



Concept Note The 5th Regional Skills Technical Working Group Meeting

Enhancing Human Resources Development in ASEAN: Progress of MRA and MRS *Piloting the Mutual Recognition of Skills' Implementation and Progress in Implementing the Mutual Recognition Arrangements in ASEAN*

12-13 September 2019
Hanoi, Viet Nam

1. Background

Through the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), the leaders of ASEAN countries have committed to transforming ASEAN into a stable, prosperous, and highly competitive region with equitable economic development including reduced poverty and socio-economic disparities. As one of the first steps towards realizing the vision, ASEAN has been “facilitating the movement of business persons, skilled labour and talents” as a critical priority under the pillar of “a single market and production base with free flow of goods, services, investment and skilled labor, and freer flow of capital by 2020”¹. The mutual recognition of skills is the major instrument for skilled labor mobility in ASEAN, and it can smooth out the path in the negotiation between nations and thus facilitating the freer movement and employment of qualified and certified personnel.

There are currently three broad initiatives in promoting mutual recognition of skills among ASEAN member states, namely: Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRA), ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF), and Mutual Recognition of Skills (MRS). The MRA was established in support of liberalizing and facilitating trade in services, envisaged to be made possible through the mobility of professionals in ASEAN, particularly for skilled personnel in eight categories, of mostly high-skilled occupations.² The ASEAN Economic Ministers endorsed the AQRF in August 2014 which was designed as a common reference framework that enables comparisons of education qualifications across participating AMS.³ Evidence indicates that the bulk of migration within ASEAN is found in the middle-to-low skilled categories of workers. Therefore, the ILO, in close collaboration with the ASEAN Secretariat, initiated the implementation of the MRS programme with a focus on the middle-to-low skilled workers to complement the MRA⁴ and AQRF.

Per 2017 ADB/MPI⁵ report the ASEAN region’s economy represents the seventh largest in the world and aims to rank higher by 2050, and “these developments can only be achieved through much greater emphasis on region wide skills development”⁶. Against this light, the 5th Regional Skills Technical Working Group (RSTWG) Meeting will bring together discussions on the progress on the implementation of both the MRA and MRS. The meeting will also discuss the updates on the AQRF progresses.

Moving towards the pilot implementation of MRS

ILO, with the support of the Government of Korea, provided various technical assistance activities and facilitated a series of regional and national consultation meetings to push forward the implementation of MRS. While effective MRS implementation depends on the trust and confidence that education and training institutions and employers place on the credentials and validity of qualifications that are officially issued by mandated organizations in each AMS, there is considerable variation in national capacity, especially quality assurance mechanisms of national skills development and certification systems among AMS. ILO’s MRS Programme has

¹ Recommendations of the High Level Task Force (HLTF) on ASEAN Economic Integration contained in the Bali Concord II.

² Eight categories are: medical doctors; dentists; nurses; architects; engineers; accountants; tourism professionals; and surveying (the last category still in framework stage).

³ <https://asean.org/asean-economic-community/sectoral-bodies-under-the-purview-of-aem/services/asean-qualifications-reference-framework/>

⁴ ILO & ADB: *ASEAN Community 2015: Managing integration for better jobs and shared prosperity*. Bangkok, 2014.

⁵ MPI: Migration Policy Institute

⁶ ADB: *The long road ahead: Status report on the implementation of the ASEAN mutual recognition arrangements on professional services*. Manila, 2017.

thus responded to narrowing the gap in national capacity and focused on capacity building of institutional structures and mechanisms for MRS.

Building on the efforts in preparing for MRS in the past years, the MRS Programme has come to a critical juncture. On the one hand, it remains undisputed that the existence of a common ground on the process of MRS and the cross recognition of activities would directly benefit a range of stakeholders. On the other hand, despite significant efforts in developing national capacity and preparing for the realization of the MRS, there have been limited, if not no, experience of actual practice of country-to-country MRS implementation within ASEAN. Continuous efforts at building and strengthening the national skills and certification system are still needed to build trust and credibility of the certifications issued by a country. However, further efforts for realizing MRS – and thus the region’s vision of facilitating the freer movement and employment of qualified and certified personnel – also need to be guided by the pilot implementation of MRS. Sharing the results of such a pilot initiative would provide a strategic and informed guidance to AMS in taking the region’s MRS initiative forward.

Pilot participating countries and occupational skills

At the 4th RSTWG Meeting, the pilot MRS implementation was agreed and initiated as below.

- I. Thailand with Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar with masonry, bricklaying and plastering as the primary and cross cutting skill area of choice for the mutual recognition process (Cambodia’s secondary skill area is building electrical wiring, and Myanmar’s secondary skills area is in sewing machine operation).
- II. Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam with transport and logistics skills development as the chosen skills area for the mutual recognition process.
- III. Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and the ASEAN Secretariat to work on the integration of the mutual recognition processes with the *ASEAN Guiding Principles for Quality Assurance and Recognition of Competency Certification Systems*.

Update and progress on the above three pilot efforts will be reported at the 5th RSTWG Meeting.

2. Objectives of the 5th RSTWG Meeting

The 5th RSTWG Meeting aims to facilitate further coordination and cooperation among the AMS, together with the ASEAN Secretariat, in moving forward with the on-going mutual skills recognition efforts within the region with a focus on the MRA and MRS implementation. The Meeting will facilitate:

- 1) knowledge sharing of the progress in implementing the MRA in ASEAN with a view to identifying and addressing barriers for further implementation;
- 2) greater understanding of the evolving context of the MRS/MRA implementation, including recent development of AEC in relation to challenges and opportunities related to human resources development and regional labour market information;
- 3) experience sharing on the pilot MRS implementation in 2019 and discussions on the next steps for taking the MRS programme forward, in terms of:
 - i. extending the MRS pilot implementation as a response to skills shortages in the region,
 - ii. extending the capacity building activities in facilitating the MRS;
- 4) discuss and develop inputs for a harmonized work plan under the skills recognition in ASEAN (i.e. MRA, MRS and AQRF);
- 5) knowledge sharing on other relevant latest developments and initiatives on HRD/Skills/TVET in ASEAN in meeting common skills challenges in the region, including the Regional TVET Council and Future Skills Agenda by the Industry in ASEAN.

3. Expected Outputs of the Meeting

The expected outputs from the 5th RSTWG Meeting are listed below.

1. Resolution for recommending further action and a harmonized work plan on MRA, AQRF and MRS under the umbrella of the ‘skill recognition in ASEAN’ to SLOM-2020.
2. Resolution for recommending further actions on MRS (synthesized from action plans developed to extend the MRS implementation in response to skills shortages in the region and extending capacity building activities that will further the MRS).
3. A Meeting Report on (i) the progress made on piloting the MRA and MRS implementation in ASEAN; (ii) the ways forward on the MRA and MRS implementation in ASEAN; and (iii) the regional labour market information, skills, future skills and TVET initiatives in ASEAN.

4. Date and Venue

The 5th RSTWG Meeting will be held on **12-13 September 2019** at the **Daewoo Hotel** in Hanoi, Vietnam.

5. Workshop Participants

Two participants from each of the AMS will be nominated for the 5th RSTWG Meeting. They would be the (1) Skills Focal Point on MRS and (2) SLOM Focal Point, from each AMS, with the exception of the host country, whereby a higher number of participants is anticipated. It is expected that the National Skills Focal Point is a senior level official who is knowledgeable with the implementation of their action plan on the MRS and the on-going collaboration with the AQRF, especially at the TVET levels. To provide continuity, AMS’ Skills Focal Points who attended past RSTWG meetings are preferably nominated.

ASEAN Secretariat and the AQRF Committee are invited as continuing key partners of the ILO-MRS programme. BNSP will be invited to survey the next corridor in pilot implementing the MRS.

The Chairs of the MRA’s and the representatives of the ASEAN employers and workers’ organizations, namely ABAC, ACE and ATUC, will be invited to obtain the perspectives and insights from the industry. Representatives from the relevant industry organizations, federations and enterprises will be invited to provide feedback and facilitate the recognition of skills of the migrant workers in their respective sectors.

ADB and BNSP are invited to promote synergy of efforts in promoting the mutual recognition of skills within ASEAN, including the MRA and MRS.

THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IS STRONGLY ENCOURAGED.

6. Organization of the Meeting

To meet the objectives stated above, the Meeting will be organized along the following sessions:

Day 1

Opening Session

- Session 1-1: Implementing the MRA in ASEAN: Stocktaking of Experiences and the Way Forward
- Session 1-2: Stocktaking of Experiences and the Way Forward for the MRA Implementation
- Session 2: Evolving Labour Market Contexts and Information in ASEAN – Skills Matching and Labour Mobility
- Session 3: Review and Lessons Learned from the 1st MRS Pilot Implementation – 2019

Day 2

Session 4: Moving Towards Realizing an ASEAN Community through the Recognition of Skills and Labour Mobility

Session 5: Updates on Other Key Activities Linked with the Skills Recognition Initiatives

Concluding Session

Following the Concluding Session of the main meeting on Day 2, there will be “Side Meetings” held in the late afternoon designed to further the efforts in the pilot implementation on the MRS based on the action plans developed.

7. Preparation Work for the 5th RSTWG Meeting

The representatives of the two pilot MRS implementation and the working group on integrating MRS processes with the *ASEAN Guiding Principles for Quality Assurance and Recognition of Competency Certification Systems* will provide the respective update and progress at the Meeting. ILO will communicate with relevant countries concerning a template for presentation in due course.

Review the recommended reading materials.

8. Development Partners

The ILO/Korea Partnership Programme and the ILO’s Triangle in ASEAN programme, funded by the Governments of Australia and Canada, will be the key partners, especially in providing vital funding support for the organization of the 5th RSTWG Meeting.