

Over 1K Pinoys benefit from Bahrain's flexi visa, gov't aid

By Joyce Ann L. Rocamora December 30, 2020, 7:31 pm

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MANILA – Philippine Ambassador to Bahrain Alfonso Ver reported on Wednesday that a total of 1,075 Filipinos have so far benefited from government assistance and Bahrain's flexi visa system.

The flexi visa is a residence and work permit made available for migrants who have no legal immigration status in Bahrain.

Through the Philippine Embassy in Manama, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) covered the cost of the payment of the visa fee for Filipinos who availed of the program.

"The original (Philippine government) funding for that would only cover lesser, but with the additional relief package during this pandemic, we're able to stretch our budget and add more people that's why we have this very big number," he said in a virtual conference.

Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Sarah Lou Arriola said the flexi visa system is a "cutting edge" program as it addresses the controversial Kafala system by allowing illegal workers to acquire regular immigration status without an employer sponsor.

"And the Philippine government, I think, is the only government that has decided to spend government funds to regularize its citizens," she said.

Arriola said aside from visa fees, the government also shouldered the first two monthly administrative fees of Filipinos who availed of the work permit.

The official expressed her appreciation to the Bahraini government for initiating the program, which she said has since empowered Filipino beneficiaries.

"It has really changed the pathway for migration and we are very thankful because (when we) talked to our people who became flexi visa holders, they said they felt free, they felt that they were empowered and that there is a second chance for migration," she said.

Aside from labor policies, the Philippine government is also working with Bahrain to protect Filipinos from human trafficking, said Presidential Special Envoy to Bahrain Robert Eric Borje.

"As they say, the traffickers will always be very inventive, they will always be innovative, but it falls on the governments of the Philippines and Bahrain to do as much as we can, and we have been achieving success in this area," Borje said.

"Again, prevention, interdiction, and prosecution is the key and it's a continuing thing, it's a commitment through the Global Compact on Migration," he added.

Borje, Arriola, together with other Philippine representatives are in Bahrain for a four-day official visit that will end on Dec. 31. (*PNA*)