

## **Does Irregular Migration Status Have Economic Benefits?**

### **The Case of Filipino Undocumented Workers Under the Amnesty Programs in the GCC Countries**

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#### **Summary:**

This paper examines the effects of government amnesty initiatives on the labor market conditions and choices of irregular migrant populations in the GCC countries. Drawing from the core survey (n=100) and in-depth field interviews with irregular Filipino migrant domestic workers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), we examine how and why undocumented Filipino migrants in the UAE deliberately avoid amnesty initiatives. We found that undocumented workers refusal logic stems from the high economic penalties, perceived unemployment and low wages in the origin countries, and other economic factors (i.e. high debt, job insecurity). More importantly, the reportedly improved labor market conditions (wage, working conditions, mobility, etc.) associated with their irregular migration status in the informal economy—which is characterized by free mobility in the GCC labor markets—holds the greatest explanatory factor. On a theoretical level, we concluded that the opportunity cost of participating is more than the opportunity cost of not participating and staying undocumented in the long run. This paper contributes to the broader literature by situating the GCC countries' critical relevance in understanding global amnesty reforms, while simultaneously offering diverse policy and institutional perspectives in managing foreign migrant population in the long run.