



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

Recruitment And Mobility Of Migrant Women In The Health Sector In The Abu Dhabi Dialogue Corridors



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Executive Summary

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are experiencing a surge in healthcare demand, leading to a significant reliance on migrant healthcare professionals. Women migrant workers play integral roles across various capacities within the healthcare sector. This report assesses the legal and policy frameworks governing the recruitment and mobility of migrant women in the healthcare sector within the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) countries. Gulf member states such as Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), along with countries of origin such as the Philippines and Thailand, are examined to help formulate gender-responsive practices and informed policy responses.

The research paper aims to bridge knowledge gaps by examining labor laws, recruitment processes, and training opportunities. The study utilizes a desk review and semi-structured interviews, involving key stakeholders in migration and healthcare. Insights were gathered from government officials in GCC countries, as well as relevant authorities in the Philippines and Thailand. The paper identifies good practices, bilateral labor agreements (BLAs), and initiatives that promote ethical recruitment, retention, and upskilling.

The GCC heavily relies on migrant labor, particularly in healthcare, where 75 per cent of physicians and 79 per cent of nurses are expatriates. The demand for healthcare is expected to surge by 240 per cent in the next two decades, creating a need for foreign healthcare professionals. Visionary reforms focus on quality healthcare services, embracing technological advancements. The demand for healthcare workers, particularly nurses, is critical, necessitating efficient recruitment and mobility policies for women migrant workers.

The World Health Organization (WHO) Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel guides ethical recruitment globally. Destination countries, such as the UK and Germany, demonstrate commitment through audits of recruitment agencies and bilateral agreements. Countries of origin, like the Philippines, have protective frameworks, emphasizing legal terms for migrant worker welfare.

The mapping of good practices showed that many countries have established legal frameworks governing the recruitment of migrant healthcare workers, with specific regulations addressing gender equality, skill assessment, and protection of workers' rights. Bilateral Labor Agreements play a crucial role in regulating the recruitment and mobility of healthcare professionals. While most agreements are gender-neutral, only a few explicitly reference women. Recommendations include aligning bilateral agreements with global guidelines and incorporating principles



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from the WHO Global Code of Practice. Successful models, such as the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between Bahrain and the Philippines and the Bilateral Labor Agreement between the UK and Kenya, emphasize equal opportunities, training, and career development for healthcare professionals. Ethical recruitment practices, including accurate information dissemination, eliminating recruitment fees for workers, and government-approved agencies, are crucial for the fair treatment of healthcare professionals, especially women.

The study underscores the importance of fair and ethical treatment, aligning policies with international standards, and acknowledging the multifaceted dynamics of women migrant workers in the evolving healthcare landscape in the GCC. Addressing challenges and optimizing opportunities in the recruitment and participation of women migrant workers in the GCC healthcare sector requires collaborative efforts. The report proposes targeted recommendations for ADD participating governments

and stakeholders, specifically aimed at improving the recruitment, mobility, and well-being of women healthcare professionals.

Key recommendations include:

1. **Mapping Admission Conditions:** Undertake a mapping of admission conditions and rights for healthcare workers from third countries to address the increasing demand in the GCC, considering social and economic impacts.
2. **Sector-Specific Bilateral Labor Agreements:** Develop bilateral agreements that are sector-specific and explicitly reference women healthcare workers, aligning with WHO guidelines and global standards.
3. **Ethical Recruitment Practices:** Enforce regulations and guidelines for ethical recruitment, addressing recruitment fees, and promoting economic development in source countries.
4. **Common Qualification Framework:** Create a common qualification framework through effective bilateral agreements to harmonize occupational frameworks and meet labor market demands.

¹Policy Brief for the Global Policy Advisory Council The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Health Worker Migration, available at:

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/files/content/images/GCC%20and%20HWM%20Policy%20Brief.pdf>

(Last visited June 8, 2023)

²Ibid.



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5. **Skills Recognition and Training Initiatives:** Implement SMPs to enhance skills development and mobility, meeting the anticipated rise in demand for healthcare professionals in the GCC.
6. **Comprehensive Information Services:** Develop accessible information and support services covering the entire migration process to empower women healthcare professionals.
7. **Labor Laws and Regulations:** Enforce labor laws protecting the rights of women healthcare professionals, ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and access to healthcare.
8. **Private Sector Regulation:** Regulate and enforce policies in private healthcare institutions, learning from good practices in the public sector.
9. **Diversity and Inclusion:** Promote diversity and inclusion in the health sector, providing equal opportunities for women healthcare professionals.
10. **Primary Data Collection:** Gather viewpoints and perspectives from migrant women in the healthcare sector to tailor policy responses effectively.