THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN

MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

PROJECT

The Recognition of Migrant Workers' Skills and Qualifications

Migrant workers are over-represented in jobs and tasks that require fewer and lower-level skills, are lower paid and offer restricted career prospects. Migrant workers, especially women migrant workers, are often subjected to "deskilling[1]" and "brain waste[2]" during their migration experience.

In order to gain access to employment migrant workers not only need to possess relevant skills, but also need to be able to signal and validate these skills to potential employers. They need to have relevant and verifiable skills in order to gain access to job opportunities and to adjust to changing labour markets. This means skills need to be transferable between jobs and easily recognized by employers – i.e. portable.

The low capacity of national recognition bodies and processes in both sending and receiving countries has been one of the major barriers of skills portability and recognition of migrant workers' skills, but is not the only one. Skills recognition at country level and between countries can be promoted by instruments available at international level or negotiated at bilateral, regional, or multilateral levels.

The African Union is working on the development of an **African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF).** The ACQF is a policy instrument that will contribute to enhance comparability and transparency of qualifications; facilitate mutual recognition of certificates; improve mobility of learners and workers across the continent; and promote cooperation and alignment between different qualifications frameworks (national, sub-regional) in Africa, and eventually with other frameworks globally.

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[1]   **Deskilling:** Labour market-related term that describes the phenomenon experienced by skilled or highly-skilled workers who enter the labour market and obtain a job below their skills or qualification level (compared to their acquired qualifications) and are considered to be "overqualified" for the job they occupy. This practice results in situations where workers perform lower-skilled jobs, and are often badly paid. If they stay (which is often the case) in that same job, they rarely climb the occupational ladder. The longer they stay in that lower-skilled job, the harder it is for those foreign workers to obtain a job in accordance with his/her qualifications, since unused skills might be lost or use value after time – and workers suffer deskilling. The end result is an unfair loss of the time and money that the worker spent in obtaining (eventually unused) qualifications and the waste of funds that his/her family and country spent on human resources.

[2]   **Brain waste:** A term commonly used in migration terminology in relation to other terms such as brain drain and brain gain. It determines the lack or bad utilization of potential foreign human resources available in the labour market. It relates to migrant workers' skills, qualifications and job experience acquired in the country of origin that are not properly utilised in the labour market of the country of destination. The main causes include the lack of recognition of skills and qualifications and hence underutilization of people's skills, and/or difficulties to obtain work permits, also driving migrant workers to work in the informal economy and often in jobs below their skills level. This results in a loss-loss situation for workers, countries of origin and countries of destination.

The Southern Africa Migration Management (SAMM) project supports on-going processes such as the **SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF)** which is a Regional Qualification Framework (RQF) to enable easier movement of learners and workers across the SADC region and internationally. It is underpinned by learning outcomes and quality assurance (QA) principles that provide a regional benchmark for qualifications and quality assurance mechanisms in 8 SADC Member States; namely, **Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland and Zambia**. Those countries have started piloting the alignment of the national qualifications frameworks with the SADCQF and to date the relevant authorities in Seychelles and South Africa have reported that their National Qualifications Frameworks are fully aligned. The outcome of aligning the NQFs of Member States with the SADCQF allows for the mutual recognition and transferability of skills and qualifications across the region.

The SAMM project also supports other national systems and processes contributing to the advancement of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for migrant workers.

At the international level the following instruments call for the recognition of migrant workers' skills and qualifications:

- ILO Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143). Article 14(b) specifically refers to the recognition of occupational qualifications acquired abroad, including certificates and diplomas;

- ILO Human Resources Development Convention, 1975 (No. 142), which promotes the adoption and development of "comprehensive and coordinated policies and programmes of vocational guidance and vocational training, closely linked with employment, in particular through public employment services"; and,

- ILO Human Resources Development Recommendation, 2004 (No. 195). Part VI, paragraph 12 indicates that "Special provisions should be designed to ensure recognition and certification of skills and qualifications for migrant workers."

MAIN SAMM ACTIVITIES:

- Production of the Report "Mechanisms to support the Recognition of Migrants' Skills in Southern Africa";

- Creation of a Community of Practice on the Skills Recognition of Migrant Workers in the SADC region;

- Comparative skills profiling surveys and assessment of skills recognition opportunities facilitating refugees and asylum seekers' access to the labour market in South Africa and Zambia;

- Skills Mobility Study in Mauritius;

- 2 Toolkits (1 for practitioners and 1 for employers) on How to navigate and support migrant workers through skills recognition policies, processes etc.;

- A Regional (SADC) methodology on how to develop a critical skills list;

- Assessment to improve the Skills Shortage List in South Africa;

- South Africa's Capacity development workshop on the recognition of migrants' skills and qualifications and labour migration statistics – to be organised with UNECA in 2023;

- Piloting on SADC Qualifications Framework and other mechanisms for skills recognition and mobility initiatives – country case study – Lesotho.

GCM RELATED PARAGRAPHS

The Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) **Objective 18 "Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences"** mentions that Member States commit to invest in innovative solutions that facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences of migrant workers at all skills levels, and promote demand-driven skills development to optimize the employability of migrants in formal labour markets in countries of destination and in countries of origin upon return, as well as to ensure decent work in labour migration.

To realize this commitment, the following actions are included:

(a) **Develop standards and guidelines for the mutual recognition of foreign qualifications and non-formally acquired skills in different sectors in collaboration with the respective industries with a view to ensuring worldwide compatibility based on existing models and best practices;**

(b) **Promote transparency of certifications and compatibility of national qualifications frameworks by agreeing on standard criteria, indicators and assessment parameters, and by creating and strengthening national skills profiling tools, registries or institutions in order to facilitate effective and efficient mutual recognition procedures at all skills levels;**

(c) **Conclude bilateral, regional or multilateral mutual recognition agreements or include recognition provisions in other agreements, such as labour mobility or trade agreements, in order to provide equivalence or comparability in national systems, such as automatic or managed mutual recognition mechanisms;**

(d) Use technology and digitalization to evaluate and mutually recognize skills more comprehensively on the basis of formal credentials as well as non-formally acquired competences and professional experience at all skills levels;

(e) Build global skills partnerships among countries that strengthen training capacities of national authorities and relevant stakeholders, including the private sector and trade unions, and foster skills development of workers in countries of origin and migrants in countries of destination with a view to preparing trainees **for employability in the labour markets of all participating countries;**
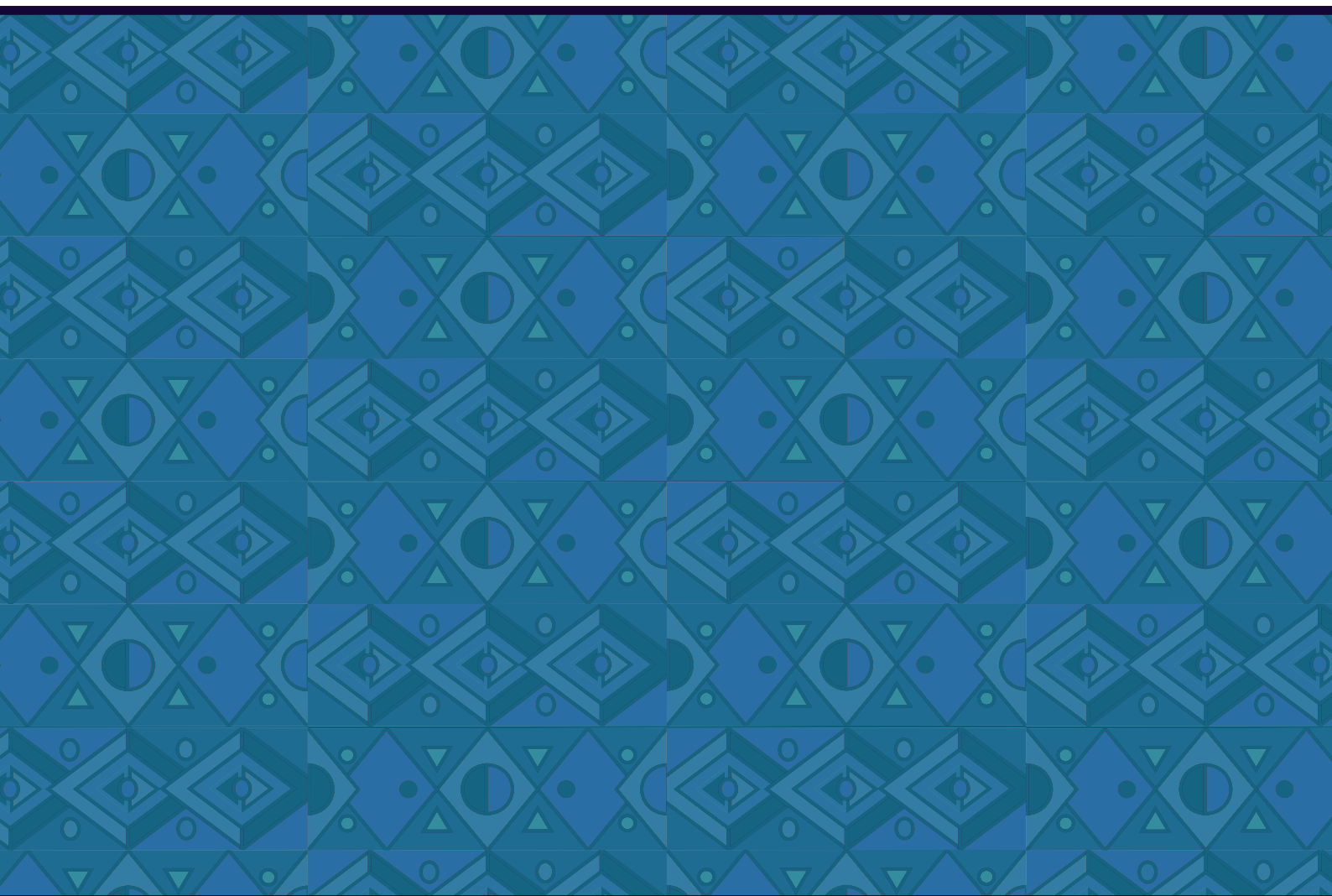
(f) Promote inter-institutional networks and collaborative programmes for partnerships between the private sector and educational institutions in countries of origin and destination to enable mutually beneficial skills development opportunities for migrants, communities and participating partners, including by building on the best practices of the Business Mechanism developed in the context of the Global Forum on Migration and Development;

(g) Engage in bilateral partnerships and programmes in cooperation with relevant stakeholders that promote skills development, mobility and circulation, such as student exchange programmes, scholarships, professional exchange programmes and trainee- or apprenticeships that include options for beneficiaries, after successful completion of these programmes, to seek employment and engage in entrepreneurship;

(h) Cooperate with the private sector and employers to make available easily accessible and gender-responsive remote or online skills development and matching programmes to migrants at all skills levels, including early and occupation-specific language training, on-the-job training and access to advanced training programmes, to enhance their employability in sectors **with demand for labour on the basis of the industry's knowledge of labour market dynamics, especially to promote the economic empowerment of women;**

(i) **Enhance the ability of migrant workers to transition from one job or employer to another by making available documentation that recognizes skills acquired on the job or through training in order to optimize the benefits of upskilling;**

(j) **Develop and promote innovative ways to mutually recognize and assess formally and informally acquired skills, including through timely and complementary training for job seekers, mentoring, and internship programmes in order to fully recognize existing credentials and provide certificates of proficiency for the validation of newly acquired skills;**

(k) **Establish screening mechanisms for credentials and offer information to migrants on how to have their skills and qualifications assessed and recognized prior to departure, including in recruitment processes or at an early stage after arrival to improve employability;**

(l) **Cooperate to promote documentation and information tools, in partnership with relevant stakeholders, that provide an overview of a worker's credentials, skills and qualifications, recognized in countries of origin, transit and destination, in order to enable employers to evaluate the suitability of migrant workers in job application processes.**

The ILO, IOM, UNESCO, ITUC and IOE have agreed to forge a Global Skills Partnership on Migration (GSP) to support countries in the identification, formulation and implementation of partnerships on skills and migration between countries of origin and destination.

TOOLS PRODUCED BY THE ILO:

1. Training Employment Services Providers on How to Facilitate the Recognition of Skills of Migrant Workers;

2. Guidelines for Recognizing the Skills of Returning Migrant Workers;

3. How to Facilitate the Recognition of Skills of Migrant Workers, Guide for Employment Services Providers;

4. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Learning Package;

5. Migrant Workers' Skills Portability in Africa at Regional Economic Community and Continental Level;

6. Understanding the Potential Impact of Skills Recognition on Labour Markets;

7. The Potential of Skills Development and Recognition for regulated Labour Mobility in the IGAD Region.

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