

The SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) and the recognition of migrant workers' qualifications

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. 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 subject to "deskilling" and "brain waste", through 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. Different methods may apply for the validation and recognition of academic education, vocational education and work experience. Skills matching, portability and skills recognition can be advanced at the continental and RECs level through Qualifications Framework, but also through mutual recognition agreement (MRA), specific bilateral or multilateral skills portability and recognition agreements, or through unilateral measures. Unilateral measures are the most common and can include recognition of informal and non-formal learning (RPL), partial recognition of formal learning and bridging courses, etc.

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. At the same time, the portability of skills depends on effective policies and trusted sources of information. Therefore, recognition tends to be most successful when established through social dialogue involving governments, employers' and workers' organizations and education and training institutions. This is true for both formally certified qualifications and informally acquired skills. At 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."

The ILO Human Resources Development 2004 Recommendation No. 195 concerning human resources development: education, training and lifelong learning defines portability of skills as:

- Employable skills which can be used productively in different jobs, occupations, industries; and;

- Certification and recognition of skills within national and international labour markets.

The **SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF)** is a comprehensive Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) for schooling, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and higher education. It was established in 2011 by the SADC Ministers of Education. Its purpose is to enable easier movement of learners and workers across the SADC region and internationally. The SADCQF is a 10-level RQF underpinned by learning outcomes and quality assurance (QA) principles that will provide a regional reference for qualifications and QA mechanisms in SADC. Member States agreed to align their qualifications and QA mechanisms to the SADCQF.

The vision is that, in the SADC region, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and other qualification credentials issued by competent authorities will contain the relevant level on the SADCQF. Alignment will enable this recognition of achievement at a regional level. The resulting transparency and information about the qualifications and QA of aligned Member States will further assist in embedding mutual trust in and between SADC countries. Regional alignment would also enable institutions and individuals to compare their learning and competence levels, and would reduce unnecessary duplication of learning and effort when moving through SADC for study or work purposes.

To give effect to this decision by the Ministers, a Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) was given the task of overseeing implementation of the SADCQF. The TCCA is a group of experts from the SADC Member States and is supported by the SADC Secretariat. In order to provide support and centrally drive co-ordination of implementation, a TCCA Executive Committee (EXCO) was established, based on the SADC Troika principles. To ensure the sustainability of the SADCQF, funding mechanisms for a SADCQF implementation unit have been developed. In the meantime, Member States volunteer to support the SADC Secretariat with the implementation efforts.

The main purpose of the SADCQF is to promote mobility, and as such, it plays a key role in setting the regional reference point for comparing qualifications obtained in SADC. Currently the SADCQF is a reference framework only with the prospect of later developing into a framework that has qualifications registered onto it. Eight SADC countries are piloting alignment of their National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) or National Qualifications Systems (NQS) with the SADCQF. The pilot countries are Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, the Seychelles, South Africa and Zambia. South Africa has started to implement a digital **E-Credentialing system** and the SADC **E-certificate** is being piloted in four countries of the SADC region (Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia as part of the SADCQF implementation plan "verification cluster").