

Migrant Women
Association Malta

STEPPING UP

AN INVESTIGATION OF
FEMALE ASYLUM SEEKERS
AND EMPLOYMENT
IN MALTA

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PREFACE

The Migrant Women Association Malta is a young, autonomous, independent, voluntary, non-profit and non-governmental organization established in 2015.

MWAM's mission is to promote migrant women's empowerment and integration. The association aims at providing a forum for migrant women's voices to be heard and for their needs to be addressed.

Therefore, MWAM soon acknowledged that a needs assessment of their target population was a mandatory step for the association. MWAM decided to focus their initial assessment on employment as they believe that it is key to women's economic independence, self-growth, and integration into the community.

Hence, MWAM developed Stepping Up; a 12-month project focused on carrying out empirical research on migrant women's access to the Maltese labour market, to gain a basis on which to build future actions and initiatives.

This publication reflects the findings of that research and is funded by the Small Initiatives Support Scheme, managed by the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector.

INTRODUCTION

Migrant Women Association Malta set to conduct this research with the aim of gaining an empirically grounded understanding of migrant women in Malta. The principal motivation was to learn about the association's target population to develop a working strategy in line with their needs and interests.

We decided to focus on employment as it is one of the main concerns of our clients and it is key to women's empowerment and social integration. Besides, there is a dearth of research on the topic in the Maltese context.

This study focuses on women who have been through the asylum process in Malta. The selection of this sample is informed by the typically implied vulnerability of this population as well as by their high representation among our clients and members. However, it must be highlighted that at MWAM does not exclude other groups and we offer our services to migrants regardless of nationality or legal status.

OBJECTIVES

In order to broaden our understanding of migrant women's access to the Maltese labour market, MWAM designed the following research objectives:

- To investigate the characteristics of the employment that migrant women are accessing in Malta.
- To measure migrant women's job satisfaction.
- To learn about migrant women's experiences of job-hunting and the obstacles they face.
- To identify the educational level of migrant women.
- To evaluate migrant women's language skills in the two official languages of Malta: English and Maltese.
- To explore the professional skills that migrant women have and those they would like to develop further.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sampling

This research targets female adults who have been through the asylum application process in Malta and had obtained a final decision at the time of the survey. It includes women with refugee status, subsidiary protection, Temporary Humanitarian Protection, and rejected asylum seekers.

To design a sample representative of the target population, we relied on the Refugee Commissioner's statistics of asylum decisions for female applicants for the period 2013 – 2016 (May). The top four nationalities of applicants were selected: Libyan, Syrian, Somali and Eritrean.

Based on this statistical information, the total size of the research population residing in Malta was estimated to be 1065.

Moreover, the available statistics were used to estimate the research population composition per nationality and legal status.

Table - Estimated composition of the research population per nationality and legal status

NATIONALITY	LEGAL STATUS				Total per Nationality
	Refugee Status	Subsidiary Protection	THP	Rejected Asylum Seekers	
Libya	9,8%	21,0%	0,1%	0,1%	31,0%
Syria	0,9%	25,3%	0,2%	0,1%	26,5%
Eritrea	0,5%	15,1%	1,6%	1,3%	18,5%
Somalia	1,0%	18,5%	0,3%	4,2%	24,0%
Total per Legal Status	12,2%	79,9%	2,2%	5,7%	100%

Quota sampling was chosen as the best option to achieve a sample representative of the composition per nationality and legal status of the target population.

Furthermore, as the target population is usually hard to reach, an element of snowball sampling was incorporated by selecting survey-takers from the research population. In this manner, the social networks of the survey-takers were utilised to gain access to participants.

The total sample size achieved is of 91 participants.

3.2 Data collection tool

A questionnaire was developed, which includes a significant proportion of fixed-response questions and a number of open-ended questions, to represent the range of individual opinions and experiences. The questionnaire consists of fifty-eight questions divided into five blocks: Bio Data, Current Employment, Job Search, Employment History, and Education and Skills.

The questionnaire was translated into the main native languages of the target population: Arabic, Somali and Tigrinya.

3.3 Procedure

The data collection took place between August and December 2016. A team of 6 survey-takers, chosen for their language skills as well as for being part of the targeted communities, collected the questionnaires. The survey-takers relied on their social networks to find participants.

The majority of the surveys were collected face to face while a small number was carried out by phone.

All the questionnaires were conducted in the native language of the respondent. The answers to the open-ended questions were later translated into English.

All data was recorded on Xcel to be subsequently analysed.

3.4 Data analysis

The collected data was compiled and analysed with Survey Monkey. A selection of filters and comparisons were applied to look out for significant differences and observe correlations.

RESULTS

4.1 Sociodemographic characteristics

The sample includes a total of 91 female asylum seekers living in Malta. 46.2% are Syrian nationals, 29.7% Libyans, 18.7% Somali and 5.5% Eritrean.

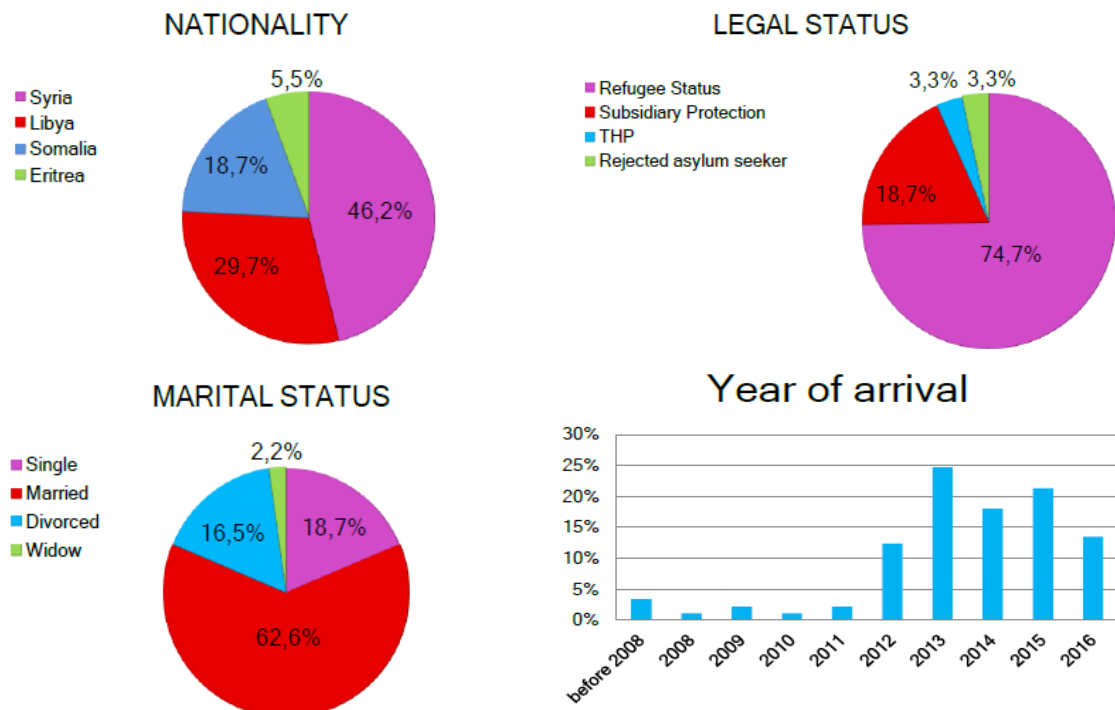
Regarding status, most of the women in the sample have refugee status (74.7%). 18.7% have subsidiary protection and an equal percentage (3.3%) are beneficiaries of Temporary Humanitarian Protection and rejected asylum seekers.

40.6% of the surveyed women are 18-30 years old, and 38.5% are between 31-40. The average age of the sample is 30.5 years, the minimum age is 18, and the maximum is 62. However, 20.9% of respondents did not reveal their age.

Regarding family composition, 62.6% of participants are married and 90.4% of them, have their husband in Malta. 73.6% of women have children under sixteen years of age. 81.5% of these mothers have their children in Malta, and the average number of children per mother is 2.9. Moreover, 44.4% of our respondents have other relatives in Malta.

Most of the participants (89.9%) arrived in Malta between 2012 and 2016 and 34.8% arrived between 2015 and 2016.

91.2% of participants live in private accommodation while 8.8% live in an Open Centre. Furthermore, most of the women live in the Northern Harbour District (56.7%) and the Southern Harbour District (28.9%).



4.2 Employment

85.7% of the women were unemployed at the time of the survey.

The main reason cited for unemployment was “not being able to find a job” (45.8%), followed by childcare responsibilities or care of dependents (33.3%). 5.6% of women were pursuing studies or professional training, 8.3% were unfit for work, and 12.5% did not want to work.

45.5% of those in employment, had held their current job for less than six months and 36.4% had done so for less than a year. None of the participants had held their current position for longer than three years.

The majority of women in employment were wage workers; only one respondent was self-employed.

73.3% of the women employed reported not having a contract. The majority worked casually (42.9%), followed by those in part-time employment (35.7%). Only 21.4% had a full-time job, and 76.9% reported that they would like to work more hours.

Over half of the employed women (53.8%) worked in cleaning services. The rest held a variety of jobs, including teacher, interpreter, hairdresser, shop assistant and kitchen helper.

Regarding job satisfaction, participants were on average, dissatisfied with their salaries, and moderately dissatisfied with the opportunities their jobs offered to use their skills. Furthermore, 46.1% would like to change jobs.

4.3 Search for employment

50.6% of the participants were looking for a job at the time of the survey, and 46.7% had been searching for 12 months or longer.

When asked about the kind of work they would like to access, participants showed a great variety of ambitions. Among the most popular options, we found tailoring, cleaning, cooking, and hairdressing and beauty. But the list also includes accountancy, administrative work, nursing, and teaching.

Women reported that discrimination was the main obstacle to employment (78.6%). The main bases for discrimination were age (44.3%), religion (31.4%), and nationality (15.7%).

The second most significant obstacle was the lack of local work experience (54.3%), followed by language barriers (34.3%), lack of job interview skills (20.0%), and lack of local references (18.6%). Moreover, 11.4% of women considered themselves unqualified while 10.0% experienced problems having their qualifications recognised in Malta.

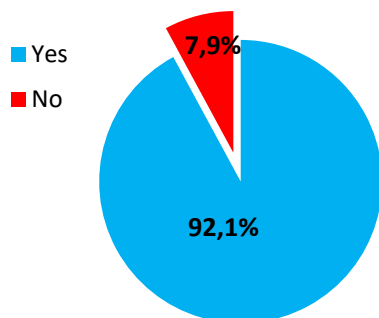
Regarding previous work experience, 62.8% had not worked before arriving in Malta. The main reason cited for the lack of work experience was childcare and other care responsibilities (46.3%), followed by being unable to find a job (37.0%). The 37.2%, who had worked before arriving in Malta, had done so for a variety of periods, mostly longer than two years. This group includes a range of professions among which, retailers, sales assistants, hairdressers, teachers, and journalists form a significant proportion. However, the list goes on to include an artist, a doctor, an oil company coordinator and a school director, among others.

4.4 Education

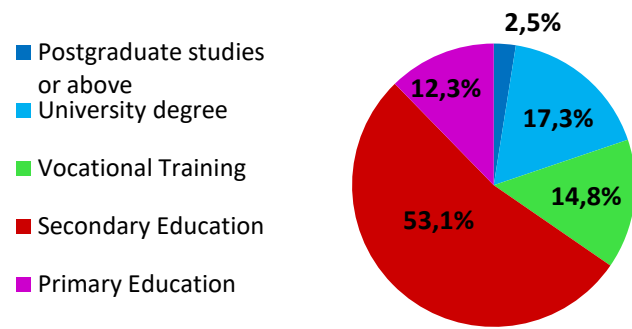
93.3% of the surveyed women are literate and have attended school. Over half of the respondents have completed secondary education. 19.8% has completed university studies, and 14.8% has pursued vocational training. Those with post-secondary education had followed a variety of disciplines from law to nursing. Economics and business administration were significantly represented (34.7%).

75.7% of respondents had not attended any courses in Malta. Those who had followed courses had mainly studied languages (76.5%).

Can you read and write?



Highest level of education completed



4.5 Language skills

Participants were asked to rank their level of English and Maltese between basic, intermediate and advanced, in 4 dimensions: reading, writing, speaking and listening. No level assigned has been interpreted as a complete lack of skills.

Findings indicate that 40.6% of the women have no English language skills and a nearly equal proportion (40.7%) has no command of Maltese whatsoever.

43.9% have a basic command of the English language while 49.5% have a basic level of Maltese. 5.4% reported an intermediate level of English and 7.7% in Maltese. 9.8% identified as advanced in English and 2.2% in Maltese.

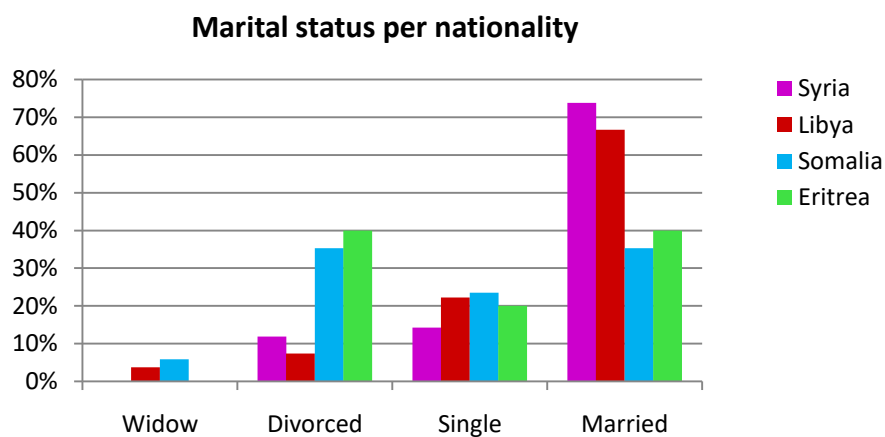
4.6 Professional Skills

71.8% of women reported being skilled in cooking, 30.8% in IT, 23.1% in languages, 12.8% in clerical/administrative work, and 11.5% in hairdressing and beauty.

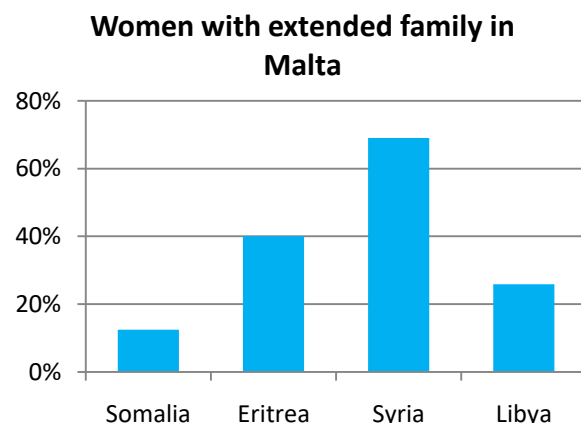
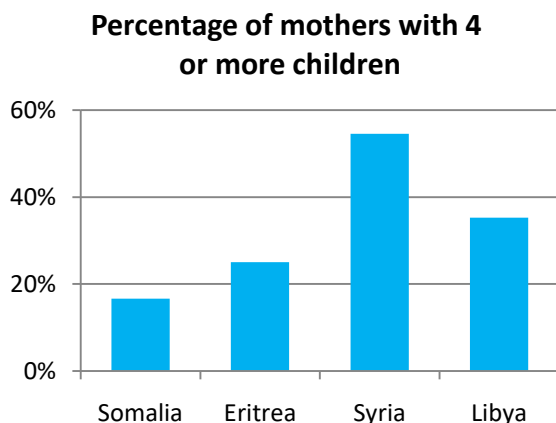
Moreover, participants were asked which skills they would like to develop further. Languages were the most popular (54.4%), followed by tailoring (24.1%). Other skills that received significant interest are hairdressing and beauty (22.8%), cooking (19.0%), healthcare (19.0%) and IT skills (17.7%).

4.7 Comparisons per nationality

Regarding marital status, Syrians record the highest proportion of married women (73.8%), followed by Libyans (66.6%). On the other hand, less than half of Eritrean and Somali women is married. Moreover, the husbands of the married Somali women are not in Malta in 75% of the cases as opposed to a minimal proportion of the other national groups.



When it comes to family composition, Syrian and Libyan have larger families; with a significantly bigger proportion of families with 4 or more children. Regarding extended family, the Syrian case stands out. 69% of Syrian women have relatives in Malta while well below half of the women from the other nationalities do.

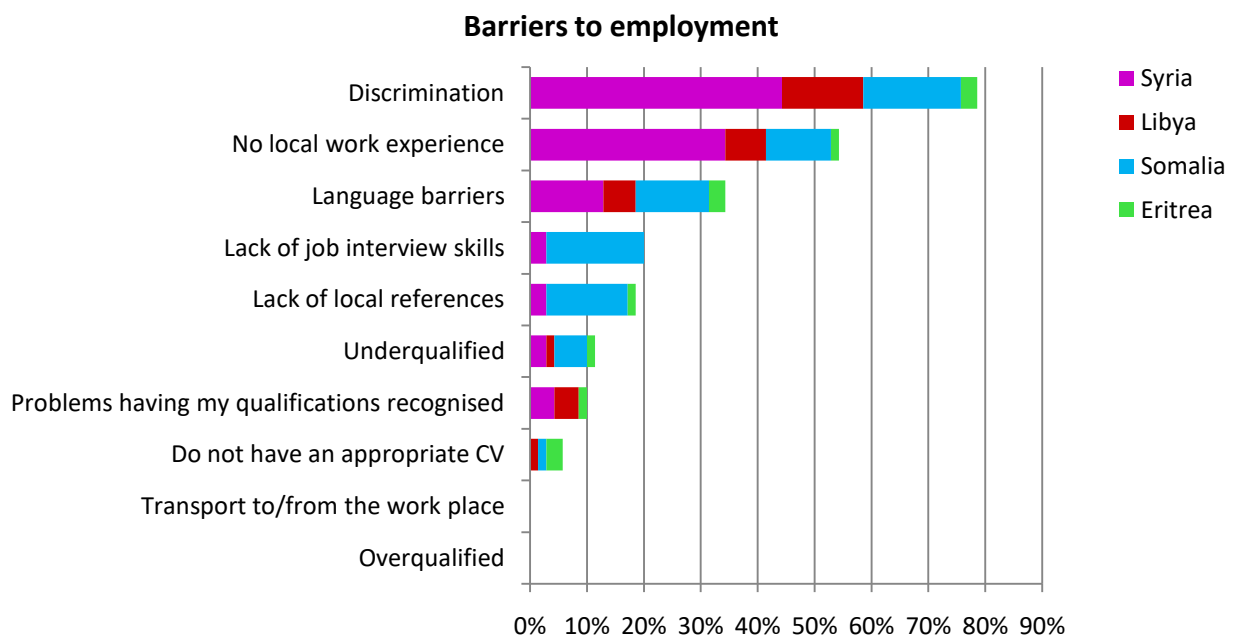


Regarding employment, Syrians register the highest unemployment rate (100%), followed by Libyans (92.5%), despite being both the most represented groups in our sample. On the other hand, Eritreans have the highest employment rate (80.0%) recorded despite representing the smallest proportion of our sample, and Somalis record an employment rate of 41.1%.

There are also differences in the main reasons for unemployment. Somalis ranked the highest on having childcare and other care responsibilities (55.6%) followed by Syrians (39.5%), while most Libyans (62.5%) could not find a job.

Regarding the characteristics of employment, a significantly smaller proportion of Eritrean and Somali has a work contract. However, the only full-timers of our sample are from Somalia, and they also have the lowest rate of casual employment. That explains the fact that the portion of women who was satisfied with the number of hours they work is totally from Somalia. About satisfaction with the opportunities to use their skills that their jobs offered, Libyan and Syrian were on average dissatisfied while Somali were moderately satisfied.

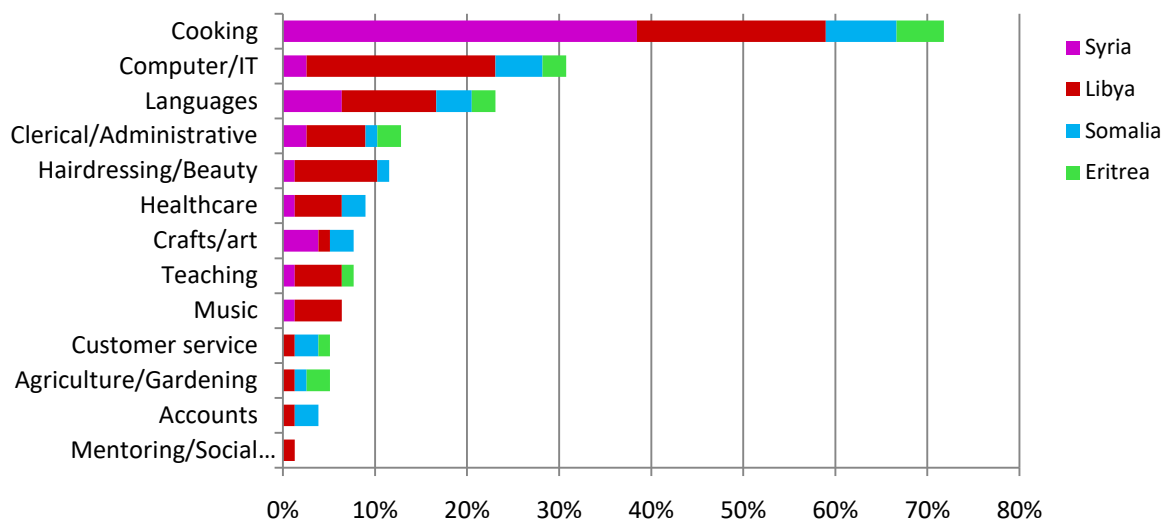
A breakdown of nationalities also renders relevant differences in the barriers to employment. Lack of work experience was a major concern for Somalis and Syrians. Lack of local references and job interview skills were obstacles identified mainly by Somalis. Language barriers ranked higher among the Eritrean and Somali, who also shared their concern about being unqualified. Discrimination, despite being flagged by all national groups, was a greater concern for Syrian and Somali women. There was also heterogeneity regarding the basis of the discrimination identified; age was primarily reported by Syrians (81%), while race and gender were reported solely by Somalis. Religious discrimination was reported predominately by Somalis and Libyans. However, some Syrians cited “wearing hijab” an additional basis for discrimination.



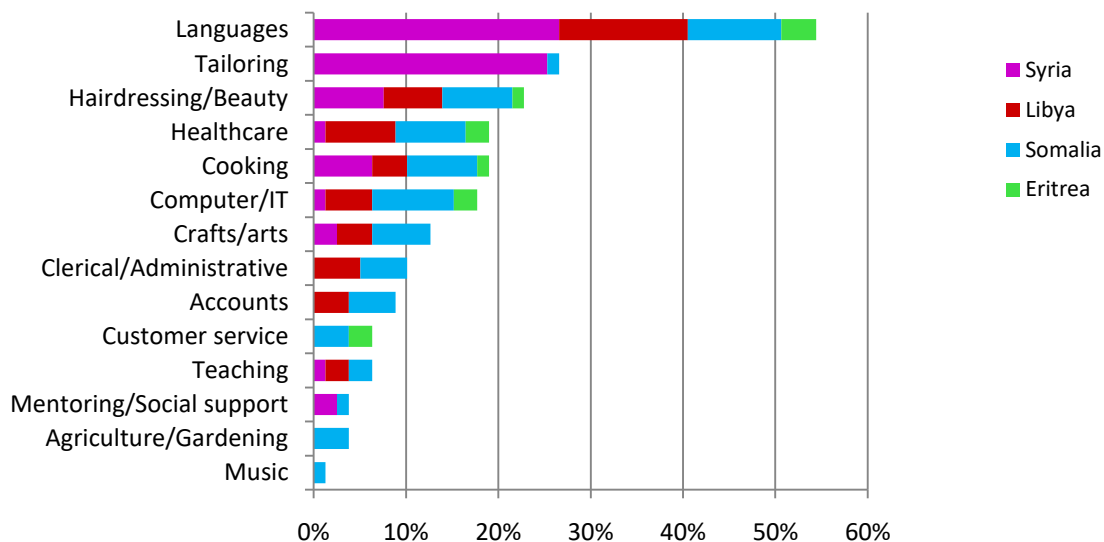
Furthermore, the educational level also varies across nationalities. Libyan made up 68.7% of those with university studies. They also recorded the highest percentage relative to their total population (40.7%), distancing themselves as the most educated.

On the other hand, the 7.9% of our respondents who were illiterate came mostly from Somalia. However, most of the women who reported having attended courses in Malta were also from Somalia. Different nationalities of sampled women had different skills and interests regarding the skills they would like to learn or improve upon, as we can observe in the following graphs.

Female asylum seekers' professional skills



Professional skills migrant women would like to develop



4.8 Employment correlations

Examining for correlations between variables, we found a few relations which although lacking statistical backing, are worthy of a mention.

Being married and employment, are negatively correlated. There is a higher employment rate among divorced women (33.3%), followed by single women (17.6%), while married women rank last (7%).

While having children does not seem to have a major effect on employment rates, it does influence the search for work among unemployed mothers. The percentage of women looking for jobs increases with the number of children, up to 4 children. Moreover, the totality of the unemployed mothers separated from their children is actively searching for work. Additionally, having extended family in Malta negatively impacts employment, by a difference of 12.5%.

Furthermore, having worked before arriving in Malta positively affects current employment, by a difference of 30.0%.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study underlines the high unemployment rate among female asylum seekers in Malta. It also puts into perspective such rate by calling attention to the childcare and other care responsibilities held by these women as well as to the high percentage who are unable to access employment despite being actively searching.

The research highlights that we cannot presume certain nationalities need less support to access employment. A high percentage of all the national groups surveyed would like to work but cannot find a job.

Moreover, the findings show the heterogeneity of the female asylum-seeking population. F.A.S. have very different educational backgrounds, family compositions, skills, and ambitions. Thus, integration efforts which do not take such differences into consideration risk leaving certain groups behind.

The research demonstrates the underutilised skill pool that female asylum seekers are. Besides, results evidence the high qualifications, extensive experience, and entrepreneurial potential of a remarkable percentage. Hence, social integration efforts should consider the variety of skills and educational levels and cater to them appropriately; from the unqualified to the highly trained, all of them require and deserve support. Furthermore, we cannot dismiss how high discrimination ranks among

the identified barriers to employment. Discrimination not only is high for the total sample but also for each and every national group surveyed. Therefore, despite the existing antidiscrimination legislation, much needs to be done; both regarding awareness raising, to increase the number of women who rely on the available legal routes, as well as bringing more accountability into the picture. Moreover, we must keep working to deconstruct prejudices against female asylum seekers.

MWAM is committed to employing the findings of this research as a guide for our work.

While this study is only a modest attempt at improving the understanding of migrant women and the Maltese labour market, we hope it will be an incentive for future research and initiatives by other organisations and authorities.

LIMITATIONS

The results presented in this report are not necessarily representative of the total population of female asylum seekers in Malta, due to the limited size of our sample and the unfulfillment of the sampling quotas.

Access to participants was highly dependent on the survey-takers social skills and dedication to the project. The gender of the survey-takers might have impacted access; the only community surveyed by male survey-takers is the least represented in the research.

Furthermore, certain nationalities were less predisposed to participate in the research. On the one hand, asylum appears to be taboo among the Libyan community due to political reasons and for being associated with poverty and helplessness. Additionally, a considerable number of Eritrean women was not interested in participating in the study as they believed that disclosing their personal information would not report them any benefits.

Moreover, there is a significant percentage of missing information due to unanswered questions. Further training of the survey-takers could reduce the incidence of missing data.

