

Multilingual Competency Questionnaires

THE MULTILINGUAL COMPETENCY QUESTIONNAIRE IS A TOOL USED ON AN OPTIONAL BASIS BY PES ACROSS AUSTRIA FOR THE SYSTEMATIC IDENTIFICATION AND COLLECTION OF THE COMPETENCIES AND QUALIFICATIONS OF REFUGEES WHEN THEY REGISTER AS UNEMPLOYED.

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The Multilingual Competency Questionnaires are used for the systematic collection/evaluation of the competencies of refugees who register as unemployed in various PES across Austria. The questionnaire is bilingual (German/mother tongue) and is available in Arabic, Dari Farsi, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, French, Romanian, Turkish, Hungarian, Russian, Portuguese. In some cases, the information collected from the Competency Questionnaire acts as an advisory tool for the PES, enabling it to decide whether refugees are assigned to further planned integration measures. In PES Graz West & Umgebung, for example, refugees may be referred to the *Integration Path* where, for a defined duration, they receive further education, training and preparation in order to help them to integrate into the labour market. The *Integration Path* is equivalent to the Competency Check rolled out in Austria in 2016.

Name of the PES

At first, the questionnaires were only used in the PES Graz West & Umgebung (in the province of Styria). Its use was expanded across Austria and is now used by various PES all over the country including Styria, Upper Austria, Vorarlberg, and in individual PES in Lower Austria, Salzburg and Carinthia.

Scope of measure

The Multilingual Competency Questionnaire is a national measure. However, not all regional PES use the Competency Questionnaires. PES are free to use it (or not) and adapt it if necessary to reflect local conditions.

When was the practice implemented?

Developed in the Autumn of 2014 and rolled out in July 2015. Ongoing.

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

In the context of getting refugees into jobs, it is important to check their skills and qualifications as soon as possible in order to prepare them for integration into the labour market. Unemployment in Austria is high with the economy growing by only 0.8% in 2015. At the same time, it is expected that a high number of refugees will participate in the Austrian labour market in the medium term, creating competition among unskilled workers.

The idea for the Competency Questionnaires first originated in 2014 in the regional PES Graz West & Umgebung. At the time, the PES suspected that their records of migrants' of skills and qualifications (before the introduction of the Questionnaire) did not reflect the actual level of skills and qualifications amongst registered migrants. It was found that advisors had generally attributed too low a qualification level, due to difficulties in identifying the skills of migrants who cannot speak any German. Therefore, in order to obtain better and more accurate information on the educational level of refugees that are registered as unemployed, Multilingual Competency Questionnaires were developed in Autumn 2014; since July 2015, these have been used to collect systematic information on the competencies of refugees and can now contribute to identifying clients who would benefit from further integration measures.

Which organisation was involved in its implementation?

At first, Competency Questionnaires were only used in the PES Graz West & Umgebung (in the Styria province), and later across all of Styria. Its use was expanded across Austria and is now used all over the country in Styria, Upper Austria, Vorarlberg, and in individual PES in Lower Austria, Salzburg and Carinthia.

Which groups were targeted by the practice?

Refugees registered as unemployed and asylum seekers who have had some work experience.

What were the practice's main objectives?

The aim of this project was to collect more accurate and complete data on the competencies and qualifications of refugees registering as unemployed, allowing the PES to gain a more complete profile of the skills and abilities of migrants, and in some cases helping the PES to decide on further integration measures for these clients.

<p>What activities were carried out?</p>	<p>In PES using Multilingual Competency Questionnaires, the following process generally takes place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ When asylum seekers receive notice of their refugee status, they must register with the PES. ▶ When refugees first register at the information desk at the PES, two things happen. They receive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) A date for their first appointment with a PES advisor which, in the case of the PES Graz West and Umgebung, normally takes place within 14 days after registration but can happen sooner in other PES; (ii) A multilingual Competency Questionnaire – some refugees who come to register at the PES have already got the questionnaire because some asylum centres stock these questionnaires and help the target group to fill them in. ▶ If they haven't done so already, refugees must fill out the questionnaire at home and bring it to their first appointment with the advisor. The questionnaire asks about previous education, language skills, previous work experience, vocational training, the profession the person would like to work in and individual circumstances (preferred working time, possible health conditions etc.). People can also indicate in which sector they have worked before and which activities they performed. ▶ At the first appointment (sometimes with a personal interpreter provided by the PES¹), PES advisors use the completed questionnaire to clarify skills, qualifications and competencies of the refugee, their career goals, preferred working times etc. ▶ All formal and informal qualifications or competencies are captured in this one document and form the basis for the PES records. ▶ The questionnaires (and content of the counselling interview) are decisive in defining next steps for a refugee. Although not the case in every PES, the questionnaires can be used in planning for the integration process (each PES is required by law to have an integration process in place for refugees²). So for example, in the case of the PES Graz West & Umgebung, information from the questionnaire is used to help the PES decide who to refer to the integration process or who to refer to other support measures, i.e. who goes on to a German language course and/or training programme and/or vocational training, and who goes on to a basic German language course only.
<p>What resources and other relevant organisational aspects were involved?</p>	<p>Initially only the regional PES of Graz West & Umgebung was involved; later, the provincial PES of Styria became involved, helping with communication and distribution.</p> <p>Translators were required to translate the questionnaires into the various languages available. This work was carried out by Zebra, a non-governmental organisation.</p>
<p>What were the source(s) of funding?</p>	<p>Funded by the PES from their own resources.</p>
<p>What were the outputs of the practice: people reached and products?</p>	<p>There has yet to be an evaluation of the Competency Questionnaires, however, the following outputs are noted in the PES Graz West & Umgebung;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The Multilingual Competency Questionnaires were produced in 9 different languages. ▶ There were 23 information events in October 2015, where registered refugees at the PES Graz West & Umgebung were given information about the questionnaires and were instructed how to fill them in. ▶ Since then, the questionnaire was distributed on an ongoing basis to all new customers.

1. PES Graz West und Umgebung is the only PES in Austria where personal interpreters support the PES advisors in the advisory first meeting with the refugee, but due to limited resources the interpreters are not able to be at every counselling interview.
2. Individual PES or PES regions may have different names for the integration process, for example, Competence Check in PES Vienna or Integration Path in PES Graz West and Umgebung.

What outcomes have been identified?

The following outcomes have been identified:

- ▶ While it has not yet been evaluated, the Multilingual Competency Questionnaire has received positive internal feedback, and has been adopted voluntarily by many PES across Austria.
- ▶ The Competency Questionnaire measure was awarded the AMS' 'Idea of the year 2015'.
- ▶ The quality of data and records has improved. The data collected via the questionnaires reflects the actual skills and qualifications of the migrants tested.
- ▶ It has helped to improve the allocation of educational training measures as well as placements.

What are the lessons learnt and success factors?

Key lessons learnt in the utilisation of the Multilingual Competency Questionnaire in Austria include the following:

- ▶ After the introduction of the questionnaire, the information collected revealed that refugees were better skilled and qualified than previously thought. Previous methods of recording refugees' abilities were simply not capturing facts accurately enough.
- ▶ It is a very cost efficient practice, which is easy to realise and adapt for other national PES.

In order to effectively employ the measure, some factors that should be considered include:

- ▶ Try to involve the Chamber of Commerce (for entrepreneurs) in the development of the questionnaires so that the questions reflect what businesses/employers need to know.
- ▶ Try to find translators who are familiar with the target group and the employment market.
- ▶ Support the target group to complete the Competency Questionnaire and encourage them regarding the advantages of this "self-assessment", i.e. the importance of informing the PES about their competencies and qualifications in order to facilitate their integration into the labour market
- ▶ Communicate with internal PES staff and try to convince them that identifying skills and qualifications is critical to the integration process.
- ▶ Involve the national asylum authority to enable the distribution of Competency Questionnaires at the time of the asylum application.



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