

Interregional Consultative Migration Dialogues and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue in the GCC-Asia Migration Corridor

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Executive Summary

Over the past half century, the GCC-Asia has become the largest interregional migration corridor in the Global South. However, despite increasing interstate diplomatic engagements and cross-border mobility flows at the interregional level, the GCC host and Asian sending states have yet to fully synchronize their interregional migration policies, directly affecting current and prospective migrants' labor rights and welfare. This GLMM policy brief analyzes the complex roles and contributions of interregional consultative migration dialogues (ICMDs) operating within the GCC-Asia migration corridor. Using the case of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD), I offer two arguments: firstly, the states' positionalities (sending, host) in the interregional migration system influences their direct capacity to effectively facilitate or implement bilateral and multilateral migration reforms. Secondly, existing power asymmetries between GCC host and Asian sending states, combined with competing national interests and strong domestic sovereignty tensions, often impact interregional collaboration processes, thus producing diverging (or converging) outcomes for ADD member states. Overall, this study emphasizes the complex yet understudied roles of ICMDs in regional and global migration governance systems.

Introduction

Labor migration is a crucial component of regional and global migration governance and diplomacy in the Global South, largely governed through either top-down (regional or national government-led) or bottom-up (dialogues, consultative forums, or meetings) approaches (Betts 2011; Newland 2005). Although states have the ability to initiate laws and policies to design and implement bilateral or multilateral migration policies, they contend that the concept of 'global governance' represents a direct intrusion into their national sovereignty and control (Zolberg, 1994; Martin et al., 2006; Newland, 2005; Betts, 2011). In particular, due to host states' strong reluctance to recognize and incorporate global migration governance into domestic law (i.e., concerning irregular immigration within their territories) this top-down approach has, by and large, become an ineffective state mechanism. As a result, many sending and host states have strategically mobilized bottom-up informal interregional consultations on migration dialogues (ICMDs) (i.e., the Abu Dhabi Dialogue and the Colombo Process), engaging in a *non-binding* interregional migration governance system to limit the potential impact of global migration governance (i.e. international labor laws) on their domestic migration processes (see ILO, Hansen, 2010; Harns, 2013; ICMPD, 2016).