



## CONCEPT PAPER

### The Third Asia-EU Dialogue on Labour Migration

*Strengthening Labour Migration Corridors between Asia and EU through Enhanced Migration Governance”*

**15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> October 2014**

**Venue: Cinnamon Grand, Colombo Sri Lanka**

#### Background

1. The Asia – European Union (EU) Dialogue on Labour Migration brings together the 11 members countries of the Colombo Process and the 28 European Union Member States. It aims to gain an improved understanding of the key trends and issues underlying labour markets of both sending countries of Asia and receiving countries of the European Union. It covers the identification of operating common policy concerns of labour migration and will support and promote actions which will facilitate safe and legal migration between the regions, thus facilitating development of both. The Asia-EU dialogue seeks to achieve these expectations by highlighting different national, sub-regional, and regional perspectives within each of the parties of the dialogue and between them, thus offering all stakeholders a better understanding of operating labour issues and, thereby, confronting the challenges faced by them. In this process, examples are drawn from the best practices; lessons are learnt from ongoing research; and operative programmes are critically reviewed to extract insights, all undertaken within the prevailing policy and legislation.

#### The First and Second Asia-EU Dialogue

2. The first Asia-EU Dialogue was convened in Brussels, and met on 29-30 April 2008. It examined the follow-up action of Colombo Process (which was first convened in April 2003), and analysed developments in Asia-EU labour migration. Good practices were shared, challenges in facilitating labour migration from Asia to Europe were identified, gaps in circular migration were located, labour migration was related to developmental needs, and the regulatory framework for recruitment was also examined.
3. The second Asia-EU Dialogue was convened in Brussels and met on 8-9 February 2011. It reviewed the implementation of the four recommendations of the first Asia-EU Dialogue and produced a further set of eighteen recommendations to be implemented in both sending and receiving countries at the national, sub-regional and regional levels. One of the recommendations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Asia-EU Dialogue was that the third dialogue be held in Asia, in the country of the Chair-in-Office of the Colombo Process. This third Asia-EU Dialogue is

due to be held in 2014 on 15-16 October 2014 in Colombo followed by Colombo Process Senior Officials Meeting.

## The Third Asia-EU Dialogue

4. The theme for the third Asia-EU Dialogue will be “*Strengthening Labour Migration Corridors between Asia and EU through Enhanced Migration Governance*”. This dialogue is funded by the European Union.
5. The Colombo Process Member States are countries of origin of labour migrants of various skill levels. The primary markets for their employment have been the Middle East, mainly concentrating on the low-skilled segments (dominated by low-skilled domestic workers), with a small percentage of semi-skilled and skilled migrant workers. Skilled migrants tend to find employment in the developed countries of Europe and America. Lower skilled migrant workers are vulnerable, having low bargaining power in negotiating their working conditions with the employer. This has led to irregular migration and trafficking for labour and other types of exploitation, debt bondage, violation of labour rights and an overall erosion of the integrity of migration programmes. It is, therefore, necessary to change focus from treating migrant workers as commodities to dealing with them as humans.
6. At the same time, despite continuing recession or slow recovery coupled with notable levels of unemployment in some Member States, the European Union continues to experience labour shortages in various occupations and skill levels. Strengthened collaboration with the countries of origin, including those in Asia, is needed to improve the governance of inter-regional labour migration and to develop effective labour matching mechanisms to link more closely migration to labour market needs, while also supporting socio-economic integration of migrant workers and wider social cohesion.

## Objectives:

7. The objective of the third Asia-EU Dialogue is to strengthen labour migration corridors between Asia-EU through enhanced migration governance.
  - a. Review the implementation of the recommendations of the second Asia-EU Dialogue;
  - b. Share experiences, challenges and good practices in the implementation of the recommendations of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Asia-EU dialogues;
  - c. Discuss potentials and challenges in the labour markets in EU countries focusing on semi-skilled and skilled categories.
  - d. Enhancing the employability of Asian skilled labour and professionals in the EU market. The participants will discuss resources and capacities of Asian countries for labour migration to European labour market. Furthermore, the dialogue will cover initiatives and programmes which seek to upgrade and certify skills, including the workings of labour market information system, facilitation of migrant employment abroad, language/cultural orientation.
  - e. Find regional priorities in order to strengthen labour migration corridors between Asia and EU countries through breakout session. This will lead to possible consideration for activities in skill development programmes to mitigate pressures to illegally enter the EU labour market, thus finding avenues for labour employment within Asia itself; and
  - f. Consider recommendations on developing managed labour migration into EU, to fill labour demand niches which cannot be met within EU.

## Participants

8. The third Asia-EU Dialogue will invite the following representatives from Asia, EU and European countries:
  - a. The third Asia-EU Dialogue will invite Colombo Process countries as well as EU Member States.
  - b. All eleven Colombo Process countries will be invited to participate: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.
  - c. All twenty-eight EU countries will be invited
  - d. Considering the recent initiatives of the Global Forum on Migration and Development and the Swiss Development Cooperation's (SDC) projects on "Mainstreaming Migration into Development," Switzerland also will be invited with other nations of EU.
  - e. Any other European countries that are engaged in labour migration with countries in Asia.