

HIV & MIGRATION

COUNTRY PROFILE 2009: PHILIPPINES

The Philippines is one of the world's largest and best organised source countries for human labour migration. There are an estimated over 7 million Filipinos overseas at any point in time working in more than 160 countries, with an additional 1.3 million undocumented Filipinos working abroad.¹⁻² The migration profile is gradually changing to include not only less skilled workers - such as domestics, construction and factory workers - but also highly skilled workers and particularly healthcare professionals.

Filipino labour migration was originally intended to serve as a temporary measure to ease the tight domestic labour market.³ Perceived benefits included stabilising the country's balance-of-payments position, and serving as an alternative employment strategy for Filipinos. However, over the years, a dependence upon labour migration or international service provision to address the problems of the domestic labour market has developed.³ Apart from employment opportunities, the continuing armed conflict in Mindanao also contributes to migration.⁴

The total remittances sent by overseas Filipino workers (OFW) reached US\$ 14.4 billion in 2007.⁵ These contributions make up about 13% of the country's total GDP. This large sum is primarily financed by female nurses and other health care workers, as well as female domestic helpers and retail workers.³

Summary

Estimated no. of migrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.8 million⁵ contract workers (OFW). • 3.6 million^{1,6} legal permanent residents abroad. • 875,000 – 1.3 million^{5,6} irregular or undocumented migrants.
Net migration rate, per 1,000 population	-2.3 in 2006 ⁷
Primary destination countries	Hong Kong, Kuwait, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Qatar, Malaysia, USA and the UK. ^{3,5,6,8}
Primary sending countries	-
Percentage of women among migrants	50.1 in 2005 ^{7,9}
Involvement in human trafficking	Yes – the Philippines is a source and destination country. ¹
Estimated number of displaced people	120,000 – 300,000 per year ¹⁰
HIV prevalence among migrants	No data currently available.

PHILIPPINES



HIV situation overview

The Philippines has a low-level HIV epidemic, with one of the lowest prevalence rates in Asia. Since the country's first reported case in 1984, the estimated number of HIV cases rose from 2,200 in 2001 to approximately 8,300 people living with HIV and AIDS at the end of 2007.¹² The national HIV prevalence estimate remains low at less than 0.1%.¹³ By June 2009, a total of 3,951 HIV cases had been reported, 71% of them among males.¹⁴ The main mode of transmission is unprotected sexual intercourse (90%).¹⁴

HIV prevalence among most-at-risk populations, including injecting drug users, female sex workers and their clients, and men who have sex with men, is low at 0.08%.^{1,15} Over the years, overseas Filipino workers have made up as much as 32% of all reported HIV cases, (19% in 2009)¹³.



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HIV and STIs among migrants

OFW, particularly sea-farers, are considered a population vulnerable to HIV infection due to conditions related to their employment. OFW make up 31.7% (1,254) of cumulative reported HIV cases, or 19% of reported cases in 2009.^{13,14} These figures may over-represent the true proportion of cases among migrants (compared to the general population) due to mandatory HIV testing for overseas employment, which is required by most host countries. Up to 75% of cases were among males, with ages ranging from 18 to 60 years (median 36 years). Sexual intercourse was the predominant (95%) mode of transmission among OFW.¹⁴ By the end of 2007, 33% of the sero-positive cases among OFW were seafarers and 17% were domestic workers.¹

A small study commissioned by UNDP in 2008 involving 93 female OFW found that 84% of the women were aware that HIV can be sexually transmitted and that using condoms can prevent infection.⁵ An earlier study by CARAM-Asia published in 2000^a, conducted among 450 migrants at the PDOS, found that 53.9% of departing migrants perceived that sexual intercourse as a mode of transmission of HIV and 66.2% reported the way to avoid infection is to not engage in risky sexual behaviour.¹⁶ Also, 19.5% of departing OFW underwent HIV testing.¹⁶

Governance and policies

- **Republic Act 8042 – the Migrant Worker and Overseas Filipino Act of 1995:** Aimed to protect and promote the rights and welfare of OFW by providing safeguards against illegal recruitment, responding to the violation of OFWs' labour rights onsite, and providing reintegration services. It also states that the pre-departure orientation seminar (PDOS) is mandatory.⁵
- **Republic Act 8504 – the Philippine HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Act of 1998 (Article 1 Section 7):** It provides that "all Overseas Filipino Workers, diplomatic, military, trade, and labour officials and personnel to be assigned overseas shall undergo or attend a seminar on the cause, prevention, and consequences of HIV/AIDS before certification for overseas assignment." The legislation also prohibits compulsory HIV testing.⁵
- **UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMR):** The Philippines was the first Asian country to ratify the Convention, in July 1995.² Indeed, the ICMR principles pertaining to the protection of migrant workers are reflected in the *Republic Act 8042*.
- **4th AIDS Medium Term Plan:** In 2005, the Philippines launched its 4th AIDS Medium Term Plan as part of its national HIV response from 2005-2010. The Plan includes renewed targets to expand universal access to HIV prevention, care and treatment among highly vulnerable groups, including female sex workers and their clients, injecting drug users, men who have sex with men and OFW.¹ By 2010, it aims to provide all migrants with access to improved HIV prevention and information services, information and referral sites in destination countries, reintegration programmes, and testing centres with quality assurance surveys and strategies.¹

Healthcare and HIV-related services

Pre-departure

The *Republic Act 8042* states that PDOS should include information on a variety of realities associated with migration realities, including HIV and AIDS. The PDOS is conducted by the Philippines Overseas

Employment Agency (POEA).¹⁶

Most receiving countries require departing migrants to undergo mandatory HIV testing. Overseas workers must undergo a medical examination after the recruitment agency or the destination country employer interviews and pre-qualifies them.¹ Tests for TB and pregnancy are also mandatory. The HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Act guarantees confidentiality of HIV test results, but in reality medical test results – including those for HIV – are sent directly to recruitment agencies.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has implemented a project that aims to improve the capacity of diagnostics clinics in providing confidential counselling and testing, as well as education on HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.⁷ The project provides diagnostics clinics with trainings on pre- and post-test counselling on HIV and AIDS, and has produced educational material to be distributed in the clinics and other appropriate venues. Another component of the project is the involvement of HIV-positive seafarers/former overseas migrant workers in peer counselling and monitoring.

Foreign Service Officers receive training from the Foreign Service Institute in collaboration with the career development arm of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA).¹ In addition, the *Positive Response: Guidebook on Handling Migration and HIV/AIDS Issues for Foreign Service Personnel* has been developed and made available along with a 33-minute HIV awareness video for OFW.¹

On-site

Some destination countries require overseas workers to go through another round of medical tests upon arrival.¹ The government of Philippines, through the Department of Labour and Employment and its attached agencies, the POEA and Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, established the Philippines Overseas Labour Offices (POLOs) that provide legal, medical and psycho-social assistance to Filipino overseas workers and a network of resource centres for the protection and promotion of workers' welfare and interests.³

In certain host countries, such as the Arab states, an HIV positive diagnosis results in the deportation of an OFW; although the reason for deportation is seldom reported to the Philippines consulates/embassies.⁴

Reintegration

The reintegration of OFW returning to the Philippines is managed by the Re-Placement and Monitoring Centre (RPM Centre), which was established under the *Republic Act 8042*.² Under the supervision of the Secretary of Labor and Employment, the RPM Centre aims to: provide a mechanism for the reintegration of Filipino migrant workers into the Philippine society; serve as a promotion house for their local employment; and, harness their skills and potentials for national development.

Vulnerabilities:

- **Women:** Since 2000, women have comprised 90% of the annual deployment of new hires for service workers. In particular, in 2006, the number was 184,454 women – about half of whom found employment in the domestic sector.⁵ In 2007, female domestic workers made up 17% of HIV cases among OFW.⁵
- **Human trafficking:** The Philippines is a source country for trafficked men, women and children to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore,

Japan, South Africa, North America, and Europe.⁸ Trafficking rings also operate internally with people trafficked from rural areas, such as Visayas and Mindanao, to urban centres.¹

- **Mistreatment and abuse:** Cases of abuse (verbal, physical, and sexual) and mistreatment of migrants have been reported, some to the Philippines embassies and consulates in the host countries.⁵ Many OFW are also overworked and the terms of their employment violated. In 2007, the POEA issued a reform package for domestic workers which stipulated, among other things, minimum age requirement and wage requirements, as well as the requirement that recruitment agencies be qualified and that employers provide a pre-qualifying certificate.⁵ Also in 2007, the Philippine Government entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the Government of the United Arab Emirates, setting standards for the recruitment and placement of Filipino workers in that country.⁵
- **Implementation and enforcement of the Republic Acts:** The quality of PDOS is not assured, and the government is unable to regularly monitor the implementation of the relevant provisions of the *Republic Acts 8042* and *8504*. HIV testing, when required by the host countries, is sometimes conducted without adequate pre- and post-test counselling.
- **Access to general medical care:** For some migrant workers, access to medical care services can be difficult, depending on whether employers allow it and on its proximity to the working environment.
- **Language barrier:** There have been reports of overseas workers made to sign employment contracts upon arrival at the host country, where the contracts were written in a foreign language (e.g. Arabic), which they could not understand.⁵
- **Internal displacement:** Between January and August 2008, conflict and insecurity displaced an estimated 300,000 people from their homes, mainly in Mindanao. The majority were displaced in North Cotabato province following intense fighting between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front rebels and government forces in early August.¹⁰

Little is known about HIV infection rates and vulnerability among internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees. The Philippines Senate proposed a bill under the *Internal Displacement Act of 2006* that contained health provisions for internally displaced persons, with a focus on women's reproductive health.¹ However, the bill does not specifically ensure HIV prevention, care, treatment and support for this population.

Notes

- Map from www.worldatlas.com
- ^aThis study also reported condom use among OFW, but due to inconsistencies in data quality, the figures are not presented here.

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