



The Hague Process  
on Refugees and Migration

**3RD EXPERT CONSULTATION FOR BUSINESS AND CITIES ON MIGRATION AND URBANISATION**

**Manila, Philippines**

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SUMMARY

The topic of migration is key in understanding social and economic realities in the Philippines. Many dimensions of the phenomenon are the subject of various national, regional and local initiatives. To address the issue of migration from primarily a business and cities perspective, however, added a new level of engagement.

THP's initiative to organise an Expert Consultation in cooperation with IDEALS and hosted by THP Board Member Doris Magsaysay offered a unique occasion for a broad selection of representatives from local government, the private sector and civil society to exchange best practices, discuss dilemmas and forge new partnerships for practical cooperation.

The consultation allowed participants to showcase existing initiatives and to progressively debate the ambiguities of the migration realities ranging from social costs to economic opportunities. An important insight was that migration is not a temporary phase society has to go through, but a persistent feature that will not go away and has to be dealt with in all its aspects.

Recurring themes in the discussions were the issue of free choice when deciding to migrate in order to escape poor living conditions, the sacrifices people have to make when they do, the lack of financial literacy of migrants and the need for better and more skills-related education.

Also, the need for more reliable data on the local level was repeatedly stressed. The mainstreaming of migration/refugee issues at the local and regional level development plans was seen to be urgent and receiving insufficient attention. Too often, responsibilities in the migration field are still seen as foremost a national concern. The consultation highlighted the respective roles of local government, businesses and civil society and gave ample evidence of the opportunities to locally advance the community of (former) overseas foreign workers (OFWs).

There was a general consensus that the capital that was so laboriously accumulated by OFWs should not be squandered in consumerism and needless spending but invested in projects that would benefit families, communities and the nation. It was underlined that often what was lacking was not the will to invest but rather the knowledge of opportunities and sound judgment. Moreover, the scams and frauds that abound around migration and remittances, make people wary of new offers.

It was clear that only by creating alliances and building partnerships the individual efforts of OFWs can be scaled up and brought to fruition.

**Participating business representatives identified the following key challenges:**

- different attempts at making financial investments more accessible for people with small capital
- business opportunities for returnees in the ICT, tourism, agricultural, health and real estate sectors
- charities that focus on the improvement of educational opportunities
- ways to attract skilled workers back to the Philippines and to retain or acquire skills to innovate and upgrade different lines of business

**A primary role of cities** is to promote the local economy. In the Philippines, remittances are often the economic backbone of this local economy. Once aware of the impact of migration in the urban or regional context and the role local authorities can play in maximising its benefits or reducing its nefarious effects, mayors and governors recognise the vast task ahead of them.

Local communities can experience very incisive impacts of migration, like:

- increasing inflation (price levels in small provincial locations can exceed those in Metro Manila)
- declining and ageing populations (notwithstanding healthy birth rates)
- skills shortages in different sectors of the economy (brain drain)
- high percentages of one parent families

At the same time these effects are exacerbated by existing social challenges as deficient education and health care, unemployment and poverty.

**Strategic partnerships**

Local authorities will have to identify allies in their endeavours to cope with the challenges of migration. Both the private sector and civil society offer experiences and initiatives that can help address these different dimensions and turn challenges into opportunities. Both entrepreneurship and philanthropy have a role to play. It is key, however, that such efforts align with wider national policies to be effective. Consultation between different levels of authority is, therefore, crucial.

The expert consultation was an opportunity for key actors with on the ground experience to meet and exchange ideas and good practices. The case studies brought forward prompted recognition and were an invitation to participants to connect with prospective partners.

All in all, it is the empowerment of the OFW, by providing better education, relevant information and access to financial options and business opportunities, that is essential to enable communities to benefit from the migration experience in the long run. Combined with better protection of OFWs abroad through legal provisions and strong government-to-government contacts, migration can become a truly free choice, part of a successful personal/family strategy to improve living standards.