International Labour Organisation

Draft Roadmap for implementing the Mutual Recognition of Skills in ASEAN

13 July 2018

Introduction

While solid but slow progress has been made towards the goal of free labour mobility in ASEAN through the establishment of eight Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) that promote cross-border recognition of skills and qualifications, the ASEAN focus has been on highly skilled professions. The Tourism Professionals MRA is, however, an exception. It promotes regional recognition in 32 job areas, from entry to advanced worker levels.

Consequently, the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint to promote the free flow of trade in services and the mobility of professional people does not capture the majority of regional migrants who depart as low skilled workers; although it will certainly facilitate circular migration with workers going away, coming back, and going away again throughout the ASEAN region, with few restrictions.

To promote fair recognition for migrant workers with only modest skill sets, the ILO has encouraged all ASEAN Member States to identify priority skill areas and to plan, at the very least, for their mutual recognition with one other Member State. To progress this Mutual Recognition of Skills (MRS) initiative, the ILO has convened several workshops involving Member States. These workshops have been participated in by ASEAN Senior Labour officials, ILO skills focal points, and by representatives of employers and trade unions. The workshops have made progress on skills recognition issues, thereby supporting worker mobility, decent work and policies aiming to shield migrant workers and their families from exploitation.

The Roadmap outlined in this document moves the mutual recognition process towards implementation and envisages participating Member States assembling a portfolio of evidence which can be the basis for formal recognition discussions between sending and receiving Member States. For mutual recognition to be agreed, the national certification agency in the receiving Member State must have confidence in the sending Member State’s national standards setting policies and processes (particularly its involvement with industry); and in the rigour of its quality assurance, student assessment and national certification. The Roadmap envisages sending and receiving Member States working together collaboratively to assemble a portfolio of evidence. Through that process the receiving Member State will be guided by the receiving partner to strengthen compliance with the mutual recognition requirements; and the receiving Member State will have increased confidence that the mutual recognition proposal is robust and can more readily be agreed to.

It is conceded, however, that recognition of qualifications and experience does not guarantee market access. Policies and regulatory frameworks that constrain and impede skilled labour mobility include requirements and procedures for employment visas and employment passes; any constitutional provisions reserving jobs for nationals; policies that close or impose numerical caps on foreign professionals and skills in sectors and occupations; economic and labour market tests that constrain employment of foreigners and requiring to have them replaced by locals within a stipulated period; licensing regulations of professional associations; and language proficiency requirements. For example, Thailand prohibits migrants from working in 39 occupations reserved for Thais under a royal decree of 1979. However, migrant workers are allowed in a number of other occupations including general labour, bricklaying, carpentry and other construction work; agriculture, forestry and fishing, animal husbandry,
mattress and quilt making, knife making, dressmaking, pottery, civil engineering and architecture1.

AQRF Referencing

ASEAN Member States are currently at differing stages in their progress towards full formal referencing of their national qualifications systems to the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF). An important underpinning document is the “ASEAN Guiding Principles for Quality Assurance and Recognition of Competency Certification Systems”. These guiding principles aim to provide the basis for developing trust and understanding of national qualifications frameworks and competency certification systems of all ASEAN Member States and to set out referencing principles and protocols for developing processes for recognition of these systems.

Where the AQRF referencing is well advanced, that may be used as the basis for seeking mutual recognition of individual qualifications from individual Member States. Documenting the 7 steps in this Roadmap will be supported by the referencing which can be used as a sound basis for seeking mutual recognition of skills in a single area.

Where a Member State is at an early stage in the development of its national qualifications arrangements, the Roadmap can guide the drafting of documentation based around even a single nationally recognised qualification.

Seven steps to the portfolio of evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP 1: Identifying areas of skill for mutual recognition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Member State proposes a qualification for mutual recognition. Recognition partners are also proposed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What Member State is the target for skills recognition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What industry with skilled worker shortage is being identified?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What is the qualification being proposed for recognition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Which Ministry is responsible for skills recognition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are national employer and worker support organisations actively involved?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In STEP ONE, the receiving Member State is nominated; the key Ministry and other agencies are identified; and the proposed skill area for migrant worker recognition is specified.

The Labour Market in the proposed receiving Member State will have been analysed so as to ascertain the nature of skill shortages on the proposed skill area. It makes sense to only target areas of known skill shortage and to plan for recognition of skill areas where migrant workers have a solid set of skills, beyond entry level.

The Ministry in the targeted receiving Member State responsible for skills recognition should be identified.

---

1 Myanmar Times, June 09 2018
If national organisations of employers or workers are significant players in these national regulatory processes (as employers are in Malaysia, for example), these should be identified.

Full details are needed for the sending Member State so that senior officials in the nominated receiving Member State have the necessary contact points.

- Name and status of sending skills recognition agency
- Key contact personnel (senior managers as well as the names of key staff who can respond to detailed issues)
- Website references especially for any qualifications framework arrangements, including specified domains of learning and descriptors for levels and quality assurance policies and processes.

For the nominated receiving Member State the key skills recognition agency should be nominated along with the names and contact details of key personnel. If other national bodies are involved, then they should be identified also and the final portfolio of evidence made available to them all.

**Achievement Checklist**

- The targetted receiving Member State is nominated
- Key contact information is provided for the skills recognition Ministry
- The proposed skill area is specified

---

**STEP 2: Benchmarking national competency standards systems**

- How do the competency standards of the sending Member State compare with those with the receiving Member State?
- How is industry leadership of skill standards setting achieved?
- Who is involved in national standards setting?
- How is wide stakeholder agreement achieved?
- Are national competency standards developed with an awareness of international standards?

**STEP TWO in the development of the portfolio of evidence provides critical information so that stakeholders in the receiving Member State may be assured that there is industry leadership of skills standards setting, that the qualification being proposed for recognition is up to date, has been fully endorsed by national industry and that standards development has taken place with an awareness of international workplace performance requirements.**

The portfolio should outline the processes used to secure industry leadership of standards-setting; in particular the composition of the focus groups which develop qualifications. The Updated Guidelines for the development of Regional Model Competency Standards provides good guidance in this.

The RMCS Guidelines recommend that together, the members of the focus groups should

- represent the breadth of the industry;
- have current knowledge of the skills required to perform the roles within the industry;
- be able to consult with industry when seeking feedback and validation;
- have time to commit to the careful development of the profile;
- understand competency based training and the dual approaches to training.

The ILO Guidelines note that members of the focus group will often be
- representatives from typical enterprises across the industry;
- from employer bodies and associations involved in the industry;
- from workers organisations;
- recognised technically expert employees;
- trainers with special industry expertise;
- representatives from other bodies with similar training requirements;
- representatives from regulatory or licensing bodies, where relevant.

The national industry body endorsing the qualification should be named. If possible, any international linkages should be included in the portfolio, to demonstrate that the standards setters are internationally focussed and the qualifications they develop are of an international standard. For example membership of the ASEAN Constructors’ Federation or the Asian Welding Federation would show that the standards setters are in touch with international requirements. In other cases, qualifications may be developed using relevant industry standards from other jurisdictions as a guide.

Achievement Checklist

- The role of industry and the process for achieving wide endorsement are outlined
- The national industry body endorsing the qualification is named
- The role of skilled workers in the qualifications development process is explained
- The international focus of competency standards setting is noted

STEP 3: Defining and benchmarking the qualification

- Is the proposed qualification recognised in the national qualifications system?
- What are the rules for assembling the units of competency into a coherent qualification?
- Has the national qualifications system been described?
- The qualifications and competency standards are put into a comparability matrix

STEP THREE in the development of the portfolio of evidence provides solid evidence that the qualification has been well developed using robust methodologies in line with the “ASEAN Guiding Principles for Quality Assurance and Recognition of Competency Certification Systems”; and the ILO RMCS Guidelines2 and has been officially recognised by

2 Updated Guidelines for Development of Regional Model Competency Standards, ILO 2016
the sending Member State within its own national qualifications system and a comparability matrix has been prepared.

A key platform to promote a sound basis for skills recognition has been provided by the ILO’s Regional Model Competency Standards (RMCS). The RMCS have been designed to assist both employers and workers, and can be used to make the recognition of the skills of migrant workers an easier and more achievable process. The RMCS are simple and flexible and can be customised to suit the skills recognition systems in different Member States. The RMCS define the essential skills required to work in a particular industry or sector, providing a flexible framework that can be used by enterprises, regardless of location or size.

The components of the qualification proposed for recognition should be fully listed. In the following Electrical Fitter example (from the ILO RMCS Guidelines), there are generic and technical skill competencies. The complete units should be available for scrutiny by stakeholders in the receiving Member State so they can judge comparability. The rules for assembling qualifications should be explained. Commonly these will relate to the inclusion of generic skills alongside the technical skills as in the example below.

**Certificate in Electrical Fitter Mechanics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competencies</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Unit title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong> Generic competencies</td>
<td>EFM-A1</td>
<td>Apply customer service skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFM-A2</td>
<td>Apply quality assurance processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFM-A3</td>
<td>Communicate effectively in the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFM-A4</td>
<td>Apply safe working practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFM-A5</td>
<td>Practise accountability in the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFM-A6</td>
<td>Research and apply technical information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFM-A7</td>
<td>Develop supervisory skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong> Electrical fitter mechanic competencies</td>
<td>EFM-B1</td>
<td>Use tools and equipment in electrical fitter mechanic operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFM-B2</td>
<td>Carry out calculations and measurements for use in electrical fitter mechanic operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFM-B3</td>
<td>Install, test and commission low voltage electrical components, motors, appliances and fittings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFM-B4</td>
<td>Maintain and service low voltage electrical components, motors, appliances and fittings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFM-B5</td>
<td>Diagnose and rectify faults in low voltage electrical components, motors, appliances and fittings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some Member States have fully developed unified qualifications arrangements from the senior secondary school, through technical and vocational education and including higher education. Others have a unified system for TVET only; or a qualifications sequence applying to qualifications awarded through a single Ministry. Whatever the current arrangement, that needs to be documented so that referencing is possible with the qualifications system in the receiving Member State.
A comparability matrix should be developed to promote the ready comparison of the units of competency in both Member States’ qualifications arrangements, noting that there will inevitably be differing unit titles and perhaps differing level assignment.

**Comparability matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Units of competency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housekeeping</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Achievement Checklist**

- The nationally recognised qualification is nominated
- Full details of the qualification are available
- The rules for packaging qualifications are explained
- The national qualifications system is outlined
- The comparability matrix is completed
STEP 4: Checking the assessment and certification arrangements:

- What is the national student assessment process?
- What assessment instruments are available?
- Who is authorised to assess students?
- What moderation mechanisms are in place to secure student assessment which is fair, valid, consistent, and to the specified industry standard?
- How is the issuing of certificates authorised?
- Is there a national register of officially awarded certificates and how is that secured and maintained?

STEP FOUR in the development of the portfolio of evidence assures officials and stakeholders in the receiving Member State that student assessment is robust in every respect and that the migrant workers will indeed have the skills outlined in the qualification and described in the profile. Evidence is provided on the trustworthiness of the sending Member State’s certification systems and how it is possible to verify certificate authenticity.

Details need to be provided of national student assessment policies and procedures. Is there a licensing system for assessors? Who can assess? Are there resource materials available to assist assessors in their work? Commonly, assessors are either senior industry practitioners who have significant practical and current work experience in the skill area being assessed; or are teachers or trainers from the relevant skill area initially, and generally experienced teachers or trainers from institutions authorised to teach those skill areas.

Are there moderation arrangements to promote the national consistency of assessor judgements? Information should be supplied indicating the mechanisms in place to support student assessment that is fair, valid, consistently applied and which measure students against the appropriate national competency standard.

Internationally, there is considerable fraud associated with the certification of vocational and academic qualifications. Certificates should have security features such as the Government logo and control numbers. Sending Member States need to have a national database of awarded certificates and details should be provided. Receiving Member States should be provided with details of the responsible agency in the sending Member State so that authenticity of certificates can be verified, as necessary.

Achievement Checklist

- National policies and processes for student assessment are outlined
- Who is authorised to assess is made clear
- Moderation mechanisms are explained
- Certificate issuing authorisation is outlined
- Certification security is detailed
- Information is provided on the national register of awarded qualifications and the agency responsible
STEP FIVE: Reviewing the quality assurance of training, assessment and certification arrangements:

- Are the quality assurance policies and processes derived from those outlined in the “ASEAN Guiding Principles for Quality Assurance and Recognition of Competency Certification Systems”?
- Who is responsible for quality assurance? How does the responsible national agency carry out its regulatory quality assurance functions?
- Where is full detail available of all policies and processes?
- Are third party external quality assurance audit reports available?

STEP FIVE in the development of the portfolio of evidence sets out solid detail to demonstrate to officials and other stakeholders in the receiving Member State that all aspects of qualifications development, delivery, assessment and certification are subject to robust quality assurance.

All ASEAN Member States will be progressively implementing quality assurance policies and processes as outlined in the “ASEAN Guiding Principles for Quality Assurance and Recognition of Competency Certification Systems”.

For the proposed skilled migrant worker qualification to be accepted it will be critically important that the quality assurance systems of the sending Member State are set out clearly and in full detail and seen to be in line with the ASEAN guiding principles. This may be achieved through a website reference, or by providing information in the portfolio of all relevant policies and procedures.

Quality assurance of the

1. development of competency standards and qualifications packages
2. delivery of education and training
3. assessment of students and
4. certification of students

gives confidence to employers and to other stakeholders in the receiving Member State. International good practice in quality assurance is mostly based on a definition of quality as “fitness for purpose”—the programme has delivered the intended outcomes; the migrant worker does indeed have the competencies claimed on the certificate.

National quality assurance compliance agencies also commonly have “continuous improvement” as a key associated principle.

Documentation in this section should outline how the quality of the 4 activities noted above is assured in the sending Member State.

1. What quality systems are in place to promote the drafting of robust competency standards meeting the needs of industry and fully endorsed by the appropriate national industry body?
2. What are the quality assurance mechanisms to promote good teaching and learning? All providers of post-school education and training services should meet some minimum standard to achieve registration or licensing to enter the post-school education and training market. They need to be properly established and organised
with the explicit intention of offering education and training services. It also needs to be obvious, for programme **approval** and **accreditation**, that the organisation can deliver a satisfactory level of quality in its education and training programmes. The outcomes should be clear and meet the requirements of industry, the professional body, the community or other stakeholders. Once registered and accredited, providers, as whole institutions, should undergo regular **monitoring** and external **quality audit** by a third party to ensure that they are maintaining and enhancing standards through continuous improvement. This they can do through continually reviewing their activities and through a coherent **quality management system** locking in the improvement as they progressively lift performance.

3. Assessment will be fair, valid, consistent and to the required industry workplace performance standard.

4. What quality arrangements are in place to support valid and legitimate certification?

**Achievement Checklist**

- The operations of the national quality assurance system are described and are in line with the ASEAN Guiding Principles
- Full details of policies and processes are available for further reference
- External audit reports are available

**STEP 6: Drafting the migrant skilled worker profile:**

This step is particularly relevant as the MRS implementation is based on business-to-business and sector-to-sector arrangements with a focus on selected occupations under specific business/or sector bi-lateral agreements.

- Does the migrant worker profile incorporate all the skills in the qualification and provide useful information for potential employers?

**STEP SIX** in the development of the portfolio of evidence provides a carefully crafted profile of the skills of the migrant workers for whom skills recognition is being sought. The profile should relate closely to the labour market analysis of skills shortages in the receiving Member State and consequently should make it very clear to officials in the receiving Member State that it will be worthwhile recognising the proposed qualification.

The skills profile expresses what a person awarded the qualification knows and can do; it gives a clear indication of the job role/s a person with the qualification is able to fulfil.

The skills profile should

- express learning outcomes in terms of the applied knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that the qualification recognises;
- allow meaningful comparison with relevant qualifications in the receiving Member State.

In addition, the skills profile should

- identify the target group for the qualification;
- state clearly the content and structure of the qualification;
- assign the qualification to a level in the qualifications structure of the sending Member State.

The following are two New Zealand examples, for Certificates in Welding and in Electricity Supply:
Certificate in Welding
This is an introductory qualification for people wishing to pursue a career in welding. It is aimed at preparing candidates with no (or minimal) background in welding, to be productive in the use of basic welding techniques in industry. The underpinning knowledge and skills covered in this qualification include welding safety; measurement; use of hand and power tools; sketching and reading drawings; welding theory for steel, stainless steel and aluminium; and managing quality in the welding industry.
The practical welding skills in this qualification cover joining of steel, stainless steel, and aluminium, employing the following techniques:
- manual metal arc welding (MMAW);
- gas metal arc welding (GMAW or MIG);
- gas tungsten arc welding (GTAW or TIG); and
- cutting using manual processes.

The skills and knowledge recognised by this qualification relate to job roles in the field of welding in downhand positions.

Certificate in Electricity Supply
This national certificate is awarded to people who have demonstrated competence in the knowledge and skills required for employment in the electricity supply industry and marks an intermediate stage in the training programme for people qualifying as an Electricity Supply Electrician; and in the future to become an Electrical Fitter, or Electrical Technician. It is typically achieved in the second or third year of a three to four year training programme. This qualification incorporates twenty seven compulsory standards out of a total of sixty one competency standards that meet the core competencies required by the Electrical Workers Registration Board (EWRB) for electrical registration.

Holders of this qualification will have accomplished a range of knowledge and skills, assessed both off-the-job (during training courses) and on-the-job (in the workplace). These include:
- knowledge of basic electrical theory, concepts, and trade practice;
- skills and knowledge related to working safely in electrical environments, including safe-working practices, and safety testing;
- some knowledge and application of relevant legislation, codes of practice, and standards;
- knowledge of the New Zealand electricity supply system;
- competence in some of the practical skills required of a fully qualified electrician;
- generic skills and knowledge related to working effectively in the electricity supply industry, such as communication skills, and report writing; drawing and interpreting electrical diagrams;
- knowledge of electric motors.

Electricity Supply Electricians install and maintain electrical services associated with distribution networks, power stations, and substations. Electrical Fitters install and maintain electrical services associated with distribution networks and power stations, which require additional skills in mechanical construction and maintenance. Electrical Technicians install, maintain, test and commission electrical services associated with distribution networks, power stations, and substations.
Achievement Checklist

- All documentation required for Steps 1-6 is complete and has been collaboratively developed with the receiving Member State
- All documentation is assembled into a single coherent package for submission to the receiving Member State

In STEP 7b there is a carefully analysed and explained draft referencing of the two Member States’ skills recognition systems so that officials in the receiving Member State may readily understand how the proposed migrant worker qualification aligns to relevant skill sets among their own workers.

A key objective for the data supplied, should be to allow officials in the proposed receiving Member State to understand the “level” of the sending state’s qualification. This can be achieved through a study of the fundamental underpinnings of the two qualifications systems, in particular the domains and the level descriptors. The following is a draft referencing (with some explanatory text) of the national qualifications systems in Malaysia and in the Maldives, using the AQRF as a translation device.
A study of the Malaysian qualifications classification requirements demonstrates that the Malaysian Skills Certificates 1-3 can be benchmarked to the Maldivian Certificates II, III, and the Advanced Certificate. There is no direct equivalent for qualifications matching the descriptors for the Maldivian Diploma (level 5), nor the Maldivian Certificate I (not shown). Consequently the Malaysian Diploma (level 4) can be equated to qualifications from the Maldives at both levels 5 and 6. The Bachelor's Degree is at level 5 of the Malaysian framework and level 7 of the Maldivian framework. Malaysian public universities do not confer general Bachelor’s Degrees but nevertheless recognise foreign ordinary Bachelor’s degrees at level 5.
A study of the AQRF level descriptors and the Malaysian requirements for level assignment shows good alignment across all 8 levels of both structures. The 10 levels of the Indonesian framework are judged to have narrower bands than are in the 8 level AQRF so that a level 6 qualification in Malaysia aligns with the same level on the AQRF and with a level 7 qualification in Indonesia.

Achievement Checklist

- The skilled worker profile has been drafted to guide employers
- The qualification is assigned to a level and referenced through the AQRF to the qualifications structure of the receiving Member State

Outputs from the development of the portfolio

- Documentation and analysis of the pilot implementation that would provide a strategic and informed guidance to AMS in taking the region’s MRS initiative forward.
- In terms of the results of the pilot, the portfolio document would highlight:
  - the feasibility and suitability of the roadmap for MRS implementation
  - Areas of unexpected shortfall and obstacles
  - the feasibility and applicability of the existing tools (e.g. ASEAN Guiding Principles, Referencing guidelines) on MRS;
  - Recommendations by the pilot ‘receiving’ members to the ‘sending’ members.
- Reporting to AMS at next RSTWG and possibly at SLOM 2019
Overall Outcome of the MRS

It is expected that the collaborative development by sending and receiving Member States will promote
- successful negotiation of skills recognition for migrant workers
- systems strengthening and confidence building for full AQRF referencing.

How many steps are achievable over the next year?

Two pilot projects are planned by the ILO to guide developments for all participating Member States and to demonstrate to the SLOM a practical way forward towards the ambition of leaders for the free flow of skilled labour throughout the region.

The MRS referencing should provide solid experience for the future complete referencing of national qualifications frameworks to the AQRF. There are 11 AQRF referencing criteria (see box below). The MRS Roadmap provides experience in meeting all except 3 (criteria 8, 10 and 11).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AQRF Referencing Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 The structure of the education and training system is described.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The responsibilities and legal basis of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process are clearly determined and published by the main public authority responsible for the referencing process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the AQRF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 The basis in agreed standards of the national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications is described.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are described and all of the bodies responsible for quality assurance state their unequivocal support for the referencing outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 The process of referencing has been devised by the main public authority and has been endorsed by the main stakeholders in the qualifications system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in the referencing process and its reporting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies and shall address separately and in order each of the referencing criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 The outcome of referencing is published by the ASEAN Secretariat and by the main national public body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Following the referencing process all new qualification certificates, diplomas issued by the national certification bodies contain a clear reference to the appropriate AQRF level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>