



Addressing Irregular Labour Migration in the GCC

A side Event at the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

***Organized by the Government of Bahrain, the Government of the Philippines
the Migrant Forum in Asia and the International Organization for Migration***

Date and Time: 8 November 2017 10:00-11:00 AM

Venue: Meeting Room – E, UNCC, Bangkok Thailand

Introduction and background

Designing and implementing regular pathways to address irregular labour migration flows can bring benefits to migrant workers and countries of destination and countries of origin. The migrant obviously benefits from not having to live and work in a clandestine manner which leaves him or her vulnerable to exploitation. At the same time, the country of destination benefits by regularized flows of labour migration, gaining tax revenue from regularized recruitment and employment, and gaining access to migrant communities that would otherwise shun interaction with the authorities.

Creating regular pathways and addressing irregularity can take many forms. For example, they can involve adopting principles and guidelines for nationwide regularization campaigns that open a window during which migrants who have been living and working in destination countries for long periods can apply for residence and work permits without facing penalties for their previous irregular status. On the other hand, they can involve specific longer term programmes that provide temporary employment opportunities to address labour market shortages (e.g. seasonal agricultural workers).

An innovative example of the latter is the sponsor-less visa recently implemented by Bahrain as a pilot to address the irregularity of migrant workers while also filling a gap in the labour market. The scheme targets irregular migrant workers currently residing in Bahrain by enabling them to become their own sponsor which gives workers the flexibility to choose his employer. The scheme is intended to overcome some of the challenges that are associated with sponsorship systems that characterise labour migration to the Gulf by allowing migrants to work in jobs that are of a part-time nature and for which a single employer may not be able or willing to sponsor a visa.



Proposed format

This side event will bring together representatives of governments, civil society and UN agencies to discuss the impact of the scheme and how it could be scaled up locally, and replicated regionally.

It will include a 60-minute session, featuring short presentations from a high-level panel, followed by a group discussion and Q&A:

- I. Bahrain's experience in the design and implementation of a sponsor-less visa by Mr. Ausamah Alabsi, Chief Executive Officer of the Labour Market Regulatory Authority, Government of Bahrain
- II. Philippine Government's Proposals for regularization and regular pathways for migration by Mr. Enrico T. Fos, focal person on human rights and migration at the Philippine Permanent Mission to the UN and Other International Organizations in Geneva.
 - I. The challenges workers face in accessing labour market while in an irregular situation and how these can be overcome by Mr. William Gois, Regional Coordinator, Migrant Forum in Asia
 - II. Best practices of regular pathways and regularization of migrant workers by Ms. Lara White, International Organization for Migration
- III. Q&A and discussion

The following questions will frame/guide keynote interventions and discussion:

- What are the benefits of sponsor-less labour migration schemes?
- What are the key challenges faced by employers and workers as well as governments in countries of origin and destination when trying to provide pathways for regular labour migration and regularization for migrant workers?
- What could be the role of the international community to support governments and other stakeholders to promote pathways for regular labour migration?
- Can the Bahrain sponsor-less system evolve from a regularization scheme to a labour migration admission policy? What are the foreseen national and regional implications of this transformation?