

Flexible Pathways into the German Labor Market How a partial qualifications approach can help integrate migrants and meet skills demands

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Germany is an immigration country. This diagnosis was made already by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder 25 years ago and recently repeated by Friedrich Merz, the newly elected German chancellor. Germany has seen substantial population influx through immigration already since the 1960s where “guest workers” were actively recruited for the then booming German labor market. However, the immigration country character has become increasingly visible during the Syrian civil war from 2015 and since Russia’s war against Ukraine in 2022, where during both times more than one million refugees came to Germany in a relatively short time. Encouragingly, eight years after their arrival in Germany more than two thirds of refugees are employed, albeit with strong gender disparities - 86 % of men vs. 33 % of women in employment (Brücker et al., 2024). Migrant workers distribute unequally across professions. The proportion of foreign employees is highest among cleaners at 37.4 % - closely followed by occupations in food production (34.4 %); building construction and civil engineering (31.2 %); tourism, hotel and catering occupations (28 %) and transport and logistics occupations (25.4 %) (Wolf, 2022).

In today’s labor market nearly one in six employees (16.3 %) subject to social security contributions has a foreign passport. This equates to 5.7 million people (Statistik der Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2025). This is only possible, because the German labor market is becoming increasingly tight due to demographic change. Labor market integration does not happen automatically. When it succeeds, though, it lays the groundwork for societal integration as well. To achieve this, labor market shortages must be clearly identified, existing skills reliably assessed, and skills gaps efficiently filled via training and education, be it vocational education and training (VET) or higher education (HE).

In the current paper we will describe how a successful integration journey using the four tools *JOBMONITOR*, my-professional-experience.org, *MYSKILLS* and *MYTQ* can look like when it is not organized exclusively around full VET-qualifications as in the past, but instead around a more modular approach of 5-8 partial qualifications per profession. This approach seems particularly useful for the German context, where traditionally a “qualifications first” approach to work and learning has been followed, with a general understanding that an education pathway does not end with a first general education qualification but rather with VET or HE qualification. This yielded great results for those who managed to achieve a VET or HE qualification, with five to six times lower unemployment rates compared to those without a qualification. However, the number of people with low levels of formal qualifications has risen from 3.7 million in 2017 to 4.4 million in 2023. This highlights the need for a new educational approach that also

reaches out to disadvantaged groups. A “skills first” approach would – at least in a first step - ignore qualifications and focus on the development of individual competences instead of full qualifications. This is discussed increasingly in Europe and abroad and, while having the potential for a better labor market matching bears its own challenges for skills assessment and skills training in terms of efficiency as well as effectivity. Partial qualifications appear to be good middle ground, as we illustrate in this paper.

We conclude with recommendations for possible next steps in the German context.

1. Monitoring regional labor market needs – JOBMONITOR.de

The German labor market, despite a recent increase in unemployment rates is still characterized by skilled labor shortages. However, this varies greatly from region to region and sector to sector. For the successful integration of skilled workers and employees into the labor market, knowing which jobs are actually in high demand in each respective region is important. The Bertelsmann Stiftung's [JOBMONITOR](#) makes changes in labor market demand visible monthly down to the district level. By evaluating over 70 million online job advertisements, detailed analysis can be performed at the level of occupations, soft skills, or partial qualifications for all German federal states, districts, and independent cities. This means that regional stakeholders can use the JOBMONITOR analyses to better tailor their further education and labor market activation measures to actual needs.

Germany's dual VET system links learning gained from working at companies with learning gained from attending vocational schools, creating a dual vocational training opportunity. Successfully completing dual vocational training leads to a certified qualification that is highly valuable for labor market entry. This system of dual vocational training is highly recognized worldwide yet rarely found outside of Europe. However, this makes it more difficult to enter the German labor market for those who lack a recognized VET or HE qualification, such as immigrants and formally low skilled workers.

Labor market needs in Germany are similarly expressed in terms of full qualifications, most of the time. At the European level, a “skills first” (qualifications second) approach is gaining traction. ESCO, the European classification for skills, competences, qualifications and occupations, is helping in structuring this approach with its 13,939 standardized skills and competences. This is particularly helpful when addressing the need for more transversal skills. These refer to competences that are helpful in solving various tasks across professions and even outside the labor market, for example cognitive competences such as problem-solving skills, self-management competences such as adaptability, and social competences such as negotiation skills.

The JOBMONITOR makes the demand for these transversal skills visible. For example, from 2018 to 2021, the demand for “German language skills” in online job advertisements rose by 28% - from an already very high level (Noack et al., 2022). At the time of writing this paper, more than one in four job ads included German language skills (26 %, April 2025).

Figure 1

Percentage of Online Job Ads that Include the Skill "German" from 2018-2025.



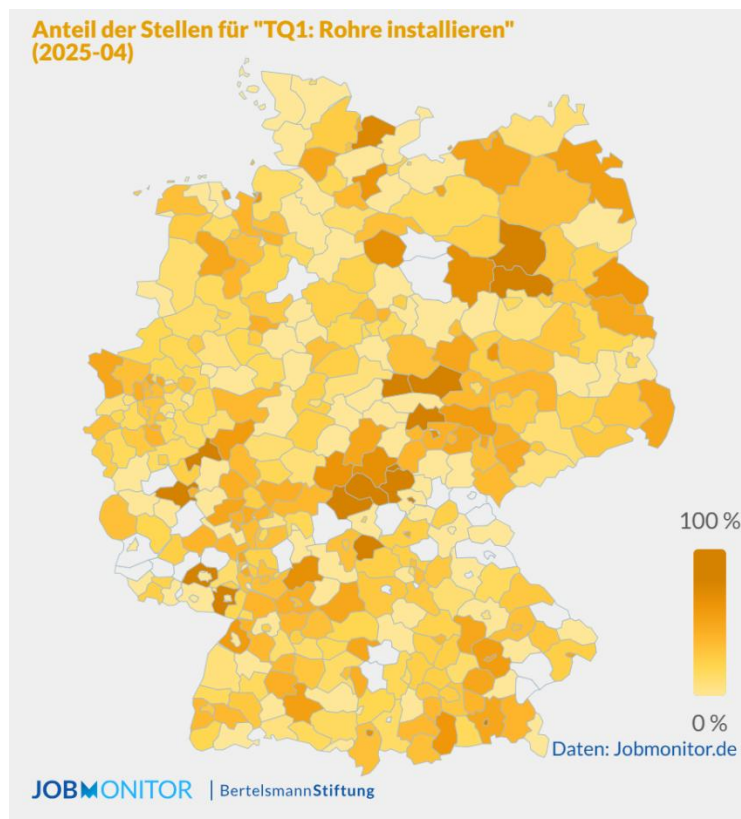
This signals that the willingness to hire foreign skilled workers in Germany is increasing - provided they speak German. A labor market focused exclusively on individual skills, however, has its disadvantages as well. Particularly with regard to skills assessment and training. Professional skills are difficult to train individually and out of context. Often skills and competences are developed and used in complex bundles.

The middle ground between full qualifications on the one hand and individual skills on the other hand, is to represent labor market skill demands and individual training needs via 5-8 partial qualifications ("Teilqualifikationen - TQ") per vocation. These can be assessed individually and where needed acquired consecutively by learners. When all parts of a qualification have been either validated or certified at the end of a training, they open the door to an external examination ("Externenprüfung") that provides the full VET qualification.

The JOBMONITOR revealed a significant demand for such partial qualifications on the labor market. Particularly it showed a much more differentiated labor market than the qualification system with its all-or-nothing logic of being unskilled (no VET-qualification) or skilled (a full VET qualification) suggests. An analysis of 4.3 million online job advertisements (OJA) for unskilled and skilled jobs from 2022 showed that ads for skilled workers on average only ask for 3,3 instead of the maximum of 5-7 parts. Job adds for unskilled workers on average asked for 1,3 parts instead of the 0 the term "unskilled" might suggest. The necessary skills for climbing an educational ladder from truly unskilled (0 partial qualifications), over partially skilled and ready for most "unskilled positions" (1-2 partial qualifications), ready for most "skilled positions" (3-4 partial qualifications) and finally to fully skilled (all 5-7 partial qualifications) can be acquired in corresponding trainings, see part 3 of this essay (Noack & Müller, 2023). Interestingly, the JOBMONITOR shows that the demand for particular partial qualifications varies from region to region (see example in Figure 2). This provides important information for local training policy that goes deeper than the often-used focus on qualifications only.

Figure 2

Percentage of Job Ads Looking for "Plumbing, heating and air conditioning specialist" that Include the Partial Qualification "install pipes" in Germany's Districts.



2. Assessing informally acquired skills – my-professional-experience.org and MYSKILLS

Before training is administered at large scale, however, existing skills need to be mapped. This helps avoiding unnecessary frustration on the learners' part and inefficient resource expenditure for the public. More than 70 % of the experts stated that Germany needs a system for recognizing informal and non-formal learning. In their eyes this would, above all, increase the career opportunities of individuals (74.7%) and support companies in the selection and development of personnel (63.2%). Indirectly, this would make an important contribution to overcoming the shortage of skilled labor (61.7%) (Velten & Herdin, 2016).

Recognizing informal and non-formal skills is indeed a major lever for securing skilled workers, particularly from migrant populations. However, the only way this was possible until very recently was the external examination ("[Externenprüfung](#)") which granted a full qualification upon passing or nothing when failing. Even recent legal initiatives such as the law for the validation and digitalization of vocational training ([BVaDiG](#)) fall short of making full use of the power of validation. Building upon the foreign vocational qualification recognition act ([BQFG](#)) and its "prototyping" procedure for those refugees that could not provide written evidence for their qualifications acquired abroad, the project "Valikom" took nine years to develop a corresponding procedure for determining competences that have been informally or non-formally acquired in Germany. What is worse, the number of potential beneficiaries this procedure turned law in the BVaDiG is

nearly insignificant with 1.150 persons a year. Considering there are 4.4 million people age 25-64 without a formal qualification in Germany, the effect of this law is seriously put into question. While the BVaDiG finally breaks with the 0-1 approach of the other formal option of recognition of prior learning, the external examination, it falls behind the BQFG in that only those people qualify for the procedure that are expected to possess more than half the necessary skills as defined in the respective VET-regulations of a profession. A greater openness for partially qualified candidates would help increase the number of candidates and combined with a partial qualification approach would make the post-validation pathways much broader (Noack, 2024).

To encourage a credible and scalable validation process, tools and instruments are needed that reliably identify, document, and assess the candidates' skills and competences. Although different instruments have been developed in the past, they greatly differ with respect to quality, transparency, and the relevance of the results. Most of these instruments were found to be too theoretical, language-heavy, time-consuming, and complex for use with migrants and formally low-skilled workers by users. Tools must meet the requirements of counsellors, who often have tight timeframes and diverse purposes for their guidance and validation sessions (Döring et al., 2015). This is where the four #Showyourskills validation tools developed by Bertelsmann Stiftung come in: they shed light on migrants' and formally low-skilled workers' competences and, being multilingual and flexible, they help improve individual career guidance practice. Two of these instruments are analogue and support direct, face-to-face interaction between the candidate and counsellor – these are the so-called Competence and Career Cards: The first helps identifying transversal skills; the second gives orientation on the German labor market in terms of relevant professions. The other two tools are digital and can support assessment independently from a guided situation. In this article, we take a closer look at the last two. Each instrument can be applied individually. However, all four tools complement one another and can therefore also be used sequentially (Noack & Wittenbrink, 2020).

My-professional-experience.org – A quick self-check of professional experience

The free website *my-professional-experience.org* offers an easy and quick self-assessment of vocational skills in thirty VET occupations in just three to five minutes. The digital self-assessment of prior experience is based on pictures that show job-related activities in all occupational fields of the respective occupation. These fields correspond to partial qualifications in that they describe specific and clearly separable jobs which can be executed by holders of the full qualification. Taken together all competences needed for professional execution of those jobs make up the competence requirements of the full VET profession. On the website, the candidate can choose between the following twelve languages: German, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, Bulgarian, Romanian, Russian, Turkish, Arabic and Farsi. The self-assessment can be conducted on a computer as well as on a smart phone or tablet PC. On the website, the candidate can choose from thirty occupations.

Figure 2

The 30 Professions from my-professional-experience.org and MYSKILLS

Automotive and Logistics		Hospitality, Foodstuffs, Textiles and Trade	
1	Driver (bus and lorry)	16	Alteration tailor
2	Motor vehicle mechatronics technician – specialising in automotive technology	17	Baker
3	Specialist for furniture, kitchen and relocation services	18	Cook
4	Warehouse operator	19	Sales assistant for retail services
Construction, Wood, Agriculture and Landscaping		20	Salesperson specialising in foodstuffs (bakery)
5	Building and object coater	21	Specialist in food technology
6	Building construction worker – specialising in masonry work	22	Specialist in the hospitality services industry
7	Construction finishing worker – specialising in tiles and mosaics	IT and Electronics	
8	Civil engineering worker – specialising in road building	23	Electronics technician – specialised in energy and building technology
9	Farmer	24	Industrial electrician – specialising in industrial engineering
10	Gardener – specialising in horticulture and landscaping	25	Information technology specialist – specialising in systems integration
11	Joiner	Metal and plastic	
Health, Personal Hygiene and Cleaning		26	Mechanic in plastics and rubber processing
12	Care assistant to older people	27	Machine and plant operator
13	Hairdresser	28	Plant mechanic for sanitary, heating and air conditioning systems
14	Housekeeper	29	Skilled metal worker – specialising in structural engineering
15	Industrial cleaner	30	Tinsmith

A filter system with broad economic sectors from agriculture and landscaping to textiles and trade helps the candidate find and select the suitable occupation(s). Going through the occupations, the candidate can add as many occupations to his/her personal self-check list as they like. After selecting an occupation and clicking “Start now,” the candidate is guided through the self-assessment. Each self-assessment captures work experience in four to seven occupational fields of application. For each field, the candidate is shown a number of pictures of typical job-specific tasks. Along with a short description of this vocational activity, the candidate is asked the question, “How often have you done this?” The answer is provided on a four-level scale ranging from “0: never”, “1 to 9 times: not often”, “10 to 49 times: often” to “50+ times: very often.”

Figure 3

Question from my-professional-experience.org

The screenshot displays the user interface of the *my-professional-experience.org* website. At the top, a dark blue header contains a memory code (0869-0294-0192-0047-0609), navigation icons, the user's role (HOCHBAUFACHARBEITER:IN / Building construction worker), and buttons for 'All professions' and 'My professions'. The main content area features a question card titled 'How often have you done that?' with a photo of a construction worker mixing concrete. Below the photo, the task is described in German: 'BETON FÜR EINFACHE BAUTEILE ANMISCHEN' and 'Mixing concrete for simple structural elements'. A progress indicator shows '12 / 28' questions. The response options are: '0 times Never', '1-9 times Rarely', '10-49 times Often', and '50+ times Very often'. Navigation buttons 'Go back' and 'No answer' are present. The footer includes a language selector (DE, EN, FR, ES, PT, PL, PY, BG, RO, TR, etc.), project information (A PROJECT FROM BertelsmannStiftung), and legal links (IMPRINT, DATA PROTECTION, PARTICIPANTS).

There is no time limit, and the candidate can jump back one question to change the last answer, if necessary. In total, the candidate answers between twenty and forty of these questions, depending on the selected occupation. The candidate can switch the language at any time during the self-assessment. The resulting summary represents the personal results in each of the four to seven occupational fields of application of the respective occupation (i.e., partial qualifications).

The development of *my-professional-experience.org* was a user-guided process: Bertelsmann Stiftung started the conception of the website in close collaboration with two counsellors from AWO and the PES and in cooperation with the Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (Forschungsinstitut Betriebliche Bildung - [f-bb](#)). Two series of short telephone interviews with ten counsellors, each from different guidance contexts, provided additional feedback on two preliminary versions of the tool. The pictures and descriptions were each quality assured by at least three professional experts.

The digital tool was tested by forty counsellors who confirmed the added value and provided positive feedback on the usability and impact of the tool. Their clients had, on average, a poor command of the German language (level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages ([CEFR](#))), one to three years of professional experience and three quarters of them were formally low-skilled workers. The results of the survey showed that clients enjoyed working with the tool (91%) and that it allowed for a faster evaluation of clients' professional experience (94%). Moreover, they demonstrated that the tool facilitated decisions regarding further competence diagnostics (93%) and helped with respect to finding internships and jobs for clients

(93%). Therefore, 94% of the testers stated that they would recommend the tool to others. These positive initial results are reflected in the strong interest and wide use of the tool. In the past 12 months alone, *my-professional-experience.org* has been visited by nearly 25,000 unique users.

MYSKILLS – Assessing Professional Competencies

The easy and quick self-assessment *my-professional-experience.org* provides a valuable indication of whether (and in which occupation) a further, in-depth competence assessment is warranted, which is where the digital competence test, [MYSKILLS](#), comes into play. Requiring 3-4 hours, it offers a reliable and scientifically well-founded assessment of the candidates' occupational knowledge based on about 125 to 150 technical questions. In contrast to *my-professional-experience.org*, MYSKILLS is not a self-assessment tool.

MYSKILLS was created in 2017 to support people who have difficulties integrating into the German labor market due to a lack of qualifications or qualifications that are not recognized in Germany. However, many of these people have professional competences that were acquired informally, while others have completed training that cannot be verified or is not recognized due to a lack of documents. Employers looking for suitable employees are therefore missing out on potential applicants who have the skills required for their jobs but are unable to prove them. Until then, there was no tool that could be used to reliably record such competences for professional activities for a large number of candidates. Thus, the idea for MYSKILLS was born.

MYSKILLS was developed for the Federal Employment Agency by Bertelsmann Stiftung again with the f-bb in order to better record non-formally acquired skills and thus, be able to use for placement in training or employment. The aim was the development and quality assurance of instruments for the valid measurement of vocational competences of people with low formal qualifications. The process of test construction was scientifically supported by the [DIPF](#) | Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education delivers empirical educational research, digital infrastructure and targeted knowledge transfer, thus contributing to coping with challenges in education. to ensure the appropriate quality of the test procedures with regard to various psychometric quality criteria. This psychometric quality assurance was carried out based on item response theory (IRT) models.

From 2017 to 2022, the MYSKILLS tests were used by the Federal Employment Agency. Since 2020, MYSKILLS tests have also been carried out at the employment office of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (ADG). From 2022-2024, the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the DIPF explored the use of MYSKILLS at adult education institutions in Germany and internationally. In total 2,208 tests were carried out during this two-year pilot phase. Alongside German (962), Russian (719) was the most frequently used test language, which can possibly be attributed to the war in Ukraine and the people coming from Ukraine. Arabic (201), Farsi (102) and Turkish (62) were also used comparatively often. MYSKILLS has been made available to all interested organizations in 2025. Any interested organization can now connect to the test system for a fee in order to use MYSKILLS (see Video 1 for a testimonial).

Video 1

MYSKILLS in action – Hossein Kowsaris Chance at MAN Truck & Bus



The MYSKILLS competence tests capture specific practical knowledge in thirty occupations. The candidate needs to apply (informally and non-formally) acquired competences to answer job-specific questions from real operational situations. Therefore, these tests are meant for people with several years of work experience. MYSKILLS can also be taken in the 12 languages as *my-professional-experience.org*. During the testing, no technical aids (e.g., smartphones) are allowed. An introductory video and tutorial preceding the test introduces the context and test procedure and explains the question formats using simple sample questions. This is to ensure the candidate is familiar with the digital technology and the test process. As with *my-professional-experience.org*, the MYSKILLS tests are also based on competence models that split the occupation into four to seven occupational fields of application, which correspond to partial qualifications. These fields also constitute the test sections the candidate is automatically guided through. Every occupational field consists of four to six typical work situations. Every situation is visualized through a short video clip that shows a specific job-related action, followed by questions pertaining to this situation. Many questions also include pictures which make the test easier to understand and less language intensive. (See Figure 4 for an illustrative example.) The candidate answers between 25 to 30 questions in each field. Therefore, one test is comprised of around 125 to 150 questions. These are “closed” question formats, and the candidate is asked questions such as: put the work steps into the right order, identify errors in the illustrated situations, or answer technical questions about the work equipment or occupational safety. During the test, the candidate can take breaks. Efficient testing is currently being piloted, so that only those test items pertaining to occupational fields, in

which candidates have reported prior experience in *my-professional-experience.org* need to be answered by them. This shortens the testing time dramatically and reduces the risk of frustrating participants significantly.

Figure 4

Sample Question Imagemap from the Occupation “cook” from MYSKILLS



After completing the test, the results are automatically calculated and are then discussed with the candidate (see Figure 5 for an example certificate). The test results are documented for each occupational field on a five-level scale ranging from zero to four points. The result of one point corresponds to the competences of a trained assistant. In this case, a probationary period, working with an employer, may be useful to get a deeper insight into the candidate's skills. The result of two points suggests that the candidate can be employed as an experienced worker. Three and four points indicate that the candidate is a qualified worker or specialist. Thus, the results explicitly show which occupational field(s) a candidate is ready to work. At the same time, they illustrate in which occupational field(s) he/she needs further training. Videos on who the test targets, as well as testimonials on its usefulness by employers, can be found at the Video Channel of Bertelsmann Stiftung, under the search term "MYSKILLS."

Figure 5

Sample Result from the “motor vehicle mechatronics technician – specialized in passenger car technology” Occupation from MYSKILLS



MYSKILLS
BERUFLICHE KOMPETENZEN
ERKENNEN



Bundesagentur für Arbeit
Agentur für Arbeit
bringt weiter.

Profession Motor vehicle mechatronics technician
specialising in passenger car technology
Results Summary MYSKILLS

Name: @#Kundenname

Date of birth: @#Kundenge **Test date:** 10.02.2020 **Test language:** English

The test covers practical occupational knowledge in six main areas of expertise for a motor vehicle mechatronics technician specializing in passenger car technology. The testing is completed by asking questions relating to typical occupational situations, via a PC. The areas of expertise and situations are derived from the prescribed training regulations and curricula. The results follow:

Practical professional knowledge

●●●● High

●●●○ Average to high level

●●○○ Average

●○○○ Not provable, to average

○○○○ Not provable

Performing standardized service and maintenance tasks

●●○○

Conducting standardized service and maintenance work on motor vehicles. Changing engine oil and wheels. Inspecting mechanical and electrical components for wear and damage and ensuring that they function correctly.

Repairing mechanical and electrical systems prone to wear

●○○○

Repairing brakes, exhaust systems and clutches. Testing, measuring and repairing lighting systems, windscreen wiper systems and ignition systems.

Dismantling and installing mechanical and electrical systems

○○○○

Fitting and balancing wheels. Replacing tie rod ends, central locking systems, air flow meters and injectors. Retrofitting tow bars.

Repairing mechatronics systems

○○○○

Testing and repairing airbags, air conditioning systems, air suspension and automatic transmission. Detecting hazards from explosive materials and electric voltages. Conducting measurements, for example using an oscilloscope, and evaluating the results.

Diagnosing vehicle controls using expert systems

●○○○

Conducting guided troubleshooting using testing software. Processing errors using measuring devices, circuit diagrams and function charts, and diagnosing which components or systems are no longer functioning. Recording and evaluating the data communication between control devices. Conducting legally stipulated inspections (general inspection/exhaust inspection).

3. Closing Skills Gaps - with Partial qQualification Trainings

MYSKILLS test results provide the opportunity to identify specific training that ideally closes the individual gap to the full qualification in a step-by-step process. In this respect, the system of partial qualification (“Teilqualifikationen – TQ”), which is becoming

increasingly popular in Germany and developing towards greater national and cross-provider integration, is particularly valuable.

A complete partial qualification program consists of five to eight TQ units, which are offered as modules by training providers. Each TQ takes between two and six months of training, includes an internship phase, and concludes with a skills assessment. This allows learning outcomes to be quickly recognized and thus enhances learning motivation and learning-related self-efficacy in participants. The partial qualification certificates can, in principle, either be recognized directly if the necessary skills have already been acquired informally (e.g., via MYSKILLS), or they can be acquired after respective non-formal training at adult education providers.

With Germany having a strong initial VET-system, this form of step-by-step qualification is intended primarily for people over the age of 25. Particularly for those who want to expand their professional skills in individual areas or to gradually qualify for a vocational qualification. Partial qualification training courses are becoming increasingly prominent in publicly funded qualification-oriented training. In recent years, TQs have been one of the fastest growing measures in the promotion of continuing vocational education and training by the public employment services.

Employers, candidates, and social welfare budgets benefit from the comparatively short duration of a partial qualification training, with labor market integration rates after a completed module nearly as high as those following a full qualification program (Bönke et al., 2022). No wonder that in an employer survey, over 80 % of respondents said they were willing to employ workers with only one or a few partial qualifications, instead of a full qualification. (Fischer et al., 2020).

Attractive incentives for employers to partially qualify low-skilled employees were introduced at the beginning of 2019: in accordance with the Qualification Opportunities Act (Qualifizierungschancengesetz - QCG), up to 100 % of the costs of further training and up to 100 % of wages are subsidized when employees are sent to a partial or full qualification training. In 2023, further incentives for the unemployed were added as part of the citizen's allowance, in the form of a monthly further training allowance of 150 euros, which is paid in addition to basic income support during partial qualification training.

Anyone who finally obtains their full vocational qualification after obtaining all partial qualifications and passing the external examination not only improves their employment opportunities in the long term but also earns significantly more money. Five years after completing a vocational qualification, the average salary is 600 Euro more per month, and even 850 Euro more per month at the end of working life. Those who already have an apprenticeship and add a second one on top can expect a monthly increase of 800 to 1,000 Euros (Bönke et al., 2022).

Partial qualification trainings are offered by chambers of commerce (<https://teilqualifikation.dihk.de/de>), chambers of crafts (<https://tqhw.de/>), employer associations (<https://www.etapp-teilqualifizierung.de/>) and adult education providers (<https://MYTQ.de/>). They differ regarding how exactly one profession is cut into parts and which professions they cover. The MYTQ initiative uses the same competence models that underly MYSKILLS and that are analyzed in the JOBMONITOR. MYTQ is a

joint initiative of several training providers sponsored by Bildungsverband e. V. (BBB), which offers flexibility through standardization in the area of partial qualification throughout Germany. With MYTQ, partial qualification programs can be carried out across locations and providers and are, therefore, compatible nationwide. This means that participants can change training providers between modules, for example if they move, or take a break between modules. The system adapts to the individual life planning of adults. It already boasts a number of successes: certified partial qualification models have been successfully developed for around 20 reference occupations (see Video 2 for some practical insights). Almost 30 partners and members are now free to offer these themselves or in cooperation with other organizations, with one provider acquiring participants, the other training them, and revenues being split evenly. New members of the initiative have the opportunity to integrate MYTQ into their own portfolio of program with comparatively little effort and, if necessary, to benefit from the experience of other partners. This led to about 1000 partial qualification trainings administered in just two years since the foundation of the initiative (Ekert, Hasse & Otto, 2025).

Video 2

MYTQ in Action



The road ahead

Finally, when skills demand (e.g., via JOBMONITOR) and skills supply (e.g., via MYSKILLS) are known, the right path for qualification (e.g., via MYTQ) becomes clear. If a partial qualification approach is used throughout the integration journey, qualification providers can efficiently offer courses that meet market and individual demands. Encouragingly, currently partial qualification trainings are being piloted that also include German language skill training units to make it easier for migrants and refugees to upskill in this step-by-step-manner.

However, a lot remains to be done in Germany for the partial qualification approach to harness its full potential. First, there are still several partial qualification systems that run in parallel. The aim should be to standardize these so that there is only one modularization system for each profession. In this way, partial qualifications can be developed, offered, and implemented uniformly throughout Germany based on binding quality standards. That would make it much easier for employers and learners alike to understand what a person holding a particular partial qualification can and cannot do. Importantly, this process of standardization should focus particularly on the added employability gained by participants with each partial qualification. There is a risk that full qualifications are split solely along the traditional VET-course trajectory (e.g., 1st half of the 1st VET-year, 2nd half of the 1st VET-year and so on) with many of the parts running short of concrete usability in the labor market. That would dramatically reduce the incentives to continue step by step on the ladder and waste an opportunity to reduce skilled labor shortages. In fact, to increase incentives for learners to add one partial qualification on top of another, social partners should consider attaching increases in hourly wages to these learning blocks. If with each part, the wage would increase by 50 ct or even 1 Euro an hour, this would surely attract many candidates to complete the learning journey.

Second, partial qualifications, once standardized, should also be integrated into formal laws for certification of prior learning. To date, they only constitute non-formal or informal learning outcomes. A reform of both the BVaDiG and the BQFG should explicitly allow granting partial qualifications as part of the formal validation processes of informal and non-formal learning in Germany and formal learning abroad respectively. While the BQFG offers some opportunities for validation of prior learning, it still focusses on validation of formal learning alone, which for the substantial but often uncertified skills of many refugees is a dead end. Where the BQFG certifies a partial recognition, this should be spelled out in terms of which partial qualifications can be certified already, and which still need to be learned. The BVaDiG needs to prove its added value for validation of prior learning over and above the existing external examination. , While it finally addresses the validation of non-formal and informal learning outside of the 0-1 logic of the formal VET system, and includes non-traditional more practical assessment methods that rely a bit less on written German language proficiency it is currently lacking sufficient public funding targets a very selective group. That we need renewed efforts for an effective law for skills recognition of prior learning is not only shown by the increase in the number of people without a formal qualification but also by the decline of people passing the external examination from nearly 18.000 a year in 2017 to a little above 15.000 in 2022 (see Figure 6). Particularly for the large group of migrants on the German labor market such efforts would open pathways to a truly sustainable labor market integration.

Figure 6

Number of People with Low Levels of Formal Qualification and People Passing the External Examination.



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