

## *The Critical Skills for Life and Work Project*

Our project's background and motivation is a co-constructive, cooperative and ethically-focused response to a human crisis: Europe has recently experienced a dramatic and unprecedented influx of refugees. By the end of 2015, the European Union (EU) as a whole received over 1.2 million first-time asylum claims (IOM, 2015), and according to the UNHCR there are now well over a million refugee asylum seekers in the EU (UNHCR, 2017).

A small but significant sub-group of these people are highly qualified professionals –doctors, architects, lawyers, teachers, engineers, for example –who, having been displaced, often find themselves in low-skilled, minimum-wage jobs for which they are over-qualified. Prior educational attainment among refugees as a whole varies depending on individual circumstances and country of origin, but in the case of Syria, the largest single country of origin of refugees, estimates suggest that there are as many as 2,000 university professionals and a minimum of 100,000 university-qualified students amongst the refugee population in the EU (IIE, 2016), and a large majority with prior professional experience before being forced to flee.

This means that among this national group alone there are likely to be over 5,000 professionals who are in a position to contribute key professional skills and experience to their host countries. Best current estimates are that among all national groups about 15,000 people fall into the category of highly-skilled refugee professionals across Europe. Their skill sets and professional experience often count for little, as host countries in an alarming number of cases fail to utilise the potential of much sought-after qualified personnel.

The integration of highly-skilled refugees into the labour market is crucial in order to avoid their long-term dependency and marginalization and to help create a positive image in the eyes of host societies, and to counter anti-migrant discourse. Highly-skilled refugee professionals can of course make an

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invaluable contribution to host societies if given the chance to do so, and to their societies-of-origin if return is a realist future option for them.

In response, this project researched and developed materials to enhance intercultural communicative skills and competences for refugees aspiring to re-enter the professional domain after a period of displacement. The project's full name was '*Critical Skills for Life and Work: Developing the Professional Intercultural Communicative Competence (PICC) of Highly-Skilled Refugees*'. It was funded by the European Commission under their Erasmus+ Programme and ran over two years (from September 2017 until September 2019). It involved researchers, refugee aspirant professionals, and volunteer language teachers working together to identify and articulate the specific needs of refugee learners and the teachers working with them. They worked together to produce a toolkit of free online resources co-designed by the participant groups to meet these needs [cslw.eu](http://cslw.eu). While its field of study was the UK, the Netherlands and Austria, its outputs are designed for application across Europe, and beyond. Its conceptual aim was to see how 'sharp-end' groups experientially negotiating 'intercultural competence' frame, articulate and operationalise this concept through language learning designed to facilitate professional (re)integration.

Please visit our project website at [cslw.eu](http://cslw.eu). Here you'll find detailed project background information, news, resources useful to displaced people seeking employment in Europe and anyone working to help them, and the toolkit, with resources for learners and teachers. Anyone involved in any way in responding positively to the refugee crisis will find useful free advice and materials. Take a look and get in touch [cslw.eu/about/](http://cslw.eu/about/)