

Promoting OSH for OFWs, Philippine Experience

Brenda L. Villafuerte, CESO III

Director IV, Bureau of Working Conditions
Department of Labor and Employment Republic of the Philippines

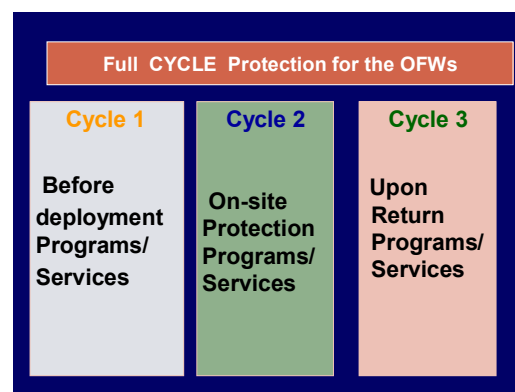
I. BACKGROUND

In the Philippines, there are 19.1 million workers in the labor market of which 19.8 % or about 3.8 million are documented contract workers or commonly called as OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers).

Being one of the largest labor-sending countries in Asia, the Philippines has deployed some 1.072 million OFWs in 2007 wherein 75.5% or 809,740 were land based and 24.5% or 263,662 were sea-based workers. Most of the OFWs are employed in Saudi, UAE, Hongkong, Kuwait, Qatar, Taiwan, Singapore, Italy, United Kingdom and Korea.

OFWs are being tagged as the country's new heroes for providing support to the Philippine economy through their remittances. Based on 2004 record of Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, the Philippines is one of the biggest remittance recipient countries worldwide with net remittance of \$8.55 billion. Thus, the government has strengthened its policy, programs and services on contract migration in order to provide appropriate and relevant social and economic protection measures for the OFWs.

The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) under the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) were established to serve as front liners in the delivery of services and management of program for the protection and welfare of the OFWs.



The thrust of the DOLE in providing social and economic protection for the OFWs covers a full cycle protection which include pre-deployment, deployment/onsite and post deployment/upon return to ensure fair, just and humane conditions of work thereby upholding the human dignity of OFWs through sustained income, health and social security benefits and access to productive opportunities.

The effort to achieve the goal of making the OFWs secure, safe, empowered and

productive are collectively being done by the different DOLE agencies spearhead by POEA and OWWA.

II. Existing OSH Programs and Activities for OFWs

1. A bilateral agreement between the Philippines and the Republic of Korea provides the basis for OSH training of all OFWs prior to departure to Korea. POEA has sought the assistance of the Occupational Safety and Health Center (OSHC) in the conduct of the two-day Orientation on OSH for OFWs bound for Korea.

To date, DOLE has conducted PDOS-OSH for OFWs to Korea which was attended by more than 16,000 workers. With this development, more countries are becoming interested in pursuing programs for the safety and health of overseas workers.

The two-day orientation module on OSH for OFWs include the following topics:

- Industrial Hygiene Situationer,
- Causes and Analysis of Accidents/Basic Principles in Preventing Accidents
- Machine Safety (Risks of Setting the Machine, Basic Principles in using/operating the Machine)

3. Linkages and partnership with safety professionals – Two (2) international



- Electrical Safety
- Safe Handling of Materials
- Emergency Preparedness
- Identification and Control of hazards/classification of Chemicals
- Basic Concept of Occupational Health
- Basic First Aid, etc.

2. Assistance to OFWs on OSH Training and Accreditation of OFWs as OSH Practitioner – Through OSH accreditation program of the Department, some OFWs were given certificate of accreditation as OSH practitioner. Accreditation Program pursuant to the provision of Occupational Safety and Health Standards (OSHS) aims to increase the number of competent individuals on OSH as well as intensify linkages and partnership with the professional organizations to further enhance the promotion and implementation of DOLE activities and programs on occupational safety and health. chapters of the Association of Safety practitioners of the Philippines in the Middle

east and UAE with more than 1,800 OFW-members were organized through the support and assistance of the BWC. The organization of ASPPI international chapters aims to promote professionalism in the practice of safety and health, strengthen camaraderie among safety professionals as well as put in place the integration program for OFWs upon their return to the country.

III. Challenges and Directions

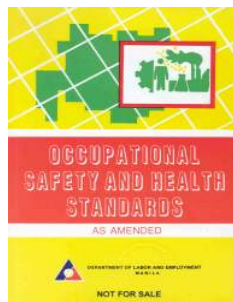
The DOLE Roadmap for OFWs for 2008-2010 provide strategic actions, programs and projects to attain full, decent and productive employment for the Filipino workforce.

The nature and frequency of work related accidents physical injuries and illnesses of OFWs is a major concern of the government that needs full attention, considering that most OFWs are in highly vulnerable/hazardous occupations.

Reported cases of OFWs on the following remain a serious concern: mental/emotional disturbance, physical injuries/accidents, sexual harassment/abuse and accidental deaths. Record showed that there are about 260 accidental deaths reported.

Thus, the government intends to implement the following programs and activities on OSH :

- enhance OSH curriculum in PDOS (Pre-departure Orientation)
- Intensify stakeholders OSH advocacy for the OFWs on site to Increase number of OFWs on-site covered by OSH information services. (Goal- 100% of deployed OFWs reached by OSH advocacy)
- Strengthen negotiations with host countries towards forging more bilateral/multilateral arrangements and other undertakings on the protection of rights and welfare of OFWs.
- Linkages with international organizations involved in OSH to strengthen support and collaboration i.e APOSHO, ASIAN OSH-NET, JISHA, JICOSH, etc.
- Review existing rules of the Philippine Occupational Safety and Health Standards (OSHS) to extend applicable rules on the safety and health of OFWs



OSHS, a set of rules on OSH being enforced by DOLE which was promulgated in 1978 pursuant to the provision of the Labor Code of the Philippines

- Reinforce FILCOM Networking to respond to Health and Safety needs of OFWs such as medical and hospital referrals, adaptability to OSH and First

Aid training to actual work environment,
training on basic self-defense, Training
on Stress management/coping
mechanism

- Build-up on the psychosocial
intervention to cushion adverse effect of
migration on the OFWs and family
members.

Reference : DOLE- Roadmap, 2008-2010