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Migration Management for Sending Countries: The Philippine Experience
“Challenges of Migration & Development Faced by Sending Countries: The Philippine Response”

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Actually while preparing for this training program with the assigned topic of “migration management for sending countries: the Philippine Experience”, my initial draft consisted of 35 pages covering policy and institutional framework, laws and regulations, brief descriptions of the various migration-related government agencies and the respective operationalization of their mandates, regional and international cooperation and cross-cutting concerns on Migration and Development.

But after talking last week to our friend Daniel Cervan-Gil, the Senior Project Director of this training program, who gave me an idea of the diversity of participants who signed up for this first training with the great majority coming from the so-called receiving countries, I decided to redesign my lecture for today.

Daniel also very wisely advised me that my being the last speaker on the 2nd day of the training program would mean that you, the participants may be suffering from information overload and may start to feel the tiring effect of a long day.

So instead of bombarding you with the details of how the Philippines has managed this migration phenomenon, I felt that all of us would be better off if I give you the original 35-page document as reference material which you can read at your leisure and which can help you contextualize the remarks I will be making today. I will instead focus on the challenges of migration and development faced by sending countries highlighting the Philippine experience and its responses to these challenges.

With this, I hope to meet one of the specific objectives of this training program, that is, “for participants to develop new ways to think through the challenges of managing migration….by understanding the considerations and by asking themselves questions that each jurisdiction will need to contemplate”.

I did not want to present a picture-perfect Philippine migration governance but rather to show you that most of the actions we have taken and are currently taking are our strategic responses to these challenges and are culled from the lessons (many of them painful) learned from 4 decades of significant mobility of our people.

I am asking you to use the Philippine experience as a tool to come up with your own strategies and to help assess which would work best in your respective countries, especially if you are a sending country. If you are a destination country, then, my hope is that you will have a better understanding and appreciation of the situation, the positions and action taken by your migrants’ homeland such as the Philippines.

I. BASIC PHILIPPINE MIGRATION DATA

Before I go to the meat of my presentation, allow me to give you some very basic data on the Philippine migration.

With almost four decades of continuing international migration history, the Filipino Diaspora is now considered as one of the most diverse and dispersed Diasporas in the world.

Since 1995, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, the government agency I head, has put together the Stock Estimates of Overseas Filipinos, in cooperation and in coordination with other migration-related government agencies in the Philippines and all the embassies and consulates of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

As of our latest data, there is an estimated 10.5 million Filipinos working and living in more than 200 countries and territories, 47% of which are living permanently abroad while 40% are temporary migrants, composed mostly of overseas Filipino workers or OFWs, and 13% are irregular migrants, meaning those not properly documented and having no valid residence or work permit abroad.

The top 10 destination countries of overseas Filipinos are US (3.49 million or 33%), Saudi Arabia (1.26 million or 12%), UAE (931,562 or 8%), Canada (852,401 or 8%), Malaysia (686,547 or 6%), Australia (391,705 or 3%), Japan (243,136 or 2%), UK (218,777 or 2%), Kuwait (213,638 or 2%), and Qatar (200,016 or 2%).

I usually point out the distinction between Overseas Filipinos or OFs, in general and permanent and temporary migrants, in particular, in order to underscore the more nuanced nature of the Philippines’ international migration.
More specifically, I think there is a need to correct the misimpression perpetuated in our local mass media that Philippine migration is only or mostly labor migration.

This distinction has implications in terms of the kind of interventions needed and gaps in these interventions for these varying segments of Overseas Filipinos.

A good example of this is the reality of irregular migrants which asks for a different set of actions to lessen their number as they are the ones most vulnerable to abuse, violence and human trafficking. But at the same we have to be mindful that in spite of their migration status, their human dignity must be maintained and their human rights protected.

I also highlight this current Filipino migration profile to emphasize that even if the Philippines is recognized as being one of the biggest source of human resources worldwide, the country has gone beyond labor migration. At present, many of our people are leaving the country because of marriage migration, family reunification, educational and business opportunities and professional and career advancement.

**Overseas Filipinos’ Remittances**

According to the World Bank, the Philippines (USD$25 billion) ranks third globally in terms of remittances received next to India (USD$70 billion) and China (USD$60 billion).
The IOM’s Country Migration Report: the Philippines 2013, pointed out that: “At the macroeconomic level, remittances are about eleven times of foreign debt investment from January to June 2012 and are also equivalent to 15 percent of gross international reserves as of the end of July 2012.” The Report also made the conclusion that “they support economic growth since they serve as a driver of consumption expenditures which comprises more than 52 percent of the country’s Gross National Income (GNI).”

Notwithstanding the positive impact on the household and the economy in general of remittances, the challenge to reduce the cost of transferring remittance remains to ensure sustainability and further maximize its gains.

The Philippine stands with other countries in pursuing the “5 by 5 objective” which commits to reduce the transfer costs from 10 percent to 5 percent over 5 years. This is one of the challenges which I will discuss later with CFO’s several initiatives to encourage migrants, the families and the communities left behind towards more productive use of remittances.

II. Elements of Migration Management

A. Policy

For the Philippine Government’s Policy on managing migration I would like to cite the position of Philippine President Benigno S. Aquino III on migration expressed in his 16-point Social Contract with the Filipino People with his commitment of a transformational
leadership: “From a government that treats its people as an export commodity and a means to earn foreign exchange, disregarding the social cost to Filipino families to………………… a government that creates jobs at home so that working abroad will be a choice rather than a necessity and when its citizens do choose to become Overseas Filipino Workers, their welfare and protection will still be the government’s priority.”

This statement is a recognition of the reality of migration and our people’s right to move but it does not mean that the Aquino government is pursuing labor migration as a development strategy. We are aware and are continuously reminded that it is a balancing act between generating as many domestic jobs as possible so that migration becomes an informed choice for Filipinos and not a matter of necessity, and managing migration to reduce its costs, to maximize its benefits, to promote the rights, the welfare and well-being of overseas Filipinos. We acknowledge the development potential of migration and the need to fully realize that potential in keeping with the goal of government for inclusive growth.

Keeping in mind the President’s marching orders, we at the Commission on Filipinos Overseas immediately re-crafted our Vision/Mission stressing that Migration and Development is our framework in empowering overseas Filipinos’ communities everywhere and in strengthening the links between them and the Motherland.

In our Ten-Point Goals for 2010 to 2016, under Policy Advocacy, we committed to the following:

1. To advocate for coherent, coordinated and clear development policies to be mainstreamed in the policy-making process of government;

2. To support and strengthen a favorable rights-based policy environment for the promotion and protection of rights, welfare and status of overseas Filipinos.

**B. Mainstreaming of Migration and Development at the National Level**

The Philippine government has taken steps to mainstream migration issues in the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) – the country’s blueprint to attain inclusive growth and achieve full human development of its people.

Through the advocacy and efforts of the CFO and other stakeholders, 60 migration-related provisions were included in seven out of nine chapters of the PDP. This covered issues on remittances, financial literacy for overseas Filipinos, second and third generation overseas Filipinos appreciating Philippine culture and heritage, the
productive use of social and financial remittances, ways to reverse brain drain to brain gain, the fight against human trafficking, women in labor migration, strengthening of safety nets for overseas Filipino workers, balanced messages of migration and development in Philippine education both in formal and alternative learning systems, and the seamless reintegration of returnees, among many others.

Such achievement is worth noting because it was the first time that the country’s national plan of action for development went beyond the topic of overseas labor deployment and remittances. It also marked the significant engagement of the country’s national development planning body, the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) in linking migration policies to development policies.

C. Mainstreaming at the Local Level

We believe that migration cannot be managed unilaterally and only from the national level. Local government units must begin to appreciate their migrants’ population and engage them as their development partners for the good of their communities, towns, provinces and regions. Although some of local leaders have started to tap the resources of the diaspora for local development, they are still few and far between and have not reached a critical mass to be significant.

The EU-funded project called Joint Migration and Development Initiative Phase II Project (JMDI2) is a step towards the attainment of this goal, as local government units and sub-national structures in three regions of the country are being capacitated on how to mainstream, institutionalize and upscale migration and development initiatives in their localities.

This initiative is a response to one of the recommendations of the Migrants’ Associations and Philippine Institutions for Development (MAPIID) project done by Scalabrini, the CFO and other migration-related agencies and NGOs from 2008 to 2010:

“Local governments are important links in realizing the development contributions of migration. So far, these links are largely non-existent or very weak as indicated by the lack of appreciation for migration in local development plans and the informal, ad hoc approach to requests for assistance by OFWs and their families or offers of assistance by overseas Filipinos…..Unless links, dialogue and cooperation are forged with local governments, “national” migration-related programs will remain ideas…..”

The project calls for, among other things, the creation of new local structures such as migrants’ one-stop resource center and migration and development councils or committees, the gathering of data towards a migration and remittance profile of the localities chosen, the inclusion of migration in the local and regional development and
investment plans, the conduct of financial literacy and enterprise development training among the migrants’ communities and their families left behind.

The goal is to reach a “tipping point” when the results are owned by the stakeholders and duty-bearers especially the local government units and sub-national structures and the innovations and initiatives become institutionalized at the local level.

**D. Policy Coherence**

Again, IOM’s Country Migration Report 2013, pointed out the fact that: “As various functions related to the governance of migration are distributed among different departments within different agencies, coordination and cooperation among agencies is necessary.”

In addition, it observed that “the governance of migration has increasingly become a multilevel, multifaceted initiative of policy-making in every country.” More so, in the Philippines which has been lauded as model of interest to other countries of origin because, among other reasons, its governance is “comprehensive – it covers all the different types of migrants, it covers all the phases of the migration process and it covers all the aspects related to migration.”

Because of this, the lack of policy cohesion and coordination has always been brought up to the attention of government. I am happy to report that the CFO with full support from the NEDA pushed for the creation of the Sub-Committee on International Migration and Development under the Social Development Committee of NEDA. It will be chaired by NEDA, and will be composed of high-level representatives from the departments or ministries of labor, foreign affairs, CFO, interior and local government, the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines (ULAP), and the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC).

During the discussion at the cabinet level regarding the creation of this sub-committee, I was pleasantly surprised to hear that so many other ministries wanted to be included such as Health and Social Welfare and Development. It was agreed that task forces relevant to the issues of the different ministries will be created where their participation and membership would be welcome.

Among the functions of the Sub-committee is to report the implementation of multi-stakeholder and/or multi-agency programs and policies on international migration and development and recommend actions required, and respond to the directives and needs of the Social Development Committee-Cabinet Level in terms of formulating international migration and development related policies.
E. Migration Data Harmonization

The 2013 Country Migration Report was quite critical about the state of affairs of the Philippine migration data and infrastructure. These are some of the fundamental challenges it faced in the gathering, encoding, processing and publishing of migration data:

1) The different purposes for which agencies collect data lead to different sources of data, different procedures in data gathering and ultimately in problems concerning the possibility to share data;

2) Agencies do not use the same definitions or classifications regarding the various categories of clients they interact with;

3) There is no single designated agency which has clear leadership concerning data on migration;

4) There are no clear policies or procedures for sharing data among agencies and with the public.

Again, I am happy to report the passage of the law creating the Philippine Statistical Act of 2013, which reorganizes the Philippine statistical system, merging all the major statistical agencies engaged in primary and secondary data collection and compilation.

It likewise provided for the creation of inter-agency committees for the purpose of coordinating and resolving agency and sectoral concerns on statistical matters. One of those is the Committee on Migration. I already requested the NEDA Minister, the chair of PSA and the newly-appointed National Statistician Dr. Lisa Grace Bersales to constitute this body the soonest possible time, given the abovementioned concerns of disharmony in migration data.

These initiatives uphold the principle that in order to make migration work for development, one must have an improved understanding of the migration and development nexus especially with the help of more and better data which in turn would trigger more and better evidence-based policies at all levels.

The call for more and better data to inform policy has been raised in every Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) over the last seven years, already producing a marked increase in research on migration and development linkages. As the Special Adviser of the UN Secretary General on Migration Peter Sutherland notes in Migration and Development: “Today we have far clearer insights into the effects of
migration that allow us to build a robust set of policies.” He cites the availability of a “data-rich, measurable way to analyze the development effects of migration,” particularly the impact of remittances and how migration relates to the eight original Millennium Development Goals. (Sutherland, 2013).

F. Major Migration-related Legislation

With the government’s commitment to provide the necessary protection and to improve the lives and welfare of overseas Filipinos and their families, several significant legislations have been passed. Those most meaningful are listed and described in detail in the 35-page Reference Material I mentioned earlier:

1) R.A. 8042 otherwise known as the Migrant Workers and Filipinos Overseas Act of 1995. This is the landmark legislation which became the primary law setting a higher standard of protection and promotion of the welfare of migrants, their families and overseas Filipinos in distress. In 2010, this was amended by R.A. 10022 which expanded further the scope of protection for overseas Filipinos.

With the help of the 2013 Country Migration Report, I will just highlight the most significant aspects in the law in relation to the conduct and articulation of the government foreign policy in relation to overseas Filipinos:

a) "it established the Legal Assistant for Migrant Workers Affairs (RA 8042 sec. 24). The function created within the Department of Foreign Affairs involves the support for legal representation of aggrieved OF’s in foreign courts and assistance to repatriation of OF’s in distress or other crisis situations such as wars, conflicts, terrorism, trafficking, deportations and seafarer piracy among others. The office, now renamed Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs (OUMWA), has been the primary body responsible for situations calling for massive repatriation and release of OF’s in jail or held hostage by terrorist elements.

b) it established the Migrant Workers and other Overseas Filipinos Center in Philippine embassies (RA 8042 Sec. 19). The center has a variety of functions that are helpful to migrants, including counseling and legal services, welfare assistance, information advisory, such as the post-arrival orientation, human resource development and other services. Experience has indicated that such centers within the embassy have played an important role, particularly in the protection of stranded Filipino workers.
c) it placed the protection of Filipinos abroad as the highest priority of the Philippine Foreign Service Post (RA 8042 sec. 27).

d) it emphasized the One Country- One Team Approach (RA 8042 sec. 28). Already expressed under EO 74, series of 1993, the country-team approach mandates all personnel in embassies and consulates to act as one in the protection of Filipinos overseas, under the leadership of the Ambassador. This has contributed to the effective response of the post to the needs of overseas, particularly in times of crisis.

2) R.A. 9225 or the Citizenship Retention and Reacquisition Act of 2003, under this law those who have lost their citizenship when they acquired new foreign citizenship may reacquire their Filipino citizenship while those who acquire other citizenship after the adoption of this law are deemed to have not lost their Filipino citizenship.

3) R.A. 9189, otherwise known as the Overseas Absentee Voting Act of 2003. This law provided for the participation of overseas Filipinos to in the national election, even if they are living or working outside the country. It allowed them to vote for the President, Vice-President, Senators and Sectoral or Party List representatives.

However, the overseas voters registration and actual voting itself has been dismal. In the 2004 elections 364,187 registered and 233,092 voted. The 64 percentage participation rate dropped to 16 percent in 2007, which was not a presidential election.

In the 2010 elections, 589,830 registered and 134,000 cast their vote, equivalent to 23 percent.

This disappointing rate of registration and voting have highlighted the following points: the OFs are geographically dispersed and it is not easy to reach the foreign post where they can cast their ballot (the foreign posts are limited to major countries and locations); they have limited time off from work and it is not easy to obtain permission to vote; and voting may require taking a day off and travelling some distance, which is costly.

The requirement of the affidavit stating the intention to return to the Philippines within three years was also considered a major obstacle. Even more pronounced are the difficulties for seafarers, who are mostly at sea and who have very little time when ships
come to the port and cannot go to Philippine embassies and consulates to vote. (CMA 2011).

Taking all these challenges in consideration, Republic Act 10590 was passed in May 2013 to amend the Overseas Voting Act of 2003. Under the amended law, Filipinos overseas are no longer required to execute the affidavit to return after approval of their registration. The law aims to expedite the registration of overseas voters and provide for the setting up of field and mobile registration centers, the automatic registration of voters and alternative modes of voting.

The amended law seems to have produced instant positive results as the Department of Foreign Affairs, Overseas Voting Secretariat (DFA-OVS), released the tally for the first month of overseas voter (OV) registration in preparation for the 2016 Presidential Elections.

It reported that for the month of May, 2014, Philippine Foreign Service Posts (FSPs) processed a total of 18,631 new overseas voter registrant applications. This figure is 111% higher than (8,819) the first month of overseas voter registration for the 2013 Senatorial Elections; 64% more than (11,397) for the 2010 Presidential Elections; and more than 630% over (2,543) the 2007 Senatorial Elections.

DFA says that “If the Foreign Service continues to outperform itself at this pace, despite existing challenges, the ambitious goal set by the DFA-OVS and the COMELEC to gather one (1) million new overseas voter registrants, by the end of this registration cycle on 31 October 2015, is attainable. The total registered overseas voter stock accumulated during the previous registration periods stands at 975,263.”

R.A. 9208, otherwise known as the Anti-Trafficking in Person Act of 2003. This law in response to the high incidences of trafficking which targeted several prospective victims was further amended and enhanced by the RA 10364 in 2012.

The Philippines in 2009 and 2010 was categorized twice in a row in the dangerous Tier 2 Watchlist but from 2011 up to the present it achieved and retained its Tier 2 status although it continues to aim towards Tier 1 ranking. Tier 2 category means that the Philippines is making significant efforts to comply with the standards but still has not reached full compliance.

The US State Department’s GTIP Report pointed out the government’s successes in the following areas: 1) increased and sustained funding for the Inter-Agency Council against Trafficking (IACAT); 2) enactment of amendments to the anti-trafficking law which strengthened the hand of government in the prosecution of a wider set of crimes.
considered as human trafficking and provided for greater protection of victims; 3) efforts to implement anti-trafficking laws, regulations and programs not only in the national but also in the local levels; 4) more preventive measures to reduce the trafficking of overseas Filipino workers; 5) more notable initiatives to protect victims who are overseas, and 6) increase in financial and human resources in the campaign against human trafficking.

However, the GTIP Report also highlighted many significant gaps and inadequacies in the country’s compliance, mostly due to the weakness in its judicial system. This is manifested in the frustrating failure to hold many offenders accountable, the inordinate length of trials, the lack of public prosecutors handling only trafficking cases, corruption at all levels which is exploited by the traffickers to undermine the fight against trafficking, Although there has been a significant increase in the number of prosecutions and convictions in the last 3 years, the US Report still considered the number disproportionately low.

IACAT pointed out in its July 2013 Updates in Trafficking of Persons’ Convictions that there has been a huge improvement in convictions over the last three years compared to the five years before that (2005 to 2010).

During the latter, there were a total of 44 convictions and 42 persons convicted. For a much shorter time of 3 years, convictions went up to 109 while there were 87 persons convicted. This achievement can be attributed to the concerted and heightened efforts of the Department of Justice (DOJ), the IACAT chair, fully supported by all the members (both government and civil society) of IACAT.

While the other IACAT members focused on prosecution and protection, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas addressed the prevention aspect of the campaign. It heads the IACAT Advocacy and Communications Committee (ADVOCOM), composed of both government agencies and civil society organizations.

One of the first projects of IACAT-ADVOCOM in 2011 was the creation of the 1343 ActionLine against Human Trafficking. It is the only 24/7 hotline facility that is dedicated to matters related to human trafficking, from inquiries to emergency or crisis calls, from reporting of possible human trafficking crimes from the public to information about the anti-trafficking campaign. It can be reached through local telephone lines, text, online and toll-free global numbers in 16 different countries.

Since it was established in March 2011 and up to January 2014, the 1343 action line has received 19,575 calls, which resulted in 269 actual cases with 291 victims served.
Most of the reported human trafficking calls originated from the Philippines, followed with calls from Saudi Arabia, usually on labor trafficking and Malaysia, usually involving sex trafficking.

**G. Regional, International and Regional Cooperation**

The Global Commission on International Migration said: “Cooperation and consultation among States is the basis for the formulation of more effective international migration policies. In cooperating with each other, States are exercising rather than diminishing their sovereignty.”

The Philippines has been at the forefront of international, regional and national efforts to institute policies, programs, and mechanisms to promote and protect the rights of our migrants at every stage of the migration cycle.

These include the ratification by the Philippines of the UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families in July 5, 1995. At about the same time, the Philippine Congress passed the comprehensive Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995 to “institute the policies of overseas employment and establish a higher standard of protection and promotion of the welfare of migrant workers, their families and overseas Filipinos in distress…….”

This law was amended and enhanced in 2010 through Republic Act No. 10022 to further improve “the standard of protection and promotion of the welfare of migrant workers…….” Just to name two of its additional provisions were the adoption of a “selective deployment policy” and the importance given “to bilateral labor agreements (BLAs) in managing migration in countries of destination” (Casco, 2013).

In May 2012, President Aquino signed ILO Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers to protect and promote the rights of domestic workers. This was very much in line with the Philippine advocacy and commitment to protect the rights of one of the most vulnerable among our migrant workers, the household service workers.

On the national level, the ratification of this ILO Convention was followed closely by the passage of Republic Act No. 10361 or the “Batas Kasambahay”, “instituting policies for the protection and welfare of domestic workers in the Philippines.”

This is the country’s loud and clear message to the world that we live up to our advocacies, whether internationally or domestically. It also demonstrated the impetus
that an international convention gives to domestic legislation hand in hand with the robust lobbying of the Philippines very dynamic civil society.

At the regional level, please note that in 2007, the ASEAN Summit held in Cebu, Philippines resulted in the Heads of State coming out with the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. The Philippines was the proponent of the Declaration and it helped that the country was the host of the ASEAN that year. “The declaration constitutes a milestone in the ASEAN approach to migration as it indicates a convergence of approach with emphasis on the protection component, and the formation of the ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the Declaration”. (Country Migration Report: the Philippines 2013).

However, despite our government’s ratification of the UN Migrant Workers Convention and the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers, we have to face the reality that there is a lack of ratification of these Conventions from the side of receiving countries. Thus, the Philippines through the Department of Labor and Employment (or DOLE) has aggressively forged bilateral labor agreements (BLAs) with countries of destination.

As of November 2013, the Philippines signed 87 BLAs which vary in content and coverage. So far, they comprise of 38 agreements that are “general in scope and usually contain principles and areas of cooperation on the employment, welfare and protection of workers” (Dimapilis-Baldoz, 2007) sometimes directed at the employment of health professionals and domestic workers, 9 agreements on social security and 40 agreements related to seafarers. (Casco, 2013)

I will cite 2 recent bilateral agreements which are quite trail-blazing.

The first one is the bilateral agreement signed a year ago (May 5, 2013) with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with regards to the recruitment and deployment of Filipino domestic workers. It provides for the following, among others: a standard employment contract accepted by the two countries and binding among all parties from employer to domestic worker, from Saudi recruitment agency to its Philippine counterpart; the use of recruitment companies that practice ethical recruitment, regulation of recruitment costs in both countries, that the salary of the domestic worker will not be charged any cost attendant to his/her recruitment and deployment, that there will be no imposition of any kind of unauthorized salary deductions.

In addition, it states that it is the responsibility of the Saudi government: to facilitate the opening by the employer of a bank account under the name of the domestic worker for the deposit of his/her monthly salary as provided by the employment contract, to
establish a mechanism which will provide 24-hour assistance to the domestic workers and facilitate the issuance of exit visas for the repatriation of domestic workers upon contract completion, emergency situations or as the need arises.

The second BLA which I will cite is the one signed with the Government of Germany on March 19, 2013, this time on the “Placement of Filipino Health Professionals in Employment Positions in Germany”. Specifically, the agreement declares that “Filipino health professionals may not be employed under working conditions less favorable that those for comparable German workers and that employers must provide adequate accommodations to them.” It also provides that “both parties will explore projects to sustain and promote human resource development in the Philippines”.

This agreement was dubbed by both countries as the **Triple Win** project, where as they put it, while addressing the health professionals that: “Everyone wins: you as a professional, your country of origin and Germany. It’s a win-win-win situation.”

The project asserts that it follows the Code of Conduct of the World Health Organization and that it does not recruit nurses from countries where are is a shortage of nursing professionals. It provides the health professionals the following: to acquire skills in the German language as well as supplemental nursing skills, support with the emigration process in the Philippines, as well as integration upon arrival and up to three months after.

### III. Other Major Migration-Related Challenges

#### A. The Filipino Diaspora

Let me start by quoting from the winning speech of then 18 year-old Patricia Evangelista in an International Public Speaking competition in London in 2004. “It’s not just an anomaly; it’s a trend: The Filipino diaspora... A borderless world presents a bigger opportunity, yet one that is not so much abandonment but an extension of identity. Even as we take, we give back. We are the 40,000 skilled nurses who support the UK’s National Health Service. We are the quarter-of-a-million seafarers manning most of the world’s commercial ships. We are your software engineers in Ireland, your construction workers in the Middle East, your doctors and caregivers in North America, and, your musical artists in London’s West End.”

Some 10 years later, much of what was said in her piece still holds true. The Filipino diaspora is not just an anomaly nor an inexplicable phenomenon but a trend, and based on records, one that is actually growing in size and complexity.
The MAPID study which I mentioned earlier had this to say in 2010 about the Filipino Diaspora: “Beyond remittance inflows and the improved economic conditions of OFW families, the contributions of labor migration to sustainable development are not quite evident, particularly when the experiences of other countries in Asia are considered. The development of former emigration countries such as South Korea and Taiwan has been attributed in part to brain gain, not labor deployment and remittances. India and China, which are also outmigration countries, are attracting investments and return migration or visits by their highly skilled overseas-based nationals. In other regions, such as the case of Mexico, migrant giving has stepped up with tres por uno program, a scheme where every dollar contributed by a migrants’ association has a counterpart of a dollar each from the local, state and federal government.”

“By comparison, the Philippines still remains wedded to labor deployment and there are no signs of a policy shift that will link the country’s migration policies to development processes. There are no indications either of moves to explore the development possibilities presented by the Filipino diaspora. Overseas Filipinos are interested in supporting development projects in the Philippines but they are wary of linking with government institutions.”

Keeping this exhortation in mind, the CFO went to work on the Filipino diaspora. Its first initiative was to organize a Global Summit of Filipinos in the Diaspora every two years in Manila, the first and second held in 2011 and 2013, respectively. The Third Global Summit is slated for February 2015 with the theme “Vision and Action for the Filipino Diaspora 2015 and Beyond.”

The Global Summit is a platform for a dialogue among the Philippine government, other migrant-serving institutions, multi-lateral organizations, academe and civil society with the Filipino migrant community leaders. Attended by over 500 overseas community leaders from an average of 25 countries, the Global Summit has become a means to communicate the importance of the partnership with overseas Filipinos in furthering the development programs of the government and other stakeholders.

Regional Summits are also being held in between the Global Summits at the initiative of the diaspora groups to allow them to focus the discussion on issues that are relevant to them and network with other Filipino groups abroad.

The first Regional Summit of Filipinos in the Diaspora was held in 2012 in Rome, Italy. The second Regional Summit will be held on October 16-18, 2014 in Abu Dhabi, UAE convened and organized by the Filipinos in the Middle East and Africa. These Regional
Summits are critical as they are instrumental in the formation of networks among Filipino organizations in the regions. The Regional Summit in Rome led to the creation of the European Network of Filipino Diaspora (ENFiD).

The Global Summit also paved the way for the birth of the Diaspora to Development or D2D Initiatives – a menu of 10 different areas of engagement for overseas Filipinos:

We identified the following ten areas of engagement to mobilize the Filipino diaspora:

1. Business Advisory Circle aimed to assist overseas Filipinos to set up business partnerships in the Philippines

2. Alay Dunong sa Bayan or Brain Gain to systematize and strengthen the skills and technology exchange/transfer in the field of science and technology, and engineering

3. Diaspora Philanthropy to systematize the transfer of financial and material assistance from overseas Filipinos towards identified projects (education, health and welfare, calamity relief, small-scale infrastructure, livelihood enterprises) or beneficiaries in the Philippines

4. Diaspora Entrepreneurship and Investment to develop and promote new financial instruments for overseas Filipinos to invest in and to encourage them to do business in the Philippines

5. Balik-Turo or Teach Share: a continuing professional and vocational education exchange program intended to entice returning academics and professionals to teach and work in whatever form with educational institutions in the Philippines

6. Tourism Initiative to invite migrant investments in eco-tourism and medical tourism and other tourism related services.

7. Global Legal Assistance and Advocacy mobilizes the support of overseas Filipino lawyers and legal experts to provide free legal assistance and advice to overseas Filipinos in distress

8. Medical Missions as a systematic means to coordinate and facilitate the conduct of medical missions by volunteer overseas health professionals in areas that require medical interventions and assistance
9. **Arts and Culture Exchange** to promote and facilitate the exchange of artistic products and cultural workers between the Philippines and Filipino communities abroad

10. **Return and Reintegration** providing returning overseas Filipinos and retirees with information on available services and benefits for a successful reintegration into local life in the Philippines

The other way to engage and reach out to the diaspora is to use varying forms of media or technology. Some successful examples in other countries of the creative use of social media and technology are the Global INK or Indian Network of Knowledge\(^1\), the Africans in the Diaspora or AiD website\(^2\), the Indonesian Diaspora Network\(^3\), the Jamaica Diaspora Connect\(^4\), the One Vietnam website of Vietnam\(^5\), the Overseas Singaporean Portal of Singapore\(^6\) and the My Irish 140 account of Ireland on Twitter\(^7\).

In the Philippines, we have launched **BaLinkBayan**, the one-stop online portal for Overseas Filipinos’ diaspora engagement. It is an E-Government Project spearheaded by the CFO accessible through [www.balinkbayan.gov.ph](http://www.balinkbayan.gov.ph).

**BaLinkBayan** is the marriage of two terms, “**link**” with its internet connotation and “**balikbayan**” a Filipino-coined term for a returning Filipino migrant. The program provides inter-active information for diaspora-driven initiatives such as entrepreneurship, investment, philanthropy at the city, town and provincial levels. This is in line with the inclination and desire of overseas Filipino to “**pay back**” and retire in the places where they come from.

The **BaLinkBayan** Online Portal likewise features conduits for skills and technology transfer and informs overseas Filipinos the governments services that are tailor-fit for them and their families in social security (SSS), universal health care (PhilHealth) and housing loans (Pag-ibig)
The final step to diaspora engagement is stewardship, where commitment is sealed through a reporting mechanism on the part of the government and a reward and recognition system for the diaspora.

With this in mind, the Philippine Government has instituted a biennial Presidential Awards for Filipino Individuals and Organizations Overseas under the auspices of the CFO. This awards system recognizes the important contributions of Filipinos abroad in advancing the cause of either the Filipino communities in the home country or a specific sector of Filipinos abroad. To date, since its establishment in 1980, 367 Presidential awardees from 46 countries have been recognized.

According to the Global Diaspora, Strategies Toolkit: Harnessing the Power of Global Diasporas: “The key to success…(of implementing a comprehensive diaspora strategy)…is identifying exceptional people and organizations in the diaspora and connecting them with exceptional people and organizations in the home country.”

“It is a small fraction of the overall number of the diaspora that are the ones who are going to make the difference,” and “Individuals make things happen, but inspired and passionate individuals make great things happen.”

“The role of government is to act as facilitator rather than implementor of programs….”

“Recognize that diaspora members do not have to return home to make a difference. Brain drain can lead to brain gain and brain exchange in a productive cycle,” and “Structures should be set up to ensure ongoing participation.”

Former Jamaican Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller could not have expressed it better as she addressed the Jamaican diaspora: “We have to redefine the concept of the nation. The nation today is not territorial; it is not bounded by physical space. The nation is a social and political construct. In a borderless world the nation is no longer confined by geography. There are 2.6 million people in Jamaica but there are approximately another 2.6 million living overseas. We also have to redefine patriotism. Patriotism can no longer be seen as necessarily synonymous with residence in the country of one’s birth. The fact that you are not physically located here does not make you any less committed to this country and its development nor does it make you, in this globalized era, disconnected from Jamaica.”

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And finally, let us hear from a member of the Filipino diaspora on “One Filipino’s Journey to Silicon Valley and back”:

“This job led me to believe that an individual can create billion dollar businesses from scratch and be an active part of the technology ecosystem in Silicon Valley as a potential partner, investor or acquirer.

What was missing though was the direct link to the Philippines, meaning, how my ideas can be felt by my countrymen. I wanted to give the best technology in the world to some of my best friends in the world.

What I realized in my time in the Valley was something that I knew all along: that my heart was in coming back home, somehow, someday.”

Speaking is Earl Valencia, a young highly-educated and skilled Filipino migrant who returned to the Philippines to be the Head of Corporate Development of Smart and is the co-founder and President of the IdeaSpace, a multi-industry incubator and accelerator for technology start-ups.

Just like Earl Valencia, any one of the millions of Filipinos living or working overseas possesses the necessary skill, talent, network, resources to contribute to the development of the Motherland. There are many Earls out there. The challenge is to provide the mechanisms and a conducive policy environment.

It was the poet Robert Frost who said, “Home is where the heart is”. For overseas Filipinos, Philippines remains their homeland, no matter how far away they go and how long they have gone.

B. Channeling of Remittances for Development

For almost four decades as a sending country, the Philippines has weathered various financial crises (both domestic and international). In surviving these crises, the country has learned quite a few lessons, especially in relation to remittances:

1. Improving the remittance environment encourages continued flow of remittances;

2. Promoting financial education among overseas Filipinos and their families mobilizes remittances towards productive activities and allows our overseas Filipinos to look forward to a financially secure future back home or in their host country;
3. Return and reintegration initiatives for Overseas Filipinos should be multi-sectoral in approach and given more attention by the Philippine government;

4. Collective remittance models and harnessing the economic development potentials of migration require a business and investment perspective; and,

5. Diversification of skills, professions, destination countries translate to resilience in remittance levels

a) IN IMPROVING THE REMITTANCE ENVIRONMENT

Learning from this experience, the Philippine Central Bank (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas or BSP), actively sought to improve the remittance environment in three ways: 1) by enhancing transparency and competition to lower remittance charges, 2) by expanding and diversifying channels of remittances and 3) by exploring low cost options for fund transfer.

The Central Bank launched an Overseas Filipinos’ portal in its website, linking with all the banks’ web pages on remittance services, fees and rates. It also required the posting in the bank’s premises and websites their remittance charges and other relevant information. This provides the overseas Filipinos and their beneficiaries with competitive data, leading to more informed decisions on their choices of remittance channels.

Furthermore, it improved service of remittance providers by facilitating the interconnection of major ATM networks. It authorized qualified rural banks and cooperative banks to operate a foreign currency deposit unit (or FCDU) which gives Overseas Filipinos the option of maintaining foreign currency deposits instead of immediately changing them to pesos. It also standardized the banks’ identification requirements and allowed the use of foreign-issued IDs.

Committed to use new technology for low cost options, BSP likewise set up a local clearinghouse -PhilPaSS -to eliminate the use of couriers in delivering remittances. This initiative reduced charges by as much as 90 to 96 percent and lowered the back end processing fees to 50 pesos per transaction.

From 2004, the remittance cost in the Philippines has gone down to 12 percent, on the average. There is still a way to go to reach the universally desired target of 5 percent. In addition, according to BSP, 95 percent of all remittances now go through the formal channels with only 5 percent going through the informal ones.
The Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) partnered with BSP to establish a multi-stakeholder Remittance for Development Council (or REDC) - an advisory and policy recommending body and a venue for regular dialogues and feedbacks on issues regarding remittances especially on measures to lower its costs; easier, greater and faster access to remittance channels and innovative remittance conduits.

b) PROMOTING FINANCIAL EDUCATION

Perhaps the greatest lesson that any overseas Filipino has to learn is: --that it is not how long they have worked or lived abroad or how high their salaries are that result in a seamless and successful retirement but how they are able to do fiscal goal setting and financial planning as a family, before and during their migration phase.

This is why the government and various non-government organizations (NGOs) continue to undertake financial literacy campaigns (FLCs) that aim to promote a culture of savings among overseas Filipinos and their families.

Cognizant of this situation, CFO set the goal of assisting overseas Filipinos and their families left behind to achieve financial freedom and independence through financial education. In 2012, a financial literacy module called “Kaalamang Pinansyal Tungo Sa Kaunlaran” or “KAPIT KA!” was developed to guide overseas Filipinos and the families to enhance their basic understanding and skills in budgeting, savings and financial planning. The modules are now incorporated in CFO’s pre-departure orientation seminars (PDOS) for Filipino emigrants.

1) PESO Sense: The Philippine Financial Freedom Campaign

The Philippine Financial Freedom Campaign or Peso Sense, for short, is our latest financial education initiative. It is essentially a Financial Education and Entrepreneurship program, which will cover all Filipinos, whether sender or receiver of remittances. This approach takes off from the study conducted by World Bank in 2012 stating that the most effective form of financial literacy is that which is directed not only to the remitter but to the beneficiaries as well.

UNDP Philippines and CFO is executing the Campaign through various forms of communications, from the world wide web to leaflets, from social media to videos and finally through mobile applications. With this strategy we hope to disseminate our advocacy of financial inclusion to as many publics as possible.
Another unique feature of Peso Sense is that the modules are customized according to six different and targeted profiles: students, young adults, business owners, the employed, home makers and retirees.

2) Financial inclusion for children and the youth

Inspired by the movement started by the Child and Youth Finance International to give 100 million children in 100 countries by 2015 financial access and financial education, CFO also partnered with Land Bank of the Philippines, a government bank, for the *Kiddie Katapat Savings Program* or KKıSS for short.

This is a program to equip Filipino children and youth, both in the Philippines and abroad, with the basic knowledge and habit of saving and the value of preparing for their future. With the approval of the Central Bank, dependents of overseas Filipinos, who are 7 years old and above are allowed to open and maintain their own ATM Savings account for an initial deposit and minimum balance of P100 (approximately US$2.50). In turn, CFO and Land Bank encourages overseas Filipino parents, siblings or guardians to match the amount saved by their dependents. This program is CFO’s concrete response for child-friendly banking services and youth-oriented financial literacy.

3) Overseas Filipinos’ Remittance for Development (OFs-ReD)

In 2011, CFO together with NEDA began implementing in the province of Ilocos Norte the *Overseas Filipinos Remittance for Development (OFs-ReD) Project: Building a Future Back Home*, with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and sponsored by Western Union’s philanthropy arm – The Western Union Foundation (WUF)

Within 2 years the Project achieved the following:

- Identification of Collective Remittance Models—micro-finance institutions, rural bank, migrant savings and investment, cooperatives) and selection of the most appropriate model

- Creation of Migration and Development (MnD) Council in the province of Ilocos Norte -- a multi-stakeholder mechanism led by the local government that draws in stakeholders and develops migration and development initiatives. The Council coordinates various initiatives, serve as referral
system and operate as a “clearing house”. The Council ensures the following:

- Integration of migration in the development plan of the province
- Packaging concrete investment/enterprise options in the province/municipality for migrants in partnership with private sector, cooperatives and NGOs
- Database development
- Networking and advocacy among migrants and their families

- A Collective Remittance Fund was set up in 2013 to finance the credit needs of new or existing migrant-owned enterprises in the area. The fund came about when the Provincial government of Ilocos Norte, the Western Union Foundation and the Cooperative Bank of Ilocos Norte, which is also the depository bank, pooled in P1 million each to jumpstart the fund. The fund is loaned to former or current overseas Filipino or their dependents with new or existing income generating enterprises. In 2013, there were 46 loan applications filed. Of this number, 14 applications were approved amounting to Php 1.28 million. Loans went to fund micro-small enterprises such as dragon fruit planting, bagnet making, rice trading, hog breeding, sari-sari (retail) stores etc. There are 14 loan applications under review for the year 2014.

In its specific provision on remittances, the Philippine Development Plan points out that:

“Policymakers will need to focus on leveraging remittances as a tool for economic development. While remittances are private transfers, the government can ensure that the policy environment is conducive to the use of remittances for investment in well-considered financial products, in productive activities such as entrepreneurial undertaking as well as in better housing, education and healthcare for remitters and their beneficiaries, improving the financial education of the overseas Filipino community and implementing measures to further promote the flow of remittances through the financial system that would help catalyze the development role of remittances.”

C. The Migrants Caught in Countries in Crisis (MICIC) Initiative

One of the substantive outcomes of the UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in New York last October was the recognition of the growing concern for stranded migrants and migrants caught in crisis situations, as well as the attention of the international community to the widespread hazards, distress and
abuse suffered by migrants in transit and destination. This was articulated by the UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon in his Welcome Remarks at the UN conference.

Many of our own overseas Filipinos have a first-person story to tell about the dangers and risks to life, and the anguish and suffering brought about by the wars, natural disasters, and other mass upheavals encountered by them as migrants in another country.

Extreme dangers to life, and human suffering such as those encountered by our countrymen abroad are among the harsh realities that have been associated with migration. Because more and more people move about, and the number of migrants is foreseen to increase even further, the potential for crisis situations which migrants may find themselves in will probably not diminish.

It therefore demands that all in this interconnected world – governments (whether of origin, transit or receiving countries), international organizations, civil society, the private sector and migrants themselves - to jointly address and deal with the issue.

I will quote from the Concept Note of the Working Group of Countries which is headed by both the United States and the Philippines on the “Migrants in Countries in Crisis” (MICIC) Initiative.

“Over the past ten years the world witnessed a number of natural disasters and conflicts, including the Asian tsunami in 2004, the Haitian earthquake in 2010, the 2011 crisis in Libya, Hurricane Sandy in the United States and the Fukushima earthquake and tsunami in Japan in 2012, in which migrants have been among those seriously affected. When countries experience such crises, migrants may lack adequate means to ensure their own safety. They can be ‘caught between the cracks’ because no frameworks exist delineating the responsibilities of State and other actors….”

“A number of calls have gone out to develop better ways of addressing the effects of these kinds of crisis on migrants.” Thus, after the UN High-level Dialogue on Migration and Development in October, a small working group of governments (Philippines, United States, Australia, Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Ethiopia and the European Commission) partnered with multilateral organizations such as IOM, UNCHR “to develop and advance an initiative on migrants in countries in crisis.” The core group agreed “to define the issues, look at best practices, collect the evidence base, and propose a way forward to strengthen the international community’s capacity to better
manage situations where migrants suddenly have ended up in a vulnerable situation in a country in acute crisis...."

1) The Philippine Experience and Lessons Learned

The Philippine policy on the protection of our migrants has been first tested during the Gulf War in 1990 which affected more than 100,000 overseas Filipinos who needs to be evacuated out of Kuwait.

Since then, the Philippine government has put in place crisis contingency plans with the objective of ensuring the safety of Filipinos should danger arise out of conflict or disasters. All of our Philippine Foreign Service Posts are mandated to regularly update its contingency plans under their respective areas of consular jurisdiction. These plans include determination of relocation centers and prepared routes for exit and material and logistical resources requirements, among others.

For a systematic and more comprehensive response to the needs of our overseas Filipinos caught in crisis, our President Benigno S. Aquino III signed the Executive Order No. 34 in 2011 which established the Overseas Preparedness and Response Team under the office of the President.

The team is composed of several government agencies, tasked to formulate strategies, programs, and policies to appropriately respond to crisis situations affecting Filipinos abroad; seek bilateral and multilateral partners for assistance in the formulation and implementation of plans, programs, and policies; and formulate and review contingency plans for the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Australia, the Pacific, the Americas, and Europe every six months.

2) Issuance of Alert Warning Level for Countries Affected by Crisis

The Philippine government also adopted a crisis alert system which serves as the basis for emergency and repatriation and deployment restrictions.

Alert Level 1 implies Precautionary or Warning Phase;
Alert Level 2 Restriction Phase,
Alert Level 3 Voluntary Repatriation, and
Alert Level 4 would mean Mandatory Repatriation for all of our citizens, and at the same time total deployment ban of workers on that country.
To illustrate: the Department of Foreign Affairs in January 2014 issued Alert Level 2 for Bangkok and surrounding areas which have been placed under a 60-day state of emergency by the Thai Government. The same alert level was also issued for Venezuela and Ukraine this March 2014, in view of the political tensions in these countries.3

An Alert level 3 on the other hand was issued for Yemen in December 2013, following a terrorist attack on the Yemeni Defense Ministry Complex; and for Egypt in November 2013 due to the incessant political unrest in the country.

3) Repatriation of Migrants Caught in Crisis

When a crisis worsens and becomes life threatening, the Philippine government issues voluntary or mandatory repatriation for our migrants, usually on the expense of the government.

In 2013 alone, our Department of Foreign Affairs took the lead role in the mass repatriation of overseas Filipinos, including the deployment of Inter-agency Rapid Response Teams, in the following countries:

- a) 5,821 Filipinos in Saudi Arabia due to the implementation of “Saudization policy” which led to the crackdown of undocumented migrants
- b) 1,699 Filipinos in Syria due to civil war
- c) 148 Filipinos in Egypt due to civil disturbance
- d) 16 Filipinos in South Sudan due to the deteriorating security situation in the country
- e) 7,068 Filipinos in Sabah due to the Lahad Datu stand-off between the Malaysian security forces and Royal Security Forces of the Sultanate of Sulu

Innovative, cost-effective and even creative mechanisms are devised by the Philippine government in repatriating the migrants. These include forging of alliances and partnerships with significant stakeholders in the countries in crisis, opening Embassy or Consulate hotlines that are accessible 24/7, utilizing social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. in reaching out to migrants, and seeking the assistance of Philippine honorary consulates and Filipino community leaders, among others.

4) Strategic Partnership with Stakeholders in Assisting Distressed Migrants
The Philippine government alone will not succeed without the help and assistance of other important stakeholders such as the host government, international organizations, private sector and the civil society, and Filipino communities in assisting distressed migrants during crisis.

To cite just one example:

In 2011-2012, the Philippine government partnered with and sought the assistance of the Syrian government and several groups in facilitating the mandatory repatriation of Filipino evacuees from Libya and Syria, most of whom crossed the borders to Lebanon just to ensure safety. The Syrian government granted the request of the Philippine government for the waiver of exit visa fees for the Filipino migrants and to free them from their employment contracts. It must be noted that every worker prior to their repatriation, had to obtain an exit visa permit from the Syrian Immigration and Passport Directorate. International Organization for Migration-Beirut, on the other hand, organized a chartered flight for Filipino nationals back to the Philippines, while Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center provided temporary shelters. The Philippine schools overseas also helped by serving as temporary evacuation centers and converging areas for Filipinos affected. The Philippine Airlines also provided assistance to the government by repatriating Filipino migrants who flee Libya back to the Philippines, particularly those who exited via Crete in Greece.

5) Lessons Learned

a) Crisis preparedness is a top priority. Every government should have their own clear policy, program and mechanism on crisis management, contingency plans, and reliable data and information on the location of their migrant citizens.

b) Partnership is essential. Every government is encouraged to build ties with the key players and stakeholders in migration – the host government, international organizations, NGOs and civil society, private and business groups, and the migrant community.

c) Services to the migrants should be holistic in every aspect of migration phase – from the pre-crisis, during the crisis stage, up to their eventual return to home country.

Let me end this section on Migrants in Crisis by sharing a quote by US justice Francis T. Murphy “No more essential duty of government exists than the protection of the lives of its people. Fail in this, and we fail in everything.”
D. Feminization and youthful profile of Philippine Migration (permanent migrants)

The Commission on Filipinos Overseas which oversees the registration of permanent migrants including marriage migrants had in its record from the period of 1989 to 2011, 412,728 registered spouses or partners of foreign nationals, 91.4 percent of them are females.

The majority of them are young or under 35 years old (25% are from ages of 20 to 24, 31% are from ages 25 to 29 and 19% are 30 to 34). 47 % of them are either college graduates (29%) or have reached college level (18%) when they got married. 30% are either high school graduates (19%) or have had high school education (11%).

The top destination countries of our marriage migrants are: USA, Japan, Australia, Canada, Germany, South Korea and U.K.

Given this profile of predominantly female marriage migrants, the CFO has set up a non-traditional Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar consisting of group guidance and counseling with a trained counselor as facilitator and when needed, a one-on-one counseling. This program which is country-specific aims to provide information and advice on the realities of cross-cultural marriage and family, the marriage migrants’ rights and obligations, available support network for women migrants in distress, among others.

In 2012, the CFO and Korea’s Ministry of Gender Equality and the Family, or MOGEF, formally agreed to work together to help Filipino marriage migrants with resettlement, adjustment and assimilation issues, and to promote their empowerment of through post-arrival programs such as language lessons. Currently, there are over 200 multicultural centers acting out as support network in Korea.

We hope that the Memorandum of Agreement between CFO and MOGEF serves as a template for similar agreements with other countries where there is a pattern of marriage migration from the Philippines..

The age profile of permanent emigrants is clearly different from that of migrant workers: one in five emigrants (20 percent) is below 15 years old, and one in 10 (10 percent) is an elderly. Considering the large share of the under 15 years old group, half of the
emigrant population is single. About 75 percent had at least some high school education (30 percent had completed tertiary education or higher); less than a third were employed prior to emigration."

Again faced with this trend, the CFO has designed another innovative pre-departure orientation program for Filipino young migrants, age 13 – 19, called “peer counseling”. Here they are given the opportunity to air among themselves their concerns and issues about leaving the country and living and studying in a new and strange environment. A trained counselor serves as facilitator, gives advice, shares her input to the discussion and highlights the points brought up by the young soon-to-be migrants.

We have likewise developed a program to reach out to our young migrants called YouLeaD (or Youth Leaders in the Diaspora). One of these initiatives is the Balik-turo or a 2-week study-tour, where the 2nd and 3rd generation of Overseas Filipinos are exposed to specific regions in the Philippines and where they could re-discover the heritage, the history, the culture and tradition of their Motherland.

E. Feminization of Temporary Migrants

According to the 2013 Philippine Country Migration Report: “Data on the sex composition of labor migrants became available in 1992. After 1992, female migration climbed, mostly driven by the demand for care workers in the developed economies. Notably, the new hires among the land-based OFWs were dominated by women until 2006, and rebounded by 2009. It may be recalled that worker deployment in the 1970s was dominated by male migrants due to the demand of workers for the numerous construction projects in the Middle East. By the 1980s, the labor needs shifted to other sectors, which opened employment options for women migrants in sales, the health sector, and services (of which household workers were a large component). “

Again the Philippine government, both from the executive and legislative branches and with the strong and sustained advocacy from civil society, has responded with a comprehensive structure of regulation, protection and assistance encompassing the migration process and has adopted a human rights framework in migration governance.

It especially takes cognizant of the unique challenges that face migrant women workers especially domestic workers given the above-mentioned data.

To mention a few of the legislative action taken by the Philippines on the feminization of labor migration,: 1) In August 2012, the Philippines became the second country to ratify
the International Labor Organization Convention 189: Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers; 2) Less than 6 months later, the Philippine President Benigno S. Aquino III signed into law Republic Act 10361, also known as the Magna Carta for Filipino Domestic Workers which complements ILO Convention 189.

I mentioned earlier that last year the Philippine Department of Labor Secretary Rosalinda Baldoz signed a historic agreement with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s Labor Minister Engineer Adel Bin Mohammed Fakeih specifically covering domestic workers. This is the first of its kind to be signed by the Saudi government with a country of origin such as the Philippines

A study by Scalabrini reveals that there is a variation in terms of gender roles when women migrate compared to men. “When men migrate, the left-behind wives indeed assumed more responsibilities with their dual roles as fathers and mothers. But when women migrate, it appears that families go through more adjustments – this is not surprising because changes in women’s roles often have more implications for the family than changes in men’s roles. If women assume men’s responsibilities when the men are not around, men do not as readily take up caregiving.

The 2008 International Conferences on Gender, Migration and Development which resulted in the 2008 Manila Call to Action gave the following recommendations:

1) Establish sex-disaggregated databases on migration. Strengthen monitoring on the situation of migrants through sex-disaggregated data collection and gender analysis of migration trends and include these in State reports to relevant UN and ILO treaty bodies.

2) Provide for family reunification and for measures to uphold the rights of accompanying children irrespective of their parent’s migration status, especially with regards to their birth registration and access to education and health care.

3) Provide access to psycho-social support programs for children of absent parents and raise awareness and capacities of fathers to effectively engage on domestic work and child care.

Families of migrants left behind or resulting from migration such as in the case of inter-marriages and children from these unions need to be included in governments’ and civil society’s full-cycle of interventions if we are to fully maximize the gains of migration and to address the costs to the migrants’ families and children.
Let me end with the challenge as hurled by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon –
that it is for us to “make migration work for the benefit of migrants and countries alike. We owe it to the millions of migrants, who through their courage, vitality and dreams, help make our society more prosperous, resilient and diverse”.