

## OILING MIGRATION WHEELS

### Towards a global skills validation infrastructure

*Concept note drafted as a contribution to the consultations phase of the process leading to a “Global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration”*

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#### ***I. Migrants' skills waste as global problem***

A vast economic literature shows that the formal education and (even more so) the labour market experience obtained by migrants prior to migration is undervalued in destination countries and that this leads to systematic overeducation and overskilling effects (among many references, see, for example, Chiswick and Miller, 2007; Dustmann, Frattini and Preston, 2013; Ferrer and Riddell, 2008; Nordin, 2007; OECD, 2007 and 2014).

According to some analyses, this mismatch should gradually decrease upon arrival, thanks amongst else to a positive self-selection of migrants on the basis of their ability and motivation (Chiswick and Miller, 2007). But recent data show that, on the contrary, the risk of overqualification has been increasing for recently arrived immigrants in almost all OECD countries (OECD, 2017a: 68-70). This is probably due to the greater difficulties migrants usually find in cushioning labour market shocks (through family support, unemployment insurance, or by temporarily returning to education) which makes them more likely to accept lower quality jobs in times of crisis.

The large-scale waste of human capital produced by the inadequate recognition and poor valorisation of migrants' competences is increasingly viewed as an issue calling for targeted policy responses (Galgóczi, Leschke and Watt, 2012). In the European Union, the issue has obtained even higher priority in the context of the recent surge in arrivals of asylum-seekers and refugees and their particularly difficult labour market insertion (European Parliament, 2016; Martin et Al., 2016; OECD, 2017b).

Given huge cross-national variations in the nature of the challenge (due i. a. to diversity of migration and labour market situations, different approaches and capacity levels in active labour market policies, etc.), policies to counter migrants' overqualification are designed and implemented mainly at national or even sub-national level.

Without questioning that policy responses in this area need to be highly context-specific and flexible, we do believe that some transferrable technical solutions might have a wide and non-

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strictly national (ideally even global) sphere of application and might give a substantial contribution to the general improvement of the currently “less-than-perfect international transferability of human capital skills” (Chiswick and Miller, 2007: 2).

## ***II. Portable skills portfolios as part of the solution***

One of the main problems faced in order to improve the employability of migrants is the assessment and certification of their pre-existing hard and soft skills. Migrants (and particularly forced migrants and refugees) are often not able to exhibit a CV and evidences of competences they own. The need is to identify their level of knowledge and the types of skills that can be useful to the success of the integration process, both social and professional, formal and indeed informal. Migrants also need to become aware of their potential in relation to the new labour market they have to approach.

More generally, migrants encounter a problem in making their knowledge and skills visible in such terms that formal educational institutions and broader career ecosystems of recruiters are able to recognize them. Most existing systems of educational degrees and job-relevant accreditation require enrolment in formal programs and institutions and dictate that learning needs to follow prescribed paths. Informal, peer-based and self-directed learning is only acknowledged to the degree that it supports the formal curriculum. Learning opportunities are wider than formal courses, including on-the-job training, internship, volunteering, leisure, etc. Further, most of these formal systems do not account for skills like social skills or digital literacies or for granular skills and incremental learning, and thus a degree or report card tells a limited story about what relevant skills and competencies people have developed during their working history and along the migration process. Social skills or “soft skills” are becoming increasingly important as recruiting and valuation criteria; the harsh living conditions associated with the migration processes elicit the development of these abilities that are, however, neglected and not evident.

Digital Open Badges are the current trending proposal as “common currency” to define skills, competencies and achievements. They are usually issued against an evidence: something that the learner has done that proves her or his skill / competency / achievement (for instance a video showing how she/he performs a task, a job physical output, the results of a test, etc.) and not on a self-assessment basis.

With Digital Open Badges skills and competencies are captured more granularly across many different contexts, assessed and certificated using proofs of evidence, collected in the personal E-portfolio, associated with an online personal identity, so that they can be displayed to key stakeholders to demonstrate own capacities. They collect evidence of skill development, including new or often neglected skills such as social skills or digital literacies. They are an inviolable individual endowment, of individual property associated with an identity, are paperless and stored on cloud. Emerging technology like Blockchain allows to create a decentralized digital “Competence Ledger”, where transactions are referred to by the recordings of skills acquired, assessed, certified, stored, endowed and portable as “SkillsBlock”, spendable on the labour market, as accreditation to start self-employment or access to formal training and job opportunities or to obtain grants (“competence-as-a-money”).

## ***III. How to build transnational credibility: Certification mechanisms.***

Digital Open Badge assesses and certifies existing prior competencies and the new ones that are gradually acquired through formal and informal learning opportunities. The badge issuers can be all the subjects that create and offer learning opportunities for migrants, mainly in the arrival countries but also in the provenance ones: third sector organization, schools, vocational training

centers, employment agencies, employers, public bodies, etc. The aim is to create a “Decentralized Competence Assessment Ecosystem” worldwide distributed sharing same rules about the assessment and accreditation process, as well as the tools and the methodologies applied.

The badge is issued by accessing digital interoperable platforms called Open Badge Factory (there is no single centralized platform) which require the use of the recognized international standard for the issuance of badges, as defined by the Mozilla Foundation.

Minimum criteria - without the badges being of no value - must be defined, e.g. how the competencies should be described, the type of evidence that should be provided, like video, artefacts, job output, etc., approved test batteries, etc.

The system “speaks two shared languages”: that of the technological standard and that of the assessment process standard, leaving any issuer free to define - within these constraints - the specific competencies that s/he will accredit, his/her description, the specification of the accreditation process and the admissible evidence required (proofs, outputs, deliverables, tests, etc.)

Issuers should provide additional methods of assessing by means of “gamification”, through for instance learning games, awards, vignettes, etc., in order to increase the motivation and the engagement of the users.

The assessment system could be enriched with reputational features, that enhance the value of the badge according to the reputation of the issuers (evaluated for instance on the basis of the completeness and accuracy of their assessment process). The badge owner's reputation may in turn grow as a function of endorsement and recognition by, for example, recruiters, employers, peers, etc.

The individual is the data owner and can therefore be assured about the use of her/his personal data. At the same time, she/he is encouraged to provide this information as she/he envisages a possible return in terms of employment opportunities as well as social inclusion (“Nudge” logic instead of prescription logic, which generally leads to circumventing rules).

#### ***IV. Level of application and scalability***

The Digital Open Badge project is scalable. It can be implemented at several levels: national, regional and global. At regional level, the areas of free circulation such as the EU or ECOWAS might be the best candidates for first experimentations. In this regard, the support offered by the Digital Open Badge to intra-African migration might constitute an asset for the development and growth of economic districts as it has happened elsewhere.

Also the Mobility Partnerships promoted by the European Union within the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility might include such kind of solutions to facilitate labour matching between origin and destination countries. Whereas international and bilateral agreements aimed at controlling and channelling migration flows are difficult to reach given the origin and destination countries’ different sets of interests, the Digital Open Badge appears as a win-win solution: destination countries could make better value of the human capital held by migrants to meet local labour market needs, and origin countries might limit exploitation and brain waste of their mobile citizens with positive consequences in terms of rights, volume of remittances and re-employability of returning migrants. In this perspective, in the countries of origin of migratory flows, “Assessment Access Points” could be provided, offering the possibility of issuing badges.

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