

# Global Compact for Migration Review: Youth Consultations

## THE PHILIPPINES Report

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## Introduction

**The Philippines** remains among the leading countries in the world in facilitating high flows of outbound labor-migrants, with over a million each year as part of its national development strategy. In 2019, the country assisted the migration of at least 2.2 million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs).<sup>1</sup> No available hard statistics indicate how many children are left behind by one or two OFW parents, yet some organizations estimate it to be anywhere from 6 to 9 million.

Latest available statistics<sup>2</sup> found that among OFWs, the proportion of females is slightly higher than their male counterparts. The age demographic of females is also considerably younger than males overseas. The minimum age for overseas work is set at 18 years old, with the exception of domestic work at 23, however there exist case-specific exceptions such as Filipino Direct Hires. Notably, **about 7% and 5.4% of young female and male OFWs respectively belonged to the 15 to 24 years age group.** Youth aged 25 to 29 also constitute the second largest age demographic of OFWs, at 20.7%. Domestic work is the main occupation of young migrant workers.

Meanwhile, the country also has a long history of hosting migrants (which include communities of immigrants, irregular migrants, and expatriates).<sup>3</sup> Despite this, outbound migrants overwhelmingly outnumber inbound migrants. In 2019, the net migration rate was set at an estimated -1.8 for every 1000 members of the population.<sup>4</sup>

Affirming its commitment to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, (GCM) the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth (UN MGCY) GCM Team for the Philippines conducted consultations with the following entities: one organization catering to young migrants and survivors of human trafficking, six young migrants, three who identify as third culture kids<sup>5</sup> (TCKs) and five whose parents are employed or have been employed as OFWs, one young professional who has worked in the field of humanitarian response with irregular migrants, and a representative of a youth-led project working for the benefit of OFWs. The consultations highlighted youth perspectives regarding the implementation of four specific objectives of the GCM:

- **Objective 2:** Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin.
- **Objective 15:** Provide access to basic services for migrants.
- **Objective 17:** Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse

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<sup>1</sup> Open Democracy, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020

<sup>3</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Philippines, 2017; Note, distinction between immigrants and expatriates in the country are social definitions.

<sup>4</sup> The World Bank, 2019

<sup>5</sup> Third Culture Kids (TCKs) are those who have been raised in a culture different from the culture of their parents because of their parents' work or religious activities (Espada-Campos, 2016) . In the case of Filipino TCKs, most of them are children of OFWs.

to shape perceptions of migration.

- **Objective 18:** Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications, and competences.

The results from the consultations are summarized in the policy briefs contained in this document.

## Overall Themes and Key Recommendations

In general, Children of OFWs and young OFWs identified two main drivers for outbound migration: the lack of employment opportunities, as well as the mismatch between educational attainment and available opportunities in the country.

Children of OFWs, whose parents have taken an active role in the Filipino communities in their respective host countries, pointed out that incidents of domestic violence and illegal recruitment persist and often become “open secrets,” especially in the case of irregular migrants. One organization, with anti-human trafficking programs for young migrants confirmed that these cases have only been exacerbated by national lockdowns. There have been efforts to mitigate these incidents through community support-systems offered by organizations and alliances overseas.

Young migrants recalled various experiences of racism, microaggressions and negative stereotypes as an issue reinforced by poor media representations of Filipinos overseas. Integration is turning into a privilege for many Filipinos abroad. Meanwhile, irregular migrants in the country remain largely underrepresented.

Though there exists youth active in the field, for a country that is viewed as a model in terms of its migration policies, there is a great lack of youth participation in the pursuit of safe, orderly and regular migration.

**Youth call on national governments to strengthen collaboration with international partners by improving current national mechanisms of programs dedicated to monitoring the status of migrants within host countries.** The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated cases involving incidents of violence and illegal recruitment. The impact of the programs implemented by host countries must be felt at a local level and ultimately reach vulnerable groups and individuals, instead of being centralized alone at an institutional level.

**Youth call on the national government to continue working with recruitment agencies to streamline the processes involved in ensuring mobility among migrant workers.** The application stage necessitates multiple requirements throughout stages that can get difficult for the migrant workers. The bureaucratic recruitment system has led to many inefficiencies that hinders migrant workers from completing the legal process.

**Youth call on national governments to collaborate with organizations on the local, sub-regional, and regional level such that migrants, as well as their families, are provided psychological and emotional support.**

Bearing in mind the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDGs 8, Decent Work for All and 10, Reduced Inequalities, as well as our commitment to the 2030 Agenda, we assert that the integration and protection of migrants is only possible through **an emphasis on human rights and an acknowledgement of their valuable socio-economic contributions**. We call on governments, especially at the regional level, to take greater action to implement a global compact that is beneficial for all.

## Objective 2: Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin

When citizens are not able to access quality work and education, they seek opportunities in other countries. Consultations revealed that for many Filipinos in search of jobs and financial stability, the ideal destination for migration leans towards developed countries. On a domestic level, migration from provinces and municipalities to big cities has caused a significant rural-urban disparity in the country.

### **Key Youth-Led and Youth-Focused Projects**

Youth have been at the forefront of mitigating factors leading to outbound migration, through:

- Actively participating in the policymaking process and continuously forwarding agenda on socio-political issues
- Forming youth-led organizations and foundations or volunteering services to NGOs focusing on providing subsidies and opportunities related to work and education
- Utilizing the landscape of social media to raise awareness on the status quo and encourage citizen involvement in ushering necessary changes from the government

### **Key Recommendations**

From a socio-economic perspective, the Philippines must find ways to minimize high human capital flight, noting that a considerable number of educated and professionals emigrate. Moreover, individuals who are successfully able to move abroad and situate themselves are normally perceived in the Philippines with a degree of recognition, often-times hailed as ‘modern day heroes.’

**Youth call on the national government and its relevant agencies to implement more reliable mechanisms to boost productivity through legislation and accessible social services.** Within central cities of industry and commerce, traffic congestion and high urban population density are daily realities.

These present detrimental effects not only to the national economy but to Filipinos themselves, especially in work productivity and health.

**Youth call on the national government to enhance coordination with regional and local governments in facilitating further opportunities for social mobility.** Considering the Philippines is an archipelago, Filipinos from periphery areas move towards the central cities due to the lack of programs and development in their provinces. However, the influx of individuals into urbanized areas also reduces the availability of opportunities.

**Youth call on the national government to strengthen partnerships between the public and private sector, and other relevant work industries, to improve the conditions of the job market.** Acknowledging the high trend of human capital flight, or brain drain, apparent in the country, Filipinos are compelled to leave because of the alarming unemployment rate. Possible areas of concentration include increasing job availability, improving employment benefits, lessening skills mismatch and implementing training programs.

**Youth call on the national government to improve its crisis and disaster response frameworks to promote and ensure stability for its citizens, where needed.** The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted aspects of the system, which require immediate action. Pro-active policies in priority areas including health, employment, and education to address the growing rural-urban gap among Filipinos demand considerable attention.

## Objective 15: Provide access to basic services for migrants

The Philippines has multiple projects and services made available to OFWs and their dependents. Government programs focus mainly on educational scholarships for outbound migrants, and entrepreneurial incentives for returning migrants. Despite this, it has been found that only a small percent of total active migrants avail of these services.<sup>6</sup> Based on the interviews conducted and further research, this may be due to a combination of lack of awareness of programs,<sup>7</sup> and their inconsistent implementation.

### **Key Youth-Led and Youth-Focused Projects**

Youth have been helping migrants access basic services, through:

- Launching online awareness campaigns through social media platforms informing both migrants and the public about the rights of migrants and services accessible to migrants
- Providing and distributing personal protective equipment (PPE) for repatriated migrants such as face shields and face masks during the COVID-19 pandemic

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<sup>6</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs, 2016, 2015; Philippine Statistics Authority, 2012

<sup>7</sup> Department of Labor and Employment Institute for Labor Studies, 2016

- Volunteering in NGOs that cater to defending the rights of vulnerable migrants through pro-bono legal assistance

Migrant youth and the children of migrants are the focus of services and support, through:

- Receiving education subsidies and financial assistance provided by the national government
- Receiving psychosocial support from the national government, and various Filipino-led NGOs with regards to integration into their host country, and family counseling

### **Key Recommendations**

While the Philippines, with its large population of migrant workers, has commendable laws and services in place for its migrant population, there is a disconnect between migrants and the national government in its implementation.

**Youth call on the national government to implement practices to overcome bureaucratic barriers and reliance on connections to access basic services.** The national government must conduct inspections to ensure that embassies and consuls are adequately staffed, projects are being well-implemented and are consistent with the standards in place, and services offered are evenly and consistently accessible to the concerned stakeholders.

**Youth call on the national government to improve monitoring and evaluation practices of projects launched by government agencies.** There is a lack of recent data on the results of the various projects implemented. Youth ask for more transparent monitoring of the number of migrants receiving the services, and for follow-up evaluations if the services meet their set objectives, especially in light of the on-going pandemic.

**Youth call on governments and respective stakeholders to investigate cases of corruption and the continued existence of illegal agencies.** This includes the consistent audit of the budget allotted to the governmental bodies and departments concerned with migrants. Intergovernmental cooperation must also occur with respect to the elimination of illegal recruitment agencies so as to prevent abuses and cases of human trafficking.

**Youth call on the national government, and other relevant organizations to create effective information campaigns of the rights and services open for OFWs.** In particular, their rights abroad, and the services offered by their respective embassies and consuls. The language used should be simplified, and made available in the various vernacular languages.

## Objective 17: Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration

OFWs and even their children experience discrimination from both their destination countries and home countries. This results in an identity struggle for many of the children of OFWs, often identifying as third culture kids (TCKS). Discrimination is further perpetuated by misrepresentation in the media.

### Key Youth-Led and Youth-Focused Projects

Youth have been at the forefront of eliminating forms of discrimination through:

- University functions that encourage discourse on migrant perception - through round table discussions and film viewing talkbacks
- Week-long events, such as OFW Week, that allow for discourse and information dissemination
- TCK psychosocial support groups in universities that help TCKs adjust to their destination country and/or home country

Migrant youth and the children of migrants are the focus of services and support, through:

- Cultural events spearheaded by NGOs and consulates overseas
- Tight-knit communities in host countries with youth-led and youth-centered communities

### Key Recommendations

**Youth call on the national government and other international organizations to launch information campaigns to rectify inaccurate portrayal of migrant workers in the media.** The media often portrays misinformed pre-existing stereotypes regarding migrants. False perception towards migrants leaves them vulnerable to discrimination in the workplace.

**Youth call on the national government to widen collaborative ties with organizations to establish groups or programs that serve as a psychosocial support group for TCKs.** This is with the goal of helping them adjust quickly and safely to their host countries or to their home country. TCKs struggle with identity as many do not feel welcome in their home country and their destination country. A more proactive approach is necessary for their psychological well-being.

## Objective 18: Invest in skills development and facilitate the mutual recognition of skills, qualifications, and competences

The country's well-established culture of labor migration has turned it into a major source of skilled and low-skilled migrant workers worldwide. However, many OFWs, especially young low-skilled female workers, still risk the possibility of being trafficked or exploited for labor.

### Key Youth-Led and Youth-Focused Projects

Young migrant laborers remain at the focus of skills-development projects through:

- Receiving skills training and upgrading courses conducted by different government agencies
- Receiving financial support covering the costs of expenses for technical and job-related training
- Benefiting from starter kits for the promotion of livelihood programs to return migrant workers - prioritizing women who were displaced by the hostilities and conflicts in their host country, or victims of illegal recruitment and trafficking, and other distressed and displaced women household service workers

### Key Recommendations

The upskilling and reskilling of workers does not only build their qualifications and competences, but also decreases their vulnerability to violations of their human dignity. In light of the pandemic, it is also important to equip workers with technical skills as a response to the unprecedented digitalization of services, such as documentation and consular procedures.

**Youth call on governments and civil societies to continue capacitating migrants not only through integral skills, but also with knowledge of their rights.** Information and awareness is integral for migrants to protect themselves from inequality and exploitation. **We call for particular attention to disadvantaged groups**, such as unaccompanied minors, women, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ and survivors of abuse.

**Youth call on governments and businesses to deepen partnerships and foster practices that increase the employability of migrant workers.** In particular, deeper regional cooperation is necessary for mutual recognition of skills, qualifications, and competences across different sectors.

**Youth call on governments to streamline the use of new technologies for the capacity-building of migrant workers.** In light of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, all migrants must not only have stable access to technology and reliable lines of communication, but also be able to reach out for assistance through digital channels of communication.

## Conclusion

Filipino migrants and their families have experienced several violations of their human rights in host countries. Due to poor social conditions, Filipinos are forced to seek job opportunities in other countries as OFWs. As a result, they are separated from their children. Furthermore, they also face negative stereotypes that are present in the Philippines due to poor media representation, which can exacerbate racism and microaggression towards young migrants abroad. This policy review stresses how these issues can be mitigated, while focusing on the integration and protection of migrants. It calls to improve



practices that shift negative public perception, both in the Philippines and in host countries, towards migrants.

As a country that has pledged to address the plight of migrants, the Philippines pioneered policies that are geared towards safeguarding their basic human rights. However, lapses in its implementation as well as the social stigmas associated with migrants make it difficult for positive change to occur. Hence, it is essential to emphasize the importance of effective policy implementation such that programmes currently in-place ensure that the human rights of migrants are respected and fulfilled, and that the workers themselves, as well as their families, are both empowered and protected.

The youth constantly seek avenues in order to engage and actively participate in response to the plight of the migrants. In light of this, we call for multi-sectoral collaboration that fully-involves national governments and all other stakeholders, guided by the GCM as well as the SDGs, such that change may happen now and may continue in the future.

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