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Socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Overseas Filipino  
Workers and their left-behind families: a scoping review

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Title: Protocol for a scoping review of the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic to Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs)

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## I. Background

Labour export has been a state policy of the Philippines since the 1970s in response to domestic unemployment. This represented the third wave of migration in the country. Filipino who worked overseas were called overseas “contract” workers (OCWs) because they possessed temporary contracts. The term overseas “Filipino” workers (OFWs) was coined under the Ramos Administration to recognize the sacrifices of Filipinos overseas (Cosalan, 2010). In most cases, the term OFWs is used generally and synonymously with Filipino migrant workers with or without contracts. OFWs are either land-based or sea-based. OFWs are differentiated from Filipino emigrants who leave the Philippines for family reunification, marriage migration and long-term skills-based migration or permanent visa holders (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 2018). An increasing feminization of labour migration became prominent in the 1990s. Women OFWs are found in the domestic and care sector, entertainment, “commercial sex work”, garments, and electronics (Ofreneo and Samonte, 2005).

In the Philippines, OFWs are considered modern-day heroes because of the foreign earnings they bring home. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were 2.18 million OFWs. 2.11 million are OCWs and 69,000 have no visa or working permit according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2022a). From April to September 2020, an 18.6% drop was noted during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic. This translated to 405,000 unemployed OFWs.

As of October 22, 2022, the Philippines’ Department of Health reported a total of 3,997,941 COVID cases; 21,325 active cases; 3,912,733 recovered; and 63,883 deaths (DOH, 2022). Meanwhile, the report of the Philippines’ Department of Foreign Affairs revealed that as of February 28, 2022, in relation to COVID-19 among Filipinos abroad, there are 25,116 confirmed cases; 8,808 undergoing treatment; 14,851 recovered; and 1,462 deaths (DFA, 2022).

One of the notable effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on OFWs is the massive unemployment in the host countries. OFWs in the health and domestic sector suffered discrimination, job loss, salary loss or reduction, and homelessness despite being front liners. As a result of this displacement, the Philippine government funded the repatriation of OFWs. A total of 809,374 OFWs were transported back into the country

and into their respective regions as of November 20, 2021 (Department of Labor and Employment, 2021). Without a comprehensive program for the repatriated OFWs, it contributed to the already high unemployment and poverty in the country. In 2019, the unemployment rate was 5.2% (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019). Several months into the pandemic, the unemployment rate was recorded at 8.7 % in October 2020. (Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), 2021). The unemployment rate decreased to 8.1% in August 2021 and 5.3% in August 2022 (PSA, 2022b). However, the job quality worsened as underemployment remained at 14.7% in August 2021 and August 2022 and peaked at 15.8% in March 2022. The think tank IBON Foundation raised the concern that the jobs created in 2022 were mostly part-time at 54.7% (Dela Pena, 2022).

To date, there are no scoping reviews conducted of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the OFWs. The planned scoping review will be the first in this area. Academic databases, research reports, and policy papers by established organisations will be searched for the scoping review.

## II. Scoping Review Objectives

The objectives of the scoping review are

- a. To map out the current literature on the socio-economic effects (health, work conditions, remittances, regularisation, living conditions, migration journey) of the COVID-19 pandemic on OFWs.
- b. To identify the coping mechanisms of OFWs and other stakeholders (their families, host and origin country, support groups/ organisations) to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## III. Scoping Review Questions

The scoping review will answer the following research questions:

- a. What are the socio-economic effects (health, work conditions, remittances, regularisation, living conditions, migration journey) of the COVID-19 pandemic on OFWs that have stayed or were repatriated?
- b. What are the coping mechanisms of OFWs and other stakeholders (their families, host and origin country, support groups/ organisations) to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- c. What are the research gaps?

## IV. Inclusion Criteria

The scoping review will utilise the framework developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), Levac *et al* (2010), and Peters *et al* (2015). Arksey and O'Malley's framework has five stages: identifying the research question, identifying relevant studies, study selection,

charting the data, and collating, summarising and reporting the results. It includes inclusion and exclusion criteria following the population, concept, and context. Enhancement by Levac et al to the methodology was partially utilised. The iterative team and the use of consultation as a required component of scoping study methodology were not included because of limited resources. This protocol is based on the works of Peters *et al* (2015).

	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OFWs aged 18 years old and above (documented and undocumented)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other nationals/ mixed</li> </ul>
Concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effects, responses, and coping mechanisms to the COVID -19 pandemic (the central theme of paper)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COVID-19 pandemic is not central in the research question/s of the paper</li> </ul>
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family, workplace, community organisations/groups, host countries, sending country (Philippines)</li> </ul>	
Study Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods</li> <li>• Peer-reviewed articles, research reports by organisations, policy papers</li> <li>• Open-Access</li> <li>• Written in Filipino or English</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theses, dissertations</li> <li>• Conference proceedings, reviews, blogs, working papers, editorial</li> <li>• Restricted access</li> <li>• Written in a language other than Filipino or English</li> </ul>

## V. Search Strategy

Online databases provided by the University of Geneva will be searched. These are the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS), Web of Science: Social Sciences Citation Index, Cairn, Persee, and JSTOR. Other online databases with open

access will be included - ProQuest, EBSCO, SAGE, PsycINFO, Sciencedirect, PubMed). Keywords to be used are OFWs, OCWs, Filipino migrant workers, COVID-19 pandemic, and *pandemya*. Titles and Abstracts deemed relevant will be reviewed and imported into Zotero App. The same keywords will be used with Google Scholar to exhaust all possible sources. Websites of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Labour Organization, and other relevant organizations will be searched. The references section of primary sources will also be screened.

Search dates: October 22 - November 30, 2022. Articles/reports published from 2020 onwards.

The reviewer will conduct abstract screening, full-text screening, data extraction, and data presentation.

#### VI. Extraction of the Results/ Charting the Data

The researcher will chart the data using the following variables: general information (title, author/s, year, country, and study design), the socio-economic effects of COVID-19 to OFWs, the responses and coping mechanisms of different stakeholders, gaps/recommendations for further research. The data will be entered into the MS Excel Application.

#### VII. Presentation of Data

The PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) will be used (Tricco *et al*, 2018).

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