

Background paper¹

Theme 2: Migration narratives and communication: What role, responsibility and resources do governments have?

Roundtable Session 2.2: *Communicating effectively with migrants*

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1. Introduction

a. *Global Context*

Our world is witnessing the highest levels of movement on record. The growing number of international migrants has now reached 272 million, up from 258 million people in 2017². That is not a new phenomenon. Since the earliest times, humanity has been on the move. Some people move in search of labor or economic opportunities, to join family, or to study. Others move to escape conflict, persecution, terrorism, human rights violations, or the adverse effects of climate change and natural disasters.

Migration is also arguably more controversial today than at any point since the end of World War II. Migration is taking place in a highly polarized context, rife with negative and harmful misrepresentation of migrants and migration processes, which bears little resemblance to reality. While various surveys and

¹ This paper has been prepared by UNAOC, under the guidance of the RT 2.2 Co-Chairs Gambia, the Philippines and United Arab Emirates, and with valuable inputs from RT team members during and between the Roundtable consultations. Though all attempts have been made to make sure that the information provided is accurate, the authors do not accept any liability or give any guarantee for the validity, accuracy and completeness of the information in this paper, which is intended to solely inform and stimulate discussion of Roundtable session 2.2 during the GFMD Summit meeting in January 2020. It is not exhaustive in its treatment of the session 2.2 theme and does not necessarily reflect the views of the authors, the GFMD organizers or the governments or international organizations involved in the GFMD process.

² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). Population Division. International Migrant Stock 2019. Report: <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>

reports have shown that general attitudes towards migration remain positive, anti-migration voices are stronger and louder than pro-migration voices.

Deepening political polarization and harsh anti-immigration rhetoric have reshaped even mainstream narratives about migration and migrant communities. In numerous countries, political and public hostility to migration has resulted in a significant reduction in legal routes to immigration.

As migration becomes more contentious and politicized, governments face the challenge of finding ways to inject information into a polarized policy debate and gain the trust of skeptical publics, facing obstacles that can lead messages to be misinterpreted, or to exacerbate tensions. In this context, there is a crucial need for governments to communicate effectively with migrants, who may be distrustful of governments of both receiving and sending countries.

Endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly on 19 December 2018, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) urges governments to “provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration” (objective 3) and to commit to strengthen “efforts to provide, make available and disseminate accurate, timely, accessible, and transparent information on migration-related aspects for and between States, communities and migrants at all stages of migration³.”

Roundtable 2.2 will examine the role, responsibility, and resources that governments have to communicate with migrants, as well as best practices and recommendations for governments to communicate more effectively with migrants.

b. Objectives of Roundtable 2.2

The objectives of Roundtable 2.2 are to:

- Exchange experiences of governments – and other stakeholders – about practices and lessons learned in communicating effectively with migrants throughout the migration cycle (in countries of origin, transit, destinations, and return);
- Identify ways and methodologies to measure the success of various communication initiatives targeted at migrants;
- Identify the reciprocal benefits of effective communication with migrants for all stakeholders;
- Foster a better understanding of governments’ goals, tools, challenges, and responsibilities when communicating with migrants, including in the context of pre-departure information campaigns, as part of consular outreach efforts, in the context of immigration and visa processes, and in local integration processes;
- Raise awareness about the importance of a gender-responsive and human rights-based approach when communicating with migrants;
- Strengthen the ability of governments to inform migrants about reintegration processes in their countries of origin;

³ Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration:
https://refugeemigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/180711_final_draft_0.pdf

- Reflect on the effectiveness and ethical implications of governments' communication practices when addressing migrant communities and diaspora organizations, and explore options to address new challenges in the context of emerging forms of media, including misinformation and hate speech.

c. Desired Outcomes of Roundtable 2.2

The desired outcomes of Roundtable 2.2 are to:

- Collect concrete feedbacks on areas of needed improvement in governments' communication with migrants, including ensuring that communication is gender-responsive, culturally sensitive and effectively targeted;
- Identify the means and tools that would support the evaluation of the efficiency of governments' communication with migrants;
- Articulate and draft tangible recommendations for future multi-stakeholder cooperation, grouping all levels of decision-making, including non-governmental actors, such as migrant, diaspora, women, and youth organizations.

2. Key Issues for Policy Makers

Governments are facing a drastically changing communication landscape. With fewer people reading print media and other printed material, and more content being created and shared online, there have never been more opportunities to tailor communication to suit audience preferences or to provide opportunities for direct dialogue between public administrations and populations.

At the same time, the proliferation of digital media and content creators – as well as disinformation and “fake news” – is making it harder for members of the public – including migrants – to know what information and whom to trust. In addition, the amount and speed of information sharing make it difficult to follow instructions or guidelines.

This new media environment may also be reducing the space for nuanced and balanced reporting. Journalists are working towards even tighter deadlines, and under the pressure of attracting readers, their success being increasingly measured by the number of clicks and shares, which pushes them to produce more sensationalist headlines and content.

Alongside these trends, the way policymakers frame information can significantly shape public opinion and influence the success of migration policies. In a media space increasingly characterized by misinformation and sensationalism, every balanced and fact-based communication initiative counts. And in a context of a lack of trust in governments and increasing support for anti-immigration parties, there is little room for failure.

3. Challenges and Tensions

Government communication about immigration can come from a variety of sources and have different levels. They may be planned or spontaneous, and supportive or against immigration. Governments may aim to communicate neutral information or work to persuade people to support specific policies.

In the context of migration, words and terminology matter. However, while most governments have teams of communication specialists, few have had the training to tackle questions related to immigration, as well as regular updates on migration trends, flows, challenges, and opportunities.

While words do matter, communication is not only a matter of language but also of timing. The actions that accompany communication, the contexts in which they emerge, and the agents/stakeholders who deliver them all send critical cues about their underlying intentions and assumptions. Governments can use communication and leave all parties feeling heard, informed, and without further stigmatizing or alienating migrant communities.

The approach of some governments has been to look at the migration cycle holistically and use different moments to reach migrants and potential migrants with different messages, specifically the moments throughout the cycle when some form of government intervention occurs, such as when they seek documentation for departure or consular processes. This approach requires significant coordination between countries of origin, destination, and transit.

Policy makers tend to over-emphasize the economic impact of migration, which is not always primarily in people's minds. The public is also concerned about stability, loyalty, familiarity, and competition that they feel migrants may bring across a range of goods (jobs, housing, social benefits, access to school, health care and public services). Policymakers need to address those concerns head-on, and to acknowledge the legitimacy of those concerns and explain how potential problems may be avoided.

4. Ideas for Action

Governments and other actors must think of the use of communication and marketing techniques, especially since anti-immigration voices use them very effectively.

Identifying Target Groups

Differences in migration experiences defy traditional audience segmentation — messages and tone of messaging need to be adapted to different audiences. In their communication efforts, governments need to consider the diversity within the migrant community.

Efforts to communicate with migrants should be sensitive to the various situations and circumstances of migrants, which can vary greatly. There are migrant communities with different needs: e.g., women migrants, children migrants, irregular migrants, elderly migrants, labor migrants, migrants with disabilities, LGBT+ migrants, etc.

To communicate effectively with different migrant audiences, governments must spend time and resources to identify the nuances that set them apart, their media consumption patterns, the restrictions they may face and how they will respond to specific narratives. What is convincing to one group might backfire on another. Governments must be aware of differences in literacy, media literacy, and technology literacy and access among migrant populations. Genuinely understanding the concerns of one's target audience and making them feel heard is an essential part of developing successful narratives and communicating effectively with migrants.

Identifying the Right Channels of Communication

Governments need to meet migrants where they are. That means using social media, television, film, and the arts, and any other relevant platforms. Successful communication depends on matching the

message to the audience through the right media channel. Governments need to find appropriate channels to communicate with migrants to ensure that they reach them and better assist them.

Traditional Channels of Communication

Governments may use traditional communication methods, such as grassroots outreach (door-to-door), helplines, hotlines, and call centers, which present an accessible and low-tech way through which communication with migrants can be facilitated.

Consulates are obvious conduits for information dissemination and governments may establish information points along relevant migration routes that offer opportunities for migrants to communicate with consular representatives of the country of origin.

Labour migrants are particularly vulnerable to disinformation during the recruitment stage, when they can fall victims to deception about the nature of employment, the work conditions, etc. In an effort to provide accurate and timely information to migrants at all stages of migration, governments should consider putting in place pre-departure and post-arrival orientation training, which offer direct contact and good opportunities for communicating with migrants.

New Media

Social media serve as an essential source of information for many migrants who may put greater trust in what is circulated on social networks than by government services. To communicate with migrants, governments can take advantage of social media platforms, which can sustain migrant networks and enable them to participate in the generation and dissemination of information. In particular, social media can be used to provide information in real-time, especially in the context of crises/emergencies. Governments may also choose to develop applications that target migrants' information needs, such as emergency services and consular posts.

Identifying the Right Messengers

Communication campaigns are often most successful when they are championed by trusted messengers. The messenger is indeed as important as the message. People are more likely to hear and believe messages from people they can trust. A prominent representative of the diaspora/migrant community in the destination country can be an excellent candidate. Peer-to-Peer outreach in countries of origin directly involving migrants in the collection and dissemination of information has been scientifically proven effective in both informing migrants about risk and changing attitudes towards irregular migration. Governments should consider building alliances with effective messengers/influencers – sports heroes, popular media stars, etc. – and celebrate models of social inclusion and social peace in their communication efforts.

Language

- Governments should communicate in languages that are spoken by migrants;
- Content should be adapted to diverse literacy levels and accessible to individuals with disabilities;
- The language used should be clear and straightforward, and avoid jargon, acronyms, etc.;
- Any messaging should be gender-responsive and address the specific needs and challenges of women, men, girls, and boys – migrants are not a homogenous group;

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- While facts and accurate information are crucial, values are also important. Governments need to understand what it is that people value, their deepest source of common humanity, and how those can be linked to the migrant experience;
- Governments and their communicators need to understand how and when to speak to different audiences, and when to listen.

Interactivity

Communication is a loop. It's not only about communicating *to* migrants, but also about hearing back *from* migrants. Interactivity is crucial in this context. For example, migrant workers should be able to report exploitation and abuse, and have these communication channels connected to assistance and grievance mechanisms.

Assistance and Access to Services

Information that targets migrant communities should:

- Be made available to migrants in a way that does not require them to divulge personal information (immigration status, identity, etc.);
- Include location and contact information for services available to migrants to receive assistance, especially emergency services available in host countries (e.g., hospitals, police, counseling centers, shelters, etc.);
- Comprise clear information regarding the rights of migrants in the host country, human rights and fundamental freedoms, options, and pathways for regular migration, and possibilities for return.

Civil Society Organizations

Enlisting and involving civil society organizations – in particular, migrant and diaspora organizations – can significantly facilitate communication with migrants. Civil society organizations are generally in direct contact with migrants, have information on crises affecting their communities, and can, therefore, be crucial allies in generating content for effective communication. In particular, civil society organizations have the ability to reach migrants who are hard to reach (e.g., migrants in irregular situations, etc.).

Governments may choose to work with specialized civil society organizations to develop guidelines on ways to communicate with migrants. Forming partnerships with migrant organizations and providing support to these organizations (funding, capacity building, activities to leverage their work such as professional training, etc.) may be another efficient way to foster better communication. Organizing events (meetings, conferences, seminars, etc.) with civil society organizations to reach various migrant networks can also be a useful way to get in contact with migrants.

Private Sector

Employers tend to have ongoing contact with migrant workers. Establishing mechanisms to communicate with all of their migrant workers can be an efficient way to reach large numbers of people. These private sector actors can get information to migrants about an emerging crisis, steps they need to take to protect themselves, etc.

The positive role of the private sector is also reflected in effective social dialogue. Consultations and cooperation between governments, employers and workers organizations can lead to better communications between public administrations and migrant workers.

Training

In many national and local migration ministries, policymakers are tasked with designing communication campaigns, weighing word choices, and addressing potential public blowback. The capacity to communicate effectively about migration with migrants should be mainstreamed into core training for in-house communication teams and reflected in strategic communication documents of the respective state authorities. In addition, governments must work to ensure consistency in messaging amongst different government actors, agencies, etc.

Media

Active collaboration between governments and the media (journalists) can contribute to both countering misinformation and reaching migrants with accurate information. Different measures can be put in place, including training opportunities for journalists, the development of codes of conduct for reporting on migration, etc.

5. Guiding Questions

- How can governments and other communicators involve migrants in developing messaging that resonates with them?
- What about the role of non-migrants in this process? Much of the public messaging around immigration coming from governments is almost entirely targeted at a domestic audience, and it is therefore important to recognize their role in shaping the narrative around migration and the impact this inevitably has on messaging.
- How can communication targeting migrants and developed by governments be assessed and tested? How can the efficiency and impact of communication be measured?
- How can messaging be gender-sensitive, addressing the specific needs, priorities and challenges of migrant women, men, girls, and boys?
- How can the coherence of top-level messaging be maintained across multiple audiences? How can governments ensure overall coherence in their messaging and communication with migrants?
- What goals do different parts and levels of governments pursue in their communication with migrants?
- How can governments and other communicators (e.g., civil society, diaspora organizations, migrant communities, etc.) segment successfully? What data / data sources can they draw on to identify audience size / language needs, etc.?
- How can governments make their information accessible to migrants? How can they be responsive to migrants? Are certain communication practices/channels with migrants more useful than others? If so, why, and for what purpose?
- How can governments establish trust with migrants within their borders and with their citizens abroad?
- What messengers should be used to communicate with migrants?
- What media sources should be used to best communicate with migrants?
- How can governments and other stakeholders tackle false information directed at migrants?
- What role can migrants and their networks play in vetting information (peer- review)?
- How can governments, including at local levels, incorporate tailored information on basic services to promote social inclusion and participation by migrant communities?
- How can immigration and visa processes be enhanced to better inform all migrants about the availability of regular pathways for migration?

- To what extent do successful communication practices incentivize voluntary return and sustainable reintegration? What are these practices?
- How can governments and other communicators reach hard-to-reach migrants? What role can migrant communities, civil society, and the private sector play?

6. Resources and Best Practices Examples

Cities

Governments at the local level, while often lacking a voice in setting immigration policy, are responsible for many concrete aspects of migration, from the organization and use of public spaces to the development of affordable housing, and plans to meet the social, cultural, religious, and other needs of diverse communities. Cities and states have a long history of promoting diversity through communication campaigns, such as “[Diverse City](#)” in New York, which presents immigration as part of the city’s identity and richness.

IOM, the UN Migration Agency

- IOM, the UN Migration Agency, launched the [MigrantApp \(MigApp\)](#) in 2017, the first pilot of an IOM global initiative to provide information to facilitate regular, safe, and orderly migration using mobile devices. The MigApp provides reliable, rapid, and free information in three languages on governmental, private, and civil society services for migrants. The MigApp facilitates access to information on more than 1,500 georeferenced centers where migrants can receive assistance or information. The application also offers tips on regular and orderly migration, alerts on risks related to irregular migration and the option to answer mini surveys safely, thus fostering migrant empowerment. The MigApp provides information on health centers, consulates, and embassies, migration offices, human rights protection centers, as well as centers that offer shelter. It also includes information regarding training and employment, specific assistance for vulnerable groups of people such as women, children, and victims of trafficking in persons, as well as assistance programmes for migrants. <https://www.iom.int/news/un-migration-agency-launches-mobile-app-migrants-mesoamerica>
- In September 2019, IOM released the promising results of a rigorous scientific review of its [Migrants as Messengers](#) peer-to-peer awareness-raising campaign implemented in Senegal, Guinea and Nigeria from December 2017 to March 2019. A short video about the Migrants as Messengers campaign can be found here: <https://www.iom.int/video/migrants-messengers-overview>
 - o The project trained returnee irregular migrants to use the Organization’s mobile-phone-based Community Response App to take videos of other returnees answering set questions about their experiences. The videos were edited and widely circulated on social media and at community events.
 - o The [Project Evaluation](#) reveals that 19 per cent of potential migrants surveyed were better informed, 25 per cent more aware of the risks of irregular migration and one-in-five less likely to do so after participating in IOM awareness raising events in Dakar, Senegal, relative to a control group who did not.

OECD Network of Communication Officers on Migration (NETCOM)

Good communication can be a powerful tool in support of migrant integration. The “[Communicating on Migrant Integration](http://www.oecd.org/migration/netcom)” website of the OECD Network of Communication Officers on Migration (NETCOM) makes available articles and good practice examples on the topic: www.oecd.org/migration/netcom.

International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)

Practices supported by ICMPD:

- **Georgia:** Within the EU-funded [ENIGMMA project](#), implemented by ICMPD and funded by the EU, the project team together with Georgian state institutions and stakeholders in the destination country started a practice of joint development of legal residence guidelines for Georgian migrants in several destination countries (Greece, Spain and Italy). On the Georgian side, the Georgian Diaspora department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is involved, alongside the State Commission on Migration Issues, the Consular Department of MFA, and consular services abroad. With regard to the destination countries, the stakeholders differ: they include ministries responsible for migration and residence permits, municipalities, NGOs, academia, and private immigration lawyers.
- **Republic of Moldova:** the [Crisis Communication Plan in the field of irregular migration](#)⁴ was devised with the participation of a wide range of governmental actors and institutions at local and central levels. Such an inclusive approach was important, in particular, when a sensitive topic is addressed and it contributed to better inter-institutional coordination with regard to communication in the field of irregular migration. Another lesson learnt from this action is the need to involve the communication services/communicators of various state agencies.
- **The Philippines:** Together with the Philippines Overseas Employment Administration, ICMPD, under the MIEUX initiative⁵ deployed [social marketing tool](#) in attempting to influence behaviour of different segments of the populations (young people, students, women, would-be migrants, etc.) in relation to a campaign on trafficking and illegal recruitment. Social marketing campaigns are designed to influence the target group’s actions and adopt a new behaviour or change a current behaviour which affects the target group in a negative way. In doing so, there is a need to understand different target groups’ needs and level of understanding and target them differently based on their level of education, age, understanding and other characteristics. In this respect, a 5P approach to communication with migrants is advisable: public - product- place - promotion – partnership.
- Participatory approach by communicating with migrants while devising policies and programmes in order to take into consideration their needs, aspirations and priorities - e.g. Malawi, Madagascar and Ghana developed diaspora engagement policies by consulting diaspora groups abroad; Cabo Verde elaborated the National Immigration Strategy by communicating with immigrants residing in the country.
- **Integrated approaches to communicate with different categories of migrants** – e.g. Pakistan and Afghanistan established [Migrant Resource Centers](#) with EU support⁶ (implemented by ICMPD) targeting would-be migrants and returnees in a holistic manner.

⁴ <https://www.mieux-initiative.eu/en/actions/176-moldova-communication-irregular-migration>

⁵ <https://www.mieux-initiative.eu/en/actions/145-philippines-trafficking-in-human-beings-i>

⁶ <https://www.icmpd.org/our-work/capacity-building/regions/silk-routes/>

ILO

1. The [Recruitment Advisor](#) is an online peer-to-peer review platform that allows migrant workers to comment on their experiences, rate the recruitment agencies and learn about their rights. The platform is available in multiple languages, and currently lists thousands of agencies in Nepal, the Philippines, Indonesia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong (China), Malaysia, Singapore, and Kenya, and is expanding to other countries. The MRA was launched in 2018 and is developed by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) with the support of the ILO.
2. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is embarking on a series of [media training programmes](#), and has developed a toolkit and glossary for journalists to ensure that journalists are able to (a) share accurate and unbiased information with potential migrants, and (b) contribute to a balanced public narrative on migration. In addition, each year the ILO hosts a Global Media Competition on Labour Migration to promote and reward quality reporting.
3. The ILO has supported the establishment of [Migrant Worker Resource Centres](#) (MRCs) in multiple countries. The MRCs are run by government, trade unions and civil society organizations, and provide information and support services (including legal support and dispute resolution). The ILO has also developed an operations manual for the establishment and operation of MRCs.

[Philippine Experience: Effective Communication with Migrants as a Country of Origin](#)

In the context of the current discourse on Migration Governance, the Philippines identifies itself as a country of origin. While the country does host a significant foreign-born community within its archipelago, there are approximately 10 million⁷ Filipinos Overseas, who still call the Philippines home. It is for their protection, rights, and welfare that the Philippine Government has emerged over the last 4 decades as a champion for global governance for the protection of migrants.

The Philippine legislature has been a partner in this effort, enacting laws that designed to offer protection to Filipino migrants at all stages of the migration cycle, facilitating interphase with government at pre-departure, on-site, return and reintegration. These stages in the cycle offer opportunities for effective communication, through institutionalized mechanisms, as well as through other channels, facilitated by technology and social media, among others. It is the view of the Philippines that all channels combined are needed to be effective.

It is at those points of interphase that there exists an opportunity, an obligation even, for government to communicate effectively with migrants, through institutional mechanisms.

Considering the large number of Overseas Filipinos, the Philippine government strongly enforces its mandate of protecting Filipino migrants and promoting their welfare through bilateral, regional and multilateral platforms, including informal processes such as the GFMD.

The Philippines also ensures that there is an effective, timely and accurate communication between the government and Filipino migrants at all stages of migration, to guarantee their safety and protection. Multiple traditional and innovative communication channels are utilized to break communication barriers and reach out to overseas Filipinos (OFs) wherever they may be, and however they may choose to communicate. The primary driver of our communications platform is the preference of our migrants.

⁷ The number is estimates at 10,353,514 as of 31 December 2018

Protection Mandate grounded in the 1987 Philippine Constitution

ARTICLE II, SECTION 4. The prime duty of the Government is to serve and protect the people

ARTICLE XIII, SECTION 3. The State shall afford full protection to labor, local and overseas, organized and unorganized, and promote full employment and equality of employment opportunities for all.

Embodied as a Pillar of Philippine Foreign Policy:

The Protection of the rights and Promotion of the welfare and interest of Filipinos overseas is one of the pillars of Philippine Foreign Policy, of equal value as Political interests in national security and territorial integrity, and interests in Economic diplomacy.

Statutes:

Republic Act No. 8042 as amended by R.A. 10022, or the Migrant Workers Act of 1995

Declaration of Policy:

- Uphold the dignity of overseas Filipinos
- Provide adequate and timely social, economic and legal services to Filipino migrant workers
- State does not promote overseas employment. The existence of overseas employment rests solely on the assurance that the dignity and fundamental human rights and freedoms of the Filipino citizens shall not, at any time, be violated.
- Gender sensitive criteria in formulation and implementation of policies and programs affecting migrant workers.
- Filipino migrant workers, documented or undocumented, are adequately protected and safeguarded
- Civil society members are partners in the protection of Filipino migrant workers and in the promotion of their welfare
- Government fees and other administrative costs of recruitment, introduction, placement and assistance to migrant workers shall be rendered free

The Philippines has found that Filipino migrants are most comfortable interacting through word of mouth from among their contemporaries in the community, through the internet, and by utilizing social media channels. There is a need to ensure that the information shared on these platforms are relevant and valid. The effort to clear these platforms of false information is also key. Multisectoral engagement with civil society and the migrant community organizations is key to stop the spread of false information.

For government transactions, however, migrants still trust government web-portals, physical presence of the government abroad, and face to face interactions. This is an advantage, in terms of ensuring valid information. However, there is a need to invest in the necessary infrastructure to facilitate those interactions at regular and reliable intervals.

The following are the protective schemes and best practices of the Philippines in caring for its migrants:

Pre-Departure Phase:**1. Documentation of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs)**

The Philippines has long focused efforts to ensure that OFWs, particularly those in vulnerable situation, are properly documented, in line with GCM Objective 7, 14, among others:

The following innovations have been added to augment existing procedures:

- New Hires Online Services for Recruitment and Manning Agencies. These involve the submission to the POEA by licensed agencies recruiting land-based and sea-based works of their new hires' employment documents using internet, and paying the processing fees online.
- Balik-Manggagawa (BM) Online Processing System. This is a web-based facility that enables the Baling-Manggagawa (BM) or vacationing OFW to apply online for Overseas Employment Certificate (OEC) and have the approved OEC printed by him/her anywhere.
- POEA's AIR-TIP provides free legal assistance to complainants who are victims of illegal recruitment and recruitment violations of licensed and unlicensed recruiters,

2. [Pre-Departure Seminars](#)

• **Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS) for Emigrants**

The Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) conducts country-specific PDOS to Filipino emigrants to orient them on topics such as travel regulations, immigration procedures, rights and obligations as Filipino migrant, cultural differences, settlement concerns, employment and social security concerns.

In order to make its services more accessible to the public, the CFO also conducts mobile PDOS especially in areas that are historically considered as origin provinces of Filipino emigrants.

• **Peer Counseling**

This pre-departure program is designed for 13 to 19 years old. It aims to provide a venue for youth migrants to discuss their specific concerns about leaving their country of birth and residing in a new country.

• **Country Familiarization Seminar (CFS) for Europe-Bound Au Pairs**

The CFS platform for cultural exchange participants of Au Pair to be equipped with adequate information on settlement processes, values, cultural and social realities in the host countries, health and safety measures, airport and travel procedures and available support networks.

• **PDOS for Exchange Visitors Program (EVP) Participants**

EVP participants are Filipinos who go to U.S. for cultural exchange program. They are required to attend the PDOS before leaving the country. The PDOS discusses obligation and responsibilities of the participants, settlement concerns, and airport and travel procedures.

• **Guidance and Counseling Program (GCP) for Spouses and Partners of Foreign Nationals**

The conduct of pre-departure counseling services for Filipinos in intermarriages is also mandated by the Philippine Government as part of its anti-mail order spouse and trafficking-in-persons measures.

GCP is a customized PDOS consisting guidance and counseling and orientation on the realities of cross-cultural marriage and family, adjustments and coping mechanisms, the marriage migrants' rights and obligations, basic immigration policies, available support network for women migrants in distress, among others.

• **Community Education Program (CEP)**

The CFO conducts annual information campaign nationwide in coordination with various government agencies, non-government organizations, faith-based groups, media, local government units and academic institutions in informing prospective migrants on conditions of working and/or settling abroad, as well as generate community involvement on migration concerns.

It aims to raise public awareness about issues on international migration, intermarriage, and existing government policies and programs directed against illegal recruitment, trafficking-in-persons, and documentation fraud, among others.

- **Pre-Employment Orientation Seminar (PEOS)**

The PEOS is a program required for those Filipino who wish to work abroad. The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), working with Local Government Units (LGUSs) to provide basic information on foreign employment.

- **Comprehensive Pre-Departure Education Program (CPDEP)**

The CPDEP is either a four or six-day orientation seminar attended by Household Service Workers (HSWs). The CPDEP is jointly conducted by accredited NGO PDOS providers and Overseas Workers' Welfare Organization (OWWA). The NGO-accredited PDOS providers administer the PDOS on the first day, while OWWA handles the language, culture and stress management sessions on the succeeding days.

3. Social Protection Schemes

- **Philippines' Social Security Programs for OFWs**

The Philippines is one of the first countries in Asia to respond to social security issues brought about by external migration of labor.

The Philippines' Social Security System (SSS) pursued the establishment of Social Security Agreements (SSAs) with other countries that host Filipino migrants. The following are the salient features of SSAs aimed at reducing or eliminating nationality- and territory-based restrictions on social security: (1) Equality of Treatment; (2) Export of Benefits; (3) Totalization of Insurance Periods; and (4) Mutual Administrative Assistance.

The newly enacted *Social Security Act of 2018 provides the compulsory coverage of OFWs in the Social Security System*. The benefits include, among others, retirement, death, disability, funeral, sickness and maternity.

SSS has attaches in some Philippine embassies abroad, especially in those countries that caters numerous OFs, to communicate their services and make it available to Filipino migrants

- **Health Insurance Program for OFWs**

The PhilHealth program for OFWs allows members to avail themselves of PhilHealth benefits even if they are confined in hospitals abroad. At the same time, their qualified dependents in the Philippines may avail themselves of the benefits even if the principal is working overseas.

The newly enacted *Universal Health Care Act* provides that all Filipino citizen, including those abroad, shall be automatically included as member of the National Health Insurance Program of PhilHealth.

Philhealth has attaches in some Philippine embassies abroad, especially in those countries that cater to numerous OFs, to communicate their services and make it available to Filipino migrants

- **Membership in Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration**

OFWs are mandated to have OWWA membership before their deployment abroad. Coverage period is two (2) years and renewable for another 2 years period upon payment of membership fee: USD 25.

OWWA members may avail the following benefits: Educational Program, Scholarship for Dependents, death benefits, disability or dismemberment benefits, medical assistance program, burial benefits, repatriation program, and reintegration programs.

- **Mandatory Insurance**

The Philippines Migrant Workers' Act provides Compulsory Insurance Coverage for Agency-Hired Workers.

Recruitment/manning agencies are required to have their deployed workers covered by a compulsory insurance policy which shall be secured at no cost to the said worker. Such insurance policy shall be effective for the duration of the migrant worker's employment and shall cover, at the minimum: Accidental death, Permanent total disablement, Repatriation cost of the worker when his/her employment is terminated without any valid cause, including the transport of his or her personal belongings, Subsistence allowance benefit when OFW gets involved in a litigation, Money claims arising from employer's liability, compassionate visit of family members, medical evacuation, and medical repatriation.

4. Recruitment Regulations

- **Local Recruitment Agencies**

Only recruitment agencies licensed by POEA are allowed to recruit and deploy OFWs.

The principal/employer and the recruitment/manning agency are jointly and severally liable for any and all claims arising out of the implementation of the employment contract involving Filipino workers for overseas deployment. This provision shall be incorporated in the contract for overseas employment and shall be a condition precedent for its approval.

The recruitment/placement agencies are required to have a performance bond with POEA that shall be answerable for all money claims or damages that may be awarded to the workers.

- **Standard Employment Contract**

The minimum provisions in the standard employment contract are the following:

- Statement of worksite or place of work
- Contract duration
- Position Title
- Monthly salary rate in accordance with the prescribed standards or guiding rates
- Regular work schedule of eight (8) hours per day for not more than six (6) days per week
- Overtime pay for service beyond regular working hours
- Free transportation to and from the worksite, or offsetting benefits
- Free food and accommodation, or offsetting benefits
- Benefits which include Vacation Leave, Sick Leave, Medical and Dental, and Workmen's Compensation in cases of work-related sickness, injury or death
- In the event of death of the employee, worker's remains and personal belongings shall be repatriated to the Philippines at the expense of the Employer
- Just causes for termination
- Joint and Severally liability of the employer and recruitment agency

- **Certification Compliance of Countries of Destination**

Deployment of overseas Filipino workers shall only be allowed in countries where the rights of Filipino migrant workers are protected and which the Philippine government has issued Certificate of Compliance.

The following are the requirements:

- (a) It has existing labor and social laws protecting the rights of workers, including migrant workers;
- (b) It is a signatory to and/or has ratified multilateral conventions, declarations or resolutions relating to the protection of workers, including migrant workers; and
- (c) It has concluded a bilateral agreement or arrangement with the government on the protection of the rights of overseas Filipino Workers; or

(d) The receiving country is taking positive, concrete measures to protect the rights of migrant workers

On-Site Phase

1. Network of Foreign Service Posts (FSPs)

The Philippine Embassies, Philippine Consulate General, and Philippine Overseas Labor Office, provides 24/7 assistance to Filipino nationals abroad, especially those in distressed.

The Philippine Foreign Service Posts (FSPs) has 24hours Assistance-to-National hotline that distressed Filipinos may contact whenever they need help. The Philippine government provide the following services:

- a. Whereabouts / Ascertaining Condition
- b. Family Financial Support
- c. Repatriation
- d. Medical Repatriation
- e. Shipment of Remains/ Cremated Remains
- f. Shipment of Personal Belongings
- g. Employment-related complaints
- h. Jail Visitation
- i. Compassionate Visit of the NOK
- j. Request for ROD and other Civil Registry Documents
- k. Recommendation for Blacklisting
- l. Monetary Claims
- m. End-of-Service Benefits
- n. Blood Money Negotiations
- o. Assistance to Detained OFWs and those Serving Prison Terms
- p. Provision of Services of Lawyer/Counsel
- q. Monitoring of Death Penalty Cases
- r. Piracy
- s. Maritime Issues
- t. Transnational Crime (i.e. Trafficking in Persons, Illegal Recruitment, Human Smuggling)
- u. Child Custody / Parental Child Abduction Cases
- v. Assistance to Kidnapping and Hostage Victims

The Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) covers conciliation-mediation services and legal assistance to address employment-related complaints or cases. The POLOs also provide temporary shelter to OFWs who ran away from their employers and are waiting for the resolution of their labor cases or eventual repatriation.

- **Use of Social Media for On-site Services:**

The Philippine government used Facebook as an effective communication tool in reaching out to and providing needed assistance to migrants in distress abroad. The Philippine government finds it effective due to the following:

- a. Social media, and Facebook in particular, are effective tools in bringing closer government services to the intended beneficiaries, in OUMWA's case, the distressed Filipino migrants. I also share that Facebook has become one of the means used OFWs to reach out to OUMWA and other government agencies and access government services. In a sense, Facebook empowered them.
- b. Effective communication is founded on trust and in turn, trust begins with regular and truthful engagement with the audience. I share OUMWA's experience of addressing OFWs concerns

- and shout out for assistance aired through social media. I also shared the notion that in social media, “content is king and distribution is queen” as regards effective communications; and
- c. The fight against fake news should be on fake news’ own platform. If the fake news is shared through social media, effective engagement through social media should be the answer.

Social media also has helped in bridging the gaps and maintaining the strong ties of migrants with their home country. In this regard, several pages were created to promote specific advocacies, programs and services of the Philippine government, such as the following:

The Peso Sense – it aims to improve financial literacy by promoting productive expenditure, greater savings, and entrepreneurship among OFs and their beneficiaries in the Philippines.

The Filipino Ties – it aims to provide updates regarding the Philippine government’s initiatives to advance the interest of Filipino diaspora; events and activities relating to OFs and their families left behind; and other relevant news/features on migration and development

BaLinkBayan – it refers to interconnectivity through the worldwide web. The BaLinkBayan is OFs’ one-stop online portal for diaspora engagement, offering an integrated and unique platform to re-engage with the Philippines. It seeks to bring together 10.24 million Filipinos in diaspora into an integrated and comprehensive platform that taps into their knowledge, expertise, skills, networks, material, and financial resources to contribute to the development of the Philippines.

- **Post-Arrival Orientation Seminar (PAOS)**

Post-Arrival Orientation Seminar (PAOS) is a continuation to the PDOS, primarily to equip OFWs appropriate information as guide on their overseas employment. General topics: profile of Filipinos in the country, pertinent laws for foreign workers, available government services, practical tips on working and living in the country of destination.

- **Regulation of Foreign Recruitment Agency (FRA)**

FRAs are required to register and be recognized by FSPs and Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) to be able to tract and monitor the condition of OFWs.

- **Bilateral Agreements:**

The Philippines enters into Bilateral Labor Agreements (BLA) with host countries with large number of OFWs. BLA mainly consists the following:

- Uphold ethical recruitment policies
- Recruitment shall be governed by a standard contract
- Reducing costs of recruitment of domestic workers
- Humane treatment to workers

[Return and Reintegration](#)

1. Financial literacy program

FSPs offer financial literacy program for OFWs while abroad. OFWs are encouraged to attend these programs, especially if they already intend to return to the Philippines.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), OFW Bank, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and other government financial institution, also provide financial literacy program to returning OFWs upon arrival in the Philippines.

2. Reintegration Programs:

OWWA offers livelihood opportunities to OFWs who have finished contracts and have no wish to go back to work abroad.

- **Balik-Pinas! Balik-Hanapbuhay! Program** a non-cash livelihood support/assistance intended to provide immediate relief to returning member OFWs, active or non-active who are displaced from their jobs due to war/political conflicts in host countries or policy reforms controls and changes by the host government or are victims of illegal recruitment and/or human trafficking or other distressful situations.
- **Overseas Filipino Workers – Enterprise Development and Loan Program (OFW-EDLP)** is an enterprise development intervention and loan facility of OWWA, in partnership with Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) and the Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) intended to support enterprise development among OFWs and their families.
- The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and OWWA has partnered to provide OFWs opportunities to establish or enhance their business (via Negosyo Centers) by providing loans for returning OFWs to start business

3. National Reintegration Center for Overseas Filipino Workers (NRCO)

The amended Philippines' Migrant Workers Act created the NRCO for the Philippines to have a specific government agency in charge to provide mechanism for returning Filipino migrant workers for their reintegration into the Philippine society, serve as a promotion house for their local employment, and tap their skills and potentials for national development. Undocumented OFWs may also avail NRCO programs and services upon their return to the Philippines.

NRCO Programs:

- The Balik Pinay! Balik Hanapbuhay! Program enables women OFW returnees to start and to operate livelihood undertaking for self-employment. The Program consists of a livelihood skills training and the distribution of the starter kits.
- The Livelihood Development Assistance Program (LDAP) has provides grants for livelihood assistance to returning OFWs.
- “Sa Pinas, Ikaw and Ma’am/Sir” project aims to re-train HSWs on the skills set needed for the Teacher 1 Position in DepEd, get hired in their hometown and get out of plain domestic work.
- The Women REACH (WR) Program allows return women OFWs to cope and start their reintegration in the country, in partnership with Coca Cola Phils, to provide full training and learning course on entrepreneurship including its Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and Tools for impact measurement.

Additional Readings

- Ahad, Aliyyah and Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan. 2019. Communicating Strategically about Immigrant Integration: Policymaker perspectives. Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/MPIE-CommunicatingIntegration-FINAL.pdf>
- Migrants in Countries in Crisis (MICIC) Initiative. 2016. Guidelines to Protect Migrants in Countries Experiencing Conflict or Natural Disaster. Geneva: International Organization for Migration. https://micicinitiative.iom.int/sites/default/files/document/micic_guidelines_english_web_13_09_2016.pdf