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APL-Bud Foreign Pilots



R10 task 8.4 Pilots outside Poland Report

Report on the pilots carried out by the foreign partners using existing APL accreditation systems for the migrant construction workers. Analysis of the experience and lessons learned in the process.

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APL-BUD FOREIGN PILOTS

A. INTRODUCTION

The Foreign Pilots were activity 8 of the APL-Bud project and were carried out in parallel with the Polish pilots (activity 7). The pilots were intended "to demonstrate practical procedures and systems to certify the profile of competences of Polish and foreign construction workers inside Poland and outside" and "Foreign partners need to set up a similar process [to the Polish pilots], with assessors and explanatory/guidance documentation in appropriate languages. They need to monitor the process for the APL-Bud report and to ensure quality." (Project proposal). The foreign pilots were intended to learn from partner countries' best practice, and to show how APL can be carried out for migrant workers.

This report describes the APL systems in the five partner countries which attempted to hold pilots. All the foreign partners encountered major problems in recruiting candidates to participate in the pilots, and so this report dedicates one section to this aspect. There is then a section on the assessment process itself, followed by Conclusions and Recommendations.

1. Polish Pilots

APL-Bud selected three Polish construction occupational qualifications for the pilots: brick-layer, roofer and plumber. Under the new Polish Vocational School curricula (selected as the basis for the pilots) these equate to 7 modules:

1.1 Brick-layer (bricklaying)

1.2 Brick-layer (plastering)

2.1 Roofer (basic)

2.2 Roofer (advanced)

3.1 Plumber (water)

3.2 Plumber (gas)

3.3 Plumber (heating & ventilation)

The Polish pilot concentrated on the recognition of prior learning for experienced but unqualified workers. The agreed methodology was to have:

- an application form setting out prior experience
- a health & safety test,
- a theory test
- a practical test.

The Polish pilot was carried out at the Marian Osiński State Construction Schools in Gdańsk, and a certificate was issued by ZETOM-CERT Ltd (a well-established certification body) with full official national recognition.

2. Selecting the Foreign Pilots

In the foreign partner countries the equivalent qualifications were identified. In several cases there was not an exact one-to-one match.

The foreign partners of the APL-Bud project were required to carry out pilot APL assessment of Polish construction workers in their country. It was agreed that the assessment should use existing APL systems in the host country, in order to:

- see how well the APL system works for migrant workers (of whom Poles are the largest contingent)
- enable the migrant workers to have the benefit of an appropriate qualification in their host country
- avoid setting up a new APL system, where functioning systems already exist

The benefits were:

- The systems are already in place, tried and tested, with: assessors, support and guidance, assessment centres, awarding bodies, quality assurance, supporting documentation, public recognition, etc. It avoids duplicating a system which is already functioning.
- The candidates would gain foreign qualifications. This is a powerful motivator for the candidates as it helps them to compete on equal terms with local workers, and the qualification may also have some recognition back in Poland or in a third country.
- The pilots would identify any barriers in these systems that disadvantage/exclude foreign workers, helping them to improve

access for migrant workers. The systems have probably been developed for their own citizens. We have found many unexpected barriers (for example: complexity, difficulty of obtaining information, aversion to exams and authority) in addition to the expected ones (for example language).

- It is much cheaper, easier and more efficient to use existing systems rather than creating a special Polish overseas system.
- The Polish system cannot operate outside Poland without legal changes: it does not have the authority to hold assessment outside Polish borders.
- It would enhance the sharing of experience of foreign best practice with the Polish partners.

It was hoped that by documenting the differences between the APL-Bud system in Poland and the foreign system, it would be possible to demonstrate that they were equivalent (in scope, standard and reliability) so that the APL-Bud qualification could also be awarded. This may require a slight addition to the foreign assessment to ensure that the scope is fully covered. In practice it was only possible to award an APL-Bud project qualification, not the full accreditation awarded to candidates in Poland.

B. THE FOREIGN APL SYSTEMS

The scope and standard of the foreign qualifications had been carefully mapped against the Polish qualification (the new syllabus being developed by the Ministry of Education, which we have called the referential) to identify any differences. This work was carried out under activity 4 of APL-Bud.

Since Turkey did not have any existing APL systems it was agreed that pilots would not be held in Turkey. It was intended to hold pilots in the other countries (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Romania, UK), but in practice it proved impossible for the German partner to contact suitable candidates.

The foreign APL systems used were:

- **Belgium:** APL is a regional matter, and so there are 2 government systems (Flanders and Wallonia). For the 3 occupations selected for the pilots (roofer, plumber and bricklayer/mason) there is not yet any APL qualification system in Flanders, but in Wallonia there are assessment centers (centres des compétences), coordinated by a consortium near Brussels (Uccle). The system is quite new, but it is not well known. The system has a 1 hour multiple choice theory paper (which includes testing on health & safety) and an 8 hour practical test over 2 days which includes a professional interview. It is based on the French system of Validation des Acquis Professionnels, and is not available in Flanders or in the Flemish language. The candidates were Poles.
- **Germany:** there is no system designed specifically for APL, but the Externenprüfung system permits access to the final exam of the apprenticeship ('Dual') system for those who have not served an apprenticeship, provided that they can show they have more than 1 ½ times the experience in the occupation greater than those who have served the equivalent apprenticeship (in other words, at least 4 ½ years experience). There is a theory test and a practical test, both are in German, and each must be passed. There is no support and guidance system.
- **Italy:** there is a national system of description of the profiles but not a national system of construction qualifications, only regional ones. However the (unofficial) Trasfobuilding assessment process (developed under an international project) has been used and is

becoming more widely used and better known as it answers an unsatisfied need. The 1 day process involves practical assessment with multiple evaluation of simulated tasks in a building school. The candidates were Poles and Romanians.

- **Romania:** the national APL system (part of the competence-based qualifications system) was used. The system has a 1 hour multiple choice theory paper (which includes testing on health & safety) and an 8 hour practical test over 2 days which includes a professional interview. The candidates were Romanians interested in working in Poland.
- **UK** has two assessment methods suitable for APL: OSAT (On Site Assessment & Training) and EWPA (Experienced Worker Practical Assessment).
 - ▶ OSAT is the standard assessment method for all construction NVQs, and only includes training inputs that are needed (so a competent person will need no further training). It consists of observation (and questioning, including testing on theory) of the candidate on site on a number of days, so that evidence is assembled to show competence in all units of the NVQ. The candidates were Poles, Romanians and Lithuanians.
 - ▶ EWPA has been created as a special accelerated assessment for competent workers. The candidate is observed and questioned while carrying out simulated construction tasks in an Assessment Centre. It usually requires an initial briefing and professional interview to confirm that the candidate is suitable, followed by the practical assessment over 1 or 2 days (depends on the occupation). The Candidates were Poles.

Only in Germany, Romania and UK was there an existing national system which is functioning, and even there it is not widely known (and even less widely used) for assessment of experienced workers (APL). In UK, this obscurity was made worse by the widespread local variations of assessment centres, assessment procedures (and therefore time required), and funding arrangements – so that although it is nominally a national system, no two assessment centres treat it quite the same and one is left with the impression of overwhelming local variation and complexity. The partner formed the opinion that it was virtually impossible for a migrant worker to be able to attain accreditation unaided. None of the systems had adequate support and guidance (both designed and operating), and no system was sympathetic to foreigners.

C. RECRUITMENT OF CANDIDATES

The recruitment of candidates proved a major problem in Belgium and UK, and in Germany it appeared insurmountable (largely because transition arrangements excluded Polish workers from the German labour market). Migrant workers are not easy to contact, even 5 years after EU accession they are not networked with each other (and still less with migrants from other countries) and they are not necessarily motivated to improve their qualifications. The partners tried numerous approaches. In general the most successful approach was to use the local training college. It may be that other approaches would have worked over a longer time-scale.

Numbers of recruits by different methods

(● = tried but not successful):

	Belgium	Germany	Italy	Romania	UK
Church	●				●
Trades union	2	●			
Polish language press	1				4
Social centres (Polish pubs)					●
Polish construction networks	2				2
Polish employers		●			2
Employers		●			3
Training Centres	●	●	10	5	8
Personal contacts					1
Total responses	5	0	10	5	20
Bricklayers	1 Polish		10 (5 Polish, 5 Romanian)	5 Romanian	5 Polish
Roofers	3 Polish				
Plumbers	3 Polish				0
Carpenters					8 Lithuanian 1 Polish 1 Romanian
Others					1 Lithuanian 1 Polish 1 Romanian
Total candidates	7 (1 person is candidate for all 3 occupations)	0	10 assessed	5 assessed	9 assessed

The major incentive for candidates was to get a foreign qualification, in order to improve competitiveness on the local labour market (more work, better pay, better status, more legal) but this was often not enough. The APL-Bud Polish qualification was not a significant incentive (NB it is not yet a certainty that the Polish qualification can be awarded to candidates outside the country). Migrants may not expect to stay long enough to make local qualifications worthwhile. Employers perceive loss not gain from qualifications for their migrant workers (loss of production during assessment, cost of assessment, subsequent demands for higher wages or loss of employees).

Migrant workers' foreign language skills are often poor. Recruitment of Polish candidates benefited hugely when the Polish language was used (for advertisements, or discussions with candidates). Candidates are concerned their host country language skills are insufficient for assessment. There is a separate vocabulary (and often concepts) which is not part of migrant workers' everyday speech even in their own language: qualifications, government grants, portfolios, evidence, assessment. UK assessors remarked that they had to explain what test questions mean even to native English candidates.

A final cultural obstacle: both candidates and employers in the construction industry tend to have a deep-rooted antipathy to officialdom, including government grants, assessors, etc. This was made worse by problems of illegal working and illegal pay/tax/conditions in some countries, which hindered both the partners while recruiting and made migrant workers unwilling to come forward as candidates.

D. ASSESSMENT

Each country's assessment process followed a similar pattern:

1. An initial briefing in which the candidate's work experience is evaluated, their self-assessment is used to identify the appropriate target qualification (and any additional learning or experience that is likely to be required), the assessment process is explained (including the standards and criteria used) and plans are made for collecting and assessing the evidence.

2A In each country there is then an accelerated assessment over one or two days performing typical construction tasks in an off-site assessment centre. It is normal for this to include some test of theoretical knowledge: verbal questions or a short written test.

2B In UK an alternative assessment route (OSAT) is offered which is a variant of the standard UK assessment process for apprentices or NVQs; this route requires sufficient visits to the workplace by the assessor (typically 6 to 8) to create a portfolio of evidence, covering all the functions listed in the qualification.

2C In Italy a second self-evaluation was introduced to the standard Trasfobuilding procedure, recognising the special situation of APL with already competent and experienced candidates.

3. The final action in stage 2 is the announcement of success (or otherwise). It is normal at this point for the Assessor to provide advice and guidance on career and further training options. This may be an official role or unofficial 'good citizen and neighbour' helpful advice. It is usually offered on the basis of the assessor's experience in the sector, without any special training.

In Germany, the transition arrangements prevent Poles working as employees, and the Externenprüfung test is only available through the Chambers (of employers), effectively excluding any Polish migrants from taking the test.

Comparative table summarising assessment:

	Belgium	Germany	Italy	Romania	UK (EWPA)	UK (OSAT)
Pilot Location	Chatelineau assessment centre		Como Building School	Construction site, commune Florica, district Buzau	Safety Plus Training at Dukeries College, Newark	Construction sites in Central London, by Safety Plus Training, and Nottingham by Castle College
Occupations			bricklayer	bricklayer, stonemason, plasterer	bricklayer	bricklayer, carpenter
Candidates			5 Polish, 5 Romanian	5 Romanian aged 23-32	3 Polish aged 38-57	2 Polish, 2 Romanian, 2 Lithuanian
Theory test				1 hour multiple choice	30 minute questioning by assessor	Questioning over 3 visits
Practical test (depends on occupation)			6-8 hours	8 hours (on 2 days)	6-8 hours	6-10 visits by assessor
Cost	Fee and employee grant paid by Govt. Candidate's wage paid by employer.	275 € + materials paid by employer or sometimes candidate	250-300 € cost was covered within the school assessment budget		~1,300 € fee per head paid by Govt grant	1,300 – 1,800 € per head paid by Govt grant

Cost of assessment was not a major factor, because the college assessment centres had found budgets and grants to cover the cost. However there did not appear to be any funding specifically aimed at migrant workers (except for one or two limited projects, such as APL-Bud)– instead the migrant workers were using funds intended for local nationals. The real cost depended on numbers of candidates available at one place/time/occupation (for efficient use of assessor), the capacity of the assessment centre, the extent of individual briefing, advice and guidance provided, and the grants available.

Grants for the employer were not high enough to motivate the employer, because employers are likely to have to pay more for a qualified worker or even lose the newly qualified worker. The company must have another kind of benefit, like training for the workers, tax reduction, points for public tender etc.

The desire to avoid unemployment was the main motivator to the candidates. But the labour market doesn't actually ask for qualifications (except CSCS for access to large UK sites). People said "we don't need a qualification" or "We know how to get a qualification when we need it".

The written theory test was a strong disincentive (it was often the reason the candidate did not have a qualification until now). Candidates had difficulty understanding the written questions – UK assessors reported that this is true even for candidates taking the test in their own language. It reflects the divide between the classroom and the workplace. The UK approach of asking the candidate orally, so that the candidate's real understanding is assessed, overcomes some of this problem, especially when the test is in a foreign language.

Language was a significant barrier, but one which was overcome by the assessors and candidates in each pilot (in the same way as it is overcome by supervisors and migrant workers in the workplace). The official process rarely made allowances for people with other languages (the UK CSCS Health & Safety test is an exception, being offered in a wide variety of languages), and the assessors did not speak the migrant workers' language. Where special programmes have been created for migrant workers, they include language tuition and this is doubtless extremely valuable for the candidates but did not form part of our pilots. The Stage 1 briefing of the assessment process was often carried out with a group of candidates, so that they were able to help each other by translating.



Feedback from the candidates and assessors was universally positive: the assessment was relevant and appropriate, rigorous but fair, the candidates appreciated the opportunity to get an appropriate professional qualification.

E. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are substantial difficulties in contacting and engaging with migrant workers.

There are substantial barriers to migrant workers getting qualifications in their host countries and to recognising their original national qualifications. The systems exist but are difficult to find and unnecessarily complex, variable over time and place – particularly disadvantaging migrant workers. There is also a need for language training for migrant workers so that they can perform at levels reflecting their capabilities.

Traditional assessment processes that concentrate on the underpinning knowledge are not well suited to verifying that migrant workers have achieved the learning outcomes. The written theory test is the least popular part of the whole assessment process, largely because of the words in which questions are expressed. For the practical test: a simulation is preferable to the portfolio-building approach, for migrant workers.

Migrant workers were very appreciative of the APL process, not only valuing the qualification, but expressing a desire to progress to higher levels and learn more. This would doubtless be magnified if professional information, advice and guidance (IAG) support were available. Migrant workers are particularly in need of IAG support that is available in their language. IAG support is needed at all stages: recruitment, induction, assessment and after completion (including support for those who do not achieve the desired qualification).

The existing APL systems are of high quality and we encountered no reasons to question the quality of the national assessment process used for the foreign pilots – their processes and QA systems all seemed of acceptable standard. It would be helpful if the APL-Bud qualification could be awarded to those assessed outside Poland (taking into account the matching of the scope of the qualification, which has been precisely determined by the mapping).

There is a lack of concrete motivation for APL, both for workers and their employers. Both employers and workers (especially migrant workers) need to be targeted with better information of the opportunities available and the benefits and incentives: improved conditions of employment (not only money, but also level, status, formalization, responsibility) for

workers, improved competitiveness for employers. The fragmented nature of the construction industry, with its poor safety record, waste and inefficiency, reliance on subcontracting and self-employed craftsmen and a large migrant labour workforce, all indicate the need for an APL campaign targeted specifically at the construction industry.

Existing APL systems are not widely known or used. Even the concept of APL is not widely known or understood, especially amongst migrant workers. All national qualification systems for construction workers (such as the UK's CSCS) should have an APL route and specific assistance to migrant workers.

The geographical limitations on national qualifications (and their assessment) make it desirable to develop a Europe-wide construction skills passport scheme. Any such scheme needs to certify competence in the individual functions (professional tasks), not just the complete occupation, since there are such differences in occupational scope across Europe.