



Migration Profile

THE PHILIPPINES

A. Executive Summary

The Republic of the Philippines, an archipelago in Southeast Asia, is the world's fifth-largest island nation and one of the most populated countries in the world: 109,180,815 (2020). The National Capital Region (NCR), also known as Metropolitan Manila, is the country's political, economic, and educational centre as well as its most densely populated region, comprising over 14 million people in total, many of whom reside in rural communities that neighbour Manila. The combination of a large population, the lack of employment opportunities, and weak government structures, has led to a substantial population of Filipino migrants throughout the world, which has shaped the political, economic, and social structure of the country and has become one of its main development strategies. Currently there are approximately 10.2 million Filipinos overseas, in more than 200 destination countries and territories.

At the same time, though immigration to the Philippines is relatively limited, there is a very significant degree of internal migration, particularly rural-urban movements. There is also internal displacement, with people in prolonged or protracted displacement situations caused by natural disasters. Internal displacement is further compounded by conflict on the island of Mindanao. As an archipelagic country consisting of roughly 7,641 islands in the Pacific Ring of Fire and typhoon belt, the Philippines is among the top five countries in the world most affected by climate change effects and resulting internal displacement: approximately 4.1 million new displacements were recorded in 2019. Though internal displacement is one of the main challenges faced by the country, the number of refugees on the territory is much smaller. There are a total of 690 registered refugees and 333 pending cases of asylum seekers, mostly coming from Turkey, Syria, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Somalia, and Yemen.

The Philippines has experienced an increase of stateless people because of armed conflict. The island of Mindanao has become one of the country's trafficking hotspots, with children being trafficked to major cities in the Philippines and to other countries, especially Malaysia, for exploitation in the sex trade and labour operations. To make matters worse, online child sexual exploitation has more than tripled during the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

With around 72 dioceses, 7 Apostolic Vicariates and a Military Ordinariate, in the Philippines, the local Catholic Church has a very active and organized involvement in migrant issues and ministries. From the Episcopal Conference to local parishes, most bishops, priests, and religious sisters are aware of Philippine migration issues and are proactively working to assist Filipino migrants and IDPs.

Country Profile

I. Basic Information

The Republic of the Philippines is an archipelagic country in Southeast Asia with its capital in Manila. It consists of approximately 7,641 islands in the Pacific Ocean that are broadly categorized under three geographical divisions: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. With a total land area of 300,000 km (mostly mountains with various proportions of coastal lowlands) this Presidential Republic is the world's fifth-largest island country, and one of the most populated countries in the world: 109,180,815 (2020). As one of the countries along the Ring of Fire, where up to 90% of the world's earthquakes and some 75% of the world's volcanoes occur, the country has a significant volcanic activity and a consequent abundance of mineral deposits. In addition, rising temperature and typhoons caused by climate change negatively affect rise yields, causing greater outmigration from agriculturally-dependent provinces to urban areas.

With a life expectancy at birth of 71 years and a growth rate of 1.52%, the population of the Philippines is quite young, concentrated in regions with good arable lands. The total median age is 23.5 years and 31.9% of the population under 15. Such a large and young population contributes to making the Philippines one of the most dynamic economies in the East Asia Pacific region. With a sustained average annual growth of 6.4% between 2010 and 2019, the Philippines is moving from being a lower middle-income to an upper middle-income country, with an economy influenced by increasing urbanization. In 2019 the country had a 376.796 billion USD GDP, with the agricultural sector accounting for 14% (despite employing 30% of the workforce) and the industrial sector accounting for 30% of GDP. This is evidence of the transition from being an agricultural country to one that is newly industrialized, with an economy that is increasingly oriented towards services and manufacturing.

According to the latest available data (2010 estimates), this archipelagic country is inhabited by more than 175 ethnolinguistic groups, most of which are part of the Austronesian or Malayo-Polynesias speaking groups: Tagalog (24.4%); Bisaya/Binisaya (11.4%); Cebuano (9.9%); Ilocano (8.8%); Hiligaynon/Ilonggo (8.4%); Bikol/Bicol (6.8%); Waray 4%; other local ethnicity (26.1%); and other foreign ethnicity (1%). This ethnic repartition is also reflected in the main languages and dialects used in the country. English is the official language, as well as Filipino, a standardized version of Tagalog. The major dialects include: Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocano, Hiligaynon or Ilonggo, Bicol, Waray, Pampango, and Pangasinan.

Census data from 2010 confirmed that Christianity remains the dominant faith of the country, with 80.6% of the population being Catholic, 8.2% Protestant (including 2.7% Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches, 1.2% National Council of Churches in the Philippines, 4.3% other Protestant), 3.4% other Christian, 5.6% Muslim, 2% tribal religions, and 2.9% others.

II. International and Internal migrants

With a total population of 218,500 international migrants (statistics from midway through 2019), representing 0.2% of the population, and a net migration in the 5 years prior to of negative 335,800, the Philippines continues to be a country of emigration rather than immigration.

Indeed, immigration to the Philippines is a relatively small phenomenon, involving an annual flow of less than 20,000 people settling in the country for various reasons. The majority of immigrants coming to the Philippines are from Asia, particularly from China, and more recently from the Republic of Korea. Only the 10.9% of international migrants are 65 years or older, which demonstrates that most of the immigrants are young people, moving to the country mainly for educational purposes.

Internal migration plays a much more significant role than immigration in the Philippines. Internal migration is rather routine in Philippine society. According to the 2018 National Migration Survey (NMS 2018), approximately 55% of Filipinos ages 15 and over have migrated to other cities/municipalities, provinces, regions, or countries for 3 months or more since birth: 49% were internal migrants moving within the country, 3% international migrants moving to and from other countries, and 4% were both internal and international migrants. Since the country continues to undergo rapid urbanization, people increasingly move from the rural areas to the urban centres, in search of better opportunities. The main destinations within the country remain Calabarzon, Metro Manila, and Central Luzon. In these rural-urban movements, female migration is very significant in the Philippines, constituting the majority of the outmigrant population from rural areas. The main reasons for moving include job opportunities, marriage, and access to better schooling.

Finally, there are roughly 182,000 persons within the Philippines in prolonged or protracted displacement situations caused by government troops fighting against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the Abu Sayyaf Group, and the New People's Army. There are also approximately 1,068 stateless persons, who are descendants of Indonesian migrants. Decades of armed internal conflict, particularly in the Southern island of Mindanao, have continued to create and perpetuate a population of displaced persons. Every year, natural disasters and calamities such as typhoons and earthquakes also displace millions of people across the country.

III. Emigration and skilled migration

The Philippines is primarily a migrant-sending country with a well-developed policy for

managing outward migration as a way of developing itself. According to the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (which supports emigrant workforce), in 2020 there were 10.2 million overseas Filipinos in over 200 destination countries and territories: 4.8 million of these were permanent migrants, 4.2 million temporary migrants (so called “Overseas Filipino Workers” or OFWs), and 1.2 million were irregular.

In 2018 alone, 73,719 persons emigrated from the Philippines, the majority of which chose the USA as a destination country, followed by Canada, Japan, Australia, Italy, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Germany, South Korea, Spain, and others. Filipino migration to the United States has a considerable history. There are currently around 4 million Filipinos or Americans with Filipino ancestry living in the US, mostly in California and Hawaii. Such migration is mostly motivated by family reunification as well as work opportunities. As a result of their strong English skills, Filipinos who emigrate usually have high college education rates and are more likely to have higher incomes and lower poverty rates than those who stay in the Philippines, reflecting the lack of employment opportunities in the country. In 2019 for example, according to World Bank data, Filipinos living abroad sent nearly 33.5 billion USD in remittances to the Philippines via formal channels, which was an increase of 3.9% compared to the 32.2 billion USD recorded in 2018. These remittances thus represent 9.9% of the Philippines’ GDP. The Philippines ranks third in the world, after India and China, for the highest sums of remittances received from abroad. The economic benefits received from this Filipino diaspora are also encouraged by the government through provisions on migration and development included in several programmes that promote circular migration and the return of emigrants, among other things. Return migration, however, is still underexploited, with the majority of return migrants experiencing difficulties in finding a job at home that corresponds to the qualifications they earned abroad.

Most of the Filipinos who emigrated in 2018 were under the age of 40. To be specific, 29% were 17 years old or younger, 66% were between 18 and 64 years old, and 5% were 65 years old and above; and the majority were females: 43,329 over 30,390 males. Figures also demonstrate a consistent rise in annual emigration for employment, in which women also outnumber men, especially in the case of domestic work. There is a notable link between the occupations of migrants and their gender distribution. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and the UAE mainly receive service workers, who are predominantly female Filipino domestic workers, while Saudi Arabia and Qatar see a large share of male Filipinos employed as production and transportation workers, equipment operators, and labourers.

Mass annual emigration of OFWs, as well as the large diaspora of Filipino communities, has created the emergence of a subculture of emigration that shapes the political, economic, and social structure of the Philippines. Politically, government agencies, like the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, have been founded to deal with the migration of registered workers, negotiate international labour terms, and support the workforce as a way to develop the country. Socially, specific courses or educational fields (such as medical, nursing, vocational maritime courses, etc.) are promoted in order to prepare people for immediate overseas employment.

IV. Forced Migration (internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, and refugees)

Being an archipelagic country consisting of roughly 7,641 islands in the Pacific Ring of Fire and typhoon belt, the Philippines is one of the 5 countries in the world most affected by climate change effects and related internal displacement. Storms, floods, and earthquakes displace millions of people each year. In addition, the conflicts and instability in Mindanao have left hundreds of thousands of people living in protracted displacement over past decades and continue to drive new displacement. All in all, the Philippines recorded approximately 4.1 million new displacements in 2019. Typhoon Kammuri was the largest displacement event of 2019, triggering more than 1.4 million displacements across the central regions in December 2019. In early January 2020, the Taal Volcano caused an intense seismic activity that forced more than 300,000 people to evacuate their homes. This high exposure to various natural hazards is further compounded by the conflict between the government and armed groups in the southern island of Mindanao. Of the 4.1 million new displacements in 2019, 183,000 of them were caused by conflict and violence. Though the conflict in Mindanao ended in 2017, in 2019 almost 58,000 people were displaced in a conflict in the region. Thousands of IDPs still live in evacuation centres and transitory sites where they have been since the tensions began. In this sense, the main challenges faced by IDPs in the country, affecting those who have been displaced by natural disasters and conflicts alike are: access to secure and durable housing; access to basic services; and generating adequate income despite the lack of safe livelihood opportunities in the areas of displacement. This internal displacement seems to remain on the rise: the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre projects roughly 717,500 new displacements per year for sudden onset hazards in the Philippines.

While internal displacement continues to be one of the main challenges faced by the country, the number of refugees on the territory is relatively minor, with 690 registered refugees and 333 pending cases of asylum seekers, mostly coming from Turkey, Syria, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Somalia, and Yemen.

Finally, another global phenomenon affecting thousands of Filipinos is the rise in stateless people despite the ongoing efforts to resolve such cases. According to the UNHCR there are at least 10 million stateless people in the world: about 40% of them live in Southeast Asia, of which 7,318 are in the Philippines. The persons at risk of statelessness in the Philippines include unregistered children, foundlings, children of Filipino descent in migration situations (for example in the Middle East and the Malaysian state of Sabah), persons of Indonesian descent residing in Southern Mindanao, and the Sama population – an indigenous and nomadic ethnic minority living mostly on the sea in Mindanao.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

According to the *Trafficking in Persons Report* of 2019, despite fully meeting the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and having increased the resources allocated to the

Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking and other judicial reforms, the Philippines still has to increase its efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict perpetrators of trafficking, especially labour traffickers. This reality is accentuated also by the natural disasters that constantly strike the country, resulting in chaos and economic instability, which in turn lead to an increase in human trafficking.

In 2019, authorities in the Philippines investigated 407 suspected trafficking cases (compared to 488 in 2017), and initiated the prosecution of 227 alleged traffickers (compared to 177 in 2017). These cases included 18 labour trafficking defendants, 195 sex trafficking defendants, and one defendant charged with using a child for soldiering. As for the victims, the government reported 2,953 potential victims of trafficking and provided assistance to 672 victims of sex trafficking, 425 victims of labour trafficking, and 159 victims of illegal recruitment. Victims have also been reported among Overseas Filipino Workers, including 215 female victims of domestic servitude.

Abroad, forced labour and sex trafficking affect a significant number of Filipino migrant workers, particularly in the Middle East and Asia. Internally, forced labour and sex trafficking also affect women and children from rural communities and impoverished urban centres, most of whom come from Metro Manila, specifically Valenzuela, Quezon City, Muntinlupa, and Manila. Regarding human trafficking, the Philippines is primarily considered to be an internal/domestic country and a country of origin. On one hand, within the country, sex exploitation occurs in tourist destinations where there is a high demand from citizens of Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and the United States. There are also increasing reports of cases involving tourists coming from Japan, Morocco, Iraq, and Denmark. On the other hand, the exploitation of Filipino migrant workers is also on the rise, especially in domestic service. In the United States, for example, hundreds of Filipino workers, mostly females, are trafficked to work in servitude, making Filipino the first-ranked nationality of victims of human trafficking. Other destination countries for human trafficking originating in the Philippines are Japan, South Korea, European countries (especially Italy), Jordan, Taiwan, and Malaysia. Finally, the Philippines is also used as a transit country for the transport of sex trafficking victims from China.

Estimates suggest that 60,000 to 100,000 children are victims of human trafficking in the Philippines. Because of the armed conflict, the island of Mindanao has become a trafficking hotspot, with children being trafficked to major Philippine cities and outside the country, especially to Malaysia, for exploitation in the sex trade and labour market. Online child sexual exploitation has then more than tripled during the COVID-19 pandemic, as poverty, job loss, and families' inability to feed their children have led to make easy money by selling children online. The Philippine Department of Justice received roughly 279,166 cyber tips from March to May of 2020, compared to 76,561 cyber tips over the same period in 2019.

VI. National Legal Framework

The Philippines is one of the few countries in the Asia-Pacific region to be a signatory to the

1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its *1967 Protocol*. Likewise, on May 30, 2011 it became the first Southeast Asian country to ratify the *1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*.

The Philippines' long-term experience with international migration has brought about the establishment of institutions, policies, and practices to manage this reality, with a particular focus on emigration and international labour migration, as a country of origin rather than destination. Its migration policy and governance are mainly characterized by tripartite approaches and multi-sector engagement, with various agreements concerning migration-related issues, for example the *Memorandum of Agreement* between the Philippine government, UNHCR, and the International Organisation for Migration. The establishment of the Sub-Committee on International Migration and Development in 2014, for example, was an important step forward in the pursuit of this multi-level migration governance. The Philippines, however, has no specific legislation regarding the protection of asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons, or IDPs. Instead, the legal guidelines for the State's response in cases of displacement are based on the *Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010* (PDRRMA). The *Omnibus Rules and Regulations Implementing the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995, as amended by Republic Act 10022*, for example, defines the obligations of government institutions that implement response programmes for Filipino emigrants caught in crises abroad.

Among the legal instruments dealing with migrants, the *Philippine Immigration Act of 1940* provides the basis for policies concerning the admission and stay of foreign nationals. The *Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995* serves as the landmark law on migration governance in the country, covering a wide range of areas including migrant support services such as pre-departure orientations and job placements. Such legislation is further strengthened by Philippine Medium-Term Development Plans introduced by each new national government that comes into power. The current *Philippine Development Plan (2017-2022)* includes migration-related provisions and lists initiatives to increase social protection programmes for OFWs and their families, with education and livelihood assistance programmes as well as relief assistance programmes. The Plan also addresses illegal recruitment and trafficking, especially of children.

As for human trafficking, the *Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2012* amended the 2003 Act that criminalized sex trafficking and labour trafficking, in order to intensify efforts to combat trafficking and increase penalties for violators. The 2012 revision increased sentences to up to 20 years' imprisonment and fines between 19,050 and 38,100 USD. The 2012 Act also established the Inter-Agency Committee Against Trafficking (IACAT) with twelve members, of which nine are government agencies and three are NGOs with specific roles in combatting human trafficking.

VII. Main Actors

The State

The Philippine government bodies that are involved in matters concerning migration and asylum seekers include: the Department of Justice, the National Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Immigration, the Philippine National Police, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, the Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs, the Department of Foreign Affairs, and the Department of Social Welfare and Development. These bodies are also part of the Inter-Agency Committee Against Trafficking (IACAT) constituted of 12 members (9 government agencies and 3 NGOs). The Department of Social Welfare and Development has also established the National Recovery and Reintegration Database as a database on trafficked persons. For its part, the Bureau of Immigration oversees the administration and enforcement of immigration as well as alien admission and registration laws, in accordance with the provisions of the Philippine Immigration Act.

The Catholic Church

With roughly 72 dioceses, 7 Apostolic Vicariates and a Military Ordinariate, in the Philippines, the local Catholic Church has a very active and organized involvement with migrant issues and ministries. From the Bishops Conference to the local parishes, most bishops, priests, religious sisters, and lay people are aware of Philippine migrant issues. Within the country, the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ECMI) of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), chaired by H.E. Bishop Ruperto Cruz Santos of the Diocese of Balanga, is most actively involved with migrants, refugees, and victims of human trafficking. A basic percentage breakdown highlights the kind of work done by the ECMI on different issues surrounding migrants: 60 per cent is dedicated to diocesan ministries (which includes training in pastoral care, families, migrant workers, and migrants children); 20 per cent is devoted to human trafficking; and 20 per cent concerns chaplains, refugees, and direct services such as case handling. Other major Catholic agencies involved with migrant work in the Philippines include, but are not limited to: Nassa/Caritas Philippines, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), ICMC, the Good Shepherd Sisters, the Daughters of Charity, St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception Missionaries, The Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC), the SVD community, and the Salesians.

Nassa/Caritas, for example, was created by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Philippines in 1966 in order to accompany the poor and marginalized. It represents the Philippines to Caritas Internationalis with several emergency, recovery, rehabilitation, and resilience-building programs that have been implemented since its establishment. One of the on-going projects, for example, is Farmfirst, launched in 2015 to empower vulnerable communities for climate change adaptation and sustainable development. The JRS, for its part, works on the island of Mindanao where some 4 million Filipinos have been displaced since the year 2000. The JRS offers them support to strengthen their involvement and participation in on-going peace dialogues. Building peace and resilience in these areas is also one of the objectives carried out by CRS, who responds to the call for immediate help after disasters and helps those affected by conflicts and emergencies by providing supplies, shelters, jobs, and the rebuilding of homes and community.

The Catholic Church in the Philippines also advocates on behalf of Overseas Filipino Workers, calling for better treatment and protection, supporting them through pastoral workers and migrant chaplaincies, and participating in campaigns against human trafficking. In response to the vast number of migrant workers who leave their home and children (with the risk of having their passports or wages withheld, or suffering verbal, physical, or sexual abuse), in 2003 the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines launched an on-going formation program aimed at the sons and daughters of OFWs. Among its achievements is increased awareness of migration issues and concerns among children, as well as scholarships and livelihood activities.

Finally, regarding human trafficking, the work done by the Talitha Kum network is essential in making the issue of human trafficking a priority, especially in the cases of women and children.

International organisations

The International Organisation for Migration is one of the international organisations that work actively in the Philippines. Its Philippine office was established in 1975 and its regional office in Manila, established in 1996, was one of the first regional offices of the IOM in the world. Its units include: the Migrant Protection and Assistance Unit, which is responsible for providing assistance in voluntary returns and reintegrations, counter-trafficking activities, and general assistance for vulnerable migrants; the Labour Migration Unit, which partners with the Department of Labour and Employment to manage labour migration and protect the rights of the workers; and the Migrant Health Division, which includes the Manila Health Centre established in 2013 to offer health assessments to migrants in order to help them better integrate into destination countries.

The UNHCR is among the organisations operating in the Philippines that focus on asylum seekers, refugees, statelessness persons, and internally displaced persons as part of its essential activities. For over 30 years, the UNHCR has operated in Mindanao to provide durable solutions for refugees, to reduce and end statelessness, and to empower displaced families. In 2016, for example, the UNHCR supported the governments of the Philippines and Indonesia to confirm the citizenship of 4,112 persons of Indonesian descent in Mindanao. Especially in the case of IDPs, the UNHCR works in partnership with several other key actors. The Protection Cluster, for example, is a group that is jointly led by the UNHCR and the Department of Social Welfare and Development, counting over 100 members that include government agencies, international and national NGOs, and UN agencies working in response to natural disasters as well as displacement caused by armed conflicts.

Other international organisations that play a crucial role in the Philippines include: Action Aid (which provides emergency aid and long term support to those hit by natural disasters); ASEAN (which works to promote peace, stability, and development in Southeast Asia); the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (which runs a variety of disaster and crisis relief programmes); and Initiatives for International Dialogue (which conducts policy and advocacy campaign on Mindanao).

Other organisations

There are numerous other organisations in the Philippines, including NGOs, which deal with refugees and asylum seekers as well as internally displaced persons. For example, CARE Philippines is a leading international humanitarian agency that has been working in the country since 1949 to provide disaster response, emergency preparedness, integrated risk management programs, and livelihoods recovery. CARE Philippines works in partnership with several local actors, such as ACCORD, a non-profit organisation working with vulnerable communities in the Philippines for resilience building. Among the NGOs that are active in the Philippines, there is also Habitat for Humanity Philippines, a Christian non-profit organisation working to build strength, stability, and self-reliance through shelters to empower Filipino families in need. There is likewise the Philippine Red Cross, committed to providing help and protection to indigent Filipinos in vulnerable situations.

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