Guidelines for Recognizing the Skills of Returning Migrant Workers

International Labour Organization

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Foreword

Skills recognition and qualification reforms have dominated national and international debates on training and skills development in recent years. The need to improve the quality and effectiveness of training systems and the increasing mobility of skilled workers have been the main driving forces behind the need to develop new approaches to skills recognition and with new skills standards in Asia and the Pacific.

Since the mid 1990s, the International Labour Organization has helped member States in the Asia–Pacific region to develop their national skills standards systems under the Asia and the Pacific Skills Development Programme. More recently, the ILO member States called on the ILO to develop Regional Model Competency Standards (RMCS), which are now a priority area of the Regional Skills Network, a programme that was set up in 2006 under the ILO Regional Skills and Employability Programme in Asia and the Pacific (SKILLS-AP programme), a partnership initiative with the Korean Government.

Migration, and particularly skilled migration, is increasingly circular; recognition of the skill level thus is required while departing and returning of a migrant worker to provide a supportive mechanism for these workers to effectively negotiate when they seek employment.. The SKILLS-AP programme has conducted several workshops in the area of skills recognition, and supported member stages to develop and endorse the RMCS for different sectors and thus contribute to simplifying the skills recognition and assessment process nationally and for the Asia-Pacific region.

This document contains guidelines and proposals for establishing a process to recognize the skills of returning migrant workers. David Lythe produced the guidelines for the SKILLS-AP programme with supervision from Sandra Rothboeck, Skills and Employability Specialist, Decent Work Technical Support Team Bangkok. The draft guidelines were discussed during a regional workshop in Bangkok on 15–16 September 2010. They fill a particular gap in the skills recognition research and policy work for returning migrant workers.

There are very few government and private sector interventions in place that take advantage of the work experience and competencies accumulated by workers abroad, which should be recognized and used in the labour market of the sending countries. These guidelines confront the complexity of developing countries and propose solutions for effectively managing the skills recognition process, with transparency and systematically.

I would like to express my appreciation to Mr Lythe for his excellent work. I would also like to thank the team of SKILLS-AP and the Decent Work Team in Bangkok, which includes Ray Grannall, the former manager of the SKILLS-AP Programme, Sandra Rothboeck, Carmella Torres, Wipusara Rugworakijkul, Alin Sirisaksopit, I also want to thank the Korean Government for its continuous support. And last but not least, I appreciate the participants in the September workshop who critically reflected and provided feedback on the then-draft guidelines. I am sure that these final guidelines will be greatly appreciated by countries in the region, both for the development of their national skills standards and as a basis for discussing skills recognition across countries.

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Definitions

Advisor
Person officially assigned by the national agency responsible for providing services to migrant workers to advise and support each migrant worker, particularly in the assembly of the portfolio of evidence for assessment.

Assessment
The process of reviewing evidence and making judgements as to whether a returning migrant worker can perform according to the knowledge, skills and attitudes specified in the Regional Model Competency Standards (RMCS) or the national competency standards.

Certified assessor
Person authorized to conduct an assessment of a returning migrant worker to determine if the competencies specified in the RMCS or the national competency standards have been acquired and are current.

Competence
The possession by workers of what they are expected to know and to do, together with the capacity to apply that skill and knowledge in new situations and environments.

Mutual recognition of vocational qualifications
The result of comparing the vocational qualifications system in one jurisdiction with that in another and deeming broad technical equivalence and common acceptability of vocational qualifications.

Portfolio of evidence
Comprehensive record of all technical and soft skills acquisition, work experience and all work-related achievements, such as leadership and supervisory roles.

Recognition of prior learning
Process through which previous learning outside the formal education and training systems is assessed against relevant competency standards so as to verify that a worker's competencies are current and can be acknowledged with appropriate certification.

Skills recognition
The result of the formal assessment of the portfolio of evidence; confirmation that skills acquired internationally correspond fully to specified RMCS units or national units of competency.

Verifier
Second assessor who checks that the competency-based assessment has been carried out fairly, validly, consistently and to the required industry standard.

1. Background

The International Organization for Migration estimates[1] that there are 214 million migrant workers worldwide crossing international borders in search of employment and human security. This number is expected to increase rapidly in the coming decades. The International Labour Organization (ILO) sees this global challenge as requiring policies and resources to better manage the labour migration so that it contributes positively to the growth and development of the sending and the receiving countries and to the migrant workers.

Most migrating workers are low-skilled, accepting dirty, difficult and dangerous jobs and at wage rates lower than what nationals will accept partly because their options are limited. But there are also more highly skilled workers migrating like from the Philippines. The stock of potential labour migrants in the Mekong subregion is projected to be 5 million over the next 10 years.

Under the ILO SKILLS-AP/ Korea Partnership Programme, the ILO conducted several workshops involving member States to develop a process for recognizing the skills of migrant workers. The discussions encouraged progress on skills recognition issues, which ultimately will support worker mobility, decent work goals and help to shield migrant workers and their families from exploitation. One result of earlier workshops has been the publication of the Regional Model Competency Standards (RMCS), which member States can use to help describe the skills of workers.

The RMCS have been used in a recent Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) project that resulted in agreement on four levels of competency: In 2007, ASEAN member economies adopted an Economic Community Blueprint to promote the free flow of trade in services and the mobility of professional people. However, the blueprint does not capture the majority of regional migrants who depart as low-skilled workers, although it enables circular migration with workers going away, coming back and going away again throughout the ASEAN region, with few restrictions.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) finances a project to promote the recognition of the skills of *departing* migrant workers in the Mekong subregion. Experiences and policy developments from that project thus far informed the drafting of ILO guidelines for recognizing newly acquired skills of returning migrants and the assessment model now proposed for consideration by member States (which this document represents). The ADB project is making use of the ILO's RMCS as a primary platform for the cross-border recognition of workers' skills, thereby helping to redress the region's skill-shortage situation and improve competitiveness.

Until recently, slow progress had been made towards recognizing the skills of returning migrant workers. Many workers returned without the opportunity to have their newly acquired skills and work experience formally acknowledged. This situation impacts negatively upon their employability and on labour market outcomes. In addition, many returning migrant workers lack support services that can help them find employment or self-employment or training. These are missed opportunities for capitalizing on the wealth of new learning and skills the workers bring back.

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[1] www.iom.int

1.1 Scope and purpose of the guidelines

These guidelines promote the formal recognition of newly acquired skills of returning migrant workers. To implement that recognition process, the guidelines propose providing advice and support to departing migrant workers so that they gather data while employed overseas and then providing further advice, support and assessment of their skills when they return. The proposed additional services can be made available through an existing government agency. Where a suitable existing agency is not in place, establishing a national agency, with provincial and district units, may be required.

As the following diagram illustrates, the guidelines presented here outline a modality through which returning workers can: i) assemble data from their overseas employment, including any skills training, into a comprehensive portfolio; ii) map that data against identified national or international competency standards; iii) be assessed; and then iv) achieve formal recognition for their new skills and work experience. This process reflects a rights-based approach towards achieving the goal of decent employment or self-employment.

The guidelines were developed at a time of significant progress in many countries in strengthening technical and vocational education and training and in establishing robust skills recognition systems, often through competency-based vocational qualifications frameworks. Additionally, member States are increasingly putting into place mechanisms for recognizing both informal and structured workplace skills acquisition (and recognise prior learning).

Capitalizing on those positive developments, these guidelines aim to help agencies reach out effectively to returning migrant workers and, through the proposed mechanisms for assessing their skills, make it easier for them to reintegrate into the labour market or to become self-employed.
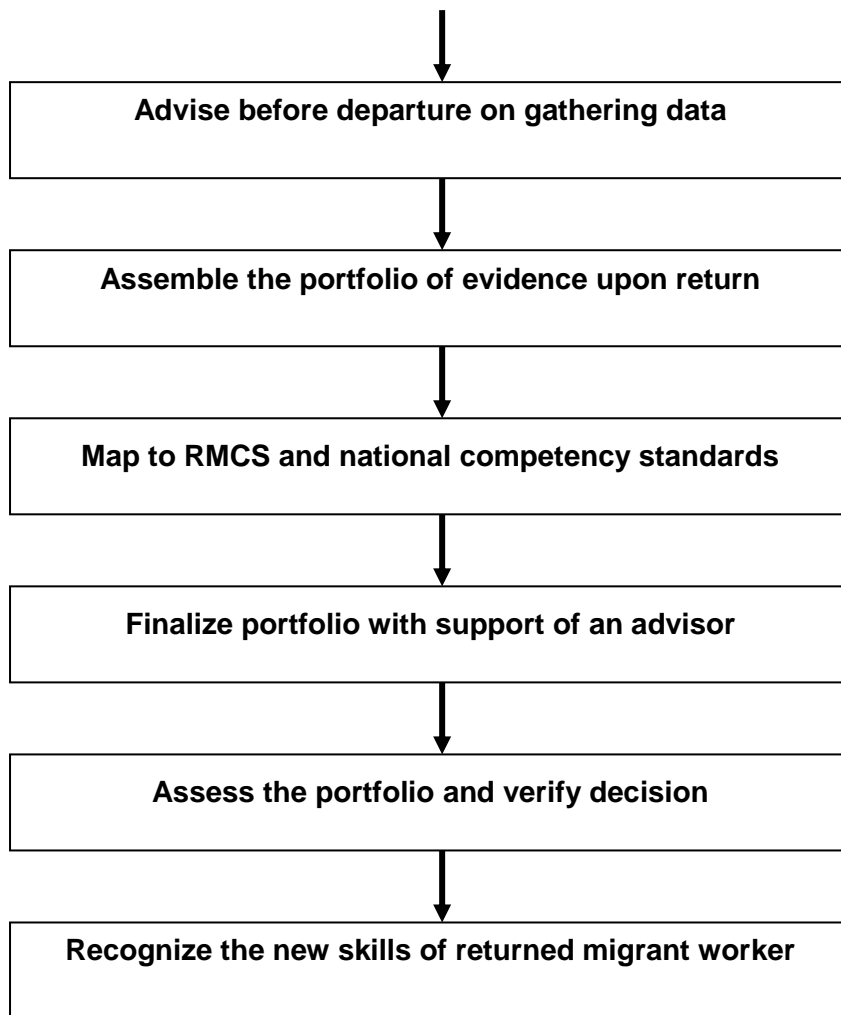
These guidelines are for use by:

- ✓ government agencies responsible for sending and receiving workers
- ✓ national agencies responsible for recognizing migrant workers' skills
- ✓ local agencies and non-government organizations providing support services to departing and returning workers
- ✓ national employers' and workers' organizations
- ✓ private and overseas employment services.

The guidelines propose the following features for recognizing the new skills of returning migrant workers:

- ✓ the role of the responsible national agency (page 4)
- ✓ the use of a portfolio of evidence of the new skills of returning migrant workers (page 9)
- ✓ the use of the RMCS, national competency standards and the mutual recognition of vocational qualifications (page 13)
- ✓ the assessment of the portfolio of evidence (page 15)
- ✓ the roles of government, employers and workers (page 18).

Steps in the proposed skills recognition process

Advise before departure on gathering data

Assemble the portfolio of evidence upon return

Map to RMCS and national competency standards

Finalize portfolio with support of an advisor

Assess the portfolio and verify decision

Recognize the new skills of returned migrant worker

2. National agency to support migrant workers

The role of an existing national agency can be extended to provide new services to support departing and returning migrant workers. In the absence of that possibility, a new national agency should be established. The national agency needs to offer outreach services in provincial and district areas nationwide. The services could be provided through the agency's offices or through contracts (and training) with partners, such as NGOs, employers' or workers' associations and private employment services. Services need to be available to both departing and returning migrant workers. The guidelines recognize that there will be different structures in each member State to provide the proposed services.

2.1 Support for departing migrant workers

For departing migrant workers, member States should develop a pre-departure checklist and that a wide range of services should be provided, including information on:

- ✓ the work environment in the receiving country
- ✓ employment contracts in compliance with national labour laws, ensuring decent work and the provision of training
- ✓ wages and working conditions
- ✓ safety and safety standards
- ✓ equipment that will be provided
- ✓ health care and medical leave entitlements
- ✓ job security
- ✓ social and other benefits
- ✓ insurance
- ✓ repatriation benefits
- ✓ contact details of embassies and trade unions in the country of destination.

Some "lifestyle" pre-departure training would be very valuable, especially for low-skilled workers who may be about to encounter hard manual labour in difficult circumstances and with minimal personal support. Training in language, culture (and work culture) and occupational safety and health is essential. Workers should take with them a record of their current skills and qualifications. This may require an assessment of those skills and a record to be provided prior to departure.

To promote skills recognition upon the return to their home country, two particular services are proposed for departing migrant workers:

- ✓ The inclusion of the provision of skills development with formal skills recognition in all overseas contracts. A skilled worker is more likely to be a high performer and contribute more in productivity and in the mentoring of other workers. The formal recognition may, at its simplest, be a document signed by the trainer or employer.

- ✓ The provision of advice or training before departure to encourage the regular collecting of evidence of skill development while overseas so that the raw material for skills recognition is available when the worker returns. The collecting evidence should not be made onerous but be simple to carry out.

Where both the sending and receiving countries have established national vocational competency-based qualifications frameworks, the responsible national agencies in both countries should work together on benchmarking and on a mutual recognition of vocational qualifications. Departing migrant workers should be aware that any formal skills training carried out in the receiving country might be readily recognized in their home country upon their return. Over time, it may be possible for member States in the region to work together to develop a common "passport" that recognizes the RMCS, soft skills and knowledge of the languages and cultures of the region.

Examples of pre-departure training

Member States offering pre-departure training for migrant workers include:

Cambodia – The Association of Cambodian Recruitment Agencies conducts pre-departure training programmes for migrant domestic workers in technical and soft skills to prepare them for working with families whose culture, religion and household equipment may be quite different.

Sri Lanka – Training programmes prepare prospective female domestic migrant workers intending to travel to the Middle East (14-day, 104-hour course) or elsewhere (22-day, 176-hour course). Both programmes cover topics such as remittance management and family economy, safety and use of electrical appliances, family well-being and health, foreign language and cultural skills.

It will be important that industry and workers' associations in receiving countries are made aware that migrant workers are being asked to gather documentation for a future portfolio of evidence so as to enhance their employment prospects when they return. Thus, the following issues should be raised with those associations by the responsible national agency:

- ✓ the nature and details of the contracts to be offered prospective migrant workers
- ✓ the need for a full job specification, with details of skills and skills levels required, referenced to the RMCS, where possible
- ✓ whether skills upgrading training is to be part of the contract
- ✓ support, especially from employers, for data gathering by workers for their future portfolio of evidence of skills development
- ✓ regulations on permitted fees to be charged by recruitment agents
- ✓ information on workers' collective rights and obligations
- ✓ regulations on occupational health and safety, safety standards and the use of protective equipment.

Employers in receiving countries should all be informed of the RMCS and of the use that migrant workers will be making of them; the employers should understand how they can use the RMCS to maximize the skills of their workers.

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Examples of services abroad for foreign workers

In 2010, the **Republic of Korea** piloted three services to prepare foreign workers to reintegrate into their home labour markets:

1) **Vocational competency development training.** One objective of the training is to assist the workers' adaptation to the Korean work culture and to improve the productivity of small and medium enterprises; the other objective is to prepare foreign workers for resettling in their home countries with suitable vocational competencies.

2) **Skills or business venture training for returning workers.** The objective is to encourage workers whose visas are soon to expire to plan for their return and to support their smooth return with business skills.

3) **Employment adjustment education for workers transferring their workplaces.** This programme informs foreign workers about the Korean corporate culture and relevant laws and provides tips on interpersonal relationships in the Rep. of Korea culture. The objective is to minimize the number of workplace transfers and thus stabilize employment and lift productivity.

Trials are also ongoing in the Rep. of Korea to assist returning foreign migrant workers to obtain employment in multinational companies in their home countries and elsewhere overseas.

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2.2 Supporting returning migrant workers

Returning migrant workers (who may have departed as manual labourers) bring back new skills and knowledge, international work experience and any accumulated capital additional to remittances already sent home. These benefits from worker migration can be enhanced if a country has in place systematic policies and procedures to ensure the successful reintegration of the migrant workers into decent employment or self-employment that takes full advantage of their new knowledge and skills. These may include national registration and profiling procedures. Advisory services can assist workers to invest any capital wisely – and hopefully productively; and can help them to secure work or self-employment so as to make good use of their new skills and thus to support national development. There should be equal access to services for all returning workers.

The following new services are proposed to support returning migrant workers:

- ✓ small business advice to ensure that any capital brought back is invested wisely and productively
- ✓ the development by returning workers of a portfolio of evidence attesting to their new skills and knowledge
- ✓ employment profiling and placement services so as to gain maximum economic benefit from their new skills
- ✓ advice on self-employment options and on any assistance available, such as training for enterprise development and information on access to credit and loans.

The responsible national agency should help returning workers navigate the pathways required for their skills to be recognized and provide access to any other relevant services and programmes. Employment placement services will require collaborative and strategic actions on the part of government agencies and employers' and workers' associations so that there are in place the right processes, information and resources to fairly and accurately acknowledge the knowledge, skills and work experience of workers.

The responsible national agency will consequently need to bring together employers' and workers' associations, education and training institutions, professional and regulatory bodies, and national skills or qualifications certificating agencies. The returning workers may have to pass through one or a combination of their services to successfully re-enter the labour market or become self-employed in their home country.

Given that returning workers have earned income while overseas, the services could be provided for a cost-recovery fee. However, this issue will require discussion in every member State when the national agency is established (or expanded). Government budgetary support will be required if there is not a cost-recovery fee. Another option may be a financial contribution from the employer of the newly recognized highly skilled worker.

For returning workers, there should be:

- ✓ information about how to register and get their skills recognized
- ✓ affordable assessment services so their new skills are recognized fairly and transparently, based on current and accurate information
- ✓ advice of the next steps, which may be employment or a gap-filling training programme leading to full occupational certification
- ✓ promotion of self-employment options, including the establishment of small and medium enterprises, and access to credit and loan facilities.

The overall outcome should be that returning migrant workers have the opportunity to use their skills and international work experience for the benefit of themselves, their families and their country, through either decent employment or self-employment.

Examples of services for returning migrant workers

The **Philippines** has established a Skills Registration Database for returning migrant workers in Davao province. Six government agencies under the leadership of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) oversee the Permanent Returning Overseas Filipino Workers Network (PeRSON). TESDA maintains the database and, together with the Overseas Workers Welfare Agency, links their expertise to prospective employers or other useful services. Local government, industry and training organizations recognize the workers as "heroes of the modern Philippine economy" and tap their expertise. The network operates to link returning workers with business and other opportunities, with emphasis on the importance of the skills and work experiences acquired. Additionally, TESDA in partnership with the Philippine Department of Labor and Employment is setting up a database of skills available in all localities that will serve as the basis for offering training, re-training and skills upgrading and certification.

Viet Nam is setting up a national system to organize and manage national skills evaluation and certification. Occupational skills evaluation centres are to be developed nationwide. These centres will organize skills tests on an annual basis at five occupational qualification levels. Based on the results, the General Department of Vocational Training will grant a certificate for the candidates from level 1 to level 5. Attendance at a training institution is not required for taking the skills test.

3. The portfolio of evidence

All returning migrant workers should develop a portfolio of evidence of training and of relevant work-related achievements. The portfolio should provide a comprehensive record of all technical and soft skills acquisition, work experience and all work-related achievements, such as a promotion to a leadership or supervisory role. Of course, organizing the portfolio may not be a priority while the worker is overseas; however, collection of the raw data should be.

Employers should value the portfolio for the detailed information provided about a prospective worker. Returning migrant workers should benefit from having a clear summary of their skills for a future employer's consideration. Use of the industry standards from the RMCS and the national competency standards will allow employers to:

- ✓ provide a more detailed specification of skill requirements
- ✓ be certain that new workers have the skills required
- ✓ accurately map the skills of their workforce
- ✓ improve recruitment processes
- ✓ target training resources
- ✓ increase productivity from having a more highly skilled workforce.

The skills recognition process will acknowledge the skills gained through international work experience, verify that they are still current and, if possible, relate them to the RMCS or the home country's competency standards and vocational qualifications. If such referencing is not possible, the detailed information in the portfolio can still be useful to potential employers.

The portfolio should contain evidence in two broad categories: official documents and supporting documents. Preferably, documents should be in English to promote cross-border understanding.

Official documents will be:

- ✓ job descriptions
- ✓ details of work and training history
- ✓ certificates from formal training courses.

Supporting documents may be:

- ✓ details of any workplace or similar training programmes, signed by the trainer or supervisor
- ✓ written statements attesting to work experience and skills development, signed by supervisors and employers
- ✓ performance appraisal documents
- ✓ information on any leadership, supervisory and soft skills developmental roles held by the migrant worker
- ✓ details of any additional roles undertaken, such as the establishment of workplace safety and quality improvement policies
- ✓ photographs of work sites, equipment used and products made by the migrant worker
- ✓ logs of work activities.

Although retaining evidence of the acquisition of technical skills is the priority, documentation of "soft" skills should not be overlooked. Migrant workers may acquire considerable expertise in some soft skill areas, particularly those employed in the service sector, but also those who progressively assume a team leadership and supervisory role. In some areas of employment, soft skills really are the technical skills to perform the job.

Soft skills are commonly regarded as the everyday skills beyond the technical expertise and knowledge required to perform in a given role. These skills include:

- ✓ interpersonal, communication and customer service skills
- ✓ capability to create networks and to work in teams
- ✓ problem-solving skills
- ✓ research and analytical skills
- ✓ time-management skills
- ✓ capacity to learn and adapt.

While technical skills are important, translating technical proficiency into economic output commonly requires soft skills. In some occupations, such as personal and customer services, success is driven entirely by soft skills. It is also difficult to measure and certify proficiency in soft skills, and they may not always be built into formal qualifications.

Migrant workers should collect and retain evidence of their soft skills development. This may be no more than a personal record of performance, such as working in teams. Or it may be testimonials taken from customers and employers about the worker's soft skill capabilities. This documentation can be included in the portfolio.

Some technical skills acquired will be more significant than others for the returning migrant worker. Skilled workers are increasingly scarce in a number of industries worldwide, including the health and information technology sectors. Workers acquiring these scarce skills should be encouraged to seek out formal training opportunities and obtain and retain detailed documentation of such training for inclusion in their portfolio and final job-seeking resume after they have returned home.

Helping domestic workers build portfolios

Domestic and other workers with relatively basic skills may not return with a significant range of new skills that can be mapped and assessed against national competency standards or the RMCS. They will, however, have acquired some new skills from working with modern household technology and living in a different cultural environment.

The development of a portfolio could thus focus on documenting the new skills acquired. Those skills may provide a platform for identifying training opportunities once the worker returns, perhaps for future employment in hospitality, food preparation and service or in child care.

Soft skills are incorporated into national vocational competency-based qualifications in different ways among member States. Retaining details of soft and technical skills

acquisition is thus important because the evidence from international training could possibly be credited towards the award of a vocational certificate in the worker's home country.

The portfolio documentation should be assembled in a ring binder with dividers to separate the types of information included. The portfolio should begin with standard personal identification details, such as the name, address and contact information for the migrant worker, details of the work experience and qualifications prior to departure.

The national agency supporting the reintegration of returning migrant workers should make advisors available to assist with the assembling of the portfolios. The advisors should be persons of high credibility and trust, who provide information, guidance and support throughout the process. They should have good counselling and communications skills and a personality that easily gains the confidence of migrant workers.

The role of the advisors is to assist the returning migrant workers to:

- ✓ identify the RMCS units, the national competency units or the national vocational qualifications for which recognition is sought
- ✓ obtain a copy of the components of those units and qualifications, their competencies and any other relevant information
- ✓ arrange for the services of a certified assessor and verifier
- ✓ map the evidence against the specified competencies
- ✓ identify any evidence gaps and ask the applicant to fill those gaps, if that is possible
- ✓ assist the worker in finalizing the portfolio for submitting to the certified assessor
- ✓ advise on a suitable training programme or other action useful for a worker's next ambition.

The questions to guide the advisor in initiating the recognition process will be:

- ✓ Are there RMCS or national competency standards available in the industry fields of international work experience?
- ✓ If there are RMCS or competency units, which units should the international experience be realistically mapped to?
- ✓ Is it possible to map against the requirements of a full competency-based qualification in the home country?

Section 4 has further details of the RMCS and national competency standards. Appendices I and II have examples showing how skills and work experience can be mapped to depict achievement of the requirements of an RMCS unit and a national competency unit.

Taking assessors to the workers

In the **Philippines**, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) set up a process in Region XIII, in the municipality of Socorro, which is home to many highly skilled but non-certificated carpenters, masons, furniture and cabinet makers, to recognize skills acquired through hands-on experience either locally or through overseas employment. A team of assessors conducted assessments of workers' skills in house construction sites.

Where mapping is difficult, undertaking formal training or a complete testing programme of the specified competencies may be the best way to achieve recognition for skills acquired overseas. This may apply especially where there is significant theoretical underpinning for the workplace skills.

4. Regional Model Competency Standards, national competency standards and mutual recognition of vocational qualifications

4.1 Regional Model Competency Standards

The RMCS were designed to assist both employers and workers and can be used to make the recognition of the skills of returning migrant workers an easier and more achievable process. The RMCS are simple and flexible and can be customized to suit the skills recognition systems in different countries. The ILO has published the RMCS in a simplified format so that they can be used in discussions among governments, employers, workers and training organizations. Receiving countries can use the RMCS to specify clearly their skill requirements; migrant workers returning home can use them to describe their new skills and knowledge.

The RMCS define the essential skills required to work in a particular industry or sector, providing a flexible framework that enterprises can use, regardless of location or size. The structure is deliberately simple so that they can be easily understood. Additional elements can be added as required. The standards are grouped functionally and not as jobs or occupations. Capacity-building training is required so that governments and social partners make good use of the RMCS.

RMCS currently available at the ILO

- ✓ **Manufacturing**
  Casting and moulding; machining operation and component assembly; fabrication and finishing; equipment servicing and maintenance; furniture manufacturing; textiles manufacturing

- ✓ **Tourism**
  Tourism product development; sales and marketing; office administration and venue maintenance; tour operations and guiding; attractions and theme parks; supervision and management

- ✓ **Construction**

- ✓ **Agriculture**

- ✓ **Generic or core work skills**
  Administration, supervision, basic scientific skills, soft skills, computer skills, introductory generic skills

- ✓ **Mechanical repairs**
  Air conditioning, motorcycle and automotive repair

Additional RMCS can be developed depending on demand. RMCS are needed in areas such as domestic work and other informal economy occupations. The ILO will investigate adopting competency standards already developed for domestic work as an additional RMCS.

Appendix I provides an example of how to begin the process of mapping details of newly acquired skills to the broad specifications of an RMCS unit.

4.2 National competency standards

Several member States have developed or are in the process of developing national competency-based technical and vocational education and training qualifications systems. These more precisely specified competencies also provide a reference point for the recognizing of workers' skills or even of complete qualifications.

The learning outcomes of a training programme in an overseas country can be mapped against competency units developed for a national vocational qualifications framework. The mapping will identify any gaps and differences between the details of the overseas training and the home country's skills specifications in its competency standards.

Appendix II contains an extract from a national unit of competency and shows how the evidence of overseas achievement can be progressively mapped to the specified elements of competence in the national unit. Following a successful assessment, it should be possible for a worker to receive credit towards vocational qualifications in the home country.

4.3 Mutual recognition of competency-based qualifications

Especially where skills upgrading training has been built into overseas contracts, migrant workers could achieve full vocational qualifications while overseas. Obtaining mutual recognition of these qualifications requires the agency responsible for providing services to returning migrant workers to liaise with the home country's national vocational certification agency. That agency will in turn need to link with the sister overseas-certification agency to benchmark qualifications frameworks and mutually recognize the vocational qualifications, as demonstrated in appendix III. For benchmarking and the consequent mutual recognition to be accorded, the national certification agency should have confidence in the overseas country's national standards setting policies and processes (particularly its involvement with industry) and in the rigour of its quality assurance and student or worker assessments.

In member States that do not have competency-based systems in place, it will be more realistic to map the training programme against the RMCS, as indicated previously. In skill areas for which there are no developed RMCS or national competency-based vocational qualifications, evidence of the training undertaken can be summarized in the portfolio of evidence for the consideration of potential employers.

5. The assessment and skills recognition services

The national support agency will need to have its own certified assessors or make use of the assessment system already in place with the national vocational certification agency. Member States with national competency-based vocational qualifications frameworks will most likely already have assessment arrangements in place that can be extended to include the proposed portfolio assessment. There may be national and provincial skills testing centres primarily to assess students from institutional training programmes (such as in Philippines).

Policies and processes may already be in place to assess workers in the workplace or to assess candidates in recognition of prior experiential or non-certificated learning (such as in Sri Lanka). Discussions with the national vocational certification agency may lead to an existing service that can be expanded, with policies and processes suitably modified, to include assessing the portfolios of returning migrant workers, based on the RMCS as well as the national competency standards.

The national support agency will need a formal agreement with the certification agency that, using the portfolio approach, its assessors can assess validly against the simplified RMCS as well as the national competency standards. If private agencies are involved, there will need to be formal accreditation processes.

If no such assessment service exists, the national agency with responsibility for supporting the reintegration of migrant workers will need to investigate whether such a service can be established through a network of trained and certified assessors or by attaching accredited assessment centres to existing nationally recognized organizations.

The certified assessors will be asked to:

- ✓ review the portfolio of evidence supplied
- ✓ consider the evidence supplied of skills, knowledge and experience, mapped against the specific competency requirements of the RMCS or national competency standards
- ✓ seek further evidence, conduct testing or set up practical exercises when additional evidence is needed
- ✓ make a formal assessment and a recognition decision, identifying any skills and knowledge gaps and providing advice to the candidate on future actions.

The certified assessors should be selected for the assessment role because they have sufficient depth and breadth of knowledge and skills in the content areas they will assess. But they will also need to be good communicators. In partnership with the returning migrant worker and the advisor, they will attempt to match the evidence of the international skills development to the competencies of the specified RMCS or national competency units for which credit is being sought. If insufficient evidence is submitted, more may be requested.

A variety of assessment methods should be encouraged. Demonstration, attestation, interview or the evaluation of work samples or projects are commonly used for this type of assessment. The assessment should be as rigorous as, but no more so, than what takes place in formal institutions or workplaces. Assessors must apply non-traditional methodologies.

Assessors should:

- ✓ demonstrate objectivity, sensitivity and reasonableness in the assessment process
- ✓ have an understanding and ability to carry out a range of assessment techniques
- ✓ have the ability to judge diverse evidence, fairly and accurately
- ✓ have the ability to draw inferences based on evidence presented
- ✓ have the ability to share control of the assessment process with the migrant worker.

Recognition of skills though the portfolio assessment should be carried out solely by a certified assessor and that person's decisions should then be checked by a second certified assessor acting as a verifier.

Assessors and verifiers should be either:

- ✓ senior industry practitioners who have significant practical and current work experience in the skill area being assessed or
- ✓ teachers or trainers from the relevant skill area; initially, these will be experienced teachers or trainers from institutions authorized to teach those skill areas.

Assessors and verifiers must be committed to ongoing training and be prepared to take part in updating training as required. They should also be committed to maintaining knowledge and relevant experience in the area in which they assess. Assessors may also need to take part in national consistency of assessment training and related moderation of assessment activities. Assessors should identify any conflicts of interest they may have from assigned assessment activities. Assessors may be called upon to assist with the resolution of appeals against assessment decisions.

Only certified assessors should assess and determine that RMCS standards have been achieved or that the requirements of national competency units have been met; this proposed stipulation will be essential for the credibility of the portfolio assessment system and for acceptance of decisions by the national vocational certification agency and by employers.

There is ample international precedent and good practice examples available to support the general concept of recognizing prior experiential or non-certificated learning. National certification agencies use the recognition of prior learning as a process to allow candidates an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through evaluation of documentation, together with a series of assessments specifically designed to assist them to display their competence. At the end of the assessment process, the candidate can be issued credit that is linked to the national vocational qualifications or can be awarded a full vocational qualification. Recognition of prior learning can acknowledge competencies, whether acquired through unaccredited formal learning, workplace experience or general life experience. The proposed process for recognizing the skills of returning migrant workers is very similar to the recognition of prior learning process.

Recognizing prior learning

In **Sri Lanka,** policies encourage the recognition of prior learning process, which accredits a learner's competencies regardless of how and where they were acquired. The competencies may have been achieved through means that include any combination of formal or informal training and education, work experience or general life experience. Recognition of non-certificated learning can be combined with any formal certification to enable assessment decisions. The national vocational qualifications system recognizes prior learning based on national competency standards and determines the extent to which an individual has achieved the required competencies for partial or total completion of a national vocational qualification (NVQ). The minimum industrial exposure requirement to become eligible for recognized prior learning is 18 months for NVQ level 2 and level 3 qualifications; for level 4, it is 24 months.

Prior learning can be acquired from:

- ✓ the workplace
- ✓ life experience
- ✓ self-directed learning
- ✓ non-certificated informal learning
- ✓ formal learning but not officially accredited
- ✓ informal or undocumented understudy or mentoring schemes
- ✓ in-service training
- ✓ distance education or open learning
- ✓ community-based education
- ✓ overseas training or work experience.

Training programmes will be required in all member States once decisions are made to establish advisory and assessment services for migrant workers. These programmes need to prepare the advisors to work with the migrant workers and to train the assessors and verifiers in competency-based assessment. Training needs to meet the requirements of the national certification agency, if there is one.

To promote national and international credibility, assessments will be competency-based (further explained in appendix IV).

6. Recommended roles for government, employers and workers in support of skills recognition

The role of government should include:

- ✓ establishing services for migrant workers through one of its own agencies or setting standards and accrediting private service providers to support migrant workers;
- ✓ ensuring that there are services to support departing and returning migrant workers, including:
  - advice, training and skills assessment prior to departure
  - support and skills assessment for returning workers so they can reintegrate, with maximum use made of their new skills
  - assisting returning workers where overseas employers are unwilling to provide evidence of skills acquisition
  - recording the support of employers to help with future placement of workers when they return home;
- ✓ translating the RMCS and making them available to employers' and workers' associations and prospective migrant workers and providing training in their use;
- ✓ linking the RMCS to the national competency standards;
- ✓ establishing links with the national vocational qualifications certification agency to encourage benchmarking of vocational qualifications with counterpart agencies in receiving countries;
- ✓ setting up skills assessment and recognition services for returning migrant workers, ensuring that staff and assessors are trained and that there are close links with the national vocational qualifications certification agency;
- ✓ working to achieve support for skills recognition for migrant workers from employers and workers and their national associations;
- ✓ involving employers and workers in the recruitment, selection and training of advisors and assessors;
- ✓ resolving the issue of funding for the services to be provided;
- ✓ promoting the participation of employers and workers in all aspects of the national competency-based skills recognition system;
- ✓ promoting the availability of provincial and district support services;
- ✓ negotiating with other member States for the mutual recognition of vocational qualifications and involving the social partners in those negotiations.

The role of employers and workers and their national associations should include:

- ✓ working with the agency nominated by the government to provide direct support to departing and returning migrant workers;
- ✓ nominating and supporting experienced industry practitioners to be trained as certified assessors and verifiers;
- ✓ making the translated RMCS and the national competency standards available and promoting their use by departing and returning migrant workers and by employers;
- ✓ assisting advisors when seeking employment or self-employment for returning skilled migrant workers, once their portfolios have been assessed;

✓ working with (and negotiating memoranda of understanding) with counterpart or international associations and trade unions in other countries to promote the fair treatment of migrant workers.

Examples of trade union involvement

Trade unions are establishing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with counterpart unions in receiving countries to support migrant workers. For example:

The **Cambodian** Union Federation and Cambodia Confederation is about to sign an MOU with the Malaysian Trade Union Congress to allow all Cambodian migrant workers in Malaysia to join as members.

The **Indonesian** Confederation of Labour Unions (KSBSI) has agreements with the Malaysian Trade Union Congress to promote protection for migrant workers.

APPENDICES

A1. Regional Model Competency Standards

The following example is from the simplified manufacturing industry RMCS (Unit D4). The standard is that the worker can perform lathe operations.

Perform lathe operations
Job requirements are determined from drawings and work is sequenced. The job is set up and turning operations are performed. Components are checked for conformance with specifications.

Performance elements
- ✓ Observe correct safety precautions, including wearing of protective clothing and safety glasses.
- ✓ Interpret drawings, determine sequence of operation and select tooling to produce component to specification.
- ✓ Set up job using instruments, such as dial test indicators and digital read-out equipment.
- ✓ Calculate speeds and feeds using appropriate mathematical techniques and reference material.
- ✓ Use the full range of accessories on a centre lathe, including three- and four-jaw chucks, centres, face plate, steadies, cross slide and tail stock.
- ✓ Perform turning operations to specification.
- ✓ Check components for conformance with specifications using appropriate techniques, tools and equipment.

A migrant may acquire these skills through a formal training programme, structured training in the workplace or even through informal training and supervision in the workplace.

Using the first three performance elements from the RMCS unit above, mapping could start with questions, such as the following suggests.

Assessment questions:

Perform lathe operations Job requirements are determined from drawings and work sequenced. The job is set up and turning operations are performed. Components are checked for conformance with specifications.	Is this work part of the international job description supplied? Is there a statement from the employer or supervisor that the work was actually performed?
Performance elements ✓ Observe correct safety precautions, including wearing of protective clothing and safety glasses.	Is there a photograph of the worker or information on workplace safety policies and their strict application?
✓ Interpret drawings, determine sequence of operation and select tooling to produce component to specification.	Is there a statement from the supervisor about the quality of work outputs?
✓ Set up job using instruments, such as dial test indicators and digital read-out equipment.	Can the returning migrant worker satisfactorily explain to the assessor these set-up activities?

The answers to the questions and the results of a scrutiny of the portfolio evidence can be recorded in a grid such as proposed for the extract from the Philippines competency unit that follows in appendix II.

A2. National competency standards

The following is an extract from a competency unit in automotive technology from the Philippines, listing the four elements of the standard and their associated performance criteria. The elements taken together make up the overall competency. The performance criteria specify the quality of the evidence that must be demonstrated to meet the outcomes in the elements. Collectively, they provide the standards against which the elements are assessed. In relation to every element, the performance criteria specify what is expected to have been done to a particular quality level or standard.

The comprehensive detail of the competency standard promotes ready comparison with the skills specifications of standards in another member State.

UNIT OF COMPETENCY: PERFORM SHOP MAINTENANCE

UNIT DESCRIPTOR: This unit deals with inspecting and cleaning of the work area, including tools, equipment and facilities. Storage and checking of tools/equipment and disposal of used materials are also incorporated into this competency unit.

ELEMENT	PERFORMANCE CRITERIA
1. Inspect or clean tools and work area	1.1 Cleaning solvent used as per workshop or tools' cleaning requirement. 1.2 Work area is checked and cleaned. 1.3 Wet surface/spot in work area is wiped and dried.
2. Store or arrange tools and shop equipment	2.1 Tools and equipment are checked and stored in their respective shelves or location. 2.2 Corresponding labels are posted and visible. 2.3 Tools are safely secured and logged in the records.
3. Dispose wastes or used lubricants	3.1 Containers for used lubricants are visibly labelled. 3.2 Wastes and used lubricants are disposed as per the workshop's standard operating procedures.
4. Report damaged tools or equipment	4.1 Complete inventory of tools and equipment is maintained. 4.2 Damaged tools or equipment/facilities are identified and repair recommendation is made. 4.3 Reports prepared have no error or discrepancy.

The certified assessor could record evidence of skills acquisition of the elements and performance criteria under three categories:

- ✓ portfolio evidence supplied
- ✓ practical tasks carried out at the direction of the assessor
- ✓ questions asked of the returning migrant worker.

ELEMENT	PERFORMANCE CRITERIA	EVIDENCE FROM:		
		Portfolio	Tasks	Questions
1. Inspect or clean tools and work area	1.1 Cleaning solvent used as per workshop or tools' cleaning requirement.			
	1.2 Work area is checked and cleaned.			
	1.3 Wet surface or spot in work area is wiped and dried.			

Where necessary, the advisor will need to work with the returning migrant worker to see if additional evidence can be supplied or if additional training can be provided to plug skills gaps. Practical testing is a suitable way to verify skills acquisition, if evidence is otherwise unavailable.

A3. Mutual recognition of qualifications

Competency-based qualifications commonly consist of units and are assigned to a level, based on a descriptor or a qualification definition. By comparing these level descriptors and qualifications definitions across member States, it is possible to benchmark national qualifications frameworks. A migrant worker achieving a full qualification in a country with a competency-based system can thus aim to have that qualification benchmarked to similar qualifications in the home country. Although the qualification can be benchmarked, which indicates the comparative level of technical skill achieved, the precise content of compared qualifications may differ because competencies are packaged in different combinations in different countries.

As an example (and noting that this draft benchmarking requires official confirmation by the relevant national certification agencies), a Filipino migrant worker acquiring a higher certificate qualification through the Workforce Development Agency in Singapore could expect to be recognized upon returning to the Philippines as a Certificate III (PTQF) by TESDA, the national TVET certification agency.

Singapore	Philippines
Graduate certificate/Diploma	
Specialist diploma	
Diploma	
Advanced certificate	Certificate IV
Higher certificate	Certificate III
Certificate	Certificate II

A Sri Lankan migrant worker in Malaysia achieving a Skills Certificate level 3 in Malaysia should, upon returning to Sri Lanka, could have that recognized as the technical equivalent to the national certification agency's National Certificate 4.

Malaysia	Sri Lanka
Advanced diploma/General bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree
Diploma	National diploma 6
	National diploma 5
Skills certificate 3	National certificate 4
Skills certificate 2	National certificate 3
Skills certificate 1	National certificate 2

A4. Competency-based assessment

Assessment of the portfolio of evidence for the recognizing new skills must involve a process that is fair, valid, consistently applied and be measured against the appropriate competency standard. Competencies credited to the migrant worker must be current. Where assessment decisions may result in credit awarded towards national vocational qualifications, the assessment will need to take place under the authority of the national certification agency.

The RMCS and the new national vocational qualifications in member States are commonly expressed in terms of competencies. All students in training programmes (and in the future as proposed, migrant workers submitting portfolios) should be required to demonstrate evidence of achievement of those competencies before credit is awarded for individual units or before complete qualifications are awarded. Consequently, credit can be awarded without regard to length, place or method of learning. This can be a significant change for students, workers, employers and education and training institutions who may be more familiar with the traditional approach in which a curriculum may be taught, a generic examination is administered that may or may not cover all aspects of the curriculum, students are ranked and about half are commonly deemed to have "passed".

An assessment based on the gathering of evidence of learner achievement against a specified industry standard encourages a diversity of styles of teaching and learning and opens up the possibility of very different approaches to learner assessment, including the recognition of experiential learning and direct assessment following structured or informal learning in the workplace. Competency-based assessment allows for improved reporting to learners and is generally welcomed by employers who know more precisely what it is that workers know and can do.

This competency-based approach provides a sound platform for introducing the formal recognition of skills acquired through migrant work. An assessment against specified standards makes it more possible to evaluate the diverse evidence (including the proposed portfolios) that will be presented by returning migrant workers wanting formal recognition of their experiential learning or seeking to be assessed in their places of work.

The assessors will need to be certain that the evidence provided in the portfolio is:

- ✓ authentic
- ✓ valid
- ✓ consistent
- ✓ sufficient.

As well, they need to be sure that the evidence meets the specified RMCS or the national competencies.

A5. Additional sources of information

1. The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (www.poea.gov.ph) has a very thorough schedule of services noted on its web site.

2. For a very informative migration booklet, see www.immi.gov.au/allforms/booklets/1119.pdf

3. Information and good practices for the recognition of prior learning is available at www.vetinfonet.det.wa.edu.au

4. Information on the ILO/Korea Partnership Programme is available at www.ilo.org/asia/whatwedo/projects/lang--en/WCMS_098458/index.htm

5. The RMCS for the manufacturing industry is available at www.ilo.org/asia/whatwedo/publications/lang--en/docName--WCM_041777/index.htm

6. The Regional Skills and Employability Programme in Asia and the Pacific web site is www.ilo.org/skills-ap