

## **Summary/Preliminary Report of the Employers' Conference 2013, Dubai**

### **DRAFT VERSION ONLY**

The Second Employers' Conference organised by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) and the India Centre for Migration (ICM) was held on 27-28<sup>th</sup> October 2013 at Dubai. The Conference was inaugurated by the Honorable Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs (HMOIA), Shri Vayalar Ravi with the keynote address by Mr. Dilip Chenoy, MD & CEO, National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC).

Background notes for all sessions were prepared by ICM staff and given to the Chairs of relevant sessions. The summary report herein below comprises session notes compiled by ICM staff and a full report shall be submitted shortly hereafter.

### **Key Points**

#### **SESSION I: Emigration from India: Initiatives of the Ministry**

**Chair: Shri Lokesh Kumar, Indian Ambassador to the UAE**

The GCC countries have over the years become a promising destination for Indian workers. On an average around 6-7 lakh Indians migrate to the GCC under the ECR category. In 2012, 7.47 lakh emigrants were registered in the Emigration Check Required (ECR) category. India-UAE and India-Saudi Arabia are among the largest migration corridors and around 42.5 % of India's remittances come from the GCC countries. MOIA and its various divisions have an important role to play in the welfare of Indian workers abroad.

#### ***Migration: Trends and Challenges***

***Shri. R.Buhril, Protector General of Emigrants (PGE)***

Protector General of Emigrants, Shri R. Burhil gave an overview of the mandate of the PGE's office and its role in implementing the Emigration Act of 1983. Modes of recruitment vary for ECR and the Emigration Check Not Required (ECNR) categories. Recruitment for ECR workers can be done by registered recruitment agents (RAs), foreign employers (FEs) and project exporters (PEs). A brief overview of the process of emigration clearance and employment of low-skilled workers was also given.

Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar are the top 3 destinations for Indian workers to the GCC region. Some of the problems often faced by workers are violation of contracts, ill-treatment and harassment by employer, poor working conditions, non-payment of wages and retention of passports by employers. The PGE mentioned about the

grievance redressal process and the actions taken by his office against foreign employers for violations under the Emigration Act.

Some of the additional challenges in emigration highlighted by the PGE included illegality of status of emigrants owing to visa overstay, or during transfer between employers (owing to restrictions on mobility of migrant worker) and by the use of paper visas. Unilateral changes made by employer to contractual terms, working conditions, non-fulfillment of contracts and exploitation by employers add to the vulnerabilities of Indian emigrant workers in the GCC countries.

### ***Initiatives of the Ministry***

#### **Shri Iqbal Singh Bains, Joint Secretary (Financial Services & Emigration Policy), MOIA**

Shri Bains presented a snapshot of the various initiatives of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) including social security agreements (SSAs), memoranda of understanding (MoUs) between India and various destination countries. He took the opportunity to highlight the proposed MoU with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on domestic workers, a matter that has recently received the Cabinet approval. Another important enabling provision for Indian migrants abroad is the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF).

The Mahatma Gandhi Pravasi Suraksha Yojana (MGPSY), a key initiative of MOIA to encourage and enable the overseas Indian workers to by giving government contribution to:

- Save for their Return and Resettlement (R&R)
- Save for their old age,
- Obtain a Life Insurance cover against natural death during the period of coverage.

The government's contribution available under the MGPSY is for a period of five years or till the return of subscribed worker back to India, whichever is earlier. A worker who goes to a Gulf country at the age of 30 years and returns at the age of 40 years, would contribute 2000 per annum to the National Pension Scheme and 4000 to the Unit Trust of India under MGPSY. He would get a pension of 1,339 per month; 70,961 at the time of his return; 30,000 on natural death; 75,000 for accidental or permanent death and 37,500 for partial disability. Shri Bains expressed the keen interest of the Ministry to carry forward this fund and therefore invited the employers to also be proactive about the MGPSY. The success of the fund also depends on continual subscription, failing which it becomes ineffective. The need for a savings habit amongst workers for the success of the fund cannot be overemphasized.

MOIA's efforts to facilitate safe, legal and informed migration include initiatives such as the Overseas Workers Resource Centre (OWRC) at New Delhi which provides need-based information to emigrants and their families through a toll free number. The OWRC helpline is available 24x7 in 11 languages. The number of calls received in 2011 were around 40, 000, growing to around 80,000 in 2012 and around 90,000 as of September 2013. Shri Bains mentioned of the top 10 categories of enquiries made at the OWRC namely, related to *inter alia*: authenticity of recruitment agent, procedure to go abroad, visa status, Indian embassy, NRI marriages, emigration clearance etc. He also spoke of the e-Migrate Project and its usefulness for PBBY verifications and emigration verification. He however mentioned that the handshake between immigration check post and the e-Migrate system is pending. Highlighting the advantages of the eMigrate Project, he said that it would help undo various problems encountered in the process of emigration, facilitate electronic and secure interactions between Embassies and MOIA, better grievance handling and data capture and sharing so as to inform policymaking and regulation. Though ambitious, MOIA has targeted December 2013 as the date for trial and going live of the e-Migrate Project.

### ***Issues discussed in the session***

- A question regarding the possibility of linking of all banks for MGPSY, instead of specific banks was raised drawing attention to the difficulties faced by emigrant workers in accessing these banks. Shri Bains clarified that the restrictions of the kinds of banks associated with the scheme is owing to the fact that the three components of the scheme are subject to different regulatory requirements, and hence different service providers. He however pointed out that automatic debit from bank account of the subscriber can be done online. There is also scope for other banks/NGOs to play a facilitative role under the MGPSY.
- On the issue of the loss suffered by employers after incurring high visa fees and return of worker to India after a short period of employment, Shri Lokesh Kumar clarified that these are only isolated cases and happens when the working conditions are not satisfactory. Workers cannot be kept forcibly; especially maids and the concerns of employers need to be balanced with the challenges faced by the workers in going back.
- Some concern was also raised about the high minimum wages set for Indian migrant workers in the UAE, making it difficult for employers to adhere to and affecting the feasibility of projects. Shri Lokesh Kumar however stated that the minimum wage rates had been arrived at two years ago in consultation with local employers to ensure basic wages, savings etc. These are moderate and not too high and employers can give their feedback to the Indian Embassy regarding the same. He stated that he was not aware of any negative feedback having been received from the employers in this regard. Mr. Buhril also added that it is the

responsibility of the Indian government that our people are paid respectable wages. In this regard, embassies were requested to update the wage rates every year.

- Representative from the NRI Affairs, Goa raised the issue concerning the dangers of online job recruitments and information on procedures for compensation for workers dying abroad. In response, Shri Buhril commended the State of Goa for its active involvement in addressing recruitment malpractices and mentioned about the various government officials who need to be informed and intimated about interviews being conducted in India for recruitment of Indian workers. Shri Lokesh Kumar, clarified that details regarding the formalities required for investigation and compensation on death during employment abroad for migrant workers is available on the Indian embassy's website.

## **SESSION II**

### **Labor Markets and Qualification Frameworks**

**Chair: Mr. Hamid Ali Rao, The Ambassador of India to the KSA**

He gave a brief account of historical migration from India tracing back to the pre-colonial time. He mentioned that Indian labour flows to GCC are continuously increasing with an exception to the current year where the numbers have slightly come down. Destination countries in the GCC started demanding more and more skilled people. Therefore, he stated that unless we offer better skills, we will miserably fail in the forthcoming years. For understanding the opportunities and labour market trends, studies on labour markets are necessary.

#### ***Relevance of LMAs in the contemporary migration***

**Dr. Paul Comyn, ILO, New Delhi**

He started by asking three basic questions such as, a) why is LMA unpopular in the current scenario, b) what are the challenges for undertaking LMA studies, and c) what are the key migration issues.

Industries are demanding increasingly high skilled people. Transformation of information should be timely. Employers demand labour in the context of its business environment and workers' skills. Community advice and career guides are also playing increasingly important role.

Key migration issues:

There is limited information and awareness on occupations and skills in demand, wages and terms of employment on offer and supervision. He underlined the importance of the

role of agents and sub-agents in job matching and placement of right people for right jobs. Using internet platform may be useful for information dissemination.

The above problems are further exacerbated by the weak migration management, limited links between origin and destination countries, limited data and information, limited emigration services and lack of standardisation of skills and services. Changing demand for skills, markets, technology, policy regulations, etc will enormously bring in changes in the characteristics of labour migration in the coming years.

The changing labour markets are imposing new challenges and new constraints. There are emerging problems of skills mismatch, discouraging wages and working conditions, business cycles, etc. The stocks and flows of migrants are also changing rapidly. Weaknesses of data, fragmented labour market information, institutional arrangements, limited capacities, etc. would emerge prominently in the forthcoming years.

There are no models available for anticipating skills demand. There is a need for undertaking specific studies, sectoral analyses, econometric analyses, data collection, obtaining industry signals, etc.

Some of the new developments occurring in South Asia region are adoption of National Qualification Frameworks (NQF), increasing capacities and training and strengthening labour marketing analyses. For example, Nepal adopted ISCO 2008, Sri Lanka adopted Pre Departure Orientation Training (PDOT), Bangladesh has strengthened its research capacities, Pakistan has instituted pre-departure and skills training, Afghanistan is focusing on dual skills development for both national and international needs. India is initiating a job portal specifically targeting employment in GCC countries, international certification, National Skills Development Agency, etc.

He also briefed about the ongoing work at ILO on areas such as the Abu Dhabi dialogue, rectifying ILO conventions, research on foreign employment legislations, Kafel system of recruitment and practices, regional models, guidelines for migration services and recognitions of the contribution of returnees.

**Ms. Lara White, IOM, Geneva**

She commented on LMA, Global Economic Symposia, Global Competition for Talent especially from the OECD countries. She highlighted that it is important to discuss the employer's perspective.

Unlike the Indian skilled migration to the OECD countries, GCC countries receive both skilled and low skilled people. Recruitment practices need to be reformed to select right people for right jobs. Ethical recruitment practices, the global code of practice are

becoming more and more important in the discussions. Human rights perspectives are also important and should be respected.

**H.E. Ausamah A. Al Ansi, CEO, Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA), Kingdom of Bahrain**

He appreciated the contribution of Indians not only economically but also socially and culturally. He tried to assess market needs in terms of the demand and supply sides. He admits that there are issues on GCC recruitment, however, assured that they are working to address such issues innovatively. Migration processes and experiences are different in different countries. Gulf has no exception. Take the example of the US, UK, and Korea, they all differ in their concerns and approaches.

Gulf migration has started in the 1970 with the oil boom. We at the GCC are reacting to the markets and not driving it. If we look at the changes in the Indian economy, skills development, etc., we understand we have to be more competitive than before to attract the best of the talent from India. It is only possible if our economy is doing well.

Europe is ageing. Indian workers may well prefer EU to the Gulf. These things are going to affect the GCC countries and reduce its attractiveness. Therefore, Bahrain is trying to make migration experience better for migrants. Unfortunately governments of the sending and receiving countries find it difficult to arrive at a consensus.

Debt system exploits the entire cycle of migration. Migration and employment costs should come to zero. We cannot enforce because these costs are associated with the middlemen in India. There are a chain of middlemen who already have exploited the migrants before they reach this place. We cannot be solely responsible for this.

We understand the limitations of the Kafala system and are constantly trying to reduce its adverse impact on the migrants. Bahrain allows free movement of migrants within the country by allowing change in employers. We can improve the services that are available within the country.

Most of the origin countries approach is reactionary. We need to be pro-active to make a significant impact. We need to work closer as sending and receiving countries and setting an achievable target.

The benefits of circular migration will never accrue if migrants are indebted. This legacy is forced on us by the agents and middlemen in India. Unless we chose to act pro-actively, everything will be reactionary.

**Q & A**

**Q1. How to explain the emerging labour markets in the context of 'nitaqat'?**

Ans. Responding to the question, the Ambassador of KSA mentioned that there has been an increase in the net inflow of Indian migrants to KSA after the 'nitaqat' law has been introduced. The new law may cause problem to workers' out of status. Free visas will not be possible any more. However, the economy of KSA is booming, so we can expect more demand for labour in the future. The contracts signed in India have no validity as per the local law in KSA.

**Q 2. Can you tell us more about the LMRA whether its assessments are done across the skills spectrum, outreach to employers and regularity? Also what according to you are the ingredients for success in labour market assessment?**

Ans. H. E. Mr. Absi responded by saying that the LMRA in Bahrain produces very rich data which is unfortunately unutilised. The data is ridiculously rich and is complemented with administrative data. We have access to information on business flows, copy of contracts, wages paid etc. The LMRA data is not readily available and there has to be direct web-based access. Doing an LMA is an uphill battle because nobody likes to be regulated and chaotic markets are preferred.

**Q 3. Where do we stand on the movement of people at WTO negotiations?**

Ans. Ms. Lara White, IOM

Migration dialogues are on in the SAARC region. It is moving away from unilateralism to bilateralism. Skilled migrants may stay within the continent rather than going to other continents if right policy is put in place in the region.

**Q 3. What is the response of other GCC countries.**

Ans. H.E. Absi.

Other GCC countries look upon the Kingdom of Bahrain for understanding how the new policies fared in Bahrain so as to follow the suit.

## **SESSION III**

### **Skill Development Initiatives in India**

#### **Session 3**

The session discussed the importance of harmonizing skill development initiatives in India and a specific case study of a state government effort in facilitating overseas employment. The session was chaired by **Mr. Shikar Aggarwal, Joint Secretary & DG, DGET, Ministry of Labour and Employment**. He spoke about how through more than 10,000 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) the government is attempting to skill its

population and combat unemployment. However inspite of these massive efforts, lack of skills and capacity is a major issue facing the nation.

One of the main reasons for this is the information asymmetry that exists. There exist no effective methods by which these ITIs could talk to the industry to understand their requirement. Hence the courses and curriculum are often outdated resulting in a skill mismatch between what the student has to offer and what the industry needs.

He urged the various companies and the recruiting agents to help the Ministry of Labour to understand the training needs clearly. This would help in projecting the demand and also to tailor-make the around 130 courses that ITIs are currently offering according to the needs of the industry. Various companies need to form groups and estimate their aggregate manpower requirement and communicate the same to the Ministry of Labour.

**Dr K V Swamy, GM, OMCAP** presented on the challenges in skilling and certification from the perspective of the state governments. Andhra Pradesh is one of the few states that has a state government run recruiting agency – OMCAP (Overseas Manpower Company Andhra Pradesh Limited) to safeguard overseas job aspirants from exploitation by unauthorized and unscrupulous placement agencies.

He began his presentation with the recommendations that were made in the Employers' Conference held in 2011. In this background, he said that there has been a consistent effort by the Overseas Manpower Company in AP to understand the skill gap and upgrade the skills of the job aspirants. OMCAP has devised new schemes like FLY-1000, in this regard. Under this scheme the costs of training, testing and certification will be met by Government of Andhra Pradesh and the recruitment support would be provided by OMCAP by forming tie-ups with foreign employers.

OMCAP also is trying to understand the needs of the industry and conduct the requisite training to place its candidates in various trades overseas. He also highlighted the efforts by the government in providing pre-departure orientation to the migrants.

**Mr Dilip Chenoy, MD & CEO, NSDC**, presented on the importance of harmonizing the skill development initiatives in India. In the near future, India will be the largest individual contributor to the global demographic transition. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that India will surpass China as the world's largest population by 2025, with a large proportion of its population in the working age category. The BCG-CII study estimates this at 57 million. A 2011 International Monetary Fund Working Paper found that substantial portion of the growth experienced by India since the 1980s is attributable to the country's age structure and changing demographics.

On the other end of the spectrum there is a huge dearth of talent and need for manpower. In the EU alone, between 2012 and 2025 it is estimated that around 106 to

114 million jobs would be created. GCC Deloitte had predicted that UAE and Saudi Arabia would have over 100,000 jobs. This is where the demographic dividend of countries like India needs to be capitalized.

The NSDC was set up as part of a national skill development mission to fulfill the growing need in India for skilled manpower across sectors and narrow the existing gap between the demand and supply of skills.

The National Skill Development Corporation India (NSDC) aims to promote skill development by catalyzing the creation of large, quality, for-profit vocational institutions. It provides funding to build scalable, for-profit vocational training initiatives. Its mandate is also to enable support systems such as quality assurance, information systems and train the trainer academies either directly or through partnerships. Key elements of NSDC's underlying philosophy are threefold.

- To encourage private sector to participate in skill development.
- As private sector needs commercially attractive models, NSDC would provide "patient funding" to encourage private sector to enter this space.
- Development of the ecosystem for the skill development space.

Dilip Chenoy concluded by outlining a three point agenda for enhancing cooperation in the skill development arena with the GCC nations

- Importance of creating a platform to share the learning from each other on the best practices in the space.
- Provide inputs to the Sector Skill Councils to ensure that international standards of employment are being met.
- Encouraging GCC-India collaboration on capacity building initiatives in India.

### **Issues Discussed**

- The employers requested the government to constitute a nodal body which could serve as an interface with the industry bodies so that coordination becomes easy. They suggested that till the time a body is constituted the embassy could be an interface.
- A suggestion that came up from the floor is that the curriculum especially for the skilled workers imparted in technical institutes and ITIs in India is outdated and often obsolete. The authorities have to tailor it to international standards and also ensure that it keeps pace with the changing technology.
- Very often in the destination countries there is no standardization regarding the qualification framework. Each company has their own specific requirements. So as a country of origin it would be important to ask the destination countries to setup a sector skill qualification framework so that skill development initiatives in

India could set up certain bench marks for meeting these standards and requirements.

- Another suggestion that came from the floor is to look at the possibility of facilitating a business to business contact for skill identification and training.

## **SESSION IV**

### **Perspective of the Employers in GCC countries**

**Chair: Mr. Yusuffali M.A. MD, EMKE LuLu Group**

***Construction Sector***, presentation by **Mr. Akbar Khan, Executive Director, Emirates Trading Agency (ETA) Group**

Mr. Akbar Khan gave an organizational overview of his company and highlighted the large majority of Indian workers in employment with his company (nearly 55%). The company has a preference for Indian workers owing to their skills. While Indian workers make a significant contribution in the UAE economy there are certain requirements they need to meet with for being considered for employment in the construction sector. They need to be mentally and medically fit.

He mentioned some of the important challenges faced by emigrant workers in the UAE. These include challenges of being part of a multicultural environment (less than 1% UAE nationals), high salary expectations coupled with false promises during recruitment, home sickness, abuse and violations by employers, extreme weather conditions, unhealthy habits, high pressure to meet skills standards and lack of counseling. There are also challenges faced by employers such as in the case of limited visas available for Indian workers, shortages in availability of skilled workers and inadequate training facilities in India. To offset the gaps in training facilities, ETA has started training centres in India.

Mr. Khan recommended at least a one-day session of pre-departure orientation for intending migrants from India so as to suitably equip them for the conditions in the Gulf. The Indian embassy officials need to be more accessible. He suggested that the social security net envisaged for migrant workers need to be expanded possibly 10 times over to be meaningful for the worker.

***Hospitality Sector***, presentation by **Mr. Kulwant Singh, Lama Group**

Established in 1997, the Lama Group estimates that the tourist industry in the UAE is larger than the recorded estimates given that a number of Indian tourists tend to stay with their relatives. He expressed the desire for more Indian staff to better understand the needs of Indian tourists coming to the Gulf.

Shri Kulwant Singh mentioned about some of the UAE initiatives that have helped in the working conditions in the tourism sector. These include the freedom of mobility in the labour market, work restricted to a maximum of 9 hours and payment of overtime. He stressed the need for a right-based approach given the multinational nature of the industry. Some of the challenges highlighted by him were the difficult working conditions involving long hours and continuous periods of standing, repeated movements, time pressures, the need to always please the customer and violence and harassment from employers, colleagues and customers. The quick turnover of workers, with many wanting to take up short-term employment in the Gulf for gaining foreign work experience is also a challenge for employers.

***Healthcare Sector***, presentation by **Shri Ravindra Rai, Vice President, HR & Personnel, NMC Healthcare**

NMC has a staff of 3,500 staff and runs hospitals and day care centres. The GCC healthcare sector relies heavily on expatriate professionals with 75% & 79% of them working as doctors and nurses in the GCC countries. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have the highest percentage of expatriate healthcare staff.

He pointed out that healthcare demand and spending is rising sharply in the UAE. There are various drivers for healthcare demand in the UAE. Improved technology influences the volume of demand and impacts efficiencies and demand burden on supply. These include demography, ageing and related unique health risks and economic growth also influences patient behavior and healthcare. Availability of health insurance will also affect the usage of health service. In Saudi, Kuwait and Oman health insurance is compulsory.

The demand for ICU nurses, neonatal and labour nurses has gone up. There is a great demand for specialty nurses but they are not easily available from India. Shri Ravindra Rai suggested that possibly the Government of India could be more involved in helping with the migration of aspiring healthcare workers from India. Some GCC countries have been successful in reducing their dependence on foreign healthcare workers such as in the case of Oman, especially with regard to nurses. Until recently the healthcare sector in the Gulf was dominated by public sector delivery of services but the government is increasingly encouraging private sector engagement in healthcare services.

Shri Rai highlighted various challenges encountered by employers in the healthcare sector. These include emphasis on recruitment of local workers, language barriers, perception that Western educated healthcare staff is better and therefore need better compensation. The lack of internationally accredited universities/qualifications is also a problem. He stated specifically in the context of India that few qualifications have been accredited and recognized by the GCC countries, particularly by regulatory authorities in

Dubai and Abu Dhabi. He emphasised that the experience gained by Indian healthcare workers is far more “hands on” compared to their counterparts in the West and this needs to be “capitalize[d]”.

He concluded his presentation with a suggestion for a long term vision and understanding of the healthcare needs in the Gulf, which in turn will create employment opportunities for Indians. In view of the need for greater employment opportunities, he suggested an appropriate change in India’s emigration policy.

## **SESSION V**

### **Perspectives of the Receiving Countries in the GCC region (part II) – A session with the Indian Ambassadors from the GCC.**

**Chair: Mr. M. K. Lokesh, Indian Ambassador to the UAE**

**Mr. Hamid Ali Rao, Indian Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

Gulf recruits foreign workers when it is unavoidable. Of the 20 million people in KSA, 9 million are foreign workers. Payments are lower. Locals do not perform certain categories of jobs. However, work culture is slowly changing.

Saudisation is being introduced initially in the government employment, later in the private sector. The Nitaqat programme has been very successful from the Saudi point of view. However, we have more Indian migrants now than before the implementation. It has not affected much so far. The law also provides scope for adjustment of the status of migrants.

In the future, however, the number of foreign workers has to come down. Indian workers are preferred in Saudi because they are hardworking and peace loving community. Saudisation may affect unskilled workers, the skilled worker however continue to be in demand due to the booming economy. We have to demonstrate the skills, the workers need to be world class. If there is quality then we can neutralise the Nitaqat effect.

Our objective should be to attract business to India to generate employment for the youth. We should not depend on the world to give us jobs. FDI may be the way out.

**Dr. Mohan Kumar, Indian Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain**

The Gulf labour markets and the economy are in full transition. One should analyse where these economies are heading while considering opportunities for migration. In the future, the world may not depend on the Gulf for oil and energy. US will no longer need oil from Gulf after 10/15 years.

Employers should come together to form a lobby group for lobbying to the GCC governments. Bahrain has the most liberal policy on international migration. Other GCC countries should follow it.

The employers may lobby the following:

- Current regulation without adequate insurance cover is not sustainable. Employers cannot shirk from their responsibilities or impose on another employer.
- In the days to come, employees will choose the employer and not the employer who will select the employee. Therefore, the best employers will have the best workers.

The capacities in the Embassies in the Gulf are limited compared to the embassies in other countries.

#### **J. S. Mukul, Indian Ambassador to Oman**

Indian community is the largest and preferred community in Oman. There are about 650,000 Indians living in Oman. Health is an important area for improvement. The current rate of progress is not up to the mark. He also raised concerns over fake visas, overtime, non-payment of wages, etc.

#### **Mr. Sanjiv Arora, Indian Ambassador to Qatar**

550,000 Indians living in Qatar. The growing demand is not due to the FIFA world cup, as popularly perceived.

#### **Panel Discussion on Emerging Challenges in Emigration of Manpower to the GCC countries.**

**Mr Omar Shariff, Group HR Manager, Abu Dhabi Cooperative Society & Spar Middle East** initiated the discussion by highlighting the fact that since the previous Employers Conference held in Hyderabad in 2011 nothing much has changed. He went to the extent of even questioning the objective of conducting an Employers' Conference.

Mr. Shariff in this context also spoke about the fact that India as a country needs to change its high handed attitude while dealing with foreign employers. He also mentioned that this is so different from how other nations approach the employers. He even questioned India's policy approach of neither encouraging nor discouraging emigration, given the fact that India has a huge surplus of labour. Mr Shariff also pondered about the relevance of dividing the workers into the categories of ECR and ECNR. These categorizations are leading to bottlenecks and needs to be re-thought about at the policy level.

MrShariff concluded by saying that India needs to focus on giving pre departure orientation (PDOTs) to its migrant labour as it really helps them in a foreign country. India also needs to better its policy approach not only with a focus on welfare of the migrants but also to attract foreign employers.

**Ms. Lara White, Senior Migration Specialist, IOM** contextualized the discussion on overseas employment in the light of IOM's effort to build a public private partnership for improving the cycle of migration. We live in a rapidly changing world wherein we see increasing incidents of South- South migration as opposed to the traditional South-North migration. It is hence no surprise that UAE and Saudi Arabia are amongst the top 10 destination countries. In this context of increasing flow of migrants to the Global South, IOM works on enhancing the quality of life of the migrants, bettering the gender disparity that exists and also promoting ethical recruitment practices.

Through its global network of more than 440 offices, IOM attempts to bring together governments, civil society and the private sector to establish labour migration programmes and mechanisms. She mentioned that it is important to focus on fostering the synergies between labour migration and development while dealing with international labour migration. For this the governments of both sending and destination countries needs to collaborate in their efforts. In addition, business houses also need to extend their support in promoting legal avenues of labour migration. In this context, Ms White spoke on the new Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council and the California Transparency in Supply Chains Act. These initiatives attempt to ensure that the business houses take active steps to protect the rights of migrant workers and also create an environment to enable ethical recruitment practices. Employers' Conferences such as this provide an ideal platform to bring the various stakeholders together and build synergies.

Ms. White concluded by saying that IOM's policy aims to facilitate the development of policies and programmes that are in the interest of migrants and society, and aim to provide effective protection and assistance to labour migrants and their families.

### **Comments and Suggestion**

- It was pointed out that the ECR category is very essential to safeguard the interest of people who simply do not know what it means to emigrate or what the rules are or their rights and responsibilities in a foreign country. We can look at tweaking the criteria and also look at better implementing the criteria, however all together abolishing the criteria would be a wrong step.
- Another point that was brought forward was that IOM in addition to advocating for migration management in the developing nations it also needs to advocate for

making immigration systems in developed nations transparent. This would go a long way to ensure immigration protection for citizens especially from developing countries.

- The house was informed that Government of India has launched various initiatives like MGPSY (Mahatma Gandhi Pravasi Suraksha Yojana), skill development initiatives, modified the guidelines for the ICWF to help the distressed overseas, since the last employers conference.
- It was observed that there exists an information asymmetry. The government, employers and the worker operates in isolation and a mechanism needs to be evolved to bridge this gap and to allow the free flow of information.
- The employers suggested that the government should attempt grading of the employers based on the volume of recruitment and social commitment. This would not only help the employers in establishing credibility but also for the individual workers to decide on which company to join.

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