

UNCTAD workshop on  
**Recognition of qualifications to facilitate  
movement of natural persons**

Co-organized by UNCTAD-ACP Secretariat

Geneva, 3 May 2019

**Opening remarks**

by

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UNITED NATIONS  
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**Opening remarks by Director, DITC of UNCTAD**  
**Workshop on recognition of qualifications to facilitate movement of natural persons**

Room XXVI, Palais des Nations, Geneva, 3 May 2019

Distinguished panellists and participants,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to this workshop on recognition of qualifications to facilitate movement of natural persons. Today we will discuss this important topic that brings together two key areas for the achievement of sustainable human and economic development: services trade policy and labour migration. I wish to express our special appreciation to the co-organizer, the African, Caribbean and Pacific Secretariat, with whom we have been working to bring this workshop to you.

This workshop comes at a particularly timely moment as it can contribute to informing and preparing member States of the United Nations as they embark on a review of progress made towards achieving the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and its sustainable development goals. In July of this year, the meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development will be convened in New York to examine some of the goals that are closely related to services trade policy and labour migration. This includes goal 10 on “reducing inequality within and among countries”, and its target 10.7 on “facilitating orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people”, and goal 17 on “strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development”.

How is services trade policy linked to improved mobility of persons? Let’s go back to the fundamentals of services trade to answer this question. One of the modes of delivery for trade in services, as defined in the WTO and other agreements, is through the movement of natural persons: mode 4. The relevance of the linkages between services and migration is also underscored by the fact that, according to the ILO, in 2014, around 71 per cent of migrant workers were concentrated in services.<sup>1</sup> This figure would be higher if migrant workers in the construction sector were included. ILO also estimated that migrant workers accounted for 164 million of the 258 million migrants in 2017.<sup>2</sup> Mobility of persons can therefore benefit from services trade policy that addresses related barriers. On the other hand, other policies to improve mobility of persons can benefit services trade.

There are other significant linkages between services and mobility of persons, including the relevance of services and services trade to address several economic drivers of migration, and the importance of financial services for remittances. You are welcome to take some of the publications we have done on this, available at the entrance of the room, and visit our website to know more of our work on these topics.

While the GATS aims to achieve liberalization for trade in services in all modes of delivery, movement of natural persons remains much more restricted than other modes. One of the restrictions to mode 4 is non-recognition by a host country of skills or qualifications obtained

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<sup>1</sup> ILO, 2015, ILO Global estimates on migrant workers. The provided number of migrant workers on services does not include the construction sector.

<sup>2</sup> ILO, 2018, ILO Global estimates on international migrant workers.

in a home country. Countries can address this important barrier by providing autonomous recognition of foreign skills or qualifications or by engaging in mutual recognition agreements or arrangements between countries to facilitate the temporary migration of people: the MRAs. This issue will be our quest today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The trade community can have an important role in reducing barriers to the movement of natural persons, related to the recognition of skills and qualifications. In this area, we can join hands with broader efforts to improve mobility since the movement of natural persons in providing services could be seen as part of the movement of labour, a type of migration. As such, global and regional initiatives on migration are also mindful of restrictions relating to recognition of skills or qualifications.

In this context, the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, adopted in December 2018 in Marrakech, Morocco, and endorsed by United Nations member States, specifically promotes “transparency of certifications and compatibility of national qualifications frameworks by agreeing on standard criteria, indicators and assessment parameters, and by creating and strengthening national skills profiling tools, registries or institutions in order to facilitate effective and efficient mutual recognition procedures”.

The global compact on migration further recognizes trade agreements as tools to facilitate the recognition of skills, qualifications and competences. Specifically, it encourages member States to “conclude bilateral, regional or multilateral mutual recognition agreements or include recognition provisions in other agreements, such as labour mobility or trade agreements, in order to provide equivalence or comparability in national systems, such as automatic or managed mutual recognition mechanisms”. Trade in services agreements and MRAs could therefore positively contribute to the achievement of target 10.7 of the sustainable development goals on “facilitating orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people”.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At this workshop we will be hearing from distinguished panels of speakers as well as participants on views and lessons that can be adopted to help countries harvest the benefits from the trade in services-migration-development nexus, particularly from recognition of skills and qualifications. We look forward to the sharing of experiences and knowledge, which can then help to identify options that countries can use to facilitate mode 4 trade in services, and in a broader sense, migration, through recognition of qualifications and skills, including under trade agreements or labour agreements.

I wish to encourage panellists and participants to come up with concrete policy recommendations and best practices in these topics. I also believe that these discussions today will provide member States with experiences and findings that can be useful for the review at the high-level political forum in New York and for the implementation of the global compact on migration.

Pledging the full support of UNCTAD in these important endeavours, I thank you for your attention!