

### Mayors Mechanism Perspective

Delivered by Ms. Madelaine Yorobe Alfelor, Mayor of Iriga, Philippines, Treasurer of UCLG World

It is an honour to have the opportunity to contribute in this regional consultation. For us local authorities, this is an important space to express our commitment to global agreements and share our realities on the ground. It is also a vital follow up from our participation as a key stakeholder during the 12<sup>th</sup> Global Forum on Migration and Development held in Quito earlier this year.

Migration's complex nature necessitates a whole-of-government approach. International, national, and local lens are essential to ensure that we are leaving no one behind. With globalisation and urbanisation, cities have gained an increasing responsibility in managing migration. This includes ensuring that policies are inclusive and people-centric, and providing essential services regardless of status. Mayors have expressed strong commitment to the principles of the Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees through the Marrakech Declaration and in the 6<sup>th</sup> Mayoral Forum on Human Mobility, Migration and Development.

The Philippines is a country of origin of migrant workers. From April to September 2019, the number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) was estimated at 2.2 million who contribute total remittance estimated at PhP 211.9 billion. Out of the 30,000 households in Iriga, half of these have migrant workers. They contribute 200 million in bank remittances every year.

Social protection of Filipino migrant workers is mandated in the Philippines through Republic Act 10022 also known as the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino Act. Ensuring the safety and welfare of OFWs is explicitly stated as a paramount concern of government in the Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022. This has been localized in the Bicol Regional Development Plan 2017-2022 that committed to involve overseas Filipinos in development planning through the creation of local migration and development councils, regional committees, OFW desks and strengthening of migrant resource centers. The city works with the families of migrant workers for a holistic approach.

The coronavirus disease outbreak further exposed how our cities are crucial in migration policies and action. In the Philippines, over 51,000 Overseas Filipinos have been repatriated by national government since February 2020. They undergo mandatory quarantine until they receive negative test result for COVID19. Local governments then facilitate return to their homes. This has increased the demand in reintegration and livelihood programs.

In connection with the thematic areas, I would like to share our experience in Iriga City. On the governance of labour migration, because of the COVID19 crisis, the entire employment landscape has changed. A lot of migrant workers who have been repatriated are now without work. We are strengthening our economic enterprises. We will start operating call centers that will employ 800-1,000 employees. We are building a local amusement park that will need 2,000 labour workers during construction and 1,500 employees once in operation. We also have co-working spaces to help entrepreneurs in their incubation period. Since agriculture is one of the industries in the city, we are preparing seminars and committees to teach our constituents to be more active in agriculture and other livelihood work. National government has provided a stimulus package for repatriated workers.

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06 July | 9:00-11:00am CEST/ 5:00-7:00pm Manila

In terms of leveraging technology to empower migrants, we have a partnership with a Singaporean company that helps migrant workers in paying utilities and tuition fees of children of migrant workers. Families left behind are handicapped in fiscal management and have tendency to use their money for other basic materials not necessary for day to day lives. We have website/chat where we encourage migrant workers to talk to us which we personally answer in cases of emergency. We are contemplating to develop an ID system with all the resident and migrant worker data with QR code and ATM so if government has amelioration, it will be easier to transfer funds. We are doing our best to partner with banks for online services/payment. Philippines is not yet technology savvy so it is hard to avail of data from national government. There is need for data analytics.

On fostering partnership to realize migration related goals, UCLG plays a vital role. It is easier to coordinate with cities where you have established close ties. We also execute partnerships through the ambassadors from the Philippines to the respective countries.

Much is expected of cities and local governments in terms of achieving global agenda and commitments and this has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Mayors are dedicated to deliver our mandate. However, in order to do so, we need support from national government and the international community. We seek institutional access to migration policy processes whereby we can be partners in development and not simply implementers. We call national governments for the provision of resources and capacities to develop and implement mutually agreed goals and targets. We call for a strengthened alliance with civil society, business sector, and other stakeholders to reinforce our initiatives to protect the welfare of migrants. It is only when we work together can we co-create a better future for our people.