"Bridging the Digital Gap: Refugee Women's Experiences with Digital Systems in the Netherlands"

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Project research: DigiSkills2Work: Digital skills and labour market integration of female refugees in the Netherlands

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OBJECTIVES

• *Understand barriers in digital integration through refugee women's experiences.*

•*Reflect on digital tools like RefugeeWork.nl.*

•*Co-develop ideas to bridge the digital divide in asylum reception systems.*

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BACKGROUND: THE ORIGINAL WORKSHOP

Conducted as part of a research project at Radboud University Nijmegen led by Dr. Giacomo Solano:

Focus: How digital skills affect refugee women's access to the Dutch labor market.

Target group: Refugee women living in the Netherlands.

Methods:
- *Participatory co-creation workshops(e.g. RefugeeWork.nl) & focus groups*
- *Qualitative interviews*
- *Local and national policies analysis*

Round table to involve stakeholders: Municipal actors, case managers, digital platform developers, and civil society..

Aim: Identify barriers and propose inclusive, gender-sensitive, and culturally aware solutions to digital skill gaps.

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Today's Flow

1. Introduction & voices from the field

2. Role-play activity with *RefugeeWork.nl*

3. Focus group simulation

4. Groups Reflections

5. (guest speaker with field experience)

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VOICES FROM THE FIELD: REFUGEE QUOTES (1)

"The former president of Yemen used to shout to the people, 'You missed the train!' which was always ironic, because we didn't even have trains in Yemen. Here in the Netherlands, it was the first time we actually saw one. But what surprised us even more was having to learn how to plan trips, check in, and check out, everything digitally!"
– Refugee woman from Yemen, 2025.

"The first time in my life I had to use digital services was here in the Netherlands. It started in my very first week, when I had to find my way to the refugee center in Ter Apel, and the first tool I used was Google Maps."
– Refugee woman from Syria, 2025.

"I wish I had access to my bank account, but I am afraid doing something wrong. That is why my son has my bank account and gives me pocket money."
_ Refugee women from Syria-Kurd region.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD: REFUGEE QUOTES (2)

"I didn't even see a computer in my country, I had the Nokia without a screen. My husband had been here for a few years before me, so he knew all the steps and handled most of the bureaucratic and digital things. I don't know how to walk in the street alone"
– Refugee woman from Eritrea, 2025.

"I know how to use Excel and Microsoft Word — that's no problem! But the system here is different. What is DigiD? You must pay for everything online, manage child benefits, insurance... And after five years living in the Netherlands, it was only today, in your workshop, that I learned I can search for jobs online!"
– Refugee woman from Afghanistan, 2025.

"I didn't go to school in Somalia, Here I'm lost. When I go somewhere, I write the address on a piece of paper and ask people to direct me! I don't know how to use Google maps."
*_ Refugee woman from Somalia, 2025.*

I have studied in Syria IT, but I didn't know that searching for job could be through job platforms!
– Refugee woman from Syria, 2025.

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Walking in Her Shoes: Testing the Refugee Job Platform RefugeeWork.nl as a Refugee Woman (30 minutes)

"From observation to participation: An experimental activity simulating the digital job search journey of refugee women."

- Based on earlier quotes and insights you will simulate the experience of creating a job profile as a refugee woman.
- You will reflect and document the digital and cultural barriers observed.

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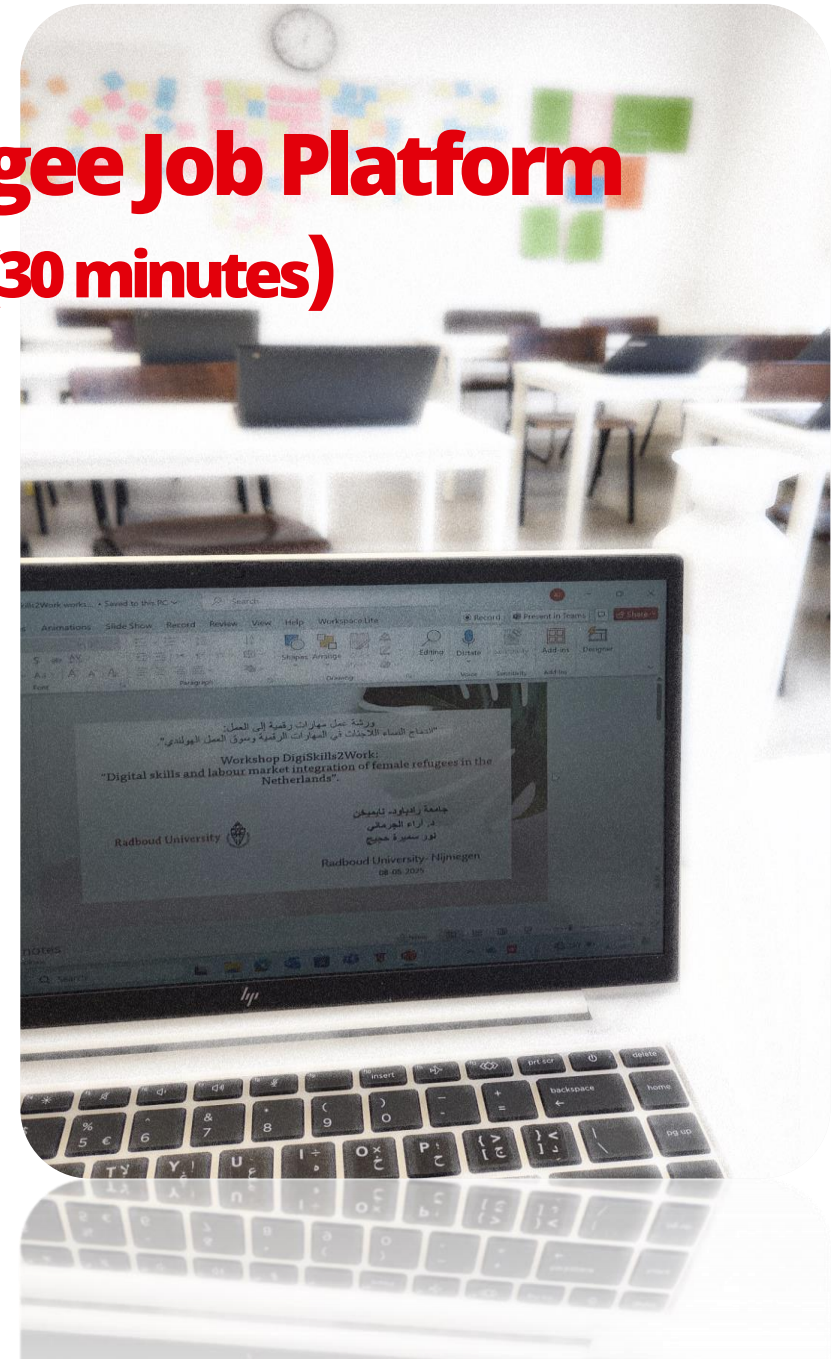
INSTRUCTIONS: GROUP SETUP

Step 1: Go into Small Groups (3–5 people)

Each group use one laptop/tablet or Mobile.

Visit: RefugeeWork.nl

Step 2: Role Play

One member acts as a refugee woman (Syria, Eritrea, or Afghanistan).

Others assist in creating a profile together.

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GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION

While exploring the platform, reflect on:

- What cultural aspects might confuse or discourage her?
- Are job categories inclusive of diverse skills?
- Is the site gender-sensitive?
- What digital skills are required to use the platform?
- How accessible is the platform for women with limited digital skills?
- How accessible is the platform for women with limited Dutch proficiency?

Write your answers on flipchart paper.

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OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS OF FEMALE REFUGEES (5 MINS)

Category 1: Integration & Access Gaps

- **Digital skills are very important, they repeated! It should be taught in a language that refugees understand, not wait until they speak Dutch, it is very urgent to understand the system in the Netherlands.**

- **They wondered if it is important to put their photos?**

Category 2: Systemic Labor Market Barriers

- For 80% of them, it is the first time they log in to the Job Platform. They do not know what possibilities this digital tool offers. What does the Platform entail?

- They commented jobs are very municipality-oriented.

- Asked: What if they provide incorrect information about their gender or education? What is the impact of this on getting the right job?

Category 3: Digital Literacy and Tech Barriers

- **Participants mostly struggled with creating a password.**
- **Some participants never saw a computer before arriving here, they don't know how it is working and what is the benefits of using it?**
- **The idea of registering in a platform is not clear, why they have to register?**

Category 4: Administrative Gaps

- If the contact person doesn't know about the offered Digital skills trainings in the neighborhood of female refugees, they don't refer them.

- The highly educated participants wanted an intake interview that focused on their digital skills, not just their education.

- When men find work, women often lose access to information and feel uncertain about job searching or using digital systems in the Netherlands.

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Groups Reflection (25 mins)

Share Insights Each group briefly presents 1–2 key takeaways from their activity.

"How do your insights align with what real refugee women shared during my research?"

What could make digital tools more inclusive for refugee women?

What could you implement in your organization to address these challenges?

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Guest speaker Noemi Mena Montes will share her experience with refugee women from AZC's (5 mins)

Noemi Mena Montes holds a PhD in Political Communication and Migration. She is currently an Assistant Professor in Migrant Inclusion at Radboud University and a researcher within the migration network RUNOMI.

Noemi has been actively engaged in the field of digital inclusion and refugee empowerment through different educational and research initiatives, both at the university and as co-founder of the NGO Re-starter (www.re-starter.org) . At Radboud University, she teaches in the Newcomers Program for asylum seekers and had been the co-coordinator of a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project focused on the empowerment of refugee women.

 Digital Education, Access and Inclusion: Opportunities and Challenges for Migrants and Refugees in The Netherlands – Runomi

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ROUND TABLE TO INVOLVE STAKEHOLDERS

Dr. Giacomo Solano and I warmly invite you to **join us in presenting the results** of our research on **9 October**, from **2:30 PM to 5:00 PM**.
The event will take place at the **Municipality of Utrecht**.

Please let us know if you are willing to participate by emailing us at:

- araajaramani@gmail.com

- Araa.aljaramani@gmail.com

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We hope you can join us and contribute to the discussion.

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THANK YOU

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