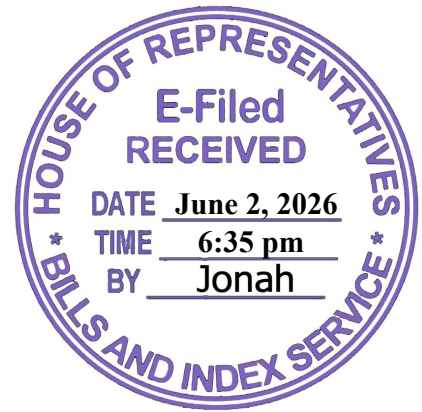


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. **9693**



Introduced by Representative JEFFREY SORIANO

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This bill seeks to institutionalize a comprehensive and full-cycle reintegration program for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and returnee-OFWs. It provides for employment facilitation, skills and qualification recognition, entrepreneurship development, financial literacy, social protection, psychosocial support, and other interventions necessary to help returning OFWs successfully reintegrate into Philippine society and the local economy.

Overseas Filipino Workers continue to make immense contributions to the country through their hard work, skills, and remittances. Yet many OFWs who return home after years of working abroad encounter difficulties in finding suitable employment and establishing sustainable livelihoods that are necessary for a successful transition back to their families and communities in the country. Existing reintegration initiatives, while valuable, remain fragmented and often insufficient to address the diverse needs of returning migrant workers.

This measure institutionalizes a coordinated national reintegration framework by providing access to employment opportunities, entrepreneurship and financing programs, business capacity-building, financial literacy training, psychosocial counseling, social assistance, and skills recognition mechanisms. It likewise establishes a Returnee-OFWs Management Information System designed to ensure that reintegration services are accessible, responsive, and tailored to the needs of OFWs and their families.

The nation owes a lasting debt of gratitude to the millions of OFWs whose hard work and sacrifices have helped sustain countless Filipino families and contributed significantly to national development. It is therefore imperative that the State provide meaningful opportunities and comprehensive support to ensure their successful return, reintegration, and continued participation in the country's growth and progress.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate approval of this measure is earnestly sought.

HON. JEFFREY SORIANO

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. **9693**

Introduced by Representative JEFFREY SORIANO

AN ACT
ESTABLISHING A COMPREHENSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION
PROGRAM FOR OVERSEAS FILIPINO WORKERS, APPROPRIATING FUNDS
THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

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.* – It is hereby the declared policy of the State to recognize the invaluable contributions of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) to national development and to affirm its commitment to uphold their fundamental rights, including the right to equal opportunity, decent living, dignity, and participation in decision-making processes affecting their lives and well-being.

To this end, the State shall implement comprehensive and sustainable reintegration programs for returning OFWs, regardless of documentation status, that address their economic, social, psychosocial, cultural, and gender-responsive needs. Such programs shall be tailored to the skills and circumstances of OFWs, integrated throughout the migration cycle, and designed to promote access to employment, entrepreneurship, agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture, and other livelihood opportunities, as well as financial literacy and economic self-sufficiency.

The State shall likewise foster conditions in which migration is a matter of choice rather than necessity and strengthen collaboration among public and private stakeholders in the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of reintegration programs.

SEC. 3. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this Act:

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 they are 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;

d. Returnee-OFW or *Balikbayan* refers to a Filipino migrant worker who has completed, terminated, or returned from overseas employment and has resettled or is in the process of resettling in the Philippines, including those returning due to contract completion, repatriation, distress, or voluntary return. This also includes Filipinos returning to the country after extended residence abroad; and

e. Undocumented OFW, also known as irregular OFW, refers to an OFW not registered with the Philippine government as an OFW, or whose documents are incomplete or valid.

SEC. 4. *Coverage.* – This Act shall apply to all Overseas Filipino Workers and returnee-OFWs, including undocumented OFWs and those requiring targeted assistance, such as senior citizen OFWs and solo parent-OFWs. Where applicable, the families of returnee-OFWs may likewise avail of reintegration services and support provided under this Act.

SEC. 5. *Access to Employment Opportunities and Qualification Recognition.* – To ensure equitable access to employment and fair recognition of qualifications, the State shall employ the following:

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 (DILG), Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Health (DOH), Civil Service Commission (CSC), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Public Employment Services 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 acquire while living or working overseas.

SEC. 6. *Initiation of Reintegration Process.* – The reintegration process of 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/retooling/micro-credentialing (*Kaalaman*);
- b. Psychosocial and social support services (*Kalinga*);
- c. Entrepreneurship (*Negosyo*); and
- d. Employment (*Hanapbuhay*).

SEC. 7. *Returnee-OFWs Management Information System and Reintegration Management System.* – To ensure an efficient, coordinated, and data-driven reintegration of returnee-OFWs, the State, through the DMW shall:

a. Establish and maintain the Returnee-OFWs Management Information System (ROMIS), which shall serve as the primary information network and database containing information on the educational attainment, skills level, 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. Within the ROMIS framework, finalize the development and operationalization of the Reintegration Management System (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. Both the ROMIS and 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 to national development.

SEC. 8. *Institutional Framework for Recognition.* – The DMW, in coordination with the OWWA and the National Reintegration Center for OFWs (NRCO), shall serve as the lead agency for the implementation, coordination, and monitoring of the full-cycle reintegration program established under this Act.

The NRCO shall serve as the central coordinating body for reintegration policies, programs, and services. It shall promote the active participation of relevant government agencies, LGUs, private sector partners, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure the effective, efficient, and responsive delivery of reintegration services to returnee-OFWs and their families.

The NRCO shall develop and institutionalize reintegration frameworks, strategies, and standards addressing the economic, social and psychological aspects of reintegration. In coordination with the OWWA and other concerned agencies, it shall oversee the implementation of reintegration programs and services, conduct policy and program research, and ensure that reintegration initiatives are evidence-based, coherent, and aligned with national migration and development objectives.

The MWOs and OWWA Overseas Welfare Offices (OWOS) shall be strengthened to provide pre-return reintegration counseling, information, referral, and other appropriate support services to OFWs abroad, including undocumented OFWs, to facilitate their successful reintegration upon return to the Philippines.

SEC. 9. *Pre-Return and Reintegration Orientation Seminar.* – There shall be a Pre-Return and Reintegration Orientation Seminar (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.* – To promote entrepreneurship and equip OFWs and returnee-OFWs with the knowledge, skills, and support necessary to establish and sustain viable enterprises, the State shall provide business-oriented capacity-building training and related support services.

The DOLE, in coordination with the DTI and the DA, shall provide business-oriented capacity-building training for OFWs seeking to establish their own businesses. Such training shall focus on:

- a. Business conceptualization and conduct of feasibility studies;
- b. Registration and other administrative matters related to starting and operating a business;
- c. 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;
- d. Business promotion, advertising, and marketing; and
- e. Product and service delivery.

The DMW shall strengthen and expand the FAS-SBMIT and shall collaborate with relevant government agencies and stakeholders to provide opportunities for entrepreneurship development, business incubation, marketing, and mentoring.

The DA, through the Agricultural Credit Policy Council Support (ACPC), shall provide capacity-building support to returnee-OFWs applying for its loan programs, particularly those engaged or intending to engage in agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture, and other agri-fishery enterprises. Such support shall complement available credit programs and assist beneficiaries in acquiring the necessary skills to improve their business management.

The Small Business Corporation (SB Corp.), a government-owned and -controlled corporation attached to the DTI, shall support reintegration efforts by providing capacity-building programs and access to credit facilities.

The training and support services provided under this Section shall likewise facilitate mentorship opportunities by assisting returnee-OFWs in identifying and connecting with mentors in their chosen industries.

Priority for participation in the training and related support services under this Section shall be given to returnee-OFWs with no background in establishing and operating their own businesses, particularly those intending to establish sole proprietorships and who have no experienced business partners.

SEC. 11. *Components of Reintegration Services.* – Reintegration services under this Act shall be provided throughout the migration cycle and shall include the following:

a. Pre-Departure Services. - These shall include:

1. Mandatory pre-departure orientation seminars on available reintegration programs, services, and opportunities, including support mechanisms for undocumented OFWs;
2. Financial literacy training focused on income management, savings, investments, and long-term financial planning; and
3. Family counseling and preparedness programs to help OFWs and their families cope with separation and eventual reunification.

b. On-Site Reintegration Support. - These shall include:

1. Accessible support services through MWOs for OFWs in distress, including undocumented workers;
2. Skills development, upskilling, and training opportunities designed to enhance employability and preparedness upon return; and
3. Mechanisms for addressing exploitation, abuse, and other forms of vulnerability, including access to legal assistance and psychosocial support.

c. Return and Post-Return Reintegration Services. - These shall include:

1. Reintegration counseling and case management to assist returnee-OFWs in developing tailored reintegration plans;

2. Economic reintegration assistance, including employment facilitation, entrepreneurship training, livelihood support, and access to financing programs;

3. Social reintegration support, including assistance in accessing housing, civil documentation, education, healthcare, and social protection programs;

4. Psychosocial services addressing mental health concerns and challenges arising from migration and reintegration; and

5. Specialized assistance for vulnerable OFWs, including victims of trafficking, persons with disabilities, senior citizen OFWs, solo-parent OFWs, and those with specific medical or psychosocial needs.

SEC. 12. *Protection of Undocumented OFWs.* – No undocumented OFW shall be denied reintegration services due to their status. Mechanisms shall be established for the regulation of undocumented OFW's 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 OFW's evolving needs.

SEC. 14. *Dedicated Financing and Loan Programs.* – To promote sustainable reintegration through entrepreneurship and livelihood development, the State shall provide dedicated financing and loan programs for returnee-OFWs, as follows:

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 Services (AMAS), and ACPC, Government Financial Institutions (GFIs) and qualified 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.* – The dedicated programs under this Section shall primarily cater to returnee-OFWs with no existing enterprise or livelihood projects.

i. 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.

ii. Returnee-OFWs with existing enterprises deemed robust may be referred to the standing programs of the DTI for appropriate assistance.

SEC. 15. *Programs for Qualified OFWs to Teach in Academe.* – The DMW shall, in coordination with the CHED and TESDA, provide a program to invite qualified and highly-skilled OFWs to teach in universities and colleges recognized by 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, shall include returnee-OFWs as beneficiaries in their respective social protection and other relevant programs.

The DMW and the 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 (RA) 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.* – To ensure equal employment opportunities and full compliance with the Anti-Age Discrimination in the reintegration and local employment of former OFWs, the State shall:

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, as well as other entities operating within the Philippines, shall ensure strict compliance with RA No. 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. *Psychological Support and Counseling.* – The DMW shall, together with OWWA and the DOH, facilitate psychosocial support and reintegration counseling for returnee-OFWs and their families.

SEC. 20. *National Reintegration Network.* – The National Reintegration Network (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 RA No. 8042, otherwise known as the “*Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino Act of 1995*,” as amended; RA No. 10801, otherwise known as the “*Overseas Workers Welfare Administration Act*”; and other relevant laws and 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 (NCRO), promulgate the necessary implementing rules and regulations within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act.

The promulgation shall be made in accordance 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 portion or provision of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, other provisions hereof shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 26. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

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

Approved,