

Brief

Abu Dhabi Dialogue – Ministerial Consultation on Overseas Employment and Contractual Labour for Countries of Origin and Destination in Asia

Background

1. At the request of several Asian governments, the first Ministerial Consultation for Asian Labour Origin Countries was held in April 2003 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Ten Asian labour countries of origin participated, namely, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. These countries made several recommendations for enhancing the management of overseas employment and agreed to a follow-up programme that paved the way for the second round of Ministerial Consultations held in Manila, the Philippines, in September 2004, in which Afghanistan participated as an observer. These Ministerial Consultations became known as the “Colombo Process.” A third Ministerial Consultation took place in Bali, Indonesia, in September 2005. Afghanistan became a full member on that occasion. The third consultation was greatly enriched by the active participation of countries of destination as observers, namely delegations from Bahrain, Italy, Kuwait, Malaysia, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.
2. With the attendance of the destination countries, a major objective of the Colombo Process has been advanced, consistent with the recommendations from the Ministerial Consultations in Manila and Bali regarding the critical importance of developing opportunities for dialogue between countries of origin and destination. The idea then emerged of establishing dedicated dialogue between the Asian countries of origin of the Colombo Process and countries from priority regions of destination. The “Abu Dhabi Dialogue” is the first initiative of this type to further contribute to strengthening the management of contractual labour mobility.
3. The United Arab Emirates had taken the groundbreaking step of hosting an inaugural Ministerial Consultation in Abu Dhabi of Asian destination countries with the Colombo Process states on the theme “*Contractual Labour Mobility in Asia: Key Partnerships for Development between Countries of Origin and Destination.*” The meeting was meant to highlight the potential of contractual labour mobility to benefit overseas workers as well as the development of both countries of origin and destination in Asia. This Ministerial Meeting brought together for the first time the Colombo Process states with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, plus Yemen and two additional Asian countries of destination, namely Malaysia and Singapore, in the first meeting of the “Abu Dhabi Dialogue.” The Abu Dhabi Dialogue constituted a milestone in regional cooperation on contractual labour mobility.

Objective

4. The Abu Dhabi Dialogue served as a forum to mobilize new ideas and concrete activities towards development of a comprehensive and practical regional framework for contractual labour mobility in Asia, promoting the welfare and

well-being of workers and the development of origin and destination countries, with the active support of international and regional partners.

Key partnerships

5. The participating states of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue have identified several key partnerships for development. These partnership areas have been selected on the ground that they are subjects of common interest for Asian countries of origin and destination, and would benefit from deeper collaboration between these countries in the form of explicit, action-oriented partnerships.
6. These partnerships are reflected in the Abu Dhabi Declaration adopted by the states participating in the Abu Dhabi Dialogue.

Partnership 1: Enhancing knowledge in the areas of: labour market trends, skills profiles, temporary contractual workers and remittances policies and flows and their interplay with development in the region.

Partnership 2: Building capacity for effective matching of labour demand and supply.

Partnership 3: Preventing illegal recruitment practices and promoting welfare and protection measures for contractual workers, supportive of their well being and preventing their exploitation at origin and destination.

Partnership 4: Developing a framework for a comprehensive approach to managing the entire cycle of temporary contractual mobility that fosters the mutual interests of countries of origin and destination .

7. These partnerships are based on the mutual interests of labour origin and destination countries, with a particular focus on development. They are action-oriented and, in addition to governments, will seek to engage other relevant stakeholders for the implementation of initiatives which will take this partnership forward in a spirit of international dialogue and cooperation.

Participating countries

8. The Abu Dhabi Dialogue is a dialogue between the 11 Colombo Process countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam), and 9 Asian destination countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates and Yemen). The Dialogue therefore takes place amongst governments from several geographical sub-regions in Asia, addressed in this document under the generic term "Asia." These are Western Asia (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen), Southern Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), Eastern Asia (China, Japan, and South Korea), and South-East Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam).

Joint Secretariat

9. The Ministry of Labour of the State of the United Arab Emirates and the International Organization for Migration together comprise the Joint Secretariat.