

MYSKILLS IS A TECHNOLOGY-BASED MULTILINGUAL TEST THAT USES PICTURES AND VIDEOS TO ASSESS THE JOB-RELEVANT SKILLS OF REFUGEES AND DOMESTIC JOBSEEKERS WITHOUT FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS/CERTIFICATIONS IN ORDER TO HELP THEM FIND WORK OR ENTER TRAINING.

## MYSKILLS – recognising professional competencies

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### GERMANY

MYSKILLS provides an objective and validated way of identifying job-relevant competencies.

The main target groups are

- Refugees and migrants (the majority of asylum seekers have no formal training or qualifications or at least have no official documentation to prove it),
- Formally low-qualified workers with job experience.

Jobseekers, PES counsellors and employers benefit from reliable and objective information about skills and competences. Jobseekers gain documentation on their job-related skills which they can use for training or job applications.

Name of the PES

German PES (Federal Employment Agency - *Bundesagentur für Arbeit* - BA)

Scope of measure

National

When was the practice implemented?

Test development began in July 2016, twelve tests have been in nationwide use since December 2018.

What was the driver for introducing the practice? Was it internal or external?

The German labour market is highly dependent on formal academic and professional qualifications. Refugees, migrants and low-skilled workers who do not possess formal qualifications are likely to only have access to unskilled work. Furthermore, even though two-thirds of refugees have work experience, the lack of validation of informal and non-formal learning leads to an underestimation of their competencies in the German job market, since these informally acquired competencies are not taken into account properly.

This is significant given that the number of low-skilled workers in Germany is projected to increase sharply up to the year 2020, while the need for workers with formal qualifications grows simultaneously. In response to high numbers of refugees in 2015/16, it was decided that instruments were needed early on in the counselling process, so refugees could complement language training in order to speed up the time it takes them to find a job.

Which organisation was involved in its implementation?

- German PES (Federal Employment Agency - *Bundesagentur für Arbeit* - BA): Responsible for project steering, decisions on content and design, piloting tests, engaging employers, integration with BA systems.
- *Bertelsmann Stiftung*: A private, non-profit foundation that develops and funds its own projects for social reform; as a partner of the BA, it partly funded the project.

Which groups were targeted by the practice?

Refugees, migrants and formally low-qualified workers with job experience.

What were the practice's main objectives?

MYSKILLS aims to identify the competencies and work-relevant skills of refugees and migrants through technology-based testing, and to use the results of the test for placement, training and apprenticeships. It makes informally or non-formally acquired competencies visible and usable for job entry and enables further training. The aim is that career advisory and job market integration for unqualified refugees, migrants, and low-skilled workers are improved.

MYSKILLS is an improvement of previous validation tools by:

- Being multilingual and culturally sensitive;
- Including visual-based learning and simulation (rather than relying on written language only);
- Delivering reliable, objective and valid results through a standardised test on competencies (not a self-assessment);
- Assessing vocational competencies in professional fields and thus below the level of (full) formal qualifications; and
- Being quick and affordable enough to allow it to be scaled up to a large number of clients nationwide.

<p>What activities were carried out?</p>	<p>MYSKILLS is a vocational competence test that is completed by the client following the PES counselling interview, if the client has work experience in an occupation but has no recognised formal qualification or way to prove it. Based on the clients' job experience, MYSKILLS is taken in order to assess their vocational competencies compared to German standards.</p> <p>PES staff put individuals forward for testing in one or more professions. The test takes place in a PES-run test centre and takes about four hours. There are 30 different tests being developed, each covering a particular profession (e.g. sales assistant for retail services or chef). The professions were chosen according to a mix of factors like work experience of refugees and formally low-qualified workers, the existence of partial qualification models, the duration of VET qualification and skills demand.</p> <p>The tests are supported by pictures and videos and are available in six languages (German, English, Arabic, Farsi, Turkish, and Russian). The images show concrete occupational actions in real-life settings. For each profession the test has five to eight different action or competence fields (e.g. for the test 'sales assistant for retail services' these include 'handling customer service' and 'working at the till'). Each action field has several specific tasks associated with it. The competence/action areas are clearly separable, represent occupational areas/assignments in companies, are oriented towards existing partial qualification models, and represent the full vocational proficiency (as established in VET regulations). The individual is evaluated for each area and graded over five levels from high skills to low/no skills. The individual receives feedback on the assessment through their PES counsellor and is given a document containing their test results. Depending on the outcome of the assessment, a decision is made on whether deployment to a particular placement is possible or not, whether extra training is needed, or what occupation placement may be most suitable.</p>
<p>What resources and other relevant organisational aspects were involved?</p>	<p>To develop the tests for each of the 30 professions, professional experts (e.g. training providers or trade bodies) were contracted to help identify associated professional actions and skills to be tested. <i>Bertelsmann Stiftung</i> organised workshops with broader stakeholders (e.g. chambers of commerce, practitioners, vocational trainers) to assure quality and validity of the test.</p> <p><i>Bertelsmann Stiftung</i> also organised a scientific committee for quality assurance. Universities (<i>Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt University Berlin</i>) were contracted to construct and validate the test questions, and the German Institute for International Educational Research (DIPF) designed a pilot pre-test to validate the questions.</p> <p>The Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (<i>Forschungsinstitut Betriebliche Bildung (f-bb) gGmbH</i>) has monitored the pilot phase and supported the German PES to introduce MYSKILLS into their processes.</p> <p>MYSKILLS has been extensively piloted in 10 regions.</p> <p>The IT platform was built by a contractor. It is integrated into PES systems so that test results are received directly by PES counsellors.</p>
<p>What were the source(s) of funding?</p>	<p>No publicly available information.</p>
<p>What were the outputs of the practice: people reached and products?</p>	<p>MYSKILLS is operational for twelve professions (since end of 2018). The following are the key achievements so far:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ About 4 5100 people have already participated in the twelve available tests (i.e. motor vehicle mechatronics technician, sales assistant for retail services, farmer, chef, skilled metal worker, building construction worker, joiner, building and object coater).</li> <li>▶ 18 tests in different professions have been developed.</li> <li>▶ The professions have been integrated into PES operations and training has been given to all BA integration, placement, and advisory staff. Development and piloting of the remaining tests will be completed in spring 2019.</li> </ul>
<p>What outcomes have been identified?</p>	<p>Because the initiative is very recent, there are no documented outcomes as of yet. However, anticipated outcomes are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Clients gain documentation on their job-related skills, which they can use to access higher-skilled work or training.</li> <li>▶ PES gain validated and objective information and are able to better place refugees or develop pathways for further training and qualification.</li> <li>▶ Employers benefit from reliable and objective information about skills and competencies and can offer appropriate opportunities.</li> </ul>

### What are the lessons learnt and success factors?

Key lessons are as follows:

- ▶ The extensive test development and piloting, drawing on extensive expertise, has ensured that the tests are of very high quality and reliability.
- ▶ Stakeholder management has been crucial in ensuring that MYSKILLS test results will be recognised and accepted by trade bodies and others.
- ▶ Workshops with employers and PES counsellors as part of test development have ensured that these stakeholders are committed and that the results will be utilised by them.
- ▶ MYSKILLS has a specific approach to what it measures and what it leads to; it does not aim for formal recognition of qualifications and it does not aim to replicate already existing competency profiles.
- ▶ MYSKILLS is being integrated into PES systems, which will ensure that it is combined with existing procedures and that information is accessible to counsellors.

There are some limitations of MYSKILLS:

- ▶ It is a predictor of skills and competencies based on a technology-based test, and it does not measure practical skills in action;
- ▶ It does not assess theoretical knowledge or social and cognitive abilities; and
- ▶ It does not assess language proficiency (because it is translated).

Given these limitations, it is likely that MYSKILLS will be combined with other provisions, such as ALMPs, soft skills training, and language training. Job counselling will take place before and after the test.



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