



Startup Refugees:

We walk the talk!

Study on the employment of Ukrainians
in Finland 2022-2023

by Mariia Prystupa & Startup Refugees

31 December 2023, Helsinki Finland

1	Introduction	3
1.1	Background	3
1.2	Ukrainians in Finland: before and after February 2022	4
1.3	Ukrainians & Startup Refugees	8
2	Ukrainians & Match Made in Startup Refugees ...	11
2.1	General structure of the population	11
2.2	Match Made in Startup Refugees Skills Profiles	14
3	Employment Results	20
3.1	Ukrainians employed through the Startup Refugees and in Finland in general	20
3.2	Factors affecting employment of Ukrainians.....	22
4	Conclusions and Recommendations	24
5	Further Readings and References	27

01

Introduction

1.1 Background

Forced migration is a much debated topic these days. The estimation of the UN Refugee Agency is that as of mid-2023 there are 110 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. The number has shown a drastic increase since 2011. People seek safety from wars, armed conflicts, state oppression, economic, political and social insecurity. The trend of the 21st century is the so-called climate migration caused by climate change and natural catastrophes.

The process of leaving one's home is a stressful one for both the forcibly displaced person or people as well as the eventual host countries. People moving to a country other than that of their origin or citizenship face a number of legal, cultural, and psychological challenges. The position of a forced migrant or refugee is a vulnerable one, that is further complicated by the lack of the opportunities, planning, preparations, and freedom of choice. For the host countries, the inflow of people in need of support poses a number of challenges as well. Decisions regarding the legal status of migrants and refugees are subject to the internal political debates and international relations situations, and require careful considerations of the national security, welfare, economic, and ethical aspects.

Management of inbound migration and integration of immigrants is a costly process that requires investments. We argue, however, that ***such investments are always justified***. Unsuccessful integration and inclusion of large groups of people results in social security system overload, increase in criminal and marginal activities, the sense of insecurity and social alienation in society in general, increase in anti-migrant and racist attitudes, and political tension – to name a few. Successful integration and inclusion of people coming to a new country, on the contrary, means that newcomers have a safe living space, possibilities to utilize their skills, and social networks within the country. *Such people tend to bring fresh, out-of-the-box angles into their environment's everyday life and economic activities.*

Some may regard the investment into the integration and inclusion of newcomers as highly risky as it does not provide returns or even pay off in case they later leave the country. It is worth considering that although direct returns in this case are minimal, there is an *indirect positive influence of great potential*. A person who has gone through a well managed integration process gains knowledge of local experiences, ways, and know-hows, accumulates skills and social connections. Taking these to a new destination, they contribute to the international prestige of the host country and international networks, attracting new qualifications, experience exchanges, international

discussions and other resources. Thus, **migrants should always be seen as a brain gain!**

In 2015, Finland experienced an unprecedented refugee crisis. The Finnish Immigration Service reported receiving almost 30,000 applications for international protection during the second half of the year – compared to the regular amount of 2,500 to 3,000 in other 6-months periods. Such a significant and rapid increase in the inbound migration was a shock to the Finnish Immigration Service, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (KELA), public healthcare system, housing market, educational institutions, and local communities.

During that period, Startup Refugees was launched as a social initiative with one operative principle – to look at the coming asylum seekers as a brain gain, and not a burden. Guided by the basic thesis that **work is the fastest way to become included in a new environment**, the organization took on the task to facilitate the employment of refugees and asylum seekers. In eight years, it has grown into a network of more than model for employment, and a wide network to support refugees.

With the onset of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Startup Refugees was able to act fast to support Ukrainian refugees in Finland. The organization has initiated, among other things, a new cooperation with

the Finnish Chamber of Commerce, by which their 21,000 member companies have received information about Startup Refugees' services, expanding the opportunities for mutually beneficial employment.

1.2 Ukrainians in Finland: before and after February 2022

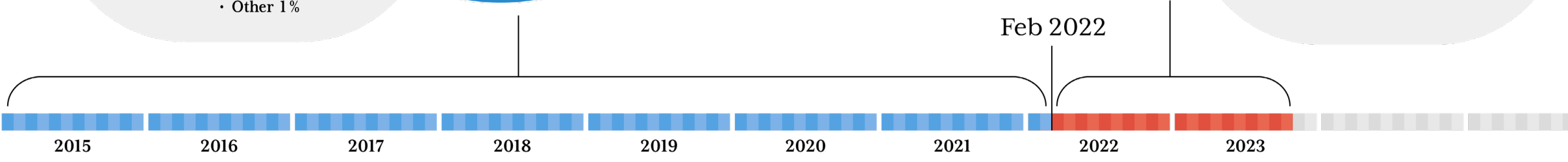
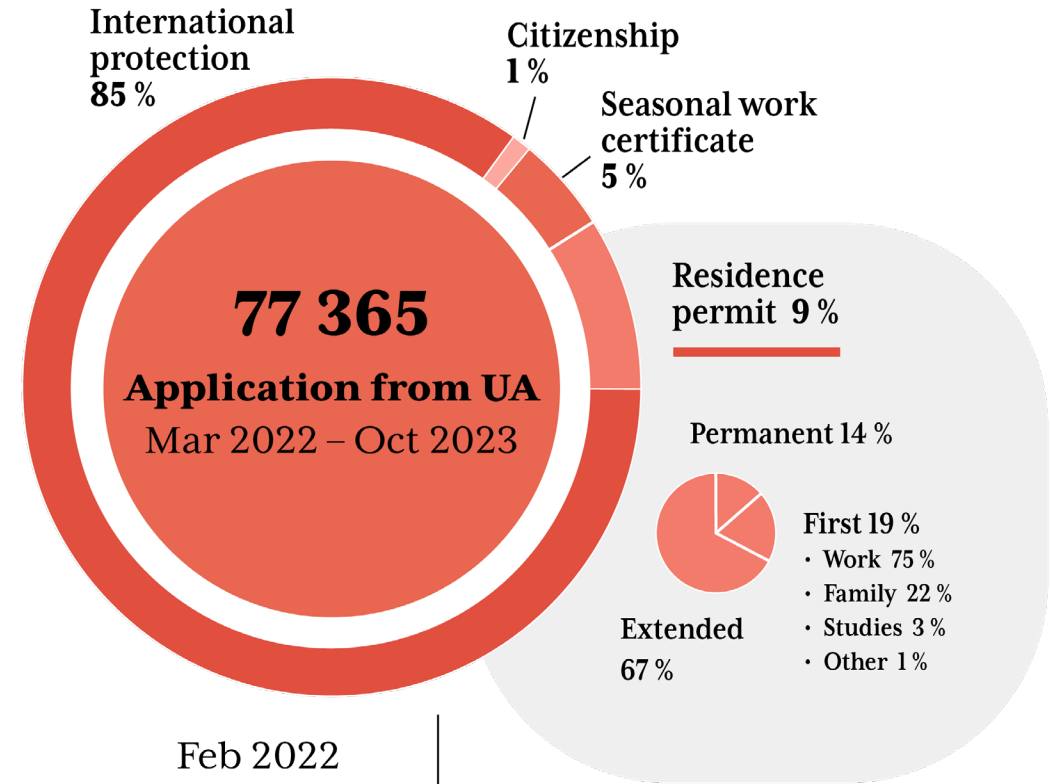
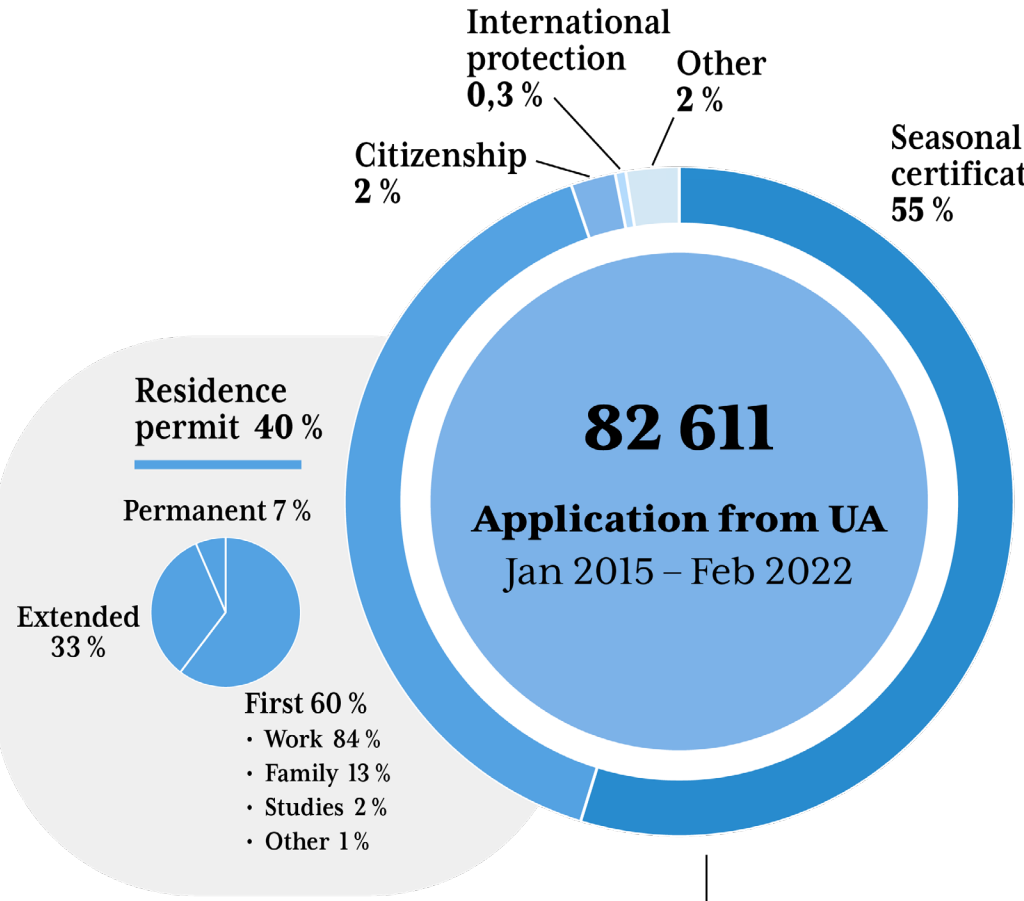
Ukrainian citizens have long been present in Finland's population. Since 2015, there has been a rapid increase in absolute numbers, as well as relative amounts, of the applications received by Finnish Immigration Service from Ukrainian citizens. Since 2019, they have consistently led the top nationalities of immigrants. *The clear majority of these applications concerned a seasonal work certificate or a work-based residence permit.* Cases of studying in Finland, joining a family, or claiming international protection were much more rare. In Ukraine, there has been an established network of recruitment agencies offering employment for seasonal work in the Nordics. Considering the difference in the costs of living and the wages between the Nordic countries and Ukraine, seasonal jobs were seen as an opportunity to significantly improve the financial situation of a family, as well as for many people the only realistic way to ever visit these countries.

On the 24th of February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine and launched a military attack on all over the country. This caused a huge amount of people fleeing the war, both within and outside the country. There were up to 15 million people who left Ukraine at some point after the onset of the full-scale invasion, around 6 million Ukrainian refugees recorded globally, more than 90% of which in Europe, and up to 6 million registered internally displaced people. These numbers are difficult to assess accurately, because some cases may have eluded registration, and because there is a steady flow of return migration represented by refugees visiting their families or choosing (or being forced) to return to Ukraine.

In response to the invasion, the EU activated the Temporary Protection Directive, which entered into force on 4 March 2022. It was intended as a swift reaction to the situation providing a favorable legal environment for accepting people fleeing the war in Ukraine. Starting from March 2022 and until November 2023, Finnish Immigration Service has received almost the same number of applications from Ukrainian citizens as during the previous seven years, over 80% of them being applications for temporary protection. In total, **more than 61,000 Ukrainians have received a positive decision on their temporary protection** application so far.

Ukrainians in Finland: Before And After February 2022

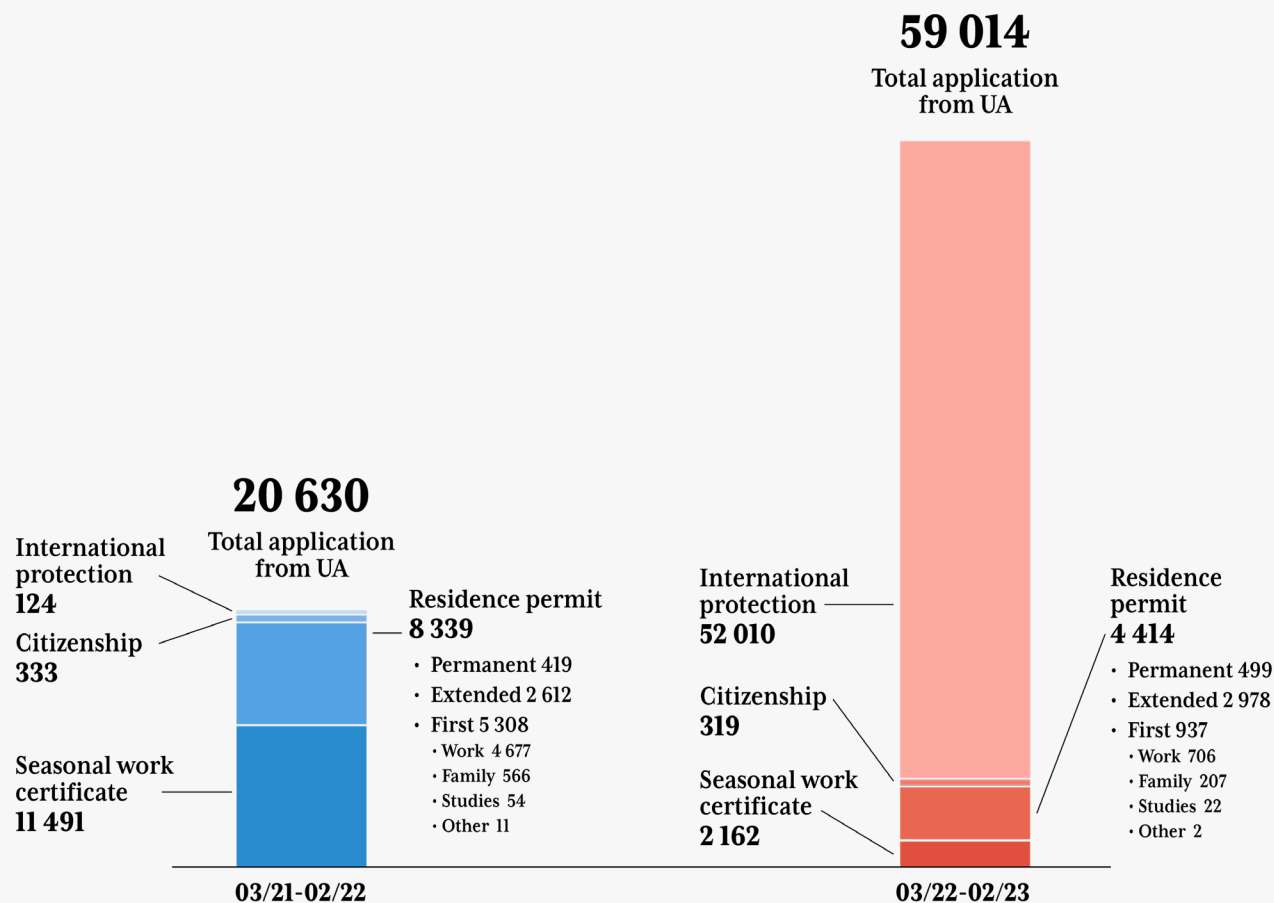
Mar 2022 – Oct 2023
 Total positive decisions on international protection
61 840
 temporary protection 61 837
 asylum 3



Comparison of the two one-year periods before and after the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive shows significant changes in Ukrainian migration to Finland. First of all, the number of applications per year became three times higher. This shows the unusual intensity of the refugee inflow and the critical character of the situation. The substantial prevalence of the applications for international protection is a new feature, and the *singularity of the legal status of a person under temporary protection can be seen as a sociopolitical phenomenon.*

At the same time, the substantial decrease in the number of applications for seasonal work certificates and first-time applications for all types of residence permit suggests that Ukrainians preferred temporary protection over other options. The likely reasons for such a decision are the easy application process, high rate of positive decisions, and the right to work from the day of submitting the application. A Ukrainian citizen can come to Finland with a national ID, submit the application for temporary protection, sign a contract right away, and start working the very next day. In situations like these, the pre-existing networks of contacts with employers and co-workers was a significant success factor. Temporary protection was also a convenient option for those who were not ready to make any long-term decisions, such as where to stay and how to make a living. Thus, despite being a distinctive group, people under temporary protection are also a diverse one.

Application from UA per year



The presence of Ukrainian refugees has caused a big resonance in Finnish society. Many Finnish citizens are shocked by the war and take the situation personally, since Finland also shares a state boundary with the Russian Federation, as well as familial, cultural, and business connections. Discussions were raised about unequal attitudes toward Ukrainians and other refugees. A lot of organizations and individuals are directly involved in activities aimed at the social, psychological, and material support of Ukrainian refugees. The economic aspect of the situation is of interest to many parties, especially considering the history of work-based migration of Ukrainians to Finland.

The information from TE Services and VATT Institute for Economic Research, as well as Startup Refugees' own data show a **high rate of workplace demand among Ukrainians**. The presence of a significant amount of labor migrants from Ukraine and work-related networks is one important prerequisite for such a situation. The aforementioned difference in the living costs is also an important factor. Even those Ukrainians who were able to retain their job and perform it remotely had to, in most cases, switch to a job in Finland to secure sufficient income. Moreover, military action and occupation of territories, destruction of premises, and economic turmoil have caused many people to lose their jobs. Time spent in Finland may have as well be regarded as an opportunity to improve

one's financial situation or make savings, especially if a person has family members or friends who were unable or unwilling to leave Ukraine, such as elderly parents, people with disabilities or of limited mobility, men of age between 18 and 65, etc.

Employment in Finland represents not only direct financial value, but also work experience in an international environment which improves an employee's professional skills and job market position. Finally, it is important to regard psychological incentives for getting a job, though they are difficult to determine in each individual case. The sense of control over one's life, self-sufficiency, bringing positive change to the immediate surroundings, having a meaning and a purpose in life are the feelings made scarce by the experience of being under attack and taking refuge from war, and those attainable through the engagement in work.



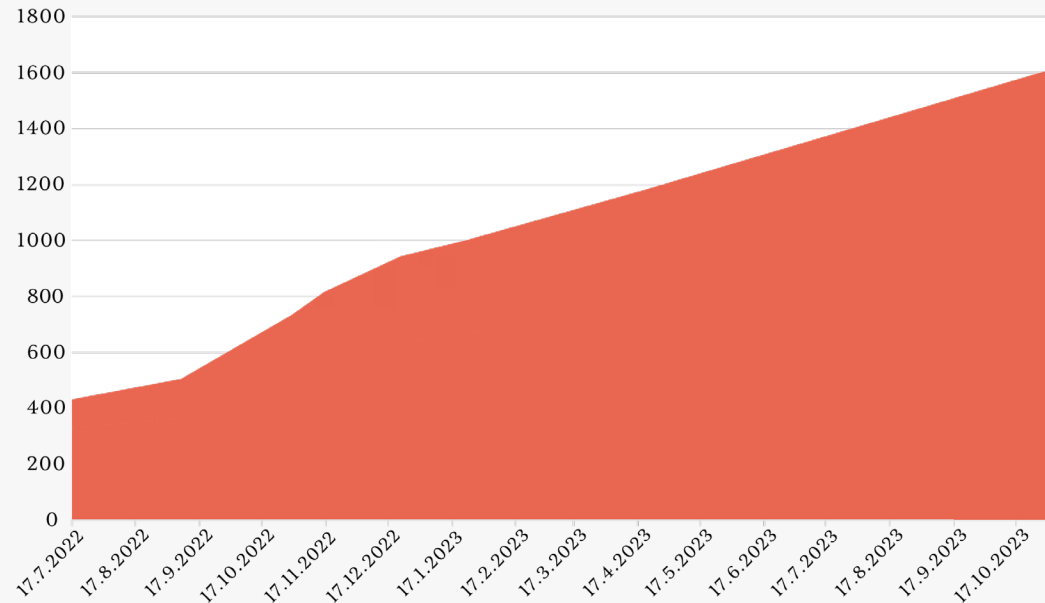
1.3 Ukrainians & Startup Refugees

Startup Refugees started collecting skills profiles of Ukrainians under temporary protection already in early March 2022. During the rest of the year, the increase in the number of professional profiles was consistently at approximately one hundred per month. As of mid-December 2023, there are around 1650 profiles in the Match system. The number changes every day, since new people join and others find permanent employment or leave the country, but it still keeps increasing.

The scope of Startup Refugees' services include work in a wide sense: the organization provides assistance in getting employment, education, professional training, entrepreneurship services, professional networking, and voluntary work. The basic thesis for all operations is that **work is the fastest way to settle into a new environment**; it brings routines and security to a person's everyday life, thus **improving their health and overall well-being**. Finnish and international research on the matter supports the statement. The individual importance of work as an activity is based on three main features:

1. Work involves practical interactions with the material and social environment, and applied tasks on manipulating immediate surroundings. It adds everyday routines and structures lifestyle, contributing to the adaptation to a new environment;
2. In the course of work a person communicates with other people, creating social connections, elaborating identities and solidarities, which facilitates positioning oneself in the society;
3. Completion of work tasks engages a person's abilities and skills, which helps build a positive self-image, a sense of meaning and perspective, and a sense of control over one's life. Despite common notion, having a job that is not entirely fulfilling has a better effect than having no occupation at all, first of all because usually the latter actually means having no paid job but being able to perform another activity of choice. Considering the wide range of occupations Startup Refugees provides assistance with, this definitely fits in the ultimate purpose of faster and better inclusion of newcomers.

Ukrainian profiles on Match





Such an approach corresponds well with the interests of migrants oriented at getting income, gaining professional experience, and settling into the Finnish labor market for potentially permanent residence. Although these categories don't describe the complete population of the Ukrainian refugees, they still apply to a significant share of it.

It is quite demonstrative that Startup Refugees has become a central actor in reaching the Ukrainian refugees, and a kind of key expert in their employment. The importance of the **collected data on the skills and professional backgrounds**, as well as the **experience with the successful employment of refugees**, is recognized by the hiring companies, local authorities, Finnish and international bodies, professional associations, non-governmental organizations, and think tanks. Many of these entities have contacted Startup Refugees with both academic and applied interest for information about Ukrainians' skills and employment, and how these could be supported most efficiently.

Startup Refugees is strongly focused on the practical support for employment which is why it as an organization does not have the resources to satisfy the demand for quite detailed information. This particular project launched together with Ami Foundation and guided by their vision of establishing **the best and most skilled labor market** in the Nordics for the Helsinki

Metropolitan Area enables the processing and distribution of such information to bring out specifically positive experiences on how the professional potential of refugees has been successfully harnessed for their benefit and for the benefit of the host society.

The project offers **unique and concrete information about the employment** of Ukrainian refugees that is based on real experiences. It is focused, first of all, at the ongoing situation with many refugees from Ukraine having already come and still coming to Finland, as the war continues endangering people's lives and well-being. The outcomes provide insights into what kind of people they are, what their skills, interests, and needs are, and what can be done to support their employment and accelerate their inclusion into Finnish society. Most of the solutions may as well be applied to refugees with other backgrounds, already present in Finland or potentially coming in the future, with the necessary adjustments.

We hope that the presented project will be of interest to:

- 1.** Finnish state bodies, such as Finnish Immigration Service (Maahanmuuttovirasto), Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela), and Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö), that deal with the cases of people coming to Finland as refugees;
- 2.** Foreign Embassies in Finland which represent home countries of the refugee and broader immigrant population in Finland, and Embassy of Ukraine in the Republic of Finland in particular;
- 3.** Municipal authorities, and first of all those of cities Helsinki, Espoo, and Vantaa, which host the largest share of the Ukrainian refugees, as well as of those municipalities that have local communities of Ukrainians or wish to attract them as potential workforce;

- 4.** Non-governmental organizations, humanitarian foundations, and activist groups in Finland whose activities concern both Ukrainian refugees as such and the matters of migration, human rights, and diversity in general;
- 5.** Labor unions and other workers' organization whose interests are directly involved with new people entering the labor market;
- 6.** Companies and entrepreneurs interested in hired workers and business partners;
- 7.** Researchers concerned with matters of the Finnish labor market and labor mobility.

We are ensured that all of these target entities can interact with the forced migrants more efficiently, and together turn the existent critical situation to a mutual benefit.



02

Ukrainians & Match Made in Startup Refugees

2.1 General structure of the population

To position the Ukrainian refugees within the Finnish labor market, it is important to understand who these people are, what their life situations are and the backstories behind them. Here we focus on the Ukrainian citizens who came to Finland starting from March 2022. There is a share of third country nationals who have applied for temporary protection in Finland based on the war in Ukraine – they are most often spouses or civil partners of the Ukrainian citizens having had a residence permit in Ukraine. They are excluded from this analysis for two main reasons. First, there are legal nuances in applying for and getting a decision on the temporary protection for the third country nationals, as there is a symbolic difference in perception of the refugees from Ukraine with another national background – thus, the challenges these people are facing are likely to differ from those most relevant to Ukrainian citizens. Second, concerning the data on employment, it is impossible to clearly distinguish this group of refugees from their compatriots coming to Finland. Although acknowledging the complications of their situation, the following analysis is limited to Ukrainian citizens under temporary protection in Finland only.

Unfortunately, the main feature to form the vision would be the forced character of their displacement. Even though, as has been shown earlier, many of these people might have planned to go to Finland for work, the actual decision was affected by a number of unexpected factors that have appeared suddenly, such as fear for their lives, loss of housing, loss of income, death or military service of household members, and compulsory evacuation. Framed in completely different circumstances, these plans can no longer be regarded as purely economic migration.

The concept of forced labor mobility includes cases of changing a job or undergoing substantial changes in the contents of a job (set of responsibilities, working hours and schedule, payments, etc.) due to circumstances that are out of control of the employee and disregarding their individual professional strategies. In such cases employees often experience downward mobility in terms of career and income, qualification mismatch, compromised professional identity, and disintegration of the networks of professional and personal ties. The situation created by the invasion certainly falls into this category, and the listed consequences can be noticed in the available data. Arguably, from February 2022 onwards more opportunities for planning for the new circumstances can be found, but considering the major economic effects of the war, the whole national economy will

be experiencing turbulent and hardly predictable changes at best, and an overall downfall at worst. In this situation, human resources in the labor market should be a pivotal matter for both national authorities and international partners interested in stabilizing the economy. Preservation and development of qualifications, steady supply of qualified workforce, technological and social innovations to the labor market, and support of the labor communities are of utmost importance for an economy where two thirds of households have paid employment as their primary source of income.

Thus Finland is going to experience a larger than usual inflow of people from Ukraine interested in joining the workforce for at least as long as the war continues. Both attending to the needs of this group in the home economy and developing cooperation with Ukrainian counterparts have potential for enriching the Finnish economy.

Another notable feature of the Ukrainian refugee population is the gender imbalance. There were around 1,5 times more women than men applying for temporary protection. Data from Startup Refugees' Match system show a very similar distribution by self-reported gender. In the age groups of 19 years and younger, however, the presence of two binary genders is approximately equal. This suggests that the

main reason for such an imbalance is the restrictions placed on the men of age between 18 and 65 in leaving the country. A highly controversial decision made by the Ukrainian government, which is of serious concern for human rights defenders internationally, obliges the said group to stay within the country for the potential implementation of their military duty. As of December 2023, it is still legally forbidden for a male Ukrainian citizen of the conscription age to cross the state border in the outbound direction, unless for a limited list of recognized occasions and with a permission from the State Migration Service. There is also a prevalence of women in the age groups of 65 years and older, which can be explained by the overall larger number of women of this age and the long-term difference in life duration expectancy by gender among Ukrainians.

To sum up, the Ukrainian refugee population mostly consists of women of working age and minors under 18 years old. This is different from the structure of the previous refugee population in Finland. The Finnish labor market is one of the top in the world with regard to gender equality at work, providing more equal employment and payment to persons of any gender, but habitual practices from a different context brought by such a large economically active group should be taken into account.

In Ukraine, people have equal rights to attain professional education and employment regardless of gender, except for the legally established list of especially strenuous and dangerous jobs where women cannot be employed. The list was reviewed and shortened a few years ago. It is difficult to state what were the true reasons behind the decision, but the technological advancement allowing better protection for people in dangerous jobs has definitely contributed to making this possible. Notably, professional areas such as border guard and military service are not on the list, and in fact there is a significant share of women in such professions in Ukraine. Still, there are gender-based prejudices regarding work among Ukrainians which may influence directly or subconsciously their inclinations for taking certain jobs or their workplace behavior.

A very illustrative and important situation is one with parental leave. Only in June 2021 changes to the relevant legislation were introduced to promote equal rights of parents for taking care of their child. Before that, the birth-giving mother posed as a central figure in the matter. It was possible for a father to go on parental leave, but his role was viewed as a secondary one, along with other relatives. As for same-sex couples, their parental rights are still not legally recognized. Thus, there is a long tradition of child care being seen as a necessary duty after child delivery for

the birth-giving woman. The current situation, in fact, supports this conception, since one of the most important incentive for leaving the country for the Ukrainian families was providing a safe environment for the children, and only a woman could go with them, taking up on the immediate everyday responsibility for them. Furthermore, the difference in the cost of living limits dramatically the possibilities of financial support that Ukrainian refugees can give to their families in Ukraine. Even a low-paid, part-time job in Finland is likely to be more helpful.

Minors interested in working for income are another important group of refugees. Data from VATT Institute for Economic Research show a relatively high rate of employed Ukrainians between 15 and 19 years old, compared to their overall number and to the employment of other job seekers in Finland of the same age. It is quite common for young people in Ukraine to look for a job during final classes in school or student years. In a refugee situation, they are able to ensure a valuable contribution to the household income. Some of them may have as well come without family, and need to provide for themselves. The earliest stage of their career determines special needs of this group, as well as potential higher returns of investing in them. The perceived temporariness of the presence of Ukrainians in Finland – both on the side of the Finnish public discussion and Ukrainians themselves – is

an important feature forming this group. The legal status of “temporary protection” suggests that, unlike asylum seekers, these people are going to go back to their home country once the danger is over. In spring 2022, this was the way most Ukrainian refugees would describe the situation. People were overwhelmed by the force driving them out of their homes and resisted it in every way in an effort to make things go back to normal.

With time passing, and with seeing no perspective of the much expected victory in the near future, Ukrainians face more practical issues of getting on with their lives. Some return to Ukraine without waiting for the end of the war. Common reasons for such a decision are reuniting with family, choosing a more usual way of life in a familiar place, difficulties settling into a foreign society, and practical complications, such as lack of housing, income, healthcare or administrative services. Those who chose and managed to stay in Finland up to December 2023, or to find reasons and means to return here on a periodical basis, are going to remain around. From this perspective, temporary protection becomes less of a convenient quick decision and more of an unstable, insecure position, prompting Ukrainians to look for the possibilities of getting another type of residence permit. Since it is unusual for a Ukrainian citizen to have familial connections in Finland, this becomes an



2.2 Match Made in Startup Refugees Skills Profiles

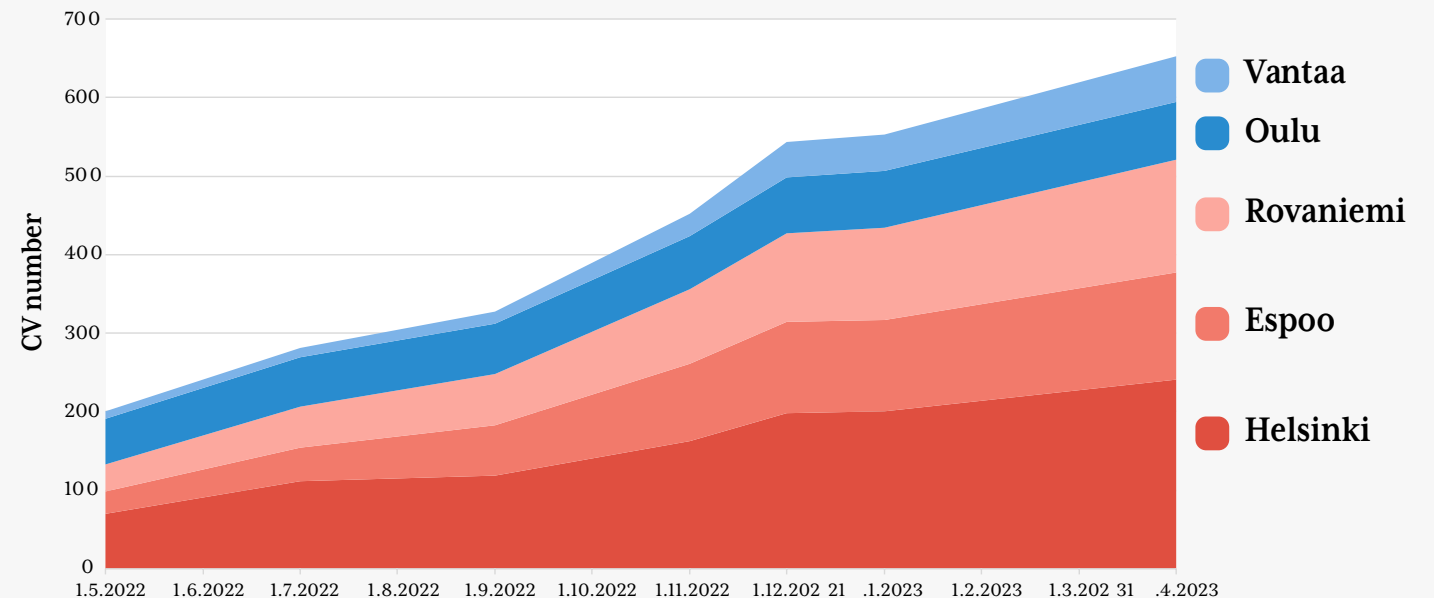
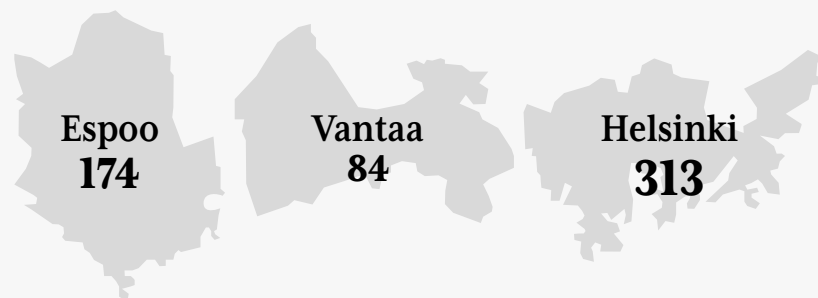
The Helsinki Metropolitan area has a specific place in the matter of the Ukrainian refugees. Most of these people have arrived in Finland from the south, passing through the Baltic countries, Poland, or Germany, submitted their temporary protection applications in Helsinki, and stayed at the reception centers in the Metropolitan area at least for a few days. In the Match system, Helsinki starts as a top location by number of active profiles in spring 2022, and remains in this place until now. There are in general 84 municipali-

ties mentioned in at least one active profile, one third of them mentioned in at least ten. The top locations by number of active profiles as of December 2023 are Helsinki (313), Espoo (174), Rovaniemi (143), Oulu (85), and Vantaa (84). Arguably, such distribution is affected by the locations of Startup Refugees' offices in Helsinki, Oulu, and Rovaniemi. However, this is not the only and likely not the main factor, as the Match services can be accessed online from any location, including outside Finland, the job opportunities from partner companies are located in various municipalities, and the choice for the offices' locations as such had practical reasons behind it. From the experience of the community coordinators at Startup Ref-

ugees, the Metropolitan area is much more accessible, both in terms of work and personal life, for people without good knowledge of the Finnish language than other areas in Finland, and Rovaniemi serves largely as a center for seasonal work in the field of hospitality which has high workforce demand. Moreover, the Metropolitan area has established transport connections with other countries which is important for those Ukrainians who want to be able to visit or invite family members and friends staying in other European countries or in Ukraine. Thus, the area appears as a major point of pull-in force, which determines the outstanding role of the local forces in the integration and inclusion of Ukrainians.

Ukrainian professional seekers & location

Among them, located in the Metropolitan area (Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa)



The knowledge of languages among Ukrainian refugees is impressive but hardly suitable for the Finnish labor market. In 78% of profiles people claim both Ukrainian and Russian as either “very good” or “native language”, with two fifths of them having both as native. Noticeably, around 16% don’t mention any native language, as well as no level of either Ukrainian or Russian. Since this information is only added upon jobseeker’s initiative, these are likely the cases when people didn’t think of such a skill as a merit worth mentioning in a job application, or deemed it not relevant. Considering also possible political reasons behind the choice of language, the actual rates of Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism is likely higher. Additionally, 16 profiles claim a third language as native, in most cases combined with good knowledge of Ukrainian and Russian, including 7 profiles that have three languages as native.

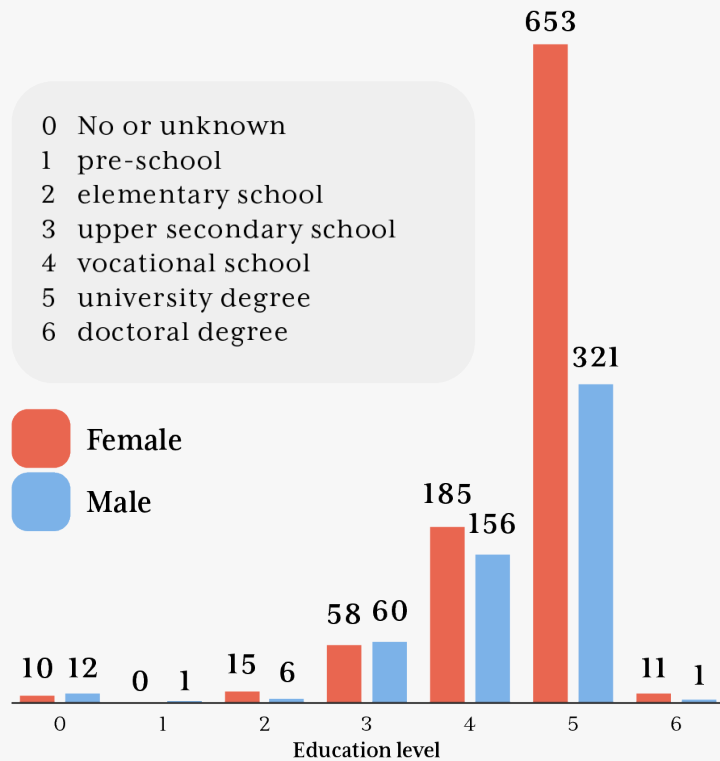
Aside from the two most common languages, there are twenty-eight languages that Ukrainians report knowledge of, including Finnish, Swedish, and English, that are specifically asked from the applicants. More than half of the profiles mention at least “mediocre” level of at least one of the languages, meaning that the majority of Ukrainians are able to communicate in at least three languages. The most commonly known languages are English, German, and Polish. There are no jobseekers considering Finnish as their

native language, and only 17 reporting good or very good level. Over 72% admit to no knowledge of the Finnish language. The average level of this skill in the Match system is 0,36, which is from none to basic, and closer to the former.

The knowledge of English is more evenly distributed, with “basic” level being moderately prevalent, likely due to the fact that this assessment is required. The average skill level for English is 1,79, which is almost “mediocre” in terms of the scale – quite enough for everyday interactions in familiar situations. The level of English tends to be higher than that of Finnish, although there is a small percentage of profiles with a higher level of Finnish than English, which in most cases means basic Finnish and no English language skills at all. The problem with the self-assessment of skills is of course that they may be either exaggerated or underestimated. However, the provided distribution is supported by other data, and shows that for many job seekers language is a significant barrier mostly due to the mismatch of one’s skills and the labor market requirements.



Education level



The situation with professional education is similar. Ukrainian refugees show a high overall level of education: two thirds have a university degree, and two thirds of the rest have vocational education. However, finding a job in Finland that corresponds with a person's education is complicated by this education degree being from a very different system. As was discussed earlier, it has been unusual for a Ukrainian citizen to come to Finland for studies, so there are none to few cases of people having had at least part of their education done in Finland. The differences in the systems of education in Finland and in Ukraine cause, first of all, difficulties for a person to adequately assess their actual educational level in Finnish terms, especially if they have had a non-typical educational path, and makes it harder for a Finnish employer to clearly estimate qualification of a potential employee, as well as to feel sure about them being the suitable candidate.

Along with the vulnerable economic position, the lack of confidence in relying on one's own education leads to jobseekers intentionally lowering their expectations as to the potential job, and expressing readiness to accept a job they are overqualified for. The majority of Match profiles have a very wide-range description of what kind of job the person is looking for. It usually includes one's educational specialization, field of their previous work experience (especially if these

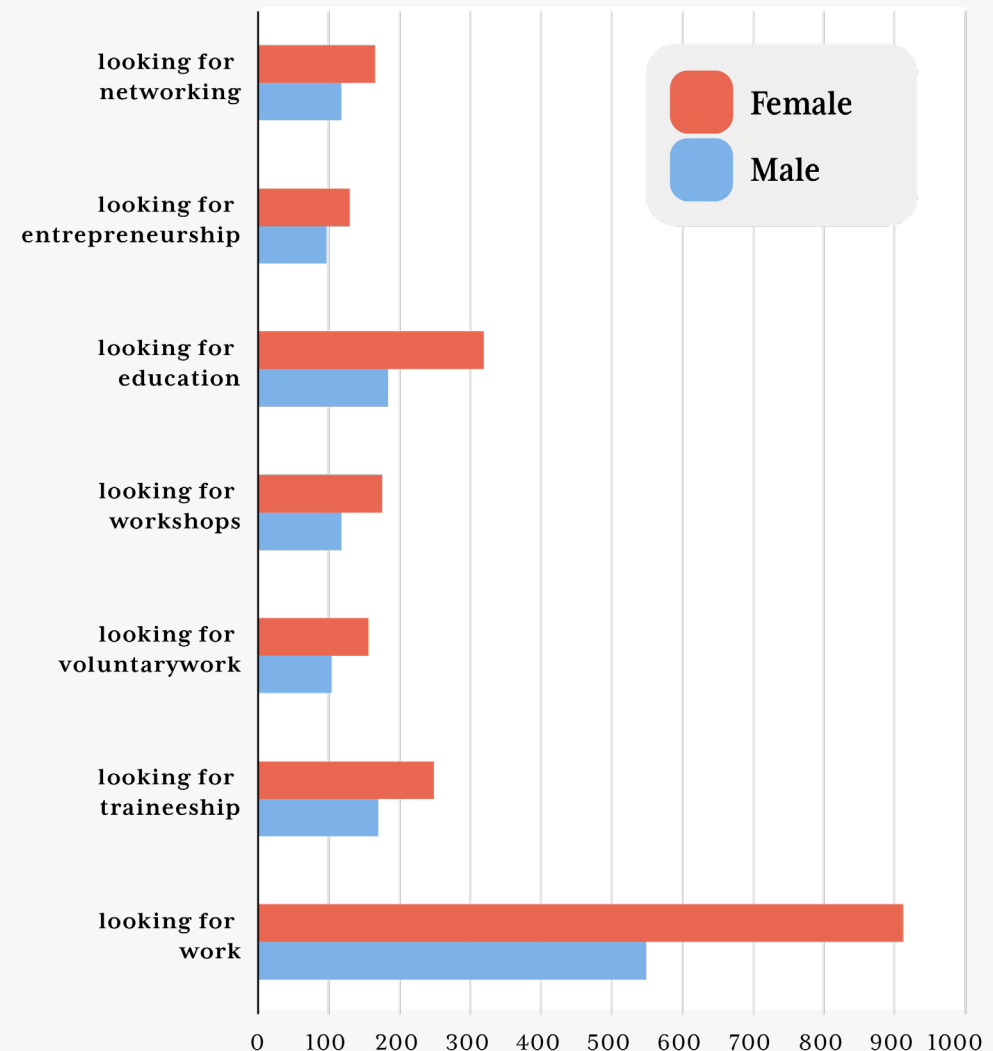
two are different), and a number of jobs that do not require high qualifications or may be supported with experience obtained outside educational institutions and the traditional professional life.

On average, there are 3,5 target professional categories per profile, and this number differs for male (4,0) and female (3,1) applicants, which should be taken into account as a gender-based difference in market behavior. Top target categories also differ by gender. For women they are Cleaning (63%), Restaurant (53%), and Manufacturing&Production (33%); and for men Construction (59%), Manufacturing&Production (51%), and Cleaning (45%). Such distribution is likely due to a combination of good supply of such jobs, relatively low threshold, and popularity of these professional fields in Ukraine for a side-work, for example for students, meaning that a person is quite likely to have at least some experience in them, even with an educational degree from a completely different field.

In the free-text section describing the job the person is looking for, many expressly state readiness to take on any job they are qualified for or to learn new skills. This is also reflected in the kinds of services a person is interested to receive from Startup Refugees: the absolute majority is interested in getting employment, but internship or training that would help

settling into the labor market sooner are of quite high demand as well. The data from the free-text section supports the distribution of the target professional categories. There is high presence of terms related to *cleaning* (like cleaner, housekeeper, housemaid, dishwasher), *restaurant and cafe work* (cook, waiter/waitress, hosting, barista, bartender, baker, confectioner), *production industry* (engineer, electrician, mechanic, machine operator, tailor, shoemaker, packer, factory worker, warehouse worker), and *construction* (builder, carpenter, construction worker, industrial alpinist, plasterer, interior works). Other commonly present fields are also *agriculture* (greenhouse, farming, gardening, fishing, forestry), *sales and services* (accountancy, marketing, shop assistant, merchandise, customer support, courier, taxi driver), *beauty services* (cosmetology, hairdresser, makeup artist), *education and children care* (school teacher, kindergarten assistant, nanny, sport trainer), *medicine* (doctor, including by specializations, nurse, paramedic, pharmacist, veterinary doctor), *IT* (system engineer, software developer, information security, QA), and *social work* (support for children with special needs, for elderly people, psychological support). It is worth mentioning that some people include Finnish descriptions of their professional fields, even in the cases when they do not know Finnish very well. This is an indirect indicator that they are willing to put effort into adjusting their practices to fit into the Finnish labor market.

Seeking opportunities based on gender



Skills that Ukrainians report having follow the general trends as well. The top skill categories mentioned in profiles are *Hospitality & Customer Service*; *Construction, Mechanics & Agriculture*; *IT & Technology*; and *Social Work & Healthcare*. There are a few differences between the profiles from the Metropolitan area and other parts of Finland. In the Metropolitan area, skills in *IT & Technology* are reported more often (56% vs 45%), and less often are reported skills in *Construction, Mechanics & Agriculture* (49% vs 64%) and *Social Work & Healthcare* (39% vs 46%). This seems to have a correlation with the balance of the said fields of the Finnish labor market by area, though the character of this connection is not clear.

There are differences in the structure of skills by gender as well. While *Hospitality & Customer Service* is the absolute top skill category for all jobseekers, female

applicants report more often skills from *Social Work & Healthcare* (56% vs 24%) and *Handicrafts* (33% vs 22%), and male applicants – skills in *Construction, Mechanics & Agriculture* (82% vs 44%) and *Logistics* (56% vs 29%).

The lowest rate is shown in the skills from the *Leadership, Entrepreneurship & Business* category: around 23% of applicants report having them, with no significant differences by gender or location. Since this category has a number of soft skills which are important for employees in any field of employment, the trainings offered by Startup Refugees on working life in Finland, preparation of a CV, self-presentation during a job interview, and entrepreneurship in Finland are a good example of measures taken to improve the professional chances of newcomers. In the feedback system, people employed through Startup Refugees often mention that these training sessions were useful and beneficial in their journey to employment.

The distribution of individual skills under these categories lists *Cleaning, Kitchen work, and Washing dishes* as absolute top skills by number of profiles, as well as the level reported. Other top skills include also *work with office programs* (email, text editor, tables, presentations), *Storage work, Farm work, Construction work, and Sales*. The data on individual skills are difficult to analyze, as each applicant decides freely on what to mention or not mention in their profile, and they may have very different notions of the meaning of each skill and each skill level. The system includes very distinct skills which require special training, such as *Driving, Electrical work, and Medicine*, as well as everyday skills present in both professional and personal life, like *Laundry work, Washing dishes, and Social media*, and provides disambiguation only in few cases, namely *Child care within family/Professional child care* and *Professional cooking*. However, they are important as a

Top professions



message that jobseekers choose to communicate to a potential employer.

Some people decide to pick only one skill closely related to their target position with a high level of it, for example *Office work*, *Data analysis*, or *Web development*. This is a clear strategy to represent oneself as a good, confident professional. Others seem to go diligently through the whole list of skills and pick everything that applies. The employers don't have access to the full profiles of the candidates, but this may serve as an additional marker of a jobseeker's interests and needs for those working toward their employment at Startup Refugees.

On average, there are five confident skills (meaning skills marked as "good" or "very good") per profile, and each of 75 skills on the list was picked for confidence in at least seven profiles. Obviously, the structure of skills from the Match profiles of the Ukrainian refugees provides evidence that they are a diverse population largely interested in employment, including self-employment, representing a wide range of professional backgrounds, experiences, and skills, and taking an active position in their working life.



03

Employment Results

3.1 Ukrainians employed through the Startup Refugees and in Finland in general

Since March 2022 Startup Refugees has facilitated the signing of 191 employment contracts by people from Ukraine.

During 2023, Ukrainians were the majority of the active and new clients of the organization, and almost half of all people who found employment through it. There are records of several people in the organization's database who have found employment through other means, which is an important evidence that Startup Refugees is a valuable but not exclusive source of employment for this group. The organization itself has employed Ukrainians as community coordinators and interns, considering the increased needs for communication with and about the Ukrainian refugees, thus providing an example of a good employer company supporting diverse and fair employment. In addition several Ukrainians have attended the entrepreneurship course offered by Startup Refugees and have ended up as entrepreneurs.

The majority of the contracts of all types were fixed-term for three to six months. Contracts of this duration receive consistent feedback about being accurately described and clearly communicated, likely because at the time of hiring an employee for this period an employer has a clear vision of the concrete tasks they are needed for. Such contracts seem to work well as a possibility for both employer and employee to get to know each other through actual work, and to make an informed decision whether to continue the employment relationship. There are and were cases where contracts were extended after six months, as well as those where they were not. The feedback on the fixed-term contracts also shows that they are important for people who can get them as their first job in Finland, as this helps to get professional experience from Finland and to develop an understanding of Finnish working culture.

The second common case were indefinite contracts, though around half of them were 0-hour which received very uneven feedback. Quite often people who got an offer for a 0-hour indefinite contract did not actually get anything to do because the employer still was not offering them any working hours after 30 to 50 days from the employment date. There is good feedback on 0-hour contracts as well, which seems to depend largely on the responsible attitude from the employer's side.



0-hour contracts represent a significant share of all contracts regardless of duration as well. Although full-time employment is clearly prevalent, this new and previously unfamiliar to Ukrainians type of employment relationships gains popularity, for better or otherwise. It is tricky, since it is never clear how much work it actually means, and thus it lacks the stability and clarity of other types of employment contracts. For a person in a vulnerable position like a refugee it may serve as quite a negative factor. Part-time contracts represent only a minor share, but according to feedback, they fit perfectly for people in some situations, for example those who work and study at the same time, engage in intensive Finnish language courses, or cannot work full-time due to health issues or family obligations.

Fields of employment as represented in the contracts signed correspond perfectly with the structure of skills and target jobs discussed earlier. The positions in the contracts are related to *Cleaning, Restaurant work, Manufacturing and Production, Construction, and Services*. There were also ten contracts for specialist positions. The consistency of the data from Startup Refugees, as well as comparison with other data on employment of Ukrainians, suggest that this is the actual general structure of their position in the Finnish labor market at the end of the year. Most of the people who do find employment, find it in semi-qualified jobs and in a limited number of fields.


People with rare and high qualifications face more complications in finding suitable employment, proving their qualifications to the employer or the authorities, adapting to the differences in their field between Ukraine and Finland.

💡💡 *Specialist refugee professionals need to rely more on personal networks, which they often do not have, or on the support of local colleagues.*

There is a very illustrative piece of feedback from a person who received permanent full-time employment that corresponds with their profession and experience from Ukraine. This person says that the employer and the colleagues are very friendly and supportive, and the work often concerns other Ukrainians, making this interaction easier for both the employees and the clients. This person is happy with their place of work, and is, by all means, an honest representative of Finland's working population.

3.2 Factors affecting employment of Ukrainians

Extended period of unemployment decreases a person's chances to become employed again, as they lose sharpness of skills without practice, fall out of context of their professional field, and feel it more difficult to follow what is happening in their specific fields. For a person who has had to leave home and to look at arranging their life in another country, continuous isolation from working life can have even more of a destructive influence. There has long been evidence that the three to six months period before an asylum seeker can get a legal permission to work undermines their inclusion into the host society. The temporary protection status was designed so that a person could start working right away. This worked as a facilitation factor, allowing even to make some arrangements prior to coming to the target country.

 *Professions widely represented in the structure of skills of Ukrainian refugees are present among the fields with high workforce demand in Finland according to the state statistics.*

For example, categories like *Manufacturing and Accommodation and Food Service activities* demonstrate both a significant number of open workplaces and a slow rate of filling them. There are also a larger number of vacancies in the categories *Human Health and Social Work activities, Wholesale and Retail Trade, and Transportation and Storage*, including land transport, warehousing, postal and courier activities. The fields of work like *Personal service activities, Construction of buildings, and Advertising and Market Research* have a smaller number of open workplaces but longer time needed to fill them. Ukrainians who have relevant skills can become an important resource in invigorating these fields.

High workforce demand and labor market mismatch are ambiguous factors in this situation, however. Employment of Ukrainians in the fields with high labor market mismatch, such as hospitality and construction, can conceal the issues that prevent the native population from taking these jobs. High workforce demand in the low threshold fields like retail trade and warehousing can engage employees with higher qualifications in other fields, locking them out of more suitable careers. Both cases are an immediate solution with long-term implications, and should have the attention of the relevant authorities. With regards to the labor market, it is important to consider the increased needs for certain services

due to the presence of Ukrainians. As seen from the experience of Startup Refugees and partner companies, it is prudent and profitable to engage Ukrainian employees in covering the needs of their compatriots. This allows avoiding the language barrier, stabilizing additional load, and promoting inclusion of both the employees and the clients. Such a strategy should be considered, first of all, for healthcare and education, well represented in the skills but not the employment fields of Ukrainians.

That being said, needs and interests outside the labor market, such as housing options, availability of healthcare, social, and public administration services, can significantly affect working strategies among others. There are known cases of Ukrainians leaving Finland over the impossibility to get adequate medical treatment, the pressure on children having to attend two schools, or the potential complications with getting necessary documents after childbirth. Dissatisfaction of specialists over the legal nuances, administrative and economic factors preventing them from getting a relevant career in their specific field can also force them to move elsewhere.

Not exclusive to Ukrainians but still a highly relevant factor is the mental situation of a refugee. Having experienced traumatic events and facing unusual circumstances, people feel insecure and disoriented,

they need to adapt to striking differences in everyday routines, traditions, and habitual rules of conduct. Coping with this takes a lot of effort, and many people experience homesickness, loneliness, and a sense of social exclusion. These feelings and processes undermine strategic planning and productivity, and can thus be considered as obstacles to rapid employment.

📌 *Actual social exclusion and discrimination, though, is less of a problem for Ukrainians than refugees with other backgrounds.*

Ukrainian employees get well accepted even in working environments with low international diversity. On the one hand, this is one obstacle less to face. On the other hand, it still leaves them behind the native population.

Employing a refugee means putting more effort into onboarding, and taking responsibility for a person in a vulnerable economic situation and emotional condition. Not every company is willing to put in the effort. Using the case of Ukrainian refugees, we advocate that despite the increased investments it is a good strategy from both social and economic perspectives. So far, people reach employment through a bottleneck of their marginal position in the labor

market, and find their places in mainstream fields where most companies have either a critical need for employees or previous experience with employing refugees.

The potential of this population, however, reaches more than that. Master of Applied Linguistics, Choirmaster, Drama Theater and Cinema Actor, Ukrainian language tutor for foreigners, Labor protection expert, Lifeguard at sea, Railway worker, Specialist in city administration. These various specialists are present in the Match sample, and could have their place in the Finnish economy, and so could others who will join the database in the future.

Specialities of Ukrainian jobseekers within Match:

- Master of Applied Linguistics
- Choirmaster
- Drama Theater and Cinema Actor
- Ukrainian Language Tutor
- Labor Protection Expert
- Lifeguard
- Railway Worker
- Specialist in the City Administration



04

Conclusions and Recommendations

The war in Ukraine has shown that regulations can be adjusted to accommodate a large group of people in search of safety. This experience shows that decisions tailored for a specific situation provide good returns, and can be used to create more flexible labor and social policies to accelerate inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants into the Finnish labor market and society.

Employment of refugees is important both for them and the host society. Refugees look for ways to regain control over their life, become self-reliant, practice their skills, form social connections, improve self-esteem and overall well-being. This is best achieved through employment. The host society should be interested in the inclusion of newcomers so as to shorten the period when they have to rely completely or largely on the support of the state or volunteer organizations, and to avoid negative effects often associated with migration. Employment promotes this as well.

Companies employing people of foreign background need to put more effort into including them in the business, over time this leads to a tangible advantage, because diverse teams tend to be more productive and efficient.

Moreover, by developing an international community in the workplace companies increase their receptivity and facilitate further employment of people of various backgrounds.

Concerns regarding the loss of investments with refugees leaving the country are hardly verified in the case of Ukrainians. Research shows that many of them plan to stay in Finland even after the war ends. Moreover, a well settled employee is more likely to prefer staying in their established workplace, or to bring extended international connections in the case of leaving. Thus, employing Ukrainians and other refugees brings positive effects to the Finnish economy and society.

In order to promote employment of refugees and migrants in Finland, recommendations are as follows:

1. Human resources should be in the focus of labor market development. Ukrainians and other refugees are not getting employed in the professions that match their education, skills, and motivations. Just by introducing more flexible employment policies it is possible to enact the diverse potential already present in Finland. For example, it would be beneficial to adjust the conditions of temporary protection to encourage people entering the labor market, even if they only have short-time contracts.

2. The employment of refugees should be a field of increased attention of labor protection bodies and market analysis specialists, and self-reflection of hiring companies. Marginal position within the Finnish labor market and oftentimes insufficient knowledge of the Finnish labor legislation increase their risk to fall victims of abuse or miscalculations or to conduct unintended violations. Their economic vulnerability should not be used to plug holes of structural problems in the Finnish labor market, as it hurts not only the refugees getting employed in jobs where their qualifications and skills are not fully used, but also the businesses which could actually use these qualifications and skills, and all other employees by lowering standards of job offers.

3. The structure of the population and personal situations of refugees should be taken into account when considering their employment. The effective measures to promote employment of different groups of refugees will vary, and may concern differences not obvious or not relevant to the Finnish citizens. Speaking specifically about Ukrainians, this concerns gender-based differences, a common type of household consisting of one adult woman and a child or children, and young jobseekers at the age of 15 to 19 years. One way to balance their employment is to engage women in professions with high workforce demand that are not usually present in their qualifications by offering targeted training to women who are interested in a career change or cannot find employment after having searched for a long time. For women with children, the availability of educational institutions is equally important in regard to the choice of place of residence and to their own availability for employment. Flexible working shifts may be offered to enable combining working and parental responsibilities. Young people are easier to include because of their openness to novelty, but the lifelong effects of this early stage on their career should be considered, and inform their introduction to various opportunities and sufficient information for making informed choices.

4. Barriers to the employment of Ukrainians in healthcare and education should be analyzed separately. There are many Ukrainians qualified in these fields who are not getting relevant employment possibilities. Some companies have changed their recruitment principles and language requirements in order to employ Ukrainians, and received impressive results. This experience should be scaled to include various fields and all people in Finland who have been forced to flee their home country. Opening the way for refugees to enter new fields of employment is important in their inclusion, because it helps them build professional networks, which are especially important for specialist professionals. One person connected to such a network can further involve their contacts from the refugee population, improving chances to match the right person with the right job.

5. Workshops regarding general matters about the Finnish labor market should be considered more important for refugees than even professional training. Quite often people already have good qualifications and extensive experience but simply do not know how to present them correctly to an employer. The practice of Startup Refugees shows that sometimes providing a refugee employee with proper means of orientation into the Finnish labor market is enough for them to find employment opportunities on their own.

6. Hiring companies should introduce training and mentoring programs for refugees to find motivated and dedicated staff. Rather than just trust a degree or experience from unfamiliar institutions, employers should take up on a practical verification and targeted adjustment of their skills to be adequate for concrete tasks. The current apprenticeship training (oppisopimus) system should be developed to include more teaching languages and ensure fast access for refugees to meaningful employment. This will also provide them with more motivation and social prerequisites for learning Finnish faster. The salary of a person participating in an apprenticeship training could increase while their skills develop making the apprenticeship training period less economically burdening for the employer.

Finally, we hope this report brought to light some new information about the employment of Ukrainians and other refugees in Finland. While the findings may not be groundbreaking, they provide substantiated data on what is crucial for refugees in terms of employment. Securing employment as a refugee in Finland remains a challenging task, but with the assistance of a great network, it is achievable. Hence, we extend an invitation to all those eager to contribute to refugee employment and entrepreneurship to join the Startup Refugees network! Together we can create an inclusive society where refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants have fast and equal access to a meaningful professional life.



05

Further Readings and References

Ami säätiö: <https://ami.fi/>

Startup Refugees: <https://startuprefugees.com/>

Bontenbal, Ilona & Lillie, Nathan (2019), The Role of the Third Sector in the Labour Market Integration of Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Finland. SIRIUS WP4 national research report.

Kylmälä, K., (2019), Recognizing Barriers for Refugee Employment With Logistic Regression. Master's thesis, Aalto University.

Maahanmuuttovirasto (2023), [Ukraina-sivut](#) ja [Työnteko Suomessa](#) sivustot.

Startup Refugees (2019), [Employment of Asylum Seekers by the Startup Refugees Network 2015-2018](#).

Svynarenko, A., Koptsyukh, A. (2022) The situation of Ukrainians in Finland who fled the war: Survey results. Publications of the Ministry of the Interior 2022:34. https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/164318/SM_2022_34.pdf

Tilastokeskus (2023) Tilastotiedot ja taulut. <https://stat.fi/tilastotieto>

Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö (2023), [Kotoutuminen.fi: Päivittyvää tietoa Ukrainasta saapuvien oleskelusta, tilapäisestä suojelusta, työskentelystä ja palveluista Suomessa](#).

Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö (2023), [Selvitys tilapäistä suojelua saavista työvoimapalvelujen asiakkaina ja työmarkkinoilla](#). Kotoutuminen 2023:42.

Työmarkkinatori.fi (2023), [Työvoiman saatavuus ja kohtaanto -raportti verkossa](#).

VATT (2023), Datahuone: [Ukrainalaiset Suomessa](#).



START

UP REF

UGEES