

Review of Government Budget Allocation for HIV Interventions, Policies, and Outcomes for Migrants

Action for Health Initiatives, Inc. (2022)

Background of the Study

The Philippine government has long viewed labor migration as a strategy to address unemployment and boost foreign exchange earnings, formalizing it through the Labor Code of the Philippines (Presidential Decree No. 442) in the 1970s.

Migration significantly contributes to the national economy, with remittances reaching \$33.5 billion in 2019, accounting for 9.3% of GDP and 7.8% of GNI. However, despite its economic benefits, migration exposes OFWs to health risks, including heightened vulnerability to HIV due to living and working conditions that may lead to risky behaviors.

The study explores how the Philippine government allocates resources for health programs benefiting OFWs, particularly those addressing HIV prevention and support. It seeks to examine budget allocations for these programs and identify barriers that limit their accessibility, ensuring that the needs of OFWs, who contribute significantly to the economy, are adequately met.

Budget Allocations of Agencies Mandated to Provide Services for Migrants

In the Philippines, migration is managed by specialized agencies that are assigned specific roles in the different stages of the migration process and to make sure that the rights of migrants are protected.



The DOLE is the country's primary agency mandated to formulate policies, and implement programs and services in the area of labor and employment, including both local and overseas employment of Filipinos. DOLE's migration-related services include on-site welfare services and reintegration services for OFWs which are both under its Workers Protection and Welfare Program. Generally, the major allocations within the DOLE budget that are relevant to migration have increased since 2016 despite the notable decrease in the department's overall budget in 2017 and 2018. There was a huge increase in the department's allocation for workers' welfare programs from PhP1.4 billion in 2016 to PhP9.5 billion in 2020. The budget also expanded to include a separate line item for livelihood and emergency employment for repatriated OFWs, promotion of International Labor Affairs, and promotion of rights and welfare of workers with special concerns.



NRCO is an attached agency under the DOLE that aims to provide a mechanism for the reintegration of returning migrants to the Philippine society, serve as a promotion house for their local employment, and tap their skills and potential for national development. As an attached agency of the DOLE, it draws its budget from the Department. It should be noted, however, that there is no budget allocation from the Department that is specifically earmarked for NRCO. Instead, the department's budget under the GAA is allocated for specific Programs which DOLE and its attached agencies are expected to implement.



Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) ensures that worker's rights are protected by educating workers, providing different kinds of assistance, and working closely with non-government organizations and workers' organizations to make services more accessible to the overseas workers. Its Overseas Employment and Welfare Program which covers overseas employment facilitation services and worker's welfare and government placement services increased from PhP119 million in 2016 to PhP218 million in 2020.



The Overseas Workers Welfare Association is another attached agency of the DOLE that serves to provide services for OFWs. In terms of budgeting, OWWA's main allocation goes to its Social Protection and Welfare for OFWs Program. It should be noted that many of its programs and services are implemented and provided in coordination with other agencies such as POEA, NRCO, or even the umbrella department, DOLE, itself. It is not clear, however, how the programs and services are being allocated for given the fact that there seems to be a redundancy in their implementation or provision.



DOH allocations for HIV-related services or programs and for the operation of the Philippine National AIDS Council (PNAC) has gradually increased in 2016 to 2020, except for a notable decrease in 2019, presumably to meet the requirements needed to curb the increasing trend in HIV infections. However, the GAA does not indicate how much is earmarked exclusively for the national HIV response. This means that the budget for HIV-related programs and services is lumped with the budget for other infectious diseases.

DOH-Epidemiology Bureau and the National AIDS/STI Prevention and Control Program

The bulk of the budget allocations for the national health response on HIV and AIDS is allocated for the National AIDS/STI Prevention and Control Program (NASPCP). The budget for HIV response represents a very small percentage of the annual budget or an average of 0.99% in 2016 to 2020.

DOH – Migrant Health Unit

DOH-MHU is an attached office under the department's Bureau of International Health Cooperation (BIHC) and serves primarily as the focal point in the DOH for all migrant health-related issues. It also functions to "facilitate the delivery of specific services to OFs with critical health needs". To function as a unit and to be able to implement the programs that it is tasked to handle, the MHU derives its budget and funding from the budget of the DOH. However, because of the way the budget is prepared, there is no clear indication in the GAA as to how much is allocated specifically for the DOH-MHU. Neither is there clear cut budget allocation for the programs and services it implements or provides, including how much is allocated for medical repatriations.

DSWD - International Social Welfare Services Office

Section 19 of RA No. 8042 provides for the establishment of a Migrant Workers and Other Overseas Filipino Resources Center in countries where there are large numbers of Filipino migrant workers. The budget for the operation of the Center and the deployment of SWAtt is sourced from the regular budget of DSWD as included in the GAA.

DFA-Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers' Affairs

This office is primarily responsible for the provision and overall coordination of all Assistance to Nationals (ATN) and legal services to all OFs in distress and their families through the Philippines embassies or consulates. The OUMWA sources its budget to operate from the regular budget of the DFA. Since the 2018 budget, the protection of rights and promotion of OFW welfare gets only about 15% of the amount for the Consular/ATN Program which also covers provision of consular services including issuance of passports, visas and other consular documents.

Commission on Filipinos Overseas

CFO provides assistance to the President and the Congress of the Philippines in the formulation of policies and measures concerning or affecting Filipinos overseas, and the development and implementation programs that promote the interest and well-being of these Filipinos overseas. The CFO has its own budget allocation for its Overseas Filipino Welfare Program under the GAA.

Migration and Universal Health Care

The issue of migration and health centers on ensuring the availability, accessibility, and affordability of health services for migrants at all stages of the migration cycle. In the Philippines, the Universal Healthcare Act of 2019 (Republic Act No. 11223) seeks to guarantee all Filipinos, including migrant workers, access to quality, affordable healthcare. Under this law, all citizens are automatically enrolled in the National Health Insurance Program, and migrant workers, as direct contributors, are covered along with their dependents.

National Health Insurance through PhilHealth

For OFWs, PhilHealth has a wide range of benefits available, including Inpatient benefits, Outpatient benefits, Z benefits, and SDG-related benefits. Specifically for people living with HIV is the outpatient HIV/AIDS treatment (OHAT) package. This is a case-based payment scheme where PhilHealth pays a maximum of PhP30,000.00 per member-patient per year or PhP7,500 per quarter. The Z benefits are benefit packages designed for members with severe and catastrophic cases while the SDG benefit packages are medical packages that were created by PhilHealth in compliance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Addressing OFWs' health needs requires a broader and more inclusive approach. While HIV is the only health issue systematically monitored, rising cases among OFWs highlight the need for comprehensive intervention programs. The government needs to address the health concerns of OFWs more holistically, which starts with generating data to understand the range of physical and mental health issues faced by OFWs.
- ▶ Improvements are needed in the reintegration program that is currently in place so that it is not limited to just livelihood assistance and entrepreneurship. It is equally important to address the social, psychological, and health needs of OFWs that may affect their integration back to their families and communities.
- ▶ In keeping with the principles of universal health care, the government needs to enhance access of OFWs to health services in destination and transit countries and supplement PhilHealth coverage by negotiating with destination country governments to ensure compliance of employers to employment contracts that require them to provide health insurance coverage for their OFW workers.