

## Germany: Competence Cards

### Introduction

**Title:** Competence Cards

**Country:** Germany

**Developer:** Bertelsmann Stiftung and Forschungsinstitut Betriebliche Bildung (f-bb)

**Type of tool:** It helps identify and document transversal social, personal and methods skills. It exists in nine languages: German, French, Spanish, Russian, Turkish, Arabic, Farsi and Tigrinya.

**Target group:** It is particularly suitable for counselling immigrants and refugees but is also used with other target groups, like disabled people, long-term unemployed and the youth seeking professional orientation.

People with migrant backgrounds still suffer significant disadvantages with respect to educational and professional opportunities. However, many newcomers have **valuable experience and qualifications**. In cooperation with various partners, the Bertelsmann Stiftung has developed Competence Cards for migration and education counselling in order to speed up the recognition and utilization of such qualifications and experience.

The 49 Competence Cards offer a flexible, low-threshold introduction to the topic of **skills identification and documentation**. They illustrate social, personal and some transversal method skills. The cards use simple language descriptions, a visualisation and translations in eight foreign languages for each skill. In combination with the eleven interest cards, they can also be used beyond the direct purpose of skills identification, for instance, for professional orientation, for writing applications and CVs or to generally empower clients in communicating their strengths.

The cards are based on tried and tested **competence terms**. The culture-fair visualisation of the individual competencies, together with the competence term translations in eight languages, is helpful in overcoming language barriers and establishing a common terminology for social, personal and methodological skills between the guide and client. In addition to the information for the clients (on the front), the cards also contain valuable information and instructions for the guide (on the back). They have the potential to contribute toward the development of a more comprehensive validation system in Germany and have triggered further projects, both analogue and digital, regarding multilingual picture-based skills assessment.

### Organisation and description of the tool

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The Competence Cards are licensed under CC BY SA 4.0. This way they can be easily adapted to the needs of the respective counselling context. The **open license** also sets the foundation for further user-driven dissemination and improvements. This also means that in any other country these cards can be translated and used.

## Implementation

In an **interview**, a counsellor goes through the cards together with the client. The duration of the application of the Competence Cards depends on the objectives of the session and the counsellor's experience and available time. A short analysis of individual competence areas can be performed in 15 minutes. A complete analysis of potential can generally take up to 1 to 1.5 hours. Virtually no costs are incurred by the counsellor or the client since a printable pdf-version of the Competence Cards in both German and English are provided free of charge by the Bertelsmann Stiftung. A hard copy of the German set can be obtained from the Bertelsmann Stiftung at 10.- € plus 5.- € for an accompanying box.

Throughout the course of the counselling session, client and guide **identify existing skills**. The counsellor evaluates the plausibility of the self-assessment using questions on the back of the cards. For example, he or she might encourage the client to share a particular event in his biography when that particular skill became evident. Furthermore, the guide can ask the client to estimate the level at which he or she possesses a particular skill, using the provided +, ++ and +++ card. At the end of the process, the skills (and their levels) are recorded in a documentation template which clients can take with them and submit to a potential employer or their employment agency representative, for instance.

The Competence Cards are compatible with **labour market integration**: representatives from the public employment services were involved in the development of the cards. This resulted in 20 of the 49 Competence Cards illustrating precisely the skills used in their profiling system. Red frames around those cards easily distinguish them from the other cards. The cards have been found to be very useful for drafting application letters and résumés since they help identify and clearly describe both the personal strengths of the clients and their central interests and hobbies.

They are particularly suitable for counselling **immigrants and refugees** but are also used with **other target groups**, like disabled people, long-term unemployed and the youth seeking professional orientation.

## Description of the target group

In Germany, three systems share the responsibility of providing adult migrants with guidance and support. The first is the immigration counselling provided by the seven **non-statutory welfare organisations**, e.g., Caritas, Diakonie and German Red Cross. This system provides guidance on many issues, from accommodation to childcare, including the documentation of non-formal and informal learning. The second is the **IQ-Network**, which is in charge of recognising formal qualifications acquired abroad. The third is the **Public Employment Service**, which provides assistance in finding a job and provides unemployment benefits.

The Competence Cards initially focused on the first system, because immigration counselling is most engaged in the identification of non-formal and informal learning and has the most holistic approach to the individual learner. These immigration counsellors are the first target group of the Competence Cards, in order for them to use it with their clients, migrants. However, in the meantime the instrument is used in the other two contexts and even further guidance institutions as well. The Competence Cards support the interaction between the counsellor and client.

## Policy context

The use of Competence Cards can help refugees and immigrants take the first step toward having their skills recognised and thus integrate the German labour market, but it cannot stop there.

In order for the skills to be fully valued on the strongly formalised German labour market, they have to be measured against an applicable standard and certified in a manner that companies and individuals can understand and believe. Recent research comparing the German **validation system** to those of other countries has shown that, despite the European Council's 2012 recommendation to formally establish a comprehensive system of validation of non-formal and informal learning until 2018, the necessary framework conditions have yet to be established in Germany (Gaylor, Schöpf & Severing, 2015; Gaylor, Schöpf, Severing & Reglin, 2015).

## Impact for assesses

The impact on the **client** is manifold:

- Most clients really **enjoy** working with the Competence Cards because it is a playful approach that helps tease out skills that even the clients themselves were not aware of prior to being confronted with the Cards.
- Some counsellors report that clients also tend to lose their reservations regarding German public institutions and **open up** to the guidance process. This is sometimes rewarded in much faster labour market integration than anticipated (see Breukelchen, 2017 for a report on a day in the life of a guide).
- clients with rather limited German language skills (A2/B1) can truly benefit from the analysis of potential when using this **multilingual** instrument.
- The instrument contains easy access **documentation templates**. The documentation of the skills determined during the analysis of potential not only increases the immigrants' self-confidence, it also provides an orientation for labour market entry. In guidance practice, the documentation of the analysis of potential has often been neglected, especially due to time constraints. If documentation was compiled, it was often not passed on. Consequently, easy access documentation templates are required, to help overcome this obstacle and the Competence Cards offer these.
- People with migration experience, who have suffered trauma or who generally have low self-confidence, benefit in particular from this **low-threshold approach** (combination of simple language, playful use, culture-fair visuals and foreign language translation)

Also for the **counsellor** there are huge benefits: the Competence Cards are a flexible instrument that can be used modularly. Counsellors can thus decide on a needs-oriented basis how to perform a skills identification and documentation and how much space to give it in the guidance process.

## Link

<https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/competence-cards>

## Videos

- Short promotion: <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/media-center/media/mid/competence-cards-for-potential-analysis-in-immigration-counseling-for-adult-immigrants/>
- Instruction video: <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/media-center/media/mid/competence-cards-for-potential-analysis-in-immigration-counseling-flexible-application-options-for/>

