

Social Research Call

Title:

Bridging Skill Gaps for Labor Market Reintegration: Identifying Reachable Skills



Acronym: SKILLBRIDGE

Project leader: Rodrigo Belo

Host organisation: Nova School of Business and Economics (Nova SBE), Universidade Nova de Lisboa

Main purpose of the project: The project develops a data-driven framework for identifying reachable skills: competencies valuable for placement, close to the jobseeker's existing skills, and feasible to acquire through short-duration training. With the Portuguese employment service (IEFP), we test whether targeting training at these skills improves reemployment of the long-term unemployed.

Design/methodology/approach: We pair linked administrative records with a randomized controlled trial. A reachability score ranks each jobseeker's missing skills by contribution to placement, estimated from actual hiring decisions and weighted by proximity and training availability. The trial compares algorithmic to counselor recommendations for skill-targeted training.

Potential results: The project delivers a skill-importance ranking estimated from placement outcomes, an individual-level reachability score, and causal estimates of the effect of skill-targeted training on six-month employment and match quality. The partner agency will get a working recommender system and guidelines for counselor use.

Social relevance of the research: In 2024, about 37% of unemployed individuals in Portugal had been out of work for over a year, and Spain carried the second-highest long-term unemployment rate in the EU, with the burden falling on workers with the fewest qualifications. As employment services across Europe adopt the ESCO skill ontology, a rigorously evaluated targeting rule can shape how training resources are allocated.

Originality/value of the project: To our knowledge, this is the first experimental evaluation of a skill-targeting system built from revealed hiring decisions in a live public employment service. It changes the focus of training evaluation from program attendance to individual skill acquisition. Built on European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), it is replicable across European employment services.