

# Abu Dhabi Dialogue

Submission to the International Migration Review Forum

May 2022

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## Introduction

This report is submitted to the International Migration Review Forum by the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD), an Interstate Consultative Mechanism (ISCM) that enables dialogue and cooperation to improve the governance of labour migration between Asian countries of origin and destination.

This document has been drafted and submitted in line with the Joint Declaration of Ministers attending the Sixth Ministerial Consultation, convened in Dubai on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> October 2021, which called ‘on the Secretariat to draft a short report underlining how the Abu Dhabi Dialogue meets Objective 23 of the Global Compact (“Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration”) and submit this to the relevant organisations in advance of the IMRF.’

In submitting this document, the Abu Dhabi Dialogue takes note of Article 47 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which invites ‘Regional Consultative Processes and other global, regional and subregional fora to provide platforms to exchange experiences on the implementation of the Global Compact, share good practices on policies and cooperation, promote innovative approaches, and foster multi-stakeholder partnerships around specific policy issues.’

The Abu Dhabi Dialogue also takes note of Article 50, which invites ‘Regional Consultative Processes to review the implementation of the Global Compact with the respective regions, beginning in 2020, alternating with discussions at a global level at a four-year interval, in order to effectively inform each edition of the International Migration Review Forum, with the participation of all relevant stakeholders.’

Finally, the Abu Dhabi Dialogue takes note of Article 52, which invites ‘fora such as ... Regional Consultative Processes and others to contribute to the International Migration Review Forum by providing relevant data, evidence, best practices, innovative approaches and recommendations as they relate to the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.’

At the Sixth Ministerial Consultation of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, assembled Ministers invited the Chair and Secretariat to identify options for ‘organising a multi-year programme of activities focused on national efforts to implement the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, to enable Member States to share information and experiences.’ The Abu Dhabi Dialogue will endeavour to report on the outcomes of that programme to the next International Migration Review Forum, in 2026.

This report summarises activities undertaken as approved by Ministers of the ADD through to the end of 2021.

## Background to the Abu Dhabi Dialogue

### About the Abu Dhabi Dialogue

The Abu Dhabi Dialogue was established in 2008 as a means of building trust and increasing cooperation among Asian countries of origin and destination on issues relating to labour migration governance. The Member States of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue are Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates and Vietnam. Regular observers include IOM, ILO, OECD, UN Women, the private sector and civil society representatives. The current Chair-in-Office, since October 2021, is the Government of Pakistan, and the permanent secretariat is provided by the Government of the United Arab Emirates.

As a state-led Regional Consultative Process, the ADD aims to enable safe, orderly and regular migration in some of the world's largest temporary labour migration corridors. Through multilateral dialogue and cooperation on the joint-development of labour mobility-related programming, implementation and reporting, the ADD helps to ensure that Member States develop partnerships for adopting best practices, and are in a position to learn from one another's experience.

### Asia-GCC Labour Migration

Over the course of the ADD's existence, recognition of the importance of the inter-relationship between labour migration and development has grown significantly. According to UNDESA, migrants in the six GCC States account for over 10 percent of all migrants globally, with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates hosting the third and sixth largest migrant populations in the world respectively.

Foreign nationals make up a significant proportion of the population in all GCC countries. Of the temporary labour migrants arriving in the Gulf, the vast majority come from Member States of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue. Workers of Asian origin consequently play a highly significant role in the economies of the Gulf, and have contributed to the rapid development that has taken place in the GCC over the last twenty-five years.

As a result of these factors – and the governance structures that underpin them – support for labour migration among host communities in countries of destination remains higher than in many other parts of the world. There is broad consensus that migrant workers play a significant role in the economic development of receiving countries.

The migration of temporary workers to the GCC also has a beneficial impact on the socio-economic development of the countries of origin. According to World Bank comprehensive figures (2020), approximately \$118 billion was remitted from GCC countries, representing over one sixth of worldwide remittances. Remittances by migrant workers in Gulf markets consequently represent a significant source of foreign earnings, ranging from 3%-31% of the GDP of sending countries in Asia. Moreover, the workers return home with enhanced social capital, including skills and knowledge, networks and entrepreneurial ideas.

### Three Pillars of Effective Governance

Three pillars of effective governance guide the identification of the thematic priorities and the design of programmes that are initiated by the Abu Dhabi Dialogue:

- Ensuring the protection of migrant workers, empowering migrant workers to fulfil their goals and aspirations and affording migrant workers the opportunity to benefit from the outcomes of temporary labour migration;
- Responding to the changing needs of both businesses and workers, with particular attention to the requirements of women migrant workers;
- Supporting labour market institutions in the enhancement of the efficacy of their labour migration policies, including those relating to fair recruitment, skills development and recognition, the provision of information and orientation, and access to justice

These principles are at the heart of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue's commitment to facilitating safe, orderly and regular temporary labour migration.

### Meetings of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue

Chairmanship of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue rotates between sending and receiving Member States, typically on a biennial basis. To date, Kuwait, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and the UAE have Chaired the ADD, with Ministerial Consultations held as follows:

- First Ministerial Consultation, Abu Dhabi, 2008
- Second Ministerial Consultation, Manila, 2012
- Third Ministerial Consultation, Kuwait City, 2014
- Fourth Ministerial Consultation, Colombo, 2017
- Fifth Ministerial Consultation, Dubai, 2019
- Sixth Ministerial Consultation, Dubai, 2021

The Chair-in-Office is assisted by the Troika and a representative group of Member States (one country of origin and one country of destination) who act as an Advisory Group and

provide leadership to, and oversight over, the process between Ministerial Consultations. The Advisory Group currently consists of Pakistan, the UAE and Sri Lanka (the Troika) alongside the Philippines and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Meetings of Senior Officials and various workshops and discussions are held between Ministerial Consultations.

## Contributing to Objective 23 of the Global Compact

### Background

As set out in the introduction to this document, the Dubai Declaration of the Sixth Ministerial Consultation calls for a report, focused on the ADD's contributions to Objective 23 of the Global Compact, to be submitted in advance of the International Migration Review Forum.

Article 39 of the Global Compact, addressing Objective 23, commits signatories to 'support each other in the realisation of the objectives and commitments laid out in this Global Compact through enhanced international cooperation, a revitalised global partnership, and in the spirit of solidarity.' Of particular relevance to the ADD, it acknowledges the importance of joint action in addressing challenges faced by least developing and middle-income countries, and recognises that 'migration and sustainable development are multidimensional and interdependent.'

As a state-led, voluntary forum for discussion of and cooperation on the governance of migration, the Abu Dhabi Dialogue plays a key role in meeting these objectives.

### Thematic Priorities of the ADD

In addressing its mission to further cooperation and collaborative discussion among Member States, the Abu Dhabi Dialogue has forged a unique approach, which builds capacities and reinforces trust among Member States and stakeholders through a programme of bilateral and multilateral partnerships. These partnerships have evolved through each Chairmanship cycle, but have focused in particular on the following key issues, which are of particular relevance to conditions of labour migration in the Asia-Gulf corridors:

#### **Raising standards of recruitment in countries of origin and destination**

The ADD has regularly convened discussions and partnerships relating to recruitment practices in countries of origin and destination. Ensuring that recruitment fees are not charged to migrant workers and addressing contract substitution can be challenging due to multi-jurisdictional oversight over the process. This was first foregrounded in the ADD context through a collaborative study with IOM titled "Research on the Labour Recruitment Industry between the United Arab Emirates, Kerala (India) and Nepal. The ADD plays a key role in bringing together governments to address this challenge and propose innovative solutions, including by assisting in identifying the provision of financial and technical assistance from third parties. Recent research undertaken by ILO on leveraging technology (see below) to enhance compliant labour selection practices has further strengthened discussion of this thematic track.

## **Addressing mutual recognition and certification of skills**

Mutual recognition and certification of skills has long been identified as a critical factor in promoting the development outcomes of labour mobility in labour sending countries, as well as increasing productivity in labour receiving countries. Barriers to recognition and certification, including in-work certification, often stem from a failure to align and harmonise incentives among all stakeholders. The ADD has addressed these issues through numerous programmes, including the development of cooperation frameworks involving a wide range of relevant actors.

## **Providing information and orientation programming**

The ADD has played a critical role in developing an innovative approach to information and orientation programming for migrant workers. The ADD's CIOP programme, which has been developed in coordination with IOM and the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, approaches the issue from a holistic perspective, aligning information provision at the pre-employment, pre-departure and post-arrival stage along individual migration corridors. To date, corridors addressed by the programme include Bangladesh >> Saudi Arabia; Philippines >> UAE; and Sri Lanka >> UAE.

## **Enhancing the role of technology in the governance of migration**

Technology plays an increasingly important role in the governance of labour migration, with applications relating to recruitment, information flow and data cooperation, and government oversight over the migration cycle. Challenges faced by Member States in implementing effective technological solutions include issues relating to data sovereignty, hosting and security, as well as burden sharing on costs and fees. The ADD has also recently looked at how technology can be effectively used in order to lower barriers for migrant workers to access justice and dispute resolution mechanisms. The ADD has frequently addressed these issues, and allowed Member States to explore and discuss potential solutions.

## **Improving standards for domestic workers**

Labour migration corridors in the Asia-Gulf region are notable for the opportunities afforded to labour migrants working in domestic positions. To address the growing complexity of domestic work and the specialisation within the sector, Member States discussions have looked in depth at the future of the care economy in the Gulf and the adoption of a human-centric approach. A focus on gender has been consistently utilised to help identify challenges specific to female workers. These programmes aim to provide improve occupational standards, align wages with skills, and promote mobility within the sector. The ADD has

played a key role in highlighting the need for deeper understanding on the benefits and involving a broad range of stakeholders in researching options for implementation.

### **Strengthening inter-regional, intra-regional and global cooperation**

Member States of the ADD have long recognised that while labour migration within the region has characteristics that are unique to its area of focus, there are also lessons to be learned from the approaches taken in other contexts. The ADD has therefore consistently promoted greater inter-regional, intra-regional and global cooperation. This has included organising several workshops in coordination with other ISCMS, as well as holding a regional consultation in coordination with the GFMD in 2020.

#### [ADD Research Programme](#)

At the most recent Sixth Ministerial Consultation, the Abu Dhabi Dialogue reviewed a research programme that was launched in 2019. The programme was designed to strengthen understanding among Member States with regards to the ADD's thematic priorities and ground policy and partnership development in an evidence-based approach. The two-year research programme drew on the expertise of a range of international organisations, focused on the following four research tracks:

#### **Research Track 1: Anticipated Changes in the Employment Landscape in the GCC and their Impact on Labour Supply and Demand in ADD Corridors**

Track One resulted in the development of four research papers. The first paper, titled *The Shifting Employment Landscape and International Migration in ADD Corridors: What Skills for the Future?* highlighted the need for countries of origin and destination to adapt their education, labour market and migration recruitment systems to seize the opportunities brought by new technologies. The second, *The Future of Work for Women Migrant Workers in the Asia-Gulf States Abu Dhabi Dialogue Regional Corridor*, underlined the role of migrant women in lower-skilled work, and emphasised new opportunities for women in emerging sectors, if skills upgrades can be provided.

The third paper, *Upskilling for the Future*, provided examples of upskilling strategies and recommendations on how policy makers can cater to skilling requirements for migrant workforces. The fourth, titled *The Impact of COVID-19 on Labour Mobility Frameworks in the Abu Dhabi Dialogue Corridors*, underlined the increasing importance of public health considerations in policy making and the potential disruptions to current labour migration models resulting from the pandemic.

#### **Research Track 2: Leveraging Advanced Technology to Improve Labour Mobility Governance**

Track Two resulted in the development of three research papers. The first paper, *Tele- Justice: Facilitating Workers' Access to Justice through Digital Tools*, examined how digital tools can improve operational aspects of migrant access to justice, from preventative, administrative, adjudication and litigation perspective. The second, *Enabling Temporary Contractual Workers to Rate and Review Recruiters and Other Intermediaries through Online Platforms*, describes best practices in developing online platforms that mitigate imbalances in information dissemination in the labour recruitment process.

The third paper, *Leveraging Technology to Enhance Compliant Labour Selection Practices and Improve Job Matching*, looks at what technological and digital options exist to promote and streamline compliant labour selection and how stakeholders can approach the increasing demand for technological platforms within labour migration governance frameworks.

### **Research Track 3: Pre-Deployment Testing of Workers in Asia-GCC Corridors**

Track Three also resulted in the development of three research papers. The first, *Migrant Workers' Skills Examinations in COOs and the Recognition of Skills by CODs*, examined a skills verification programme underway in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, targeting more than 1.7 million temporary migrant workers and covering more than 1000 occupations. The second paper, *Introducing the Gulf Health Council Program for Expatriate Health Checkups*, examines the impacts of a medical screening process for migrant workers managed by the Gulf Health Council.

The third paper, *Exploring the Existing Practices of Skills Assessment (Nepal and Bangladesh) and Recognition (UAE and Qatar): A Comparative Study*, aimed to provide policy insights for further strengthening skills testing, certification and recognition in intra-Asia labour migration.

### **Research Track 4: Global Governance of Migration: Towards Greater Engagement by Regional Consultative Processes in Global Fora**

Track Four resulted in a single paper, *The Role of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue in Regional and Global Migration Governance*. That paper focused on how the ADD contributes to regional and global policy dialogue on migration by exploring convergent regional approaches to migration issues; by cooperating with other inter-State Consultation Mechanisms on Migration; and by feeding into global processes such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

### [Future of the ADD](#)

In October 2021, at the Sixth Ministerial Consultation, assembled Ministers approved a new set of thematic priorities. The approved thematic priorities are as follows: 1) enabling and

improving access to justice for temporary contractual workers; 2) facilitating and enhancing skills mobility between and among countries of origin and destination in response to changing employment landscapes; 3) addressing COVID-19 challenges; 4) integrating gender into employment promotion policies; 5) fostering international, intra-regional and inter-regional cooperation on migration governance. These priorities will form the basis for cooperation among ADD Member States through the next two-year cycle.

## Conclusions

In meeting Objective 23 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, Member States will continue to rely on state-led and voluntary fora like the Abu Dhabi Dialogue. Regional Consultative Processes play a critical role in the global migration architecture, particularly in helping to establish trust between Member States, a necessary pre-condition for stronger international cooperation and the development of global partnerships. Their thematic priorities are diverse, but their functions often include:

- a) Acting as a space for the identification of financial and technical assistance and aligning that assistance with national priorities, policies, action plans and strategies
- b) Enabling international and regional cooperation through the development of cooperation frameworks, innovative partnerships and the involvement of relevant stakeholders, while upholding national ownership and shared responsibility
- c) Ensuring the involvement of local authorities in the identification of needs and opportunities for international cooperation, to maximise the effectiveness and impact of international development cooperation
- d) Assisting States, as well as international financial institutions, the private sector and international organisations in mobilising technical, financial and human resources to strengthen their capacities to realise their commitments under the Global Compact
- e) Convening bilateral, regional or multilateral, mutually beneficial, tailored and transparent partnerships that address the challenges and opportunities presented by international migration

As underlined by the ADD's thematic and research priorities, the role of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue to date has principally been focused on points b), d) and e) of the above. However, as highlighted in the introduction, the Chair and Secretariat have been invited by ADD Ministers to identify options for organising a multi-year programme of activities focused on national efforts to implement the Global Compact. In developing this programme, discussion of the extent to which the ADD can also play a role in addressing points a) and c) will be critical. The outcomes will be reported back to the next IMRF.