



*The Embassy of
The Republic of the Philippines
Bangkok, Thailand*

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The Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines presents its compliments to the Secretariat of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and, with reference to ESCAP Secretariat's Note OES/B/8 dated 05 August 2020, has the honor to transmit the response of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines to the voluntary Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) review on migration (survey), for possible inclusion in the background documentation for the *Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the GCM*, which will be held in Bangkok on 10-12 March 2021.

The Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Secretariat of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific the assurances of its highest consideration.

Bangkok, 30 October 2020



United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Secretariat
Bangkok

Philippines' Submission of the Voluntary GCM Review
For the Asia-Pacific Regional Review of the Implementation of the
Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)

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Being primarily a country of origin, the Philippines is home to over 10 million overseas Filipinos and overseas Filipino workers, dubbed as OFWs. This diaspora of Filipino communities has prompted the country to ensure that Filipino migrants are safe and protected in all stages of migration.

Prior to the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), the Philippines has already put in place institutional efforts in response to the needs of its migrants. Policies, programs, and projects were crafted as the Philippines recognizes the tremendous contribution of our OFWs and Filipino migrants in the development of the country. With the adoption of GCM in 2018, the Philippines has seen a significant improvement in its services to migrants. Various migration-related services of the government, private sector, and civil society have been amplified, streamlined, and further developed to provide an all-encompassing approach throughout the migration process.

The GCM now serves as one of the main frameworks of the Philippines in its efforts for the protection of the rights migrants and promotion of their welfare. It has proven to be valuable framework, even in times of crisis, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when thousands of migrants from all over the world are adversely affected. The Philippines remains steadfast in pursuing its commitments to the GCM for the rights and welfare of its migrants and for the improvement of migration governance in the country and internationally.

Philippines' Submission of the Voluntary GCM Review
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1. Ensuring that migration is voluntary, orderly and regular

GCM Objectives:

- 2 Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin
- 5 Enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration
- 6 Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work
- 12 Strengthen certainty and predictability in migration procedures for appropriate screening, assessment and referral
- 18 Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competencies

a. Please highlight migration levels and trends, including drivers (if possible), and migrant experiences relevant to this cluster of objectives. *The response could make reference to trends in migration; outcomes of migration; or migrant experiences*

- **Overseas migration of Filipinos has been mostly regular and voluntary.** As of December 2019, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) recorded 10,376,773 overseas Filipinos, of which 62.8 percent are documented/permanent migrants, 29.6 percent are documented/temporary migrants, and 7.4 percent are undocumented/irregular migrants.¹
- **Employment is a main driver of international migration.** Overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) continue to renew their work contracts, as evidenced by an increasing number of OFW re-hires in 2015-2019, growing by an average of 3 percent annually.² Further, among international migrants surveyed in 2018, 73 percent had visa to work (68.4% with working visa or permit and 4.4% with seafarer's visa; 19.5% tourist visa; 2.2% immigrant visa; 1.4% student visa; and the rest had other types of visa or permits (e.g. fiancé visa, resident visa) or did not need one).

Meanwhile, of those employed, 15 percent experienced involuntary work arrangements³, with majority reporting that someone else held their identification documents to keep them from leaving; some took up employment not according to the provisions of the work contract or agreed terms; and others experienced restricted communication with family and friends.⁴

¹Based on DFA Report to Congress December 2019

²Based on data from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA)

³Involuntary work arrangements are negative work conditions that are not result of the workers' own actions, and that workers neither expected nor acceded voluntarily. This is based on the 2018 National Migration Survey.

⁴National Migration Survey 2018. <https://psa.gov.ph/content/national-migration-survey>

b. Please highlight the concrete policy, legal, and programmatic actions taken by your government to advance these objectives in recent years (in particular since the adoption of the GCM on 10 December 2018). Examples could include policy reforms undertaken, adoption of new laws, drafting of national-level implementation plans, entering into bilateral/regional agreements, signature/ratification of relevant conventions, and engagement in dialogue processes.

- **The Philippines has been participating in international forums and negotiating with host countries in ensuring decent work for Filipino migrants and creating regular pathways for migration.** Since the consultation and negotiation phases of the GCM, the Philippines has been very vocal in its advocacy to abolish the *Khafala*⁵ system existing mostly in the Middle East region. The following are the key developments in movement to abolish *Khafala* in the context of GCM:
 - On 13 August 2018, the Philippines and the Kingdom of Bahrain signed an agreement wherein both agreed to develop and formulate a standard contract to reflect both countries' efforts to lower recruitment costs, uphold fair and ethical recruitment policies, as well as safeguard conditions that ensure decent work and protect migrant workers against exploitation and abuse. This happened almost a month after the final text of the GCM was adopted during the July and last plenary session of the GCM negotiations at the UN Headquarters in New York. This agreement was on top of the working arrangements with Bahrain for the Philippine support for its flexible visa program that allowed formerly undocumented or those in irregular status to secure work visa and attain regular status in Bahrain.
 - The government of Qatar has started introducing reforms to the *Khafala* system in September 2018. Qatar has also introduced reforms to abolish exit visas for migrant workers by end of 2019. The Philippines, through the DFA, held a series of joint committee meetings with Qatar's Ministry of Labor Administrative Development, Labor and Social Affairs for the better protection of OFWs in Qatar. The Philippines also negotiated for the inclusion of domestic workers sector in its policy of non-requirement of exit visa for departing migrant workers.
 - In March 2020, the Philippines has partnered with UAE to pilot test the Abu Dhabi Dialogue Comprehensive Information and Orientation Program (CIOP) focusing on domestic work and service sectors. The Program will provide the migrant worker with information on their rights and responsibilities and psychologically prepare them on the changes they would encounter in working abroad.
- **Over the last three years, a number of bilateral arrangements were signed to ensure the protection and well-being of OFWs.** As of 2019, the Philippines has signed 52 bilateral labor agreements (BLAs) and five regional agreements.

⁵Under this system, a prospective migrant worker is sponsored by a *Khafeel* (usually the prospective employer) to enter the country and work through providing substantial amount of money (usually to pay for deployment cost charged by the recruitment agency). This allows the *Khafeels* to take advantage and view migrant workers as properties rather than as employees, leading to labor contract violations and abuses.

Of these, five countries (Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and UAE) have BLAs with the Philippines as well as specific agreements for the deployment and protection of domestic countries. Israel has specific agreements with the Philippines for the recruitment and deployment of caregivers and hotel workers through a government-to-government arrangement.

Seven countries have agreements for the deployment of workers through a government-to-government arrangement with the Philippines, as follows: China, Germany, Israel, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Canada (Yukon). Deployments of workers to the other countries where we have pre-existing BLAs are through private recruitment agencies (PRAs).

Meanwhile, regional and international multilateral agreements include those with the ASEAN, Europe, Canada, and the UN. Programmed bilateral labor agreements for review and negotiations in 2020 include those with Morocco, Russia, Thailand, Seychelles, Micronesia, Suriname, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Trinidad and Tobago, Portugal, Canada, Taiwan, Solomon Islands, and Switzerland, as well as Memorandums of Agreements (MOAs)/Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) on labor cooperation with Seychelles, Micronesia, and Turkey.

- **Mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competencies were pursued.** The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) Onsite Assessment Program provides free onsite assessment and certification in the host country of the OFW. This is to empower OFWs by upgrading their skills from vulnerable jobs to decent ones and provide better employment and income opportunities. The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) signed a memorandum of agreement with TESDA in May 2019 to collaborate in assisting OFWs and their families to avail services and benefits provided by TESDA.

Similarly, the *Sa Pinas Ikaw ang Ma'am/Sir* (literally: *In the Philippines, you're the Madam/Sir*) program of the National Reintegration Center for OFWs (NRCO) continues to provide OFW teachers with the opportunity to return to the Philippines and take entry level teacher positions under the Department of Education. Through the program, a total of 1,106 teaching positions were awarded to qualified OFWs over the last three years.

c. What are the main gaps identified and challenges faced in addressing these objectives? *These gaps and challenges may include challenges at national, regional and global levels; capacity challenges; data needs; financing and others.*

- **Challenges in safety and regularization are faced.** At the global level, the main challenges are restriction in regularization pathways or avenues to convert status of migrants once they are in the host country. At the national level, the Philippines is grappling with the presence of illegal recruitment schemes and inadequate information sharing to facilitate assistance to OFs. On the latter, issues on funding, systems compatibility, and privacy concerns are some of the other challenges.

d. Please share some of the results of these actions, effective solutions, best practices and lessons learned by your Government in implementing these objectives.

- **The government is working with host countries to expand avenues for regularization of qualified undocumented OFs.** The Philippines has partnered with Bahrain in the issuance of a “flexible visa,” a work and residency permit valid for two years and renewable indefinitely. This visa was first made available to low-skilled, skilled, and professional migrants, and was later expanded to household service workers (HSWs). For HSWs, the passport application fees were waived and liberalized the requirements for expedite issuance of Philippine passports to qualified beneficiaries. Financial assistance for the payment of the flexible visa until its first renewal was also provided to enable HSWs to save money from the first month of their regular work. Since its launch in 2018, Bahrain’s flexible visa program has regularized approximately 1,000 Filipino migrant workers, mostly HSWs in irregular status.

In Malaysia, around 14,200 undocumented Filipinos were provided with Philippine passports that paved way for their successful application for regular status through the Philippine Embassy Special Consular Missions which started in April 2019.

2. Protecting migrants through rights-based border governance measures

GCM Objectives:

- 4 Ensure that all migrants have proof of legal identity and adequate documentation
- 8 Save lives and establish coordinated international efforts on missing migrants
- 9 Strengthen the transnational response to smuggling of migrants
- 10 Prevent, combat and eradicate trafficking in persons in the context of international migration
- 11 Manage borders in an integrated, secure and coordinated manner
- 13 Use migration detention only as a measure of last resort and work towards alternatives
- 21 Cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration

- a. **Please highlight migration levels and trends, including drivers (if possible), and migrant experiences relevant to this cluster of objectives.** *The response could make reference to trends in migration; outcomes of migration; or migrant experiences.*

- **The number of foreign nationals working in the Philippines increased significantly, mainly due to the proliferation of the Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators (POGOs).** The number of Alien Employment Permits (AEPs)⁶ issued by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) peaked in 2019 at 158,710, almost four times its level in 2016 after the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR) started regulating the operations of the POGO through Executive Order 13 series of 2016. Majority (91.3 percent or 143,056) of all AEPs issued in 2019 was for workers in the POGO industry. Of these AEPs, 111,500 (80%) were for Chinese citizens, 4,000 (2.9%) were for Japanese and 3,600 were for Koreans (2.6%) citizens. In 2020, the number of AEPs issued declined to 73,640 mainly due to the community

⁶An AEP is one of the permits and with corresponding visas issued to foreign nationals seeking employment in the country after a determination of the non-availability of a person in the Philippines who is competent, able and willing at the time of application to perform the services for which the alien is desired.

quarantine implemented in line with the pandemic. Of the AEPs issued in 2020, 85 percent (62,196) were issued for POGO workers.

b. Please highlight the concrete policy, legal, and programmatic actions taken by your government to advance these objectives in recent years (in particular since the adoption of the GCM on 10 December 2018). *Examples could include policy reforms undertaken, adoption of new laws, drafting of national-level implementation plans, entering into bilateral/ regional agreements, signature/ratification of relevant conventions, engagement in dialogue processes.*

- **For international immigrants to the Philippines, the government continues to ease registration processes for foreign nationals and improve legal migration processes.** On 01 May 2019, the DOLE, Department of Justice (DOJ), Bureau of Immigration (BI) and Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) issued Joint Guidelines on the Issuance of Work and Employment Permits to Foreign Nationals to clarify and harmonize existing regulations on the issuance of appropriate permits to all foreign nationals who intend to work, perform specific activities and/or render services in the Philippines, whether in the context of an employment arrangement or otherwise.

Further, to harmonize the regulations and policy guidelines governing the issuance of the authorities, permits and visas to foreign nationals intending to work in the Philippines, the DOJ, DFA, DOLE, BIR, Department of Finance (DOF), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Philippine Regulatory Commission (PRC), and National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) issued Joint Memorandum Circular on the Rules and Procedures Governing Foreign Nationals Intending to Work in the Philippines on 11 July 2019.

Additionally, the BI launched the text (SMS) messaging scheme for foreign nationals applying for their Alien Certificate of Registration Identity Card to facilitate easier delivery of the card. The BI also began stricter enforcement of the Alien Registration Act which requires all registered foreign nationals to report to immigration offices. Such procedures which allow greater access to legal migration contribute to securing the safety of foreign nationals in the country.

- **Anti-trafficking measures have been vigorously enforced and trafficked victims were provided appropriate assistance.** The MOU between the Philippines and the United Arab Emirates on Cooperation in Combating Human Trafficking was signed on 26 September 2019 at the sidelines of the 74th United Nations General Assembly in New York City. Being the first trafficking agreement between the Philippines and a gulf member state, the MOU serves as a framework for cooperation on trafficking issues as it is governed by the countries' commitments to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol).

Further, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) formulated the Recovery and Rehabilitation Programs for Trafficked Persons (RRPTP) which is a holistic package of services involving LGUs that cater to trafficking issues from prevention to rehabilitation. Meanwhile, DSWD's Alternative Parental Care Program for Children in Need of Special Protection (CNSP) especially the undocumented minors facilitate the birth registration/report of birth of these children. Moreover, the DSWD facilitate the return of undocumented minors by providing authorized escorts to prevent the minors from being victims of trafficking.

- **Mechanisms to harmonize and streamline the repatriation and reintegration of overseas Filipinos were instituted.** The Inter-Agency Medical Repatriation Assistance Program (IMRAP) was established in 2017 through a Joint Memorandum Circular to harmonize existing processes and procedures of various government agencies in assisting OFs who need to be repatriated for further medical care and attention. The Department of Health – Migrant Health Unit (DOH-MHU) acts as the central coordinating body for all medical repatriation cases from different referring agencies and maintains the database for medical repatriation.

Recognizing reintegration as a key aspect of the sustainable return of OFWs, the Comprehensive OFW Reintegration Program (CORP), an NRCO-OWWA flagship program, was initiated to strengthen and harmonize the reintegration programs and services provided by various stakeholders. Since its approval, OWWA has been working for its full roll out. The CORP seeks to incorporate gender-responsive reintegration preparedness, initiate reintegration pathways, and harmonize reintegration programs of all government agencies and organizations to ensure a comprehensive approach to reintegration for all OFWs and their families.

The Women Entrepreneurs Reintegrated and Economically Active at Home or Women REACH program by the NRCO, in partnership with Coca Cola Philippines, empowers female OFW returnees economically by providing an integrated intervention composed of reintegration preparedness, entrepreneurship training, access to start-up assistance, access to microfinance, and access to a pool of business coaches in starting up alternative livelihood within the country. As of 2019, the program has produced 84 women OFW graduates in Kuwait, 51 women OFW graduates in Region III and NCR, 80 accredited trainers, and 9,000 OFW graduates linked to the TESDA-Coke STAR Program.⁷

The NRCO also continued to provide livelihood assistance for reintegration through maintaining other programs such as the Livelihood Development Assistance Program and the *Balik Pinay! Balik Hanapbuhay!* Program.

c. **What are the main gaps identified and challenges faced in addressing these objectives?** *These gaps and challenges may include challenges at national, regional and global levels; capacity challenges; data needs; financing and others.*

- **Capacity to assist trafficking victims proves to be inadequate.** The Philippines remained in Tier One in the US Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. However, the availability and quality of protection and assistance services for trafficking victims, particularly specialized shelter care, mental health services, access to employment training and job placement, and services for male victims needs improvement. Likewise, technology-enabled platforms for information dissemination on trafficking issues, as well as the capacity of LGUs in anti-trafficking conventions also needs enhancement.

⁷The Sari-Sari Store Training and Access to Resources or STAR Program was developed by the Coca-Cola Company and the TESDA to help women retailers overcome the barriers they face to business success by providing them access to business skills and life skills training; access to business resources and assets; and access to peer mentoring support.

Moreover, although the Philippines fully meets the minimum standard for the elimination of trafficking, it has to increase its capacity to investigate, prosecute, and convict complicit officials and labor traffickers, and support for specialized protection and assistance services for child victims of cyber-facilitated sex trafficking. Community reintegration services, including trauma-informed care, employment training, and job placement for survivors also needs further development.

- **Fund for repatriation assistance was depleted.** One of the major challenges for the DFA was the depletion of its Assistance-to-Nationals (ATN) Fund worth PHP 1 billion (approx USD 20.6 million) due to the unprecedented number of Filipinos who need to be repatriated and distressed OFs in need of assistance due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

d. Please share some of the results of these actions, effective solutions, best practices and lessons learned by your Government in implementing these objectives.

- **Fund augmentation was pursued to accommodate more repatriation of migrants.** In response to the DFA's call for additional funds for repatriation, the *Bayanihan to Recover as One Act – Part II* allocated PHP 820 million (approx. USD 16.9 million) for the ATN Fund. The augmentation in ATN's budget is a proof that despite the country's meager resources, the Philippine government puts forward the safety and protection of migrant workers and ensures that corresponding funds are dedicated to assist millions of Filipinos abroad, especially those who have been affected by the pandemic.
- **Institutional arrangements are put in place.** Under Joint Memorandum Circular on Medical Repatriation spearheaded by DOH, the Social Welfare Attaches at the Philippine Embassies assist in DOH repatriation and refers the case to local DSWD offices to locate and assist the families for the reintegration of the OFs. The Circular stipulates the institutional arrangement on who will do what actions at any given phase of the process— from departure of medical repatriate until point of destination.
- **Justice was served for two Filipino Trafficking victims in Bahrain.** In April 2020, the Philippines successfully prosecuted with Bahrain perpetrators of human trafficking in Bahrain committed in 2019. In particular, five Filipino women, two Filipino men, and a Bahraini policeman were found guilty and sentenced to seven years of jail in Bahrain. The said case highlights the international collaboration of the Philippines and the Kingdom of Bahrain in combating human trafficking and addressing crimes concerning migrants. Additionally, the case was pursued even without a Multilateral Legal Assistance Treaty between the Philippines and Bahrain, this is a first of its kind as the international cooperation in seeking justice for trafficking victims.

3. Supporting the integration of migrants and their contribution to development

GCM Objectives:

- 14 Enhance consular protection, assistance and cooperation throughout the migration cycle
- 15 Provide access to basic services for migrants
- 16 Empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion
- 19 Create conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries

- 20 Promote faster, safer and cheaper transfer of remittances and foster financial inclusion of migrants
- 22 Establish mechanisms for the portability of social security entitlements and earned benefits

a. **Please highlight migration levels and trends, including drivers (if possible), and migrant experiences relevant to this cluster of objectives.** *The response could make reference to trends in migration; outcomes of migration; or migrant experiences.*

- **International remittance costs in percent of amount remitted have steadily declined in the last three years.** In particular, the cost of sending USD200 from the United States to the Philippines has dropped from 5.2 percent in 2017 to 4.1 percent in 2019.⁸ The same trend is seen for the cost of sending money from Singapore (2.3% in 2017 to 2.2% in 2019) and Saudi Arabia (4.9% in 2017 to 4.1% in 2019). The US (40% of total remittances), Singapore (7%) and Saudi (6%) are the top three sources of remittances for the Philippines.
- **There is an increase in the number of returning Filipino scientists.** The number of *Balik* (literally, *Return*) Scientists reached 50 in 2019 from 25 in 2016, 36 in 2017, and 27 in 2018. The *Balik* Scientist Program, which was institutionalized through the passage of the Republic Act (RA) 11035 known as the *Balik* Scientist Act in June 2018, offer enhanced benefits and incentives to encourage experts abroad to come and/or return to the country and share their expertise.

b. **Please highlight the concrete policy, legal, and programmatic actions taken by your government to advance these objectives in recent years (in particular since the adoption of the GCM on 10 December 2018).** *Examples could include policy reforms undertaken, adoption of new laws, drafting of national-level implementation plans, entering into bilateral/ regional agreements, signature/ ratification of relevant conventions, engagement in dialogue processes.*

- **Social Welfare Attaches are now being deployed in Philippine Foreign Service Posts.** The Social Welfare Attaché Act or RA 11299 was signed in 2019, amending RA 8042. The said law mandates the DSWD to deploy social welfare attaches (SWAtts) at Posts to address the needs of OFs in distress. Moreover, the DSWD started its compendium on the good practices done by the SWAtts at the different posts and compilation of success stories of OFWs and their families served.
- **Access to government services was made easier for OFWs.** Five additional One Stop Service Centers for OFWs (OSSCO) and 343 additional OFW Helpdesks launched between 2017 and 2019 have improved the coverage of government services. The use of online systems for processing and registration has made government transactions more convenient for OFWs. Additionally, government transactions that cater to OFWs are simplified through the full roll out of online transactions such as in Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA).

⁸The World Bank, Remittance Prices Worldwide. https://remittanceprices.worldbank.org/en/corridor/United-States/Philippines?order=field_cc1_total_cost_percent_cal&sort=asc#tab-1

This includes e-Registration of OFWs and Seafarers; *Balik Manggagawa* (BM) Online for returning migrant workers; POEA Online Processing System; and further developing Online Direct Hire; Online Continuing Agency Education Program (CAEP); and Online Licensing and Legal Assistance. Further, the government provides online platforms for psychosocial intervention and psychological first aid to bring together trained professionals to address the psychological needs of OFs.

- **Initiatives to engage OFs in the country's development were reinforced.** The *Lingkod sa Kapwa Pilipino* (LINKAPIL) program of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) continues to serve as a channel for the migrant Filipino diaspora to provide assistance to Filipinos at home. It facilitates the transfer of various forms of assistance from Filipinos or other donors overseas to support projects in livelihood/micro-enterprise development, education, health and welfare related activities, small-scale infrastructure as well as technology and skills transfer. The CFO acts as the principal, conduit between overseas Filipinos and the local beneficiaries, providing a coordinative support network among government agencies involved in the processing of donations from abroad. This also enables the establishment of close linkages with non-government agencies and identified beneficiaries at the local level.

From 2016 to 2020, PHP 272.07 million worth of financial and material donations through the LINKAPIL benefited 290,527 individuals from 113 provinces in the Philippines. In 2019 alone, the CFO facilitated PHP 24.93 million of donations to the Philippines. The amount received directly benefited 38,441 individuals from 24 provinces including the greater Manila area.

Diaspora engagement is also continually being expanded through wider localization of the CFO's BaLinkBayan portal. The one-stop online portal re-engages OFs to development-oriented diaspora initiatives in the Philippines and provides businesses and investment opportunities that are linked to automated transactional processes at LGUs.

From 2016-2019, the BaLinkBayan online portal was adopted by 35 cities, municipalities and provinces in the Philippines with 32 localized portals launched. The partnership with local government units were complemented with website management trainings, data gathering workshops, turnover of ICT equipment and marketing and promotional activities.

- **Financial inclusion, literacy, and security of OFWs are likewise enhanced.** In 2019, the Philippines' Central Bank or the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), together with OWWA and BDO Foundation, forged a partnership to improve the financial literacy of OFWs and their families. Dubbed as PiTaKa or "*Pinansyal na Talino at Kaalaman*" (lit. *Financial Intelligence and knowledge*), this program aims to equip OFWs with the ability to better manage their remittances, get out of debt, set aside savings or make prudent investments, in preparation for a better life when they return home to the Philippines. The BSP is developing standard financial education modules which will be included in the mandatory orientations that OFWs and their families are required to attend.

The BSP has completed a financial education module for use in Pre-Departure Orientation Seminars (PDOS) and has presented it to more than 600 trainers from OWWA-accredited PDOS providers. In turn, the module is expected to reach over 2.3 million land-based and sea-based OFWs. Standard modules are also being developed for Post Arrival Orientation Seminars (PAOS) and General Orientations for OFW Families. Meanwhile, the full roll-out of the PiTaKa campaign would mean an outreach of around 10 million Filipinos living and working abroad. This figure does not yet account for their families in the Philippines. Learning modules, which includes opening a bank account, developing saving habits, preparing a financial plan, and

learning investment options, among others, are already available in the BSP website.⁹

In addition, other economic and financial literacy programs catering to overseas Filipinos (OFs) and their families include: information-sharing on existing government-managed schemes, such as the SSS provident fund program, Personal Equity Retirement Account,¹⁰ and the recently launched digital services of the Overseas Filipino Bank (OFBank) among others.

Moreover, the Currency Exchange Facility (CEF) program of the BSP provides liquidity assistance to OFs displaced by emergencies/conflicts in other countries. To date, eight CEFs have been implemented, the latest of which is a multi-currency CEF (Iraqi Dinar, Iranian Rial and Lebanese Pound) which was prompted by the repatriation of OFs affected by the US-Iran conflict (including those in Iraq) and public protests in Lebanon which occurred in late 2019.¹¹

- **The Social Security Act of 2018 (RA 11199).** It covers all Filipinos including migrant workers and mandates entry into social security agreements (SSAs) with destination countries. Since the adoption of the GCM in December 2018, the Philippines entered into SSAs with Sweden and Luxembourg. The Philippines currently has a total of 15 SSAs with various countries. These are Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Quebec, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and UK (including Northern Ireland).¹²

c. What are the main gaps identified and challenges faced in addressing these objectives? *These gaps and challenges may include challenges at national, regional and global levels; capacity challenges; data needs; financing and others.*

- **Presence/coverage of embassies is a challenge in terms of providing access to basic services for OFs.** This is due to geographic location of embassies and limited number of personnel abroad brought by mutual reciprocity rules¹³ which remain as major challenges in ensuring consular protection.
- **Welfare officers at Posts are inadequate.** Challenges to providing assistance and access to basic services to migrants include inadequate number of welfare officers at Philippine Foreign Service Posts to address OFW issues (currently at 1:25,000 ratio of welfare officer to OFWs), inadequate number of personnel in OFW helpdesks, and lack of readiness, inadequate capacity, and active involvement of LGUs in providing reintegration programs for returning OFWs.
- **Rules in host countries lessen investment opportunities.** Strict anti-money laundering (AML) rules of foreign government, especially in Europe, restrict OFs in engaging in investment

⁹Financial Literacy Learning Modules. <http://www.bsp.gov.ph/multimedia/flcvids.asp>

¹⁰Personal Equity Retirement Account. http://www.bsp.gov.ph/downloads/primers/PERA_FAQs.pdf

¹¹The facility was open to returning OFs from 8 January 2020. However, the covering Circular will be published once the COVID-19 community quarantine in various parts of the country is lifted. The CEF will then be available for four months starting from the effectivity date of the said Circular.

¹²Social Security Agreements. <https://www.sss.gov.ph/sss/appmanager/pages.jsp?page=SocSecAgreement>

¹³Mutual reciprocity rules mean that the number of consular officials abroad should be equivalent to the number of their country's personnel in Philippines, however, they do not intend to increase their number of personnel.

opportunities in the Philippines. Likewise, issues on applicable taxes related to transfer of policies hinder investments of OFs in the Philippines. In general, the general lack of pathways to financial inclusion hinders investment opportunities abroad for OFs.

- **Active membership of OFWs is needed to secure social security benefits.** While the coverage of social security benefits has been expanded, challenges remain in pursuing active membership of OFWs through their continuous payment of premium contributions once deployed abroad. The portability of social security and health benefits, which currently requires cooperation with host government, also remains a major challenge.

d. Please share some of the results of these actions, effective solutions, best practices and lessons learned by your Government in implementing these objectives.

- **The government has taken several safeguards to ensure the proper assistance, coordination, and protection of migrants, particularly in their countries of destination.** These measures include the DFA's Assistance to Nationals services,¹⁴ Crisis Management Committee, the Overseas Preparedness and Response Team (OPRT),¹⁵ and the OFW Help Facebook page, among others.

Started in September 2019, the OFW Help Facebook page has over 50,000 followers having a cumulative reach of over 1 million Facebook users in the past few months. The OFW Help Facebook page provides a one-on-one interaction with the next of kins (NOKs) or the migrant workers themselves through the Facebook Messenger app and garners an estimated average of 30 messages daily. It is the direct line of DFA to Filipino migrants, especially during the lockdown when overseas Filipinos cannot go the Embassies or Consulates. The page is operated 24/7 by the DFA Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs (OUMWA) and caters to both regular and undocumented or irregular workers who are in distress and need an emergency response.

Moreover, DOLE International Labour Affairs Bureau (ILAB) established the 24/7 OFW Command Center and hotlines for OFs to seek help and assistance. OWWA 24/7 Operation Center and Hotline 1348 also serve as a call center and communication base during crises and emergencies to connect OFWs and their families.

- **Children of Filipino migrants are also accounted in the efforts of the Philippine government through the Philippine Schools Overseas (PSOs).** As part of its effort to provide quality assistance to overseas Filipinos and their children, the Inter-Agency Committee on Philippine Schools Overseas (IACPSO) conducts an annual Conference of Philippine Schools Overseas. The conference is meant to promote and strengthen the implementation of the Philippine curriculum in Philippine Schools Overseas (PSOs), help ensure a continuing education among Filipino expatriate students and support the unification of the overseas Filipino families, and build the capacities of administrators, teachers, and non-teaching personnel of PSOs.

¹⁴ These services include consular services, legal services, and special Assistance-to-Nationals concerns.

¹⁵The Overseas Preparedness and Response Team (OPRT) is the overall coordinating entity in the crisis management framework in the Philippines as mandated in Executive Order (E.O.) No. 34, s. 2011. DFA consolidates all contingency plans of Foreign Service Posts, which is updated preferably after six (6) months.

As of 2019, there are 41 PSOs operating in ten (10) countries (Bahrain, Timor Leste, Greece, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates) with an estimated 36,000 students enrolled from pre-elementary, elementary and high school levels.

4. Improving value-driven and evidence-based policymaking and public debate, and enhancing cooperation on migration

GCM Objectives:

- 1 Collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies
- 3 Provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration
- 7 Address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration
- 17 Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration
- 23 Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly, and regular migration

a. Please highlight migration levels and trends, including drivers (if possible), and migrant experiences relevant to this cluster of objectives. *The response could make reference to trends in migration; outcomes of migration; or migrant experiences.*

- **The number of OFWs and their status are monitored by various agencies.** Administrative data on Filipino migrants are monitored by the DFA while surveys on Filipino migrants are conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). The CFO also collects and processes emigrant data which include statistical profiles of registered Filipino emigrants, spouses and partners of foreign nationals, Exchange Visitor Program participants (US J-1 visa holders), au pairs, as well as data on diaspora philanthropy. The POEA gathers OFWs' deployment data while the OWWA gathers data on OFW welfare concerns.

Based on the results of the 2019 Survey on Overseas Filipinos (SOF) coordinated by the PSA,¹⁶ 2.2 million OFWs worked abroad between April and September 2019. The SOF further provides data disaggregated by sex, age, occupation, region of origin and country of destination.

Information on money sent to the Philippines also comes from various sources. The PSA's SOF provides remittances data from banks, money transfers, agency or local office, and the rest through door-to-door delivery, friends/co-workers and other means. Meanwhile, the BSP provides remittance data channeled through the banking system, disaggregated based on land or sea based worker. Additionally, BSP's quarterly consumer expectations survey (CES) provides data on the uses of remittances.

b. Please highlight the concrete policy, legal, and programmatic actions taken by your

¹⁶The Survey on Overseas Filipinos (SOF) is a nationwide survey that seeks to gather information on Filipino citizens who left for abroad during the last five years. It is a rider survey to the October round of the Labor Force Survey every year. <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/survey/labor-and-employment/survey-overseas-filipinos>

government to advance these objectives in recent years (in particular since the adoption of the GCM on 10 December 2018). *Examples could include policy reforms undertaken, adoption of new laws, drafting of national-level implementation plans, entering into bilateral/ regional agreements, signature/ ratification of relevant conventions, engagement in dialogue processes.*

- **National survey on migration.** The Philippines' first National Migration Survey was conducted in 2018 to address the need for in-depth and baseline data on mobility of Filipinos, both international and internal. The PSA also publishes its Survey on Overseas Filipinos as a rider to the Labor Force Survey. Further, the Inter-agency Committee on Migration Statistics (IACMS) under the PSA is in charge of harmonization efforts for Philippine migration statistics. Steps have been taken to develop a more comprehensive data on migration and harmonize different migration sources of relevant government agencies.
- **Handbook for OFWs.** Providing sufficient information on migration and development throughout the migration cycle was strengthened through the issuance of the Handbook for OFWs Act of 2018 (RA 11227). The Handbook will serve as a reference for OFWs regarding their rights and responsibilities, government programs, conditions in host countries, costs and benefits of working overseas, and reintegration.
- **Seminars and information campaigns to reduce vulnerabilities.** To equip outgoing Filipino migrants with information to ensure their security and welfare, orientation seminars are conducted during the pre-departure and post-arrival stages of migration. The online and mobile PDOS are being implemented by OWWA and OWWA-accredited PDOS learning centers (for OFWs) and by the CFO (for emigrants) to make services more accessible to the public, especially those in areas that are historically considered as origin provinces of Filipino migrants and emigrants.
- **The government established various communication lines to facilitate assistance to OFs in need.** The DFA launched the OFW Help Facebook page; DOLE-ILAB established the 24/7 OFW Command Center and hotlines for OFs to seek help and assistance. OWWA 24/7 Operation Center and Hotline 1348 serves as a call center and communication base during crises and emergencies to connect OFWs and their families. (Also discussed in 3.d.)
- **The government engaged in various institutional fora aimed at strengthening cooperation and global partnerships related to international migration.** These include the Colombo Process,¹⁷ Abu Dhabi dialogue,¹⁸ Bali-process on trafficking in persons,¹⁹ UNESCAP, and the

¹⁷The Philippines is among the 12 Member States of the Regional Consultative Process on Overseas Employment and Contractual Labour for Countries of Origin in Asia, commonly known as Colombo Process, which aims to provide a forum for Asian labor-sending countries to share experiences, consult issues, optimize development benefits, and review and monitor implementations of its programs and projects.

¹⁸The Abu Dhabi Dialogue is an inter-regional forum on migration covering Asia and the Middle East regions, with 10 Member States that are countries of origin, including the Philippines, and 7 countries of destination. It aims to address the temporary mobility in Asia and to provide a base for understanding issues, practices, and policies on contractual labor for the region.

¹⁹Also an inter-regional forum on migration, the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime covers the regions of Europe, Asia, Americas, and Africa with a total of 45 Member States, including the Philippines.

ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labor,²⁰ among others. Similarly, the Philippines also participated in the regional consultations organized by the Global Forum on International Migration and Development (GFMD) held last June 2020, with participation in the thematic areas of *Leveraging technology to empower migrants* and *Addressing gaps in migrant protection*.

Further, the Philippines sponsors and facilitates the biennial UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions on Trafficking in Women and Girls which strongly urges governments to ensure coherence across laws and measures responding to migration, labor and human trafficking to protect the human rights of migrant women and girls throughout the whole migration cycle, and to provide effective protection against trafficking. The Philippines also sponsors and co-facilitates with Indonesia the biennial UNGA resolution on Violence Against Women Migrant Workers which encourages States to address practical barriers, including language barriers, that women migrant workers may encounter in countries of destination, and provide them with adequate information about their rights, including rights to consular assistance, prior to their departure from their countries of origin. At the UN Human Rights Council, the Philippines is a lead sponsor of the previously annual but now triennial resolution on Trafficking in Persons, Particularly Women and Girls.

c. What are the main gaps identified and challenges faced in addressing these objectives? *These gaps and challenges may include challenges at national, regional and global levels; capacity challenges; data needs; financing and others.*

- **There is lack of consistent data on the number of OFs.** Issues related to identifying the numbers of irregular migrants, as well as different framework utilized by monitoring agencies are the main challenges related to international migration data. The inconsistencies in gathering data on documented and undocumented migrants are due to the various laws and policies in host countries. Although in the Middle East, the number of undocumented workers/irregular migrants is verified since it provides entry visas as registration for work, in Western countries, several Filipinos enter through different kinds of visas and later on shift to a visa authorized for work increasing the possibility of incorrect determination.
- **Gaps in the conduct and content of orientation programs hinder the full realization of their objectives.** Further, limitations and restrictions in the conduct of post-arrival orientation seminars (PAOS) in a number of host countries persist.

While efforts are continuously being enhanced to protect and promote the well-being of OFs, particularly OFWs, differences in terms of politics, culture, ideologies, as well as the physical distance between the Philippines and the host countries impede the wider, effective, and comprehensive provision of information, services, and protection.

d. Please share some of the results of these actions, effective solutions, best practices and lessons learned by your Government in implementing these objectives.

²⁰The ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labor (AFML) is a regional tripartite platform providing an avenue for exchange of discussions between various stakeholders of migration and of issues among migrant workers in South East Asia, in line with the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers.

- **A standardized framework on international migration data was institutionalized.** The PSA Board issued resolutions in 2017 approving and adopting the amended operational framework for counting OFs and the definition of migration for statistical purposes. Initial steps, including review of existing data and methodology, were taken by inter-agencies between 2018 and 2019 to harmonize data gathering. Furthermore, a key milestone in this area is the conduct of the first National Migration Survey (NMS) in 2018 to address the need for in-depth and baseline data on the mobility of Filipinos, both internal and international.
- **Seminars and handbooks are provided for OFWs.** To equip outgoing Filipino migrants with information to ensure their security and welfare, orientation seminars are conducted during the pre-departure and post-arrival stages of migration. A handbook also serves as a reference for OFWs regarding their rights and responsibilities, government programs, conditions in host countries, costs and benefits of working overseas, and reintegration. (Also discussed in 4.b.)

5. What steps has the Government taken to integrate the vision and cross-cutting and interdependent guiding principles of the Global Compact for Migration into its implementation? How was this accomplished?

Guiding Principle	Principle has been integrated (yes or no?)	Explanation
People-centered	Yes	Migrants have always been the center of all our migration-related programs and policies. All these programs and policies are formulated and implemented for the safety and protection of Filipino migrants abroad and foreign nationals in the Philippines.
International cooperation	Yes	The Philippines has been actively participating in international fora and discussions such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), International Dialogue on Migration, Abu Dhabi Dialogue, Colombo Process, Bali Process, ASEAN, and other various bilateral and multilateral processes. Most importantly, PH is a Champion Country of the GCM and is a member of the Steering Group of the Multi-Partnership Trust Fund to Implement the GCM.
National sovereignty	Yes	The Philippines is respectful of the entry and exit regulations of host countries, as much as it upholds its own sovereignty.
Rule of law and due process	Yes	Various policies were enacted and currently implemented to cater to the needs of Filipino migrants. In such case when overseas Filipinos face injustice or have pending

		court cases, they undergo due process with the rights and privileges afforded to them. The Philippines hires lawyers to protect the due process rights of Filipino migrants who find themselves in trouble with host countries' laws.
Sustainable development	Yes	Philippine Development Plan (PDP) Chapter 21, being anchored on GCM commitments, is also in line with the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals which aim to provide sustainable development for the Philippines.
Human rights	Yes	The Philippine Constitution, national and local policies are all anchored on human rights privileges. The Philippines is also a signatory to treaties and conventions upholding human rights.
Gender-responsive	Yes	The Philippines has since implemented policies in promoting equal opportunities for everyone – regardless of sex and gender. For example, one of the objectives of the Comprehensive OFW Reintegration Program seeks to incorporate gender-responsive reintegration preparedness program in all phases of migration, involving both OFWs and their families left behind.
Child-sensitive	Yes	The Philippines has DSWD programs such as the Presidential search for most child-friendly local government unit (LGU). DSWD's Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) also has institutionalized the various programs for children being captured in the advocacy and empowering program embedded in the Presidential search for most child-friendly LGUs as per class/category of the LGUs.
Whole-of-government approach	Yes	All public sector agencies of the Philippines government come hand-in-hand in ensuring protection of migrants. PDP Chapter 21 emphasizes the government's streamlining of its services to migrants.
Whole-of-society approach	Yes	Partners in the private sector and civil society join forces with the Philippine government to protect the rights and welfare of migrants. Their participation has contributed in the crafting of the new PDP Chapter.

6. How is the Global Compact for Migration contributing to realizing the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development? What has your Government done to integrate the implementation of the Global Compact objectives into SDG implementation?

- **International migration and development issues have been mainstreamed in the chapters of the Philippines' medium term development plan, the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2017-2022.** The results of the consultations towards the formulation of the GCM National

Implementation Plan served as inputs to the PDP Midterm Update, in which a separate chapter (Chapter 21) has been dedicated to address the needs of overseas Filipinos and international migrants in the Philippines.

The following migration-related SDGs are incorporated among the strategies in the PDP Chapter 21:

- Goal 3: Health – accessibility of healthcare (including for mental health), universal healthcare, and health insurance among OFs.
- Goal 5: Gender equality – incorporation of a gender-responsive reintegration preparedness program in all phases of migration, involving both OFWs and their families left behind
- Goal 8: Decent work – ethical recruitment and safe working conditions
- Goal 10: Reduce inequality – financial inclusion initiatives; employment and livelihood support for repatriated OFWs
- Goal 11: Sustainable Cities – inclusion of migration issues in Regional Development Plans (RDPs)
- Goal 16: Peaceful Societies – eliminating human trafficking
- Goal 17: Partnerships – GCM commitments; whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach

SDG target 10.C.1, “remittance costs as a proportion of the amount remitted,” is among the SDG indicators being monitored in the PDP Results Matrices.

7. From the Government’s perspective, are there any objectives of the Global Compact for Migration that are of particular importance in the national context? Please name the objectives that the Government has prioritized and explain why.

- The PDP Midterm Update Chapter 21, which is the embodiment of the Philippines’ national implementation of GCM, focuses on four key areas or “subsector outcomes” with regard to International Migration and Development:
 - (1) Overseas Filipinos’ rights protected and well-being improved;
 - (2) Overseas Filipinos’ participation in the country’s development and reintegration in the Philippine society facilitated;
 - (3) Engagement of overseas Filipinos, their families, and other stakeholders in governance strengthened;
 - (4) Rights protected and well-being improved for foreign nationals in the country.
- In line with these four key areas, the Government has prioritized the following GCM objectives as reflected in the PDP Midterm Update:
 - Objective 3: Enhancing the education of overseas Filipinos and other stakeholders on IMD would prepare OFs in their migration.
 - Objective 6: Facilitating fair and ethical recruitment and safeguarding conditions that ensure decent work are being done through strengthening bilateral and regional ties.
 - Objective 7: Enhancing health insurance and social security for OFWs will help address the vulnerabilities of Filipino migrants.

- Objective 12: Toward strengthening certainty and predictability in migration procedures, the Philippine government has continued to improve government services and make government transaction more convenient for OFWs. At the same time, the government seeks to ensure that foreign nationals in the country will be accorded the same basic rights we are seeking for Filipinos abroad.
- Objective 14: The government aims to enhance consular protection and assistance by providing sufficient assistance-to-nationals services.
- Objective 15: Facilitating effective service delivery to OFs will contribute to their improved welfare.
- Objective 19: The Philippine government creates conditions for migrants and diaspora to fully contribute to sustainable development of the country by tapping the knowledge and other resource of OFs.
- Objective 20: Given that the overseas Filipinos send annual remittances equivalent to about 10 percent of Philippine GDP, promoting faster, safer, and cheaper transfer of remittances can encourage more remittances.
- Objective 21: Ensuring the successful socioeconomic reintegration of OFs and their families can enable the government to harness the benefits of migration.
- Objective 22: Ensuring the portability of social insurance will ensure that these benefits can directly respond to the needs of OFs.
- Objective 23: International cooperation and global partnerships are highly significant to ensure that our OFs will be granted basic rights and welfare in their destination countries.

8. From the Government's perspective, how and to what extent have regional plans and strategies incorporated the objectives of the Global Compact for Migration? What are the main achievements, gaps and challenges to the existing regional approaches, strategies and implementation plans?

- **ASEAN Committee on Migrant Workers - Regional Cooperation.** As an ASEAN Member State, the Philippines is part of the ASEAN Committee on Migrant Workers - Regional Cooperation, following the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. With the adoption of GCM in 2018, the ASEAN are currently in the process of enhancing the effective implementation of the GCM under the ASEAN framework.
- **ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labor.** The Philippines is also a member of the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labor (AFML), a regional tripartite platform providing an avenue for exchange of discussions between various stakeholders of migration and of issues among migrant workers in South East Asia. The forum focuses on the two objectives of the GCM, Objective 6: Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work, and Objective 23: Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration.
- **ASEAN Regional Plans.** As of date, ASEAN has at least 18 ongoing regional plans to improve welfare of citizens within ASEAN.²¹

²¹ See Annex A. List of some of the ongoing ASEAN Regional Plans.

9. What methodology was adopted for completing this voluntary GCM review; how was a whole-of-government approach applied through engaging various relevant ministries and other sectors of government; what mechanisms were used to engage civil society and other relevant stakeholders for a whole-of-society approach?

- **Whole-of-government approach.** In order to accomplish this survey, a consultation meeting was conducted between members of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Sub-Committee on International Migration and Development (SCIMD), the inter-government agency body in the Philippines responsible for the Philippines' migration governance. The SCIMD is composed of all government agencies with migration-related programs and policies in its portfolio. Inputs from member government agencies were then collected and consolidated to craft the responses to this survey.
- **Whole-of-society approach.** Multi-stakeholders' consultation was utilized in the crafting of the new PDP chapter on migration, as well as the process of the PDP midterm updating. Every December, engagement of migration stakeholders is being commenced in line with the celebration of the Philippines' Migrant Month. These meetings accommodated the various programs and projects of all stakeholders in improving the migration governance in the country.

Even prior to the adoption of the GCM, the Philippines has already been implementing the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

10. Given the outbreak of COVID-19 which has affected all countries in the region, what challenges has the Government identified in implementation of the Global Compact for migration as part of the COVID-19 response, and what has the Government done to address the specific situation of migrants and their families?

- **With the pandemic and the subsequent global recession, the unprecedented volume of OFs intending to return and those who have already returned have put pressure on the capacities of OF-serving agencies in providing assistance and reintegration programs.** Meanwhile, returning OFWs face bleak employment prospects in the country amidst social distancing measures and economic slowdown. Those who stayed abroad face increased vulnerabilities, aggravated by inadequate social protection.

Government programs to support OFs amidst the pandemic include financial, livelihood assistance and employment assistance, among others. More than 240,000 OFWs were given financial assistance through the DOLE-AKAP. Other assistance provided to OFWs includes food packs, accommodation and travel assistance. To facilitate reintegration of returnees, the government also seeks to provide temporary employment (particularly in government agencies, health sector, and BPOs) or livelihood support. Through TESDA, reskilling/retooling programs for OFWs are being conducted to keep OFWs competitive whether in domestic or international labor markets.

- **DFA repatriation and other assistance to distressed overseas Filipinos.** Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the DFA, in coordination with its various Foreign Service Posts, has been

providing assistance to distressed overseas Filipinos (OFs) through financial and welfare assistance, temporary shelter, and eventual repatriation using its 2020 Assistance-to-Nationals (ATN) Fund. Philippine diplomatic and consular posts abroad are also granted Stand-by Funds, upon request, to be used for the provision of emergency supplies, medicine, food, and accommodation to OFs affected by COVID-19.

DFA also provides assistance for the shipment of remains of OFs who died of COVID-19 (allowed as long as hermetically sealed and subject to cremation within 12 hours upon arrival in the Philippines). If the remains are cremated abroad, DFA processes assistance for the shipment of cremated remains.

In addition, Posts have also been extending legal assistance related to salary claims for displaced OFWs in countries of destination whose contracts were terminated due to the pandemic. These workers were forced to return to the Philippines without receiving their wages, dues, and benefits, making them victims of wage theft.

Since the start of the pandemic, DFA conducts virtual meetings through OFW Help, earlier called OFW Help Live and now branded as OFW Town Hall. The meetings are between Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs Sarah Lou Y. Arriola, Ambassadors from various Posts, and different representatives of the Filipino communities overseas to discuss pressing issues and concerns in their areas. These weekly meetings are a way for the DFA to reach to Filipino migrants and to assure them of the assistance of the government.

As of 20 October 2020, the DFA facilitated the repatriation of a total of 225,454 OFs, composed of 151,114 land-based OFWs/OFs and 74,340 seafarers. Using the 2020 ATN Fund, the DFA has also been mounting chartered flights as necessary in areas with no available flights in order to repatriate nationals, while for those with available commercial flights, the mounting of special commercial repatriation flights.

- **DSWD Psychosocial and Financial Assistance.** The DSWD provided online counseling and provision of Mental Health Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) to returning overseas Filipinos (ROFs). The DSWD Team as member of the One Stop Shop (OSS) at the Airport has deployed Social Workers/staff to welcome the ROFs and attend to their queries especially through the Help Desk put up for the purpose. The social workers/staffs also provide assistance through telephone and emails.

DSWD field offices provide Assistance to Individuals/Families in Crisis Situation (AICS) which include financial, food and non-food items, as well as Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP). Further, OWWA's BALIK PROBINSYA Program, in coordination with DSWD, facilitates the return of OFWs in their home province.

- **Philippine Green Lanes for Seafarers.** Cognizant that seafarers are essential workers even in times of pandemic and other public emergencies, the Philippines established the Green Lane Policy for Seafarers through a Joint Circular of various Philippine Government agencies to facilitate the speedy and safe travel of seafarers, including their safe and swift disembarkation, and crew change during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Joint Circular outlines the minimum standards and procedures which shall be observed by all seafarers, shipping companies (ship operators and ship owners), licensed manning agencies, airlines, and all other similar entities involved in the process of facilitating travel for the purpose of ship crew changes and repatriation. As a member state of the International Maritime Organization and International Labor Organization, the Philippines is also enjoined to implement the protocols of both

organizations, including the IMO-ICAO1-ILO Joint Statement, and Information Note on Maritime Labour Issues and COVID-19.

- **Laws passed in response to COVID-19.** In light of the pandemic, two laws were immediately passed by the Philippine Congress to respond to COVID-19, namely the *Bayanihan* to Heal as One Act (RA 11469) and the *Bayanihan* to Recover as One Act (RA 11494), which enabled migrant-serving agencies to immediately address OFs' needs. The *tagalog* word *Bayanihan* means communal work and refers to the national cooperation of all Filipino citizens in healing and recovering from the effects brought by the pandemic.
- **"No touch, no contact" solutions.** Government agencies with migrant-related services has implemented a "no touch, no contact" policy in providing their services to Filipino migrants. As such, OWWA systems facilitate entry and deployment of OFWs with this policy as part of strategies to prevent COVID transmission. DFA utilizes the OFW Help Facebook Help in reaching to distressed overseas Filipinos requiring assistance. POEA also uses its various online portals in regulating overseas employment during the pandemic. The Overseas Filipino - CFO Online Registration System (OF-CORS) was developed in March 2020 in lieu of the mandatory physical registration of Filipino emigrants, spouses and partners of foreign nationals, au pairs and Exchange Visitors Program participants (J1 visa holders).
- **Assistance to foreign nationals in the Philippines.** Foreign nationals including refugees, stateless and asylum-seekers were accounted in the public health services during the pandemic. An omnibus health guidelines was issued in October 2020, which also account for foreign nationals. The DSWD has accommodated a few foreigners at the DSWD Residential Centers including refugees and asylum seekers. While at the Center, foreign nationals are assisted to look for jobs based on their skills; for those without skills, they are encouraged to join in skills training that the Center conducts together with other residents of the Center. Moreover, the DFA facilitated the repatriation of stranded foreign nationals (10,756 as of October 19) in the Philippines to their home country through repatriation sweeper flights organized by the DOT, DOTr, DFA, and DILG.

ANNEX A

List of some of the ongoing ASEAN Regional Plans

1. Plan of Action to Strengthen the Implementation of the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (2018-2022)
<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/PLAN-OF-ACTION-TO-STRENGTHEN-THE-IMPLEMENTATION-OF-THE-TREATY-ON-THE-SOUTHEAST-ASIA-NUCLEAR-WEAPON-FREE-ZONE-2018-2022.pdf>
2. ASEAN Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalization and Violent Extremism (2018-2025)
<https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/Adopted-ASEAN-PoA-to-Prevent-and-Counter-PCVE.pdf>
3. 11th AMMTC on ASEAN Comprehensive Plan of Action on Counter Terrorism, 20th September 2017
<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/ACPoA-on-CT-Adopted-by-11th-AMMTC.pdf>
4. 7th AMMTC ASEAN Comprehensive Plan of Action on Counter Terrorism, 17th November 2009
<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/ACPoA-on-CT.pdf>
5. ASEAN Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children
<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/APA-FINAL.pdf>
6. ASEAN Plan of Action in Combating Transnational Crime (2016-2025), 20th September 2017
https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/ASEAN-Plan-of-Action-in-Combating-TC_Adopted-by-11th-AMMTC-on-20Sept17.pdf
7. ASEAN Plan of Action to Combat Transnational Crime
<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/ASEAN-Plan-of-Action-to-Combat-Transnational-Crime.pdf>
8. The ASEAN Work Plan on Securing Communities Against Illicit Drugs 2016-2025, Singapore, 20 October 2016
https://asean.org/?static_post=asean-work-plan-securing-communities-illicit-drugs-2016-2025
9. Strategic Action Plans (SAPs) for ASEAN Financial Integration 2016 – 2025
<https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/SAP-for-Financial-Integration-2025-For-publication.pdf>
10. ASEAN Competition Action Plan (ACAP) 2016-2025
<https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/ACAP-Website-23-December-2016.pdf>
11. ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for Consumer Protection (ASAPCP) 2025
<https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/ASAPCP-UPLOADING-11Nov16-Final.pdf>
12. ASEAN Intellectual Property Rights Plan 2016-2025
<https://asean.org/asean-economic-community/sectoral-bodies-under-the-purview-of-aem/intellectual-property/>
13. ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SME Development (SAPSMED 2016-2025)
<https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/3-SAP-SMED-Final.pdf>
14. ASEAN Digital Integration Framework Action Plan (DIFAP) 2019-2025
https://asean.org/storage/2018/02/AECC18-ASEAN-DIFAP_Endorsed.pdf
15. ASEAN Strategic Plan for Culture and Arts 2016-2025
<https://asean.org/storage/2016/10/19.-October-2016-ASEAN-Strategic-Plan-for-Culture-and-Arts-2016-2025.pdf>
16. ASEAN Strategic Plan for Information and Media 2016-2025
<https://asean.org/storage/2016/09/14.-May-2016-ASEAN-Strategic-Plan-for-Information-and-Media-2016-20251.pdf>
17. Regional Framework and Action Plan to Implement the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection (2015)
<https://asean.org/asean-socio-cultural/asean-ministerial-meeting-on-social-welfare-and-development-ammswd/>
18. ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Children (2015)
<https://asean.org/asean-socio-cultural/asean-ministerial-meeting-on-social-welfare-and-development-ammswd/>