



Office of the President of the Philippines  
**COMMISSION ON FILIPINOS OVERSEAS**



**"Responding to the Challenges of Migration and Development"**

January 24, 2014

**MS. REMEDIOS I. RIKKEN**

Chairperson  
Philippine Commission on Women  
1145 JP Laurel St., San Miguel, Manila

Dear Chairperson Rikken:

Warm greetings from the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO)!

We are pleased to submit our inputs to the Philippines MDG Report on Women and Girls for your consideration for your next preparatory meeting on the 58<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW58).

For clarification on the report, your office may get in touch with Mr. Rodrigo Garcia, Jr. from the CFO- Planning, Policy, Research Division (PPRD) at telephone number (02) 552-4765 or email address [rgarcis@cfo.gov.ph](mailto:rgarcis@cfo.gov.ph)

Thank you and best regards.

Very truly yours,

**SECRETARY IMELDA M. NICOLAS**  
Chairperson, CFO

## **CFO INPUTS TO THE PHILIPPINES MDG REPORT FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS BEING PREPARED BY THE PHILIPPINE COMMISSION ON WOMEN**

To contextualize the discussion on the gender dimension of the Philippine international migration, a brief discussion on the nuanced profile of overseas Filipinos is in order. As of December 2012, data show that there are 10.48 million overseas Filipinos worldwide. Of this, 47% or 4.92 million are permanent migrants that comprise the largest category of overseas Filipinos followed closely by temporary migrants (40% or 4.22 million), more popularly known as OFWs or overseas Filipino workers, and then we have the so-called irregular migrants that is 13% or roughly 1.34 million.

### ***What has been the biggest achievement to date in implementing the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for women and girls? What have been the main challenges?***

Below are the achievements of the implementation of MDG Goals particularly for women and girls:

#### **MDG 2 and 3: On achieving universal primary education and promoting gender equality and empowerment of women**

1. Given the feminization of our labor migration and the trend in the number of registered permanent migrants from 2003 onwards -- approximately 60% of emigrants overall are female and over 92% of the migrating spouses or partners of foreign nationals, the so-called marriage migrants, are women.

The CFO which oversees the registration of permanent migrants including marriage migrants had in its record from the period of 2003 to 2012, 206,728 registered spouses or partners of foreign nationals, 92percent of them are females. The majority of them are young or under 35 years old (23% are from ages of 20 to 24, 31% are from ages 25 to 29 and 20% are 30 to 34). 47 % of them are either college graduates (31%) or have reached college level (18%) when they got married. 17% are either high school graduates or have had high school education (9%). The top destination countries of our marriage migrants are: USA, Japan, Australia, Canada, Germany, South Korea and U.K.

The CFO strives to address the particular vulnerabilities and situations of the predominantly female migrating spouses or partners of foreign nationals, in every stage of the migration cycle, such as pre-departure preparedness and marriage migrants integration to the host country.

## **2. Guidance and Counseling**

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 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, adjustments and coping mechanisms, the marriage migrants' rights and obligations, available support network for women migrants in distress, among others.

They are required to undergo country-specific pre-departure group and individual guidance and counseling sessions, which are conducted with 15 participants per session.

This allows for interaction, personalized goal setting and for questions relevant to marriage migration. The counselor helps the participants by summarizing and synthesizing this interaction with her own inputs to the discussion. The final session is geared towards individual counseling where the counselor spends time with the counselees with their specific problems and utilizes possible intervention to address any problem that surfaced in the process of counseling.

In addition, the CFO establishes linkages and partnerships with several Filipino communities overseas to seek their help in ensuring the integration of the newly arrived migrants in the destination countries. These partnerships are very much alive in the Filipino communities in Canada, Australia, United States, Italy, Scandinavia and some parts of Europe, Japan and South Korea with guidance from their respective Philippine embassies and consulates.

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 through pre and post-arrival programs such as exchange of learning modules for PDOS, access to information for newly arrived marriage migrants through MOGEF's over 200 multi-cultural family support centers and a regular training for CFO counselors and PDOS officers.. The MOU also aims to solidify joint programs and efforts on conducting research and implementing policies that will help ease marriage migrants adjustments and integration in South Korea's increasing multi-cultural society.

The CFO hopes 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. We are also hoping that the orientation given by

the Korean government about multi-cultural marriages to the Korean partners would be open to the CFO for evaluation and suggestions.

The rise in the number of international marriages has created more multi-cultural Filipino families. Children born out of these unions are referred to as “hyphenated” Filipinos, eg., Filipino-American, Korean-Filipino, and Japanese-Filipino. More updated data are needed on the number of children from these marriages especially from the latter 2 countries as anecdotal sources have shown problems, issues and concerns arising from them especially those children left behind. Then both government and civil society organizations, both from the Philippines and the destination countries, could work together to intervene effectively and deal with the problems.

The CFO closely works with groups such as Korea’s IOM-Migration Research Training Center (or MRTC), Philippine Resource Persons Group (PRPG), Kyoto University, Catholic Korea University, Metropolis International Asian Institute of Management, Kiel Institute for World Economy, among others, to encourage more researches, studies and trainings specifically in relation to marriage migration in the Philippines. Filipino NGOs such as the Development Action for Women Network and Batis Center for Women help women who used to work in Japan by counseling, through livelihood assistance, in finding the fathers of their Japanese-Filipino children and in seeking child support.

Recently, CFO forged an agreement with the Catholic Daegu University in South Korea and is about to sign an MOU with Kyoto University in Japan to supplement the Counseling program with free language and cultural lessons for marriage migrants bound for South Korea and Japan, respectively.

CFO has been highly involved in the passage of RA 10364 “An Act Expanding the Anti-Trafficking in Person Act of 2012” in February 2013, The new law that amended RA 9208, reinforced the implementation of the Guidance and Counseling Program of the CFO. Pursuant to Section 15, j: “Commission on Filipinos Overseas shall conduct the pre-departure counseling services for Filipinos in intermarriages.” The newly enacted law also amended Section 4 of RA 9208, “Acts of trafficking in Persons - It shall be unlawful for any person, natural or juridical to commit any of the following acts..... section 4 (b): “To introduce or match for money, profit, or material, economic or other consideration, any person or, as provided for under Republic Act No. 6955, any Filipino woman to a foreign national, for marriage for the purpose of acquiring, buying, offering, selling or trading him/her to engage in prostitution, pornography, sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery, involuntary servitude or debt bondage.” and Section 4 (c): “To offer or contract marriage, real or simulated, for the purpose of acquiring, buying, offering, selling or trading them to engage in prostitution pornography, sexual exploitation, forced labor or slavery, involuntary servitude or debt bondage”

All the amendments reinforced the need to penalize the perpetrators of mail order bride schemes and intermarriages that lead to or are forms of human trafficking. The CFO continues in its effort to upgrade and improve its Guidance and Counseling program in support of the Interagency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) campaign against human trafficking including those done in the guise of intermarriage, all to promote the protection and uplift the status of women and children.

### **3. Peer Counseling**

The Peer Counseling Session is required for Filipino emigrants 13 to 19 years old. The sessions aim to provide a venue for the young migrants to discuss their own concerns about leaving their country of birth. The Peer Counseling is unique because it is the youth themselves who bring up their issues: from their unfamiliarity with the foreign language of the host country to fear of rejection, from their separation from friends in the Philippines to the possibility of bullying and discrimination in their new schools, from feelings of homesickness, isolation and depression to culture shock.

While sessions are not country specific, country profiles and settlement concerns are also discussed. No other government agency provides this specialized pre-departure program for migrating Filipino youth. The same is true with GCP. CFO has decided to put it in place when we noted that almost 32% of the CFO clientele now belong to the 13 to 19 year old age bracket.

In 2013, there were 10,324 attendees in the peer counseling session.

### **4. Country Familiarization Seminar (CFS) for Au pairs**

As background, the alleged abuses and reported cases of exploitation, discrimination, sexual violation and prostitution of au pairs led to the imposition of Philippines ban on the deployment of to Europe. The Philippine government's ban did not deter the participation of these young Filipinos to the Scandinavian countries and other areas of Europe. There were reports on the continued issuance of Au Pair visas by some European countries as well as cases of exploitation and abuse. Most of these Filipinos are undocumented, hence, there are no traces of movement of these people within the host country or within Europe. Abuses were not also recorded or reported because technically these Filipino Au Pairs are considered irregular migrants. Concerned agencies, including the Au Pairs themselves, raised several issues, i.e., the absence of insurance coverage for emergency situations; the lack of a comprehensive pre-departure orientation program to address concerns over integration into host family settings; the need for a registration system and a monitoring mechanism to ensure the well-being and safety of the Au Pairs.

In 2010, the DFA agreed to lift the ban on Au Pairs headed for selected countries (i.e., Switzerland, Norway and Denmark) which guaranteed the protection of participants. Additional measures included a comprehensive pre-departure orientation, with recruitment and deployment supervised by the Department of Labor/Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (DOLE/POEA), as well as a provision for the repatriation for Au Pairs in case of emergency or illness. (DOLE Board Resolution No. 04, Series of 2010)

The Au Pair scheme fell under the POEA's "name hire" category. It was clear, however, that Au Pairs were not in the same category as regular temporary or contract-based workers. Nevertheless, the program was included in the POEA's mandate to ensure the protection of the rights and welfare of Au Pairs given POEA's regulatory function which allows it to monitor and sanction recruiters who victimize young Filipinos interested in overseas employment.

The increasing number of Au Pairs further drew attention to the need for a comprehensive monitoring system. DOLE records show that in 2010-2011, a total of 1,613 Au Pairs left for Norway (139), Denmark (754) and Switzerland (720) and underwent the DOLE-Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) pre-departure orientation program.

In 2011, an inter-agency ad hoc technical working group (TWG) was formed to draft the guidelines for the total lifting of the ban on Au Pairs. During the task force meetings, the CFO was requested to conduct the pre-departure orientation program for Au Pairs, develop and maintain a database on Au Pairs bound for Europe and discourage the participation of nannies or household service workers in the Au Pair Program since it is recognized internationally as a cultural, educational and self-improvement opportunity. (See: European Agreement on the Placement of Au Pairs – EPAP 1969) The task force likewise came up with the steps to be taken by various agencies especially the DFA, the Philippine Embassies and Consulates in Europe and the CFO.

The CFO Country Familiarization Seminar (CFS) for Au pair participants prepares them for the immersion process in a cultural and language learning context. The seminar provides input on: settlement concerns, values, cultural and social realities in the host countries, health and safety issues, airport and travel procedures and support networks in the host countries. It also encourages the au pairs to participate in the various activities prepared by Filipino Communities and EU funded non-government organizations prepared for au pairs. To ensure that Filipino au pairs' protection are in placed CFO through the help of the DFA partnered with Babaylan Denmark and its EU networks. Reported cases on violation of agreement, au pairs in distressful situations and even basic inquiries of new settled Filipino au pairs are referred to the likes of this organization.

From January to December 2013 , there were 2,859 Au pairs who registered and attended the CFO's Country Familiarization Seminar. Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, Switzerland and Germany were the top 5 destination countries for Filipino Au Pair participants. . There were less than 11 actual cases acted upon by CFO and cases were mostly about contract violation, change of host family, recruitment agencies, among others.

## **5. Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking – Advocacy and Communications Committee (IACAT-ADVOCOM)**

In December 2010, the CFO became an ex-officio member of the IACAT and was delegated to head the Advocacy and Communications Committee (ADVOCOM) because of its experience in handling the Presidential Task Force Against Human Trafficking (TFHT). CFO-TFHT implemented its anti-trafficking programs from March 2007 to March 2010, covering the four areas of prevention, protection, prosecution and reintegration.

The primary role of the ADVOCOM is to work in conjunction with its members and of the IACAT, in the initiation, implementation and evaluation of an effective communications program for the Council. The ADVOCOM will specifically oversee and monitor the implementation of the communications and information campaign and will update the IACAT with any significant development vis-à-vis the campaign.

The creation of the ADVOCOM is in line with some of the functions of the IACAT as stipulated in the Section 21 (e) of RA 9208 which is to coordinate the conduct of massive information dissemination and campaign on the existence of the law and the various issues and problems attendant to trafficking through the local government units, concerned agencies, and NGOs. The Article V, Section 16 (c) of the Implementing Rules and Regulations of the RA 9208 also stipulated that one of the roles and responsibilities of the IACAT is to undertake information, education and advocacy campaigns against trafficking in persons.

Representatives from Department of Justice, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Commission on Filipinos Overseas, Council for the Welfare of Children, Department of Education, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Labor and Employment, Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, Presidential Communications Operations Office, Philippine Commission on Women, Philippine National Police, Philippine Information Agency, Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, Bureau of Immigration (Is BI an IACAT-ADVOCOM member) International Justice Mission, Ople Policy Center and Visayan Forum Foundation comprise the members of the Committee. Other relevant non-government partners are the Kapisanan ng mga Brodcasters ng Pilipinas (KBP), Philippines Against Child Trafficking (PACT), and Dynamic Outsourcing Solutions 1.

## **6. 1343 Actionline against Human Trafficking**

One of the important accomplishments of CFO-ADVOCOM is the operationalization of the 1343 Actionline against Human Trafficking which started on 15 March 2011. It is a 24/7 hotline facility which responds to emergency or crisis calls from victims of human trafficking and their families. It can be reached from any point in Metro Manila and is likewise accessible from the provinces and overseas. Moreover, 1343 Actionline Website was launched and also 1343 Actionline infomercials were aired in radio stations.

Other notable accomplishments of ADVOCOM are the convergence Agreement with POEA, DOLE, OWWA and DILG in intensifying campaign against illegal recruitment, trafficking in persons and other schemes on irregular migration; signed MOAs with provinces and municipalities towards intensifying activities against TIP; participation in Walk for Freedom Project/ Initiative and promotion of 1343 Actionline during Celebration of Month of Overseas Filipinos

CFO-ADVOCOM also conducted the National Training the Trainers' Workshop on Trafficking to frontline and training officers in the government and non-government agencies involved in the handling and attending of human trafficking cases; and in partnership with the Philippine Commission on Women, seminar-workshops on trafficking and other related laws and gender-sensitive reporting for media professionals were held in Pampanga and Iloilo provinces.

## **7. Community Education Program (CEP)**

The CEP is an annual information campaign conducted nationwide by the CFO in coordination with various government agencies, non-government organizations, local government units, media organizations, and academic institutions.

The CEP seeks to assist prospective migrants in making informed decisions regarding working or settling abroad, as well as in generating community involvement on migration concerns. It also aims to raise public awareness about issues concerning migration, inter-marriages, and existing government policies and programs directed against illegal recruitment, documentation fraud and trafficking, among others.

For 2013, CFO reached 26 provinces, 28 cities and 57 towns and managed to bring information to 14,347 individuals who attended and participated in the program and covered 40,000 radio listeners to many interviews conducted by the CEP teams on various issues and concerns surrounding international migration, including mail order bride, illegal recruitment, financial literacy, human trafficking, among others.

## **8. CFO Foreign Sponsors' Watchlist**

There are a number of modus operandi employed in marrying Filipinas by foreigners for reasons not related to getting married at all. Multiple sponsorship pertains to the practice of sponsoring multiple Filipinas for marriage, which means that a foreigner has been married or engaged to a Filipina more than once, some may have ended in divorce, amicable or otherwise, or death. Serial sponsorship, on the other hand, refers to the practice of marrying one or more Filipinas where a foreigner has a history of domestic violence, abuse, abandonment, undetermined death, involvement in human trafficking, and other derogatory record.

While inclusion in the Watchlist does not prevent the Filipina to travel overseas or marry her foreign fiancé, it forewarns fiancé(e)s, spouses and partners about the personality, marital history, record or past of the foreigner. The Filipina has the last say whether to accept the proposal or not. Through the database, the CFO wanted to prevent illegal acts hiding in the guise of intermarriage and perpetrated against Filipinas that result to trafficking, slavery or domestic violence.

Eleven years ago, the CFO conceptualized a software database wherein names of all foreigners marrying Filipinas or Filipinos can be checked to spot marital fraud, deception and those with undesirable records. It was 1999 then, and the practice before was to crosscheck the names manually, against a folder full of papers. The plan was to speed up the process by automating the manual system. A year later, in 2000, a customized software was developed by CFO that can verify names in seconds. It also contains profiles of erring foreigners, case histories and other pertinent personal information involving spouses and partners. If a name gets a positive hit, the system can pull up previous information regarding that individual, including past transgressions in the country.

The software can run on minimal system requirements and is enhanced every year by CFO programmers. Right now, the serial and multiple sponsorship database is an integral part of the Guidance and Counseling Information System (GCIS) of the CFO.

Information contained in the database is real time and names are added on a daily basis or as the need arises. The system is hosted both on a separate and redundant servers and has multiple firewalls to protect it from cyber attacks.

The database keeps track of the following: (1) Filipinos married to foreigners, (2) foreign and Filipino nationals included in the CFO watchlist, (3) Filipinos who attended the guidance and counseling more than once, and (4) foreign nationals who sponsored more than once, with or without derogatory records.

To date, the database had foiled attempts by 5,991 foreigners to marry Filipinas on a multiple basis; identified 2,582 Filipino fiancées/ spouses who attended the guidance and counseling more than once; included 58 Filipino fiancées/ spouses in the CFO watch list; and keeps track of 251 foreign nationals in its watch list.

From January to June 2013, there were 10,686 spouses/partners of foreign nationals who underwent guidance and counseling session. (No breakdown given) While from January to December 2013, CFO recorded 21, 616 Filipino fiancé(e), spouses and partners of foreign nationals who attended the CFO Guidance and Counseling Program.