



# My Strengths Atlas

Identification of skills –  
further training for returning refugees

A guidebook for coaches



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# 1. Introduction

There has always been migration into other countries, and even other continents. Uncertain living situations, civil wars, a lack of work opportunities, insufficient healthcare, and the consequences of climate change may lead people to leave their homes. Migration to Germany is not new either, but increased immigration over recent years represents a particular challenge for the federal government and local authorities.

Many refugees expected a better future in Germany. These expectations remain unfulfilled in many cases, and some refugees have already returned to their countries of origin. In 2017 a total of 30,000 people made an application for voluntary return; in the first quarter of 2018 alone, 40,000 people applied. The federal government would like to tackle the causes of flight in the countries of origin, and open up future perspectives for people in their country of origin. Refugees should be prepared for return to the best possible extent while still in Germany. As such, the global Migration und Entwicklung [Migration and Development] project run by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH [German Association for International Collaboration] encompasses projects implemented in Germany, offering support before return, and is also why structures are being established in countries of origin to offer the returnee an anchor point and initial orientation in their home country. These measures are financed by the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development.

The project “Bildungsbrücken bauen. Weiterbildung für Rückkehrer\*innen” (Building Educational Bridges. Continuing Education for Returnees) run by Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V. (Association of German Adult Education Centres) falls within the measures supporting improved preparation for return. Further training is offered at ten adult education centres in Germany.

The low-threshold courses offered are modular in structure. The flat progression structure means they can be started on a week-to-week basis. The various training modules – sewing, tailoring and handicraft, for example – are conducted in tandem with lecturers and teaching assistants.

Because a decision to return is not an easy one for most returnees to make, coaches are available throughout the period of training to offer psychosocial support.

At the beginning of training, the identification of skills as outlined in this Strengths Atlas is performed with each participant during a consulting session. The purpose of this instrument is to give participants the opportunity to research their strengths and document their skills. In addition, the Strengths Atlas also serves as an instrument for coaches to identify and learn about the socio-emotional as well as the technical and practical strengths and abilities of participants. This serves to adapt the training program to the needs of the participants.

The individual training modules develop from the findings in the identification of skills, as well as the needs of the labour market in the respective individual's country of origin. All offers are implemented as partial qualification modules, and the participant receives a corresponding certificate after completing the training.

The contextual conditions result in particular challenges for advisors when identifying skills. Participants have very diverse cultural backgrounds and linguistic capabilities, and will be returning to very diverse worlds of work and societal structures in their countries of origin. With this in mind, the present instrument offers culturally sensitive materials that focus on each individual's resources.

## 2. Objectives and approaches of the Strengths Atlas

The identification of skills in the context of advice on return is subject to a few complex challenges. Their origins, culture, language, level of education, and formally and informally acquired (professional) qualifications, mean that the individuals receiving consultation constitute a very heterogeneous group. Although this is also true of the traditional integration course, the courses for returnees have the aim not of facilitating integration into the system of the majority society, but of providing the best possible preparation for conditions in the country of origin. There is great variation, not only in the requirements of the local labour markets and societal structures, but also in the acceptance that returnees can expect in the society to which they are returning. Unlike the majority of instruments that have been developed over recent years to improve integration in the German context (societal and professional), these specific considerations are important in the provision of advice here. In turn, this means that the trained specialist must be familiar with the demands of the countries of origin, and take these into account.

The Strengths Atlas focuses on a holistic, resource-oriented view of the individual. The primary goal is to determine individual skills, abilities, potentials, taking into account cultural aspects and gender-specific preferences. The identification of skills should provide the individual receiving advice with perspective and a guide for the near and distant future, and through reflection on their own strengths give them a visualisation of their own resources and therefore a clearer self-image. Each participant brings their own history, and therefore skills, that have been acquired in their personal or professional environment.

In the process of creating the instrument, its cultural sensitivity was reviewed by representatives of cooperating institutions of continuing education based outside Germany. In addition, the instrument is a working document that is continually adapted and updated to country- and culture-specific needs. In creating the Strengths Atlas, existing instruments for the identification of skills were analysed with a focus on migration and flight from one's home country. In addition, expert discussions were held with various non-governmental organisations, pro-

viders of continuing education, associations and information centres in order to gain an understanding of the methods used and proven there. In this process, it became clear that there is no concept and no material that can be used for every individual to be advised. Instead, practitioners prefer to use a combination of different instruments. This means that the extremely diverse requirements are taken into account, and university graduates and people without school experience alike can be tested. The instruments developed to date have often been aligned at just one particular target group. The Strengths Atlas is set to a low threshold, in order to reach all individuals receiving consultation. Depending on the requirements of the individual receiving consultation, specific and various parts of the skill identification can be processed. The individual receiving consultation is free to omit sections if they do not seem useful. The same applies to the use of materials. The time specification is used as orientation for the identification of skills in the context of individual consultation. Using the instrument with groups, as well as on a one-to-one basis for a longer period of time is always possible and in fact desirable.

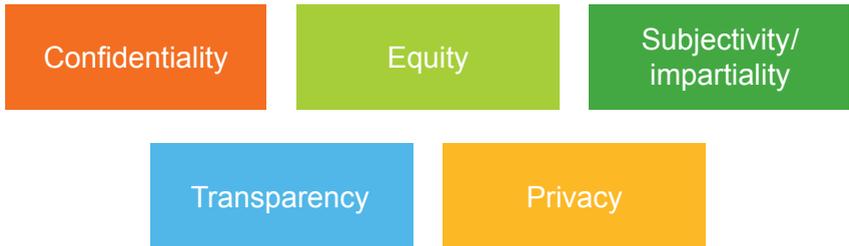
## Basic information

The Strengths Atlas is:

- » intended for individual and collective identification of skills.
- » takes around 120 minutes when advising individually/can be extended as required for groups.

### 3. Requirements for advisors using the Strengths Atlas

The following principles must always be complied with:



- » A culturally sensitive attitude and interacting on an equal footing are particularly important.
- » The advisor must be sensitive to migration histories, learning cultures and life situations of individuals with a migration background, and have a high degree of tolerance for ambiguity.
- » The advisor must be committed to confidentiality and loyalty, and should make the participant feel that they are in a protected and safe environment.
- » The objectives, processes and possible uses for the identification of skills must be clear to participants from the outset.
- » Participation in the identification of skills is always voluntary, with no results bias.
- » The identification of skills serves to ascertain the individual's strengths and to support the individual. In the advisory process, the individual receiving consultation should not develop the expectation that they will definitely have a job after returning to the country of origin.

- » The purpose of the advice is to initiate a process enabling the individual receiving advice to be resource-focused and to visualise their strengths. The central theme – of being able to develop a strategy for the future at the end of the identification of skills – should be developed in the advisory process.

The linguistic capabilities of the individual receiving consultation present a particular challenge to a successful advising process. The advisor should therefore observe the following points in this respect.

## 4. Language

- » If the individual has a low level of linguistic capability, the speed of speech and vocabulary choices must be adapted.
- » An advisor should always ensure that he or she has understood correctly and been correctly understood.
- » The advisor must be sensitive to the fact that the views and understanding of the advisor do not correspond to the views and understanding of the individual receiving consultation.
- » In addition, regular reflection on the advisor's own role is strongly advised in order to avoid derogatory behaviour towards the participant. German language skills have nothing to do with intelligence.

## 5. The structure of the Strengths Atlas

	Time	Page
 <p><b>My roots</b> The participant(s) develop their origin and identity by examining their own biographical roots and stages of life, as well as role models and values.</p>	Approx. 30 min.	2–9
 <p><b>My protected environment and places of learning</b> In particular when it comes to the professional and activity-specific experiences, it is possible to link into previously identified learning environments. This is particularly useful for individuals receiving consultation who come from countries of origin with more informally organised labour markets where there is no professional training in the traditional form.</p>	Approx. 45 min.	10–21
 <p><b>My desires and goals</b> The participant(s) should reflect on their desires and goals and write down or draw specific points. These could be very general or specific career-related desires and goals.</p>	Approx. 15 min.	22
 <p><b>My strategy</b> The participant(s) should think about a strategy for the period after their return. What contacts do I have? Which resources are available to me? What would I like to do? How can I reach my goal?</p>	Approx. 15 min.	23–24

## 6. Work instructions for the Strengths Atlas

### Worksheets

#### My roots

##### Where do I come from? (p.2)

Please draw a mind map (sociogram/flower meadow/tree) with the participant in the centre, and during the consulting session fill out the personality and relationship map.

M4

M5

##### My own family (p.3)

Please draw the individuals into the mind map (sociogram/flower meadow/tree). The participant is in the centre. Work on the personality and relationship map in parallel.

M1

##### Stages of my life (p.4)

Use the flower meadow worksheet and set out the individual stages here. Write the locations and people as well as the areas of employment that the participant associates with this into the flowers.

M3

M8

##### Role models (p.5)

Record the most important characteristics of the participant's role model; what ideals/aspirations does the participant have? What characteristics are important to him/her? What does he/she strive for?

##### Values (p.6)

Note the personal values of the participant in their private (family, friends) and professional (work) lives. Use worksheet M7 "I am ..." or the personal treasure chest (M12) for this purpose.

M7

M12

### Language (pp.7–8)

Record a self-assessment and, if possible, a third-party assessment of the participant's language skills.

M3

M17

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### My personal contacts (p.9)

The individual receiving consultation reflects on their personal social network mainly in the country of origin. Who do I know? Who can provide support for me – at the social and professional level?

M9

M12

M17

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## My protected environment and places of learning

### Social life (p.10)

Enquire about the participant's experiences in their social environment (in the host country and in the country of origin).

M9

M17

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### Household/caring for children and older people/medical expertise/manual work/agriculture (pp.11–15)

Enquire about experience and knowledge in the various fields of activity (here too, the frames of reference are host country and country of origin).

M3

M9

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### Creative (p.16)

Which creative or sports activities interest or appeal to the participant(s)?

M11

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### Intercultural skills (p. 17)

What intercultural (learning) experiences has the participant had? How can this influence a return?

M8

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### Training (p.18)

What formal schooling and career training has the individual receiving consultation had?

M17

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### Professional and activity-specific experience (pp.19–21)

What informal schooling and career training has the advisee had?

M3

M9

### My desires and goals

The participants should reflect on their wishes and determine which ones they would like to pursue further and, if necessary, reformulate them into goals.

M7

M15

### My strategy

Together with the individual receiving consultation, consider how they can concretely implement the goals that have been developed, what steps are necessary and what approach can be used.

M13

M14

## 7. Work instructions regarding the materials

### Basic information on the use of the materials in the group

When using the materials, it can be helpful if the advisor evaluates the completed worksheets in the group and thus filters out and analyses potential group dynamics and common strengths or problems of the group. The results can be discussed together in the group and help to identify which contents are particularly in demand and to create a more homogeneous offer.

#### Example – M4: Tree

Create an individual and collective technical/professional profile of the participants and work out the core interests.

1. Read all the completed “trees”.
2. As a supervisor\*, create a tree that reflects the most frequently expressed interests of the participants.
3. Invite participants to present their trees to other participants and encourage the group to discuss common "flowers" and "buds" in terms of the abilities they would like to develop.
4. If the participants are too shy to present their tree in the group, you as a supervisor can first present your own tree.

#### Example – M7: I am ...

Create an individual and collective socio-emotional profile of the participants using the information provided in Material 7 “I am ...”.

1. Obtain an overview of all the completed worksheets of Material 7.
2. As a supervisor, create a general hand-heart-head diagram based on the most frequently mentioned characteristics, abilities and priorities.

3. Invite participants to present their profiles to the other participants and discuss common goals and wishes in the group.

## Work instructions for individual materials of the Strengths Atlas

### M1: Energy barrel

### M2: Mood tree

These two exercises are a good first step to find out the mood and thus the needs of the participants. This can be used to plan further advice and put together exercises. The two worksheets can be used as required as a mood assessment at the beginning of each lesson.

### M3: Strengths map

Ask the participants to outline their personal life journey. A different colour should be chosen for the different areas (family, places of residence, activities). The participants then sketch the personal importance of the stated areas of life in the various phases of their life. For phases that were very important, these should be marked with a wide bar. If they were not as relevant, the bar should be made correspondingly narrower. Encourage the participants to enter special events and comment on their sketch.

### M4: Tree

Ask the participants to draw their own tree with roots, trunk, leaves and flowers, buds and fruits on the page provided in the Strengths Atlas. If the participants need more space to draw, you can alternatively give them an A3 sized sheet.

1. The participants enter their own roots etc.

Roots	Where do I get the strength for my life
Trunk/bark:	What has been important in shaping me and my life?
Leaves	What do I use to present myself? (Strengths and abilities)
Flowers/buds:	What would I still want to develop, unlock, and learn? (My development goals)
Fruits	What have I achieved, what have I been successful at? (Special achievements, but also formal certificates)

2. Discuss the completed trees with the participants.
3. The task may take 20 minutes or longer.
4. It will be quicker if the rough structure of the tree is already provided and the participants just need to draw in the elements.

### **M5: Flower (meadow)**

Ask the participants to draw their own flower/flower meadow on the page provided in the Strengths Atlas. Use the tree method for orientation here. The task may take 20 minutes or longer.

As an alternative to the flower meadow, you can also work with the participants using the flower stem. The instructions for this are also based on the tree method.

### **M6: Circle of life**

#### **Step 1:**

In preparation, work with the participants on the following questions about their life phases:

- » What happened?
- » What's happening now?
- » What do I expect/hope for?
- » What has shaped me? What extraordinary experiences have I had?

#### **Step 2:**

Ask participants to set out their results starting from the circle, in the form of a mind map.

- » Pre-school and school
- » Military and civil service
- » Training and studies
- » Internships and jobs
- » Jobs
- » Advanced and continuing education
- » Family and children

- » Friends and other students
- » Free time and hobbies
- » Volunteering

### **M7: I am ...**

In this exercise, participants brainstorm about the qualities, activities and things that make them stand out and that are important to them. The list of examples can provide inspiration.

### **M8: Reflection questions**

Here the coach works with the participant(s) on questions from the educational counselling on their life and learning situation.

### **M9: Areas of activity in my life**

Invite the participants to write down their activities in their lives to date in the table.

1. The second step is to invite them to write down which tasks and requirements they have mastered in this time and what skills they have used or newly acquired in these tasks.
2. The participants then record the skills from various times of their life which they would like to continue to use/use in the future.

### **M10: What I am proud of**

In this exercise, participants describe an event that they experience as a personal success. This can be a job-related, performance-oriented or personal event from everyday life, school, work or leisure. You can also use a photo for visualisation.

### **M11: 20 things I enjoy doing**

This is about participants writing down, without thinking about it for long, things that they enjoy. These are often smaller things, such as going for a walk or playing an instrument. A collection of enjoyable things can help during the difficult times. Participants can write the list on a special piece of paper and make it look pleasant.

### **M12: My personal treasure chest**

The treasure chest can be used either based on previous materials or as a summary of core values, resources, strengths and goals. Participants visualise their cherished experiences and knowledge, and collect them in their personal treasure chest.

### **M13: From the idea to the goal**

This exercise is a trial run. The participant should choose a short-term goal and consider who or what could help them to achieve it. The SMART goals could also be used here. The important thing is to evaluate the goal, whether it is realistic, whether it can be achieved, what needs to be done, who can help and what the concrete time frame is. Use if-then sentences. Alternatively, you could also use the options sun in M14.

### **M14: Options sun**

The options sun is a method that enables various alternatives to be presented straightforwardly and easily.

- » The relevant subject, such as current career options, is written in the centre of the flipchart (or A4 sheet).
- » Write down options as rays: like the rays of the sun, the different options are written down starting from this theme in the circle, one option per ray. First, it's necessary to secure the options that the advisee already has in their heart and mind.
- » The skill of the advisor is to expand the options, to listen to the advisee's stories and to actively suggest further options.
- » Then, the advisee should initially assess how attractive the options are on a scale from 0 to 10 and write it down.
- » In the second round, the advisee should then assess the feasibility of the options on a scale from 0 to 10 and mark them in another colour. Discuss the result.

In most cases, one to two options arise from the picture which are both attractive and seem sufficiently feasible. These can then be further discussed and where applicable reviewed using an affect balance.

#### What is an affect balance?

#### And what is it used for?

The decision for a particular option can be reviewed again using an affect balance.

Specific measures can then be set out at the same time:

- » what could the advisee do to make the positive value of the option increase and the negative decrease?

An affect balance is also useful for an internal consideration as to whether an option is positive or negative.

### **M15: Picture cards**

Picture cards are laid out and associated with certain questions.

1. The participants look for a picture that attracts them at that moment. For example, a picture may become a symbol for a goal that the participant would like to achieve. Pictures that are associated with certain ideas and goals are more easily remembered.
2. The group collects positive terms about a participant's selected picture card, which are then written down by the coach.
3. The participant then reports what they associate with the picture card.
4. Participants receive a copy of the picture, to act as an anchor that reminds them of their goals, for example.

### **M16: My strengths**

Write down the strengths of the participant(s) in each field. A mind map type of design can be used here. Different colours can be used for the different areas.

### **M17: Identification of skills (brief)**

Depending on the needs and time resources of the advisee, use this short systematic identification of skills, or use it as a supplement to the participant's/participants' portfolio(s).

## 8. Explanations

### SWOT analysis

*"The SWOT analysis (also called strengths-weaknesses analysis) is one of the most popular methods of situation analysis in marketing, management and personnel and executive development. The reason: only a reliable (valid) assessment of strengths, weaknesses, risks and opportunities makes it possible to develop successful strategies and future prospects. This applies to companies as well as to individual specialists and executives"*

The SWOT analysis was developed in the 1950s at Harvard Business School to work on case studies in the field of strategic planning. The most important purpose of a SWOT analysis is to provide a realistic and reliable assessment of the initial situation. The term SWOT analysis (also called strengths-weaknesses analysis) is an acronym comprising the starting letters of (topic) terms with the following core questions:

<b>S</b>	<b>Strength</b> Strengths	» What is working very well right now?
<b>W</b>	<b>Weakness</b> Weaknesses	» What is not working well right now?
<b>O</b>	<b>Opportunities</b> Opportunities/possibilities	» What are the future opportunities and possibilities?
<b>T</b>	<b>Threat</b> Threats/risks	» What could go wrong in the future?

From the combination (matrix) of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, (creative) measures and strategies can be derived which can ensure the success of an organisation or person.

» The source and more detailed information can be found online at:  
[wpelez.de/swot-analyse/SWOT-Analyse.pdf](http://wpelez.de/swot-analyse/SWOT-Analyse.pdf)

## SMART

The SMART formula is an tool for formulating goals. It consists of five criteria that a good goal should fulfil:

<b>S</b>	<b>Specific</b>	A goal should be as specific and concrete as possible.
<b>M</b>	<b>Measurable</b>	It is important here to mention a quantity structure, a time specification or any other measurable criterion.
<b>A</b>	<b>Accepted</b>	Goals must be accepted by the person involved. The goals must be appealing or desirable to the person. Goals that are considered unacceptable have little chance of success.
<b>R</b>	<b>Realistic</b>	Realistic goals are more readily accepted and motivate people far more than those that are considered unrealistic at the outset.
<b>T</b>	<b>Time-bound</b>	A time must be specified. This does not always apply to all goals. If, for example, the goal is purely financial or purely technical, the setting of a deadline frequently does not play a role.

» Source:

[projekte-leicht-gemacht.de/blog/pm-methoden-erklaert/die-smart-formel/](https://projekte-leicht-gemacht.de/blog/pm-methoden-erklaert/die-smart-formel/)

## Affect balance

The Zurich Resource Model (ZRM) developed by Maja Storch and Frank Krause describes the affect balance, a method for linking the intellect and affect (emotions). This means linking the evaluations of the intellect with bodily signals. The idea is to contrast unpleasant feelings with pleasant feelings and to relate that to the decision at hand. As affect often operates at the subconscious level, the affect balance also serves to make feelings visible. The important thing is to very closely observe your body and its positive feelings.

» Further information

[ismz.ch/](https://ismz.ch/)

» Source:

[resilienz-akademie.com/affektbilanz/](https://resilienz-akademie.com/affektbilanz/)

# Material sources

## **M 1: Energy barrel**

Source: Mannheimer Abendakademie und Volkshochschule GmbH

## **M 2: Mood tree**

Adapted from Mario Rinvoluceri

## **M 3: Strengths map**

Authorship: DVV: arising from the project “Bildungsbrücken bauen. Weiterbildung für Rückkehrer\*innen“

## **M 4: Life tree**

Adapted from Ries, Zurich 1998

## **M 5: Flower meadow**

Authorship: DVV: arising from the project “Bildungsbrücken bauen. Weiterbildung für Rückkehrer\*innen“

## **M 6: Circle of life**

Based on Richard Nelson Bolles, 1970, “What colour is your parachute?”

## **M 7: I am ...**

©Monika Simikin, Mannheimer Abendakademie

## **M 8: Reflection questions**

Source: Created from skills records in the training advice

## **M 9: Areas of activity in my life**

Source: Created from skills records in the training advice

## **M 10: What I am proud of**

Authorship: Talentkompass NRW [NRW Talent Compass]

## **M 11: 20 things I enjoy doing**

Source: Barbara Sher “Wishcraft. Vom Wunschtraum zum erfüllten Leben” [“Wishcraft, from the idle wish to the fulfilled life”] (Universitas Verlag Tübingen)

## **M 12: My personal treasure chest**

Authorship: DVV: arising from the project “Bildungsbrücken bauen. Weiterbildung für Rückkehrer\*innen“ [Continuing education for returnees]

## **M 13: From the idea to the goal**

Authorship: Talentkompass NRW [NRW Talent Compass]

## **M 14: Options sun**

©IFL, Irmgard Betzler

## **M 15: Picture card**

©Picture cards from the Zurich Resource Model developed by Maja Storch

## **M 16: My strengths**

Source: Created from skills records in the training advice

## **M 17: Identification of skills (brief)**

©Mannheimer Abendakademie



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