



حوار أبوظبي بين الدول الآسيوية المرسلّة و المستقبلّة للعمالة
Abu Dhabi Dialogue among the Asian Labor-Sending and Receiving Countries

Meeting of Abu Dhabi Dialogue Senior Officials

11-12 May 2016, Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Final Report

Senior Officials representing member governments of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue among Asian Countries of Labor Origin and Destination (ADD) held a regular meeting on 11 and 12 May 2016 in Dubai, UAE. In attendance were observers from non-member governments, international organizations, academic and non-government organizations and private sector actors. The list of attendees included government delegates from Bangladesh, Bahrain, India, Indonesia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, UAE and Vietnam, as well as an observer delegation from the GCC General Secretariat, the Executive Bureau of the GCC Council of Ministers of Labour, the government of Switzerland, IOM, ILO, ESCWA, Migrant Forum Asia, academic institutions in Bahrain, the United States and Bahrain and private sector executives.

Following an opening session that was addressed by the heads of delegation of Chair-in-Office, Kuwait, the Philippines and the UAE (members of the Troika), the remainder of the first day was marked by two successive thematic meetings, moderated by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The first centered on current and potential alternative models of labour recruitment and addressed the need for more effective government regulation to ensure the transparency of the recruitment processes and better protection of workers from unfair practices that subjects them to exploitation, and a more effective matching of job seekers and employment opportunities. A number of alternative recruitment models were explored, focusing on the

need to redress the structural flaws of the currently prevalent models in the Asia-GCC corridors. Discussions addressed bilateral and multilateral government cooperation in vetting and deploying potentially fairer and more effective models that lend themselves to better regulation and leverage skill development, certification and mutual recognition and the use of technology to improve the matching of workers and job opportunities. This first thematic meeting was led by researchers and experts from the University of California, the IOM, Migrant Forum Asia, the government of the Philippines, an independent expert from India, the ILO and Bayt.Com, a technology firm.

A second thematic panel discussion, led by experts from New York University Abu Dhabi, the Bahrain Center for Strategic and Geopolitical Studies, the ILO, the government of the UAE and SAP (technology company), dealt with the topic of labour mobility in destination labour markets. It highlighted the benefits of labour market flexibility and internal mobility to workers, employers and in terms of the broader labour market outcomes, notably in terms of increased labour productivity, better job matching and an improved skill mix. It explored model policies and operational tools to facilitate internal mobility and empower governments of destination countries to leverage its benefits.

Day two of the Senior Officials meeting, co-chaired by the Chair-in-Office, Kuwait, the Philippines and the UAE, began with a review of current ADD joint activities and initiatives, then proceeded to the sharing of newly launched unilateral initiatives and programs by member governments, with a view to identify new ADD-sponsored collaborative initiatives.

A report on the preliminary findings of an IOM-commissioned research project on the recruitment industry in the Asia-GCC corridors (with a focus on the recruitment of Nepali and Indian workers for placement in the UAE) was presented by the IOM delegation. It was followed by a presentation of a comprehensive and standardized pre-departure and post arrival orientation program that was developed by the government of the Philippines, and a progress report on the UAE-led pilot project on skill development, certification and recognition in partnership with UAE employers, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka-based training centers, third party quality control service providers and academic researchers, the government of Switzerland and international organizations.

The government of Indonesia led the exchange of good practices with a presentation on an electronic labour exchange platform, followed by the government of Saudi Arabia presenting on “Musanid” system for managing the contracting and deployment in Saudi Arabia of domestic workers from Bangladesh, then a presentation of a case study on “India’s National Virtual Employment Marketplace and, finally, a presentation by the UAE on the establishment of visa centers in key geographical areas of countries of origin that will be mandated with processing labour applications and contracting and the issuance of labour cards.

Following a mid-day break, Senior Officials met in a concluding session, at the beginning of which the delegation of Sri Lanka asked to take the floor and announced the candidacy of the government of Sri Lanka to chair the next cycle of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue. Member government delegations unanimously welcomed Sri Lanka's candidacy and agreed to Sri Lanka's proposal to host a meeting of Senior Officials and the 4th Ministerial consultation in Colombo on 23-24 January 2017.

Senior officials proceeded to discuss a draft final communique that included proposed future programs and initiatives, their recommendations to the 4th Ministerial Consultation and a draft agenda for the said Consultation.

1. Models of labour recruitment in the Asia-GCC corridors

- 1.1.** Senior officials agreed to multiply efforts and elevate bilateral and multilateral cooperation to ensure the transparency and fairness of recruitment practices and processes and to combat abuses that subject workers to exploitation in COO's and COD's.
- 1.2.** They reached consensus on the need to conceive and develop alternative recruitment models that are not marked by flaws that are inherent to the currently prevalent models and compromise the effectiveness of regulation and enforcement. They called for increased cooperation among member governments to improve their regulation of private recruitment agencies, to work to ensure the alignment and cohesiveness of their regulatory frameworks and to leverage the role of non-government organizations in promoting fair and transparent recruitment practices. They further agreed to give due consideration to government-to-government models of recruitment.
- 1.3.** Senior officials noted with interest the substantial work and investment by certain governments, notably the government of India, in skilling and in training workers prior to their deployment in countries of destination. They recognized the opportunities provided by skilling to elevate cooperation on alignment of occupational standards and the recognition of skills and up-skilling. In turn, this will inform and guide the development of recruitment models that are anchored on certification and mutual recognition of skills, including the development of electronic labor exchange platforms that match qualified workers with job opportunities posted by accredited employers, either directly or facilitated by partner governments.
- 1.4.** They also noted with interest ideas that surfaced during the discussion on leveraging information technology and online job search engines, provided such solutions are made to be responsive to the requirements of government regulation of the contracting process and the imperative of labour protection.

2. Enhancing labour mobility in destination labour markets

- 2.1. Senior officials observed that the setting of policies that govern mobility, that is the granting of a new work permit to a worker after his/her labour relation with a current employer has ended, is the prerogative of the relevant authorities of the government of the destination country; it is, hence, subject to the sovereign discretion of such authorities.
- 2.2. It was further noted that the ensuing discussion highlighted the many benefits that mobility affords to workers, employers, the labour market of the destination country at large and the economic development of the country of origin. These benefits include:
 - 2.2.1. The retention of qualified and experienced workers and the improvement of the skill mix within the labour force
 - 2.2.2. Improved earning potential of workers, contributing to higher labour productivity and the development of human capital
 - 2.2.3. Improved productivity at firm and sector levels
 - 2.2.4. Improved and stable labour relations on the basis of respect of workers' rights and the interests of employers
 - 2.2.5. Avoidance of the costs of recruiting and deploying workers from overseas
 - 2.2.6. Increased remittances to COO's and improved skills of returning workers
- 2.3. Senior officials noted the initiative by the UAE to enhance labour mobility and expressed interest in the development of a model policy framework that ties skilling in COO's, the recognition of initial skills and skills that are acquired on the job (up-skilling), admission and mobility policies in COD's and re-integration policy in COO's

3. Reports on current ADD-sponsored bilateral and multilateral programs and initiatives

- 3.1. IOM presented preliminary findings of the research project it was commissioned to undertake on the recruitment industry in the India-UAE and Nepal-UAE corridors and on the roles of the various actors in the recruitment processes, including agencies in the two COO's and the UAE, subagents and brokers, and UAE employers. The projects aims at recommending measures by governments to ensure transparent and fair labour recruitment as part of the final report to be produced in August of this year. Key findings:
 - 3.1.1. More workers accessing jobs through social networks
 - 3.1.2. Workers routinely bear illegal costs through payments to recruiters and in some cases employers
 - 3.1.3. The cap of recruitment fees that is set by governments of COO's typically assumes that employers bear the costs, while, in reality, the recruitment model is

- based on workers paying the costs, which suggests that the collection of additional sums from workers goes to defray the actual costs of the recruiting agencies.
- 3.1.4. More often than not, workers do not disclose payment of illegal fees
 - 3.1.5. Providing better and simple-language information to workers is an effective way to eliminate their reliance on informal and subagents
 - 3.1.6. Many employers are aware of payment by workers of illegal fees and do not attempt to prevent it
 - 3.1.7. Difficulty of access to principle training and qualification centers encourage illegal and unethical practices
 - 3.1.8. All too many workers are unaware of the laws and relevant government policies, as well as caps on recruitment fees
 - 3.1.9. These preliminary findings reinforced the conviction by senior officials that dealing with and preventing illegal practices that put workers at risk during recruitment represent a major challenge, and that the current regulatory landscape has not succeeded at the level of enforcement
 - 3.1.10. This requires that governments act along two parallel tracks:
 - 3.1.10.1. Improving regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms in order to ensure compliance, identify and prosecute violators
 - 3.1.10.2. Proceed with the identification and assessment of alternative recruitment schemes and models to determine their relative merits and suitability for the Asia-GCC corridors, with a view to providing better protection for workers and more effective matching of workers and employment opportunities
 - 3.2. The Philippines delegation presented a comprehensive and integrated pre-departure and post-arrival worker orientation program, which the government of the Philippines developed in cooperation with IOM. The proposed program consists of several modules, including ones on the cultural and social environments in the GCC, the rights and obligations under employment contracts, fundamental worker and human rights, gender considerations in preparing for going to work overseas, dealing with crisis and emergency situations, healthcare issues, financial awareness, travel and security and preparation for return to home countries. An entire chapter was dedicated to guidelines for program management and governance.
 - 3.2.1. The entire document had been distributed to registered delegates; the Philippines delegation presented an executive summary
 - 3.2.2. Delegations agreed that the proposed program represents a valuable resource that can be leveraged by pairs of member governments in localizing an integrated curriculum for pre-departure and post arrival orientation. Governance for the program at regional level needs to be addressed to maximize benefits; the

Philippines proposed the creation of a Working Technical Groups to support the implementation of the programs by pairs of interested COO/COD governments.

- 3.3. The Kuwait and UAE delegations presented on the Pilot Project on Skill Development, Certification and Recognition, being implemented in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The presentation highlighted the objectives of the pilot, its governance and its phases, and proceeded to describe the pilot's activities to date: the partnership with accredited training centers in the COO's, the engagement of a quality control and attestation service provider and the collection of baseline data on participating workers (administration of surveys). The presentation concluded with a description of planned activities and a timeline for concluding them.

4. Sharing of new initiatives undertaken by member governments with a view to identify future ADD-sponsored collaborative programs

- 4.1. Indonesia presented on a newly developed labour exchange platform
- 4.2. Saudi Arabia presented on 'Musamid', an electronic system for the recruitment, contracting and deployment in Saudi Arabia of Bangladesh workers
- 4.3. A case Study on "India's National Virtual Employment Marketplace" was presented by an independent expert from India
- 4.4. The UAE presented on the creation and operationalization of visa service processing centers, attached to its diplomatic missions in various geographical areas of a number of COO's, which will be responsible for processing the contracting of workers and the issuance of work permits prior to departure
- 4.5. Bangladesh presented on "Good Practices in Migration Management"
- 4.6. Sri Lanka presented on "Recent Initiatives on Welfare, Training, Protection and Reintegration of Workers"
- 4.7. The Philippines presented on "Onsite Training and Assessment of Overseas Filipino Workers".

5. The closing session

Senior officials deliberated a number of issues in a final session during which deliberations were restricted to ADD government delegations. They recommended areas and programs of future collaboration, adopted a series of recommendations to the upcoming Ministerial Consultation 23-24 January 2017 in Colombo and a draft agenda for the meeting of ministers. During this final session, the Sri Lankan delegation announced that its government has agreed to chair the next ADD cycle and host the Ministerial Consultation in Colombo.

