



# THE TALENT BEHIND THE NUMBERS: INTRODUCING REFUGEES IN GREECE

*UPDATED: JUNE 2022*

Refugees learn how to use computers as part of the UNHCR non-formal education programme for adults in the reception and identification centre on Chios island. © UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

**UNHCR Greece**  
2021 - 2022

# With a bag full of skills

In their search for safety, refugees have left their homes and possessions behind, pinning their hopes for the future on their skills and work experience. Their skills are an indication of what asylum-seekers and refugees can bring to their own communities, as well as the Greek labour market.

In April 2021, UNHCR collected and recorded information on the education level, work experience and skills of 6,960 adult asylum-seekers and recognized refugees on the Aegean islands. These first findings were complemented in February 2022 with information from 1,166 adult asylum-seekers and refugees who were self-accommodated on mainland Greece.

Of the total interviewed in 2021 and 2022, 67% were asylum-seekers and 33% were recognized refugees. In their majority, they came from Afghanistan (34%), Syria (13%), the Democratic Republic of Congo (9%), and Somalia (8%). Seventy-five per cent were men and 25% women.

The data was recorded according to the individuals' declaration and not on the basis of official documentation certifying the educational background and/or skills. More specifically, the data collected focused on a) education acquired by adults in their country of origin or former residence, transit or third country, including Greece; and b) work

experience and skills gained from official or unofficial employment, formal education, vocational training in their country of origin or former residence, transit or third country, including Greece.

**8,126**  
refugees and  
asylum-seekers  
participated in  
the skills-  
mapping  
exercise



**“I hope to find safety in Europe and rebuild my family’s life”, Kholoud says.**

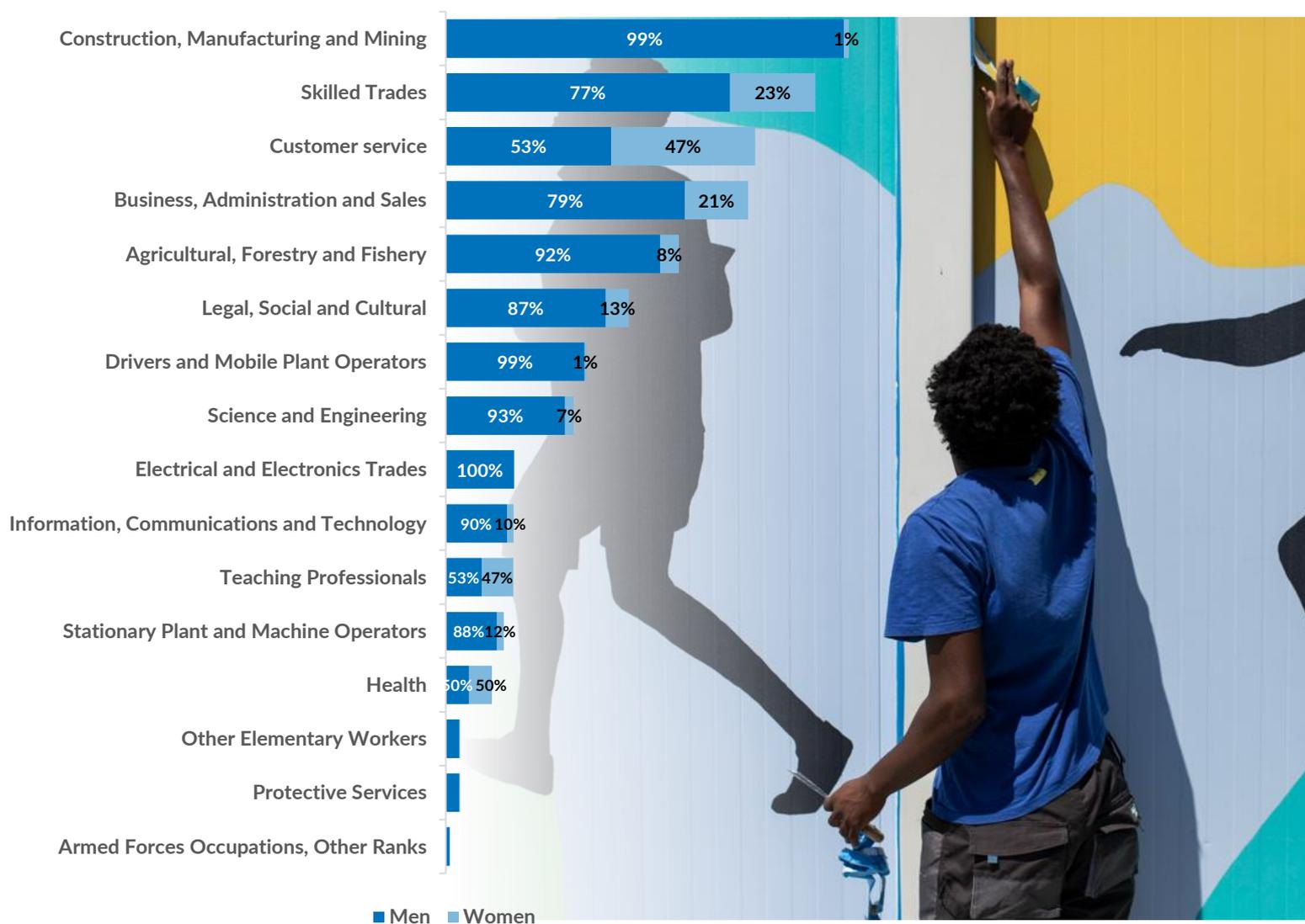
Kholoud, a Syrian asylum-seeker of Palestinian origin, used to work as a school teacher in Syria.

She now lives with her two sons in the Closed Controlled Access Centre on Samos island. The boys had to quit elementary school and flee Syria with their mother, to escape the war.

© UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

## A mix of skills and cultures

Although the findings present only a segment of the valuable potential of asylum-seekers and refugees in Greece, it is testament to the wide spectrum and diversity of their skills. Most commonly, refugees worked in construction, manufacturing and mining (17%), mastered skilled trades (15%), were engaged in customer service (13%), business and sales (10%) and were employed in the agriculture and fishery sector (10%). Amongst them were also doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists, and ICT professionals.



An asylum-seeker in the Closed Controlled Access Centre on Samos island is voluntarily painting one of the site's containers © UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

## Refugee student in Greece towards his dream to become a doctor

Boye was forced to flee his home in Ghana in 2016 when he was just a child, alone. Fast forward five years and he is now studying Biomedical Sciences in Deree, the American College of Greece. Thanks to a fully funded four-year scholarship provided by the College, he is now one step closer to his dream of becoming a doctor.

*“I want to be someone who can help. During my journey from Ghana to Greece, I realized certain fundamental needs that people have that are not being met. Like education, health, food, and shelter. So I decided I wanted to help in one of these fields and I realized that health was a good option to consider”,* Boye says.

You can read the rest of Boye’s story [here](#).

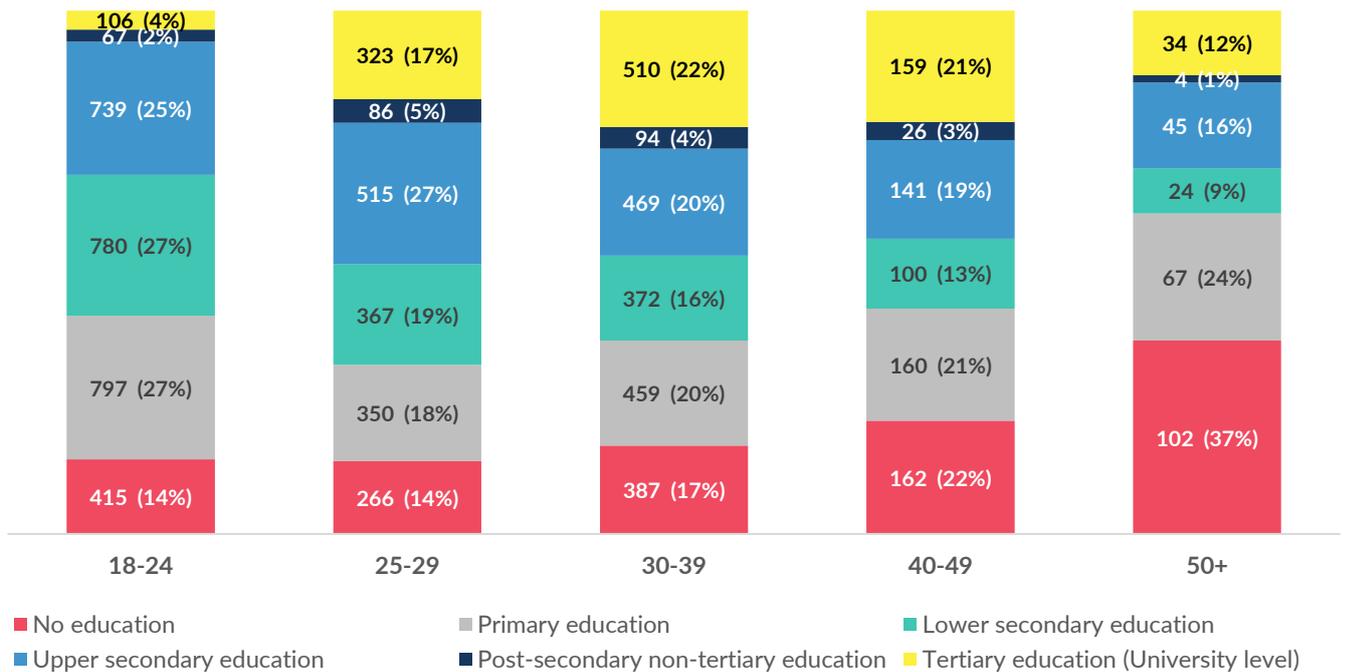
© UNHCR/ Achilleas Zavallis



### Education: a long-term investment

The majority of asylum-seekers and refugees interviewed had formal education outside Greece (84%); 1,132 men and women had university education (14%).

Ensuring access to education, particularly higher education, can be life-changing for asylum-seekers and refugees. It enables them to find a job more easily, it strengthens their resilience to economic hardship, and most importantly it is a right that helps them build their future and restore a sense of normality in their lives.



# Bringing refugees' potential to the fore

## A win-win for both refugee and host communities

The skills and work experience of refugees represent significant economic potential for receiving countries, like Greece. In support of the National Integration Strategy, UNHCR acts as a catalyst, capitalizing on its cooperation with local and central authorities. The Office designs its programmes on the basis of what refugees need – informed by UNHCR's close relationship with refugee communities. UNHCR's integration programme works at different levels and with different actors to enact change and promote integration bottom up, top down and across. In cooperation with national and regional authorities as well as experienced NGOs, UNHCR:

- identifies practical obstacles in administration and legislation and proposes solutions
- empowers refugees to help themselves and their communities
- works with Municipalities to offer expertise on refugee issues, ensure sustainability of programmes and develop effective and inclusive local coordination mechanisms
- implements pilot integration projects with potential for big impact
- engages with media and the public to overcome stereotypes and see the refugees for who they really are
- engages the corporate world and the private sector in including refugees into the labour market.

*“Refugees are the architects of their own futures. With the right support, they can integrate and bring lasting contributions to the economies and societies of the countries hosting them”*

Maria Clara Martin  
UNHCR Representative



Charlotte from Gabon and Raissa from Cameroon, both asylum-seekers, during an employment counselling session at the UNHCR-supported ADAMA Integration Centre.  
© UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis

# THE TALENT BEHIND THE NUMBERS: INTRODUCING REFUGEES IN GREECE

*UPDATED: JUNE 2022*

UNHCR Greece



UNHCR Office in Athens  
91 Michalakopoulou Street  
GR-115 28, Athens, Greece

#### CONTACTS

Eleni Biza, External Relations Officer, UNHCR Country Office in Greece | Email: [biza@unhcr.org](mailto:biza@unhcr.org)  
Elena Marda, Liaison Associate, UNHCR Country Office in Greece | Email: [marda@unhcr.org](mailto:marda@unhcr.org)  
[www.unhcr.org/gr](http://www.unhcr.org/gr)