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Gender employment gaps of the population of foreign background in Finland

Background

In 2014, the topic of the LFS ad hoc module was the labour market situation of migrants and their immediate descendants. Given the low share and number of the target group in Finland, it was evident that the sample size, not to mention the size of the final data, would remain too small for any further analysis on the situation of people of foreign origin. At the same time, the increasing need for information on the population of foreign origin was also evident. Although the share of this population group of all the population still was roughly 5 per cent in 2014, the growth has been drastic compared to the situation in the beginning of 1990's with less than 1 per cent of population in Finland having origins abroad. In 2014, most of the population of foreign origin – persons whose both parents were born abroad – were of working age and first generation migrants.

Thus, Statistics Finland decided to carry out a special survey on the work and well-being of people of foreign origin (UTH) as an extension to the LFS ad hoc module. The coverage was considerably broader than the contents for the AHM 2014 as comes to sample size as well as the contents. The survey was carried out in a co-operation with National Institute of Health and Well-being, the Finnish Institute for Occupational Health and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment.

Methodology

The starting point for the UTH survey was very ambitious: this would be the first time that the whole population of foreign origin would be covered. Admittedly, a few surveys on the well-being, employment and living conditions of people of foreign origin had been conducted, but for practical reasons they only covered the few biggest sub-groups.

The additional sample of 5,449 persons was drawn from the population registers from among persons whose both parents – or the only known parent – was born abroad. Those included in the LFS AHM sample answered only to the LFS and AHM questions. The additional sample was presented with the normal LFS and AHM questions, but in addition they were presented with a set of questions on employment, working conditions, health, living conditions and social relationships.

Interviews were carried out by the Statistics Finland's interviewer organization in 2014 as face-to-face interviews lasting approximately one hour. Altogether nine new interviewers were recruited from among the population of foreign origin. In addition to Finnish, they conducted interviews in Swedish, English, Russian, Arab, Somali, Chinese, French, Estonian, Sorani, Persian and Thai. The interview questionnaires were translated to all these languages, but the contact letters into altogether 27 languages.

The interviewers of foreign origin conducted the interviews in the Metropolitan area where the majority of the people of foreign origin live. Tele-interpreting with the help of Skype was used in cases where the interviewees lived in other parts of Finland: there would be a Finnish-speaking

interviewer at the interviewee's home and she took the contact with the interpreter-interviewer in the Metropolitan area.

The response rate of the survey was 66 % thanks to all the extra efforts made by motivated interviewers. There were 4,009 persons of foreign origin in the combined data, 716 of which participated only in the LFS AHM and 3,262 of which participated in the UTH survey. In addition, there were 16,500 persons of Finnish origin in the LFS AHM data. For the analysis, the effects of non-response were corrected by weight calibration at to the population level so that eventually the data corresponded to 241,000 persons of foreign origin aged 15 to 64 years and 3,251,000 persons of Finnish origin.

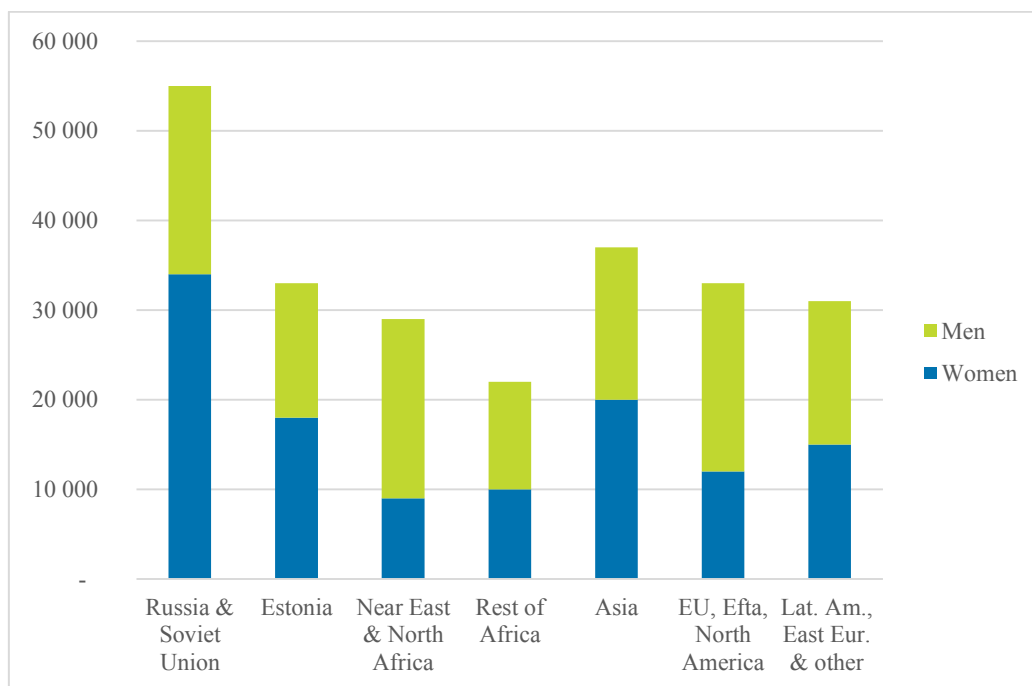
Reaching of the target persons was not always easy, since people of foreign origin tend to move addresses and use prepaid mobile connections more commonly than the population of Finnish origin. The interviewers had sometimes to find extremely innovative ways to get in contact with the target persons.

One of the problems encountered was that the information in the population register, from where the sample was drawn, was not always up-to-date. In fact, it turned out that as much as 9 per cent of the sampled persons already have moved out of the country; since they had not informed authorities about this moving out, their names and personal information was still included in the population registers. This finding has led to an intense co-operation with Population Register Centre and Statistics Finland the purpose of which is to develop ways to "clean up" the registers from people who in reality cannot be counted any more among the population of Finland.

Groups and the reasons for coming to Finland

In 2014, there were 241,000 persons aged 15 to 64 years of foreign origin who were permanent residents in Finland. Half of this population were women, half men. Immigration at a larger scale is such a recent phenomenon in Finland that only some 15,000 persons of foreign origin aged 15 to 64 years were born in Finland themselves. For the analysis, population of foreign origin was classified in six different groups of reasonable size (Figure 1). The sex composition of these groups varied from a very female-dominated groups of those with Russian or Soviet Union origin and those with Asian origin to the strongly male-dominated groups of those of Middle Eastern and North African origin or those with origins in the EU- or Efta-countries or in North America.

Figure 1. Population of foreign origin aged 15 to 64 yrs, by sex and country cluster in 2014, UTH



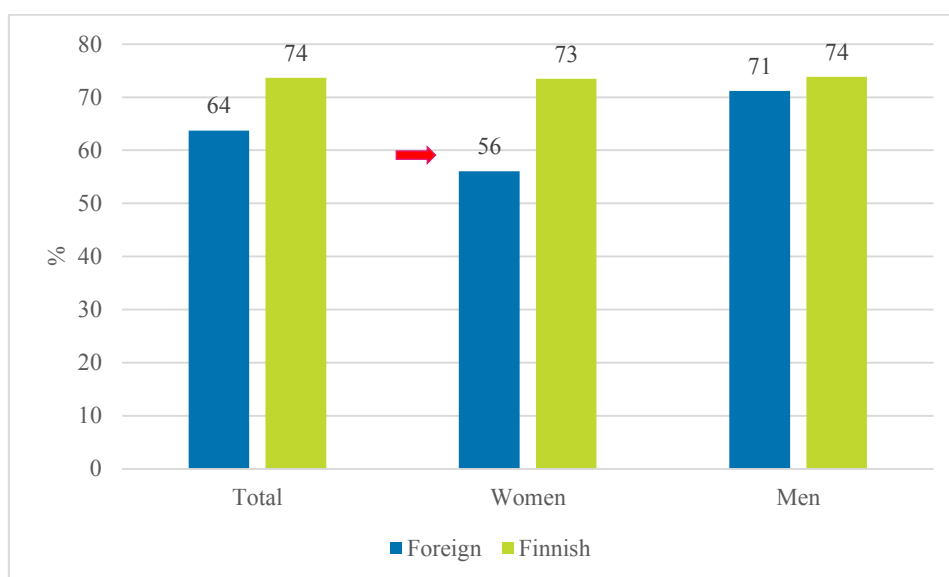
The reasons the interviewed reported as a response to the AHM question for their moving to Finland were manifold. Of persons of foreign origin living in Finland in 2014, family reasons had been the motivation to move into the country for over one-half. Among women, two out of three (66 %) as against to 42 % of men had come for family reasons. Coming for work (12 %) or coming for studies (7 %) was much less common for women than for men (24 % and 14 % respectively). Only 8 % of women had come as refugee or asylum seeker as against to 13 % of men. Other reasons were in the background for about as many women (7 %) as men (8 %).

Almost half (47 %) of the people of foreign origin had lived in Finland for more than 10 years in 2014, women slightly more commonly than men. However, one in six (17 %) were newcomers, having arrived in the previous 5 years.

Low female employment rate presses down the employment rate of migrants

The employment rate of the population of foreign origin aged 20 to 64 years was about 10 per cent lower in comparison to the population of Finnish origin. The difference mainly stems from the different employment situations of women: while the employment rate of men of foreign origin (71 %) was about at the same level as that of the men of Finnish origin (74 %), the gap in employment rates of women was almost 20 percentage points (foreign 56 % vs. Finnish 73 %). Consequently, the gender employment gap among the population of foreign origin widened up to 14 percentage points in 2014, while among those of Finnish origin, the gender employment gap was practically non-existent. In fact, it is the high female employment rate in Finland which makes the employment gap between Finnish and migrant women so striking. (Figure 2.)

Figure 2. Employment rate by sex and origin, population aged 20 to 64 years in 2014, UTH



The gender employment gap was clear in all country clusters in 2014. It was the most prominent among the population from the Sub-Saharan zone (women 30 % vs. men 62 %), where women's employment rate was particularly low. Among those with Russian or Soviet Union origin (58 % vs. 66 %) or with EU and North American origin (69 % vs. 78 %), the gap was the narrowest – but still, almost 10 percentage points.

Tertiary education no guarantee of employment for women of foreign origin

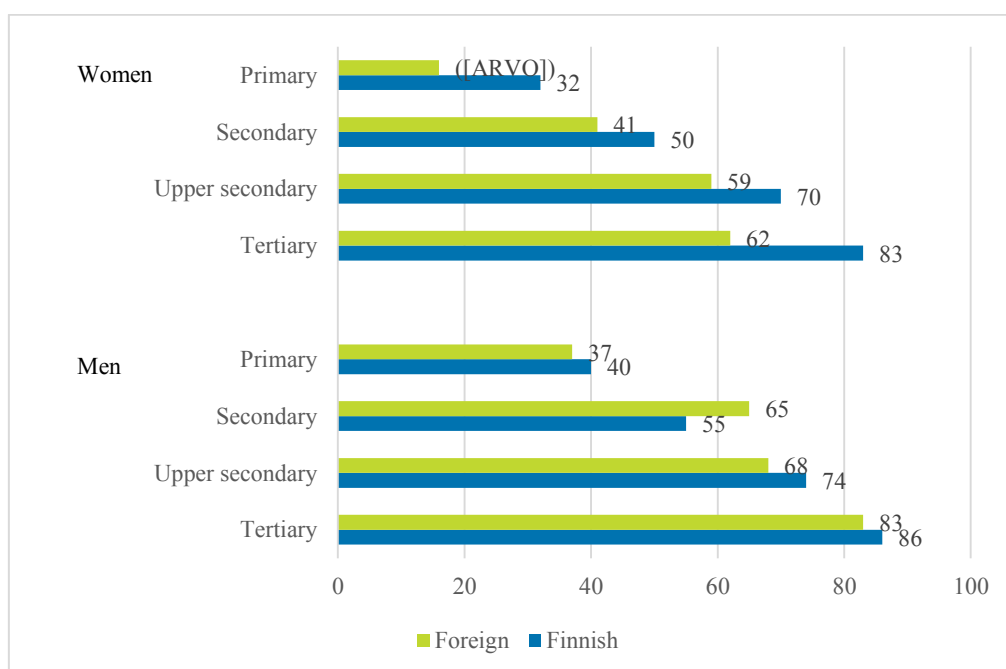
Why is there such a gender employment gap among persons of foreign origin? Would the differences in the educational structure of women and men of foreign origin explain for these gender gaps?

This does not seem to be the case. First of all, the educational structure of the population of foreign origin aged 20 to 64 is more polarised than that of the population of Finnish origin. The share of those with tertiary education is almost as high (40 %) as among the population of Finnish origin (44 %). However, among the population of foreign origin there are relatively much more of them, who have achieved a secondary education degree at the most (18 %) compared to those of Finnish origin (7%).

Few percentages have gone to school only for a couple of years or not at all – most of them are women, often coming from Middle East or Africa and with a refugee background. On the other hand, among people of foreign origin women have more commonly tertiary education than men (43 % vs. 38 %) just like among people of Finnish origin (women 53 %, men 36 %). As to the very low education, there is no gender difference among the population of foreign origin.

However, the impact of education on employment rate is different among women and men of foreign origin. For men, education increases the employment in a similar way as for men of Finnish origin. Among the tertiary educated over 80 % are employed just like among men of Finnish origin. The share goes down to less than 70 % for those with upper secondary, 65 % of those with secondary and 37 % of those with primary education at the most.

Figure 3. *Employment rate by education, sex and origin, population aged 20 to 64 yrs in Finland in 2014, UTH*



In contrast for women the educational background does not play as a big role in getting employed as for men. The employment rate remains very low also among those with tertiary education (62 %) if one compares with women of Finnish origin (83 %). Admittedly, the share is even lower among those with upper secondary (59 %), secondary (41 %) or primary education at the most (16 %)**.

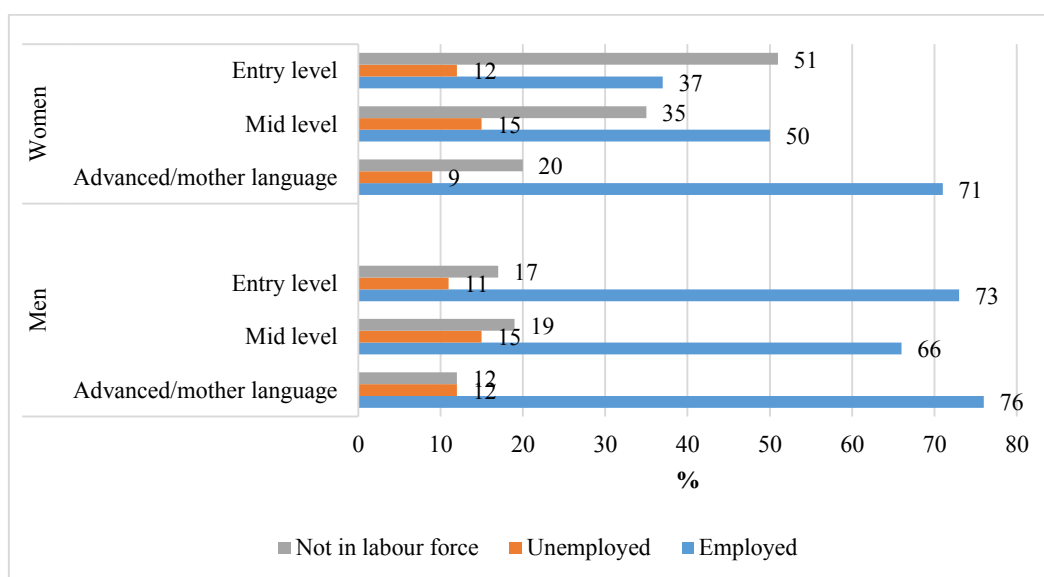
For women, better language skills are required to get employed than for men

Language skills in the country's language are often emphasized as a crucial factor for migrants' employability. Finland has two official domestic languages, Finnish or Swedish. The gender gap in the language skills of either of these languages is not huge among the population of foreign origin. In fact, women more commonly (46 %) than men (39 %) speak Finnish or Swedish at advanced level or even as if it were their mother language. Only 23 % of women compared to 29 % of men are at entry level.

Theoretically, the better the language skills, the easier it is to get a job. Indeed, this seems to be true for women of foreign origin. Among those with entry level skills at the most, half are outside the labour force and less than 40 % employed. As to those with advanced skills and beyond, the employment rate is 70 % or nearly as high as among women of Finnish origin. One in five only is out of labour force.

However, for men the language skills seem not to be linked so strongly to employment. More or less 70 per cent are employed irrespective of how well they command Finnish or Swedish.

Figure 3. First generation of the population of foreign origin aged 20 to 64 yrs by sex and skills in Finnish/Swedish in 2014, UTH, Statistics Finland



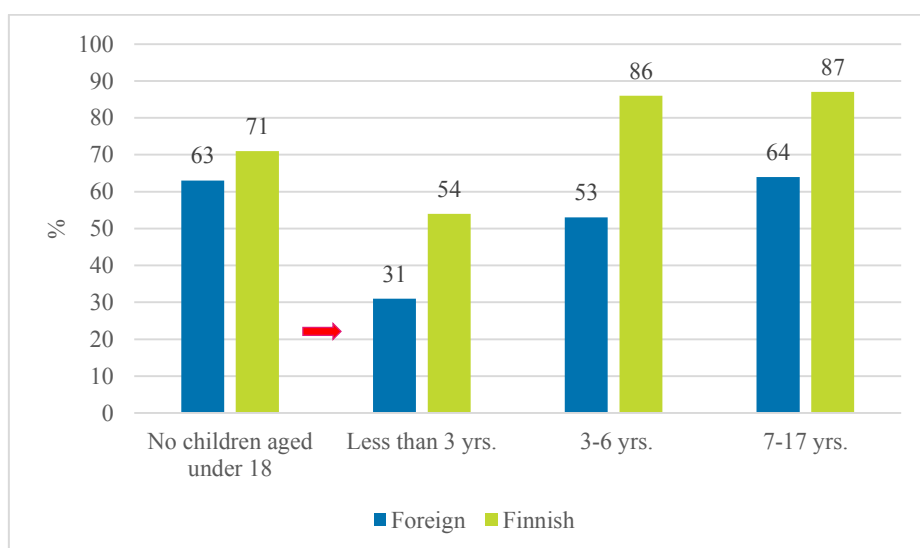
As a consequence, the employed women of foreign origin are quite a selected group. Respectively, women not in the labour force, especially those taking care of their own children as their main activity, have quite weak language skills on the average. Almost half of them are at entry level in Finnish or Swedish.

The outcome may seem strange, but is largely explained by the occupational gender segregation. Women more commonly work in such tasks, like nursing and care, where command of domestic languages is indispensable, while men more often are employed in manufacturing, construction and technics, where it might not be so necessary to command Finnish or Swedish. For instance, although one in four of women and men of foreign origin in employment are working as professionals, male professionals mostly are employed in the technical field and sciences, but women mostly as medical doctors and teachers. The working language of these male professionals often is English, which is common in big companies in this sector. For medical doctors and teachers, skills in Finnish or Swedish more often is necessary.

Motherhood impact negative for women of foreign origin

Finally, one big reason behind the low employment rate of women of foreign origin compared to Finnish women is the motherhood impact. It is very strong among the population of foreign origin even when children grow older. For women of Finnish origin, the impact is to be seen only among mothers with children aged under 3. (Figure 4.)

Figure 4. Female employment rate by origin and age of the youngest child, women aged 20 to 64 yrs, 2014, UTH



Moreover, the number of children in the household also is linked to the employment rate of women of foreign origin, in particular, not so much to women of Finnish origin. Among the mothers of three or more children, only one in three mother of foreign origin is employed as against to three in four among mothers of Finnish origin.

Admittedly, the motherhood impact varies by country clusters. There is barely no impact among women of Russian or Soviet Union origin, while among women of Middle East or African origin the gap is huge: only 22 % of mothers of children aged under 18 as against to 46 % of women without children are employed. At this point, it should be noted, that the educational level of women in this country cluster is very low, and it is particularly low among mothers of this group.

Why is it difficult to get employed for mothers of foreign origin?

Why is it difficult to get employed for mothers of foreign origin with children aged under school age? After all, Finland is a country with accessible public day care with moderate day care fees – in fact, low-income families do not have to pay for day care at all.

These women often seem to lack education, work experience and language skills. Among non-employed women aged 20 to 49 years and with children aged under school-age one in three has basic education at the most, one in three has no previous work experience and one in three has weak language skills in Finnish/Swedish. This is partly due to the fact that these women typically had children at a quite young age and thus had no time to educate themselves or to get work experience. Early motherhood may seem as a meaningful alternative for young women who consider their prospects in the labour market poor. However, it is for sure that these prospects do not ameliorate by the years at home caring for children. Among non-employed mothers of foreign origin, almost one in two considered that their weak language skills in Finnish/Swedish was for them the main obstacle for employment in 2014.

Employment rate increases by the length of residence in Finland – for mothers too

However, employment rate of women seem to increase by the length of residence in Finland. Among men, the connection is not that straightforward, but it is still clearly to be seen among those with a refugee background, and fathers.

Integration shows especially well in the employment rates of mothers of foreign origin. Among women who had lived in Finland for more than 10 years in 2014, the employment gap between mothers and women without children had narrowed to 5 per cent. The employment rate of foreign origin women, who had children aged under three and had lived in Finland for over ten years was almost as high as that of mothers of Finnish origin with children aged under three. As to childless women who have lived in Finland for more than 10 years, the employment rate was nearly as high as that of their counterparts of Finnish origin in 2014.

The findings of the survey help to identify the groups of immigrant women who are at the most urgent need of language training and vocational – or even basic – education in order to be able to make their way in to the Finnish labour market. Efforts put in the promotion of the educational opportunities of these women make an input in their children's future too: the educational background of the parents strongly associates with the NEET-rate or the rate of early school leavers no matter whether the youngsters are of foreign or of Finnish origin.