



PHILIPPINE MIGRATION RESEARCH NETWORK **POLICY NOTES**

PMRN Policy Note 2023-01

POLICY IMPERATIVES FOR FILIPINOS IN THE U.K. AMIDST THE COVID-19 CRISIS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted Filipinos living and working in the United Kingdom significantly. The Filipino community in the UK is diverse as it has a substantial number of professionals, including nurses, doctors, engineers, and teachers. They contribute significantly to the UK's healthcare system and other sectors of the British economy. However, the pandemic has exposed certain challenges faced by the Filipino community, including healthcare workers' safety, temporary migrant workers' vulnerability, and the need for better support for Filipino international students.

This Policy Note addresses the concerns raised during a webinar organized by the Philippine Migration Research Network (PMRN) and the Philippine Social Science Council (PSSC). This Note highlights the importance of protecting the rights and welfare of Filipino migrant workers in the UK. It proposes measures to enhance their safety, well-being, and access to support during and beyond the pandemic. This Note came out of a PMRN webinar that was conducted during the early surge of COVID-19 cases in the United Kingdom and the rest of the world. Policy measures were recommended during this webinar.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past four decades, migration has played a pivotal role in shaping the dynamic essence of the Philippines' national identity. Filipinos residing within the country and those dispersed around the globe, collectively forming a vibrant diaspora, actively engage as integral contributors rather than passive onlookers in navigating the intricate challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 stretches beyond its immediate health implications, encompassing unparalleled disruptions across the spheres of economics, politics, and society worldwide. As these intricate complexities continue to unfold, the ultimate resolution of this multifaceted crisis remains uncertain. This Policy Note emerges

from the discussions among a panel of experts during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONTEXT OF WEBINAR

The webinar, Filipinos in the UK and COVID-19, took place on 13 May 2020. Interestingly, during that same month, the UK ramped up its COVID-19 testing capacity to reach an impressive 100,000 tests per day, as reported by the British Foreign Policy Group (Aspinall, n.d.)

The webinar focused on examining the pandemic's impact on Filipino migrants from the UK. The discussion sparked a noteworthy suggestion for

Philippine Migration Research Network
with the support of
Philippine Social Science Council

**MIGRATION DIALOGUES:
FILIPINOS
IN THE U.K.
AND COVID-19**

Join our webinar on 13 May 2020, 5:00-6:30 PM (GMT +08:00)
via Facebook Live: [Philippine Migration Research Network](https://www.facebook.com/Philippine-Migration-Research-Network/)
fb.com/migrationPH

Register here: bit.ly/migrationdialogues2

For inquiries:
pmrn@pssc.org.ph

Resource Speakers:

 Gene Alcantara Journalist, Storyteller, Community Leader & Immigration Consultant	 Cielo Romero Senior Urgent Care Practitioner Medway On Call Care (MEDOCC)
 John Dale Dianala DPhil Candidate University of Oxford	 Nadine Opiniano Matron (Elderly Care) University Hospital of North Midlands Hospital Trust
 Amuerfina R. Reyes Labor Attache to the United Kingdom Department of Labor and Employment	 Moderator: Maruja M. B. Asis Executive Director Scalabrini Migration Center

Resource speakers who shared their insights on various aspects of migration and its impact on communities and individuals:

- **Mr. Gene Alcantara**, a respected British-Filipino journalist, storyteller, community leader, and immigration consultant, shared insights on migrant community engagement.
- **Ms. Cielo Romero**, a Senior Urgent Care Practitioner, contributed valuable perspectives on healthcare support for Filipinos in the UK.
- **Mr. John Dale Dianala**, a DPhil candidate at the University of Oxford and president of the Philippine Oxford Society, highlighted the importance of academic and cultural support for Filipino students.
- Additionally, **Ms. Nadine Opiniano**, Matron of Elderly Care at the University Hospital of North Midlands Hospital Trust, discussed challenges and opportunities in elderly care.
- **Ms. Amuerfina R. Reyes**, Labor Attache of the Philippine Embassy in the United Kingdom, shared her extensive experience in safeguarding the rights and welfare of Filipino migrant workers.

The participants in the said webinar were from Filipino communities in different countries, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, the United States, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Japan, Sweden, Uzbekistan, Switzerland, New Zealand, and Germany.

forthcoming dialogues, exploring the circumstances of overseas Filipinos across various destination countries. This suggestion resonated, leading to the conception of a dedicated webinar that put a spotlight on the situation of Filipinos in the UK.

It is worth noting that the UK holds the distinction of being the second-largest European destination for Filipino migrants, a status only surpassed by Italy. A key highlight within this context is the substantial presence of Filipino nurses within the UK's National Health System (NHS), comprising the third-largest nursing cohort following British and Indian nurses.

SNAPSHOT OF THE CONTEXT - EARLY IN THE PANDEMIC

According to the World Health Organization (2020), On 13 May 2020, the same day of the webinar, the Philippines reported 11,618 confirmed COVID-19 cases. In response to the elevated risk of COVID-19 transmission, an extension of the modified, enhanced community quarantine was enforced until 31 May 2020 in NCR, Laguna, and Cebu City. Other regions were classified based on risk levels: 'moderate risk' regions transitioned to general community quarantine after 15 May (including Region II, III, IV-A except for Laguna, CAR, VII except for Cebu, IX, XI, and XIII), while 'low-risk' regions maintained minimum health standards (including Region I, IV-B, V, VI, VIII, X, XII, and BARMM). At that time, the COVID-19 situation in the Philippines was still in the early stages of the pandemic.

WHY THE UK? - STATUS OF FILIPINOS IN THE UK

The United Kingdom (UK), with an international migrant stock of 9.6 million, constituting 13% of its 66 million population, stands as a significant destination country. Notably, it ranks second in Europe as a preferred choice for Filipino migrants, following Italy. While Filipino nurses and healthcare professionals remain highly visible in the UK NHS, the Filipino community here encompasses a rich diversity, including those who have attained UK citizenship and a growing second generation.

Protecting Healthcare Workers

Filipino healthcare workers, especially nurses, have emerged as crucial frontline heroes in the NHS during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several recommendations have been proposed in the webinar to safeguard the safety and well-being of Filipino healthcare workers:

1. Ensuring a consistent and sufficient supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) becomes imperative for all healthcare workers, including Filipino nurses. This measure will fortify health workers' frontline work to contain the virus.
2. The International English Language Test System's (IELTS) requirements for nurses and healthcare professionals should be reevaluated to streamline the recruitment and deployment

processes. By easing these barriers to employment, more Filipino healthcare workers can contribute their expertise to the UK's healthcare system without undue delays.

3. Regular risk assessments should be conducted, particularly for healthcare workers belonging to the Black Asian Minority Ethnicity (BAME) group, to identify potential vulnerabilities and provide necessary support. These assessments will help in designing targeted interventions to protect those who may face heightened risks.
4. It is crucial to extend the compensation provided to the families of healthcare workers who lost their lives to COVID-19, to include Filipino workers who succumbed to the virus. This gesture will acknowledge their sacrifices and provide much-needed financial support to the affected families.

Protecting Temporary Migrant Workers

Temporary migrant workers, particularly female domestic workers and male fishermen, emerged as among the most vulnerable groups to exploitation and abuse in the United Kingdom. To safeguard their rights and well-being, several crucial measures can be considered:

1. It is essential to extend protection measures to all foreign migrant workers, irrespective of their visa status. This extension should encompass employment rights and benefits, including minimum wage and social protection. By ensuring equal protection for all temporary migrant workers, the UK can create a more equitable and fair working environment.
2. Strengthening labor standards enforcement becomes vital to address labor abuses and combat recruitment fraud. Enhancing monitoring and enforcement mechanisms will deter unscrupulous employers and recruitment agencies from taking advantage of vulnerable temporary workers, including domestic workers and fishermen.
3. A comprehensive review and reevaluation of visa restrictions are necessary to prevent the prevalence of undocumented workers, especially domestic workers whose visas are non-extendible. Restructuring these restrictions will offer greater protection and stability to temporary migrant workers, ensuring their legal status and access to essential services and social protection.

Supporting Filipino Students

Filipino students pursuing their education in the United Kingdom encountered distinctive challenges during the pandemic. Providing them with comprehensive support networks and ensuring access to essential educational facilities will enhance their academic experience and contribute to their personal growth and overall well-being during these uncertain times. To address their needs and well-being, providing them with substantial support is crucial through the following recommendations:

1. There is a pressing need to establish dedicated student support networks and guidance systems for Filipino students. These networks will serve as vital sources of information and assistance, particularly during emergencies. By ensuring that Filipino students have access to essential guidance and support, they can navigate their academic journey in the UK with greater confidence and resilience.
2. Advocating for Filipino students' access to educational facilities is of utmost importance. Many Filipino students rely heavily on laboratories and libraries for their studies. Facilitating their access to these facilities, whether in-person or through innovative solutions, will allow them to continue their educational pursuits effectively, even amidst disruptions caused by the pandemic.

Strengthening Government-Community Partnerships

During times of crisis, fostering effective collaboration between the Philippine government and the Filipino community in the United Kingdom becomes paramount. To strengthen this vital partnership, the following steps can be considered:

1. Establishing improved mechanisms for data collection is crucial. Accurate and up-to-date data on the welfare and challenges faced by the Filipino community, especially in regions beyond London, is essential for informed decision-making and targeted support initiatives. By understanding the community's needs comprehensively, the government can tailor its efforts to effectively address the specific concerns of Filipino workers and students across the UK.
2. Providing enhanced and accessible consular services is vital. Filipino workers and students require efficient consular support that caters to their unique needs and concerns. By streamlining processes

and ensuring ease of access to consular services, the government can provide timely assistance and guidance to those in need, fostering a sense of security and support within the community.

3. Sustaining active advocacy efforts for the rights and welfare of Filipino workers in the UK. The government should play a proactive role in representing the community's interests, particularly in cases of abuse or discrimination. By advocating for fair treatment and standing up against injustices, the partnership between the government and the Filipino community can create a safer and more equitable environment for all.
4. Strengthening collaboration by relevant Filipino migration stakeholders through initiatives that promote cultural and social support. Encouraging the *bayanihan* spirit within the Filipino community will foster a sense of unity and shared purpose. By organizing cultural events, support networks, and community-driven projects, the partnership can enhance social cohesion, enrich cultural connections, and provide a strong sense of belonging for all members of the Filipino community in the UK.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key players

At the time of the webinar, the Department of Foreign Affairs continued to address matters concerning Filipino communities abroad primarily. However, the landscape is shifting with the establishment of the new Department of Migrant Workers (come 2022). This division of responsibilities has become necessary due to the escalating demand for high-quality services for Filipino communities residing beyond the Philippines' borders.

Best practices

Amid the global challenges brought about by the pandemic, the Filipino community has exhibited remarkable initiatives that stand out as exemplary practices. Notably, fundraising campaigns have been organized to support families affected by COVID-19-related fatalities among Filipinos. This spirit of solidarity has extended to the distribution of food packages to frontline workers, dissemination of critical information from the UK government and relevant Philippine authorities, and the sponsorship of meaningful initiatives such as Holy Masses for frontline heroes and support for COVID-19 patients and their bereaved families.

In addition, the Philippine government has taken proactive measures, including the USD 200 DOLE AKAP (Abot Kamay ang Pagtulong) financial assistance for displaced Filipino workers, as well as similar aid of USD 200 for OFWs confirmed to be infected with COVID-19. The distribution of food relief to affected individuals, along with the coordinated repatriation efforts, has provided critical relief to over 700 workers, bolstering the government's commitment to its citizens abroad.

CHALLENGES

One pressing challenge that demands the Philippine Government's attention is the lack of up-to-date statistical data on Filipinos, both in the UK and globally.

Filipino migrants aspiring to explore opportunities in the UK face persistent challenges, particularly regarding English language proficiency requirements.

Visa-related concerns are especially pronounced among Filipino workers, particularly fishermen, who often grapple with transit Visa issues. This predicament is mirrored in the domestic helper sector, where a substantial portion of undocumented workers reside due to the vulnerability inherent in the OFW community, making them susceptible to deceptive recruitment practices.

While the government's monetary support is acknowledged, it remains minimal, leaving a disparity as many overseas Filipinos reside in cities characterized by a high cost of living.

REFERENCES

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This policy note is based on the content of the webinar (Filipinos in the UK and COVID-19). The contents of this policy note is not necessarily the official position of the PMRN.