



Transparency and Self-employment
for migrant workers through
Assessment Center

GIVECOMPETENCEACHANCE



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme



Transfer Guidelines for Assessment Centers for Migrants

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Transparency and Self-employment for migrant workers through
Assesmentcenter

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1. Fields of Application and Use of the Methods

Over the past decades, there have been fundamental changes to the working world in Europe's industrialised states. Social and methodological skills play an increasingly important role. Specialised skills by themselves are no longer sufficient for satisfying the complex demands of working life – this realisation had taken hold in the human resources management system by the 1980s at the latest. Although one's qualifications may reflect current knowledge, social and methodological skills demonstrate the ability to actively apply this knowledge in a practical setting. As a result, skilled personnel working as engineers and craftsmen will also need communication skills so that they can work in a team or respond to customer requests and complaints. They must exhibit flexibility and stress tolerance, and have presentation skills so that they can introduce products or outputs.

Even employees with minimal qualifications are expected to have knowledge and understanding of work processes in their entirety. They should also be prepared to recognise disruptions to work processes and be able to promptly make correct decisions to solve the problem.

The Berlin-based educational institution LIFE e.V. developed an Assessment system for migrants in 2006, which evaluates and documents skills based on concrete job demands and takes into account specific demands that are placed on people with migrant backgrounds looking to enter the German workplace.

This Assessment Center was transferred within the context of the GCAC project to Poland, Italy and Romania, and received practical testing in Olsztyn, Marsala and Perugia.

There are a variety of fields of application and use of the methods:

- The participants deal in depth with the key competences that they will need to enter the working world within the host country: they learn about the respective requirements and compare these with their own

competences. They have the opportunity to sharpen their own self-perceptions and to broaden their scope of action.

- Through the Assessments, human resources professionals receive valid information about the key competences of applicants – more precise than through conventional recruitment tests or interviews.
- In the professional orientation and advisory process, the simulation of real job requirements in an Assessment allows for the recognition of the individual strengths and potential of the advice seekers, and relates these to the job profiles.

This publication describes the opportunities and conditions for carrying out the Assessment for women with migrant backgrounds, and the experiences to be expected during the transfer of methods to Italy and Poland.

2. Specific Demands of the Target Group

The Assessment that was developed and implemented within the context of this project is tailored towards career entry for migrants.

Migrants looking for work abroad recognise the following hurdles that they need to overcome if they are to start a career:

- Experiencing foreignness: situations during the application process, within the team or during conflict situations at work, in which the style of communication and value systems conflict with one's own.
- Experiencing discrimination: by officials, colleagues or employers, and often with a doubled effect as a migrant and a woman.
- Language barriers in the most diverse of situations: for example, during communications with officials, during the application process, with colleagues – and the associated condition: speechlessness.
- Disorientation: the realisation that there are unfamiliar rules in the host country or that one has to deal with a variety of, at times, confusing opportunities, rules, services and guidelines, e.g. how cooperation is structured, the different dealings with hierarchies, etc.

The methodology matches the specific requirements of the target group through the following aspects:

- Explanation of how competences are understood in the host country: an Assessment for migrants should explain the importance of different competences in the host country's professional sphere.
- Mediation among working environments in different states: for immigrants, the process takes on the role of a mediator between different (work) cultures, since it confronts participants with the working world. Experience gathered during the Assessment aids in understanding the norms and codes in the working world of the host country and to take these into account when looking for jobs.
- Identification of competences independent of spoken language. The Assessment can uncover the competences of participants from other countries even if they haven't yet mastered the host country's lan-

guage – experiences and actions are in the foreground, not just argumentation.

Participating in the process, however, requires basic skills in the host country language. Linguistic hurdles are part of daily life that migrants will have to live with during career counselling, job interviews, or while communicating with their bosses. If one doesn't understand something, one needs to ask questions – this is also one of the Assessment's requirements that the migrants will need to deal with.

3. From Carrying out the Expert Workshop to the Preparation of Final Report – Step-by-Step Development and Execution of an Assessment Center

3.1 Development of Assessment Tasks

First Step

Finding typical critical situations. In every profession and life situation, there are typical critical situations that demand very specific social or methodological competences. Collecting and selecting these situations is the first step in developing an Assessment.

For a migrant looking for a job in the host country, this could be visiting a job placement agency in which an advisor sits, who might be friendly, but may offer advice filled with prejudice and have no sympathy for a job-seeking migrant (when there are so many locals without a job). Will the migrant succeed in fulfilling her wish of working in her vocation? Or not? How does she achieve her objective? Competences like communication skills and assertiveness become apparent in such situations.

Competences represent options for action available to the participants that even they are unaware of in many cases. If one wants to reveal these competences, situations need to be created in which the participants act in a self-organised manner in order to overcome a realistic exigency. But how does one identify typical critical situations, which will reveal these competences? The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) is used for this purpose in the Assessment. It was developed in the 1940s in the USA by J.C. Flanagan. Flanagan assumed that a system becomes most evident at its extremes. Accordingly, demands become most pronounced when people encounter the limits of their own inner systems, when disruptions to one's daily routine arise. These disruptions form the basis of the Assessment. An Assessment Task must therefore simulate not only typical demands, but also critical situations.

Experienced practitioners know such situations better than anyone and therefore their know-how is incorporated into an expert workshop – the more representative the range of experts present, the more likely that they will find the correct situations¹.

The example presented here, *“In the Bureaucratic Jungle”*, deals with a counselling situation and more particularly, one about a business start-up. Career counsellors and start-up experts should participate in the *expert workshop* along with migrants, who have experienced such bureaucratic channels.

First, situations are collected that are typical of the work area or the situation that will be addressed in the Assessment. Such situations should occur frequently and be relevant to the target group. From this list, critical situations will be selected – i.e. ones that are difficult to overcome.

Second Step

Precisely describe typical critical situations. Precise descriptions of the typical critical situations feed into the requirement profile with which the tasks must correspond.

“In the Bureaucratic Jungle” – Requirement Profile

The task deals with experiences that many migrants have had at public offices: the experience of not being welcomed, being put off, not receiving the information needed for seeking a job, creating a business, organising one’s daily affairs, or achieving social integration.

The simulation requires of the participants that they overcome resistance and follow their objectives. Despite discriminatory responses, they need to

¹ The project partners in Italy and Poland listed professional independence/grounding of a small business as a realistic chance for migrants to integrate themselves into the working world and maintain their existence. As a result, a corresponding assessment task was developed with the title *“In the Bureaucratic Jungle”*.

remain persistent in order to gather the information they need, to grapple with people in positions of authority, and to assert one's own interests. At the same time, they should remain friendly, and win the advisor over by convincing them.

Materials for the Assessment Tasks are developed based on the typical critical situations. They include:

- Task descriptions for the participants
- Description of roles and tips for role-players
- Observed competences including the observation items.
- Information for executing the task, including length, space required, and materials required.

“In the Bureaucratic Jungle” – Task Description for Participants

You've been living with your family in ... (Italy, Poland) for three years. You live from temporary jobs, little bits of work here and there, but you haven't been able to find a job yet that matches your qualifications. You hear from a friend that a store recently opened and since then you can't stop thinking about it. That's something that you could do too!

Last week, your friend told you that there are subsidies for people who want to open their own business and that this support comes from the employment office or even the European Union. You didn't understand exactly. But your friend was sure of it and was very optimistic. He gave you the address of the office that you need to visit and he told you that it would be very easy to get money from the state to start a small business. All you need is a good idea and a business plan. You think that all this sounds very good and decide to give it a try.

Today you have finally been given an appointment at the office. The “Infopoint ESF” is responsible for awarding start-up subsidies and it wasn't easy at all to get the appointment. There seems to be a lot of demand for getting counselling and subsidies. Now you're sitting together with a lot of other people and waiting for your turn. With the rush of people, the advisor

will not have much time for you and you don't expect to get more than 10 minutes. So you need to be brief and get the maximum amount of information out of the advisor within this short timeframe. You got the number 645, and number 644 has just been called. You still have 10 minutes left to prepare for the conversation and to crystallise your business idea.

During the conversation you absolutely want to clarify the following points:

- Is there really financial support for people launching start-ups and what are the conditions for receiving this support?
- What specifically do you need to do?
- What are the chances of your business idea getting supported?

During the “In the Bureaucratic Jungle” task, just a single person will be playing along – the advisor. Detailed stage directions are provided to the person who takes on this role so that during the simulation this seems like a real life person – this person can even be a little bit exaggerated and presented as full of prejudices.

“In the Bureaucratic Jungle” – Role Description for the Advisor

You are Mr. Koslowski, Advisor at “Infopoint ESF”, which is responsible for start-up subsidies. Up until a year ago, you worked at the consulting firm “Job aktiv” and along with other advisors, you won a prize for successful start-up advising. Because of this, your boss recommended you when the employment office opened the “Infopoint ESF” one year ago and started looking for qualified staff. You agreed to the transfer, but now you are no longer happy with your work as a start-up advisor. The people that come to your office hours just want money. That's all that most of them are interested in. Many of the start-up ideas are absurd and unfeasible. As a result, your work largely consists of talking the people who come to you out of their ideas. It's a depressing task. Besides, you don't have any time to talk through the business plans of the people coming to see you. 10 minutes per person is just too short! Your advising is therefore limited to providing the greatest possible amount of information within the shortest

possible time to people who don't exactly understand what start-ups are all about. Over time, you have become very impatient with your clients. On the other hand, you are excellently qualified for your work, and if a customer succeeds in convincing you with their idea, you can offer very helpful tips. After all, one shouldn't forget: start-up subsidies are good if one is familiar with the bureaucratic channels and knows how to make a correct application.

Third Step

Defining Observational Criteria (Items) and Conducting Test-Run.

In order to largely avoid during the Assessment that observers use their own personal interpretation of a behaviour and base their perceptions on their own set of values, every observed competence needs to be defined as precisely as possible. For this purpose, each competence will be allotted specific characteristics – observational criteria or items – which are known to both the observers and the participants. This is the only way to ensure transparent and methodologically correct work.

“In the Bureaucratic Jungle” – Observed Competences and their Items

- **Assertiveness:** Demonstrates self-assuredness, asks for information even if the advisor reacts in an unfriendly fashion; maintains opinions despite resistance from the advisor; defends own ideas; stands by own strengths and competences (lists them); takes on the offensive when reacting to discrimination; develops strategies in order to assert own position.
- **Communication Skills:** Takes initiative in approaching others and starting conversations; expresses own opinions; shows interest in what others are saying, listens attentively; asks questions; contributes to establishing a cooperative working atmosphere; encourages others to participate; shares the excitement/frustration of others; underscores verbal communication with gestures and facial expressions; maintains eye contact; holds facing posture.

- **Tolerance for Frustrations:** Remains patient even when under stress and time pressure; starts over again after failures; accepts criticism of work results or processes; remains calm in the face of personal attacks; works in a results-oriented manner under stress and time pressure; maintains working method or discussion structure despite interruptions; maintains sense of humour even in the face of stress and time pressure.

Test Run and Optimisation. Prior to launching the newly developed Assessment, it is absolutely crucial to conduct a general test, if possible, with individuals from the target group. During this test run, attention should be paid to being as realistic as possible, maintaining accuracy in terms of subject matter, degree of difficulty, and observability of the identified competences. If the test phase reveals one or another weakness in the Assessment, further work needs to be done.

3.2 Executing the Assessment Center

First Step

Orientation. Every Assessment Task begins with an orientation programme for the participants lasting about one hour. It raises their curiosity about the task without anticipating it. This is achieved by explaining the task situation, but not giving a detailed description of the simulation. The orientation programme forms the connection between the competences demanded by the task and the demands of the workplace. In order for participants to open up to the simulation of a critical situation and to derive optimal use from the associated learning and development opportunities, they must be able to assess the relevance of this situation to the working world. In addition, the participants are given the opportunity before and after each Assessment Task to exchange ideas about different action strategies, learn about the solutions of other participants, and to learn from one another. This combination of individual and group experience aids in reflection on one's own behaviour and opens one's eyes to alternative courses of action.

Second Step

Observation. The observational criteria (items) are also described prior to each task and a half hour limit is planned on this explanation. The participants are informed of these criteria for two reasons. First: they need to know which specific competences are going to be observed during the task so that they can successfully overcome the situation. Second: a differentiated self-Assessment is only possible if they are aware of the criteria according to which they are being evaluated.

After the respective task has been presented, the participants have about 15 minutes to prepare. The length of time for carrying out the task varies – team situations can last 45 minutes, while role-plays usually only require 15 minutes.

For each task, there is a lead observer and a co-observer – this is part of the method and fulfils the quality standards of maintaining the highest possible degree of control over subjectivity. The LIFE Assessment has a

strict distinction between data collecting during the observation and the evaluation of data that takes place after the observation has finished. During the Assessment Task, the observers record and take notes regarding as many concrete actions and statements as possible, but without classifying them according to the respective items.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
morning	Introduction	Individual Feedback	Individual Feedback	Individual Feedback
	Orientation Programme Explanation of the Observational Criteria	Orientation Programme Explanation of the Observational Criteria	Orientation Programme Explanation of the Observational Criteria	Conclusion
	Assessment Task	Assessment Task	Assessment Task	
	Self-Assessment by the Participants	Self-Assessment by the Participants	Self-Assessment by the Participants	
afternoon	Assessment of the Observed Behaviours by the Observers Competence Reports Observer Conference	Assessment of the Observed Behaviours by the Observers Competence Reports Observer Conference	Assessment of the Observed Behaviours by the Observers Competence Reports Observer Conference	

Third Step

Assessment and Reflection. The Assessment is conducted on the one hand by the observer, and on the other through a self-Assessment by the participants. These findings are collected during a feedback discussion.

Self-Assessment. Directly after each task, the participants have about 15 minutes to formulate a self-Assessment. They are given a form for this purpose. Once more, they are supposed to review their behaviour during the task, the competences that they demonstrated, and reflect to put down the corresponding observational criteria on paper. During this process, they deal in depth with the observational criteria and learn to relate their own actions to the associated key competences.

Competence Reports. Following the task, observers create individual competence reports for each participant. They should allot around 15 minutes to each report. During this time, they classify the noted observations according to the relevant observational criteria (items). A quantitative evaluation and a qualitative description are given for each of the task's observational criteria. The focus of the Assessment, and therefore the focus of the competence report as well, is on strengths rather than deficits. This does not mean, however, that only positive statements can be recorded. Particularly if the results of the Assessment are to form the basis for further advising, the advisors need information about development topics or qualification needs.

Observer Conference. The lead observer and co-observer align their competence reports in a one-hour observer conference, during which they discuss irregularities, problems, and questions that arose during the execution and evaluation of the task. The coordination between the two observers provides an additional control function: the social dynamic between observers and participants is controlled and subjective skewed perceptions are largely eliminated.

Feedback Discussions. The competence reports and observer conference form the basis for the individual feedback discussions, which take place between the main observer and participant on the day after each Assessment Task – a one-on-one discussion. The discussion lasts for half an hour and the objective is to provide participants with a precisely detailed Assessment of the competences, which they demonstrated during the Assessment Task. The self-Assessment is incorporated here along with the external perceptions of the observers. The feedback discussions focus on the strengths of the participants, but also serve to identify qualification needs and to jointly look for solutions and alternative courses of action.

Final Report. The Assessment Center concludes with the awarding of a certificate that documents the differentiated overall profile of the participants' competences. The overall profile can serve as the basis for addi-

tional career counselling and qualification or can help the participants prepare for job interviews.

3.3 Resources and Costs

Human Resources

There is no specific qualification that makes it possible to develop and implement an Assessment Center. Advisory and training experience as well as knowledge of psychological processes, for example, are all important pre-conditions. Knowledge about competences and the ability to transfer this theoretical knowledge into a practical setting are just as necessary. For the development and implementation of the Assessment, the following experts are needed:

- Experts from the various sectors or from professions dealing with Assessment are absolute requisites for the development of tasks, and for mastering and identifying the typical critical situations and competences needed. It is recommended that at least 5-6 professionals participate in the expert workshop in order to guarantee a representative group makeup – these should be both internal and external experts.
- It is advantageous if observers have social science or pedagogical backgrounds or if they come from an advisory or training context. The decisive factor is if they have the ability to separate their own perceptions from an Assessment and not automatically project personal experiences onto the behaviours of others.
- Internal experts take on the task of moderation and organisation – they take care of planning, conduct the entire Assessment, design the introduction, and see to the numerous tasks that arise during the process. They organise the observers and ensure that the process runs smoothly.

Spatial Requirements

- The spatial requirements needed for the execution of the Assessment depend on which typical critical situations are selected. A large number of the Assessment Tasks in the GCAC project take place in an office

setting. If one wishes to put participants within the context of a job orientation in a manual or technical setting, the corresponding facilities are needed. If necessary, these tasks should be carried out in a company or training center, since it's important for the setting to be realistic. In one of the Assessment Tasks during the GCAC project, critical situations were simulated in a catering business. The professional cooks that one of the project partners were able to provide made it possible for the participants to quickly forget that they were in a simulation.

- Quiet rooms are necessary for the feedback discussions. Since observers are supposed to deliver their feedback in parallel, this calls for a correspondingly larger number of rooms during the Assessment phase.

Expenses

In order to calculate expenses, proportional staff costs, room prices and materials need to be computed.

- Four days should be set aside for the development of an Assessment: one day for the expert workshop and three days for developing the role-plays and for establishing underlying observational criteria (items) for the competences.
- Conducting an Assessment with three tasks takes three and a half days, during which the Assessment experts observe the tasks, give feedback, and write competence reports. For an Assessment in which twelve migrants participate, for example, four Assessment experts are needed, since one person can observe three participants on average.

4. Implementation

4.1 Experimentation and Testing of Assessment Center

As planned, it was possible to transfer the process at the three selected locations: the Assessment training as well as the testing of the process were successfully conducted in Sicily (Marsala), Umbria (Perugia), and Poland (Olsztyn). The local cooperation partners organised the training and the testing with migrants. In addition to the project partners, in Perugia it was possible to win over the Università dei Saperi and in Marsala, the educational organisation ANFE, both of which supported the implementation with rooms and personnel.

The trainings took place over a 40 hour period. The participants became acquainted with the Assessment methods and their application by taking on all the roles themselves, one after another: they were observed, they observed, and they moderated the proceedings. They also learned to apply the methods to the three developed tasks, which they would also later execute with their target groups. During the experimentation phase, which lasted for 36 hours, the advisors implemented the methods with the target groups that they work with professionally: unemployed women with migrant backgrounds who are looking for work in the host country.

Assessment Testing Programme

Monday

9:00 Start
Preparation of the Assessment with the Observers
Discussions about Moderation; Distribution of Tasks
Coffee Break
Repeat of the Assessment's Methodological Fundamentals
13:00 End

Tuesday

8:30 Welcome and Introduction of Participants and Observers
Introduction of the Methods; Programme Explanation
Coffee Break
10:15 Introduction of the **"The Poster"** Task – Team Task
10:45 Execution of Task under Observation
11:45 Self-Assessment of the Participants
12:00 Conclusion of First Day
12:30 *End of Day for Participants*
12:30 *Lunch Break*
13:30 Preparation of Competence Reports (Classifying, Quantifying, Qualifying)
and Drafting of Competence Reports on the Computer
17:30 *End of Day for Observers*

Wednesday

08:00 Observer Conference
08:30 Individual Feedback Discussions
09:00 Orientation Programme – Expert Interview
Coffee Break
10:00 Introduction to the **"Super Menu"** Task – Presentation Task
10:30 Execution of the Task under Observation
(2 Rounds à 45 Minutes)
12:00 Self-Assessment of the Participants
12:30 *End of the Day for Participants*
12:30 *Lunch Break*
13:30 Preparation and Drafting of Competence Reports on the Computer
17:30 *End of Day for Observers*

Thursday

08:00 Observer Conference
08:30 Individual Feedback Discussions
09:00 Orientation Programme
Coffee Break
10:00 Introduction to the **"In the Bureaucratic Jungle"** Task – Consultation
Task
10:30 Execution of the Task under Observation
(5 Rounds à 10 Minutes + Preparation 10 Minutes)
11:45 Self-Assessment of the Participants
12:15 *Lunch Break*
13:15 Preparation and Drafting of the Competence Reports on the Computer
17:15 *End of the Day for Observers*

Friday

08:00 Observer Conference
08:30 Individual Feedback Discussions
09:00 Conclusion of the Assessment Center with the Participants
10:00 End of the Assessment Center

A total of 40 advisors, job placement agents, and project developers took part in the observer training: 14 from Perugia, 15 from Marsala, and 11 from Olsztyn.

The composition of the participant groups with which the Assessment process was tested in practice varied widely:

In Perugia, eight migrants participated in the Assessment Center. Their ages ranged from 22 to 50. They came from Venezuela, Mexico, Poland, Romania and Peru.

In Marsala, 8 women also participated in the testing. Their ages ranged from 26 to 39 and they came from India, Tunisia, Romania, and Nigeria.

The 10 women who participated in the Assessment in Olsztyn were Poles with migrant backgrounds. They all had spent multiple years abroad in Germany, England, Ireland or the USA. After returning to Poland, they all had to start over professionally. Their ages ranged from 25 to 50.

For three and a half days, the participants with migrant backgrounds experienced the Assessment Center, a method none of them had been familiar with.

The advisors not only had to observe the behaviour of the participants during the tasks, but also had to give feedback, organise the proceedings, moderate the separate phases of the Assessment Center, and explain the methods. Throughout the entire testing process, they were supervised by Assessment experts from Germany and received feedback.

4.2 Evaluation of Transfer

The evaluation of transfer is based on expert discussions with the advisers and extensive questioning of all the migrants that participated in the Assessment Center. Focus was placed, on the one hand, on questions of transferability of methods to the advisory requirements and organisations in Italy and Poland, and, on the other hand, on migrants' satisfaction with the Assessment Center process and their Assessment of the process in terms of improving their chances on the job market.

4.2.1 Transferability of the Methods

The advisors from all the organisations participating in the training arrived at the shared Assessment that the methods were complex and required a large number of personnel and a lot of time, both of which are not available in all organisations.

'In regard to the overall possibility of implementing the process, it will not be easy to incorporate the methods into our job placement activities. I think that the training activities are easier, because one spends more time together with the participants.'
(Job Counsellor Marsala)

'It was a positive, interesting, and very practice-oriented experience, but not easy to implement. This is particularly true for the employment offices where we just have one hour per client to identify competences and where we have to advise a lot of different people. Unemployed, employed, men, women, migrants, the disabled.' (Job Counsellor, Perugia)

The fact that the advisors work in different organisations makes it even more difficult to collect the necessary personnel for executing an Assessment Center.

Nevertheless, the advisers rated the process very positively and emphasised the high degree of practical relevance. They listed the following aspects as transferable within the context of job counselling, job orientation, and qualifications:

The observers sharpened their perceptive abilities. The *systematic separation of perception and interpretation* is helpful for every type of competence identification and can also be applied very well in career counselling.

'I found the concept of separating perception and interpretation particularly interesting. In theory, this sounds simple, but in practice it is difficult. It was good to get to try that out myself.' (Job Counsellor, Perugia)

'The method is very interesting, particularly the systematic separation of observation and interpretation. I already knew about Assessment, but we had never done it so systematically before.' (Job Counsellor Olsztyn)

'We received observation training, which was very good. In the past, we always interpreted immediately and now is the first time that we have learned to first understand what a person does and says without immediately evaluating it. This separation of perception and interpretation is something I can also apply to my work.' (Job Counsellor Olsztyn)

Underpinning competences with clearly defined criteria and giving feedback based on these criteria is innovative for career counselling and can be applied in other contexts, e.g. in personnel Assessment.

'During the seminar, I was able to reflect on my work again for the first time in a long time. About how difficult it is to make objective judgments about the competences of our clients and to really be fair to them. Through the criteria and items that the Assessment observations are based on, the method gave me an objective basis for my judgments.' (Job Counsellor Perugia)

'I particularly liked the controlled subjectivity during observations and the criteria-based Assessment. These are things that I will also be able to use in my work when I am advising or identifying competences.' (Job Counsellor Marsala)

'In the past, we have also observed, but not on the basis of criteria. Now we have another basis for our competence observations. I also thought it was important to have additional competences available with items and also to learn how one develops an Assessment Task so that we can adapt them to other target groups.' (Job Counsellor Olsztyn)

'In a week, I will have a meeting with employers, which will focus on recruitment of participants. The method I learned is something I can apply to great effect for this task. As I've already said, the separation of perception and interpretation and the criteria-based feedback was very helpful.' (Job Counsellor Olsztyn)

The method's competence orientation focuses on the strengths (not the deficits) and thereby makes a considerable contribution to empowering the participants.

'Finally a training programme that dealt very practically with empowerment. The rest of the time we just learn about it in theory. We learned how to awaken motivation in others and there was a focus on personal growth in our target group as well as in ourselves.' (Job Counsellor Perugia)

'I particularly liked that the method focuses on strengths. The positive aspects, and that it doesn't focus on deficits.' (Job Counsellor Marsala)

The participants became aware of their key competences and were able to name them and explain them, e.g. during a job interview. This qualifying aspect of the Assessment in terms of key competences can also be integrated into career counselling.

'The participants learned a lot about key competences. And not only the participants: To be honest, prior to the seminar I also wasn't sure what "team work" really meant. One always reads about it and talks about it, but by discussing the items, it became very clear what is meant by key competences. The participants can also use this on their applications and Curriculum Vitae.' (Job Counsellor Perugia)

Through its orientation towards the job market's requirements, the Assessment Center prepared participants for future employment. This aspect of orientation towards requirements can also be transferred to other competence Assessment processes. The Assessment Tasks can also be used in career counselling in order to bring people looking for counselling closer to the demands of the working world.

'During career counselling, we also work with role-plays and feedback. But our observations are not as systematic and the role-plays are not as clearly oriented towards the demands of the job market. This is an area that we could integrate the Assessment Tasks very well.' (Job Counsellor Olsztyn)

Not all of the advisors who participated in the training had experience advising migrants. Some of them worked on job orientation with students or in children's education. The level of interest in adapting the methods to other target groups was correspondingly high.

'The two weeks were really helpful for my professional practice. While I don't work with migrants, I can transfer these methods to other target groups.' (Job Counsellor Marsala)

'If I understood that correctly, the Assessment Center can be done with any target group and adapted to the most diverse of contexts and demands. That would also be interesting to learn about. This provided me with ideas for my work as well. I am a teacher stuck in a dilemma: I need to evaluate the performance of young people, but I'm often unable to convey my Assessment. By using the criteria-based methods of

the Assessment Center, I have learned a method that can make my evaluations more objective.’ (Job Counsellor Perugia)

‘Following the test phase, I was very enthusiastic. I think that the methods are a perfect match for schools. I certainly want to transfer the methods into a school setting. Introduce them to my colleagues. For students in the job orientation phase, that would be a great thing.’ (Job Counsellor Marsala)

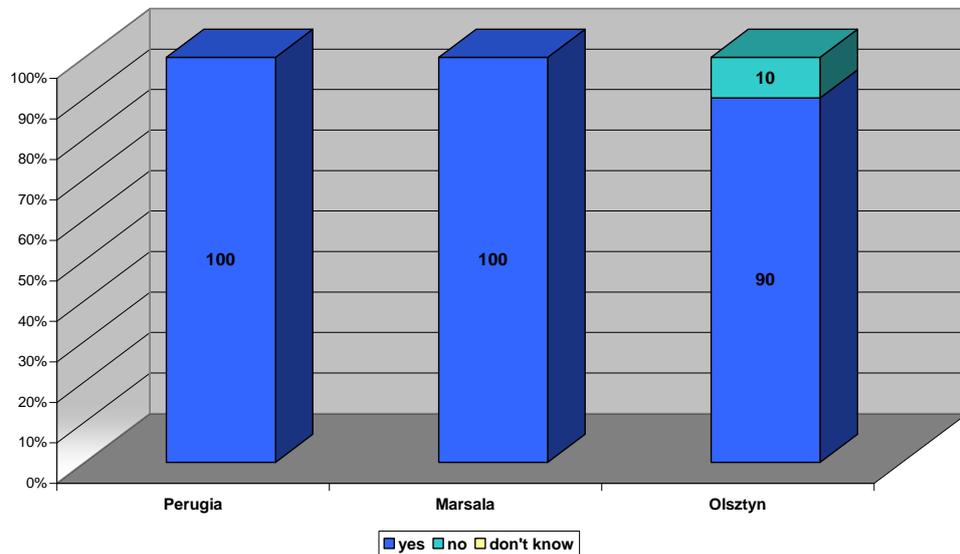
‘An Assessment would also be important for internships. We could observe young people completing internships and give them a certificate regarding their key competences. This would also be helpful when they apply for jobs.’ (Job Counsellor Marsala)

4.2.2 What the Beneficiaries Say

All of the migrants who participated in the Assessments said that they were very satisfied. This was evident in both the questionnaires that were filled out at the end of each practice test as well as the concluding evaluation discussions.

In response to the question as to whether their participation in the Assessment Center resulted in greater *understanding of their strengths and weaknesses*, all but one of the participants answered with a “yes”. In explaining her “no”, the Polish participant wrote that even prior to the Assessment, she already was very familiar with her strengths and weaknesses.

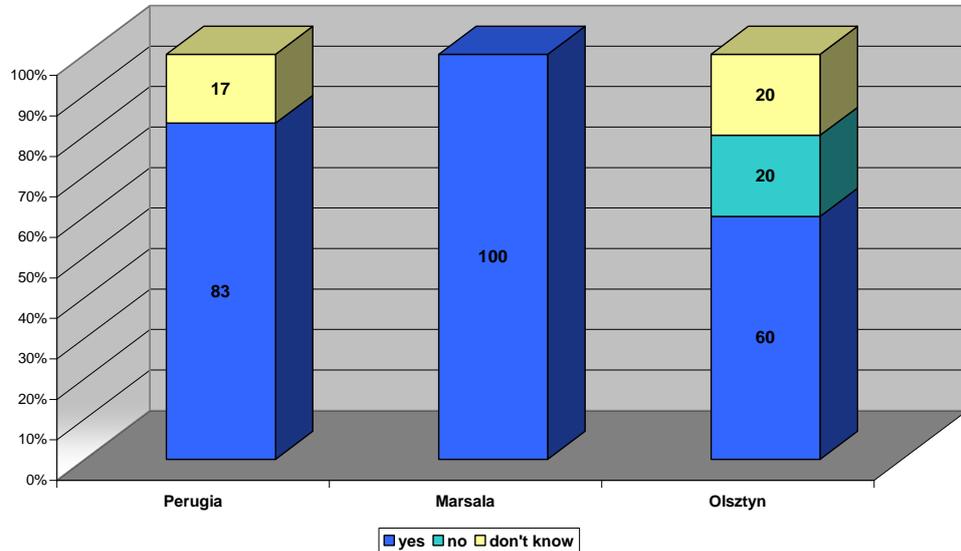
Assessment Test Evaluation, May 2011 - Beneficiaries
„Through the Assessment, I gained greater understanding of my personal strengths and weaknesses“



The participants responding with “yes” explained that *“My self-confidence has grown”, “The feedback has made it possible for me to assess myself more realistically”, “I discovered strengths within myself that I didn’t know about before, e.g. assertiveness”, “During the Assessment, I tried expressing my opinion and sticking to it even when others disagreed with it.”*

While the question regarding *impact of the Assessment on future career planning* was largely answered positively, among the Polish participants, two answered with “no”. The Assessment’s effect was seen particularly positively in Marsala. This was likely the case because most of the participants there were grappling for the first time in their lives with the question of applicability of their competences to working in Italy.

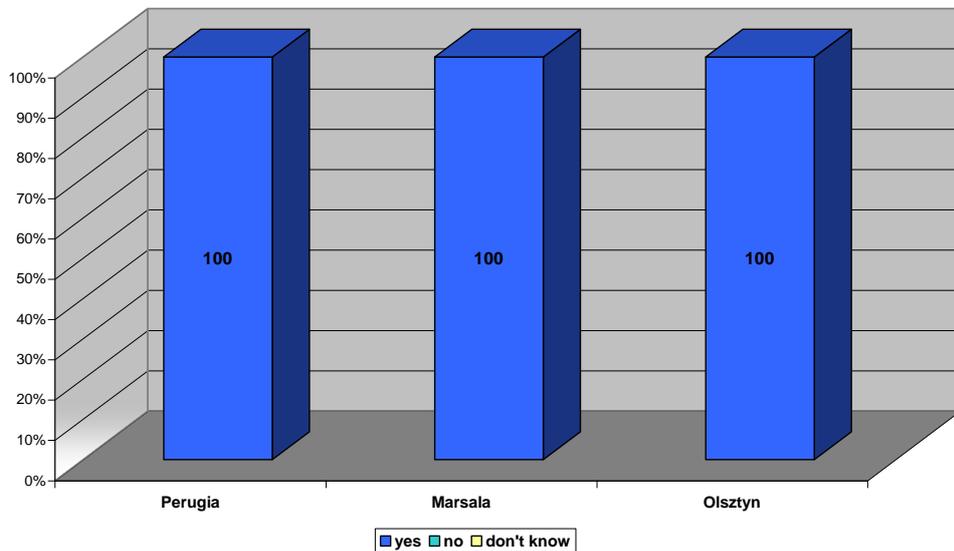
Assessment Test Evaluation, May 2011 - Beneficiaries
„My participation in the Assessment Center was important for my future career planning “



The participants emphasised the professional orientation programme as being particularly positive, as well as the discussion of career planning during the feedback discussions, the encouragement from the advisers to hold to one’s professional goals, and the opportunity to receive support and career counselling even after the conclusion of the Assessment.

All of the participants were in agreement with their answer to the question: *“Would you recommend the Assessment Center to your friends?”*
Everyone answered with a “yes”.

Assessment Test Evaluation, May 2011 - Beneficiaries
„I would also recommend the Assessment center to my friends“



In the final rounds of evaluation, the participants remarked on *different aspects*: All of the groups emphasised an increase in self-confidence. Many of the participants said that they had evaluated themselves more harshly during the self-Assessment and only became aware of their own strengths following the feedback discussions.

'Now I feel more self-assured than before. I think that is a very major success of the Assessment. The observers reported back on my strengths, which made me feel much stronger.' (Participant Olsztyn)

'During the Assessment, I felt more confident every day, and things went better with each task.' (Participant Marsala)

A number of the participants discovered competences during the Assessment that they had previously known nothing about.

'I had thought that I was quiet and inconspicuous, but the observers told me that I appear calm and confident. That was the great thing about the Assessment Center, having someone observe you and tell you how you seem.' (Participant Olsztyn)

'I realised that I am assertive. That's something that I wouldn't have thought of before.' (Participant Olsztyn)

Testing their abilities in a practical setting was a highlight of the Assessment Center for many participants.

'I was very please with two things: we received individual guidance. This made it possible to really learn something. And the practical exercises made it possible to try things out every day. We didn't just talk; we showed what we could do.' (Participant Marsala)

The older participants with experience applying for jobs placed particular value on being able to use the results of the Assessment Center for their applications.

'Now I know more about my strengths and weaknesses. That's something that I can really use when I apply for work.' (Participant Perugia)

Almost all of the participants greatly appreciated the working atmosphere during the Assessment. The cooperation with the observers as well as the good relations that rapidly developed among the participants were emphasised as positive.

'I felt strengthened by the group of participants. We interacted and gave each other tips. I've never gotten to know people so well over such a short time.' (Participant Marsala)

'I especially liked the atmosphere during the Assessment. The observers were very friendly and praising. We interacted with one other on equal footing.'
(Participant Olsztyn)

'Prior to the Assessment, I had major prejudices towards employment advisers and against offices in general. I never went to them. Now I've had the experience of employment advisers also being friendly.' (Participant Perugia)

Some of the Italian participants had language difficulties. Since the language of the host country was used throughout the entire Assessment, it was not always easy for those who haven't mastered the language yet to follow the process, even though the advisers made an effort to use simple words and clear pronunciation.

5. Conclusion

It was possible to successfully complete the training and testing for the Assessment Center for migrants in Italy and Poland. Following the conclusion of the test, the advisers as well as the woman with migrant backgrounds rated it very positively. This was also evident in statements during the dissemination conference.

It will be difficult, however, to implement the process in its entirety in employment offices, because the method is complex and its execution requires a high number of personnel and lots of time. The fact that advisers work in different organisations, physically separated from one another, makes it even more difficult to collect the personnel needed for carrying out an Assessment Center.

There is a high level of motivation among the participating partner organisations and advisers to integrate essential elements of the Assessment into advising, qualifying, and identification of competences.

In particular:

- Training the perceptive abilities of advisers, separation of perception and Assessment, controlling subjectivity during advising and identification of competences
- Give feedback based on defined criteria, which are known to the advisers as well as the people seeking assistance.
- Integrate discussions of key competences into advising and use criteria to underpin key competences.
- Take into account the requirement orientation of simulations and role-plays during advising and qualifying as well, in order to prepare advice seekers for the demands of the job market and the working conditions in the host country.
- Integrate action orientation into identification of competences during advising in order to give advice seekers the opportunity to clearly

identify their competences and express them (not just speak about them).

Participating in the Assessment Center raised the chances of migrants to successfully enter into a career. The following factors were decisive in this regard:

- Due to its orientation towards competences and strengths, the process contributes to raising self-confidence. The participants got to know their strengths and felt invigorated and fortified for applying for a job.
- The competence certificate provides a clear and structured summary of all the competences demonstrated during the Assessment Center and can be used during the application process.
- The Assessment Tasks prepared the participants for the concrete demands of the working world.
- The advice seekers learned about and understood the relevance of key competences in the host country and were able to list them in their job applications.
- During the orientation programme prior to the Assessment Tasks, the employers were able to speak and explain the realities of work, introduce different jobs, and encourage the participants to apply. In one case, a participant was immediately offered a job.
- From the contact with the advisers during the Assessment, additional advisory meetings were subsequently scheduled with employment agencies and suggestions were given for further qualifications. The prejudices that many women with migrant backgrounds have towards employment agencies and career counsellors were diminished through the personal contact.

The number of participants that will find a job following the Assessment Center cannot be estimated at the current time. It certainly depends not

only on the process and the efforts of the advisers, but also on the development of regional job markets and demand for workers.

The recognition of the competence certificate, awarded at the end of the Assessment, by official offices – on an international level as well – could increase the usability of the certificate and increase the long-term impact of the Assessment Center on the integration of migrants into the job market. This carries particular relevance for a target group, whose certificates generally aren't recognised in the host country and who therefore have hardly any officially recognised documents that verify their qualifications and competences.

The Polish project partners have taken the first step towards international applicability of the competence certificates. They issued their certificates not only in Polish, but also in English.



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Italia



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Polska



Life e.V.
Deutschland



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Agentia Nationala pentru Ocuparea
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