



1. In January 2021, 53 Filipino women who were recruited in the United Arab of Emirates were trafficked to Syria as maids. They were physically, sexually and mentally abused by their employers. Their salaries were also denied. The victims were imprisoned in their employer's homes, and some have fled to the Philippine Embassy in Damascus. During the investigation made by the country's Senate Committee on Women, it was made known that the trafficking was done through gross connections and connivance of recruitment agencies, Bureau of Immigration officials, and airport employees to deploy Filipino women for non-existent jobs abroad to only be exploited further.ⁱ
2. An International Justice Mission (IJM) - led a study released in 2020 confirmed Philippines as a global hotspot for online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC) with data from participating law enforcement agencies globally showing that the country received more than eight times as many referrals as any other country during the 2010-2017 baseline period.ⁱⁱ In one particular recommendation by Qatar during the 3rd Cycle says the government supported the recommendation to "Make further efforts to protect children against all risks of sexual or economic exploitation" (Qatar, 133.240), and recommendations made by Algeria, to "strengthen measures aimed at protecting children against violence and all kinds of sexual exploitation" (Algeria, 133.237). And yet, with the Philippines, under the most restrictive, militaristic, and longest lockdown in the world imposed by the government, online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC) cases rose to almost 300 percent. According to the country's Department of Justice, they recorded 279, 166 cases from its Cyberline Trip Report hotline, from March 1 to May during the same period last year. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children recorded a total of 279,166 cases from its Cyberline Trip Report (CTR) hotline from March 1 to May 24, from 76,561 reports during the same period last yearⁱⁱⁱ. The COVID-19 lockdowns created a perfect storm for increases in all forms of online sexual exploitation of children, with sex offenders working remotely from home and children locked-up in with their traffickers and spending more time online. Additionally, the economic hardships, lack of social and financial aid coming from the government, have made it more lucrative and compelling for Filipino families especially children to become victims of trafficking for their survival.
3. Under the situation of the pandemic, there has been an alleged online selling of students' sensual videos and nude photos to help in raising money for gadgets needed for online learning and for payment of internet bills. The Department of Justice was mandated to have an investigation on this in January 2021. Along with this, a 13-year old child was raped by a 31-year old man whom she met through Facebook last July 2020. The victim was lured into personally meeting the perpetrator when the latter promised to give her a smartphone that she could use in her online class^{iv}.
4. A federal grand jury in the Eastern District of Virginia indicted US Diplomat Dean Cheves for engaging in illicit sexual conduct with a 16-year old Filipina girl in August 2021. Cheves is charged with one count of engaging in illicit sexual conduct in a foreign place and one count of possessing child pornography in the special maritime and territorial jurisdiction of the United States^v.

Attacks against Human Rights Defenders

5. There has been a slew of illegal arrests among human rights defenders in the Philippines under the dispensation of President Rodrigo Duterte as malicious blacklisting of individuals and organizations has been a constant threat against rights defenders and even ordinary people. Sally Ujano, a child rights advocate, and the chairperson of the National Coordinator of Philippines Against Child Trafficking, was illegally arrested in November 2021 over fabricated charges of rebellion^{vi}. Ujano is a staunch advocate of children's rights in the Philippines and she actively led national campaigns and advocacy for raising awareness of the children who have been victimized by human trafficking. This has been against the recommendation for human rights defenders made by Hungary during the third cycle of UPR to "Guarantee the establishment of a safe and enabling environment for the work of human rights defenders, specifically through the adoption of a law for the protection and recognition of human rights defenders (133.176 Hungary);

Conclusion:

The deep poverty in the country is still the driving force why forced migration thrives, subjecting to higher vulnerabilities of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) to human trafficking.

There is really no clear and systematic plan on the part of the Philippine government for long-term local job creation and in fact, has heavily relied on migration that has not brought about genuine economic development in the country.

The assistance to migrant workers affected by the pandemic provided by our government is greatly insufficient and inaccessible to many. While we recognize that there is a government response to those affected, there is still much to be done in order for this program to reach the majority of affected migrant workers.

Recommendations:

1. For the Philippine government to continue the investigation and prosecute all the government officials involved in the trafficking of 52 women in Syria.
2. For the Executive Branch of the Philippine government to approve the Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2022 passed by both the Senate and Congress for further protection of women and children against labor trafficking and OSEC.
3. Issue invitations to UN special procedures and mandate holders, especially those with pending requests

4. Establish effective systematic complaint mechanisms to ensure that overseas Filipino workers can file a complaint against their employers without fear of being harassed. While avenues are present and the government is extending its services, availability and access are still limited to many, especially to those who are in the most vulnerable situations like the household service workers.

ⁱ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/trafficking-migrant-workers-syria-uae/2021/01/24/1d79e43c-3f0d-11eb-b58b-1623f6267960_story.html

ⁱⁱ https://www.ijm.org/documents/studies/Final-Public-Full-Report-5_20_2020.pdf <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/08/08/20/students-struggling-to-get-gadgets-for-online-classes-fall-victim-to-abuse-sexual-exploitation>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1103852>

^{iv} <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1379226/pnp-to-check-reports-of-students-selling-sensual-pics-online-to-support-education>

^v <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/us-foreign-service-member-indicted-engaging-illicit-sexual-conduct-philippines-and-possession>

^{vi} <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/11/15/women-children-rights-advocate-Sally-Ujano-arrested-alleged-rebellion-.html?fb>