▶ Research Brief

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Tracer study: Skills Profiling Application in Egypt for refugees and host communities
Key Findings and Way Forward

Background

Communicating relevant skills and expertise to potential employers is the first step towards gainful employment for any job seeker. However, this can be particularly challenging for the refugee community since their training and educational qualifications often differ from that of the host country. Therefore, ILO PROSPECTS Egypt in collaboration with Skilllab, a social start-up based in the Netherlands, and the Association of Businessmen in Alexandria (ABA), piloted a skills-profiling application that enables refugees and host communities to self-assess and communicate their skills to potential employers. Similar pilots were also conducted in Kenya and Lebanon.

The pilot exercise aimed to achieve three broad outcomes:

Increased self-awareness of skills and expertise among job seekers in refugee and host community

To communicate their skills and expertise with potential employers, job seekers need to be fully aware of their technical skills but also core skills and other transferable skills. The skills profiling application is based on the European multilingual classification of Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) and uses an artificial intelligence (AI) engine. It conducts an automated interview process with the user based on his/her past experience, and thus enables a rigorous mapping of skills and expertise. Various interactive segments provide an overview summary of the applicants' skills set and expertise while making him/her more self- aware of his/her own skill set and capabilities. The application also provides analysis of skills gaps and points to training and learning needs relevant for certain occupations.

Detailed summary of skills and experiences of job seekers in a competency-based format

While a traditional CV/resume tends to enlist professional experiences of job seekers, the skills profiling application aims to generate skills-based summaries in a competency-based format which could prove more useful during a selection and interview process. This type of summary provides a more accurate and in-depth picture of the job seeker's skills and fit for the relevant job. Employers are expected to find screening processes easier, making recruitment more efficient. They would only invite applicants for a final interview based on this summary.

Enhanced modalities and processes for job matching and employment counselling

The skills profiling application maps the experiences of an applicant in the form of skills and competencies gained and assesses the applicant's fit for a role based on these skills set and competencies. Therefore, it provides the job seekers, employment counsellors and employers with a common language and format in the job application process. Employment counsellors are expected to benefit from more accurate information and more efficient job matching and employment counselling.
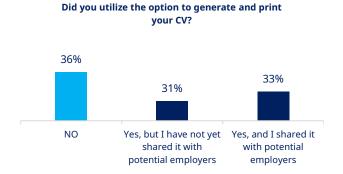
Key findings

The pilot in Egypt was conducted among 400 beneficiaries in 2020/21. Beneficiaries also had a chance to participate in induction sessions to learn about the application and how to use it. A tracer study was conducted approximately three months after the pilot exercise to collect direct feedback from the beneficiaries. The study was administered in Arabic, through email and SMS, and included 16 questions in total. It provided insights into key aspects of the usage and advantages of the profiling application.

Level of Engagement

In total, 64% of total beneficiaries who participated in the tracer study used the application to create their CVs. 33% of these beneficiaries also shared their CVs with a potential employer. They also used the app to print their profiles and extract the list of professions best matching to their skills set. Therefore, an encouraging number of beneficiaries have been positively engaging with the skills profiling application.
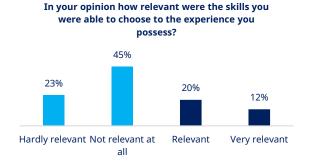
Did you utilize the option to generate and print your CV?

NO	Yes, but I have not yet shared it with potential employers	Yes, and I shared it with potential employers
36%	31%	33%

User Friendly Modality

In total, 61% of beneficiaries found the application 'very easy' to use and 28% found it 'easy'. What is interesting is that this finding is not correlated with levels of education among beneficiaries, hence users with lower educational levels found the application as easy to use as others.

How easy did you find it to register your profile and fill in the app?

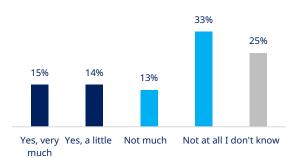| Very easy	Easy	Difficult	Very difficult
61%	28%	5%	6%

Relevance of skills suggested

In total, 32% of beneficiaries found the skills suggested by the application relevant or very relevant during interview processes. However, 23% found them 'hardly relevant' and 45% found them 'not relevant at all'. Therefore, a larger majority of beneficiaries found the application irrelevant when it comes to the skills they can choose in relation to the experiences they possess.
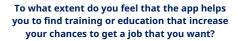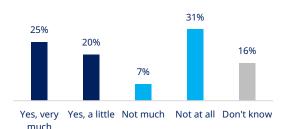
In your opinion how relevant were the skills you were able to choose to the experience you possess?

Hardly relevant	Not relevant at all	Relevant	Very relevant
23%	45%	20%	12%

Link with finding a job

Only 29% of beneficiaries found the application useful for finding a suitable job opportunity, versus 46% who didn't find it useful. With regards to finding training/education opportunities that could boost their employability, 45% found the application useful, and 38% did not. However, one out of four could not tell whether the application was useful to help find a suitable job and one out of six was unsure about its contribution to help identify education and training opportunities. Therefore, the application's contribution to employment outcomes for beneficiaries is mixed. These results, however, are not surprising when comparing to other short-term assessments of impact or perception of impact of career guidance services, given the short period of time that elapsed between receiving the service and the tracer study. Further assessments are needed to determine why some beneficiaries (one out of three) found the app helpful in their job search, and/or to determine their training needs, and others didn't, and whether this changes over time.

To what extent do you feel that the app helps you to find a suitable job opportunity?

			33%	25%
15%	14%	13%		

Yes, very much | Yes, a little | Not much | Not at all | I don't know

To what extent do you feel that the app helps you to find training or education that increase your chances to get a job that you want?

25%	20%		31%	
		7%		16%

Yes, very much | Yes, a little | Not much | Not at all | Don't know

Way Forward

Make the application more inclusive and relevant for the local context: Technical terms and CVs

Many users especially from the refugee community found it challenging to use the application since terms used for occupations, skills set, and educational qualifications often differed from their home country. Although the application provided translations, they were not always accurate. Therefore, prior to any roll-out, the most common terms used by the target community should be added to the application. It was also noted that many users would complete their profiles but preferred to use other common formats of CVs and resumes instead of the format recommended by the application. More CV options should be provided on the application, including formats that users can modify further themselves.

Make induction training an integral part of promoting the skills profiling application

Although a large majority of beneficiaries positively engaged with the application, 36% of beneficiaries did not

generate their CVs. Since most users found the application user friendly, there could be other reasons why every third beneficiary did not engage well with the application. The application took on average 3 to 6 hours to fill and job seekers could have found it too time consuming in comparison to the benefits that the exercise may reap. The tracer study also found that many users were unsure or less convinced about the application's usefulness to help them find a job or identify further training. In addition, several applicants did not fully complete their profiles and hence could not efficiently communicate their skills to potential employers. Although ABA offered induction sessions, many applicants did not participate. This could have compromised their ability to both comprehend and use all functionalities of the application in the first place. Therefore, induction sessions for the application should become an integral and compulsory element in promoting the application, for users to learn how to interact with it and to fully understand its benefits and use. In general, the user interface and user experience of the application should also be regularly reviewed and enhanced.

Integrate the application with more comprehensive and practitioner supported processes

As for any digital career guidance service[1] it is important that the application is integrated in more comprehensive and practitioner supported processes like group or individual counselling, career education and job search support. In Egypt and Kenya, for example, the ILO uses the application as part of the Job Search Club methodology, a two-week intensive job search activity, based on peer learning and group support, to activate long-term unemployed and disadvantaged job seekers including refugees, and empower them to successfully and independently look for a job themselves.

Enhance the application's outreach and engagement with potential employers

The tracer study showed mixed results regarding its perceived usefulness to achieve direct employment outcomes for the beneficiaries. In addition to linking to vacancy platforms, steps should be taken to make the application better known among local employers in the host country and allowing employers to browse candidate profiles. Strategies could include promotion through local media, social media, mailings, or information brochures for

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1   Cedefop. 2018. Handbook of ICT practices for guidance and career development. Luxembourg: Publications Office. http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/368695; and ILO. 2022. Inventory of digital career guidance services, forthcoming.

employers by employment offices and implementing partners. A mapping of local job boards/vacancy platforms and analysis of vacancy data could allow leveraging meta data of these platforms to guide the AI engine in suggesting and prioritizing skills demanded in the local labour market.

Plan and conduct long term impact assessment
To fully understand the impact of the skills profiling application on the employability of individuals, a longer-term approach needs to be taken and further impact assessments could be carried out 1 and 2 years after the use of the application.

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