

**Philippine State and Its Absconding Domestic Populations:  
Structural Constraints, Coping Strategies in An Authoritarian State of Qatar**

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**Summary**

This paper examines how and why sending states manage and govern absconding migrant populations in the host country. Applying the unique survey and qualitative interviews in Qatar, we identified the following conclusions. First, despite the structural legal, institutional, and political constraints, the Philippine state has continuously developed both formal and informal strategic coping strategies and mechanism to rebalance the embedded power asymmetry in the host country. Second, while the high volume of absconding domestic cases has imposed institutional and budgetary constraints on the Philippine bureaucracy, the state, however, regained and secured legitimacy and control over its migrant diaspora populations, while exerting its ‘capacity to rule’ within the sector by implementing administrative regulations beyond the official mandate to curb labor malpractices. The state has also utilized both social and diplomatic relations and mechanisms to strengthen its access, power, and legitimate control, given the embedded legal constraints in the host country. Third and most importantly, absconding is not only a costly governance issue, but also produces a “lose-lose-lose” outcome for all stakeholders (i.e. receiving/sending states, employers, brokers, and migrants and their families”). Thus, the sending and receiving states have

the same policy incentives: to limit the rate of absconding due to direct and indirect cost.

In addition, the following recommendations have also been identified help ameliorate the absconding domestic cases' conditions in Qatar and other GCC states. First, sending states like the Philippines in the GCC region need to continuously develop and expand pilot projects like the Post-Arrival Orientation Service program to empower migrant workers and employers about their labor rights and responsibilities in the host country.<sup>1</sup> Second, both sending and receiving states need to develop law enforcing and government bodies to effectively deal with domestic workers' complaints to reduce cases of absconding. In particular, receiving states like Qatar need to properly reform its governing labor laws and include the unique needs of domestic workers, or create special law for domestic workers both in line with ILO Domestic Workers Convention C189. Third and most importantly, sending and receiving states need to facilitate more direct bilateral coordination to critically address labor market issues (including minimum wages, workers' rights and working conditions, and mobility), while simultaneously facilitating knowledge sharing on migration governance practices to eliminate potential legal, institutional, and economic inefficiencies within the GCC domestic work sector in the long run.

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<sup>1</sup> The Philippine state has developed series of legal and policy reforms to curb labor exploitation and abuses faced by Filipina domestic workers in the origin, transit, and destination countries. For example, the government formed the Inter-Agency Council for Trafficking to combat illegal recruitment and human trafficking of domestic workers, and imposed restrictive monitoring in major in airports to detect fake "tourist" migrants, who often migrate as domestic workers.