

Gender and Reintegration of Overseas Filipino Workers

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The aim of this technical paper is two-fold. First, it seeks to map out current overseas Filipino worker (OFW) reintegration programs and services, including those created to assist migrant workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, whether they are returning OFWs or those yet to be deployed. Second, and based on the available information on these reintegration programs and services, evaluate them from a gendered and intersectional perspective. The last section of the paper also presents directions which migration governance agencies and actors, as well as advocates of gender equality and women's empowerment like UN Women, could take in helping strengthen OFW reintegration programs and services, especially within the broader spaces opened by the Department of Migrant Workers Act.

In terms of methodology, the mapping focused on government and Filipino/Philippine-based non-government agencies providing reintegration services for OFWs. The agencies and their programs

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were culled from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) mapping¹ in 2018, and information from the Internet. The mapping does not claim to be exhaustive, nor comprehensive, in the light of the international discussions on sustainable reintegration — and thus reintegration programs — which consider the broader context of the workers’ migration journey, from pre-departure to return, as important factors in reintegration, not just the conditions of their return. Instead, the mapping generally follows how “reintegration programs and services” are defined and operationalized by Philippine agencies i.e. focused on ensuring economic stability and continued productivity of OFWs upon their return to the country. In mapping reintegration programs initiated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the criteria was widened to include return services, or immediate support services provided to OFWs upon their return to the country, including psychosocial interventions, material support in relation to their quarantine and travel to their home provinces, and financial assistance.

The mapping also excluded the following agencies which also offer reintegration and other related services:

- academic and private training institutions offering formal or technical-vocational courses to OFWs;
- private banks and remittance centers which have dedicated services for overseas Filipinos and OFWs; and
- OFW reintegration programs of inter-governmental agencies such as UN Women, ILO and IOM.

Relevant academic and gray literature on labor migrants’ return and reintegration also informed the gender analysis of reintegration programs.

For the purposes of the paper, the gender analysis was mainly based on women migrant workers’ experiences due to the lack of sex- and gender-disaggregated data on reintegration. Literature on Filipino sea-based migrant workers, which could also be a reference on the male experience of labor migration, is also limited.² This is true for migrant workers with diverse SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression), as well.³ These topics are areas for future documentation and research in OFW reintegration studies.

¹ *Reintegration of Overseas Filipino Workers A Handbook for Duty Bearers and Stakeholders (Part II: Compendium of Programmes and Services for the Reintegration of Overseas Filipino Workers)* (IOM, 2018)

² Three studies on Filipino seafarers and reintegration were found at the time of writing this paper. One is a study on the readiness and perception of successful return of Filipino male seafarers, which showed that majority of the research participants are on “moderate” level of preparedness to return, taking into consideration the accumulated tangible (assets) and intangible (education of self and children) resources, and social capital (relations with wife and children) (Isidro-Bañez, 2020). The second and third studies are on the *women* sea-based workers’ experiences in the male-dominated sector of international seafaring (Tangi, 2020 and 2016). While not directly referencing their reintegration, these studies describe the character and impact of gender-based discrimination and violence on women seafarers as well as the critical gaps in policy and institutional mechanisms to address them, which have a bearing on their immediate and long-term physical and mental health, and empowerment.

³ There is a growing interest in the LGBTIQ+ experiences in labor migration studies, albeit literature is still sparse. These studies highlight one’s SOGIE as a factor in decisions to work overseas, in addition to economic reasons, i.e., to escape

Reintegration and Overseas Filipino Workers

The reintegration of international labor migrants in their countries of origin is one of the least studied stages of the migration cycle.⁴ In the Philippines, data is limited to administrative data, for instance, numbers of OFWs who have availed of reintegration programs and services, or distressed OFWs assisted for repatriation and other needed intervention. Qualitative studies provide a rich source of insight on the experiences of OFWs who have decided to return to the country “for good,” however, limited in its scope and representation of OFW groups (e.g. by gender, age, occupational category, ethnicity geographic distribution).

Nevertheless, the importance of measures to ensure smooth reintegration of OFWs is widely acknowledged because overseas labor migration is regarded as temporary and assumes that OFWs would eventually return to the country on their retirement, if not earlier. The most current law on migration, R.A. 11641, which created the Department of Migrant Workers, reiterated this as a guiding policy in viewing Filipino overseas work:⁵

The State does not promote overseas employment as a means of economic growth and national development, and shall continuously aim to make it a choice and not a necessity. The State shall institute measures that will strengthen the domestic labor market for effective reintegration of Overseas Filipino Workers.

The OFWs as a sector are lauded as “modern-day heroes,” contributing significantly to the country’s economy through their remittances, as well as a potential human resource pool for national development. This is evident from how reintegration programs are framed in policies. Prior to the enactment of the Department of Migrant Workers Act in December 2021, there was no conceptual definition of “reintegration” in national laws. Instead, elements of its general framework could be gleaned from possible reintegration programs which can be undertaken by the National Reintegration Center for OFWs (NRCO) i.e., it involves the return and mainstreaming of OFWs into productive life in the country. Reintegration programs mentioned in R.A. 8042 or the Migrant Workers Act, and its amended version, R.A. 10022, include the promotion of financial literacy, livelihood and local employment for returned OFWs, harnessing their skills for development aims, and ensuring their welfare as pathways.⁶

With the enactment of the Department of Migrant Workers Act, it was qualified that reintegration should also be “sustainable.”⁷ The International Organization for Migration (2017) defines sustainable reintegration as a condition when “returnees have

gender-based violence and discrimination in their countries of origin, to be empowered to explore their sexuality in countries deemed friendlier to the LGBTIQ+ community (e.g. Thailand, West European countries), and to enjoy legal rights to marry or have civil unions. Specific to the overseas Filipino LGBTIQ+ workers, see Ulla and Pernia (2022), Okada (2020), and Galang (2015).

⁴ Kang, J.W. and Latoja, M.C.G. (2021).

⁵ Section 2, R.A. 11641

⁶ See RA 8042 and its amended version RA 10022, which established the National Reintegration Center for OFWs (NRCO).

⁷ Section 3(i), RA 11641

reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers. Having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions as a matter of choice than necessity.” Further, the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the Department of Migrant Workers Act stated that reintegration programs should be effective and gender-responsive.⁸ The IRR also specifies that it should take a holistic approach and consider the needs, goals, interests, capacities and potentials of the OFWs.

It is also notable that the Department of Migrant Workers Act adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) as one of its reference policies. The GCM included sustainable reintegration, specifically, its Objective 21 is on cooperat[ion] in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration. Among the action points under this objective is the provision to migrant workers of “equal access to social protection and services, justice, psychosocial assistance, vocational training, employment opportunities and decent work, recognition of skills acquired abroad, and financial services, in order to fully build upon their entrepreneurship, skills and human capital as active members of society and contributors to sustainable development in the country of origin upon return.” It also includes addressing the needs of the communities where the migrant workers will return, and ensuring that national to local development planning, policy decisions and budgeting consider migration concerns.

Following this, it is thus important that OFW reintegration and reintegration programs – and factors shaping them – be viewed from a multi-level perspective i.e. the micro (individual), meso (community) and macro levels. It also points to the continuum of the migration experience which affects the quality of migrant workers’ reintegration and issues they face on coming back to the country:

Planning for return and reintegration should start before migration and continue during employment. Migrants who suffer recruitment abuses, carry heavy debt burdens, or provided with misleading information prior departure cannot effectively realize their migration objectives. Similarly, abuse and exploitation in the workplace and discrimination in the destination country will seriously undermine the capacity of the migrant worker to save or to return in conditions of dignity (ILO, 2019).

This presents a shift from the idea of “successful reintegration” which has centered mostly on the experience of the individual migrant workers and their families, i.e., if they are prepared to return or have achieved their migration goals, or not, to “sustainable reintegration,” which broadens the discussion to emphasize contextualization of the process itself within the whole migration cycle experience. It locates reintegration concerns in national development when it requires addressing structural factors maintaining migrant workers in positions of vulnerability in the country of origin and destination. Stakeholders to the issue are not limited to the migrant workers and migration-focused agencies and organizations, rather a whole of society approach is envisaged to address the intersectionality of issues embedded in migration i.e. overseas migrant work as a labor, gender,

⁸ Section 3(eee), Implementing Rules and Regulations of RA 11641

health, community, and international relations issue, among others. In this sense, then, the convergence of services and initiatives of various stakeholders to promote OFW rights and wellbeing, from pre-migration to return, is relevant to reintegration.

The extent of the country's progress toward sustainable reintegration is largely unmeasured —and the limited data (or systematic data collection) on OFW return and reintegration is one evidence of this. One of the efforts to address this gap was the adoption of the National Action Plan on Sustainable, Gender-Responsive Return and Reintegration in 2021. The National Action Plan is based on existing legal frameworks, international consensus documents and agreements such as the GCM and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and national development plans, and considered, as well, realities such as the COVID-19 pandemic which have a great impact on the labor migration landscape. It lays down seven strategic objectives, each with specific indicators to measure progress of accomplishment (See Table 1 below):

Table 1: Strategic Objectives and Indicators of Accomplishment of the 2021 National Action Plan on Sustainable, Gender-Responsive Return and Reintegration

Strategic Objectives	Indicators / Milestones
1. Ensure that safe and dignified return and readmission of migrants and family members include providing for their legal and health concerns, including for their psychosocial well-being, especially for the most vulnerable such as children, victims of trafficking in persons and gender- based violence, refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless persons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated, aligned and well- defined repatriation and return programs especially in times of crises and emergencies are in place, covering OFs/OFWs and their families as well as refugees and stateless persons. • Updated and improved contingency plans for emergency and/or mass repatriations. • Established operational emergency response mechanisms.
2. Develop and maintain an accurate, reliable, and harmonized database of Filipino migrants in countries of origin and destination, which allows for gender disaggregation, to facilitate multilateral engagements throughout the migration cycle and strengthen monitoring mechanisms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of LGUs regularly building, collecting, storing and updating database of OFs/OFWs at the specific local level. • Annually updated database of OFs/OFWs and families in both countries of origin and destination by government agencies or units concerned. • Renewed interest in a unified database for migrants through policy dialogues and advocacies, budget allocation, or call for proposals from national agencies.
3. Utilize more extensive, efficient and effective digital technology, social media platforms, and traditional media to communicate with and disseminate information to Filipino migrants in countries of destination and to repatriated migrant workers in the Philippines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased reach and engagements in social media posts of government agencies both in countries of origin and destination. • Traditional media takes the initiative in reaching out to Filipino migrants to disseminate information, resulting to increased number of migrants availing the programs and services for the migrant population.

Strategic Objectives	Indicators / Milestones
<p>4. Disseminate and utilize comprehensive, updated, sustainable and gender- responsive reintegration framework and case management tools, and identify and define the clear reintegration pathways in order to clearly address the multisectoral needs of different types of returnees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Filipino migrants planning to return or have returned to the Philippines are able to identify which reintegration pathway they wish to follow and the corresponding interventions, programs and providers in the pathway concerned. • Reintegration actors in the government, private sector and CSOs are trained on the updated reintegration framework, leading to improved reintegration programs and services and enhanced coordination across different levels and dimensions of reintegration. • Psychosocial interventions, coordinated by interagency actors, are widely available and easily accessible to Filipino migrants, whether they are for deployment, for repatriation, already repatriated and planning to reintegrate to local community, or for remigration. • Case management and monitoring and evaluation tools are developed and regularly used on existing reintegration programs and services.
<p>5. Improve alignment of policies and programs on employment, skills, and economic development at municipal, provincial and regional levels for a more comprehensive framework to address local economic development needs, including the informal economy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligned and functioning policies and programs on employment, skills and economic development at different local levels that will benefit returning migrants and their families for further skills training or local job placements, including the informal economy. • Increased ease of access to information by returnees on local job opportunities and skills training opportunities through the creation or improvement of placement or matching mechanisms. • Passage of legislation for LGUs to institutionalize PESOs in their localities.
<p>6. Strengthen financial inclusion of migrant workers and their families, especially women migrant workers, in countries of origin and destination.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved and effective financial literacy education/programs for migrants and their families as evidenced by increased savings and investments in the local communities. • Increased number of women migrant workers enrolled in financial literacy programs.
<p>7. Build stronger coordination through multi-stakeholder forums among national agencies (NGAs) involved in reintegration, with local government units (LGUs), civil society organizations (CSOs), faith-based groups, private sector, cooperatives, and OFW associations/OFW Family Circles across all levels—national, regional, provincial, municipal/city focusing on what can be done to support OFWs/families in the different reintegration pathways.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established and functioning OF/OFW associations and Family Circles at municipal/city, provincial, regional and national levels. • Active operational forums at all levels involving multisectoral stakeholders engaged in reintegration programs and services. • Creation of interagency groups including cooperatives and OFW associations at the local level tasked to address support mechanisms for OFWs and their families throughout the migration cycle.

The lead implementing and monitoring agency for the National Action Plan is the Department of Migrant Workers.

National Reintegration Center for OFWs

The National Reintegration Center for OFWs (NRCO) was created in 2009 by Republic Act 10022, which amended the Migrant Workers Act of 1995. Its functions revolve around facilitating reintegration of OFWs in the country, promoting their local employment, and tapping into OFW skills and capacities for national development. Specifically, it was tasked to:

- (a) Develop and support programs and projects for livelihood, entrepreneurship, savings, investments and financial literacy for returning Filipino migrant workers and their families in coordination with relevant stakeholders, service providers and international organizations;
- (b) Coordinate with appropriate stakeholders, service providers and relevant international organizations for the promotion, development and the full utilization of overseas Filipino worker returnees and their potentials;
- (c) Institute, in cooperation with other government agencies concerned, a computer-based information system on returning Filipino migrant workers shall be accessible to all local recruitment agencies and employers, both public and private;
- (d) Prove a periodic study and assessment of job opportunities for returning Filipino migrant workers;
- (e) Develop and implement other appropriate programs to promote the welfare of returning Filipino migrant workers;
- (f) Maintain an internet-based communication system for on-line registration and interaction with clients, and maintain and upgrade computer-based service capabilities of the NRCO;
- (g) Develop capacity-building programs for returning overseas Filipino workers and their families, implementers, service providers, and stakeholders; and
- (h) Conduct research for policy recommendations and program development.⁹

The NRCO is one of the agencies merged with other migration agencies, such as the POEA and OWWA, to constitute the Department of Migrant Workers.¹⁰ Prior to this, the NRCO was a bureau under the Department of Labor and Employment, with regional representation except in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. Its portfolio of reintegration programs and services was generally focused on economic empowerment of returned OFWs. This included providing livelihood and employment support, and financial literacy programs.

As a bureau, the NRCO also faced resource constraints to address the various reintegration needs of OFWs. Thus, it also coordinated with a range of government, civil society organizations and the

⁹ R.A. 10022, Section 18

¹⁰ Section 19, RA 11641. The specific office under the DMW which will be tasked to lead OFW reintegration programming is yet to be made known at the time of writing of this report. What is clear, however from RA 11641 and its IRR is the more comprehensive perspective and approach on migrant return and reintegration, that is, it shall develop and implement a full-cycle national reintegration framework and program that considers the needs and issues from pre-deployment to return of migrants, whether they have returned voluntarily or not, and regardless if they are documented or undocumented OFWs. (Rule XI, R.A. 11641 IRR)

private sector to facilitate the various assistance that may be needed by OFWs such as psychosocial support, capacity building and financial services. The NRCO also gave priority to returning distressed or vulnerable migrant workers, including undocumented migrant workers and human trafficking survivors who are not OWWA members thus not eligible for certain reintegration programs offered by OWWA. With the increasingly feminized overseas labor migration, a large majority of their service users were females, and they also have programs which specifically target women OFWs.

Overview of International Filipino Labor Migration

Demographics

Prior the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philippines had an annual OFW deployment growth rate of 4.6 percent from 2010-2019,¹¹ with more land-based than sea-based workers (average of 77.71% and 22.29% respectively from 2017-2019¹²). Philippine labor migration is also increasingly feminized as majority of the OFWs in the past two decades are women, including recent statistics already covering the pandemic period, showing 6 female OFWs deployed for every 4 male OFWs.¹³

In terms of age distribution, 2020 PSA data show that OFWs are in their most productive years when they work abroad, from 25 to 44 years old, with a small percentage aged 15 to 24 years old. The largest number of male OFWs belongs to the 45 years old and above age group (23.3%), followed by those from the 30-34 age bracket (21.2%). Female OFWs tend to be younger, at 30 to 39 years old (45.5%). They also have a larger percentage share of OFWs aged 15 to 24 years old (4.4%) compared to male OFWs (2.9%).

Around 80 percent of the OFWs have completed high school (79.5%), including the OFWs who have some college education or higher (41.7%), according to the 2018 National Migration Survey (NMS).¹⁴ However, their jobs abroad might not match their qualifications, especially for the women. In 2020, almost half (46.7%) of the OFWs are clustered around elementary occupations; 70.3 percent of women OFWs are in this category.¹⁵ Elementary occupations are jobs which involve the performance of simple and routine tasks which may require the use of hand-held tools and considerable physical effort such as cleaning, basic maintenance work in households, apartments, hotels, offices and other buildings.¹⁶ On the other hand, male OFWs are usually plant and machine operators and assemblers (26%), service and sales workers (17%), and in craft and related trade work (15.9%) which are considered semi-skilled work.

¹¹ Senate Economic and Planning Office (April 2021).

¹² Baclig, C.E. (11 November 2021)

¹³ Center for Migrants Advocacy (September 2014). The feminization of overseas labor migration continued even during the pandemic. There was a significant drop on the number of OFWs deployed in 2020, from 2.18 million to 1.77 million. Females accounted for the majority of OFWs at 59.6 percent of OFWs in this year. (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022).

¹⁴ 2018 National Migration Survey.

¹⁵ Philippine Statistics Authority 2022.

¹⁶ 2012 Philippine Standard Occupation Classification

Work Migration

Based on the data from the 2018 NMS, the decision to work overseas the first time is largely an individual decision (73.3%). Although economic reasons are regarded as the primary reason for movement (89.2%), 53 percent also said that their financial standing is sufficient, while another 2.6 percent said it was more than sufficient. Among those surveyed, 51 percent of them were employed or have been employed prior to migration (51%). Majority of the OFWs already have children when they first migrated (63%), with 91 percent of them saying their children were below 18 years old. More than half of them are married or living with partners at the time of migration (54%), while a significant percentage are single (39%).

The overseas employment of Filipinos was usually brokered by private recruitment agencies (59.2%), although a good number of OFWs were direct hires (34.2%). However, in terms of visa status on first departure, only 71.9 percent of those surveyed said they had a work visa. The rest had a tourist visa (15.4%) and other types of visa (e.g. seafarers, fiancée, student, immigrant; 9.4%) some said they do not need a visa at all (4%). That 12.6 percent of OFWs leave the country without a work contract was also noted by the NMS. This arrangement was more often found with male OFWs (59%) than females (41%). The practice is also found more prevalent with direct hires (24%) than those who went through a recruitment agency (4.2%), and in the skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery occupations (42.7%).

To finance their first migration, many OFWs drew on the support of their family (40%), their own salaries (25%), and loans from family and friends (18%). A quarter of OFWs (25%) said their employers also helped with expenses.¹⁷

Remittances

OFW remittances in 2020 totaled to US\$29.9 billion.¹⁸ Per data from the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP),¹⁹ almost all OFW households reported using remittances for food and other basic expenses (93.9%), followed by education (66.8%) and medical expenses (51%). Only 44.7 percent of the households surveyed by the BSP stated they consciously put aside savings from remittances, while a mere 6.1 percent said they invested part of the remittances received.

The BSP also tracks the debt situation of OFW households. Using remittances to pay off household debts was reported by 17.2 percent of the respondents. Most of the OFW households who took a loan in the previous year (2019) are from middle-income households (36.3%), followed by the low-income (35.8%) and high income households (27.9%). More households outside of the National Capital

¹⁷ In the DOLE-ILS study on reintegration (2016), as much as 89% of the OFWs surveyed reported having to borrow money specifically to cover pre-deployment expenses. Prior to this, having debts and similar financial obligations were also factors in their decision to migrate (50%).

¹⁸ Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, 2020 (<https://www.bsp.gov.ph/Statistics/External/ofw.aspx>)

¹⁹ Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (2020). Consumer Expectations Survey First Quarter 2020 (https://www.bsp.gov.ph/Lists/Consumer%20Expectation%20Report/Attachments/17/CES_1qtr2020.pdf)

Region took out loans (32.1%) than in NCR (19%). These loans were used for food and basic goods (35.4%), business and start-up expenses (24.1%) and education (16.2%).

Return and Reintegration

The cumulative length of time that an OFW works overseas, which is a factor in their reintegration experience, is not documented in the NMS and by administrative data collected by government migration agencies. A 2016 survey of 600 returned OFWs by the Department of Labor and Employment - Institute of Labor Studies (DOLE-ILS) showed that the longest time an OFW spent abroad was 34 years for males and 22 years for females. The usual timeframe was for two years which is based on the contract duration of most OFWs. Females, more than males, were unable to finish their two-year contracts and stayed for less than 12 months in the country of destination.

The data from the DOLE-ILS also show that circular migration, or repeat migration, is more common in females than males, although it was noted that this may also be influenced by the limitations of the study's sampling. Among the female respondents, 49.86 percent of them migrated for work at least twice with a maximum of eight times; while it was 46.44 percent among male OFWs. However fewer females migrated beyond five times (1.66%) compared to men (6.28%).

The NMS tracked the following as regards the return and reintegration situation of OFWs: the difficulties faced upon return, their awareness of government services and support upon return, and their availment of these.

Table 2: Reintegration Issues Experienced by OFW by Sex (NMS 2018)

Reintegration Issues	Male (%)	Female (%)
Finding any job	72.9	67.3
Finding job corresponding to skills	15.6	9.6
Reintegration into society	4.7	4.2
Establishing a business	9.0	10.7
Mismatched skills acquired abroad with jobs in the Philippines	5.1	2.7
Security issues	2.4	2.5
Any difficulty	52.1	50

By wealth quintile, more OFWs from the two lowest income groups (68.3% average) experienced difficulty in reintegration compared to those in the highest income group (43%). They also reported having insufficient financial resources upon return (41% average). In terms of education, returned

OFWs with some college education and college graduates reported sufficient (71.1%) and more than sufficient (7.1%) financial resources.

Awareness of and membership in government-organized migrants networks which can support their reintegration is low among OFWs (24% were aware but only 2% are members of networks), although the more educated and those from higher income quintiles were more informed about this. The networks mentioned in the NMS were the Philippine Job Exchange Network (Phil-JobNet), which provides a listing of local employment opportunities, and the OFW Family Circles being organized by the OWWA as a support system for returned OFWs and their families. This survey result could be related to the OFWs' access to information on reintegration services prior and during their overseas work.²⁰

Not surprisingly, only a very small percentage of OFWs (4%) accessed return and reintegration support services from the government and other agencies. While females accessed mostly welfare (50.4%), legal (14.3%) and financial services (28.5%), males accessed welfare (34.5%), financial (42.1%) and livelihood (23.1%) assistance (see Table below)

Table 2: Types of Support Received by OFWs by Sex (NMS 2018)

Types of Support Received	Male	Female	Both Sexes
Welfare	34.5	50.4	41.9
Financial	42.1	28.5	35.8
Livelihood	23.1	9.6	16.8
Legal	5.1	14.3	9.3
Training/Scholarship	2.2	2.1	2.2
Employment	2.1	1.9	2.0
Others	0.4	2.6	1.4

²⁰ Ideally, this should have been addressed by attendance to pre-departure orientation seminars (PDOS) and post-arrival orientation seminars (PAOS) in the countries of destination, coupled with access to physical or electronic copies of the OFW Handbook. On the latter, Republic Act 11227 institutionalized the production and free distribution of a Handbook for Overseas Filipino Workers which outlines the rights and responsibilities of OFWs. One of its objectives is to provide “necessary information for [OFW] reintegration in Philippine society (Section 3(e)). The law was enacted in 2019, however, the Handbook is not yet available online at the time of writing of this report.

Apart from the services listed above, literature also included other needs of returned OFWs or interests upon return (IOM, 2018): volunteer work (to share their knowledge and skills acquired abroad), community and family level reintegration services, professional reintegration.

Mapping of OFW Reintegration Programs and Services

There are two tables on OFWs reintegration programs and services presented below: one is on the regular programs of government agencies and CSOs, and the second is on the services provided to OFWs affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The latter is regarded as special services which are likely to be discontinued when the pandemic situation is more stable.

The programs and services were also categorized based on its main features:

1. Economic reintegration
 - Employment
 - Enterprise and livelihood development
 - Financial education
 - Financing and financial support of OFW enterprises
2. Social reintegration
 - Community organizing / engagement of OFW communities
 - Social protection
 - Welfare services (material, psychosocial, health or legal)
3. Capacity development
 - Education and scholarships
 - Information sharing (including overseas work orientations)
 - Skills development and certification

These categories are not mutually exclusive and there are several reintegration programs that incorporate two or all three components in their design i.e. a reintegration program on enterprise development may also provide welfare assistance, especially if it targets distressed OFWs as its main clientele. Likewise, many social welfare assistance initiatives of agencies include case management and highlight referral services to livelihood and skill development opportunities for OFWs.

Table 3: Reintegration Programs and Services for OFWs

Agency	OFW Reintegration programs & services	General category of program and services	Description
Government			
Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas	Financial Learning Campaign for Overseas Filipinos and their Beneficiaries (under its flagship program, "Economic and Financial Learning Program")	Financial education / education on savings and investment	The BSP collaborates with the POEA, OWWA, DTI and LGUs, banks and non-government agencies to present its OFW-related initiatives

Agency	OFW Reintegration programs & services	General category of program and services	Description
	Pinansyal Talino at Kaalaman (PiTaKa)	Financial education / education on savings and investment	Set of financial education / education on savings and investment videos produced for PDOS and PAOS (https://www.bsp.gov.ph/SitePages/MediaAndResearch/FinEd_OFWs.aspx) The production of PiTaKa videos is in collaboration with the BDO Foundation
Commission on Overseas Filipinos	Pre-departure orientation session	Information sharing; orientation sessions (pre-employment, pre-departure, or post-arrival)	CFO clientele includes temporary migrants such those leaving as au pairs and participants to the US Exchange Visitor Program
	Guidance and counseling program	Information sharing; orientation sessions (pre-employment, pre-departure, or post-arrival)	For spouses and partners of foreign nationals; a customized PDOS for Filipinos in intermarriages mandated under the Anti-Mail Order Spouse Law
	Community education program	Information sharing; orientation sessions (pre-employment, pre-departure, or post-arrival)	Orientation for prospective migrants on the realities of working/settling abroad in partnership with LGUs, CSOs and other stakeholders. It also informs public about trafficking, illegal recruitment and other migration-related issues
	Kaalamang Pinansyal Tungo sa Kaunlaran (KAPIT KA)	Financial education/education on savings and investment	Target participants are Filipinos in the country (especially returned overseas Filipinos and those planning to work abroad) and the OFWs
	Itanong mo kay Ato! (Attorney)	Welfare services (legal)	Online legal consultation on issues or cases of human trafficking, illegal recruitment, mail-order spouses, etc. The program is in partnership with the Arellano Law Foundation
	Itanong mo kay Sis! (Sa Iyong Sulok)	Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services)	Online guidance and counseling services for overseas Filipinos

Agency	OFW Reintegration programs & services	General category of program and services	Description
	Administrative and technical assistance to Philippine Schools Overseas	Education/scholarships	The Philippine Schools Overseas (PSO) uses the same curriculum used in the Philippines. This facilitates the integration of OFW children abroad in the Philippine school system when they migrate back to the country.
	Ugnayan	Community organizing/engagement of OFW communities	Engages overseas Filipinos to volunteer in government initiatives such as those combatting human trafficking and supporting the overseas voting system through encouraging greater participation of OFs and OFWs
Department of Agriculture	Agri-Negosyo (ANYO) Para sa OFWs Program	Information sharing; orientation sessions (pre-employment, pre-departure, or post-arrival)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-service information to OFWs in terms of starting an agribusiness, provide investment opportunities, assist in crafting business plans and studies, facilitate access to financing programs, trainings, available technology, and rebuild network and linkages in all stages of the agriculture value chain • A convergence project of five government agencies: Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Science and Technology, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), in partnership with OWWA
	ANYO Loan Program	Financing / financial services or support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OFWs can avail working capital loans from PhP300,000 to 1.5 million, payable within 5 years with no interest • The loan facility open to other groups, apart from

Agency	OFW Reintegration programs & services	General category of program and services	Description
			OFWs in agri-business
Department of Foreign Affairs (through its Foreign Service Posts, Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Resource Centers)	Assistance to Nationals	Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services)	Covers welfare assistance to distressed OFWs up to their repatriation (e.g rescue, temporary shelter, psychosocial interventions, case management)
	Legal Assistance Fund	Welfare services (legal)	Provides assistance to Filipinos overseas who cannot or do not have access lawyer / legal aid
Department of Health	Inter-Agency Medical Repatriation Assistance Program (IMRAP)	Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services)	The DOH coordinates with relevant agencies which received medical repatriation cases, and other support services. Agencies include: DFA, DOLE, OWWA, POEA, DSWD, DILG, Manila International Airport Authority (MIAA), Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO) and PhilHealth
Department of Labor and Employment	Assist WELL (welfare, employment, legal and livelihood) Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services) • Welfare services (legal) • Employment • Enterprise/Livelihood development 	A convergence program implemented through DOLE attached agencies on migration i.e., POEA, OWWA and the NRCO. Other DOLE attached agencies involved are the Institute of Labor Studies, National Conciliation and Mediation Board, National Labor Relations Commission, National Maritime Polytechnic, etc.
DOLE-International Labor Affairs Bureau	24/7 Operations Center and OFW hotline (1348)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency and crisis response mechanism which could be accessed by OFWs and their families

Agency	OFW Reintegration programs & services	General category of program and services	Description
Department of Trade and Industry	Negosyo Center	Enterprise/Livelihood development	The program is not exclusive to OFWs but there are specific OFW offerings such as the Agri-Negosyo para sa OFWs in partnership with the Department of Agriculture
	Go Negosyo Program	Enterprise/Livelihood development	The program is not exclusive to OFWs but OFW with micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) can avail of their coaching and mentoring services for scale up
	Technical assistance to OWWA's Enhanced Entrepreneurial Development Training (EEDT)	Enterprise/Livelihood development	
Department of Science and Technology	Small Enterprise Technology Upgrading Program (Set-UP)	Enterprise/Livelihood development	Not specific to OFWs; the program aims to encourage and assist SMEs to adopt technological innovations to improve operations and productivity
Department of Social Welfare and Development	Recovery and Reintegration for Trafficked People Program	Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services)	The implementation of the program is guided by DSWD MC 20 s.2015. Components include case management, referral services, temporary shelter, other forms of direct assistance
	Reintegration Program for Deportees and Undocumented OFWs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services) Livelihood assistance Education/Scholarships 	The implementation of the program is guided by DSWD MC 09 s.2008. Components include case management, cash assistance (PhP5,000 max), referral services, temporary shelter, livelihood assistance (PhP15,000), scholarship assistance, etc.
Development Bank of the Philippines	Support to EEDT projects (see information under OWWA in this table)	Financing/financial services or support	Specific portfolio for OFWs developing their entrepreneurial / livelihood projects or investments

Agency	OFW Reintegration programs & services	General category of program and services	Description
Landbank of the Philippines	Landbank - OFW Reintegration Program	Financing/financial services or support	Specific portfolio for qualified OFWs developing their entrepreneurial / livelihood projects or investments
	Overseas Filipino (OF) Bank	Financing/financial services or support	A digital-only and branchless savings bank under the Landbank catering to OFs
Local Government Units	Public Employment Services (under PESO)	Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International and local job posting and information (for general public) • Referral services for OFWs on livelihood programs and assistance, financial institutions, skills development, etc.
	Pre-employment Orientation Seminars	Information sharing; orientation sessions (pre-employment, pre-departure, or post-arrival)	In partnership with POEA
	Migration and Development initiatives (select LGUs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial education/education on savings and investment • Enterprise and livelihood • Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services) 	<p>Examples of LGUs with M&D initiatives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antipolo • Cavite • Batangas • Mandaluyong • Marikina • Quezon City
	General welfare services through the local social welfare and development office (LSWDO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services) • Welfare services (legal) • Employment • Enterprise and livelihood 	Not specific to OFWs but can be accessed by OFWs and their families. Social work case management and referral services to address possible migration-related issues (e.g domestic violence, economic abuse, mental health) is part of the services provided by LSWDOs
National Reintegration Center for OFWs	Balik Pinay! Balik Hanapbuhay!	Enterprise/Livelihood development	Targets distressed women OFWs
	Livelihood Development Assistance Program	Enterprise / Livelihood development	Targets undocumented OFWs (individual), as well as OFW Family Circles (OFC), OFC Federations, OFC Cooperatives, OFC Returnees Associations (group)

Agency	OFW Reintegration programs & services	General category of program and services	Description
	Sa 'Pinas, Ikaw ang Ma'am/Sir!	Employment	Targets returned OFWs who have passed Philippine teaching licensure exam to apply for teaching positions under DepEd; if no teaching experience, the program will provide online refresher course
	Biyaheng Agri-Preneur	Enterprise/Livelihood development	Learning visits to agriculture-based enterprises for OFWs and their families
	Business Plan Competition for Seafarers and their families	Enterprise/Livelihood development	Finalists to the competition are provided coaching and mentoring; winners are given cash prizes from PhP 500,000 to 20,000
	Women REACH	Enterprise/Livelihood development	In partnership with Coca-cola Foundation
Overseas Workers Welfare Administration	Country-specific PDOS	Information sharing; orientation sessions (pre-employment, pre-departure, or post-arrival)	Apart from the regular PDOS, OWWA also conducts the Comprehensive Pre-Departure Education Program (CPDEP) is specific for outbound domestic service workers
	Assist WELL Program (see description under DOLE in this table)		
	OFW Family Circles	Community organizing/engagement of OFW communities	Activities include counseling and stress debriefing for OFW and their families, financial literacy, and values formation sessions
	Education and Livelihood Assistance Program (ELAP)	Education/scholarships	Educational assistance for children of deceased OFWs who were active OWWA members at the time of death, or children of an OFW who is imprisoned or convicted of death penalty abroad. The financial assistance also includes a livelihood grant of PhP15,000 to the spouse (if married) or parents (if single) of the OFW.

Agency	OFW Reintegration programs & services	General category of program and services	Description
	Repatriation services	Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services)	Also covers repatriation of OFW remains
	Enhanced Entrepreneurial Development Training (EEDT)	Enterprise/Livelihood development	Implemented in partnership with DTI
	OFW – Enterprise Development and Loan Program (OFW-EDLP)	Financing/financial services or support	The loan facility is for graduates of the EEDT. Program partners are the Landbank and the Development Bank of the Philippines.
	Balik-Pinas! Balik-Hanapbuhay!	Enterprise/Livelihood development	For displaced, distressed OWWA members, and those who were victimized by illegal recruitment or trafficking (see also Coca-cola Foundation's Women REACH in this table)
	Tulong sa Pag-Unlad sa Samahang OFWs (Tulong PUSO) Program	Enterprise/Livelihood development	For registered OFW groups, or OFW Family Circles (15-30 members)
	Skills-for-Employment Scholarship Program (SESP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education/scholarships • Skills development/certification 	The scholarship is for technical-vocational courses and specialized training programs given by institutions accredited by TESDA, CHED, MARINA and DOST. The recipient must be an active OWWA member or her/his dependent
	GEAR UP (Go Earn Achieve Return Uplift Philippines) Program	Financial education/education on savings and investment	For overseas domestic service workers and their families; trainings are provided on-site (for OFWs) and in the country (for their families); in partnership with ATIKHA and other stakeholders
	Groceria Project	Financing/financial services or support	Interest-free loans in the form of merchandise for OFW Family Circles intending to put up a grocery store as livelihood project
Philippine Overseas Employment Administration	Assist WELL Program (see description under DOLE in this table)		

Agency	OFW Reintegration programs & services	General category of program and services	Description
Pagtutulungan sa Kinabukasan: Ikaw, Bangko, Industriya at Gobyerno (PAG-IBIG)	Social protection	Social protection	PAG-IBIG membership and payment of contributions is mandatory for OFWs as of 25 April 2022. Its benefits include housing, provident savings and short-term loans
Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth)	Health insurance	Social protection	Assistance can be availed by the OFW and her/his dependents even if the OFW is abroad
Social Security System	Social pension	Social protection	Apart from regular SSS membership (compulsory), OFWs may also opt to enroll in the Flexi-fund Program for OFWs which is a tax-free pension-savings plan
Technical Education and Skills Development Authority	TESDA Online Program (TOP)	Skills development/certification	Online-based platform for free technical education and skills development, including National Certification II (NC2) courses required for certain overseas employment, for Filipinos in general
Non-Government / Civil Society Organizations			
Apostleship of the Sea	Social welfare program	Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services)	Services include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counseling • Provision of information and reading materials • Value formation seminars • Ship visitation • Sick visitation • Transportation • Liturgical/spiritual services
Atikha	Batang Atikha Savers Club	Financial education/education on savings and investment	aims to build savings consciousness among OFW children to decrease dependence on remittances, and curb lavish spending and negative values of materialism
	Pinoy WISE (Worldwide Initiative for Savings Investment and Enterprise) Family and Income Management Training	Financial education/education on savings and investment	Apart from OFWs and their families, the program also has modules for LGUs, cooperatives, rural banks working with OFWs

Agency	OFW Reintegration programs & services	General category of program and services	Description
	Pinoy WISE Social Enterprise Development	Enterprise/Livelihood development	Promotes OFW investment in agri-business cooperatives and social enterprises
Batis Center for Women Inc. and Batis AWARE	Social Case Management Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services) 	Works with distressed or displaced female OFWs (including survivors of VAW) and their families
	Women Empowerment Program	Community organizing/engagement of OFW communities	Capacity-building with female OFWs returnees on topics such as migrant workers' rights, leadership, organizational development and management
Blas F. Ople Policy Center and Training Institute	OFW Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services) Welfare services (legal) 	The organization have specific welfare interventions for human trafficking cases, and overseas domestic service workers.
	Reintegration Assistance for Trafficked OFWs (RAFT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enterprise/Livelihood development Financing/financial services or support 	In partnership with the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS), and linking with government agencies and private/business sector
Coca-Cola Foundation	OFW Rise Program	Enterprise/Livelihood development	In partnership with OWWA, it targets 10,000 returning OFWs to develop their enterprises and livelihood businesses, including becoming a distributor of Coca-cola beverage products.
	Women Entrepreneurs Reintegrated and Economically Active at Home (Women REACH)	Enterprise/Livelihood development	In partnership with OWWA under its Balik Pinay, Balik Hanapbuhay program and TESDA, it targets returned women OFWs to develop micro enterprises (e.g. sari-sari store, carinderia)
Development Action for Women Network (DAWN)	DAWN Multi-purpose cooperative	Financing/financial services or support	Cash and commodity loans for forced returnees or displaced OFWs, and financial support to enterprising OFs
	Educational assistance to victims of failed (cross-cultural / foreign) marriages	Education/scholarships	Can be availed by DAWN members or their children

Agency	OFW Reintegration programs & services	General category of program and services	Description
	SIKAP-BUHAY or SIKHAY Program	Enterprise/Livelihood development	Targets distressed OFWs, displaced OFWs and OFWs interested in enterprise development. Livelihood projects can be either center-based or home-based
	Psychosocial intervention for distressed OFWs	Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services)	
Faith-based organizations (see also Apostleship of the Sea in this table)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services) Financial education/education on savings and investment Enterprise and livelihood 	Faith-based organizations provide support services for OFWs abroad and in the country, and their families, as part of their ministries
Integrated Seafarers of the Philippines (ISP), and ISP Multi-Purpose Cooperative	Annual National Convention on High Opportunities & Reintegration for Seafarers (ANCHORS)	Enterprise/Livelihood development	For ISP members and their families only
	Seafarers & their Households Integrated Program (SHIP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enterprise/Livelihood development Financial education/education on savings and investment 	For ISP members and their families only
	Financial Assistance and Loans	Financing/financial services or support	For ISP members only
	Gabay ng Marino Program	Information sharing; orientation sessions (pre-employment, pre-departure, or post-arrival)	The Gabay ng Marino Guidebook (2016) contains information needed by seafarers from pre-departure to reintegration, including information on welfare services which they can access. This is given for free to seafarers and seafaring recruitment agencies
Kabalikat ng Migranteng Pilipino, Inc. (KAMPI)	OWWA-accredited PDOS provider	Information sharing; orientation sessions (pre-employment, pre-departure, or post-arrival)	
	Kalinga Program	Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services)	Hotline/crisis intervention, counseling, case management

Agency	OFW Reintegration programs & services	General category of program and services	Description
	Kabuhayan Program	Financial education/education on savings and investment	Training program on financial literacy, livelihood for OFs with investment funds
Kanalungan Center Foundation	Social welfare program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services) Welfare services (legal) Community organizing/engagement of OFW communities 	Works with distressed or displaced female OFWs (including survivors of VAW) and their families
	Socio-economic reintegration program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enterprise/Livelihood development Financing/financial services or support 	In partnership with ILO
Migrante International	Paaralang Migrante	Information sharing; orientation sessions (pre-employment, pre-departure, or post-arrival)	Migrante International has its own modules for OFWs and would-be OFWs and their families similar to the PEOS and PDOS but with more emphasis on migrant workers' rights. Paaralang Migrante also has modules for OFW who experienced violations abroad (distressed OFWs)
	Referral and welfare services	Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services)	Although mainly an advocacy group, Migrante International provides welfare and services to OFW cases brought to them
	Community organizing / engagement	Community organizing/engagement of OFW communities	with OFWs in countries where there is a Migrante International chapter, with OFW families and communities
National Association of Training Centers for Cooperatives (NATCCO)	Financial Literacy Program for Overseas Filipinos (OFs)	Financial education/education on savings and investment	The training targets OF and community leaders of cooperatives
Unlad Kabayan Migrant Services Foundation	Credit Assistance Program	Financing/financial services or support	

Agency	OFW Reintegration programs & services	General category of program and services	Description
	Migrant Savings for Alternative Investments (MSAI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial education/education on savings and investment Enterprise/Livelihood development Community organizing/engagement of OFW communities 	OFWs on-site are organized to pool together a portion of their savings to save in a bank, invest in an Unlad Kabayan social enterprise project, or develop a social enterprise themselves.

Trends and Patterns of Reintegration Programs and Services

Based on the information above, it can be said that much of the reintegration programs and services provided in the country are geared towards securing the economic well-being of OFWs and their families. Out of the 83 reintegration programs and services mapped, 60.24 percent have an economic or livelihood component. In particular, assistance in developing enterprises or livelihood projects where OFWs could invest their savings is a component of 26 reintegration programs (31.33%).

Social reintegration, which includes provision of material, psychosocial, health or legal assistance, and working with groups and communities on migration concerns, is found in 39.76 percent of the programs, while capacity building which is focused on education and skills development is in 19.28 percent of reintegration programs.

Table 3: Reintegration Programs and Services by Classification²¹

Classification	Frequency	% (n=83)
<i>Economic reintegration</i>	50	60.24
Employment	4	4.82
Enterprise and livelihood development	26	31.33
Financial education	12	14.46
Financing and financial support of OFW enterprises	8	9.64
<i>Social reintegration</i>	33	39.76
Community organizing / engagement of OFW communities	6	7.23
Social protection	3	3.61

²¹ Percentages do not total to 100% as one program may have several components

Classification	Frequency	% (n=83)
Welfare (material, psychosocial, health or legal)	24	28.92
<i>Capacity development</i>	16	19.28
Education and scholarships	5	6.02
Information sharing (including overseas work orientations)	9	10.84
Skills development and certification	2	2.41

While a more comprehensive study or gender audit is necessary to gauge the gendersensitivity and gender-responsiveness of OFW reintegration programs, it was noted in the mapping that 11 programs and services specified women OFWs as their target clientele, particularly displaced or distressed women OFWs and OFW survivors of VAW. Domestic service workers form another sub-group of women OFWs identified in three reintegration programs, two of which are under OWWA. It is also expected that majority of the OFWs needing reintegration-related assistance under programs targeting au pairs, spouses/fiancées of foreign nationals and survivors of human trafficking would be women given the overrepresentation of females in these groups. On the other hand, interventions directed at seafarers (from the Apostleship of the Sea and Integrated Seafarers of the Philippines) are likely to directly benefit mostly males, who comprise a great majority of sea-based OFWs.

Available sex-disaggregated data from the National Reintegration Center for OFWs showed that a large majority of their service users are female. From 2019 to 2021, females comprised 73 percent (3,680) of OFWs who have benefitted from the Livelihood Development Assistance Program. There was no available sex-disaggregated data on the type of livelihood projects undertaken by the OFWs during this period, however, if 2018 data from the Balik Pinay! Balik Hanapbuhay Program (a women-specific NRCO program) is an indication, majority of livelihood projects implemented are categorized as “wholesale, retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles.” This category covers putting up sari-sari stores, or neighborhood sundry shops, which is the most common livelihood project among OFWs, female or male, according to the NRCO.²²

Table 4: Livelihood Projects of OFWs Assisted Under the
Balik Pinay! Balik Hanapbuhay Program in 2018, by Classification²³

Livelihood Project	Frequency	Percentage (n=1,870)
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	1,239	66.26

²² Interview with Espina, M. and Palad, F., National Reintegration Center for OFWs (01 June 2022).

²³ Data from the Balik Pinay! Balik Hanapbuhay! 1st to 4th Quarter of 2018. Available from <https://nrco.owwa.gov.ph/index.php/transparency-seal>. For details of the activities under each industry category, see the listing on the *2009 Philippine Standard Industrial Classification*. Available from https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/PSA_PSIC_2009.pdf.

Livelihood Project	Frequency	Percentage (n=1,870)
Accommodation and food services activities	143	7.65
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	93	4.97
Manufacturing	53	2.83
Water supply, sewerage, waste management	1	0.05
Construction	1	0.05
Transportation and storage	1	0.05
Activities of private households as employers of domestic personnel	1	0.05
Art, entertainment and recreation	1	0.05
Other service activities	337	18.02

COVID-19 and OFW Reintegration Programs

Reintegrating OFWs amid the COVID-19 pandemic is a special case as its reach and impact is felt globally, affecting both countries of origin and destination. More than a health crisis, the pandemic tested the limits of international migration policies as people's mobility and physical proximity are identified as main factors of viral transmission. Governments of labor-sending countries such as the Philippines were also caught unprepared for the surge in demand for OFW assistance and the large influx of repatriated nationals, at the same time they were grappling with the pandemic's impact on their local economies and people's lives. The pandemic also necessitated the creation of special programs to support returned OFWs in their immediate needs for welfare assistance, financial support, and income generation.

The Bayanihan to Heal as One (R.A. 11469) law, and its extension, the Bayanihan to Recover as One law (R.A. 11494), provided the broad framework for economic and social welfare interventions during the pandemic. Interventions for OFWs are found in the provision on inclusion in social amelioration programs (SAPs);²⁴ access to livelihood assistance, skills training program, loan assistance and employment opportunities;²⁵ cross-border mobility i.e., inter-LGU travel;²⁶ and expansion or facilitation of MSME programs to OFWs.²⁷ These provisions were operationalized by the different government agencies, especially the DOLE (employment), DA and DTI (livelihood and enterprises support), OWWA and DSWD (social welfare), DILG (localized policies on cross-border travel, other support services) and TESDA (skills development).

²⁴ Section 4(f)2, R.A. 11469

²⁵ Section 4(g), R.A. 11469

²⁶ Section 4(p), R.A. 11469

²⁷ Section 4(z), R.A. 11469

Table 3: Special Programs for OFWs and Repatriated Filipinos Affected by COVID-19 Pandemic

Agency	OFW Support Programs & Services	General category of program and services	Description
Department of Agriculture	Expanded Sure Aid and Recovery Project (SURE COVID-19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financing/financial services or support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides working capital loans for micro and small agri-business enterprises affected by the pandemic Eligible borrowers can avail up to PhP10 million, interest-free and payable in 5 years Not exclusive to OFWs
Department of Interior and Local Government	OFW Desks in local government units	Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinates the arrival of returned overseas Filipinos to their city, municipality or province of origin, ensuring health and safety protocols on quarantine and necessary clearances for travel are followed Guidelines are found in DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2020-075
Department of Labor and Employment	DOLE-AKAP (Abot Kamay ang Pagtulong) Program	Subsidies/cash grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One-time financial assistance of PhP10,000 for qualified displaced returning overseas Filipinos, documented or undocumented OFWs assisted under OWWA Special Order 053, s.2020 can no longer avail the assistance Guidelines are published in DOLE Department Order No. 220 s.2020 Implemented in partnership with OWWA
	OFW Assistance Information System (OASIS)	Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online platform of the DOLE to facilitate orderly and smooth repatriation and welfare assistance to OFWs during the COVID-19 pandemic

Agency	OFW Support Programs & Services	General category of program and services	Description
	Job generation/job fairs for OFWs	Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participating government agencies include the Department of Transportation and Department of Public Works and Highway (under the Build, Build, Build Program); the Philippine Export Zone Authority (Development Outreach for Labor, Livelihood, and Advancement, or DOLLAR program)
Department of Social Welfare and Development	Emergency subsidy as provided in DSWD Memorandum Circular 30 s.2020	Subsidies/cash grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One-time cash assistance of PhP5,000-8,000 (based on the social worker's assessment of need) for recently repatriated OFWs (due to the pandemic) belonging to low-income families Undocumented OFWs are especially targeted by the subsidy
Department of Trade and Industry	Helping the Economy Recover thru OFW Enterprise Start-ups (HEROES)	Financing/financial services or support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PhP100 million loan facility was opened under the program for returned OFWs displaced from their employment because of the pandemic OFWs can loan PhP10,000 to 100,000 as start-up capital interest and collateral-free

Agency	OFW Support Programs & Services	General category of program and services	Description
Department of Transportation	Airport-based One-Stop Shop for Returned Overseas Filipinos (ROFs), and Locally Stranded Individuals (LSI)	Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a convergence of services for ROFs and LSIs including COVID-19 testing, quarantine arrangements, health care, welfare services, and assistance in returning to their home provinces • Participating government agencies are DoTr attached agencies, Department of Tourism – Philippines (DOT), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of National Defense – Philippines (DND), Office of Civil Defense – Department of National Defense (OCD), Department of Labor and Employment – DOLE OWWA Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (DOLE – OWWA), Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of the Philippines (DFA), Philippine National Police (PNP), and the Bureau of Quarantine (BOQ).
Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA)	OWWA Cash Assistance for COVID-19 positive OFWs	Financing/financial services or support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-time financial assistance of US\$ 200 (PhP10,000) for qualified OFWs who cannot work because of COVID-19 infection
	OWWA Special Order 053, s.2020	Financing/financial services or support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-time financial assistance of US\$ 200 (PhP10,000) for qualified OFWs bound for China, Hong Kong or Macau, who were stranded because of the pandemic • Availing this disqualifies the OFW to the DOLE-AKAP financial assistance

Agency	OFW Support Programs & Services	General category of program and services	Description
	Project EASE (Educational Assistance through Scholarship in Emergencies)	Education/scholarships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational assistance for dependents of active OFWA members whose employment was disrupted by the pandemic Maximum grant of PhP 10,000 annually for four years
	Tabang OFW	Education/scholarships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One-time subsidy of PhP30,000 as educational assistance to qualified children of repatriated, displaced or deceased OFWs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The program is in partnership with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED)
	OFW Kalinga (land-based workers) and Tulong Marino (sea-based workers)	Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food and accommodations assistance to stranded OFW returnees Tulong Marino also provides food packs for locally stranded seafarers
	Hatid-Sundo para sa OFW	Welfare services (material aid, psychosocial or health services)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free transportation for OFWs going to or coming from the airport (NAIA 1, 2, and 3) during the enhanced community quarantine
	Bayanihan Para sa Balik Kabayan (BalikaBayanihan) Campaign	Community organizing/engagement of OFW communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobilizes government agencies, CSOs and private sector, and volunteers interested in providing services for OFWs affected by the pandemic Services solicited include: psychosocial services, training, business opportunities, financial services, mentoring, etc. (https://balikabayanihan.owwa.gov.ph)

Agency	OFW Support Programs & Services	General category of program and services	Description
Technical Education and Skills Development Authority	TESDA Abot Lahat ang OFWs	Skills development/certification	Developed in response to OFWs displaced and repatriated due to COVID-19; it is a special feature of the TESDA Online Program (TOP) which caters to the general public, including OFWs, even before the pandemic

Women OFWs, COVID-19 and Reintegration

The precarious situation of OFWs as workers from a developing country, and largely employed in unskilled and semi-skilled occupations, is highlighted in times of crises such as civil conflicts in the countries of destination, economic recessions, and pandemics. Women OFWs are an especially vulnerable group because they are in elementary occupations that are largely unregulated, and carry higher risks of being exploited. The persistence of traditional gender roles and expectations at the level of the family and communities also bears down on the resources and opportunities open to women OFWs for economic and social mobility when they return to the Philippines.

These issues have been further highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in its first months when health and safety protocols were still evolving. One of the main features of the government strategy to contain COVID-19 transmission is through control of people's mobility and physical distancing. This was achieved through the national or localized lockdowns, which involved shutdown of workplaces deemed not to be providing essential services; shifting school operations to home-based learning; suspension of public transport; installation of cross-border checkpoints; and strict community curfews, among others.

For many deployed OFWs, the difficulties of physical and social isolation were compounded because they were in a foreign country. Many had to worry about their families in their home country at the same time navigating the pandemic in their countries of destination. The pandemic also emphasized the gendered dimensions of women migrant workers' economic, social and political status, which have implications on OFW interventions and support services, especially reintegration programs. The issues encountered are not new but aggravated by a global pandemic.

Pre-deployment

- There is no sex-disaggregated data on the number of OFWs considered as locally stranded individuals (LSIs), or those who were unable to leave for their employment (whether under new contract or returning to their current employment) due to the pandemic. However, it can be said that a large number of these were women, as statistics show that females have comprised majority of OFWs for the past two decades at least. Among those unable to leave amid the pandemic were

nurses affected by the moratorium imposed by the government on the deployment of healthcare workers as COVID-19 stretched health systems. Being stranded in the country resulted not only in women OFWs' loss of work and income, but also increasing debts for many migrant workers who had to borrow money to process their overseas employment.²⁸ Adding to this, OFWs from the provinces also had to borrow money for their daily expenses while waiting for flights to resume, or transportation to go back to their communities, in spite of the food and shelter assistance provided to them by government and civil society organizations. These unforeseen challenges could create significant stress manifesting in psychosocial issues in some cases.

- Risk of illegal recruitment and trafficking increased during the pandemic as syndicates exploited the difficult economic situation of households; in majority of the cases women are often victimized.²⁹

During employment/in the country of destination

- Women OFWs are mostly in jobs which are vulnerable to the economic impact of COVID-19 i.e. in food service, hotel, entertainment industries, which were shut down or have drastically reduced operations during the pandemic resulting in underemployment or outright termination of contracts. Wage theft (e.g. withholding or non-payment of salaries and benefits, or being made to do multiple work not covered by contracts, or work for longer hours without compensation) was also aggravated as some employers exploited the economic vulnerability and social isolation of OFWs during the pandemic.
- Elementary occupations, where 70.3 percent of female OFWs are employed,³⁰ are often not covered by social protection programs such as healthcare and social security benefits,³¹ as well as basic labor benefits such as overtime pay and sick leaves. Although these social protection schemes are stipulated in standard work contracts, its implementation leaves much to be desired. This is especially true for migrant domestic workers,³² and its impact were glaring during the pandemic. Many female OFWs have to rely on Philippine government support for COVID-19 treatment, and even essential needs such as food and shelter when they were displaced from their employment.

²⁸ One of the findings of a 2016 study on the working conditions of foreign domestic service workers in Singapore and Hong Kong, is that the average debt of Filipino first-time hires was US\$ 1,653 and 1,845, respectively. Filipino and Indonesian first-time hires were also more likely to be in debt (61%) compared to those who have been working abroad for more than two years (41%) (Seefar 2016).

²⁹ UN Office on Drugs and Crime (n.d.)

³⁰ Philippine Statistics Authority (2021).

³¹ Apart from OWWA membership which entitles OFWs to access social services and benefits, including accident, sickness and disability-related insurance, it is mandatory for all OFWs, sea or land-based, to be enrolled under the Social Security System (SSS), PhilHealth and PAG-IBIG. This is in consonance with the provisions of the Social Securities Act (R.A. 11199), the Universal Health Care Law (RA 11223), and the POEA-PAG-IBIG Joint Advisory No. 01-2022, respectively. The Philippines also has bilateral social security agreements with Austria, UK and Northern Ireland, Spain, France, Canada, Quebec, Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, Denmark, Portugal, Germany and Japan (SSS, 10 July 2018).

³² An ILO report (2022) states that only 6 percent of domestic service workers worldwide could be considered legally covered by comprehensive social security schemes. The percentage varies from region to region, however, the most vulnerable are those working in the Arab States (0.0%), Asia and the Pacific (0.7%), and Africa (0.1%) where almost none enjoys full social security coverage.

- Domestic service workers report being forced by their employers to work longer hours and with no days off during lockdowns. Majority of the OFW cases of wage theft involved domestic service workers.³³ There are also cases of Filipino domestic service workers in Hong Kong being abandoned and evicted by their employers when they tested positive for the virus. Employers were unwilling to let the OFW quarantine in their homes, or shoulder expenses for their quarantine and related needs. This was an additional source of physical and mental stress on OFWs.³⁴
- Working in health and care services (e.g. working in hospitals, nursing homes, hospices) also carry a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 for OFWs, and majority of the OFWs in this occupation are females.³⁵
- Apart from COVID-19, women OFWs also face health risks related to the nature of their work or workplaces. In a 2017 study of the common health problems of female OFWs, it was reported that issues related to reproductive health (e.g. dysmenorrhea, irregular menstruation, pain during urination) were the primary reason of women OFWs for accessing OWWA and PhilHealth benefits (31%). Most of these claims are from domestic service workers; data showed that there is a strong positive correlation between domestic work and reproductive health issues, as well as health concerns related to digestive, immune/lymphatic, and musculoskeletal systems.³⁶
- There is also an upward trend in OFWs experiencing mental health issues which can be traced to adverse working environments while a labor migrant and unresolved post-repatriation concerns. Experiences of stress, social isolation, discrimination and abuse are factors which increase risk for poor physical and mental health. Lack of mental health services in the country of destination (land-based workers) or in the sea vessel (sea-based workers), mental health professionals in Philippine foreign service posts, and resources for services are also challenges.³⁷

Return and reintegration

- By December 2021, more than 800,00 overseas Filipino affected by COVID-19 have been repatriated with the assistance of the government since the pandemic started.³⁸ Many of the OFW returns were unplanned and forced by circumstances such as job displacement and experiences of violence and discrimination aggravated by the pandemic. Unplanned returns also included OFWs who were still interested to continue with their employment or renew their contracts, but their foreign employers were not keen to support them given economic uncertainties caused by the pandemic.³⁹
- More women (20%) than men (13%) reported paying for the full cost of their repatriation expenses. They were also less likely to receive repatriation support from the government than their male

³³ Migrant Forum in Asia (2021).

³⁴ See, for instance, Luia, I.D., Vandana, N., Davies, S.E., Harman, S., Morgan, R., Smith, J., Wenfam, C., and Grépin, K.A. (2021), and Sun, Y., Servando, K. and E'Silva, R. (26 February 2022)

³⁵ There is an increasing trend of feminization of health care professions in the country, including in fields which are traditionally male dominated. Nursing and physiotherapists which form the majority of OFW health care professionals (new hires), are 90.6% and 61.9% female in 2015 (Abrigo, M.R.M, and Ortiz, D.A.P., December 2019)

³⁶ Esposo Ramirez, V. (2017).

³⁷ Silva, M.E.C, Zarsuelo, Zordilla, M.M., Estacio Jr., Z.D., Mendoza, M.A.F., and Padilla, C.D. (2020).

³⁸ Philippine News Agency (28 November 2021)

³⁹ Delerio, R., Dumalaog, F.C., and Mansal, C. (December 2021)

counterparts, who got the same through their employers and recruitment agencies. The financial strain from this situation was heavier on women because they were generally employed in lower wage occupations than men.⁴⁰

- In 2020, the OWWA recorded 23,986 cases of abuse against OFWs in the Middle East, and 75.05 percent of the cases involved women. These cases included contract violation, maltreatment or mistreatment, immigration or document-related problems, contract substitution, health or medical-related problems, personal problems, sexual abuse or harassment and rape.⁴¹ It should be noted that OFWs are required to have an insurance policy prior deployment, which is expected to compensate or provide for some of the expenses which OFWs may incur in case of accident, illness or death. However, the standard coverage of insurance policies needs to be reviewed for its responsiveness to OFWs' realities. Mangahas (2021) observed there are critical incidents excluded in the standard coverage of OFW insurance policies such as repatriation due to pandemics or wars in the country of destination, physical assault, rape and torture. The insurance provisions are also not explicit whether they cover OFW mistreatment.
- The viability of OFW livelihood development, usually at a micro, small and medium scale, as a feature of many reintegration programs was challenged as MSMEs were one of the more seriously affected sectors during the pandemic.
- Several government employment programs were launched during the pandemic to help displaced workers, including OFWs. These need further review, though, as regards their relevance for women OFWs who were largely employed in elementary occupations abroad, and may lack skills required for employment offerings. Job opportunities under the Build, Build, Build Program (Department of Public Works and Highway) and in the transportation sector (Department of Transportation) are likely oriented to male workers than females, these still being male-dominated. The promotion of virtual or online-based jobs by the government as alternative employment for OFWs, without other supporting interventions such as capacity building, is also challenged by the women's access to digital technology and services, if not low digital literacy to engage in this line of work.⁴²
- Repatriated female OFWs due to the pandemic are less likely to register or know whether they are eligible for government reintegration support as well (47% compared to 52% for males).⁴³
- Traditional views on women and families also affect women OFWs' access to reintegration programs and other economic opportunities, in general. Unpaid care work significantly increased during community lockdowns, and this was expected to be shouldered by women family members. In particular, support to children's studies which shifted to become home-based, and caring for ill family members and relatives were added to women's traditional household activities. Intimate partner violence against women, limited or unavailable reproductive healthcare services, alongside their own physical and mental health concerns, were also issues borne by women OFWs.⁴⁴ One consequence of this situation is that women OFWs are hindered from pursuing skills development

⁴⁰Kang, J.W. and Latoja, M.C.G. (2021)

⁴¹ Baclig, C.E. (29 July 2021)

⁴² DOLE (22 November 2020), Marasigan, L.S. (09 June 2021)

⁴³ IOM (2021)

⁴⁴ International Labour Organization (2020)

courses and other activities outside household concerns which could increase their human and social capital, and broaden their income and livelihood prospects beyond working abroad.

- Related to women OFW health, access to reproductive healthcare was severely constrained during the first months of the pandemic and in periods of surges in COVID-19 cases. This refers both to the limited access to facilities and services, as well as cost of accessing these where available due to additional costs of COVID testing, and other expenses related to health and safety protocols in health facilities, which are not publicly funded. As mentioned earlier, reproductive health issues are the topmost health concern of female OFWs which prompted them to seek OWWA and PhilHealth assistance in pre-pandemic times, especially among domestic service workers. More telehealth options became available to Filipinos as the pandemic progressed, however, access to this might not be easy for many OFWs due to issues of digital literacy and access to devices and connectivity, apart from cost considerations and lack of familiarity with or access to online payment modes.

As mentioned previously, women OFWs are already at a disadvantage as regards reintegration even before the pandemic. Based on the 2016 DOLE-ILS study, 70 percent of female OFWs did not have economic activity, whether employment or business, when they returned in contrast to only 31 percent among males. The sex-disaggregated data on the same among OFWs repatriated because of the pandemic also showed that more females are unemployed three months post-arrival, but the difference with that of males is minimal (84% among female OFWs compared to 82% compared to males).⁴⁵

Many women OFWs return to the country while they are still in their productive years (31-40 years old). However, because a large majority of them have been employed in domestic service work and other elementary occupations, with no access to further education and training in their country of destination, they have a limited range of skills to be employed as well as financial resources (e.g. savings) to use as capital for an enterprise or for investment. Gendered roles in the family may also be a barrier to women's continued participation in paid work when they are back with their family. For instance, as a woman, providing care for the household members might be regarded as her primary task, even when she is engaged in activities for self-development and economic empowerment through reintegration programs. Returning women OFWs might feel obliged to remain present at home to make up for their long absence and separation from the children.

Moreover, not all OFWs—women and men alike—have the aptitude or interest in going into business ventures or investments. For instance, among the OFWs repatriated because of the COVID-19 pandemic, only 14 percent expressed preference for business support as reintegration program; 75 percent stated that they preferred cash assistance to address basic needs. On the other hand, OFWs might express interest to be economically secure through self-employment, business or investing, however, they are limited by their current financial obligations (e.g. debt, supporting basic expenses of their household) and priorities (e.g. children's education, building a house).⁴⁶

⁴⁵ IOM (2021)

⁴⁶ DOLE-ILS 2016

The 2018 NMS data showed only 9.6 percent of female OFWs accessed livelihood assistance, compared to 23.1 percent among male OFWs.

LBT (Lesbians, Bisexuals and Trans-men) OFWs

The experiences of women of diverse SOGIE is practically invisible in OFW data and research. In 2015, the non-government organization, GALANG,* and the Institute of Development Studies conducted a study on the economic situation of LBTs which also covered the experiences of LBT OFWs working as domestics in Hong Kong and in the Middle East. The length of the OFWs' tenure as overseas workers spanned from one to 29 years at the time of the study. Their ages range from 28 to 60.

Some of the highlights of the report were:

- Material poverty and gender-based discrimination against LBTs in the Philippines are the two main factors which push them to pursue overseas work despite its difficulties and in some cases, resulting to de-skilling of LBTs who have college degrees.
- While overseas work may provide more freedom for LBTs to express their sexuality (or explore their sexuality as in the cases of married female OFWs having female partners while abroad), they are still vulnerable to forms of violence, such as sexual harassment and abuse, from their male employers, and from the general Hong Kong society.
- The situation is different for LBT OFWs in the Middle East where homosexuality is criminalized. One LBT shared that she and her partner were once photographed by their housemates, fellow OFWs, sleeping on the same bed and threatened them that they would show the pictures to the authorities.
- The LBTs who experienced physical violence and bullying in their families expressed that being able to provide for their families gained them more acceptance and power in their households. Financial security post-migration in the form of savings and investments are important for LBTs and their partners to live independently from their families while continuing to support them as needed.

* Galang is a "lesbian-initiated, lesbian-run feminist human rights organization that works with lesbians, bisexual women, and trans men (LBT) in urban poor communities, or women who either self-identify as lesbian or bisexual and/or have relationships with women but self-identify as heterosexual, as well as persons labeled as females at birth but self-identify as male (trans men)." (from the Galang website: <http://www.galangphilippines.org/about/who-we-are/>)

Transpinay OFWs in Japan*

The image of Filipino entertainers in Japan is that of a cisgendered woman. However, there is a growing number of Filipino transwomen or “transpinay” in this industry. Okada’s study of the migration journey of 14 transpinay entertainers showed that many of them are from middle-class households and college graduates, prior their migration to Japan. Their decision to work overseas is based on economic and non-economic reasons: economic because of the limited employment opportunities for transgender people in the Philippines; non-economic reasons revolve around sexual emancipation through working as an entertainer which allows them to express more fully their gender identity. Resembling a woman in physical appearance, manners and performance is emphasized as early as their pre-departure showcase (PDS) or audition to be entertainers in Japan, thus passing the auditions and eventually working abroad is an empowering and gender-affirming experience for the transpinays. As OFWs, earning a higher income than what they would have in the Philippines also meant more savings for their gender confirmation surgery.

The positive experience working as an entertainer in Japan is one of the reasons why many transpinays choose to remain in the country, even when they have lost their legal status to do so. That is, they cite the marginalization of transgender people in the Philippines, in the workplace and in society in general, as a disincentive to return. On the other hand, there were also narratives of transpinay entertainers struggling with mental health issues, drug addiction and lack of access to health care in Japan.

* Okada, T. (2022). “Gender performance and migration experience of Filipino transgender women entertainers in Japan”. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8986270/>

Ways Forward

This paper presents a broad overview of gender and migrant workers’ reintegration in the Philippines. While there is a limited range of information available on the topic, the composite picture from various migration data sources—administrative data, the National Migration Survey, statistical reports and studies from migration-focused agencies—point to following discussion points:

First, gaps in migration data in the country hinder a more robust discussion and evaluation of current approaches to OFW reintegration. Migration data is largely drawn from administrative data, which only collects data on the agency’s service users, and mostly people in regular migration. The vulnerable groups of migrant workers who need reintegration services the most may not always be represented in this case. This includes undocumented or trafficked workers and OFWs who experienced violence and abuse but did not report it. Migration data is also often not disaggregated according sex and gender, age, ethnicity, occupation abroad, among other distinctions which can facilitate a deeper understanding of their reintegration needs.

Second, economic support services, especially enterprise development programs which are the focus of many reintegration programs of both government agencies and civil society organizations, need to be evaluated for its applicability to the general profile of OFWs. Several considerations are pertinent in this regard: the OFWs’ interest versus capacities, type of assistance or amount of grant, conditionalities of the grant (e.g. initial capitalization from the OFW, putting up a collateral), timeframe of support, business environment in areas where the livelihood project will be

implemented. This also has a large interface on gender issues that disadvantage women from full economic participation. Confining women to unpaid care work, for instance, is a factor as it limits the development of their skills for jobs beyond elementary occupations where the wages are low and the risk for exploitation and abuse is higher. This is true both for women workers in the country and women migrant workers. The type of enterprises being promoted to women OFW returnees also needs to be reviewed if they are progressively contributing to women's empowerment in both the private and public spheres, or simply building on and reinforcing gender stereotypes and constraints on women (e.g. home-based livelihoods which, while may provide income to women, does not necessarily challenge the idea of mothers/women being the primary caregiver of the household).

Third, social protection mechanisms for OFWs need to be strengthened as part of more strategic measures to promote their welfare upon return, particularly as regards healthcare and social pension. Provisions for healthcare must be explicit to include reproductive health care and maternity benefits. The standard coverage of the mandatory insurance for migrant workers needs to be reviewed, if not amended, to include compensation or support in cases of mistreatment, physical assault, rape and torture.

Fourth, the approach of reintegration programs is largely at the individual or household level. Very few programs also undertake organizing work among OFWs, as well mainstreaming migration and development perspectives at the local level, to address the structural factors which hinder effective reintegration, including barriers to gender equality. While it has been touted as a channel for women to be empowered, the value of overseas labor migration as a platform for realizing gender equality is diminished when viewed under the light of the gender-based discrimination against women in the household and community, and a constricted labor market for women in the country and globally (i.e., low-waged care work, entertainment, sales and services). Nevertheless, its potential to be empowering can be maximized when structural barriers to gender equality are addressed alongside increasing women OFW's personal capacities and access to resources.

The above four points – reintegration and migration data, OFW women and economic empowerment, social protection, and addressing structural barriers to the realization of women migrant workers rights – are forwarded as major thematic areas which UN Women explore to develop actions ensuring gender-responsiveness in OFW reintegration.

Recommendations

Beyond the UN Women, the paper also forwards recommendations for other stakeholders, particularly the government migration agencies, to strengthen and ensure gender sensitivity and responsiveness of OFW reintegration programs. The overarching reference is the National Action Plan on Sustainable and Gender-Responsive Return and Reintegration; the recommendations below only emphasize some of the concrete steps which can be undertaken to reinforce current programs, as well as to address critical gaps specifically identified by this paper which affect the development, implementation and improvement of government reintegration services.

On standards and data collection

1. Establish clear and concrete standards to operationalize, monitor and evaluate the extent of “gender sensitivity” and “gender responsiveness” as applied in government interventions and institutional mechanisms relevant to overseas labor migration and in the operations of the Department of Migrant Workers, as stated for in RA 8042 and RA 11641, respectively, and in cognizance of the provisions of related laws, policies and international commitments such as the UN Conventions on women’s human rights and on migrant workers’ rights, the Global Compact on Migration, and the Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710).
2. Institutionalize the sex and gender-disaggregated collection of migration data (e.g. whether as part of administrative data or national census and surveys).
 - Review and enhance data collection on OFW return and reintegration concerns such as circular migration, reintegration needs, and OFW skills vis-a-vis Philippine labor market needs.
 - Integrate migration status in national data sets to track the programs and services accessed by OFWs (e.g. on VAW, welfare assistance, social protection programs, national and LGU employment assistance programs)
 - Integrate migration status in national data sets, where relevant, to track contributions of current or returnee OFW to local and national economic development (e.g. how many MSMEs are owned by current or former migrant workers by sex and gender) and social development (e.g. volunteer work)
3. Apart from disaggregating migration data by sex and gender, institutionalize collection and disaggregation of the data according to occupation abroad i.e., whether land or sea-based, and by occupational category.
4. Go beyond collecting disaggregated data and ensure their effective use to inform policies and programs, by increasing migration governance agencies’ capacities for data visualization and analysis, while also giving due regard to data privacy and security.

On service provision

1. Ensure support for GAD mainstreaming programs, projects and activities of government agencies involved in OFW services, particular agencies which are focused on overseas labor migration concerns. This may include:
 - Continued skills development of personnel on GAD planning and policy development
 - Ensuring the agency’s allotment of a minimum 5% of its total budget for GAD-related initiatives
 - Conducting activities to increase gender, diversity and cultural sensitivity and responsiveness of personnel, and of programs and services
 - Strengthen linkage and collaboration between the GAD and migration / ATN (assistance to nationals) portfolios in foreign service posts, especially when these involve different persons or units as coordinators or direct implementers.
2. Build the capacities and resources of foreign service posts in providing pre-return reintegration-related services such as financial education, skills development, information sharing on

employment and livelihood opportunities, as well as services and interventions on various concerns which can be accessed by OFWs through the embassies or consulates.

- Even where posts cannot directly provide such services, they can play a vital role in vetting and curating reintegration programs in the countries of destination, since poorly designed programs could actually be counterproductive for OFWs
- Regarding skills development, coordination with relevant stakeholders on basic courses on the digital literacy and use of digital resources (devices and applications) for livelihood and employment.

3. Institutionalize programs providing remote/online welfare services to OFWs, or establish formal partnerships with civil society or volunteer organizations for such.

4. Mainstream information and education sessions on the following topics in PDOS and PAOS modules: financial literacy and social protection services; human rights; reproductive, sexual and mental health; and government reintegration services.

- These can also be integrated in PEOS modules to help potential OFWs make more grounded self-assessments of their readiness to work abroad.
- Specific to social protection, promote the benefits, entitlements and services which could be accessed by OFWs from the mandatory social protection programs such as the SSS, PhilHealth and PAG-IBIG.

On strengthening and developing reintegration programs

1. Conduct periodic evaluation or impact studies on the effectiveness of current reintegration programs in general, and in responding to gendered issues in overseas labor migration in particular. These studies should also highlight how existing services promote gender equality at the level of individual OFWs and their families, their communities, and the national and local policy environment.

2. Review the current array of reintegration programs for its responsiveness to returned OFW needs, and from a gendered perspective, which considers the profile and situation of male, female and people with diverse SOGIE OFWs and their communities.

3. Identify points for strengthening collaboration and task-sharing with OFW host countries /countries of destination, recognizing that these countries also greatly benefit from the contributions of migrant workers.

- Among others, explore and promote the possibility of migrant workers availing of training programs offered by government agencies such as technical-vocational training institutions, especially those that are recognized by local and foreign employers

4. Examine opportunities to link reintegration programs with other major development concerns and challenges the country is facing, especially since climate-linked hazards and disasters could add impetus for people to migrate for work. Efforts toward climate adaptation and resilience-building

could open up employment and livelihood opportunities, such as cash-for-work arrangements in the green economy.

Enhancing local to national institutional mechanisms on overseas labor migration

1. Strengthen coordination mechanisms between national and local agencies and other stakeholders in overseas labor migration on the reintegration of OFWs, whether this pertains to economic interventions and strategies, psychosocial services, OFW skills development, or general community development.
2. Build the capacities and resources of LGUs to undertake, publish and utilize subnational gender statistics on overseas labor migration as basis for migration and development planning at the community level, especially in relation to OFW return and reintegration.
3. Support LGUs to fulfill their roles in relation to trafficking and illegal recruitment as stipulated in national policies such as Migrant Workers Act (RA 8042) and the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (RA 9308) and related laws.
4. Institutionalize mechanisms and processes on migration and development at the LGU-level to support national level planning, and implementation of relevant and gender and diversity-sensitive programs and initiatives.

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Laws and Policies

Republic Act 8042 (Migrant Workers Act of 1995)
Republic Act 10022 (Amendment to the Migrant Workers Act of 1995)
Republic Act 11641 (Department of Migrant Workers Law)
Republic Act 11641 Implementing Rules and Regulations

Websites

Department of Labor and Employment (www.dole.gov.ph)
Department of Migrant Workers (www.dmw.gov.ph)
National Reintegration Center for OFWs (www.nrco.owwa.gov.ph)
Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (www.owwa.gov.ph)
Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (www.poea.gov.ph)

Interview

Espina, M. and Palad, F., National Reintegration Center for OFWs. Zoom interview (01 June 2022).