

## RESEARCHED AND COMPILED BY THE REFUGEE DOCUMENTATION CENTRE OF IRELAND ON THE 16 SEPTEMBER 2024

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### DISCLAIMER

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. All COI Query Responses are compiled in line with the Common EU Guidelines (2008) and the EUAA Methodology (2023). This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. Please refer to all documents cited.

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### COI QUERY RESPONSE

#### PHILIPPINES - INFORMATION ON TREATMENT OF RETURNEES

*The Manila Times* in May 2024 points out that: “Four former rebels recently received various forms of assistance under the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program. The assistance was made possible through the coordinated efforts of the Philippine Army, the Philippine National Police, the Department of the Interior and Local Government, and the provincial government. One of the four former rebels who is from Dilag, Tabuk City, received P100,431.22 while one ex-rebel from New Tanglag, Tabuk City, received P153,538.06. Another former rebel from Mabilong received P19,000 aid while his fellow returnee from Lubuagan town got P69,000 under the same government program.”<sup>1</sup>

*The Philippine Star* in May 2024 notes that: “Meantime, Marcos Jr. is adamantly sticking to his support for the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), rejecting the call from many credible sources, local and international, for its abolition because of the harm it has inflicted on human rights. He now heads the task force. 'We will not abolish the NTF-ELCAC. We are going to finish (its activities) because a few barangays have yet to be covered. Some [rebel] returnees have yet to receive help,' he said.”<sup>2</sup>

The *US Department of State* Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in April 2024 mentioned that: “The government cooperated with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees or asylum seekers, and other persons of concern. As of June, UNHCR reported 911 recognized refugees in the country.”<sup>3</sup>

The *Migration Policy Institute* in January 2024 reported that: “During the pandemic, government agencies and civil-society groups pivoted to assisting with return migration and reintegration. As

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<sup>1</sup> The Manila Times (16 May 2024) Four ex-rebels in Kalinga receive govt assistance

<sup>2</sup> The Philippine Star (18 May 2024) Rights 'superbody' needs monitoring

<sup>3</sup> US Department of State (23 April 2024) 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Philippines

international borders closed, returnees arrived in droves, some returning under their own steam and others forced to leave their country of work. Virtually the entire government during that time focused on ensuring returnees' safe return, their adherence to public-health protocols, and transport to their origin communities. The DMW also set up a 24/7 operations post and a repatriation command center to assist stranded OFWs. In 2021 and 2022, approximately 463,000 land- and sea-based OFWs were repatriated through so-called sweeper flights and return ship voyages courtesy of the Department of Foreign Affairs. The rest returned on their own through available flights when borders re opened. The government provided hotels for quarantine and medical treatment for nearly 43,000 COVID-19-positive returnees. The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), the country's migrant welfare agency, reportedly spent P23 billion (U.S. \$418.2 million) for returnees' repatriation and quarantine during the first two years of the pandemic. With OFWs earning little to no income during this time, the government handed out cash grants of P10,000 (U.S. \$200) to hundreds of thousands of OFWs—including both returnees and those who stayed in host countries—costing in total nearly P5.3 billion (U.S. \$95.5 million). Thousands more benefitted from government entrepreneurial loans, financial support, scholarships, and skills training. In all, nearly 729,000 OFWs received some form of government support in the first two years of the pandemic.”<sup>4</sup>

An article published by *Research Gate* in August 2023 points out that: “It was noted during interviews of migrant health workers that most of the experiences and skills gained overseas of returning health worker migrants are not that recognized and fully utilized in the local labour market. There was also an issue raised regarding some employers in the Philippines being hesitant in taking return migrants because of their fear that these returnees may also leave for another country anytime. All interviewed migrant healthcare professionals stated that the primary challenge in return migration is the lack of government assistance to find jobs or reintegrate in the labour force for returning workers. Most of them perceived that identifying and monitoring of returning health migrant workers are limited. It was also cited that they are not aware of any government program or services for returning health care professionals. Potential employment opportunities for returning migrants has also been limited. Some nurses added that it is more difficult to reintegrate and search for opportunities among senior returnees that will match their qualifications and skills. Other nurses felt that local health care staff have feelings of resentment among those who were trained abroad and returned in the Philippines affecting teamwork and collaboration. In addition, locally trained professionals feel that returning health workers are taking their jobs”<sup>5</sup>

The document further mentioned that: “The return and reintegration of migrant healthcare workers aided the Philippines in different aspects. Most of the interviewed returnees mentioned that they were able to hold teaching positions in academia and share their expertise. Some became coordinators supervising students' training in health care facilities sharing all their learnings abroad. Other health workers.”<sup>6</sup>

A report issued by the *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights* (OHCHR) in April 2023 states that: “The Committee notes the information provided on the legislative, policy and programmatic measures taken to facilitate the voluntary return and reintegration of overseas Filipino workers. It is concerned, however, that: Social and labour reintegration and recovery initiatives

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<sup>4</sup> Migration Policy Institute (3 January 2024) The Philippines' Landmark Labor Export and Development Policy Enters the Next Generation, p.4

<sup>5</sup> Research Gate (15 August 2023) Reintegration of Returning Migrant Healthcare Workers into the Philippine Workforce: A Qualitative Case Study, p.10

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

provide only temporary relief, and do not address the longer term needs of overseas Filipino workers and their families.”<sup>7</sup>

In February 2023 the *Center for Migrant Advocacy (CMA)* reported that: “In 2020-2021, CMA helped 486 repatriated OFWs displaced by the pandemic follow up their onetime DOLE-AKAP cash assistance (\$200) following the long delay of its release or lack of updates. Some were released after 3-6 months, one after a year. A government research found that assistance from different stakeholders were largely for relief rather than reintegration. It identified gaps in mental health and psychosocial services (e.g. for abused returnees) e.g. 95% of surveyed OFWs who experienced (repeated) stranding, multiple quarantine and suffering trauma did not receive mental health and psychosocial services like counseling and therapy sessions.”<sup>8</sup>

The *UK Home Office* in November 2022 notes that: “The 2021 DFAT report, in the section that assessed conditions for returnees generally not specifically victims of trafficking noted that: 'Under normal circumstances, thousands of Filipinos enter and leave the country every day, especially for work abroad. People who return to the Philippines after several years' absence are unlikely to face adverse attention on their return on account of their absence, with the exception of those involved in international crime or terrorism. Filipinos who overstayed their work or tourist visas, or breached visa conditions in other countries are returned to the Philippines with no attention paid to them by authorities. DFAT is unaware of any mistreatment or surveillance of failed asylum seekers; it is highly unlikely the Filipino government would be aware a returning person was a failed asylum seeker. 'The International Organization for Migration (IOM) assists voluntary returnees, mainly trafficking victims, and Philippine's authorities cooperate with the IOM in these arrangements.'.”<sup>9</sup>

A report issued by the *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Australia* in August 2021 states that: “Under normal circumstances, thousands of Filipinos enter and leave the country every day, especially for work abroad. People who return to the Philippines after several years' absence are unlikely to face adverse attention on their return on account of their absence, with the exception of those involved in international crime or terrorism. Filipinos who overstayed their work or tourist visas, or breached visa conditions in other countries are returned to the Philippines with no attention paid to them by authorities. DFAT is unaware of any mistreatment or surveillance of failed asylum seekers; it is highly unlikely the Filipino government would be aware a returning person was a failed asylum seeker. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) assists voluntary returnees, mainly trafficking victims, and Philippines authorities cooperate with the IOM in these arrangements.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (13 April 2023) Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families: Concluding observations on the third periodic report of the Philippines (Advance unedited version)

<sup>8</sup> Center for Migrant Advocacy (CMA) (27 February 2023) Submission by the Center for Migrant Advocacy Philippines (CMA) to the Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW) for the third periodic reporting of the Philippines

<sup>9</sup> UK Home Office (29 November 2022) Country Policy and Information - Note: Philippines: Human trafficking (November 2022)

<sup>10</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Australia (23 August 2021) DFAT Country Information Report: The Philippines (August 2021)

The *Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW)* in December 2020 reported that: “With the straightforward mandate of the government to enhance the management of labour migration and the protection and welfare of its migrant workers, it claims to cover all aspects of migration from pre-deployment, deployment, on-site services, and eventual return. However, it should be noted that the return and reintegration dimension is still far from reflecting the real conditions and needs of migrant returnees in the Philippines.”<sup>11</sup> The same document states that: “Economic reintegration remains as the biggest challenge for many migrant returnees. While they may have gained extensive experience and skills while working abroad, migrant workers find it hard to find domestic jobs or livelihood opportunities in their communities.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) (21 December 2020) *Facts and Perspectives: Women's Labour Migration from the Philippines*

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### **Contact Information**

Refugee Documentation Centre  
Legal Aid Board  
48/49 North Brunswick Street  
Dublin 7  
Ireland

Email: [research@legalaidboard.ie](mailto:research@legalaidboard.ie)