



Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City, Metro Manila

Twentieth Congress
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **2964**



Introduced by Representatives Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez, Yedda Marie K. Romualdez, Andrew Julian K. Romualdez and Jude A. Acidre

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A COMPREHENSIVE, INTEGRATED AND
SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION PROGRAM FOR OVERSEAS
FILIPINO WORKERS

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Constitution states, under Section 3, Article XIII on Social Justice and Human Rights, particularly its sub-article on Labor, that "The State shall afford full protection to labor, local and overseas, organized and unorganized, and promote full employment and equality of employment opportunities for all."

It further states that "it shall guarantee the rights of all workers to self-organization, collective bargaining and negotiations, and peaceful concerted activities, including the right to strike in accordance with law. They shall be entitled to security of tenure, humane conditions of work, and a living wage. They shall also participate in policy and decision-making processes affecting their rights and benefits as may be provided by law."

Hence, this Representation proposes this measure to give life and substance to these provisions of the Constitution by enabling overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) to access local entrepreneurial, educational, and employment opportunities should they decide to remain with their respective families here in the Philippines for good. This bill likewise includes the provision on security of tenure, humane conditions of work, and a living wage for OFWs through

employment either in the government career service or in private enterprises known for upholding these essential employee benefits.

This proposed legislation also provides former OFWs who are to be reintegrated into the Philippine domestic economy to participate in policy and decision-making processes affecting their rights and benefits under existing laws and under the provisions of this draft bill.

The education, training, and experience gained by OFWs abroad must be put to good use in the development of our country. The State must, therefore, provide opportunities for "brain gain" through this bill, other legislative measures, and executive issuances.

OFW welfare is the main objective of this measure. This proposed law seeks to provide them with benefits and incentives should they decide to invest in businesses in the Philippines, such as access to financial literacy training and seminars, as well as the needed capital to start their respective enterprises.

During the 19th Congress, this measure was already approved by the House of Representatives on Third Reading.

Thus, the passage of this measure is urgently requested.


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Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “*Bagong Balikbayan Act.*”

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – The State recognizes the invaluable contributions of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) to national development and is committed to upholding their fundamental rights, including the right to equal opportunity, decent living, dignity, and participation in decision-making processes affecting their lives and well-being. Further, it is the declared policy of the State to:

- (a) Implement a comprehensive, integrated, and sustainable reintegration program for returning OFWs, addressing economic, social,

psychosocial, gender-responsive, and cultural dimensions, regardless of their documentation status;

- (b) Ensure such reintegration programs are customized to the needs and skill of OFWs and mainstreamed throughout the migration cycle and promote:
 - (1) Access to local employment, entrepreneurship, agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture, and other livelihood opportunities;
 - (2) Development of financial literacy programs; and
 - (3) Attainment of economic self-sufficiency, social stability, and psychosocial well-being for returning OFWs and their families.
- (c) Foster conditions where migration is a matter of choice rather than necessity; and,
- (d) Collaborate with relevant public and private stakeholders in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of reintegration programs and assistance.

SEC. 3. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this Act, the following terms are defined as follows:

- (a) *Full-cycle Reintegration Program* refers to interventions starting with the pre-departure stage, on-site support during employment, and assistance upon return;
- (b) *Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW)* refers to a Filipino who is to be engaged, is engaged, or has been engaged in remunerated activity in a country of which he or she is not an immigrant, citizen, or permanent resident or is not awaiting naturalization, recognition, or admission, whether land-based or sea-based regardless of status; excluding a

Filipino engaged under a government-recognized exchange visitor program for cultural and educational purposes;

(c) *Reintegration* refers to a multi-dimensional process enabling OFWs to re-establish economic, social, and psychosocial well-being upon return; and,

(d) *Undocumented OFW* refers to an OFW not registered with the Philippine government as an OFW, or whose documents are incomplete or invalid. An undocumented OFW is also known as an “irregular OFW”;

SEC. 4. *Applicability.* – This Act shall apply to all returnee-OFWs, irrespective of their typology and status, including:

- (a) Land-based and sea-based OFWs;
- (b) Documented or undocumented OFWs;
- (c) OFWs who have been voluntarily or mandatorily repatriated, regardless of the grounds for such repatriation;
- (d) OFWs returning to the country due to retirement or upon the termination of their employment contract; and
- (e) OFWs returning to the country due to distressing circumstances in the host country, such as war or conflict, economic instability, abuse or exploitation, pandemics, natural disasters or diplomatic fallout.

This Act shall also extend to OFWs who require targeted assistance, including senior or solo-parent OFWs. Furthermore, the families of returnee-OFWs shall likewise be covered and benefited by the provisions of this Act,

subject to and as may be further detailed within the implementing rules and regulations promulgated hereto.

SEC. 5. Access to Employment Opportunities and Qualification Recognition. –

(a) Job Fairs. The Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), together with the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) shall, in coordination with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Education, Department of Health (DOH), Civil Service Commission (CSC), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Public Employment Service Office, and in consultation with concerned business chambers and groups in the private sector, private enterprises recognized for ensuring security of tenure, humane conditions of work, and a living wage, and relevant Local Government Units (LGUs), plan and conduct regular series of job fairs in strategic sites and LGUs where there are significant presence of returnee-OFWs.

These job fairs shall facilitate employment opportunities in: (1) The private sector; (2) The national or local government, including their agencies, bureaus, offices, instrumentalities, and government-owned and/or -controlled corporations (GOCCs), for civil service qualified OFWs; and (3) Academic and non-academic positions in public schools, and state colleges and universities. Such job fairs shall take into consideration the specific skills, credentials, eligibilities, and experience acquired by OFWs from working overseas.

- (b) Expanded Employment Facilitation. The DMW and other concerned government agencies shall expand the employment facilitation offering for OFWs in the public, private, and development sectors based on progressive eligibility or qualification criteria, in partnership with the relevant national government agencies, the Private Sector Advisory Council, industry or professional associations, and other stakeholders.
- (c) Civil Service Eligibility. The CSC shall formulate guidelines to grant appropriate civil service eligibility to non-civil service qualified OFWs, based on the education, training, and experience they acquired while living or working overseas.
- (d) Skills and Academic Recognition. The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) and the CHED shall provide the necessary rules and regulations to grant pertinent national certification or appropriate degree diploma(s), respectively, recognizing the education, training, and experience OFWs acquired while living or working overseas.

SEC. 6. *Initiation of Reintegration Process.* – The reintegration process for concerned OFWs shall be initiated by the relevant Migrant Workers Offices (MWOs) six (6) months before the intended return of the OFW to the Philippines. This process shall commence by providing access to four (4) paths for reintegration, namely:

- (a) Education, upskilling/reskilling/retooling/micro-credentialing (Kaalaman);

- (b) Psychosocial and social support services (Kalinga);
- (c) Entrepreneurship (Negosyo); and,
- (d) Employment (Hanap-buhay).

SEC. 7. Returnee-OFWs Management Information System (ROMIS) and Reintegration Management System (RMS). –

- (a) Establishment of ROMIS. The DMW shall establish and maintain the ROMIS, which shall serve as the primary information network and database containing information on the educational attainment, skill levels, and experience of all returning OFWs. The ROMIS shall function as a referral system to the private sector and government institutions to facilitate job matching, possible hiring, and/or skills upgrading.
- (b) Development and Function of RMS. Within the ROMIS framework, the DMW shall finalize the development and operationalization of the RMS. The RMS shall be an online system and platform designed to streamline the reintegration process for returnee-OFWs. It shall provide access to a range of services, including financial literacy programs, livelihood training, and access to funding opportunities.
- (c) System Objectives. Both the ROMIS and the RMS shall facilitate effective connections with government and private sector partners to ensure a smooth transition for returnee-OFWs back into local employment or entrepreneurship. The RMS shall further aim to provide efficient support for the holistic needs of returnee-OFWs and their

families, thereby seeking to empower them to reintegrate successfully and continue contributing to national development.

SEC. 8. Institutional Framework for Reintegration. –

- (a) **Lead Agency.** The DMW shall, in coordination with the OWWA and the National Reintegration Center for OFWs (NRCO), serve as the primary agency responsible for the implementation of the full-cycle reintegration program.
- (b) **Role of the NRCO.** The NRCO shall function as the central coordination mechanism to: (1) Enhance participation of all stakeholders to achieve transformative, effective, and efficient delivery of services to returnee-OFWs and their families; and (2) Ensure the harmonized and synergized implementation of the full-cycle national reintegration policy and program.

The NRCO shall design and institutionalize reintegration frameworks, strategies and standards that address the economic, social and psychological aspects of return, and shall lead the coordination of relevant government agencies, local government units, and partners from the private sector and civil society. Together with the OWWA, it shall implement reintegration programs and services in accordance with established plans, policies and guidelines. It shall maintain a centralized reintegration database, undertake policy and program research, and ensure that all reintegration initiatives are coherent, evidence-based, and aligned with national migration and development priorities.

- (c) Role of MWOs and OWWA Overseas Welfare Offices (OWOS). The MWOs together with the OWOS located abroad shall be strengthened to enable them to provide reintegration counseling and support services directly to OFWs onsite, including undocumented workers.

SEC. 9. *Pre-Return and Reintegration Orientation Seminar (PRROS)*. – There shall be a PRROS to be offered by MWOs worldwide, similar in intent to pre-employment, pre-departure, and post-arrival orientation seminars, but concentrating on essential information for a returning OFW seeking to be reintegrated back into the Philippine economy and society.

SEC. 10. *Business-Oriented Capacity-Building Training*. –

- (a) Provision of Training. The DOLE shall, in coordination with the DTI and the DA, provide Business-Oriented Capacity-Building Training for OFWs who are seeking to set up their businesses.
- (b) Training Focus Areas. The training shall focus on the following key areas: (1) Business conceptualization and the conduct of feasibility studies; (2) Registration and all other administrative matters related to creating one's own business; (3) Safe and sustainable business financing, incorporating the DMW's Financial Awareness Seminar-Small Business Management Training (FAS-SBMT), which promotes financial awareness and provides training for the development and management of small businesses; (4) Business promotion/advertising/marketing; and (5) Service/product delivery.

- (c) Enhancement of FAS-SBMT and Collaboration. The DMW's FAS-SBMT shall have strengthened program coordination and shall expand its offerings. Pursuant thereto, the DMW shall collaborate with concerned national government agencies and stakeholders to provide co-opportunities for entrepreneurship development, incubation, marketing, and mentoring.
- (d) DA Agricultural Credit Policy Council Support. The DA's ACPC shall offer capacity-building support alongside its credit programs. The DA and its ACPC shall provide services specifically designed for those engaged in the agri-fishery sector. This support shall be made available to returnee-OFWs applying for ACPC's loan programs to assist them in acquiring the necessary skills and improving their business management.
- (e) Small Business Corporation (SB Corp). The SB Corp, a government-owned and controlled corporation operating under the Department of Trade and Industry, shall support reintegration efforts by providing capacity-building programs and access to credit facilities.
- (f) Mentorship Facilitation. The training provided under this Section shall also serve as a means by which returnee-OFWs are assisted in finding and connecting with mentors in the business sector, particularly those established in the industry the returnee-OFW intends to enter.
- (g) Prioritization. Prioritization for participation in the training and related support under this Section shall be given to those returnee-OFWs with no background in putting together and running/operating their own

businesses, particularly those intending to establish a single proprietorship and having no seasoned business partners.

SEC. 11. *Components of Reintegration Services.* – Reintegration services shall include the following components provided at relevant stages of the migration cycle:

(a) Pre-Departure:

- (1) Mandatory pre-departure orientation seminars covering available reintegration services and support for undocumented OFWs;
- (2) Financial literacy training focused on management of earnings and future planning; and
- (3) Family counseling on coping mechanisms for separation and eventual reunification.

(b) On-Site Support:

- (1) Provision of accessible support services through MWOs for OFWs in distress, including undocumented workers;
- (2) Opportunities for skills development and training designed to enhance employability upon return; and
- (3) Establishment of mechanisms for addressing exploitation and abuse, ensuring access to legal and psychosocial support.

(c) Upon Return:

- (1) Provision of personalized reintegration counseling and case management to develop tailored reintegration plans;

- (2) Delivery of economic reintegration assistance, including facilitation of job placement, entrepreneurship training, and access to financing;
- (3) Facilitation of social reintegration support, covering access to housing, documentation, education, healthcare, and social protection schemes;
- (4) Provision of psychosocial support services addressing mental health concerns and challenges from migration; and
- (5) Grant of special attention to the needs of vulnerable OFWs, particularly victims of trafficking, persons with disabilities, and those with specific medical or psychosocial needs.

SEC. 12. *Protection for Undocumented OFWs.* – No undocumented OFW shall be denied reintegration services due to their status. Mechanisms shall be established for the regularization of undocumented OFWs' status upon return to facilitate access to services and benefits. Information dissemination campaigns shall inform undocumented OFWs of their rights and available reintegration support. A dedicated hotline and online platform shall be established for confidential assistance to undocumented OFWs.

SEC. 13. *Monitoring and Evaluation.* – The DMW shall develop a monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the reintegration program's effectiveness and conduct regular impact assessments to ensure program responsiveness to OFWs' evolving needs.

SEC. 14. *Dedicated Financing and Loan Programs.* –

- (a) Development and Provision. The DMW and the OWWA shall, in coordination with the Department of Finance (DOF), the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), the DA, particularly its Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service (AMAS) and ACPC, Government Financial Institutions (GFIs), and qualified Private Financial Institutions, develop and provide dedicated financing or loan programs.
- (b) Purpose and Terms. These programs shall facilitate the establishment, operation, sustainability, or expansion of enterprises and livelihood projects, including Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs), owned by returnee-OFWs, under minimal and affordable terms and conditions.
- (c) Eligibility and Support. (1) The dedicated programs under this section shall primarily cater to returnee-OFWs with no existing enterprise or livelihood project. (2) Returnee-OFWs with an existing enterprise that is dismally performing shall also be eligible: *Provided*, That the DMW, OWWA, DOF, DBM, DA (through AMAS and ACPC), and GFIs shall provide financial and other support, including technical guidance, necessary to revitalize the undertaking. (3) Returnee-OFWs with existing enterprises deemed robust may be referred to the standing programs of the DTI for appropriate assistance.

SEC. 15. *Program for Qualified OFWs to Teach in the Academe.* – The DMW shall, in coordination with the CHED and TESDA, provide a program to invite qualified and highly-skilled OFWs to teach in colleges/universities recognized by the CHED and/or in training centers accredited by the TESDA.

SEC. 16. *Social Assistance Measures.* – The DMW shall, together with the OWWA, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and the DA, include returnee-OFWs as beneficiaries in their respective social protection and other programs.

The DMW and OWWA, through their regional offices, shall encourage community engagements for returnee-OFWs and their families.

All reintegration programs and services, including social assistance measures under this Act, shall be guided by the principles mandated under Section 17 of Republic Act (R.A.) No. 11641, otherwise known as the "Department of Migrant Workers Act", ensuring a multi-dimensional reintegration program that effectively addresses the economic, social, psychosocial and cultural aspects of reintegration.

The implementing rules and regulations of this Act shall contain detailed and specific provisions on social assistance and protection to ensure that more OFWs are included in the various social protection programs offered by the government, the private sector, and non-government organizations (NGOs).

SEC. 17. *Right to Participate.* – Former OFWs who are to be reintegrated into the Philippine domestic economy shall, as much as practicable, participate in policy and decision-making processes affecting their rights and benefits under existing laws and under the provisions of this Act.

SEC. 18. *Application of Anti-Age Discrimination Law.* –

(a) Compliance Obligation. In the extension of services to former OFWs and in all matters concerning their local or domestic employment, all government agencies, GOCCs, and all private corporations, partnerships, sole-proprietorships, including NGOs and other kinds of private organizations, shall strictly observe and follow all provisions of R.A. 10911, otherwise known as the "Anti-Age Discrimination in Employment Act".

(b) Monitoring and Coordination. The DMW and the DOLE shall constantly coordinate to monitor the plight and situation of all former OFWs employed in local/domestic jobs to ensure full compliance with the aforementioned law.

SEC. 19. *Psychosocial Support and Counseling*. – The DMW shall, together with OWWA and the DOH, facilitate psychosocial support and reintegration counselling for returnee-OFWs and their families.

SEC. 20. *National Reintegration Network (NRN)*. – The NRN shall be established through formal partnership agreements with relevant government and private partner agencies. It shall serve to strengthen and institutionalize collaborative efforts aimed at ensuring the effective delivery of reintegration programs and services. The NRN shall facilitate convenient and seamless access to such services through the creation of both Physical and Online One-Stop-Shops, wherein all relevant programs and services are integrated and made available on a unified platform. All government agencies and instrumentalities offering services to OFWs shall form part of the NRN.

SEC. 21. *Creating/Upgrading Offices and Personnel.* – The DMW and other concerned government agencies, upon consultation with and approval of the DBM, shall create or upgrade the necessary offices and hire appropriate personnel to ensure the effective implementation of this Act.

SEC. 22. *Non-diminution of Benefits.* – All rights, privileges and benefits previously enjoyed by returnee or reintegrated OFWs before the effectivity of this Act, including those set forth in R.A. 8042, otherwise known as the “Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995”, as amended, R.A. 10801 or the “Overseas Workers Welfare Administration Act”, among other relevant laws, executive issuances, including pertinent Supreme Court decisions, shall continue to be recognized and shall not be diminished.

SEC. 23. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – The DMW shall, together with the OWWA and the National Reintegration Center for OFWs (NRCO), promulgate the necessary implementing rules and regulations within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act,

The promulgation shall be made in coordination with the key government agencies mentioned in this Act, and in consultation with concerned GOCCs, especially those giving grants, extending loans, and providing technical assistance to MSMEs, and other relevant stakeholders in the private sector and NGOs.

SEC. 24. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current year’s appropriations of the departments and agencies concerned. Thereafter, such amount shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 25. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part hereof is held invalid or unconstitutional, the remainder of the law or the provisions not otherwise affected shall remain valid and subsisting.

SEC. 26. *Repealing Clause.* – Any law, presidential decree or issuance, executive order, letter of instruction, administrative order, rule or regulation contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act is hereby repealed, modified, or amended accordingly.

SEC. 27. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,