Ayat Nashwan and Sadia Khan: Long-Term Residency Policies and the Retention of Healthcare Professionals. A Case Study on the UAE’s Golden Visa Program in the Gulf Context

Long-Term Residency Policies and the Retention of Healthcare Professionals

A Case Study on the UAE's Golden Visa Program in the Gulf Context

Ayat Nashwan, Sadia Khan

Executive Summary

The member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are transitioning toward knowledge-based economies, creating strong demand for skilled professionals, particularly within the healthcare workforce, amid intense global competition. This policy report examines the unique role of the UAE's Golden Visa Program, introduced in 2019 and progressively expanded since then, in influencing healthcare professionals' migration decisions and intentions to remain in the country long-term. This policy report is based on a mixed-methods study that combined an online questionnaire-based survey of 139 healthcare professionals, of whom 45% were Golden Visa holders, followed by 12 in-depth qualitative interviews. Findings show positive links between obtaining Golden Visa status and intentions to stay in the country and confirm the UAE's competitiveness within the GCC. Migration motivations, including career advancement opportunities, competitive compensation, and workplace integration, also played important roles. Participants emphasised self-sponsorship, the 10-year residency, and family sponsorship as key factors supporting the stability of their stay in the UAE, making their mobility easier and allowing for long-term planning. Challenges associated with the current rules governing Golden Visa attribution include administrative delays, salary threshold requirements, and out-of-pocket insurance costs for dependents.

The policy report recommends targeted measures such as automatic eligibility based on experience rather than salary thresholds for long-serving healthcare workers, expanded family benefits, and streamlined administrative processes. These measures are essential for sustaining the UAE's leadership in healthcare workforce attraction and retention and for furthering the broader regional transition towards diversified knowledge-based economies