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A High-level Forum on a Gender-responsive and Sustainable Recruitment and Reintegration in Philippine Migration Governance

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS



Forging a Gender-Responsive Philippine Migration Governance

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High-level Forum on a Gender-responsive and Sustainable Recruitment and Reintegration in Philippine Migration Governance

UP-CIFAL Philippines & UN Women BRIDGE

Background

The Philippines played an active role in the negotiation and adoption of the historic Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) in 2018. As an advocate for the protection of rights and welfare of migrant workers, the Philippines has long established migration governance frameworks and institutions that serve more than 10 million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and their families. In fact, the Philippine government partnered with the International Organization for Migration, the International Labour Organization, and UN Women for the implementation of the Bridging Recruitment to Reintegration in Migration Governance: Philippines (BRIDGE).

The BRIDGE Project seeks to support the Philippine government in the GCM Thematic Area 4: Facilitating regular migration, decent work and enhancing the positive development effects of human mobility. Specifically, the BRIDGE Project highlights the achievement of GCM Goal 6: Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work and GCM Goal 21: Cooperate in facilitating dignified and sustainable return, readmission and reintegration.

While the migration cycle starts with recruitment and ends with reintegration, migrant experiences are complex and dynamic. At the recruitment stage, migrants are already susceptible to risks such as illegal recruitment, exorbitant challenges, forced and bonded labor, and trafficking in persons, among others. In the reintegration stage, migrants grapple with barely enough savings to return home for good, urging them to re-migrate in search of work opportunities. These challenges to recruitment and reintegration are further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic crisis, and other emerging issues in the 21st century. Women migrants, who comprise more than half of the migrant population, are severely affected by these challenges and the gender-linked risk multipliers.

With this, it is imperative to ensure fair and ethical recruitment as well as facilitate dignified return and sustainable reintegration of migrants, especially women. In doing so, there should be a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach to strengthen institutions' regulation and oversight of recruitment which are gender-responsive, including but not limited to the enforcement of fair and ethical recruitment standards, implementation of grievance mechanisms and dispute resolutions, and provision of migrant welfare and protection services, among others. Likewise, it is imperative that countries of origin and destination adopt policy frameworks for reintegration preparation even before the recruitment stage. Governments and the recruitment industry should forge partnerships for programs on holistic reintegration readiness of migrants and their families where planning starts before migration and continues throughout their migration cycle.

The **High-level Forum on a Gender-responsive and Sustainable Recruitment and Reintegration in Philippine Migration Governance** served as an avenue for Philippine migration practitioners, civil servants, scholars, private sectors and advocates to revisit the country's commitment to the GCM. It also provides an opportunity to explore best practices for the improvement of a gender-responsive migration governance in the country.

Objectives

The high-level forum aimed to:

1. Provide a gender analysis of the current and emerging issues in recruitment and reintegration of migrants including the issues, trends, and challenges faced by different genders;
2. Identify best practices in bridging recruitment to reintegration to address the different needs of men, women, and other different genders in selected migrant sending and migrant receiving countries; and
3. Recommend key action points and areas of cooperation for improving recruitment and reintegration policies in a gender-responsive migration governance.

Methodology

This event is a hybrid activity conducted physically and virtually via Zoom Meeting.

Participants

The forum was attended by 58 participants—32 attended in person while 26 attended virtually. The attendees included ambassadors and representatives from various foreign missions to the Philippines such as Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Japan, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Bangladesh, Sweden, New Zealand, Norway, and Spain. The attendees from national government agencies came from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Migrant Workers, Department of Labor and Employment, and Philippine Commission on Women. The attendees from UN agencies were from the International Organization for Migration and International Labour Organization. There were also representatives from non-government organizations such as Development Action for Women Network (DAWN), Migrant Forum in Asia, AWO International Regional Office Southeast Asia, Advocates and Keepers Organization of OFWs, SPARK! Philippines, and Mindanao

Programme

Date: 14 December 2022 (Wednesday)

Time: 11:30 AM-4:30 PM

Venue: Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila, CCP Complex, Roxas Blvd, Pasay, Metro Manila

Running Time: 5hrs

Host: Catherine Rose Torres, Programme Officer, BRIDGE Programme, UN Women

Time	Activity	Speaker
11:30-1:00 PM	Lunch and Registration	
1:00-1:10 PM (10 mins)	Opening Ceremony	
1:10-1:20 PM (10 mins)	Inaugural Remarks	Hon. Enrique A. Manalo , Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Philippines – <i>pre- recorded video message</i>
1:20-1:30 PM (10 mins)	Message	Mr. Gustavo F. Gonzalez Resident Coordinator, United Nations – <i>pre-recorded video message</i>
1:30-1:45 PM (15 mins)	2022-2028 Recruitment Reforms in Philippine Migration Governance	Hon. Susan Ople Secretary, Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) Philippines through Asec. Jerome A. Alcantara, Assistant Secretary for Land-based Services and concurrently Chief of Staff, Office of the Secretary, DMW – <i>via Zoom</i>
1:45-2:00 PM (15 mins)	The Kafala Reform: Lessons from Bahrain, Commitment to GCM, and its Impact on Women Migrants	Mr. Ausamah Alabsi Founder and Principal Consultant, Mind Map Consultants and former CEO of the Labor Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA), Bahrain – <i>via Zoom</i>
2:00-2:15 PM (15 mins)	Ethical and Sustainable Recruitment and Deployment in Emerging Markets in Europe	Atty. Maria Corina Padilla-Buñag Labor Attaché, Migrant Workers Office in Milan, Italy, Department of Migrant Workers – <i>via Zoom</i>

Time	Activity	Speaker
2:15 - 2:30 PM (15 mins)	The Ethical Recruitment Business Model: Is it Gender-responsive?	Ms. Edwina L. Beech Chairperson, Philippine Association of Service Exporters, Inc. (PASEI) – <i>in-person</i>
2:30-2:45 PM (15 mins)	Gender-responsive Return and Reintegration amid the 21st Century Crises	Atty. Sarah Lou Y. Arriola Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, International Organization for Migration (IOM) – <i>in-person</i>
2:45-3:00 PM (15 mins)	Desmigratif – The Productive Migrant Village: The Indonesian Experience in Migrant Protection and Migration Governance	Mr. Dodo Sudradjat Minister & Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia – <i>in-person</i>
3:00-3:15 PM (15 mins)	Home for Good: How Can the Government Ensure Sustainable Reintegration Especially for Women?	Atty. Kristine Rosary E. Yuzon-Chaves Executive Director, Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) – <i>via Zoom</i>
3:15-3:30 PM (15 mins)	Reintegration through Sustainable Entrepreneurship: Opportunities for Returned Women Migrants in the Local Enterprise	Ms. Mikaela Luisa Carmen R. Teves Executive Director, Samahan ng mga Pilipina para sa Reporma at Kaunalaran, Inc. (Filipinas for Reform and Development: SPARK) – <i>pre-recorded video message</i>
3:30- 3:45 PM (15 mins)	Linking OFW Reintegration to Sustainable Development and Resilience Building	Ms. Almira Diauna Former OFW and returned migrant who now works as a radio anchor and operates an edible fern farm in Aurora province – <i>in-person</i>
3:45-4:00 PM (15 mins)	Message of Gratitude	Dr. Edna Estifania A. Co Professor of Public Administration, Director of UP-CIFAL Philippines, and Associate Fellow of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) – <i>in-person</i>
4:00-4:05 PM (5 mins)	Closing Remarks	Ms. Sarah Knibbs Deputy Regional Director, UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific – <i>pre-recorded video message</i>

Summary of Proceedings

The **High-level Forum on a Gender-responsive and Sustainable Recruitment and Reintegration in Philippine Migration Governance** is a joint forum of United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) Philippines and the University of the Philippines – *Centre International de Formation des Autorités et Leaders* or International Training Centre for Authorities and Leaders Philippines (UP-CIFAL Philippines).

This forum is part of the Bridging Recruitment to Reintegration in Migration Governance: Philippines (BRIDGE) project which seeks to support the Philippine government in the GCM Thematic Area 4: Facilitating regular migration, decent work and enhancing the positive development effects of human mobility. Specifically, the BRIDGE Project highlights the achievement of GCM Goal 6: Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work and GCM Goal 21: Cooperate in facilitating dignified and sustainable return, readmission and reintegration.

BRIDGE is jointly implemented by UN Women, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and International Labour Organization (ILO), with funding support from the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF).



Various foreign missions, national government agencies, recruitment agencies, UN agencies, the civil society organizations (CSOs) gather during the High-level Forum on a Gender-responsive and Sustainable Recruitment and Reintegration in Philippine Migration Governance held on 14 December 2022 in Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila.

Inaugural Remarks

Hon. Enrique A. Manalo, *Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Philippines*

Sec. Enrique A. Manalo situates the Philippine migration phenomenon as it grew 40 years ago. Since then, the Philippines has sent more than five million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in addition to another five million Overseas Filipinos (OFs) which are the permanent migrants including those with dual citizenship. Two decades ago, the Office of the Legal Assistant for Migrant Workers' Affairs has been established by law under the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to protect the rights and welfare of Filipino migrants all over the world. This office is now known as the Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers' Affairs (OUMWA) by which the DFA through its embassies and consulates can extend assistance to Filipinos abroad who are in distressed situation. The DFA, through the Assistance to Nationals (ATN), has primarily facilitated the response to help Filipinos who are accused and convicted of crimes, who are victims of crimes including trafficking, and who are in conflict situations. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the DFA has repatriated thousands of migrants. By virtue of the Republic Act 11641, most of the ATN services will be taken over by the newly created Department of Migrant Workers (DMW).

Nevertheless, **the DFA will continue to strengthen the promotion and the protection of the welfare of Filipinos abroad as it remains an important foreign policy pillar for the department.** The DFA will continue to provide ATN services to Filipino nationals, specifically Filipino permanent migrants, dual citizens, students, trainees, and bona fide tourists. The DFA-OUMWA will remain operational to provide assistance to Filipino nationals overseas and realign its focus on migration policy.



Hon. Enrique A. Manalo, Secretary of the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), delivers a pre-recorded inaugural message for the high-level forum and signifies the Department's continuous commitment to protecting and promoting the rights and welfare of Filipinos overseas.

The DFA shall remain as the leading Philippine agency in migration affairs and shall continue to proactively participate in international dialogues relating to migrants, migrant workers, and other related issues. The DFA will continue its partnership with the UN System such as UN Women, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the International Labour Organization (ILO) through the BRIDGE Project as part of its commitment to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). The DFA acknowledges the complementing role of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) as head of the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) in combatting trafficking in the domestic front.

The DFA recognizes that women migrants are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse as well as unsafe working conditions and migration. As such, the DFA is making improvements in migration data for evidence-based policy action points. Sec. Manalo called for a productive discussion on practicable solutions for a gender-responsive and sustainable recruitment and reintegration.

Message from the United Nations

Mr. Gustavo F. Gonzalez, *Resident Coordinator in the Philippines, United Nations Resident Coordinator Office*

Mr. Gustavo Gonzalez highlights that the Bridging Recruitment to Reintegration in Migration Governance: Philippines (BRIDGE) project as a good example of partnership jointly implemented by UN Women, IOM, and ILO. He recognizes the invaluable contribution of the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) to the resources of the project. Mr. Gonzalez cites that the Philippines has more women migrants than men with 60.2% of migrants are women. Mr. Gonzalez challenges whether this statistic is to be celebrated or worrisome. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that human mobility for employment can be an empowering experience.

He, then, presents that the availability of option for labor migration is worth celebrating especially for women. However, on the other hand, he recognizes that women migrant workers are in precarious working conditions with more than half of the female OFWs engaging in elementary occupations such as domestic work. Furthermore, he cites more than a million of OFWs have returned since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a report by Scalabrini Migration Center, around 59% of returned OFWs intend to re-migrate and around 4% have already been able to do so. These migrant workers are not confronted with new challenges in the transforming labor market particularly with the rapid digitalization and de-carbonizing industries, thus requiring new skills and capabilities. This begs the questions whether migrant workers, especially women migrant workers, are well-equipped and prepared with the changing demands of the labor market. Mr. Gonzalez commends how the BRIDGE project integrates addressing the digital divide by including a digital skills training in its reintegration intervention.



Mr. Gustavo Gonzalez, UN Resident Coordinator to the Philippines, calls for collective efforts in navigating the migration journeys toward the “*matatag, maginhawa, at panatag na buhay*” (translation: strongly rooted, comfortable, and secure life) for Filipinos.

2022-2028 Recruitment Reforms in Philippine Migration Governance

Hon. Susan Ople, *Secretary, Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) Philippines* through **Asec. Jerome A. Alcantara**, *Assistant Secretary for Land-based Services and concurrently Chief of Staff, Office of the Secretary, DMW*

Asec. Jerome Alcantara states that the newly established Department of Migrant Workers or DMW is the primary agency tasked to protect the rights and promote the welfare of the OFWs. The DMW works closely with DFA and other agencies in formulation, planning, coordination, promotion, administration, and implementation of policies and systems for regulating, managing, and monitoring overseas employment and integration of OFWs. The new department is committed to empower migrant workers through digital transformation of the processes and ensure sustained ease of doing business. The DMW will also manage national reintegration programs to enhance the skills, knowledge, and competence of OFWs as well as facilitate their safe and productive reintegration. The DMW establishes that it is the home in government of OFWs and their families. This means that the department envisions itself to commit to protect the rights, promote the welfare, and fulfill the destiny of OFWs as co-architects of national economic development.

The DMW has key result areas which are to the GCM. These key result areas are:

- **Strengthening evidence-based and human rights-based policymaking** which means that international conventions and frameworks serve as basis for crafting national regulations. For example, the development of the new standards of employment contract for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is guided by ILO Conventions including ILO Convention No. 189, Domestic Workers Convention.
- **Sustaining fair and ethical recruitment based on decent work norms and policies and pursuit of anti-illegal recruitment practices.** The DMW has a cluster on licensing

and education which is currently working on strengthening incentives and regulatory mechanisms that will promote fair and ethical recruitment while pursuing actions against illegal recruiters and traffickers.

- **Expanding holistic, rights-based welfare program to empower OFWs and protect their rights.** The DMW is currently working on negotiations to ensure the protection of the rights and welfare of the OFWs.
- **Providing full-cycle national reintegration program for returning OFWs regardless of their documentation status.** The DMW is working with various stakeholders including the BRIDGE project for the development of reintegration framework. In the past, reintegration is only considered upon the return of the OFW. However, presently, there is a growing recognition that reintegration should be considered even at the start of the migration cycle and should be a shared responsibility of various stakeholders.
- **Maintaining effective governance migration capacity through organizational development, judicious resource management, continuous process improvement, and lifelong learning.** The DMW will have its personnel who are involved in verification, accreditation, and other regulatory functions undergo training and orientation on the nature and dynamics of the labor markets so that the processes of the department will be guided by market realities.

Moving forward, the DMW's program strategies include digitalization towards e-migration governance, strategies communications, capacity-development, learning, and growth, as well as partnership-building.

The Kafala Reform: Lessons from Bahrain, Commitment to GCM, and its Impact on Women Migrants

Mr. Ausamah Alabsi, *Founder and Principal Consultant, Mind Map Consultants and former CEO of the Labor Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA), Bahrain*

Mr. Ausamah Alabsi begins his intervention by establishing that in our efforts to do good, we create new realities and these new realities require us to stop, look, and see what we have done along the way. He provides a historical background on “kafala” or sponsorship which has been a major point of discussion in many migrant-sending countries particularly in Asia. He cites that kafala as a system is a migration management system which is neither good nor bad. He recognizes that if properly implemented, kafala can benefit all but if abused, it will result in trafficking of migrants. As such, kafala comes with responsibility from both migrant-sending and migrant-receiving countries. Kafala gave a lot of authority to the employer and such authority could be abused leading to the call for its reform or even abolition. It came with the legal responsibility in the host country, specifically, the employer became responsible for the accommodation, transportation, food, medical insurance, return tickets, and return of mortal remains.

In 2017, Bahrain launched the sponsorless or self-sponsored visa which enabled migrant workers to pursue their preferred employment. This meant that the migrant workers working under sponsorless visa are effectively independent contractors and are not considered as employees. Bahrain offered this to all migrant workers in the country. However, it was initially offered to irregular migrants. Through a partnership with the Philippines' DFA-OUMWA, the sponsorless visa was promoted among the Filipino community in Bahrain. Mr. Alabsi, then, acknowledges that the sponsorless visa removed the responsibility from the employers and shifted it to the migrants themselves. This meant that the migrants have to provide for their own

accommodations, food, and transportation as well as to secure their own legal contract and their own mechanisms to receive and save money. Mr. Alabsi says that, in other words, the migrants have to take over their lives and while, some are able and capable to do so, some are not. While the sponsorless visa has empowered migrant workers, Mr. Alabsi illustrates that many also returned to the kafala system because they were not provided with enough support including legal and social safety nets both by the sending- and receiving-countries. With the new department, Mr. Alabsi calls the Philippine government to continue with its policy of empowering the OFWs and pushing for kafala reform. Mr. Alabsi further begs the question on what happens after kafala and whether the migrant is ready post-kafala. He acknowledges that the Bahrain as well as other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have made significant reforms in their systems. The next step is mapping out the more practicable solutions to ensure that migrant workers are sufficiently empowered and how the governments are able to provide support for the transitioning of migrant workers post-kafala.

Ethical and Sustainable Recruitment and Deployment in Emerging Markets in Europe

Atty. Maria Corina Padilla-Buñag, *Labor Attaché, Migrant Workers Office in Milan, Italy, Department of Migrant Workers*

Atty. Maria Corina Padilla-Buñag establishes that the Middle East has long been a major country of destination for OFWs. However, recently, there has been a transition from Middle East and Asia towards the emerging markets in Europe. The factors that contributed to these transitions include the movement of deployment from Middle East and Asia to Europe, labor shortage in the European Union, the pandemic, the Ukraine crisis, the increasing more protective labor environment in Europe, and the freedom of movement in the EU region. Presently, there are seven Migrant Workers Offices (MWO) in Europe in order to address these emerging migrant needs particularly in new labor market in Hungary, Austria, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia, and Slovakia.

Amid the pandemic, the Philippines has deployed workers in these European countries particularly in industries such as manufacturing, electronics, transport, agriculture, household work, healthcare, construction, hospitality, and tourism. Despite these new emerging markets in Europe, migrant workers remain vulnerable to exploitation. Globally, around 40 million people were victims of modern slavery, 25 million were victims of forced labor, more than half of the victims were women, and almost one in four victims were migrants. Migrant workers in these emerging labor markets remain vulnerable to exploitation because of factors including (1) the seasonal nature of their employment, (2) the nature of low-skilled and low-paid workers, (3) the complicated outsourcing and employment relationships, (4) language and cultural barriers, (5) visas that tie migrant workers to specific employers, (6) lack of effective grievance mechanisms, as well as (7) gaps and inconsistencies within the countries' policies and laws governing labor migration. Therefore, there is a need for ensuring ethical and sustainable recruitment. Ethical recruitment means engaging in work practices that are legal and fair and ensure decent treatment of workforce by meeting or exceeding minimum employment standards. On the other hand, sustainable recruitment means engaging in work practices that meet current needs in a durable and lasting way without compromising the future of the business or industry. Atty. Padilla-Buñag states that these emerging markets in Europe provide a great opportunity for OFWs because they allow for family reunification, permanent residency, and freedom of movement.

With this, it is imperative to establish ethical recruitment practices. First, there should be respect for the rights of migrant workers throughout the labor migration process. Second is to adopt the “employer pays” principle of recruitment which means that OFWs should not be compelled to pay placement fees. Third is to carry out human rights due diligence on business operations and supply chains which entails constant monitoring throughout the employment term of the OFWs through the welfare desk officers required for employers and agencies. Fourth is the respect for migrant workers’ right to freedom of movement which entails that the migrant workers should have possession of their documents such as passports. Fifth is to provide access to remedies. With the newly established DMW, the Philippine Overseas Labor Offices (POLO) will now be referred to as the Migrant Workers Offices (MWO) which are the frontliners at different posts tasked to ensure that the rights and welfare of OFWs are protected. The MWOs are responsible for the verification and accreditation of contracts in accordance with Philippine labor laws and the labor laws of the host countries, employer interviews, company site visits, monitoring compliance of employers and agencies, conciliation and mediation, welfare assistance for distressed OFWs, and reintegration. Labor migration is recognized as a national thrust for economic growth. Moving forward, the DMW aims to (1) have an MWO for each embassy and consulate, (2) conduct regular visits of MWOs to the different jurisdictions, (3) facilitate reforms for country specific standard employment contracts, (4) establish Memorandum of Understanding with host countries of emerging markets, (5) conduct regular briefings with foreign placement agencies and private recruitment agencies, (6) strengthen anti-illegal recruitment and third country surveillance and prosecution, as well as (7) implement the digitalization of verification and other services. Ultimately, Atty. Padilla-Buñag calls for putting the migrants at the center of migration governance.

The Ethical Recruitment Business Model: Is it Gender-responsive?

Ms. Edwina L. Beech, *Chairperson, Philippine Association of Service Exporters, Inc. (PASEI)*

Ms. Edwina Beech prefaces her intervention by establishing the role of the private sector in a gender-equitable recruitment and reintegration. To start off, she recognizes that there are compounding factors in a woman’s career that perpetrate gender inequality from recruitment, to selection, to employment, and up to reintegration. Gender stereotypes affect how employees are recruited, to which occupations they are deployed, how their salaries are negotiated, how their employers or supervisors provide feedback, and how they receive career development opportunities.

With this, it is imperative for the recruitment industry to adopt non-gender-bias recruitment. Ms. Beech enumerates the guidelines for non-gender-bias recruitment which includes (1) avoiding advertisement with gender-coded wordings; (2) accepting as many qualified women as men applying for the job; (3) applying the same evaluation standards for all genders; (4) ensuring that job interviews are likable and competent; (5) evaluating selection criteria to ensure it does not favor any gender; (6) establish the conditions under which anonymous recruitment is most effective; (7) provide concrete and practical feedback; (8) recognize that women are as committed as men in their work; (8) avoid undervaluing women in workplaces; and (10) merit the actions, not the gender.



Ms. Edwina L. Beech, Chairperson of PASEI, discussed the role of the private recruitment agencies and the recruitment industry as a whole to ensuring a gender-equitable recruitment and reintegration of OFWs.

Labor migration involves various risk factors which is why it is important that the migrant workers feel safe and secured through the recruitment agency. As part of the recruitment industry's commitment to ethical recruitment, PASEI is one with government in its fight against illegal recruitment and trafficking in persons. DOLE Administrative Order No. 551 intensifies its fight to curb illegal activities and to further safeguard the Filipino workers from unscrupulous recruiters and syndicates. For private recruitment agencies (PRAs), illegal recruitment does not only impact the migrants but also their industry. Some aspiring OFWs resort to unscrupulous recruiters which frequently offer promising jobs and faster processing of papers. As such, the recruitment industry remains committed to providing assistance to victims of illegal recruitment and exploitation as well as providing prospective migrant workers the appropriate information on the recruitment process. For PASEI, ethical recruitment is following the rules before engaging employment, monitoring OFWs' conditions during employment, and even assisting reintegration process after overseas employment. Ultimately, PASEI ensures that the OFWs and their families are well-taken care of by the government's welfare projects and by other private sector initiatives.

Gender-responsive Return and Reintegration amid the 21st Century Crises

Atty. Sarah Lou Y. Arriola, *Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, International Organization for Migration (IOM)*

Atty. Sarah Lou Arriola shares her experience in attending the first International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) when she was still the Undersecretary of the Philippines' DFA-OUMWA. She discusses that during the time, the government highlighted the GCM Objective 6: Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work. She states that

this issue is particularly bannered by the Philippine government as part of its all-out call for kafala reform.

Atty. Arriola references the IMRF Progress Declaration which states that “safe and dignified return, readmission and sustainable reintegration in full compliance with international human rights law have proven to be difficult and complex in many cases. Conditions for more predictable travel have deteriorated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Limited progress has been made in enhancing bilateral and international cooperation to determine clear and mutually agreed procedures that uphold procedural safeguards and guarantee individual assessments and legal certainty.” Citing the experiences during COVID-19 pandemic, Atty. Arriola shares that the Philippines stopped travel but allowed repatriations. In fact, she states that close to two million Filipinos have been repatriated but the country, just like many origin countries, is not prepared for reintegration. As such, reintegration has been the weakest link.



Atty. Sarah Lou Y. Arriola, Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific of International Organization for Migration (IOM), talked about gender-responsive return and reintegration amid the 21st century crises.

IOM’s sustainable return and reintegration approach looks at the issue holistically, addressing individual, community, and structural levels. It also recognizes that return migration goes beyond the individual and is a whole-of-society endeavor. Likewise, it encourages addressing a variety of needs from economic to social and psychosocial dimensions. Atty. Arriola cites her personal experiences in dealing with migrants at the start of the pandemic. For example, one of the challenges she shares is that migrant workers in the GCC intended to return home while those in Europe, especially the undocumented migrants, showed resistance. Instead of facilitating the return of these migrants, they were instead provided with financial assistance. She also points out that it was easier to reintegrate returnees who already have the business acumen because the government already has funds for reintegration through entrepreneurship. Atty. Arriola cites that in 2019 there were 2.18 million returning Filipino migrants and 56% were women. From April to September 2020, there were 1.77 million returning migrants, 60% of them were women, majority came from the GCC, and were primarily engaged in domestic work and the service

sector and hospitality industry. Some of the difficulties faced by returning migrants include finding jobs, reintegration into society, mismatch between skills acquired abroad and jobs available in the Philippines, and security issues. IOM's COVID-19 Impact Assessment on Returned Overseas Filipino Workers found that female returnees were more likely to be low paid and were less likely to benefit from overall return support than male returnees. The report also stated that, in crisis situations, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, conditions have deteriorated.

The Philippines has played a significant role in pioneering better migration governance being the first country in the world to make the GCM part of the Philippine law. It is also one of the six GCM champion countries in Asia and the Pacific along with Bangladesh, Nepal, Thailand, Indonesia, and Cambodia. It also has a National Action Plan on Fair and Ethical Recruitment with a focus on GCM Objective 6 (Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work) and a National Action Plan on Sustainable, Gender-responsive Return and Reintegration with a focus on GCM Objective 21 (Cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration). In support of Philippines' migration governance, IOM is ready to contribute its expertise, operational capacities, frameworks and tools, perspectives on national gender-responsive and child-sensitive migration policies, and policy recommendations in line with relevant obligations under international law. The regional UN network on migration for Asia and the Pacific will continue to work with the UN country teams in preparation for the second IMRF in 2026 and the regional review in 2024. IOM is also engaged in the Colombo Process in which the Philippines is a member state as well as in the Abu Dhabi Dialogue. IOM also has a reintegration model for South Asian member states which could be utilized for the Philippines as well. More recently, IOM Philippines also has a report on Returning during the Pandemic: How Overseas Filipino Workers Navigated Reintegration in the Philippines.

For better migration governance, IOM recommends to enhance and diversify the availability of pathways for safe, orderly, and regular migration. IOM also recommends to work across all relevant multilateral forums, conclude labor mobility agreements, optimize education opportunities, facilitate access to procedures for family reunification. Atty. Arriola emphasizes that many OFWs, particularly in the GCC, will return upon their retirement and so it is imperative to ensure the portability of their benefits including social protection. She reminds that individual migrant workers have complex needs beyond labor market reintegration, and thus should also address their social and psychosocial needs. Lastly, she calls for a whole-of-government approach which should be extended to reintegration programs and should not be employed only during emergency or crisis situations.

Desmigratif – The Productive Migrant Village: The Indonesian Experience in Migrant Protection and Migration Governance

Mr. Dodo Sudradjat, *Minister & Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia*

Mr. Dodo Sudradjat prefaces his intervention by establishing that the protection of migrant workers is a symbol of the State presence to protect the people, develop national economy, and uphold the dignity of the nation and the people. The State's official philosophical foundation is enshrined in Pancasila or the five *sila*/principles which emphasizes humanity and justice. Mr. Sudradjat cites the Constitution of Indonesia wherein it mandates that the objective of the

statehood is to protect the whole people of Indonesia and the entire homeland, to advance general prosperity and to develop the nation's intellectual life, as well as to contribute to the implementation of a world order based on freedom, lasting peace, and social justice. In line with this, Mr. Sudradjat acknowledges the contribution of international migration to their national economy having been the second largest in the remittance recipient in 2021 at USD 10 million and contributing more than 7% to the State budget.

In this light, the government maintains a strong commitment to international norm and setting in the national legislation. As in the case of Law No. 6 of 2012 on Ratification of International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migration and Members of their Families (CRMW), the Indonesian government demonstrates its commitment to protect, respect, promote, and fulfill the rights as well as meet the welfare of migrant workers and their families. The Indonesian government also has Law No. 18 of 2017 on the Protection of the Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) which is on the legislation of any effort to protect the IMWs and their families in order to ensure the fulfillment of their rights (before, during and after working in legal, economic and social aspects). Mr. Sudradjat also cites GR No. 59 of 2021 on the Implementation of the Protection of IMWs to improve the governance of placement and protection for IMWs. Mr. Sudradjat also adds that this legislation aims to regulate the One-Stop Integrated Service (OSIS) for the placement and protection of IMWs that aims to improve services in a manner that is effective, efficient, transparent, fast, and non-discriminatory.



Mr. Dodo Sudradjat, Minister & Deputy Chief of Mission of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, shared the Indonesian experience on the productive migrant village and migrant protection at the high-level forum jointly conducted by UN Women Philippines and UP-CIFAL Philippines.

In the case of Indonesia, Mr. Sudradjat shares the the challenges and strategic issues faced by IMWs include illegal placement, human trafficking, and exposure to radicalism and terrorist ideologies. They also face employment problems such as unpaid wages, extended working hours, exorbitant charges, contract violation, occupational hazards, and illnesses or health risks. Given these issues, the government employs the principles of IMWs protection which include

integration, equality of rights, recognition of human rights and dignity, democracy, social justice, gender equality and fairness, non-discrimination, anti-human trafficking, transparency, accountability, and sustainability. As per Indonesia's Law No. 18 of 2017, the scope of the IMWs' protection is based on the employment sequence from pre-employment, during employment, and up to post-employment. During pre-employment, the overall activities should provide protection from registration to departure. During employment, the overall activities should provide protection during the time IMWs and their families are abroad. In post-employment, the activities should give protection since IMWs and their family members arrive at debarkation in Indonesia until they return to their place of origin, including continuing services to become productive workers. Furthermore, the scope of protection of IMWs is based on legal, economic, and social issues which involve protection of IMW in accordance to international law, remittance management, education on financial management and entrepreneurship for IMWs and their families, education and job training development, accreditation and certification, social reintegration, protection policy towards women and children, and establishment of protection centres in receiving countries.

Mr. Sudradjat emphasizes the urgent need for the empowerment of IMWs. In doing so, the Indonesian government established Desa Migran Produktif (Desmigratif) or the Productive Migrant Village. Desmigratif is a concept of managing migrant worker village by the government. It serves as a unified and integrated effort by relevant ministries and institutions to empower, protect, and serve migrant workers and their families starting from their villages. Through Desmigratif, the Indonesian government is able to improve services and protection for IMWs or migrant worker applicants in villages that have become migrant worker enclaves. Desmigratif has contributed to establishing a productive Indonesian Migrant Worker community and expanding job opportunities through productive business development and improving the skills of the migrant village. Additionally, Desmigratif establishes a database of IMWs at the village level as well as provides education on safe and procedural migration processes. It further aims to increase the active role of the central government, regional and village governments, communities and all stakeholders in creating productive migrant villages and prosperous IMW families. As such, Desmigratif targets a wide array of stakeholders who are in different stages of migration. These stakeholders include the prospective IMWs, the IMWs, the post-IMWs, and the members of IMW families.

Given this whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, Desmigratif is founded on four pillars which are providing migration service center, developing productive enterprises, fostering a community parenting, and establishing cooperatives and financial institutions. The first pillar is providing a migration service center. This entails that service center is provided in the village's community hall where prospective IMWs will be able to receive labor market information, job guidance, information about working abroad, including their rights and obligations, as well as initial document preparation. The second pillar is developing productive enterprises which is intended to help family members or spouses of migrant workers left behind in the village to develop skills and knowledge of entrepreneurship. In this second pillar, the activities include training for development skills, business mentoring, and marketing assistance. The third pillar is on fostering a community parenting. This pillar is designed to assist single parents of migrant workers left behind to come together to raise their children as a community. The fourth pillar is on establishing cooperatives and financial institutions that aim to strengthen people's productive efforts for the long term and sustainable. With the support of the local government, the village is encouraged to develop and form a business cooperative to maintain and sustain a productive village. Between 2016 to 2022, Indonesia has established a total of 503 Desmigratif spread across various provinces, regencies, districts, and villages in Indonesia and are either under a

government program or in an independent program. Moving forward, Indonesia remains committed to the empowerment of their migrant workers post-IMWs. Indonesia has empowerment programs for post-IMWs which include independent workforce activities, labor intensive activities, and trainings in work training centers.

Home for Good: How Can the Government Ensure Sustainable Reintegration Especially for Women?

Atty. Kristine Rosary E. Yuzon-Chaves, *Executive Director, Philippine Commission on Women (PCW)*

Atty. Kristine Rosary E. Yuzon-Chaves draws the attention to migrant reintegration as the Philippines is challenged by various opportunities and threats in the contemporary times. She explains that returning migrant workers, whether driven by distress and crises or by their personal choice to come home, are in need of assistance which requires political commitments, promotion of institutional services, emergence of opportunities in the local community, inspiration from successful returnees, and the recognition of the value of returnees.

Under the Republic Act 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women (MCW), migrant workers are identified as one of the marginalized sectors who belong to the basic, disadvantaged, or vulnerable groups who are mostly living in poverty and have little or no access to land and other resources, basic social and economic services such as health care, education, water and sanitation, employment and livelihood opportunities, housing security, physical infrastructure and the justice system. The MCW has specific provisions concerning returning women migrant workers. Specifically, Sec. 23 on the Right to Livelihood, Credit, Capital, and Technology articulates that *“the State shall ensure that women are provided with Employment opportunities for returning women migrant workers taking into account their skills and qualifications. Corollarily, the State shall also promote skills and entrepreneurship development of returning women migrant workers.”* Sec. 24 on the Right to Education and Training of the MCW mandates that *“The State shall ensure Women migrant workers have the opportunity to undergo skills training, if they so desire, before taking on a foreign job, and possible retraining upon return to the country.”*

Atty. Yuzon-Chaves argues that there is a need to make reintegration policies and programs work for women in a way that such policies and programs do not undermine women’s agency. In pursuit of sustainable reintegration, it is imperative to ensure that women are not left behind by integrating gender analysis, generating sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics, enabling participation, and cultivating a culture of coordination and collaboration. The first component of a sustainable, gender-responsive reintegration is gender analysis which is significant in informing and improving the policies and programs as well as in ensuring that the differential needs of men and women are addressed. It also takes into consideration the intersectional issues on class, age, ethnicity, and culture among other factors that interact with gender. As an example, Atty. Yuzon-Chaves cites that women experience difficulty sustaining and scaling up their businesses due to the lack of technical skills for entrepreneurship as well as the lack of market analysis, feasibility study, vocational training, entrepreneurial orientation, and understanding of business models. As such, it is imperative to assess the needs, aspirations, skills, and experiences of women returnees prior to providing them with financial support as part of a livelihood project. The second component of a sustainable, gender-responsive reintegration is the generation of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics. Data is a crucial component in carrying out gender analysis for planning, programming, and policy

formulation. The limitations in data on returning migrants, for instance, can hamper a clear and well-defined understanding of differences and can result into policies and interventions that may not be responsive to the particular needs of vulnerable populations, like that of women. The third component is participation which is often missed in the development process of addressing the inequality between women and men. To address this gap, government agencies should take a proactive stance in ensuring that the voices and lived experiences of women migrant workers are duly heard and made central to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of these efforts. Lastly, the fourth component is coordination and collaboration which calls for a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach at the international, national, and local levels. This entails strategically engaging stakeholders and harnessing their capacities for the effectiveness and continuity of reintegration interventions.

Atty. Yuzon-Chaves shares that the newly created Department of Migrant Workers has had a consultation on Full-Cycle National Reintegration Program in which a lot of the discussions were anchored on the principles of gender sensitivity, gender-responsiveness, and attention to vulnerable groups. She expresses that PCW is hopeful the country is on the right track in ensuring that reintegration will work for Filipino migrant women.

Reintegration through Sustainable Entrepreneurship: Opportunities for Returned Women Migrants in the Local Enterprise

Ms. Mikaela Luisa Carmen R. Teves, *Executive Director, Samahan ng mga Pilipina para sa Reperma at Kaunalaran, Inc. (Filipinas for Reform and Development: SPARK)*

Ms. Mikaela Luisa Carmen R. Teves explains that SPARK! Philippines champions Filipino women and girls through education and livelihood programs that highlight gender equality. She emphasizes the on-the-ground experience of SPARK! Philippines in uplifting the lives of Filipinas starting from the *barangay* or community level. Ms. Teves acknowledges that the limited opportunities in the Philippines drive women to work abroad. Likewise, many Filipino women who aspire of working abroad have witnessed the success stories of other OFWs in their communities. They saw how OFWs were able to earn enough to send their children to school and improve their living conditions. Ms. Teves cites the march 2022 Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) report which stated that 1.06 million out of the 1.77 million OFWs are women. Most of these female OFWs are engaged in elementary occupations such as domestic work making them vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking.

Likewise, their children left behind are susceptible to being subjected to sexual, physical, and emotional abuse by those who were supposed to take care of them in the absence of their mother. Many children left behind may have better living conditions with the remittances sent by their parents. However, Ms. Teves points out that the absence of their parents may have an impact to their development. Given the impacts of migration to the OFWs and their families left behind, Ms. Teves highlights the long-standing call for making migration a choice rather than a necessity.

Ms. Teves cites the effort of SPARK! Philippines in which they initiated a community livelihood program amid the COVID-19 pandemic. They worked with women sewers to produce personal protective equipment (PPEs) with the support of the Quezon City government. SPARK! Philippines has sustained this initiative by exploring other products to be part of the venture. Ms. Teves calls for opening possibilities and offering opportunities. Specifically, she recommends supporting women-led micro-, small-, and medium-enterprises (MSMEs), building

cooperatives that are powered by women's skills, and offering training towards financial literacy. She expresses the need to support girls' education towards their brighter future. For those who intend to migrate, Ms. Teves highlights the need to increase their awareness and education as migrant workers. Ultimately, she calls for the advocacy of women's advancement in the society and for partnership towards this common goal.

Linking OFW Reintegration to Sustainable Development and Resilience Building

Ms. Almira Diauna, *Former OFW, returned migrant, and now a farmer and radio announcer*

Three years ago, Ms. Almira Diauna recalls the country's massive lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic which led to her becoming one of the thousands of locally stranded individuals (LSIs). After three months of being stranded, she was able to return to her hometown in Dingalan, Aurora. Ms. Diauna shares how the COVID-19 pandemic changed her course of life and gave her a greater appreciation of her home as reintegrates to her community as a proud and productive farmer.



Almira Diauna, a returned OFW, shared her stories of resilience and reintegration as a radio anchor and operates an edible fern farm in Aurora province.

She shares her experience as an OFW who returned to the Philippines from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia where she worked as a domestic worker. As a returnee, Ms. Diauna reintegrated in her community through the first cultivation project of edible fern. She shares that this project aims to explore the agricultural and entrepreneurial potential of the edible fern, locally known as “*pako*”, which is a neglected and underutilized native species in Aurora province. Ms. Diauna shares that she did not have formal education so she had to do her own research in cultivating her own edible fern farm. In 2018, Ms. Diauna shares that she received a certification from the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) Regional Office as she completed the Entrepreneurial Development Training for OFWs which qualifies her for a loan to start her own

business. However, she states that she did not push through with this program. Rather, she started her career as a radio announcer in Radyo Kaedup 102.9 FM, the only radio station in her hometown, Dingalan, Aurora. Through the radio station and the National Nutrition Council (NNC), Ms. Diauna expresses how she learned about malnutrition and the need to address this issue. She intends to contribute to the solution to malnutrition as a farmer who is able to produce and supply healthy food and to address the food crisis. She shares that the edible fern farm is both a productive business venture and a vital contributor to support government programs on nutrition. As a returned OFW, Ms. Dinauna builds resilience, awareness, and impact in her community as she links her advocacy to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

Message of Gratitude

Dr. Edna Estifania A. Co, *Director of UP-CIFAL Philippines & Associate Fellow of UNITAR*

Dr. Edna Estifania A. Co expresses her gratitude to the key organizers which are the UN Women Philippines, ILO Philippines, IOM Philippines, and the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF). She acknowledges the speakers of the high-level namely UN Resident Coordinator Mr. Gustavo Gonzalez, DFA Sec. Enrique Manalo, DMW Sec. Susan Ople, and UN Women ROAP Deputy Director Ms. Sarah Knibbs. She also extends her appreciation for the presenters who shared their expertise and experience as well as for the attendees who took the time to join the discussion. She also recognizes the efforts of the staff of UP-CIFAL Philippines for putting the event together. She commends the rich and insightful discussions. She expresses how she was compelled to strengthen the integration of the gender lens in the capacity building and research in the promotion of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She pledges that as part of the contribution to the achievement of the SDGs, UP-CIFAL Philippines will continue to live by the SDG principles on ensuring that no one is left behind and reaching the furthest first. Dr. Co cites that women are disproportionately affected by various issues and their experiences vary across geographical locations as well. As such, she calls for a gender-responsive data collection and management for evidence-based program planning and policymaking in migration governance in the regions of the Philippines, across the country, and even in the Asia Pacific region.



Dr. Edna Estifania A. Co delivered the message of gratitude on behalf of UP-CIFAL Philippines and its partner, UN Women Philippines.

Closing Remarks

Ms. Sarah Knibbs, *Regional Director a.i., UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific*

Ms. Sarah Knibbs recalls that, a year ago, the Philippine government has enacted the law establishing the Department of Migrant Workers and, two years ago, the Bridging Recruitment to Reintegration in Migration Governance: Philippines (BRIDGE) project was launched. The BRIDGE is jointly implemented by UN Women, ILO, and IOM with funding support from the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF). Both BRIDGE and DMW will have to take on the challenge in managing labor migration to recuperate from the global disarray brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. As countries ease restrictions, people have ease in mobility and a sense of normalcy is somehow restored. Ms. Knibbs cites the UN Women report titled “Beyond COVID-19: A Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice” which highlighted two challenging factors. First is the care crisis which manifests in the deeply unequal distribution of care work and second is climate crisis which is the environmental destruction in the interest of profit.



Ms. Sarah Knibbs, Regional Director a.i. of UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, delivered a pre-recorded closing message where she poses the interlinked challenges of the care and climate crises.

The care crisis and the climate crisis are interlinked issues reflective of the lived experiences of women and the current state of the planet. Ms. Knibbs points out that how women are treated as free dispensers of care and emotional labor mirrors the way the planet is treated as an inexhaustible source of raw materials and ecosystems. Ms. Knibbs further cites how this echoes how many women migrant workers, especially domestic workers, are treated. She continues to highlight how domestic workers are paid with low wages, have limited social protection, and often experience discrimination based on migration status, gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic conditions, nationality, and age. She emphasizes that domestic workers are often not valued despite caring for the children, elderly, and sick and despite enabling their employers engage in productive activities outside of the household. With the ongoing climate crisis, there

will be an increasing need for care. Ms. Knibbs explains that disasters will result to injuries needing care and damages beyond repair. She adds how new and re-emerging pathogens as well as extreme weather will cause illness. She states that it is expected that much of the care work on these emerging issues will be outsourced to migrant workers. She further expounds that the social and economic vulnerability that comes with disasters and the climate crisis will generate an increasing number of willing workers who are at risk of exploitation and abuse. Ms. Knibbs calls to employ safeguarding mechanisms that will ensure fair and ethical recruitment, guarantee decent work, and facilitate dignified return and sustainable reintegration regardless of their gender. She closes the forum greeting the migrants in celebration of the International Migrants Day.

