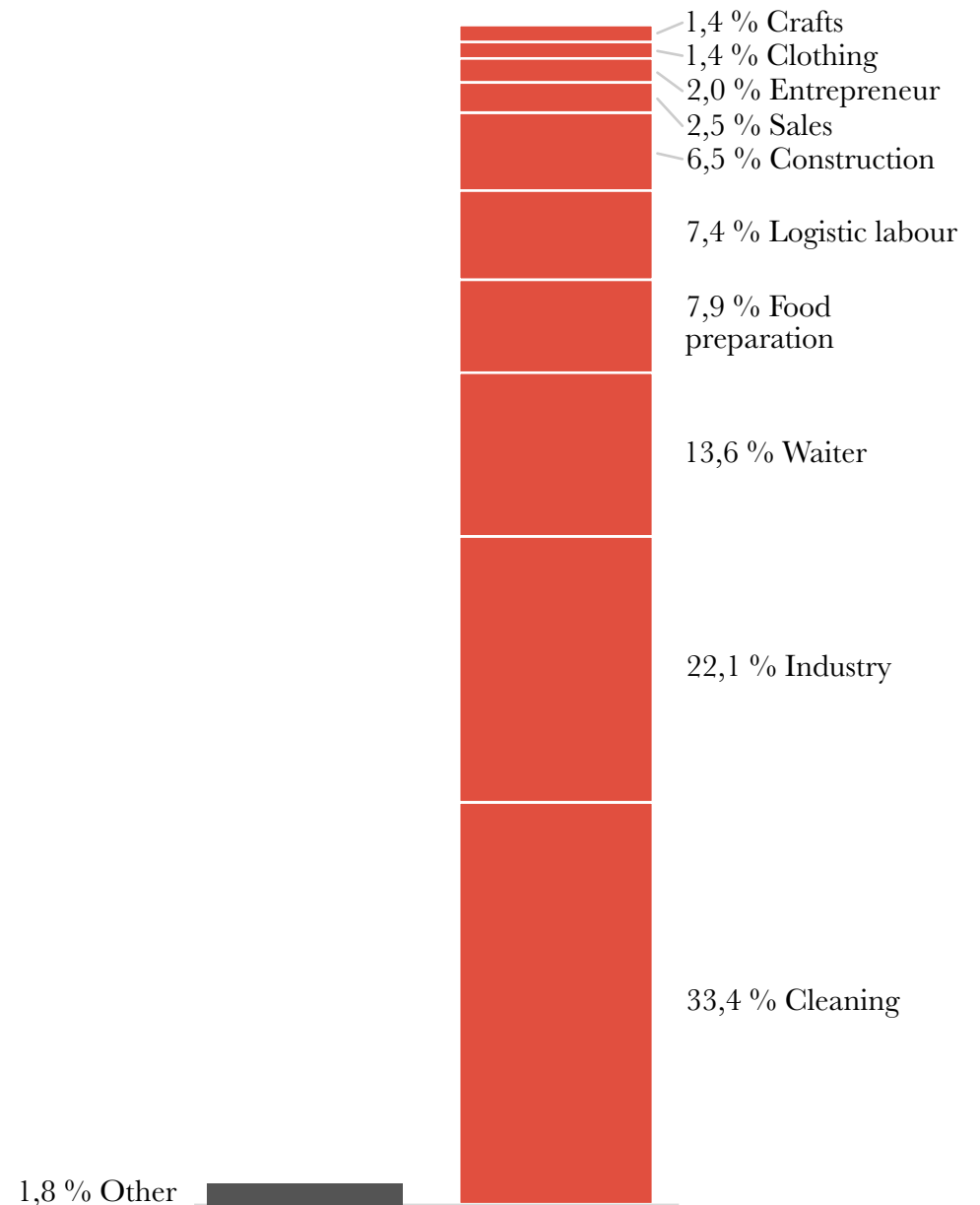


For easy comparison with the total population's professions, on the right are the top 10 most common professions in which people have found employment.

As you can see, this is different from the professions people had when they entered the country. A clear majority of the employed are industrial labourers, cleaners and waiters. However, 32% of job seekers have been able to find employment in their respective fields or areas of study. These fields include industry, food preparation, construction, cleaning and waitering, among others.

Based on the data, service and industry work are the fields where employment is easiest to find for a refugee. These professions are often different than in their country of origin, so many start working in a completely new field in Finland. This is somehow natural, because when people enter a new labour market, they might have to start with a job that

**Top 10 job categories of employment from Match**





requires fewer skills, than what they previously had. Some professional groups also need very specific skills or certificates in Finland, which take time to get. This mismatch might also be explained by the fact that companies with difficulties finding employees have actively sought our network's help. This, too, could have increased the number of jobs offered in these fields.

It's also important to note, that cleaning and similar jobs can provide an opportunity for an asylum seeker to apply for a work-based residence permit. Which is why, these jobs may seem more attractive in the eyes of the target group of this report. This echoes Joro (2019), who states that refugees are in a desperate enough situation to do any kind of work just to get by, despite having higher education or years of experience.

Even though the Startup Refugees' job-seeker pool has a notable amount of highly educated specialists, only a few engineers have been listed among the 220 profiles studied. Altogether, approximately 25 specialists have been hired directly through Startup Refugees between 2015 and 2019. This number has been growing, especially in spring and autumn of 2019, so these employment results are not part of this report.

Even though the number of employed specialists is not very high, asylum seekers with higher education have been actively participating in many educational activities at Startup Refugees (i.e. workshops, networking events, digital skills training, mentoring, etc.). Some of them have also been able to find employment on their own, after interacting with our network.

Unfortunately, the situation for asylum seekers with higher education is made worse by the fact that they don't have residence permits. Getting their degrees accepted in Finland, a requirement for many jobs, is problematic. The differences in the standards and the systems used in more specialized jobs might also cause challenges, because the skills that one learns in the Iraqi education system, for example, might not apply in the Nordic countries. Also, the risk of hiring an asylum seeker, who may soon leave the country, would be less of an issue when it comes to jobs requiring less specialization.

### **3.2. Factors Affecting Employment**

The main thing we wanted to cover in this report, were the factors affecting refugee employment. We were able to combine the data of around 220 employments with individual profiles in Match, thus being able to see possible connections between

backgrounds, skills, and employment. As mentioned before, information about these 220 employments have been collected in order to check work permits regularly, so the profiles do not include all employed people, like those who already have a residence permit.

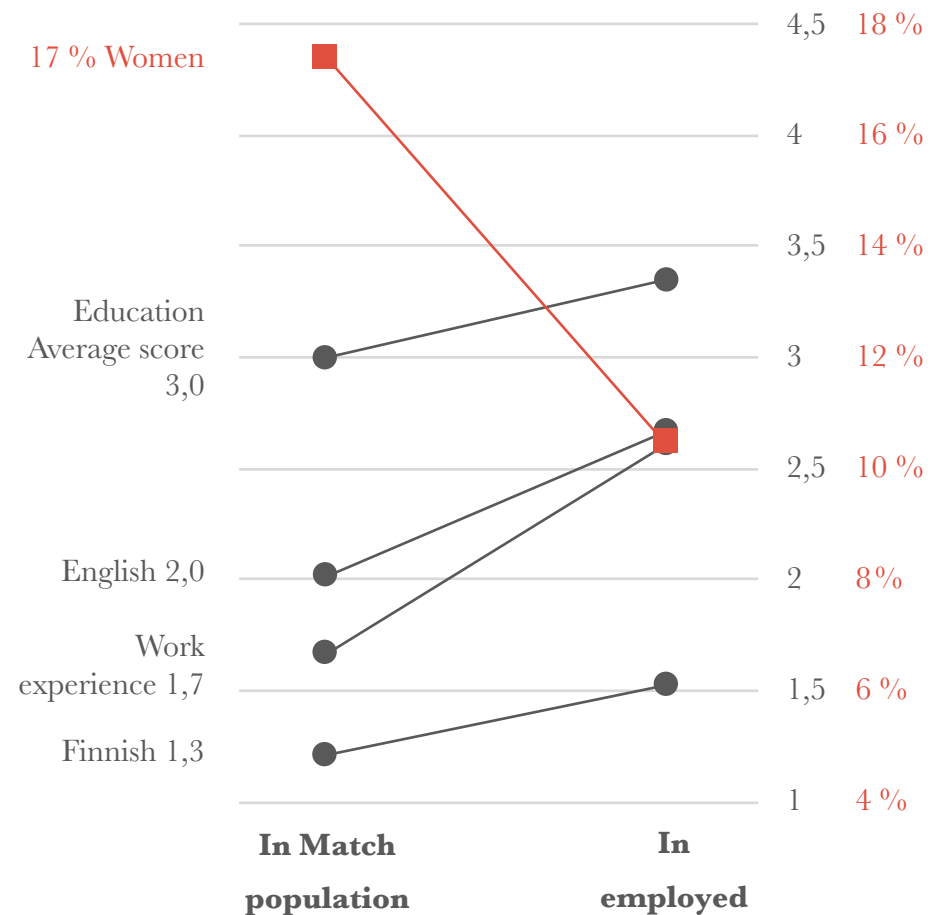
The factors we tested against employment were gender, nationality, having a business idea, willingness to become an entrepreneur, mother tongue, profession, birth year, English language level, Finnish language level, amount of work experience, and level of education.

The data was analyzed using logistic regression models (a way to mathematically model probabilities affected by categorical factors) to figure out which factors have a statistically significant connection with employment, how big a difference a single factor has, and whether or not there is multicollinearity between the factors themselves.

Some correlation between specific factors and employment can easily be seen by comparing the distribution in the job-seeking population with the distributions in the employed population, like in the graph on the right.

What we can see is that the average English and Finnish skills, education, and amount of work experience are all higher in the employed population (on the right), while the number of women drops from 17% to around 10%. After the logistic regression analysis, we can say with confidence that significant positive connections to employment exist between work experience, education, certain professions, and language skills in Finnish and English. This implies that all these factors contribute to better employment chances. However, the effect is most evident when it comes to English language skills and work experience.

**Correlation of skills and gender for employment in Match**



Left side: the average levels of English, Finnish, work experience, and education, and the share of women (with respective scales on the right) in the whole Match population. Right side: the same metrics, for those who've been employed through Startup Refugees.

Even though gender didn't have a significant, direct connection with employment, we can see that many more men were employed than women. We wondered whether there were indirect connections between gender and employment, and this seemed to be the case. We found that men tend to have more work experience and better English skills than women, thus giving them a significant advantage in employment. Also, men tend to have more convenient professions, needed in the Finnish labour market, with the clearest difference seen in technicians, where men form a very significant majority. Interestingly, 10% of the 220 people considered in this report did not have any previous experience but managed to find employment.

**People with business ideas** seemed to have lower chances of finding employment. Realizing one's idea into a business takes time. Asylum seekers are only able to start a business in Finland if they partner with European citizens to start the company. This slows

down the process of becoming self-employed.

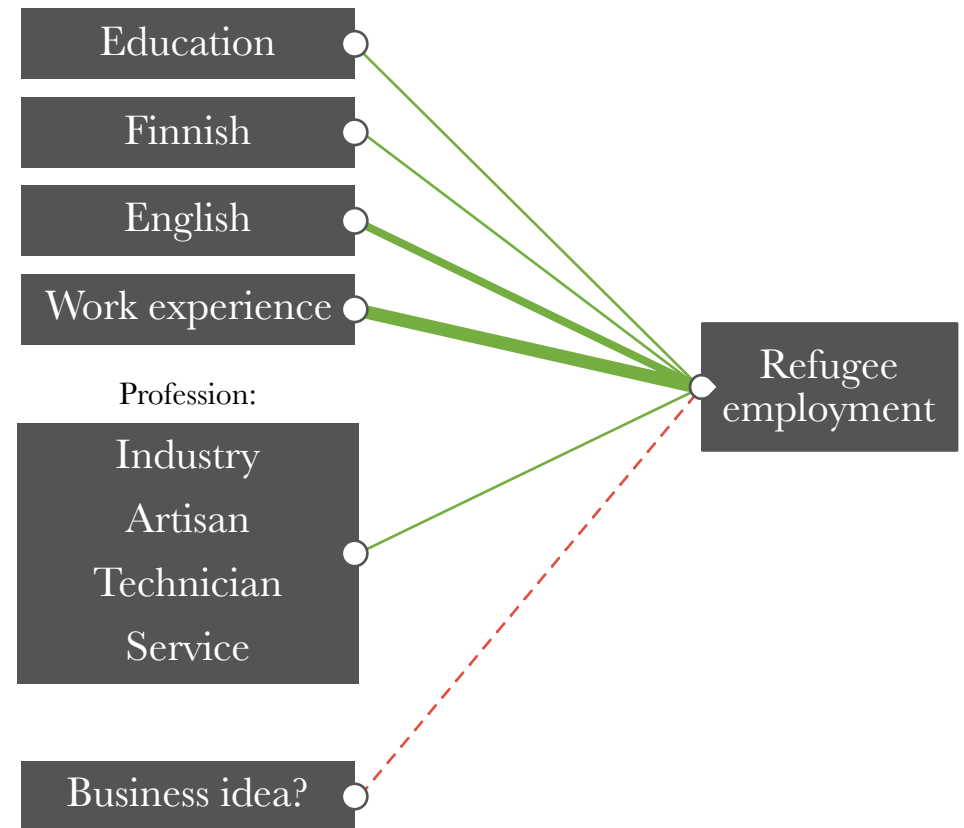
However, many of the 'Business Program' participants who tested their product through the 'Startup Refugees Cooperative,' have become self-employed through it.

For a more detailed look, we visualized the factors that have an impact on refugee employment in our model. We simplified the figure to include only the professions with the most relevant impact on employment.

On the right: green arrows indicate a positive connection, red arrows indicate a negative one. For example, education seems to be connected positively to refugee employment whereas having a business idea has a slight negative correlation with being employed. The weight of the arrow indicates the strength of the connection: thicker lines indicate a strong connection, thinner arrows a weaker one.

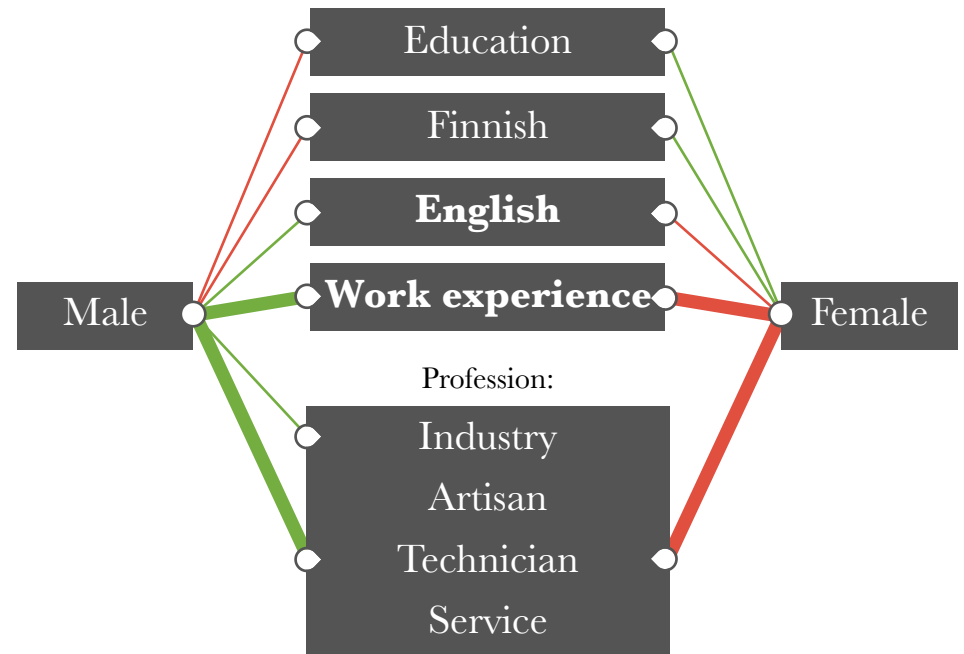
What we can see on the right is that work experience, education, English and Finnish skills, and certain professions are critical factors in employment, since they have a significant, direct connection to one's employment chances.

### Correlation of skills and employment in Match



Also, through indirect connections, we can see that one's gender also plays a role in employment. However, the indirect connections are speculative, since there are probably other direct connections, we weren't able to study, and the strong connection from work experience to employment might bias other observations from the data set. Studying other direct connections could reveal alternative reasons for indirect relationships. For example, being male could be connected to a higher interest in physical labour, which could help one's employment in construction or industrial labour. But because of the limits of our study, these kinds of connections remain unexplored. So all this to say, take these indirect connection results with a grain of salt.

### Correlation of gender and skills in Match



# 4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMEN- DATIONS

Conclusion time! According to the Startup Refugees data, English and Finnish language skills, previous education, work experience, and certain professions seem to be the critical background factors enabling the employment of refugees. Of course, we can't claim these are the only variables behind employment. Other factors also play a role<sup>6</sup>, but we weren't able to take these into account here. The factors presented in this report are the ones we found evidence for, based on the 220 profiles studied, and were able to show how they affect refugees' employment chances.

Based on our experience and results, we agree with Legrain's (2017) widely accepted view that we should get refugees employed sooner rather than later. This is also important since any previous work experience makes it

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<sup>6</sup> Like individuals' social skills, capacity to adapt, attitude, physical fitness, just to name a few.

easier for someone to find work and stay working. It also implies that Startup Refugees is focusing on the most critical factor, supporting the initial employment of refugees in a new country, since refugees face many more challenges in finding jobs compared to the general population in Finland.<sup>7</sup>

From the results, one can also see that people are highly motivated to work in the sectors in which the workforce is scarce in Finland. This is good news! In addition, refugees also bring a great variety of skills and educational backgrounds to the country, potentially benefiting society in many different ways. In order to fully activate the potential of the newcomers, employment and integration activities should be built around people's previous working experience, education and professional motivation, so that receiving countries don't lose sight of newcomers' full potential.

Every asylum seeker and refugee should have a chance to develop professional skills and enter the labour force as soon as they enter the country, especially because the majority of newcomers are young and very motivated to work.<sup>8</sup> The long waiting times for residence permits could be spent in much more meaningful, beneficial and sustainable ways. At the moment, there are still no public actions supporting asylum seekers' employment, skills development or entrepreneurial paths. In the future, this group should also be actively guided into working life from the beginning of their integration journey into Finland, not after having wasted many years of their lives.

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<sup>7</sup> According Sarvimäki, M (2017), the refugee population has considerably low employment rates in Finland. For example, 55 % of Iraq and 52 % of Somali men are still unemployed after living in a country for 5 years, and the number is even higher when it comes to women.

<sup>8</sup> Yijälä, Anu & Luoma, Tiina 2019





With 825 employments in four years, Startup Refugees has succeeded reasonably well in creating a fast employment and entrepreneurship-based integration model. There is clear evidence that refugees from certain professional fields<sup>9</sup> have been able to find employment based on their previous experience and education. However, we should also pay special attention to the people with higher education. There are many reasons finding a job for refugees with higher education is a slow process. Their expertise might not meet the official criteria of the employers, or they face problems getting their diplomas approved in Finland, among other factors. At Startup Refugees, we've been supporting this group by offering training and mentoring to help maintain their professional skills, as well as networking opportunities to build professional

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<sup>9</sup> Especially in: industry, artisan, technician and service work.

networks that'll support them in finding work.

However, employment paths tailored to this group should actively be developed in Finland.

In our experience, asylum seekers are willing to move to areas in Finland, where there are labour shortages. The high motivation to work, the professional background and the location flexibility might provide an answer to the labour shortage in Finland, and for demographic changes in upcoming years.

Our results also show that English language skills have a critical role in employment, even more so than Finnish<sup>10</sup>. This is why English training could be a lifesaver for refugees, since it seems to make getting a job significantly easier. If a refugee moves to another country or back to their home country, English is still a huge asset almost anywhere in the world. Employed refugees should have chances to develop their Finnish and English skills while working.

We also observed that men have a significant advantage finding employment, because of higher average work experience, English skills and more practical professions. This makes it even more important to focus on women's empowerment and offer women skill-development opportunities as well. It would also be important for arriving refugee families to know, that in Finland, women and men have equal opportunities in the labour market and share responsibilities when it comes to finances and home-life. Men also need to know this need this information as well in order to form a shared understanding within the families about the roles of both parents.

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<sup>10</sup> However, Finnish might be more important in other aspects of life. Also in the Northern Finland, Finnish is still more important and needed for almost any job.

We hope this report brought to light some new information about the employment of refugees in Finland. Even though the results are not ground-shaking, we have data to support what is important for refugees in terms of employment. Getting employed as a refugee in Finland is still clearly not easy, but with the help of a great network, it can be done. This is why we'd like to invite everyone who is willing to support refugee employment and entrepreneurship to join the Startup Refugees network. Together, we can continue to help newcomers find work, start companies, integrate faster to the society and become financially independent.

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**Startup refugees**

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