

Situation report: Overseas migration from La Union

by

Geoffrey Ducanes

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Abbreviations

AIRTC	Anti-Illegal Recruitment and Trafficking Council
CFO	Commission on Filipinos Overseas
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
DOH	Department of Health
DOJ	Department of Justice
DOLE	Department of Labor and Employment
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
FIES	Family Income and Expenditure Survey
HDI	Human Development Index
HDN	Human Development Network
IACAT	Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LGU	Local Government Unit
LUIMCO	La Union Inter-agency Council for Migrants Concern
MENA	Middle East and North African
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NSO	National Statistics Office
OFW	Overseas Filipino Worker
OWWA	Overseas Workers Welfare Administration
PESO	Public Employment Service Office
PDPFP	Provincial Development and Physical Framework Plan
PELA	Provincial Executive-Legislative Agenda
PNP	Philippine National Police
PSWDO	Provincial Social Welfare Department Office
POEA	Philippine Overseas Employment Administration
SOF	Survey of Overseas Filipinos
TAO	Taberna Overseas Worker Association
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

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INTRODUCTION

Overseas migration is an integral part of the economy of La Union, although this fact is not yet fully recognized. Roughly 6.2 per cent of La Union's population 20 years and older are working overseas, according to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) of 2010. This is likely an underestimate. Almost a third of these La Union workers employed abroad are college graduates, comprising 12.9 per cent of all the college graduates in the province. Remittances from abroad contributed roughly a fifth of total household income in the province. La Union is the province with the highest share of households that are highly dependent on remittances (meaning at least 50 per cent of their income are from remittances). Most of the household savings generated in La Union – about Php6 billion in 2009 – come from households receiving foreign remittances.

Despite such obvious importance of migration and remittances for the province, they have not yet been fully integrated in La Union's development plans. Overseas workers and their remittances are under-recognized and under-utilized. In addition, while there are systems in place for their support and protection, in many areas they remain inadequate. Potential overseas workers remain vulnerable to unscrupulous recruiters and traffickers, for example. And despite some noteworthy efforts, migrant returnees are still not getting adequate support. Part of the problem is lack of information, which this paper seeks to help address. In this paper we provide a situation analysis of the overseas migration situation in La Union and the existing policy framework and institutional mechanisms supporting migrant workers in the province.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section gives a brief profile of La Union province, looking in particular at population features, and the poverty, human development, economic, and employment characteristics of the province. The third section examines the trends and patterns of overseas migration and remittances in La Union, especially in comparison to the overall Philippine and Ilocos-wide trends and patterns. The fourth section reviews the migration-related institutional mechanisms in La Union. The final section gives recommendations and concludes.

1. PROFILE OF LA UNION

1.1 Population, land area

La Union is one of four provinces of Region 1 (Ilocos Region) and is comprised of one city (San Fernando City), 19 municipalities, and 576 barangays. As of 2007, the province had a population of 721,000. From 1960 to 2007 (Table 1), average annual growth rate of population in the province was 1.9 per cent, slower than the overall population growth in the country (2.6 per cent) but faster than population growth in the entire Ilocos region (1.7 per cent). Looking only at the most recent period – 2000 to 2007 – average annual population growth has gone down to 1.3 per cent.

By 2015, population of the province is expected to exceed 900,000, and by 2020 to top one million. The five biggest localities in La Union, apart from San Fernando City (population of 115,000 in 2007), are the municipalities of Bauang (70,000), Agoo (58,000), Rosario (49,000), Naguilian (45,000), and Aringay (43,000). La Union has a land area of only 1,498 square kilometers, making it the smallest of the four Ilocos provinces in that respect.

Table 1. Population of La Union, 1960-2007

Municipality/Province	1960	1980	2000	2007
La Union	293,330	452,578	657,945	720,972
Agoo	21,093	34,849	51,923	57,952
Aringay	17,572	27,524	41,422	43,438
Bacnotan	15,859	24,800	35,419	38,743
Bagulin	4,407	7,009	11,857	12,521
Balaoan	17,401	25,197	33,786	36,829
Bangar	16,381	23,715	31,491	33,335
Bauang	26,142	41,859	63,373	69,837
Burgos	2,124	4,149	6,748	8,261
Caba	9,517	14,114	19,565	20,927
Luna	18,595	25,081	32,259	35,372
Naguilian	19,528	29,304	43,501	45,232
Pugo	5,484	7,780	13,442	18,265
Rosario	18,045	29,331	43,497	49,025
San Gabriel	7,546	10,248	14,909	15,803
San Juan	14,516	20,362	30,393	32,952
Santo Tomas	14,929	22,610	31,204	33,604
Santol	6,125	7,836	11,202	11,712
Sudipen	7,926	10,796	15,099	15,949
Tubao	12,304	17,604	24,773	26,402
San Fernando City	37,836	68,410	102,082	114,813

Source: National Statistics Office

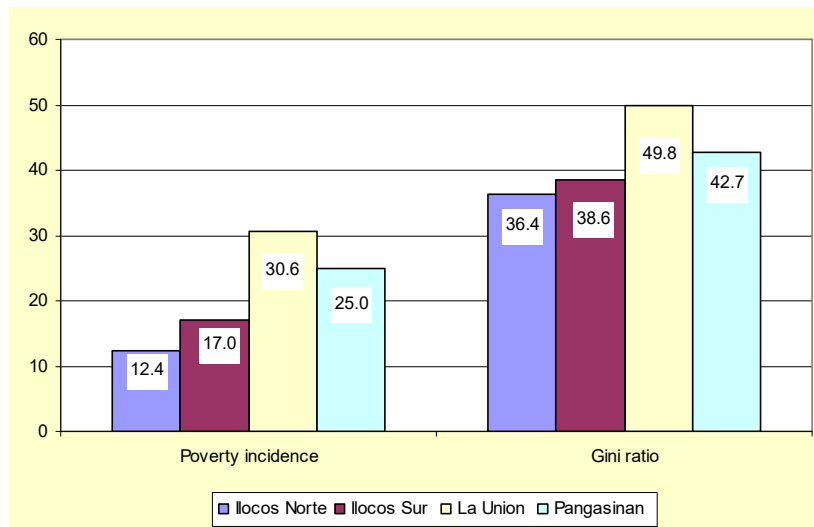
1.2 Poverty, human development

In 2009, population poverty incidence in La Union was estimated at 30.6 per cent, higher than the national average of 26.5 per cent. Poverty incidence in La Union has gone up from 22 per cent in 2003 and 26.4 per cent in 2006. La Union is the poorest province in the Ilocos Region, trailing Ilocos Norte (12.4 per cent), Ilocos Sur (17 per cent), and Pangasinan (25 per cent). Except for La Union, all the other Ilocos provinces experienced a decline in poverty from 2006 to 2009 (Figure 1).

La Union suffers from high income inequality (Figure 2). The Gini ratio of per capita income in La Union in 2009 was 49.8, much higher than Ilocos Norte (36.4), Ilocos Sur (38.6), and Pangasinan (42.7). Since 1997, La Union, in fact, has had the highest inequality among the four provinces of the Ilocos Region. Inequality in La Union increased from 2006 to 2009, similar to Pangasinan, and unlike Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur, which experienced inequality declines in the period.

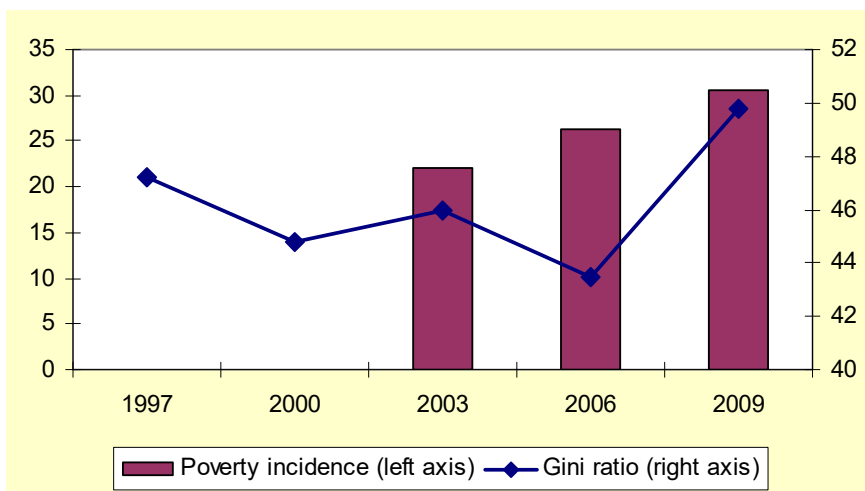
As opposed to income poverty, La Union scores very well in terms of the human development index (HDI). The HDI is a composite of three sub-indices: on life expectancy; on education; and on per capita income. Based on the computations of the Human Development Network (HDN), a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-affiliated non-government organization (NGO) based in the University of the Philippines, La Union had the 10th highest human development level among all provinces in the country in 2006 (11th if including Metro Manila)¹. La Union scored especially well in terms of life expectancy at birth (74.6 in 2006), at which it ranked first among all provinces. It was also above average in terms of education and mean income.

Figure 1. Poverty and inequality in Ilocos Provinces, 2009



Source of basic data: FIES 2009; Poverty incidence figures from NSCB.

Figure 2. Poverty and inequality in La Union



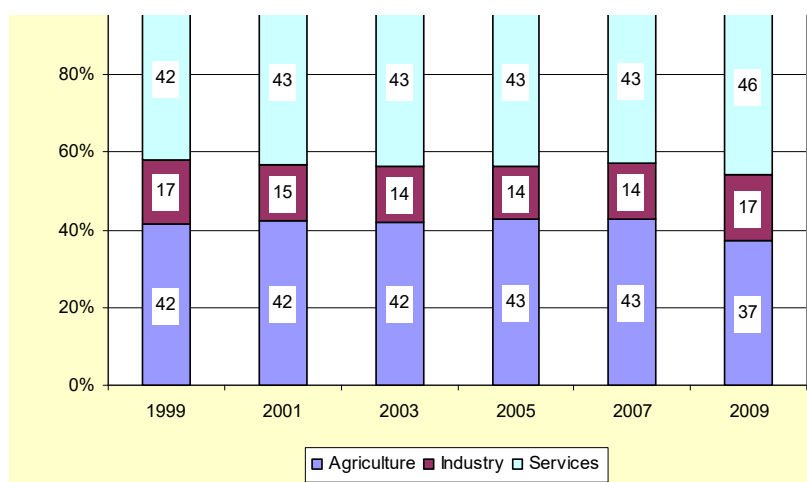
Source of basic data: FIES 2009; Poverty incidence figures from NSCB.

¹The nine provinces ahead of La Union were Benguet, Rizal, Cavite, Bataan, Laguna, Pampanga, Ilocos Norte, Batanes, and Nueva Vizcaya.

2. INDUSTRY, ESTABLISHMENTS, EMPLOYMENT

Official measures of economic output gross domestic product (GDP) are available only at the regional level². Assuming the economic output of La Union mirrors that of the region as a whole, Figure 3 shows the likely economic breakdown of the province. Economic output in the Ilocos region is dominated by the services and agriculture sector, which together have comprised 83-86 per cent of total output of the province in the past decade. Within services, trade and real estate, in particular those that are tourism-related are the main engines of the economy. The industrial sector has failed to take off in the region, accounting for no more than 17 per cent of total output in any given year in the past decade.

Figure 3. Contribution to regional GDP by sector, Ilocos Region



Source of basic data: NSCB.

Local employment in the province follows closely the pattern of regional output, with agriculture and industry providing employment to bulk of the labour force. In 2010, according to the LFS, 43 per cent of workers in the province were employed in agriculture, 42 per cent in services, and only 15 per cent in industry. The most common forms of employment were the growing of crops (28 per cent), retail trade (15 per cent), construction (10 per cent), farming animals (6 per cent), and fishing (6 per cent).

3. MIGRATION AND REMITTANCES FROM LA UNION

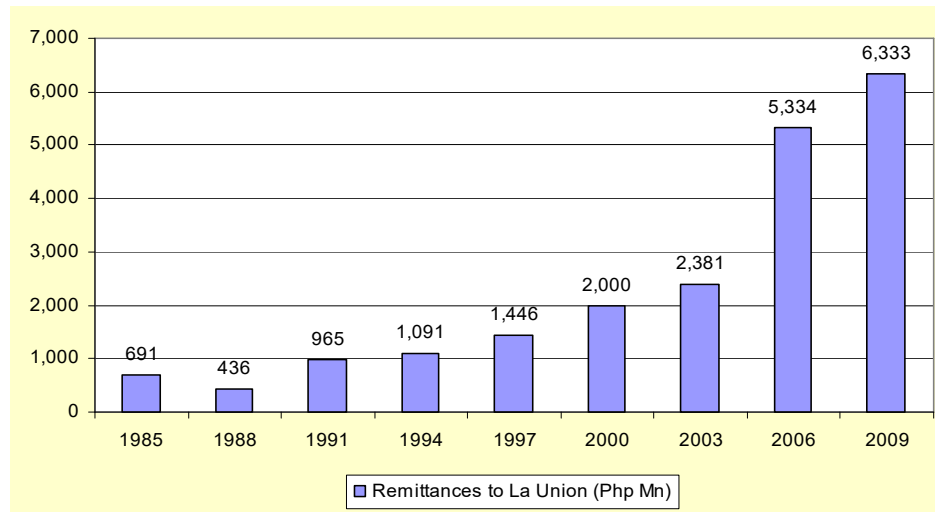
3.1 Migration

Migration and the remittances it brings is an important and still underappreciated part of La Union's economy. In 2009, based on the family income and expenditure survey (FIES), La Union households received about Php6.3 billion in remittances from overseas Filipinos, comprising about a fifth of total household income in the province (Figures 4 and 5). From 1985 to 2009, remittances to La Union have been growing at a robust 9.7 per cent per year. In

²Except for Guimaras and Palawan which made preliminary attempts at computing province-level GDP in collaboration with NSCB.

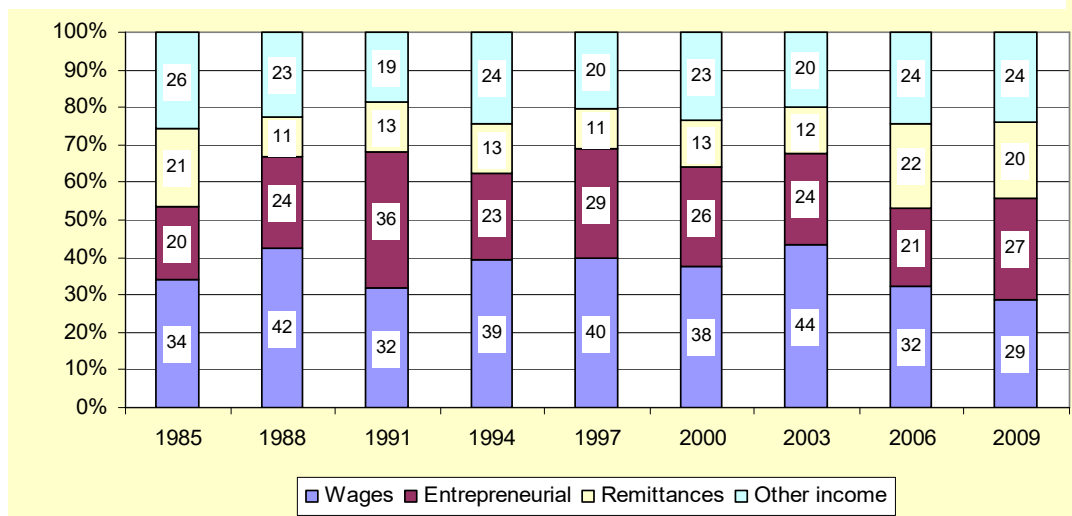
some years (1985 and 2006), remittances even exceeded the contribution of entrepreneurial income to total income.

Figure 4. Foreign remittances to La Union (Php Mn)



Source of basic data: FIES various years.

Figure 5. Contribution to total household income of various income sources, La Union



Source of basic data: FIES various years.

While there is recognition that remittances play an important role in the Philippine economy as a whole and for the Ilocos region, there is evidence they are even more important particularly for La Union. La Union has the highest percentage of families which depend on remittances for at least 50 per cent of their household income. There were 13.2 per cent such families in La Union in 2009, compared to 10.8 per cent for Ilocos region as a whole and 5.6 per cent for the entire country. La Union also has the second highest percentage of families

that depend on remittances for at least 25 per cent of their household income, following only Ilocos Norte (31.4 per cent).

Most of the household savings in the province also come from remittance-receiving households. In 2009, La Union households were estimated to have saved Php8.2 billion of their total income. Of these amount, Php5.9 billion or 72.3 per cent were from remittance-receiving households, and only Php2.3 billion or 27.7 per cent were from non-remittance receiving households (Table 2).

Table 2. Per cent of households dependent on foreign remittances

Region	Remittances as per cent of income	
	25 per cent	50 per cent
Ilocos	21.9	10.8
<i>Ilocos Norte</i>	31.4	11.4
<i>Ilocos Sur</i>	20.7	11.9
La Union	26.8	13.2
<i>Pangasinan</i>	18.8	9.8
Cagayan_Valley	13.2	4.9
Central_Luzon	16.9	9.0
CALABARZON	16.1	8.4
MIMAROPA	6.7	2.8
Bicol	7.5	3.2
Western_Visayas	11.9	4.8
Central_Visayas	10.0	5.1
Eastern_Visayas	7.8	3.5
Western_Visayas	6.1	2.2
Northern_Mindanao	7.5	4.4
Southern_Mindanao	5.4	2.3
Central_Mindanao	7.5	3.3
NCR	12.9	6.2
CAR	11.2	5.3
ARMM	4.9	1.5
CARAGA	6.3	3.4
Philippines	11.7	5.6

Source of basic data: FIES 2009.

The most detailed nationally-representative survey of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) is the Survey of Overseas Filipinos (SOF), which is conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO) every year coinciding with the October round of the LFS. The SOF collects information on overseas workers who have left the country within the past five years from the date of the survey, their number, their socio-economic characteristics, the amount of remittances in cash or in kind they send, and their mode of sending. The unit of analysis of the SOF is individual overseas worker. Remittances figures in the SOF pertain to the six-month period April to September and are available for each reported overseas worker in the household.

The SOF contains information on the province of origin of the overseas worker and thus, could be used for comparing the profile of La Union OFWs against other OFWs³. But because there are concerns about the representativeness of the SOF, especially as it pertains to

³By using the micro data set as opposed to the results published by the NSO which only have regional breakdown.

information about remittances, to avoid the potential misuse of data, the NSO has ceased releasing more recent micro data sets of the SOF after 2003⁴. The most recent micro data set made available by the NSO is for 2003.

Because it is the best available data to situate overseas migration from La Union within the broader regional and national context, in what follows we use the SOF 2003 to construct a profile of the OFWs, taking into account the data concerns noted above and the relative datedness of the data set. We just note that comparing the SOF 2003 results with results of more recent SOFs for the Ilocos region published in the NSO website (<http://census.gov.ph/data/sectordata/datasof.html>), it appears the profile of OFWs from the region have not changed by much over the period 2003-2010. Implicitly, we are assuming that this is the case also for La Union, in particular. As a validation of the results obtained using the SOF and other data sets, we also use the results of the survey done in 2010 by Kanlungan Centre Foundation, Inc. for its La Union Overseas Filipino Worker Mapping Project. The Kanlungan mapping project covered eight municipalities and 157 barangays within those municipalities. Municipalities included in the mapping were Agoo, Aringay, Bauang, Burgos, Naguilian, Pugo, San Gabriel, and Sudipen. Kanlungan counted 5,013 OFWs in these municipalities, though its definition of OFWs is broader and includes both those who are on-site and those who are returnees.

3.2 Profile of OFWs

Of the total OFWs from the country, 9 per cent are estimated to originate from the Ilocos region (Table 3). The Ilocos region has the fourth highest share among all regions, following only Metro Manila (18.2 per cent), Central Luzon (18.1 per cent), and CALABARZON (12.1 per cent). Of the total OFWs from Ilocos region, La Union accounts for 18.4 per cent, less than Pangasinan (51.5 per cent) and Ilocos Sur (18.9 per cent), though proportionately more than its share in the population of the region (15.9 per cent based on Census 2007) (Table 4).

OFWs from La Union are more likely than OFWs in general to be female, to be married, and to be the household head or the spouse of the household head (Table 5). Of the total OFWs from La Union, 63.3 per cent are female, compared to roughly half for the country as a whole and 59.9 per cent for the Ilocos region, according to the SOF. [This corresponds closely with the results of the Kanlungan mapping which found 62.5 per cent of OFWs in the eight municipalities being female].

⁴For example, see Ducanes, G. 2010. The Case of the Missing Remittances in the FIES. UPSE Discussion Paper No. 2010-04.

Table 3. Share in total OFWs

Region	% share
Ilocos	9.0
Cagayan_Valley	6.0
Central_Luzon	12.1
CALABARZON	18.1
MIMAROPA	1.2
Bicol	3.2
Western_Visayas	10.2
Central_Visayas	5.3
Eastern_Visayas	1.9
Western_Visayas	1.9
Northern_Mindanao	2.8
Southern_Mindanao	2.7
Central_Mindanao	3.0
NCR	18.2
CAR	2.1
ARMM	1.4
CARAGA	1.0
Total	100.0

Source of basic data: SOF 2003.

Table 4. Share in total OFWs in Ilocos Region

Province	% share
Ilocos Norte	11.3
Ilocos Sur	18.9
La Union	18.4
Pangasinan	51.5
Total	100.0

Source of basic data: SOF 2003.

About two-thirds of OFWs from La Union are in their twenties and thirties, roughly similar to the national and Ilocos averages. [The Kanlungan mapping found 59 per cent to be in their 20s and 30s]. About two-thirds also of OFWs in La Union are married, higher than for the country as a whole and for Ilocos region (about 62 per cent in each). [The Kanlungan mapping found the share of married OFWs at 69 per cent]. More than half of OFWs from La Union are either the household head or the spouse of the head, much higher than for the country as whole (44.6 per cent) and for Ilocos region (41.5 per cent). For the country as a whole and for Ilocos region, OFWs are more typically the children or children-in-law of the household head.

Table 5. Sex of OFWs

Group	Philippines	Ilocos Region	La Union
<i>Sex</i>			
Male	49.9	40.2	36.7
Female	50.1	59.8	63.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Age group</i>			
<20	2.0	1.4	0.0
20s	29.1	30.5	31.8
30s	36.5	36.7	35.7
40s	21.9	20.7	21.9
>=50s	10.4	10.7	10.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Marital status</i>			
Single	33.5	31.4	25.3
Married	61.5	61.3	67.3
Others	5.1	7.3	7.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Relationship to HH head</i>			
Head/spouse	44.6	41.5	51.8
Son/daughter-inc.-in-law	45.8	49.7	35.4
Others	9.6	8.9	12.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source of basic data: SOF 2003.

La Union OFWs are better-educated on average than the average worker from the province. Of the total OFWs from La Union, 23 per cent are college graduates, 35.3 per cent college undergraduates or vocational graduates, and 32.2 per cent are high school graduates (Table 6). [The Kanlungan mapping found almost the same share of college graduates among OFWs (22.7 per cent), but had a much higher share of OFWs who are vocational graduates and who have no formal schooling]. Even in 2010, the share of college graduates in La Union's adult population (21 years old and above) was only 15.2 per cent based on the LFS. Compared to OFWs in general, La Union OFWs are not as well-educated, especially in terms of the share of college graduates (35.9 per cent for all OFWs).

Table 6. Educational attainment of OFWs

Education level	Philippines	Ilocos Region	La Union
No grade	0.3	0.0	0.0
Elementary undergraduate	1.5	1.7	0.0
Elementary graduate	3.7	4.5	5.6
HS undergrad	5.3	6.6	3.8
HS graduate	24.5	37.2	32.2
Post-secondary	4.7	3.3	4.1
College undergrad	24.2	24.3	31.2
College grad	35.9	22.5	23.0
Not reported	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source of basic data: SOF 2003.

The most common areas of destination of OFWs from La Union are Asia and the Middle East (Table 7). Based on the SOF from 1997 to 2003, anywhere from 70 per cent to 90 per cent of OFWs from La Union go to other Asian countries and to the Middle East and North African (MENA) region. The most common countries of destination are Hong Kong (China) and Saudi Arabia. Based on the 2003 SOF, 57.8 per cent were in Asia and the Pacific, 31 per cent in MENA, 7.4 per cent in US and Canada, and 1.9 per cent in Europe. [The Kanlungan mapping was roughly consistent, finding the most popular destinations to be Saudi Arabia (18.6 per cent share), Hong Kong – China (16.3 per cent), Singapore (10.7 per cent), United Arab Emirates (7.3 per cent), Taiwan (5.8 per cent), Canada (5 per cent), and the United States (4.5 per cent)].

Table 7. Region of destination of OFWs

Region	Philippines	Ilocos Region	La Union
Asia and the Pacific	39.2	47.6	57.8
Middle East and North Africa	32.2	24.7	31.0
US and Canada	12.7	9.9	7.4
Europe	9.8	10.4	1.9
Latin America and Caribbean	1.0	0.0	0.0
Other region	0.4	0.7	0.0
Country not reported	4.6	6.8	2.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source of basic data: SOF 2003.

Majority of OFWs from La Union are employed in services, primarily as domestic helpers. Based on the SOF from 1997 to 2003, anywhere from 56 per cent to 72 per cent of La Union OFWs were in services work and 26 per cent to 31 per cent were in production and related work. In 2003, 61.2 per cent of La Union OFWs were in services work, 27.4 per cent were in production work, and only 5.8 per cent were in professional and technical occupations (Table 8). [Based on the Kanlungan mapping, 56.5 per cent of the OFWs found work as domestic workers, 7 per cent as labourers, 3.5 per cent as factory workers, 2.8 per cent as seafarers, and 2.7 per cent as caregivers]. Compared to OFWs for the country as a whole, a much smaller share of La Union OFWs are in professional and technical occupations and a much bigger share are in lower-level employment, consistent with the difference in educational profiles discussed earlier.

Table 8. OFWs by type of occupation

Occupation	Philippines	Ilocos Region	La Union
Professional and Technical	17.1	6.7	5.8
Administrative and Executive	2.2	0.7	0.0
Clerical and Related	2.9	0.3	1.8
Sales	1.2	1.9	0.0
Service	32.9	51.8	61.2
Agricultural and related	0.3	0.4	0.0
Production and Related	35.7	33.2	27.4
NEC	0.5	0.7	0.0
No work	7.2	4.2	3.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source of basic data: SOF 2003.

Among OFWs from La Union in 2003, nearly four-fifths were reported to have sent remittances, higher than the national average of only 69.1 per cent (Table 9). Nearly all (95 per cent) reported sending their remittances through formal means, either through banks or door-to-door services (Table 10). Only 2.6 per cent reported sending their remittances through friends or co-workers, and 2.4 per cent through still other modes.

Table 9. OFWs by whether they sent remittances or not

Status	Philippines	Ilocos Region	La Union
Sent	69.1	72.4	78.9
Not sent	27.5	21.8	21.1
No response	3.3	5.8	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source of basic data: SOF 2003.

Table 10. Remittance mode of OFWs

Mode	Philippines	Ilocos Region	La Union
Bank	68.9	58.2	65.2
Agency/local office	2.2	1.3	0.0
Friends/Co-workers	1.7	1.3	2.6
Door-to-door	22.1	31.3	29.8
Others	0.6	0.4	2.4
Not reported	4.6	7.4	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source of basic data: SOF 2003.

Using a different data set, the combined FIES 2006 and the January 2007 LFS, one may classify the La Union OFWs as to where they belong among the per capita income decile groups, or whether they belong to rich or poor families⁵. What comes out is that the large majority of OFWs from La Union belong to the richest deciles: nearly a quarter (24.5 per cent) are from the richest tenth of the population; 19.4 per cent are from the ninth decile; 45.3 per cent belong to the sixth to eighth deciles; and only 5.1 per cent belong to the bottom three deciles, what are normally considered the poor income groups (Table 11).

Table 11. OFWs by national per capita income decile, 2006

Income group	Philippines	Ilocos Region	La Union
First (Poorest)	0.6	0.7	1.5
Second	1.5	0.4	1.8
Third	2.2	2.7	1.8
Fourth	3.0	4.5	3.6
Fifth	5.2	7.0	2.0
Sixth	8.1	15.5	18.3
Seventh	9.8	11.4	12.8
Eighth	15.0	19.0	14.2
Ninth	22.9	20.5	19.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source of basic data: FIES 2006 and LFS Jan 2007.

⁵This could give information on who among the population (whether the rich or the poor) are able to migrate, but also, alternatively, whether migration does indeed lead to social mobility. Panel data is needed to distinguish between the two.

3.3 OWWA data on registered overseas workers by locality

Based on records of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), there were 29,122 OWWA-registered OFWs in La Union as of April 2011 (Table 12). Of this total, 26,037 (89.4 per cent) were land-based and 3,085 (10.6 per cent) sea-based. OWWA-registered OFWs do not include unregistered overseas workers and registered overseas workers who fail to renew their OWWA membership. The actual number of OFWs from La Union is thus expected to be higher. Consistent with the figures presented earlier, majority of OWWA-registered OFWs were women (58.2 per cent), but especially when looking at only at land-based OFWs (71.9 per cent women). As might be expected, sea-based OFWs were predominantly men (97.8 per cent).

Table 12. OWWA-registered OFWs by locality and sex

Locality	Land-based			Sea-based			Grand total	Per cent share
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total		
Agoo	674	959	1,633	248	7	255	1,888	6.5
Aringay	462	852	1,314	229	3	232	1,546	5.3
Bacnotan	509	913	1,422	251	7	258	1,680	5.8
Bagulin	61	191	252	16	1	17	269	0.9
Balaoan	473	1,100	1,573	100	2	102	1,675	5.8
Bangar	348	801	1,149	86	1	87	1,236	4.2
Bauang	1,120	1,692	2,812	354	7	361	3,173	10.9
Burgos	36	205	241	8	3	11	252	0.9
Caba	208	489	697	128	3	131	828	2.8
Luna	441	839	1,280	141	1	142	1,422	4.9
Naguilian	716	1,221	1,937	220	5	225	2,162	7.4
Pugo	141	366	507	29	1	30	537	1.8
Rosario	506	1,037	1,543	126	3	129	1,672	5.7
San Fernando City	1,916	2,800	4,716	550	9	559	5,275	18.1
San Gabriel	112	406	518	47	0	47	565	1.9
San Juan	472	851	1,323	151	2	153	1,476	5.1
Santol	65	252	317	6	1	7	324	1.1
Santo Tomas	351	588	939	109	1	110	1,049	3.6
Sudipen	190	542	732	51	0	51	783	2.7
Tubao	256	518	774	111	2	113	887	3.0
(Not stated)	109	249	358	56	9	65	423	1.5
Total	9,166	16,871	26,037	3,017	68	3,085	29,122	100.0

Source: OWWA.

The localities that were the top sources of OWWA-registered OFWs were San Fernando City (18.1 per cent of total), Bauang (10.9 per cent), Naguilian (7.4 per cent), Agoo (6.5 per cent), Bacnotan (5.8 per cent), and Balaoan (5.8 per cent), closely mirroring their share in the population. In all municipalities, women OFWs outnumbered men, but especially in Burgos, Santol, San Gabriel, and Batulin, which all had women comprising more than 70 per cent of OWWA-registered OFWs. In contrast, Agoo almost had an equal share of male and female OWWA-registered OFWs. The localities which had a disproportionately large share of OWWA-registered OFWs relative to their population share were Sudipen (ratio of OFW-share to population share of 1.22), Naguilian (1.18), San Fernando City (1.14), Balaoan (1.13), and San Juan (1.11).

3.4 Problems in recruitment and on-site

There is no official estimate of the number of irregular overseas workers who have come from La Union. According to the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), about 14.6 per cent of total OFWs (excluding permanent migrants) were in an irregular status as of 2009. If one simply assumes that the same percentage applies to La Union, and assuming in addition that the list of OWWA-registered OFWs in La Union is a comprehensive list of regular OFWs from the province, then the estimated irregular workers from the province would be about 5,000. One can easily argue, however, that this estimate is likely on the high side as irregular migration is much less common in the typical destination areas of La Union overseas workers, such as Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong (China), and Taiwan⁶.

The Kanlungan mapping provides other indicative estimates of the extent of irregular migration from Ilocos Norte. Of the little-more-than 5,000 current or former OFWs Kanlungan covered in its survey, at least 7 per cent left on a tourist visa, and a little more than a per cent left on either a student visa or some unspecified visa. Though there are mechanisms in some countries through which a tourist visa (and a student visa) can be converted it time into a regular working visa, this is uncommon and the likelihood is that those who left on a tourist visa eventually became irregular workers and may even have been trafficked. Irregular workers are more likely to encounter problems because they are usually accorded limited rights in the destination countries, especially in the workplace, and typically have little or no recourse to legal remedies in cases where they suffer wrongdoing.

Based on the Kanlungan mapping as well, the most common problems encountered overseas by OFWs from La Union are maltreatment (experienced by 4.4 per cent), illegal termination (4.1 per cent), contract violation (2.3 per cent), health-related problems (2 per cent), and non-payment (0.9 per cent). Roughly two-thirds of the OFWs reported not having encountered any problems⁷. But there were also nine respondents who reported having experienced sexual abuse while working overseas.

4. MIGRATION-RELATED INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS IN LA UNION

4.1 Government service providers

a) Local government unit (LGU)

The provincial government of La Union and some of its municipal LGU units are widely recognized as among the most dynamic in the region (and the country) and have been the recipients of numerous governance awards⁸. The forward-looking nature of the province's leaders is manifest in the province having a Provincial Development and Physical Framework Plan for CY 2008-2018 (PDPFP 2008-2018) and a Provincial Executive-Legislative Agenda for 2011-2013 (PELA 2011-2013) that were developed through a participatory process involving not only different government units and agencies but also the private sector.

⁶Although Singapore, another popular destination area for overseas workers from La Union has a high share of Filipino irregular overseas workers (46.5 per cent) as estimated by CFO.

⁷Kanlungan was careful to note that these OFWs may simply be keeping the problems they encountered to themselves, possibly out of "shame".

⁸For instance, in March 2011, the Regional Development Council awarded La Union the prize of Cleanest, Greenest, and Safest Province in Region 1.

Though extensive and forward-looking in many areas, however, both the PDPFP 2008-2018 and the PELA 2011-2013 are almost totally silent on the topic of overseas migration and remittances, despite their importance for La Union. In the PDPFP, for instance, the only mention of overseas employment was as part of a general strategy to address unemployment and limited job openings in the local economy. Specifically, the PDPFP proposes to provide referral and placement services for local and overseas as well as private and civil service employment through Jobs Fair and Employment Facilitation Programmes. There are no specifics as to how this is to be achieved. The only mention of migrants in the document is the concern about the inflow of migrants from other provinces into La Union. A quick review of the PELA indicates no mention at all of overseas migration and remittances despite the crucial role they potentially could play in efforts to reduce poverty and increase investments.

This is not to say, however, that the provincial government has no programme or initiative in support of overseas workers and their families. The Provincial Board has passed a resolution seeking to set up a migrants' desk and appoint a migrants' officer in all municipalities in the province⁹. There is only very partial success towards this end so far, however. [We discuss the problems encountered in the implementation of this in the section on DOLE and the possible solutions later]. The provincial government also lends its support both directly and indirectly through the work done in the Anti-Illegal Recruitment and Trafficking Council (AIRTC) by line agencies like the provincial arms of Philippine National Police (PNP), the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Provincial Social Welfare Department Office (PSWDO), and other agencies and through its participation in the La Union Inter-Agency Council for Migrants Concern (LUIMCO), a committee composed of parish, government, NGO, civic society, and private groups catering to the needs of overseas workers in La Union. In addition, the provincial office provides support to Bannuar ti La Union (more on this group and the service they provide later in the section on NGOs), an association of migrant returnees and families of migrants still working overseas, in the form of free office space and some money for micro-lending¹⁰.

It is thus not the case that the local government has neglected the concerns of OFWs and their families, but rather that the explicit programmes of government are not commensurate with their importance as a share of the population of the province and their actual and potential contribution to the La Union economy.

b) Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE)

DOLE mainly serves OFWs through its attached agencies Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and OWWA (more on this below). Operationally, DOLE is more directly involved in OFW concerns in La Union through the Public Employment Service Offices (PESO), which are under its technical supervision, though they are maintained mainly by LGUs. The PESO is a non-fee charging multi-employment service facility established pursuant to Republic Act No. 8759 (PESO Act of 1999), which aims to provide a venue where people could explore various employment options simultaneously and at the same time serves as a referral and information center for the various services and programmes of DOLE and other government agencies. At the moment, in the La Union provincial office (and in other provinces as well), the PESO also serves as the OFW help desk or migrant desk. Republic Act 10022 mandates the creation of a migrant desk in all LGUs to provide

⁹Resolution No. 263-2010 authored by Board Member Ruperto Rillera.

¹⁰The office space includes an electric fan and the amount of money provided was Php50,000.

“information to their constituents on all the processes and aspects of overseas employment”, including information on overseas job orders and licensed recruitment agencies in good standing (obtained from the POEA). In some municipalities within the province, the same practice is observed of assigning the migrant desk with the PESO; but in others, there are still no migrant desks.

In a locality where the volume of overseas migration is high and where the desire to migrate is strong, such as La Union, a migrant desk obviously serves an important purpose. To potential migrants, it has the potential to substantially reduce the search and information costs of finding overseas work and should reduce the incidence of illegal recruitment and trafficking (by guiding applicants to genuine jobs and to legitimate recruiters). To returnees, it provides an avenue where to find alternative employment whether domestic or overseas that fit their skills. An important issue that needs to be examined is whether there should be a dedicated migrant desk rather than simply assigning the tasks envisioned for a migrant desk officer to an existing PESO worker who may already be too busy with other work and who may not have the expertise on migration or the necessary network needed to perform the job effectively and efficiently. Certainly, given the migration and remittance profile of La Union discussed in Section 3, if there are localities that need to have dedicated migrant desks, La Union and its municipalities are among them.

c) Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA)

The POEA has one of its three regional offices in the country located in San Fernando, La Union¹¹. The POEA regional office conducts pre-employment seminars to help departing workers avoid illegal recruiters and traffickers, facilitates paper processing by allowing OFWs who are returning to their overseas jobs to have their relevant papers verified and processed in La Union instead of having to go to the POEA main office in Manila, and putatively attends to grievances of workers who are victims of illegal recruitment and trafficking.

Having a POEA office in the province is without doubt helpful to potential migrants and vacationing workers by reducing the transportation and time costs of processing documents. Some problem areas still need to be addressed by POEA, however. In the area of medical examination, for example, the POEA should be clearer about the acceptability to foreign employers of the list of the Department of Health (DOH)-accredited hospitals and clinics it provides to applicants. In the current list of accredited hospitals, two are based in La Union, which are Lorma Medical Center and La Union Medical Diagnostic Center, Inc. It turns out, however, that some destination countries, particularly those in the Middle East (where many of the La Union OFWs go), do not accept the medical certification given by many of these DOH-accredited medical centers including those in La Union. Gulf countries are reported to accept only medical certification from medical centers that are members of the Gulf Cooperation Countries-Approved Medical Centres Association (Gamca), which are mainly based in Makati City. This has resulted in some applicants having to pay for two medical examinations, not to mention additional transportation and time costs. The POEA should work with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to try and convince receiving countries to accept medical certification from all the DOH-accredited medical centers. If not, it should be clear in informing potential OFWs where they should get their medical certificates depending on their destination country.

¹¹The other regional offices are in Cebu City and Davao City. The POEA also has 10 regional extension and satellite offices.

d) Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA)

The regional office of OWWA for the Ilocos region is also in San Fernando, La Union. Based on the records of OWWA, it had 158,733 members in the Ilocos region as of April 2011, of which 17,956 were from Ilocos Norte, 29,397 from Ilocos Sur, 29,123 from La Union, and 82,257 from Pangasinan. On peak season, according to OWWA La Union, the office serves from 50 to 100 clients per day. OWWA is tasked with promoting the welfare and wellbeing of OFW members and their dependents, including the reintegration of OFW returnees. Membership to OWWA is secured by paying a US\$25 contribution fee that is effective until the expiration of the contract for those whose contracts were processed in the POEA. For those who enrolled in OWWA voluntarily in their job site, the membership is effective for two years but can be renewed by making another contribution. There is a standard package of services offered by OWWA: healthcare, disability, and death benefits; education and training programmes for members and their dependents; repatriation in cases of emergency or distress; and a reintegration programme¹². OWWA's reintegration programme has economic and psycho-social components. The economic component includes skills training, credit facilitation, lending, and preparation for livelihood projects or community-based income generating project. The psycho-social component includes the organizing of OFW family circles and the provision of counseling services. According to the OWWA La Union office, there were 76 family circles organized with the help of OWWA in Region 1.

e) Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)

DTI has both a regional office (serving Region 1) and a provincial office in San Fernando, La Union. The agency provides no services specifically targeted to OFWs or their families. But according to the DTI regional office, it offers its regular programmes to OFWs usually upon the request of OWWA, in particular training on entrepreneurship and enterprise development, business plan preparation, business counseling, marketing assistance, and others. To facilitate the setting up of businesses, the DTI together with other agencies have set up a one-stop shop for business registration where the potential investor can swiftly obtain a business name, Social Security System (SSS) registration, tax registration, and other requirements.

The take up of DTI training by OFWs is quite poor, however. In the past year, according to DTI, only about 960 OFWs (or their families) availed of training on entrepreneurship in the regional office, which is less than 1 per cent of the number of OWWA-registered OFWs in the region. No information is collected on how many actually went into business and how many failed or succeeded if they did go into business.

It is unfortunate that the huge amount of remittances that go into the province is underutilized for investments that could generate more jobs. Some attribute this to the cultural values of Ilocanos – that Ilocanos simply prefer to save money in banks rather than in other possibly more productive activities. On the other hand, it is probably true that though there are differences in the degree of entrepreneurship across places, there are entrepreneurs everywhere. In fact, there are notable small success stories of La Union entrepreneurs (such as in handicrafts and food production – empanada, for example).

¹²See <http://www.owwa.gov.ph/wcmqs/faq/#fundsource> for more detailed descriptions of all the programmes.

A new model for utilizing remittances needs to be explored in the province. Perhaps what is needed is a move away from the idea that the OFWs themselves or their families also have to be the entrepreneurs, and a move towards the idea of OFWs mobilizing their savings to provide funding to entrepreneurs through loans or co-investments, such as is done by venture capitalists. This is not to preclude the possibility that some OFWs themselves could be successful entrepreneurs. At present, there is a huge gap in the lending market that needs to be filled. On one end are the banks which provide loans at relatively low interest but to which access is difficult because of requirements (collateral, tax declarations, and so on) and on the other end are lenders who provide easier access but charge exorbitant interests (so-called 5-6 loans). Such a set up discourages entrepreneurship. Needless to say, even for such undertaking, the OFWs and their families will still require some training on financial literacy and risk assessment. There are some success stories already, however, with this model, such as in the case of Bannuar ti La Union (to be discussed later).

Another model that can be pursued is for the local government unit to access OFW savings by issuing LGU bonds targeted to them for infrastructure and other urgent needs. This potentially accomplishes two things: it hastens the completion of much-needed LGU projects while at the same time increasing the earnings of OFWs from their savings. Because of the taxing power of government, this is a low-risk investment for OFWs that should earn them more in interest compared to if they simply place their money in an ordinary bank savings account, which is the typical practice.

f) Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)

The DSWD serves as co-chair of the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT), and as such is one of the lead agencies in the government's anti-trafficking drive¹³. Among the services DSWD offers a recovery and reintegration programme for trafficked persons, aimed at providing for the psychosocial, social, economic, and legal needs of trafficked victims. The DSWD also runs centers that provide temporary shelters to deportees, repatriated migrants and other displaced persons while they are being prepared for eventual return to their places of origin.

In La Union, there is still a need to work out a better way to refer trafficking cases to DSWD. It is reported by NGOs that not all trafficking victims seek the assistance of DSWD. The main reason given is that some of the trafficking victims wish to maintain their privacy, perhaps out of shame, and this is more difficult if they seek the help of government. These victims approach NGOs (such as Kanlungan and Bannuar ti La Union) instead who have established reputations helping trafficking victims and have a more extensive network on the ground. This is unfortunate because DSWD has access to more resources to help trafficking victims redress their grievances and help them get back on their feet. A better mechanism must be put in place to allow such victims to access DSWD assistance, and for DSWD to ensure them that their privacy will be respected.

¹³Other members of IACAT are the Department of Justice (DOJ), which serves as chair, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), DOLE, POEA, Philippine National Police (PNP), Bureau of Immigration, Philippine Commission on Women, and NGO representatives.

4.2 Non-government service providers

a) Kanlungan Centre Foundation, Inc. (Kanlungan)

Kanlungan is a non-government, non-profit organization providing services to actual and potential OFWs and their families, on problems they encounter during recruitment, in the workplace, and upon return, including illegal recruitment, contract violations, and trafficking. According to its website, the Kanlungan office in San Fernando, La Union receives more than 20 cases of distressed migrants and their families every day. Kanlungan established its Community Extension Services Programme in San Fernando, La Union in 1996, which sought to organize migrant returnees and their families and to get the LGUs to recognize them as a distinct sector. To this end, Kanlungan was instrumental in forming Bannuar ti La Union (more on this group later).

Kanlungan also undertook local economic development projects in La Union, with the aim of boosting the local economy and generating local employment. Among the activities it undertook was the training of OFW families on the proper utilization of remittances and on entrepreneurship. Kanlungan, with the help of Bannuar, undertook the extensive La Union OFW Mapping Project referred to in the previous section. Kanlungan appears to be winding down its operations in La Union, however.

b) Bannuar ti La Union (Bannuar)

Bannuar is an organization of migrant returnees and the families of current OFWs whose chief aims are to promote the rights and entitlements of OFWs, prevent illegal recruitment and trafficking, and train returnees and their families on entrepreneurship and financial management skills. Bannuar has a province-wide membership of about 3,000. As already mentioned, Bannuar is provided an office by the provincial government of La Union, and in exchange, Bannuar submits an annual accomplishment report.

In the municipality of Naguilian alone, considered the most successful of Bannuar's chapters, Bannuar has about 1,600 members. Among the services offered by Bannuar Naguilian chapter is the manning of a migrant's desk in the municipal office to receive returnees or families of OFWs, hear their concerns, and then refer them to the proper agencies for assistance. The office is provided by the municipal government. Bannuar also engages in anti-illegal recruitment and anti-human trafficking advocacy in barangays. Bannuar has engaged in various local economic development projects, of which the most successful to date is the microfinance lending project called Urnong Mo Tulong Mo of Bannuar Naguilian. This micro-lending project was started in 2002 and now has a capitalization of Php2.2 million, from an initial capitalization of only Php13,000 and the infusion of a loan of Php300,000 from the local government, and a grant of Php300,000 from the Foundation for a Sustainable Society, Inc. Bannuar's and Bannuar members' experiences in livelihood projects have been mixed and includes the establishment of grocery (successful and started with soft loan from OWWA), production of vegetable noodles (on-going and started with training by DTI), tilapia and prawn raising (unsuccessful), native chicken raising (unsuccessful), hog-raising (unsuccessful), bag-making from Zesto packs (stopped), production of dishwashing detergent, and the production of paper.

According to Bannuar officers, among its projects this year and next are capacity building for municipal officers and including migrants desk officer, the formation of migrants' desk at the barangay level, the study and development of agri-based enterprises, and training of Bannuar members on paralegal, organizing, and case handling.

Though the membership of Bannuar is growing, it is still relatively small relative to the population of OFWs and returnees in La Union. For instance, as mentioned earlier, there were 29,122 current members of OWWA from La Union. Including returnees and families of migrants, the current membership of Bannuar is probably not even 10 per cent of potential members. There is still room to expand membership, especially to current OFWs and their families.

c) Other NGOs and organizations

In addition to Kanlungan and Bannuar, LUIMCO is led by the Diocesan Desk for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People of San Fernando, and similar to Bannuar, also aims to provide training for municipal officers providing service to OFWs and their families. Another small organization catering to OFWs, returnees, and their families is Taberna Overseas Worker Association (TAO) which has about 33 members and is based in Barangay Taberna in the municipality of Bauang¹⁴. TAO aims to help OFWs and returnees manage their resources and provide them livelihood projects, in addition to being a vehicle for information dissemination for OWWA and POEA policies.

5. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overseas migration plays an important role in La Union's social and economic fabric, a fact not yet given full recognition. One of every 16 La Union adults is working overseas. One of every eight college graduates from La Union is employed abroad. Remittances comprise 20 per cent of total household income in the province and most of the savings in the province come from remittance-receiving households. La Union is the province that has the highest percentage of families dependent on remittances. Such importance merits explicit consideration of OFWs in the province's and its municipalities' development plans.

OFWs from La Union are typically young (two-thirds in their 20s and 30s), female (63 per cent), employed in the services sector mainly as domestic helper, and based mostly in the Middle East and other Asian countries. Such a profile means overseas workers from La Union are more vulnerable than the average to possible exploitation and abuse. Thus, in addition to including them explicitly in its development plans, La Union's LGUs should provide better mechanisms for their protection before they leave and their reintegration upon their return.

The huge amount of remittances that go into the province is underutilized for investments that could generate more jobs. It mainly goes into low-earning savings accounts in banks. Though there are some success stories of OFW returnees themselves becoming successful entrepreneurs, they are few and far between. Perhaps new models for utilizing remittances need to be explored in the province.

¹⁴See Villarama, N. (undated) The role of transnational communities in local development. Powerpoint presentation.

One possibility is to mobilize OFW savings to provide funding to entrepreneurs (not necessarily OFWs) through loans or co-investments, such as is done by venture capitalists. This way OFW money can fill the gap between banks on one end, which provide loans at relatively low interest but to which access is difficult because of requirements (collateral, tax declarations, and so on), and usurers on the other end, who provide easier access but charge exorbitant interests (so-called 5-6 loans). For such undertaking, the OFWs and their families will still require some training on financial literacy and risk assessment.

Another model that can be pursued is for the LGU to access OFW savings by issuing LGU bonds targeted to OFWs for use in infrastructure and other urgent needs of the LGU. This potentially accomplishes two things: it hastens the completion of much-needed LGU projects while at the same time increasing the earnings of OFWs from their savings. Because of the taxing power of government, this should be a low-risk investment for OFWs. The national government already does this through the issuance of OFW bonds. The LGUs should be able to benefit the same way.

Though mechanisms for the protection of OFWs exist, and many government agencies provide some services to OFWs and their families, there is room for improvement. Setting up the migrants desk is a must for all LGUs in La Union, where the volume of overseas migration is high and where the desire to migrate is strong. This has the potential to substantially reduce the search and information costs of finding overseas work and should reduce the incidence of illegal recruitment and trafficking. The migrant desk should be a dedicated desk rather than simply an add on to another plantilla position. A good model to follow may be the one in Naguilian, where the person assigned to the migrant desk is a member of an NGO (Bannuar in this case) that has a track record of attending to migrant concerns.

The provision of services by specific government line agencies also can be improved some more. For instance, the POEA should be clearer as to which medical centers applicants should go to for their medical clearance. Though there is a list of DOH-accredited medical centers for OFWs, apparently this is not accepted by all destination countries. To avoid wasteful medical exam repetitions, the POEA should inform applicants beforehand, where they should go, or better yet work towards ensuring that DOH-accredited hospitals become acceptable to all destination countries.

Though OWWA and DTI provide livelihood training for OFWs, there is no record of how many actually go into business, and of those, how many in fact succeed. There is a need to monitor such information, as a means to obtain information as to how the training can be improved, and also to guide other OFWs. It appears only a small number of OWWA members avail of livelihood and other training. Efforts to encourage members to avail of such training should be intensified, especially training on financial management.

DSWD is tasked with helping trafficking victims, but it is reported that many would rather go to NGOs, because of some concerns by victims, like the need for privacy. DSWD should make the necessary adjustments, such as providing the necessary training for its officers in charge of trafficking concerns, and forging better links with NGOs so that they can work together better in helping victims of trafficking. NGOs have the advantage of having a wider network and a significant presence in many barangays. The DSWD has access to resources and links with other government offices.

There is a strong presence of NGOs in La Union that are concerned with overseas migration, return, and trafficking issues. But there is still wide scope for its expansion. For instance, Bannuar despite its presence in many barangays, probably captures less than 10 per cent of potential members. Most of those that are not yet fully captured are current OFWs and their families, who are in a good position to contribute by providing financial resources to La Union, but also by helping new and potential OFWs – by informing their local network about job openings, for instance, and by helping those coming to the countries where they are based in adjusting to the working and living conditions there.

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