De-skilling and Brain Waste vs. Recognition of Diplomas and Portability of Skills

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De-skilling

Labour market-related term that describes the phenomenon experienced by skilled or highly-skilled workers who enter the labour market and obtain a lower-skilled job (compared to their acquired qualifications) and are considered to be “over-qualified” for the job they occupy.

This over-qualification is not recognized, therefore workers end up working in lower-skilled jobs, often badly paid.

If they stay (which is often the case) in that same job, they can never climb the occupational ladder. The longer they stay in that lower-skilled job, the harder it is for these foreign workers to obtain a job in accordance with his/her qualifications.

The end result is an unfair loss of the time and money that the worker spent in obtaining unused qualifications and the waste of funds that his/her family and country spent on human resources.
Brain Waste

- **Brain waste**: A term commonly used in migration terminology in relation to other terms such as brain drain and brain gain.

- It determines the lack or bad utilization of potential foreign human resources available in the labour market.

- It relates to migrant workers’ skills, qualifications and job experience acquired in the country of origin that are not properly utilised in the labour market of the country of destination.

- **Main cause**: the lack of regulated migration and lack of labour migration policies in place, the majority of cases being undocumented, but not only. A loss-loss situation for workers, countries of origin and countries of destination.

Women migrant workers are more likely to be affected by « brain waste” and de-skilling.

- Over-represented in jobs and tasks that require fewer and lower value skills, are lower paid and offer restricted career prospects.

- Women account for the majority of workers in the informal economy, with greater job insecurity, lack of access to training & social protection.

- Significant overlap between being a woman, a migrant, working in the informal economy and being poor.
Mid-career migrant women returning to work (after raising a family) have specific skill and retraining requirements.

They can have less legal migration opportunities than men or have migrated as “dependants” of partners without a work-permit.

End result: migrant women re-entering the labour market may easily experience downward occupational mobility.

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**ILO’s Conventions**

- Convention 143, Art. 14 - « A Member may (b) after appropriate consultation with the representative organizations of employers and workers, make regulations concerning recognition of occupational qualifications acquired outside its territory, including certificates and diplomas ».

- Recognised as a significant prerequisite to being capable of competing on equal terms with nationals in accessing employment.
ILO’s Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration

An orderly and equitable process of labour migration should be promoted in both origin and destination countries which include policies “promoting the recognition and accreditation of migrant workers’ skills and qualifications, and where that is not possible, providing a means to have their skills and qualifications recognized”.

Importance of developing strategies for providing skills development to migrant workers and regional skills recognition schemes.

Recommendation no. 151

Migrant workers and members of their families lawfully within the territory of a Member should enjoy effective equality of opportunity and treatment with nationals of the Member concerned in respect of:

(a) access to vocational guidance and placement services;

(b) access to vocational training and employment of their own choice on the basis of individual suitability for such training or employment, account being taken of qualifications acquired outside the territory of and in the country of employment;

It urges international cooperation to promote recognition and portability of skills nationally and internationally, as well as to promote strategies and policies that mitigate the adverse impact on developing countries.

Defines portability of skills as:

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

b) Certification and recognition of skills within national and international labour markets.

3 Types of Recognition Mechanisms

1. Unilateral Recognition Mechanisms- most common form of assessing migrant workers’ skills and competencies. National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) have been developed with the aim of increasing recognition and portability of skills.

2. Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs)- formally agreed between sending and receiving countries and focus on reciprocal recognition of certifications and competences. Professional Associations are key players.

3. Regional Integration Agreements- concluded in the context of regional integration encourage the development of mutually acceptable standards and criteria for licencing and certification and to provide recommendations on mutual recognition.
ILO’s latest work

National Qualifications Frameworks (Australia, Bangladesh, Botswana, Chile, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, New Zealand, Russia, Scotland, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Turkey)


De-skilling and Brain Waste studies


Regional Model Competency Standards


Regional Workshop on Skills Recognition for Migrant Workers - Asia

ILO/SKILLS-AP/Korea Regional Planning Workshop on Skills Recognition for Migrant Workers, Bangkok, Thailand, 23-25 April 2007

ILO’s latest work....

Governing Body and International Labour Conference Reports


Skills for improved productivity, employment growth and development
ILC - 2008 Report

- Portability of skills is based firstly on core skills to enable workers to apply knowledge and experience to new occupations or industries and secondly on systems that codify, standardize, assess and certify skills so that levels of competence can be easily recognized by social partners in different labour sectors across national, regional or international labour markets.

- Improved portability of skills, supported by national and/or regional or international qualification frameworks, helps migrant workers obtain employment commensurate with their qualifications and expertise.

- Regional qualifications frameworks and regional cooperation for mutual recognition of qualifications create a favourable condition for facilitating labour mobility and portability of skills.

The role of governments should focus on establishing mechanisms for skills recognition and certification nationally, regionally and internationally, to facilitate mobility of workers.

A NQF is a platform for dialogue between education and training practitioners, government, employers and workers to make skills development more responsive to changing needs, to link initial continuing education and lifelong learning, and to ensure the wide recognition and transferability of qualifications.

At the regional level there should be coordination between countries and between professional organizations and other relevant bodies for recognition of skills so as to promote mobility within the region. As part of regional integration, inter-country ministerial coordination mechanisms to promote skills recognition and labour mobility are essential.

The ILO was requested to develop model bilateral and multilateral agreements on certification of skills for employment, through systems for recognition of skills among countries.

A major reason for introducing NQFs are countries’ attempts to relate to international systems, and to participate within what are described as globalized labour markets (e.g. indicating the equivalence to international qualifications).

NQFs identified by Governments as a policy objective contributing to improving labour mobility including:

- Improving regional integration of economies by making worker mobility easier;
- Improving the ability of workers from developing countries to find good jobs in other countries, thus improving the levels of remittances sent home;
- Improving the ability of workplaces in developed countries to quickly understand the skills and abilities of migrants.

Guidelines for Development of Regional Model Competency Standards (RMCS) – (Asia Pacific, 2006)

Background- 1st Technical meeting of the Regional Skills Network Partner Organisations in Korea (November 2000) identified skills recognition and the development of regional standards as high priority.

Important in the discussion on the recognition of skills across countries within the context of mobility of skilled workers.

**RMCS do not define qualification levels but rather cluster competencies in logical groupings that can be translated into each country’s classification system as required.**

It is important to have a common “translation tool” such as RMCS to allow the skills of migrant workers to be evaluated simply no matter what qualification they hold.

The RMCS concept deals with a whole industry or major industry sectors not single occupations.
Regional Planning Workshop on Skills Recognition for Migrant Workers (Asia Pacific, 2007)

- Importance of strengthening national systems of skills standards as a requirement for migrant skills recognition, but understanding realistic expectations of countries
- Sharing experience and knowledge is crucial to the success of any recognition system
- The Regional Model Competency Standards (RMCS) was described as an appropriate model to be applied to migrant skills standards in the Asia Pacific.

Chicha M.T. and Deraedt E. « Gender, migration and de-skilling in Geneva »

- De-skilling is real, long-lasting and can have an important cost in the short and long-term on women migrant workers themselves and their families, especially their children.
- De-skilling constitutes a waste of resources while the lack of skilled labour force can be a long-term labour market urgent need.
- De-skilled women migrants find themselves in a situation of inequality compared not only to Swiss women, but also to Swiss or national men.
- Several of them had been able to acquire professional equality in their countries and faced a net professional regression in Switzerland.
The system of recognition of diplomas and the one providing the right to exercise certain professions is complex, based on unclear criteria and fragmented among different institutions and geographical regions. Need to:

- Better inform, orient, provide support to m.w.;
- Clarify the criteria on recognition of diplomas;
- Provide training and re-training (night courses);
- Fight discrimination on access to employment through information and training of employers.

Improving the transferability of immigrant human capital in the host country labour market should be a top priority. Policy makers could implement a more selective admission system based on the relevance of foreign-acquired qualifications or/and the needs of the economy in the host country and should ensure the recognition of their education whatever the origin of its acquisition.

In case of non-recognition, they could support newly arrived immigrants to pursue further training and undertake language courses in order to enhance their foreign-acquired qualifications in the host labour market. Policies intended to give equal opportunity to immigrant women after giving birth are also essential in mitigating any negative effects of brain waste.

As the number of skilled immigrants has been increasing substantially and is expected to rise further, implementing any of these measures is of crucial importance to prevent them from present and future forms of deskilling.
Conclusions

- The recognition of foreign qualifications and skills has been an ongoing problem in countries that have permanent migration programs (Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the U.S.)

- International portability of skills still tends to be limited and migrant workers are forced to take lower levels jobs than their skills would warrant with little or none occupational mobility.

- One major reason: Lack of national accreditation bodies and processes in both sending and receiving countries.

- Recognition arrangements with countries outside the regional integration schemes are yet to be developed.

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Conclusions

- GATS Mode 4 - The Movement of Natural Persons has not resulted in much increase in trade in services, yet;

- The recognition of qualifications has been identified as a major barrier.

- The portability of skills and recognition of qualifications/diplomas of vulnerable groups and women who tend to face discrimination in the labour market, promotes economic and social inclusion, decent work and fair globalization.