

MIGRANT MINISTRY
BY CATHOLIC
SISTERS IN ASIA
REPORT

FREE TO CHOOSE
WHETHER
TO MIGRATE
OR TO STAY

BEST PRACTICES 2023

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data compiled by:
Scalabrini Migration Center

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INTRODUCTION

Home to about 60 percent of the world's population, Asia has been unsettled by the ceaseless movement of people within and across countries, to the region and from the region. Underlying this massive human migration and mobility is the proverbial search for a better life. What started out as a journey of hope, however, may have unexpected twists which can render migrants vulnerable to danger, abuse and exploitation before they leave, during the journey, upon arriving in a foreign land, and in some cases, during or upon returning home.

Catholic-inspired organizations have been a source of support to people on the move in Asia. This report casts light on the programs and services aimed at supporting migrants which are spearheaded or implemented by women religious in Asia. The report hopes to uncover elements of what constitutes a good practice—notably, innovation, collaboration and partnership, relationship with the beneficiaries, sustainability, and replicability—which may be helpful in starting or sustaining programs and services in other contexts. The focus on the work of the Sisters also hopes to show the many ways in which Sisters and women religious congregations have responded to the mission with migrants.

This collection of good practices consists of twenty-three stories of how Sisters from different congregations have accompanied migrants, assuring them that their voices are heard, that they matter, and that God is on the journey with them. The stories are not exhaustive nor representative of the totality of programs and services in Asia. First of all, Asia in this report is limited to selected countries in the sub-regions of East, South and Southeast Asia. Due to time and resource constraints, it was not possible to cover many countries and areas of all sub-regions. Hopefully, this report will serve as a living document that will continue to discover more stories of Sisters building the Kingdom of God together with migrants.

The process of identifying and selecting the stories was quite challenging. The research team was provided by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (DSSUI) with a list of congregations

which implement migration-related programs and services. A shortlist of programs was drawn up and the team reached out to the concerned congregations inviting them to either fill out a form or to schedule an interview to know more about their programs. In addition, the research team sought the help of some bishops, priests, and an association of women religious congregations. An invitation to religious congregations was also announced on Radio Veritas Asia. The endorsement of key people and the referrals of partners were crucial in obtaining the participation of women religious congregations. Most of the stories are based on interviews which were conducted mostly online; in other cases, some congregations responded to the questionnaire prepared by the team; and one story was written based on available information. A draft was prepared and this was sent to the key informants for their review and approval.

The stories about the involvement of Sisters in the ministry with migrants in Asia are organized into three sections according to where the programs are carried out: Asia-wide, countries of origin, and countries of destination. Several programs are aimed at internal migrants.

While the stories reflect specific conditions, challenges, opportunities and contexts, some general observations can be noted. Except for the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles-Scalabrinians, whose charism is the care of migrants and refugees, the rest of the congregations have other charisms that extended their mission to migrants. The Sisters' response to needs and concerns of migrants comes in different forms—for many, it is a case of Sisters being assigned to a center or apostolate that serves migrants; for some, the ministry with migrants is a congregational project; for a few, it is taking on a leadership role in a Catholic organization. Common to all stories is the partnership the Sisters have forged with a variety of organizations in the implementation of programs and services and the recognition of beneficiaries as partners on the road to their empowerment.

ASIA-WIDE INTERVENTION

COORDINATED ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING PROGRAM IN ASIA

Congregation: Intercongregational

Location: Asia

Further Info: <https://talithakumasia.info/>

Talitha Kum Asia is part of the global Talitha Kum, an inter-congregational network of women religious dedicated to combat human trafficking and to support victims, survivors and people at risk. The beginnings of the global network started in the late 1990s because of the need to organize a coordinated, comprehensive and multi-level response to human trafficking. The International Network of Consecrated Life Against Human Trafficking was established in 2009 with the International Union of Superior General. The name of the network was inspired by the story of Jesus bringing to life the 12-year-old daughter of Jairus with his words, "*talitha kum*," i.e., "rise up and walk." Historically, Sisters from different congregations have been involved in anti-slavery efforts through the years.

The network in Asia started with the launch of Talitha Kum Indonesia in 2008 after which other national networks were established. Today, there are 18 national networks and four sub-regional networks involving 210 congregations throughout the region.

To prevent trafficking, education is vital. The approach includes integrating educational programs in the schools. To empower communities and to involve them as partners, Talitha Kum conducts capacity building, equipping them to identify and combat trafficking. Events such as the World Day Against Human Trafficking, held every July 30, and the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita, the Patron Saint of Human Trafficking, commemorated every February 8, are occasions that highlight the call to fight against human trafficking and the efforts to protect human dignity.

In various countries, Talitha Kum Asia offers a range of direct services to survivors of human trafficking and people at risk, especially women and children. This support can include providing shelter, counseling, legal

assistance and vocational training. For trafficking survivors, the process of healing and recovery is supported by programs on counseling, reintegration and rehabilitation.

Talitha Kum Asia also engages in advocacy to promote policies and practices that address the 4Ps in fighting trafficking: prevention, protecting victims, prosecution of traffickers, and forging partnerships and cooperation. Partnership involves working with governments, law enforcement agencies, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to strengthen legal frameworks, improve access to justice, and raise awareness about the risks of trafficking and exploitation.

In its 2022 report, Talitha Kum Asia reported that 75,620 people were prevented from human trafficking in Asia.

Sources: <https://talithakumasia.info/>;
<https://www.talithakum.info/en/about-us>;
<https://www.rvasia.org/asian-news/talitha-kum-over-75000-people-were-prevented-human-trafficking-asia>



Sister Paula Kwandao Phonprasertuksa, SPC, Regional Representative for Asia (front, rightmost) and some members of the network in the region. Photo from Radio Veritas Asia

COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN (HOME COUNTRY INTERVENTIONS)

EMPOWERING THE MARGINALIZED AND PROMOTING SAFE MIGRATION

Congregation: Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Location: Odisha, India

Further Information: <https://aciindia.org.in/>

The Sisters of the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus are present in Odisha, a state in eastern India which is predominantly rural and home to more than 60 tribal groups. These sections of the population are among the poorest and marginalized. The Sisters founded the Snehadhara Trust which was registered in 2007 to empower marginalized groups through education and skills building programs.

Since 2006, the Trust provides hostel accommodation to tribal adolescent girls to enable them to continue their studies. Coming from far places, having a safe place to stay in Sundargarh is a major factor to keep the girls in school. There are 60 girls staying in the hostel. This core program provides not only food and accommodation but also other supports such as values education, computer classes and English language. The program aims for the girls' holistic development and to develop self-reliance. For those unable to continue formal education, the foundation offers skills training.

In 2014, the Trust started assisting rickshaw pullers, many of whom are migrants from other states such as Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Part of their meager daily income goes to paying rickshaw rental and buying alcohol (which affects their family life). The foundation encouraged the men to save, organized them into savings groups, and provided rights education.

In 2015, the Trust began working with the street children, which include migrants, who run away from their homes due to poverty and/or family problems. The foundation offers educational support and facilitates their accommodation in private or government hostels.

The Sisters paid more attention to migrants' issues during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many returned to Odisha. Due to concerns over the negative impacts of family separation and the deplorable conditions of migrants in destination areas, they initially pursued the goal of stopping migration. They changed course, turning to awareness raising on safe migration instead, when they realized that the lack of work was driving migration. The program also encourages prospective migrants to register with local government offices and to apply for the labor card (for state benefits) and the e-shram card (for national benefits); and provides information on government offices and NGOs which migrants can contact for help in their intended destinations. The Trust plans to extend awareness raising campaigns on safe migration and the dangers of human trafficking to college students. It is hoped that those who have been trained can be partners in reaching out to more communities.

Snehadhara collaborates with many partners, including local government offices, the police, NGOs, and networks with other women religious organizations. The establishment of help desks for migrants in destination areas was made possible by the cooperation with other Sisters and NGOs.

Source: Interview with and information provided by Sister Monti Rodrigues



Skills training to women and girls who dropout from school aims to provide them with skills to work locally, or to get better jobs should they decide to migrate. Photo from Sister Monti Rodrigues



Migrant registration is an important step towards protection. Photo from Sister Monti Rodrigues

ENABLING YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS IN TEA GARDENS

Congregation: Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians

Location: Assam, India

The promise of better prospects elsewhere can render young women and girls from Northeast India, the tea regions of the country, susceptible to unsafe migration.

To tackle this problem, the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians has programs to support the education of girls from the tea gardens. Part of the support is offering accommodation to the girls so that they can focus on their studies. However, due to many disadvantages, it is a challenge for some girls to continue their studies. A crucial aspect of the educational program is helping those who drop out of school to enroll in the National Institute of Open Schooling in India. This initiative offers a pathway for dropout students to resume their education and complete their matriculation. In the past three years, the Sisters supported and helped some 150 to 200 dropout students prepare for the matriculation examinations. Another alternative is vocational training in tailoring, dressmaking, weaving, knitting, candle making and rosary making to equip them with skills. In 2014, the program expanded to include providing seed-funding to start their income-generating activities.

The congregation also launched awareness campaigns in Northeast India to prevent human trafficking. These campaigns especially targeted tea garden areas where many migrants come from.

The Sisters collaborate with other women's organizations such as NE-WReN (Northeast Women Religious Network), youth groups, women groups of Tribal Tea Gardeners, and Women Association of Assam. Financial contributions from various organizations are instrumental in supporting these initiatives. Supporters include Indian foundations and donors and European organizations such as Manos Unidas and Don Bosco Mondo. These partnerships have played a crucial role in advancing the objectives of the programs, facilitating their implementation, and ensuring their sustainability.

Source: Interview with Sister Lissamma Joseph



Education enhances the life chances of young women and girls and helps prevent trafficking. Photo provided by Sister Lissamma Joseph

IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS, PROMOTING SAFE MIGRATION

Actor: Sisters of Mary Immaculate

Location: West Bengal, India

Many rural residents have been lured to migrate to the urban areas hoping to find better opportunities. The lack of information has enabled human traffickers to dangle false promises that victimize migrants, pushing them into precarious conditions.

To address this alarming trend, the Sisters of Mary Immaculate joined efforts to implement awareness programs to protect aspiring migrants from being trafficked. The program encourages aspiring migrants to register with authorities prior to their departure so that they or their families can access support. The program also includes gathering information on migrants who had gone missing. Community members are trained to identify cases of missing persons, gather information on migrants' destinations and circumstances, and report these cases to local authorities.

An important component of the program is expanding livelihood opportunities to provide options to unsafe migration to the cities. The program offers vocational training programs, such as sewing and tailoring, after which participants can apply for a loan to buy a sewing machine. The congregation has provided funding for the acquisition of 50 sewing machines aimed at empowering mothers. Training and/or financial assistance for agricultural projects are also provided. Hundreds of women have undergone vocational training and are now self-sufficient. The decline in outmigration from the villages has been noted and one factor is expanded livelihood opportunities.

The program also has a scholarship program for young women to participate in 2-3-year nursing training programs. Those who complete the training can find employment in hospitals. These efforts have not only empowered women economically but also enhanced their status in their families and communities, reducing their vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking.

Constant monitoring and follow-up are crucial aspects of these initiatives, with the involvement of community members. Through collaborative efforts, these initiatives can continue to improve the lives of individuals and communities, effectively addressing the challenges of unsafe migration and trafficking. More importantly, livelihood opportunities give people the opportunity to remain and thrive where they are.

There are plans to expand this program in other regions of the country to further broaden the campaign for safe migration and anti-human trafficking efforts.

Source: Interview with Sister Seli Thomas



*Mothers receiving sewing machines to start their tailoring business.
Photo from Sr. Seli Thomas*



Trainings and workshops are part of the empowering activities of the congregation's programs. Photo from Sr. Seli Thomas



The congregation supports the education of girls. It has a scholarship to train young women in nursing. Photo from Sr. Seli Thomas

PROVIDING OPTIONS TO NOT TO MIGRATE

Congregation: Sisters of Notre Dame

Location: Patna, India

Many exploited workers in the more developed regions of India are migrants from poor states such as Bihar. Many of these migrants also happen to come from low caste and tribal communities. In 2000, the Sisters of Notre Dame in Patna, Bihar decided to do something--to provide an option to not to have to migrate. The Sisters knew of government programs to help poor people in rural areas, but the people were not aware of these and how to access them. In 1999, the government launched the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY) targeting the poor—i.e., those below the poverty line in rural areas. The program was aimed at promoting self-employment through the formation of self-help groups (SHGs). The program specified women, Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and the physically challenged as the target beneficiaries. The national program was renamed as the National Rural Livelihood Mission in 2014.

The Sisters played the role of mediating between the SGSY and the poor, especially focusing on women empowerment and leadership. The first step is to organize women into SHGs; each group has ten members coming from ten families. The groups hold monthly meetings to discuss plans and concerns. The SHGs also function as savings groups—each member contributes 10 rupees a month. The groups' savings are deposited in a bank. Once groups reach savings of 1,000 rupees, the government provides a counterpart of 4,000 rupees, which the groups can then use as a revolving fund for income-generating activities. The SHGs are encouraged to focus on a selected number of economic projects based on their skills and resources. The groups can apply for government funding and in the marketing and distribution of their products. The next level of organization is the formation of federated groups comprising of several SHGs. The Sisters coordinated and facilitated the delivery of various support programs, such as information dissemination on government programs, training programs on livelihoods and financial education, and the promotion of financial inclusion. An important support provided by the Sisters is helping the SHGs in completing the documentation in applying for government assistance.

Since 2000, the congregation has formed 900 SHGs in various villages, of which 500 continue to be active. The focus on women empowerment and leadership has contributed to positive changes in the women and their families, and how the women are regarded by their families and communities. Some of the changes noted are the increase in the children going to school, especially the increase in school attendance by girls and better nutrition. The women's economic activities have increased the cash flows of their families, thus, they also have more say in decision-making. According to Sr. Jyotisha Kannamkal, in the past, women would only sit on the floors, but now, they have the confidence to sit on the chairs. Although the programs were not intended to deter migration, there had been an observable reduction in outmigration of men and young people from the villages.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the congregation started reaching out to tribal communities, aiming to vitalize the agricultural sector. The program aims to convert dry land into cultivable land. With financial assistance from the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, the program seeks to develop horticulture and promote sustainable practices, such as the use of organic manure. Community organizing is a key strategy to achieve these objectives. Thus far, 500 families in 30 villages have been covered by the program; in each village, a farmer's club has been organized. About 300 acres of land is being cultivated with varieties of fruit saplings. The experiences the congregation acquired in empowering women and training them for leadership can provide some lessons in their new mission with tribal communities.

Source: Interview with Sr. Jyotisha Kannamkal, SND



Training in computer literacy is a means to empower women. Photo from Sr. Jyotisha Kannamkal, SND



Demonstration-training on sustainable agriculture practices. Photo from Sr. Jyotisha Kannamkal, SND

SUPPORTING INTERNAL MIGRANTS IN KERALA

Congregation: Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Location: Vypin, Kerala, India

In 2016, the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus started a program in Vypin, Kerala to address the plight of migrant workers. Kerala is not only a major state of origin of migrant workers to the Middle East, but in recent years, it has been attracting young migrants, including those coming from North and Northeast India. The congregation in Kerala got wind of the challenges faced by migrant workers because their convent is near where the migrants work as well as information from the Sisters in Odisha, where many of the migrants originated. The migrants are employed in the fish factories; some of the women work as domestic workers.

The program started by providing spiritual support to migrants, but it broadened its scope in response to their multifaceted needs. Given the many challenges migrants face at work, the program includes workers' education about their rights and responsibilities. Translating knowledge into rights protection is not easy because participants fear jeopardizing their employment if they claim their rights. To overcome this challenge, the program develops strategies that safeguard the workers' jobs while enabling them to express their grievances effectively. In cases of salary disputes, the program mediates between migrants and employers. Although challenges remain, the program has enhanced migrants' awareness of their rights and it has bolstered their confidence knowing that they have a support network. The program further extended its scope by assisting the education of the children of migrants.

The cooperation of many actors has sustained and contributed to the program's effectiveness: the cooperation of the migrants, the support of labor contractors, the collaboration of other NGOs, and the support of other religious communities in Kochi. It has fostered partnerships with the diocese, the Kerala Labor Movement, and the Society of Jesus, thereby expanding the range of support it can extend to migrants. With the resources of other partners, the program has assisted migrants in obtaining essential documents, health cards, and access to support times of illness, accidents and bereavements.

Source: Interview with and information provided by Sister Mary Mulloor



Migrant women taking time off from their work in a fish processing company to come to church. Photo from Sister Mary Mulloor

SUPPORTING INTERNAL MIGRANTS DURING AND BEYOND THE PANDEMIC

Congregation: Sisters of Holy Cross of Menzingen (HCM)

Location: Delhi, India

Not long after the Conference of Catholic Bishops in India (CCBI) established the Commission for Migrants, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, putting the Commission to work. The lockdown, which took effect on March 20, 2020, halted economic activities, resulting in sudden loss of employment, no income and no social protection for internal migrants. In the face of these devastating conditions, migrants in the cities scrambled to return home; those who could not buy tickets walked back to their villages; many had no choice but to remain in the cities.

Sister Rani Punnaserril, HCM, Secretary of the Archdiocese of Delhi Commission for Migrants, recalled the overwhelming challenges they faced in responding to the urgent needs of countless migrants. The Commission, with the support of donors and other organizations, did their best to help the migrants, especially the most vulnerable. Food packs, rations, water, face masks and hand sanitizers were distributed to those in most need. Since many migrants and informal workers were not registered, they were not covered by government assistance. The Commission supported the civil society organizations, particularly Bandhua Mukti Morcha, which lobbied the Supreme Court to direct the government to provide rations to those without ration cards. The Commission also helped some disadvantaged groups, such as single mothers, with rent payments.

After the emergency phase of the pandemic, the Commission later extended livelihood support to those affected by the pandemic. With funding support from Raskob Foundation coursed through the International Catholic Migration Commission, the program provided beneficiaries with seed capital to start income-generating activities. The livelihood assistance program ran from July 2021 to October 2023 and was implemented in two phases. In the first phase, the program provided capital of 15,000 Indian rupees each to 100 persons. All recipients were required to attend a training program to help them run their business-

es. The 100 recipients were identified by the partners of the Commission in the dioceses of Delhi, Agra and Meerut who are engaged in assisting the migrants. In Delhi, the recipients were migrants who lost their jobs while in Agra and Meerut they both had migrants and those who returned to their villages during the pandemic. For the second phase, another 100 recipients were provided the start-up seed capital. The capital enabled the recipients to start a variety of businesses, such as petty shops, vegetable vending, food vending, goat rearing and watch repair shops. Some used the money to buy small equipment, such as sewing machines for those who opened a tailoring business, e-rickshaw battery, or drilling machines for those in construction. According to Sr. Rani, 90 percent of those who received livelihood assistance were able to maintain their businesses. Self-employment provided an option to migration for returnees and a source of income for displaced workers in the cities.

Sister Rani hopes that they can secure funding to support more self-employment economic activities. Educating migrants and informal workers about their rights is a continuing process. An important step is to register unorganized workers in the government's e-shram portal so that they can avail of benefits. A rights-based approach is very much part of supporting and enabling migrants and needs the cooperation of other stakeholders.

Source: Interview with Sister Rani Punnaerri



Training and the purchase of a sewing machine enabled a recipient to start a dressmaking business in her community. Photo from Sister Rani Punnaseril

MULTI-PRONGED PROGRAMS ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION

Congregation: Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny

Location: Nepal

Further information: <https://www.caritasnepal.org/>

Caritas Nepal is part of the global network of Caritas Internationalis, the social development/humanitarian arm of the Catholic Church which "shares the mission of the Catholic Church to serve the poor and to promote charity and justice throughout the world." In Nepal, the mission of Caritas is "to build resilient communities capable of leading their own development by empowering the marginalized, disadvantaged and vulnerable communities."

Caritas Nepal was founded in 1990 in the wake of the destructive floods and natural disasters that struck the land-locked country. Its programs and services to empower the poor and marginalized have covered 50 of 75 districts of Nepal. Over the years, it has undertaken projects aimed at enhancing livelihoods, empowering women, promoting health, strengthening disaster risk reduction and management, and tackling climate change. By addressing poverty and building community resilience, these projects contribute in tackling the root causes of migration.

International labor migration from Nepal has increased since the 1990s. In the past, this flow was mostly towards India, but it has since diversified. However, irregular migration, including human trafficking, victimizes untold numbers of aspiring migrants. Caritas launched a program to promote safe migration through multi-pronged awareness campaigns. Caritas also supports efforts to strengthen services for migrants, such as counseling, financial literacy, reintegration support, and rights education. It collaborates with municipalities for the establishment of migration help desks and harnessing local government funds for skill training programs and generating jobs and income-generating activities. One initiative is the formation of family groups, supporting the left-behind families of migrants in investing remittances in commercial farming.

Migration initiatives are implemented by the Migration and Refugee Desk. Although Nepal is mainly a country of origin, it also hosts some refugees. In the 1990s, Bhutanese of Nepalese descent sought refuge in Nepal, and Caritas quickly responded in providing food supplies and basic services. Many have resettled in other countries, with about 6,900 remaining in the camps. Caritas ran a program to facilitate the formal education of Bhutanese refugee children in the refugee camps and prepare them for admission to community schools, which is the long-term solution.

In June 2023, Caritas Nepal welcomed Sister Cecilia Durga Shrestha of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, as Executive Director, the first woman to head a national unit in South Asia. Six women hold managerial positions in the organization. Sister Cecilia's leadership will hopefully see more women in the grassroots emerging as leaders in building their communities.

Sources: Interview with Sylvia Rai; <https://www.caritasnepal.org/>; <https://www.caritas.org/>; https://www.ucanews.com/news/a-nepali-girls-journey-to-become-a-catholic-nun/103437#google_vignette



Promoting financial literacy of migrant families and refugees is among the capacity-building programs of Caritas Nepal. Photo from Sylvia Rai

ACCOMPANYING THE CHILDREN OF OVERSEAS FILIPINO WORKERS

Congregation: Canossian Sisters (FDCC)

Location: Sta. Rosa, San Pablo, Calamba, Laguna; Lipa City, Batangas, Philippines

Through their schools in several locations in the Philippines — Sta. Rosa, San Pablo and Calamba in the province of Laguna, and Lipa City in the province of Batangas, the Canossian Sisters established the program called ANAK (Anak ng Nangingibang Bansa, Aruga at Kalinga). The acronym ANAK is the Filipino word for child, and the title of the program in English translates to “child (or children) of those going abroad, nurture and care.” The provinces of Laguna and Batangas are among the top origins of Filipinos working abroad. The school-based program started way back in the 1990s, after one of the Sisters became part of UGAT [Filipino for root] Foundation, Inc., a Jesuit apostolate headed by Fr. Nilo Tanalega, SJ. The apostolate focuses on providing support to the spiritual and psycho-emotional problems of the poor. In response to the social costs of overseas employment, UGAT developed programs for migrant workers and the families left behind.

The schools run by the Canossian Sisters include many young children whose parents work abroad. Inspired by UGAT’s program for the children of migrant workers, the schools initiated a program aimed at supporting the children’s emotional and psychological well-being given the set-up of their families. The program is handled by the guidance office of the schools which implements activities to support the children, especially when they face problems with family relationships, studies and growing up pains. The schools offer regular values formation, retreats, and group activities where the children meet and share experiences. In recent years, at the start of the school year, the schools administer a questionnaire to know the students’ psychological and academic needs. This helps in designing interventions and accompanying the children throughout the school year.

The schools also developed support programs for the left-behind parents and carers, such as seminars on parenting, strengthening

family ties despite the separation, communication, and supporting the psycho-emotional needs of the children. With parents and carers and the schools working together, the children of migrant workers are assured of a safety net.

Source: Interview with Sister Rose Aquino, FDCC



Awarding of outstanding students under the ANAK program in Canossa Schools. Photo from Sister Rose Aquino, FDCC

SUPPORT TO FISHERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Locations: General Santos City, Sarangani and Maguindanao del Norte, Philippines

Congregation: Oblates of Notre Dame (OND)

When the Oblates of Notre Dame (OND) opened the Apostleship of the Sea (AOS) mission in General Santos City in 2005, they learned that the seafarers and fishers, especially the commercial and marginal fishers, was a group whose cries for help were unheeded. Around July 2006, Sister Susan Bolanio, OND, started reaching out to Stella Maris-Philippines (previously known as AOS, a global apostolate dedicated to the pastoral care of the people of the sea), to prepare to set up a pastoral care program for seafarers, fishers and their families in General Santos City and the neighboring provinces of Sarangani, South Cotabato and Maguindanao del Norte.

On September 24, 2006, Stella Maris-General Santos became the tenth member of Stella Maris-Philippines with the support of the OND HESED Foundation. As founding director, Sister Susan laid the groundwork to respond to the cries for help from this sector. Among the Stella Maris centers in the Philippines, Stella Maris- General Santos pioneered in developing a comprehensive approach to support fishers. The center also extends support to trafficked victims.

General Santos City is hailed as the tuna capital of the Philippines, but little is known about the hard work of fishers that make this possible. The working hours are long, fishers encounter bad weather, or when they face problems at work, fishers cannot readily seek help. Another occupational hazard is getting caught for illegal fishing when their vessels sail beyond Philippine waters. While the fishers are away and especially for those who languish in jails, their families do not have other means of economic support. Hence, the center lobbied with the fishing companies for financial support to the left-behind families,

Stella Maris-General Santos conducts educational programs for fishers and their families to raise awareness about their rights. It networks with other organizations to advocate for better working conditions for fish-

ers. The center successfully lobbied the General Santos City government to celebrate National Fisherfolks Day held every May 31 and make this part of the Tuna Festival. As the key people who bring tuna fish from the sea to the port of General Santos City, it is only fitting to have a day dedicated to fishers in the celebration of the Tuna Festival.

At the national level, the center was part of concerted advocacy that led to the issuance of Department Administrative Order 156-16 by the Department of Labor and Employment in 2016. This document specifies rules and regulations on the employment and working conditions of fishers on commercial vessels.

A recurring challenge is the arrest and detention of Filipino fishers who are apprehended for illegal entry. Stella Maris-General Santos provides repatriation assistance to fishers abandoned by their companies. This work entails coordination with local and national government agencies, Indonesian authorities, raising funds, and providing legal, health and psychosocial support to the repatriated fishers. As of 2021, the center has assisted in the repatriation of more than 500 detained fishers from various countries, mostly from Indonesia. The center also gives attention to the families of fishers by organizing the wives, forming a savings group, and providing training on income-generating activities.

The experiences of Stella Maris General Santos provide insights and directions to other Stella Maris centers in the Philippines which are starting to develop programs specifically addressing this long-neglected sector.

Sources: Information provided by Sr. Susan Bolanio and Sr. Jo-Anne Lorilla; Asis, MMB (2021), Stella Maris in the Philippines: Caring for Seafarers, Fishers and Their Families. Quezon City: Scalabrini Migration Center. Pp. 19, 21, 22, 115



During the pandemic, the Sisters and staff distributed cash assistance provided by AOS Singapore to the families of seafarers and fishers. Photo from Sister Susan Bolanio's Facebook, November 27, 2020



Waiting for repatriated fishers from Indonesia. Photo from Sister Jo-anne Lorilla, OND



Assisting the wives of fishers and seafarers who are detained or in difficult situations is part of the work of the center. Photo from Sr. Susan Bolanio, OND

PARTNERING WITH THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ON MIGRATION PROGRAMS

Congregation: Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo – Scalabrinians (MSCS)

Location: Quezon City, Philippines

The Philippines is among the countries with many of its nationals working abroad. The phenomenon of temporary migration for overseas employment since the 1970s has resulted in the challenging reality of split families. The separation between overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) and their families poses emotional and social costs, highlighting the need for comprehensive support and assistance programs.

In response to this reality, the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo – Scalabrinians (MSCS) collaborated with the Quezon City-Public Employment Service Office Migrant Resource Center (QC-PESO) to develop interventions to help OFWs and their families navigate the challenges of family separation due to migration. The two parties signed a memorandum of agreement on October 25, 2022 toward strengthening the protection and promotion of the rights of OFWs and their families at all stages of migration: prior to migration, while OFWs are abroad, and upon OFWs' return to the Philippines. Both parties work together in delivering information programs on safe migration, values formation, direct assistance to OFWs in distress, and support for reintegration, among others.

The partnership brings together the Sisters' long experience in the pastoral care of migrants and the Quezon City government's resources to effectively craft and deliver programs and services to OFWs and their families. The Sisters' networks with church-related organizations are also a valuable resource in the delivery of direct assistance. This partnership may be replicated in other contexts. A key advantage of this partnership is the potential to scale up migration-related initiatives and the capacity to sustain these programs.

Source: Information provided by Sr. Elizabeth Pedernal, MSCS



The Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo-Scalabrinian (MSCS) and the QC-PESO joined hands in 2022 to bolster support for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in the city. Photo from the QC-PESO Migrant Resource Center Facebook page.

EMPOWERING GIRLS FROM ETHNIC MINORITIES THROUGH EDUCATION

Congregation: Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

Location: Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Nestled in the heart of Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd (also known as the Sisters of the Good Shepherd) established a center to empower girls from ethnic minorities by providing them access to education. Established in 2016, the center supports the girls in pursuing secondary and/or college education so that they could have better job prospects and a better life. The program includes a safeguarding policy to ensure a safe environment. The residential set-up of the program provides the girls with a home away from home while they study. While staying at the center, the girls are encouraged to maintain their cultural tradition and to foster confidence in sharing their culture.

The program focuses on the education of tribal girls because they are often rendered vulnerable due to traditional and cultural norms. The program aims to dismantle barriers and equip them with the skills and values needed to thrive and optimize their potentials.

The impact of the program on the beneficiaries and their communities is profound. Acquired practical life skills enable the girls to make meaningful contributions to their families, while the emphasis on education deters early marriages, breaking the cycle of poverty.

The program sees to it that it adjusts to the evolving needs of the students. The beneficiaries participate to some extent in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the program. The success stories of former students speak of the transformative power of higher education in expanding life chances and options for the girls.

To sustain the program for the long-term, the congregation plans to establish a shelter in the home communities to reach more girls and spread the empowering effects of education to their families and communities. This approach also hopes to encourage the girls to stay and enliven their culture.

Source: Information provided by Sister Magdalen Bui Yen Ngoc



Students of the Stieng, Jraj and Xe Dang tribes feel happy to go to school and join catechism class on Sundays. Photo from Sr. Magdalen Bui Yen Ngoc



The students get to share their culture in various programs organized by the congregation. Photo from Sr. Magdalen Bui Yen Ngoc.

COUNTRIES OF DESTINATION (HOST COUNTRY INTERVENTIONS)

NURTURING THE FILIPINO MIGRANT COMMUNITY IN KYOTO

Actor: Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Mother of God

Location: Kyoto, Japan

On September 1, 1989, the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Mother of God launched a multi-pronged program to support the Filipinos residing in the Kyoto Diocese, which covers the areas of Kyoto, Nara, Shiga, and Mie. Grounded in social, pastoral, and spiritual care, the program promotes the welfare, spiritual growth, and the appreciation of the cultural heritage of Filipino migrants.

Socially, the program serves as a bridge connecting Filipinos with services provided by government agencies, NGOs and local parishes. These organizations provide assistance with language, labor issues, and support to distressed migrants.

Pastorally and spiritually, the program nurtures faith through activities such as Bible sharing, Lectio Divina, novena to the Mother of Perpetual Help, block rosary, and seasonal recollections. A variety of training programs are offered: training to become lectors, commentators, choir directors and psalmists; training in creative integrated liturgy, inculturation liturgy, and leadership training. Catechism is a foundational aspect of the program's pastoral approach. Seminars are conducted to prepare parishioners for baptism, first communion, confirmation and marriage. For the young, youth encounters and summer camps are organized

The program actively seeks to bridge generational gaps within the Filipino community and also builds bridges between Filipinos and their local parishes. While nurturing the Filipino community, the program promotes interactions between Filipinos and members of the local parishes. In the dialogues and encounters between Filipinos and local parishioners, there are spaces for Filipinos to practice and share religious traditions and celebrations, such as Flores de Mayo (floral offering to the Virgin Mary in the month of May) and Santacruzán (a procession at the end of Flores de Mayo commemorating the finding of the True Cross).

The program to build the Filipino migrant community goes beyond providing a support system to Filipinos in Kyoto. The program started by the Sisters many years ago has empowered the Filipino community with a sense of identity, belonging, and as active members of the Kyoto Diocese.

Source: Information provided by Sister Rosario Macawili, SFIC



Youth team-building, which includes Japanese-Filipino children among the participants, is part of ongoing spiritual formation. Photo from Sister Rosario Macawili, SFIC

SUPPORTING ASYLUM SEEKERS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Congregation: Daughters of Charity (DC)

Location: Metro Manila, Philippines

The Daughters of Charity (DC) had been involved in migration initiatives in the Philippines for many years, not only on programs and services for overseas Filipino workers and their families, but also for refugees. Way back in 1975, they opened their social welfare institutions for refugees with the assistance of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP). They inaugurated the Center for Assistance to Displaced Persons on 1 September 1975 in response to the arrival of boat people from Indochina which continued until 1995. The DC served in the Philippine Refugee Processing Center in Morong, Bataan and the Vietnamese Refugee Camp and Vietnamese Village (Viet Ville), both in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, until the early 2000.

In 2015, their General Assembly's theme "the Boldness of Charity in the Missionary Momentum" was articulated in the Congregation's Inter Assembly Document 2015-2021. The Document challenged each Province and Community "to discern for new and relevant missionary movements to respond more boldly to the modern forms of poverty." Thus, the Sisters in Asilo de San Vicente de Paul Community discerned to go beyond their existing programs and services to respond boldly in charity. Sr. Malou Baaco, DC, related that soon after, the answer and challenge came in the form of a Pakistani family who sought asylum in the Philippines through the CBCP-Episcopal Commission for the Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ECMI).

The family of four was Catholic and fled Pakistan because of religious persecution. Upon their arrival in the Philippines, the family was referred to a religious congregation who provided them shelter for three weeks, with the DC providing food supplies. Where will the family go?

After discernment, the DC community welcomed the family in June 2015. The DC not only provided shelter and food, but also psychosocial support, legal assistance, and various essential supports to build a life in a foreign land. While the Philippines is welcoming of asylum

seekers, they have to find ways to support themselves. The DC Sisters tapped various networks and partners to support the family.

In cooperation with the ECMI and Catholic schools, the three children were able to attend school. The DC Sisters helped the mother find work. At the time of interview (March 2024), two of the three children have completed college education in the Philippines. One of them pursued Social Work, inspired by their family's experience of having been supported by the DC. The other child is pursuing graduate studies overseas. The congregation hosted the family between 2015 and 2023 and coordinated with many organizations to provide for the needs of the family. The family now lives on their own. Having been recognized as refugees by the Philippine government, the next step is to apply for permanent residence.

Sr. Malou acknowledged the support of many partners in the ministry with asylum-seekers. The ECMI was a key mover and partner in extending support and in the advocacy of promoting the protection of asylum-seekers. Other partners included the Catholic schools which provided scholarships, the UNHCR in the Philippines, Community and Family Health Services, Inc., and various government agencies—the Department of Justice, the Department of Labor and Employment, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and the Bureau of Internal Revenue.

In helping the asylum-seeker family meet various government requirements, the DC congregation acquired first-hand knowledge of gaps in services which became the basis for advocating for the protection of asylum-seekers. This experience also helped the DC in assisting other families who sought their assistance. Among the fruits of advocacy efforts are (1) exempting refugees and stateless persons recognized by the Philippine government from obtaining the alien employment permit that will allow them to engage in gainful employment (Department Order No. 18, Series of 2017, DOLE); and (2) facilitating the legal and procedural requirements in the application of the Philippine citizenship by refugees and stateless persons recognized by the Philippine government (Supreme Court Rule on Facilitated Naturalization for Refugees and Stateless Persons, March 2022). In acknowledging the contributions of valued partners, Sr. Malou concluded that it takes a whole country to protect asylum seekers and refugees. The protection program for asylum seekers was, is and will always be the collaborative efforts of all concerned stakeholders, involving a “wider we” that Pope Francis referred to in the care of migrants and refugees.

Source: Interview with Sister Malou Baaco, DC

INTER-CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY WITH MIGRANTS

Congregation: Inter-congregation

Location: Daegu; Paju; Incheon, Kasan, South Korea

South Korea is home to more than two million migrants as of 2022. The diverse migrant population has played a pivotal role in shaping the country's cultural landscape and economic dynamism. Many multicultural centers and migrant centers have been established to support and address the needs of the growing migrant population. Multicultural centers focus on aiding foreign spouses' integration into Korean society, while migrant centers support foreign workers in overcoming challenges.

Despite these support structures, migrants face considerable difficulties as they grapple with daily challenges in Korean society. Many multicultural families and migrant workers encounter barriers in accessing healthcare, education and social services. Recognizing these challenges, organizations and advocacy groups strive to create targeted initiatives that address the specific needs of vulnerable groups.

In 2004, five women congregations established Friends Without Borders (FWB), a collaborative religious initiative aimed at furthering cross-cultural understanding and strengthening support for migrants in South Korea. The umbrella organization includes members from the Prado Sisters, Franciscan Missionary Sisters, Christ the King Sisters, Sisters of Jesus Good Shepherd "Pastorelle" (SJBP), and the Sisters of the Most Holy Trinity.

In responding to the needs of migrants, FWB members extended the services in their centers by including counseling for women who may be facing abuse in the context of intercultural marriages. Recognizing the vulnerability of women in such situations, FWB members strive to provide a safe and confidential space where women can seek emotional support, guidance, and resources to address issues related to abuse. By integrating counseling into the programs offered by their centers, women can access support and tools to heal and overcome their challenging circumstances.

The FWB started its services in Incheon in 2004 and expanded its reach in the Paju Multicultural Center in 2007. It also reached out to migrant workers, particularly those who are undocumented who cannot access basic social services such as health care. The centers where the FWB members work developed comprehensive services to respond to the needs of different migrants to ensure that no one is excluded.

Some centers offer vocational training programs, such as massage, bartending and photography. For Filipino migrants, the centers offer training programs in partnership with the Philippine embassy. The FWB was able to implement programs and services in cooperation with dedicated volunteers and financial contributions from donations.

A member of the Pastorelle Sisters; Sr. Lucia C. Olalia, one of the founding members of FWB, received recognition from the local government of Pocheon as an Outstanding Citizen in 2014 for her dedicated advocacy in supporting migrants, both workers and spouses of Koreans.

This prestigious award acknowledged Sr. Lucia C. Olalia's impactful contributions and commitment to enhancing the well-being of migrant communities, underscoring the significance of her advocacy work in South Korea. Her reflection on the pastoral care of migrants acknowledges the support of many good people both Koreans and foreigners and most of all the hand of God in inspiring and sustaining this ministry:

"I feel like I've almost touched the hand of God. Even though we may not have much money, whenever there's a need, we manage to provide something. I believe I am merely an instrument of God, helping people," she said.

Source: Interview with Sr. Lucia C. Olalia, SJBP



Embracing the spirit of Christmas with the Filipino community alongside Sister Luz Ollalia in Korea. Photo provided by Sr. Lucia Olalia, SJBP

SUPPORTING ASYLUM SEEKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES IN DAEGU

Congregation: Franciscan Missionaries of Mary

Location: Daegu, South Korea

Further Information: <https://www.facebook.com/catholicworkercenter/>

The Catholic Workers' Center in Daegu has many years of experience in supporting migrant workers and multicultural families. Under the Korean welfare system, multicultural families are those formed between a Korean national and a foreign spouse which are in need of support. The center's first experience with asylum seekers started in 2018, when a family from Syria sought help from the center. Other asylum seekers from many other countries, mostly from Africa, continued to arrive in Daegu and contacted the center for assistance. The Korean government has programs for officially recognized refugees, but asylum seekers who are in the process of applying for recognition as refugees and those whose application was rejected are left on their own. Catholic organizations like the center fill the support gap for this particular group of asylum seekers.

Sr. Marianna Swierzevska, a Franciscan Missionary of Mary, has been part of the migrant ministry of the center since 2019. She became the center's focal person for asylum seekers, and after determining their needs, the center would find ways to respond to the needs of asylum seekers. Their encounters with the asylum seekers informed the center in developing programs and services. In 2020-2022, the center cooperated with Save the Children in the latter's program to support early education for the children of refugees and asylum seekers. With their direct contacts with the families, the center bridged the dialogue involving the families, the kindergarten schools and Save the Children. Meeting the families means knowing them and their needs. The most immediate needs are usually for rice, diapers and milk powder for small children. But beyond these are larger concerns, such as how to navigate everyday life, finding employment, how to legalize their stay, health issues, and how to meet their daily needs amid uncertainties. The center assisted them in preparing documents in their application for their legal status, translation of documents, and communication with employers. In the process, the center developed a more holistic approach in their programs and services for asylum seekers.

Sister Marianna identified the mothers in need of specific support and developed initiatives for this group. For asylum seekers who hold a short-term visa, it is very difficult to get secure employment, and it is doubly hard for women to land a job. According to the women, they would prefer to work rather than ask for help, but their ambiguous legal status is a major barrier. They have many struggles—dealing with the trauma that led to seek refuge in another country, coping with the demands of everyday life in a foreign country, not knowing what the future will bring. The center provided Korean language classes to help them adjust to life in Korea.

Sister Marianna also organizes some sessions where the women can gather, reflect on their experiences, and share them in a safe place. This provides the women an opportunity to see their journey, identify the steps that help them move forward, and understand their options and constraints in looking at their future.

Another group that is given specific attention is single mothers. For this group, the center organized regular meetings called “My Day” which encourage participants to give and receive support from the other members. Everyone is free to share and be listened to with respect. This initiative has developed into a support group. Children come together with their mothers and for them, the center is like a family.

Feedback from the beneficiaries have been encouraging. The women have expressed appreciation for the sharing sessions, with some of them saying that these allowed them to think about themselves. Most of the asylum seekers are Muslims. The interactions with the center have somehow contributed to inter-religious understanding and mutual respect.

Financial support received mainly from the local church has made it possible to implement the center’s programs and services for asylum seekers. One major challenge is health care. Since the asylum seekers are not covered by health insurance, finding a way to cover hospitalization is a very demanding challenge for the center. Despite this, the center is committed to stand with the asylum seekers and to facilitate an enabling and welcoming environment for them in Korea.

Source: Interview with Sister Marianna Świerzevska



Father Kwan Hong Lee and Sister Marianna visiting and blessing the home of a family of asylum seekers. Photo from Father Kwan Hong Lee



Sister Marianna and center staff take care of the children while their mothers are attending language classes. Photo from Father Kwan Hong Lee

SUPPORTING ASYLUM SEEKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES IN JEJU

Congregation: Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (SSPS)

Location: Jeju Island, South Korea

Established in 2011, the Naomi Migrant Pastoral Center on Jeju Island, South Korea, provided support to migrant workers and marriage migrants.

The arrival of more than 500 Yemenis, mostly men, seeking refuge on Jeju Island in 2018 was something new to the resort island. Many asylum seekers came to the island because it offered visa-free entry to tourists. Jeju Island was caught unprepared to address the needs of these new arrivals. The three Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (SSPS) and four staff members of the center shifted gears to help the asylum seekers. Along with responding to the urgent need for housing and health care, the sisters and staff helped the asylum seekers comply with legal procedures so they can stay in Korea while waiting for the decision on their application for refugee status.

At the height of the crisis, the center was able to assist some 300 Yemeni asylum seekers. After some time, some of the asylum seekers left the island, leaving mostly those with families and children. For the families who remained on the island, the center cooperates with immigration authorities, local authorities, schools, employers and other organizations to meet the multifaceted needs of the asylum seekers. Beyond meeting emergency needs, the center tries to help the asylum seekers build a life in Korea. To help them find their way, the center organized Korean language classes in the early days. The center links them with employers and helps resolve work-related issues. It has also helped some refugees start businesses in farming or poultry or linking agricultural entrepreneurs with bigger companies. Another important support is facilitating access to educational opportunities for both adults and children. The center's efforts in involving parents in their children's education have produced good results.

Sister Cristina acknowledges the contributions of the different partners in providing holistic support to asylum seekers. She sees the work of

the center as part of collaborative efforts to enable refugees to be part of Korean society. According to her, the center's programs for refugees may not be easily replicated in other places because these must adapt to the context and changing dynamics of the receiving society. She is happy to note that there has been a positive change in the local community's views and receptions of the refugees among them.

Source: Interview with Sister Cristina Gal, SSPS

SUPPORTING IMMIGRANT WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES AND MIGRANT WORKERS

Actor: Sisters of Notre Dame

Location: Suncheon, South Korea

In its transition to becoming a multicultural society, South Korea has implemented policies to support immigrant women and their families and migrant workers. Although the Korean government has established structures and programs to support marriage migrants and migrant workers, there are barriers in accessing programs and services.

To ensure that the migrant population is not left behind, the Archdiocese of Gwangju established the Suncheon Migrant Pastoral Center in 2009. The center was renamed into the Suncheon Migrant Support Center at some point; and in 2023, it became Suncheon Caritas. The archdiocese invited the Sisters of Notre Dame to carry out the ministry with migrants and the congregation has been the mainstay of the center since the beginning.

Initially, the Sisters of Notre Dame focused their attention to immigrant women. The foreign women who marry Korean men lack family support when they come to Korea, unlike Korean women, who can rely on their parents should they need financial assistance, help with child care or emotional support. Separated from their natal family, the Sisters sought to fill the void of maternal comfort and support to immigrant women. The center implemented various programs: basic Korean language education, cooking classes, doll-making, and organizing picnics and bazaars. For the children, the center offered Korean language education, first communion catechism, activities during summer and winter vacations, and scouting activities. Through these initiatives, the Sisters aimed to support the integration, faith, and social skills of the children. The Sisters later included other family members, notably husbands and parents-in-law (especially mothers-in-law), in their programs to foster a whole-of-family approach to support multicultural families.

The Sisters have witnessed how the programs have made a difference in the lives of immigrant women and their families. The collaboration

of the local volunteers, who took on roles as Korean language teachers, cooking class instructors, sewing teachers, and scout leaders, has been integral to the success of their mission. The volunteers gave not only their time and skills, but also material support. In the process, they have contributed to the empowerment of immigrant women and improving their views of Korean people and society.

Over time, there has been a decline in marriage migration, and the support programs of the Korean government for marriage migrants have helped their integration in Korean society. The Korean government is more invested in marriage migrants because they will settle in Korea while migrant workers are not expected to remain in the country. Thus, the center decided to focus on migrant workers, particularly those in an unauthorized situation because they are excluded from the programs and services provided by government-supported migrant centers. Undocumented migrant workers fall between the cracks and have no access to support. The Sisters accompany the undocumented workers, both men and women, providing assistance and support. They provide emotional support and child care to women migrant workers who bear children.

The Sisters have laid the groundwork to sustain the ministry with migrants by involving the local community. The ministry has attracted volunteers—local residents, mostly Catholics, as partners in implementing the center's programs. Together, Suncheon Caritas, the Sisters of Notre Dame and the local community have become channels of God's care for migrants, especially those in most need.

Source: Interview with Sister Fabiola Choi, SND



Fostering the faith life of immigrant women, their children and migrant workers is part of the center's ministry with migrants. Photo from Suncheon Caritas



At the blessing of Suncheon Caritas in 2023. Photo from Suncheon Caritas

ACCOMPANYING FILIPINO STUDENTS IN TAIWAN

Congregation: Missionary Sisters of St Charles Borromeo-Scalabrinians

Location: Minghsin University of Science and Technology, Hsinchu County, Taiwan

In 2016, Taiwan started the New Southbound Policy to foster and strengthen relations with neighboring countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Australia and New Zealand through various exchanges in trade, technology, agriculture, medicine, education and tourism. As part of this policy, educational institutions such as the Taiwan Education Center, the Foundation for International Cooperation in Higher Education of Taiwan, and Taiwanese universities have been promoting higher education talent exchange programs, which include facilitating scholarship opportunities to study in Taiwan.

As one of the 18 countries targeted by the Southbound Policy, the Philippines has been receiving offers of scholarship programs from Taiwanese universities. Under this cooperation framework, the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles-Scalabrinians (MSCS) and Minghsin University of Science and Technology (MUST) signed an overseas educational partnership in June 2018. The host institution, MUST, provides a study and work scheme for Filipino students taking up the Bachelor of Science in Industrial Engineering. On the pastoral side, the MSCS provides a holistic accompaniment for Filipino scholars from pre-migration to the time of the students' stay in Taiwan. Prior to the students' departure, the Sisters provide an orientation covering travel tips, airport and immigration procedures, and information about living and studying in Taiwan. Sister Marcedita Saboga-a, MSCS, was designated as the Executive Coordinator of the MSCS-MUSP partnership to oversee and implement programs to support the students' academic progress, personal development and spiritual growth.

As of 2024, a total of 280 Filipino students of diverse religious backgrounds coming from various dioceses and churches were beneficiaries of the MUST program for international students. Two batches have already completed their bachelor's degree—some went on to

pursue graduate studies, some got employed by the industrial companies where they completed the study and work program, and some returned to the Philippines to start entrepreneurial ventures. In March 2024, MUST welcomed the eighth batch of Filipino students. Sister Marcedita and the older batches of students will help the new ones adjust to their academic life and navigate their way in Taiwan.

Sources: Information provided by Sister Marcedita Saboga-a, MSCS and Sr. Elizabeth Pedernal, MSCS



The eighth batch of Filipino students under the MUST Academe-Industry Collaboration Program for International Students arrived in Taiwan last March 26, 2024. Photo from Sister Marcedita Saboga-a, MSCS

COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT TO MIGRANT WORKERS AND IMMIGRANTS

Congregation: Religious of the Virgin Mary Vocations (RVM)

Location: Hsinchu, Taiwan

Further Info: <https://www.facebook.com/hsinchumigrantscenter>

Established in 1988, the Hsinchu Migrants and Immigrants Service Center has since played an important role in advocating for the rights of migrant workers and promoting the integration of immigrants in Taiwan. The Religious of the Virgin Mary Vocations has been a constant in the implementation of the center's programs and services. The Sisters' involvement in the ministry with migrant workers and immigrants draws inspiration from the compassionate teachings of Jesus.

The center provides a range of services to migrant workers, foreign spouses and multicultural families. Pastoral support includes masses in various languages and organizing group activities to promote solidarity among migrants and between migrants and the local community. Direct services include workers' education, migrants' rights education, legal assistance, referrals, counseling, medical/hospital visits, and mental health services.

Crucially, the center provides a shelter for victims of various crises, including sexual harassment, assault, human trafficking, or labor disputes. Educational initiatives include positive education, rights education for immigrants and migrant workers, Mandarin language courses, financial planning seminars, and training programs to empower individuals for a brighter future. In the area of advocacy, the center successfully lobbied for the provision of vital services to support migrants, such as the 1955 Migrant Workers Free Hotline, court interpreter services, and multilingual languages in the Ministry of Labor's National Labor Rights Portal.

It collaborates with medical institutions to ensure migrants' access to health care; also, in this regard, the center advocates providing information in several languages to . For foreign spouses and multicultural families, the center organizes family lectures and workshops to enhance harmony and reduce cultural gaps. Within the diocese, the center pro-

motes awareness of migration-related issues, which is a key factor in the protection of the rights of migrants. It is a member of the Asia-wide organization, the Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA), which enables the center to participate in regional and international discussions on migration.

As the center enters its third decade of service, it continues to walk with migrant workers and immigrants in Taiwan, with the Sisters alongside them in their journey.

Sources: Information provided by the congregation; <https://www.facebook.com/hsinchumigrantscenter>



The Sisters and the multicultural community formed by the center. Photo from the Hsinchu Migrants and Immigrants Service Center Facebook page

EMPOWERING VULNERABLE MIGRANT WORKERS IN TAIWAN

Congregation: Religious of the Virgin Mary

Location: Hsinchu County, Taiwan

Taiwan's need for workers to fill labor shortages has resulted in the influx of migrant workers from Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand. Due to language barriers and lack of knowledge about their rights in an unfamiliar country, many migrant workers end up victims of injustices and malpractices. Sister Maria Paschalia Ratuwalu of the Religious of the Virgin Mary shares that the concerns and needs of migrant workers are so grievous that the congregation cannot simply stand by and watch. Thus, the Sisters started an assistance program for migrant workers in cooperation with the Hope Workers' Center.

The program offers support and services to all international migrant workers-- trafficked persons, international seafarers, cruise workers and fishers. The congregation emphasizes the human approach by listening to the migrant workers' problems and then assessing and finding solutions. The program works at establishing a regular communication channel with migrant workers through monthly meetings and education sessions on migrant workers' rights. Moreover, the program also organizes recreational activities, outings and festivities celebrating the culture of migrants' countries of origin.

The migrant workers are not just beneficiaries but are partners who collaborate with the Sisters in articulating their needs and in finding solutions. Through forming groups, the migrants are encouraged to be leaders among themselves. Sister Maria Paschalia says this is their way of supporting the empowerment of the migrant workers, so that they will be able to help one another in addressing their issues. The congregation also works with a lawyer and makes it a point to foster collaboration between the members of the Hope Workers' Center and key government agencies—the Bureau of Labor Affairs, the Ministry of Labor and the National Immigration Agency.

Through these initiatives, the program supports migrant workers in fighting for their rights and in adjusting to their new environment while also making space for them to socialize, take care of themselves and maintain their links to their home countries. The ministry has provided migrant workers the needed support during their struggles and in enabling them to claim their rights and in restoring their dignity.

For Sister Maria Paschalia, she shares that the program has enriched her spiritually, knowing that the ministry has had a positive influence on the lives of other people.

Source: Information provided by Sr. Maria Paschalia Ratuwalu, RVM



*Education on migrants' rights is a core activity of the Hope Workers' Center.
Photo from Sister Maria Paschalia Ratuwalu, RVM*



Listening to migrants is a starting point in understanding their concerns and identifying solutions. Photo from Sister Maria Paschalia Ratuwalu, RVM

EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE CHILDREN OF MIGRANT WORKERS

Congregation: Good Shepherd Sisters Thailand

Location: Phuket, Thailand

Further Information: <https://goodshepherdphuketown.com/>

In 2010, the Good Shepherd Sisters Thailand observed a rise in the arrival of families of migrant workers in Phuket. The manufacturing, fishing and construction sectors rely on migrant workers coming from neighboring countries, mostly from Myanmar. Many families had young children left at home and were being cared for by their older siblings, despite the fact that the older siblings were also children themselves. Concerned about the safety of the young children and their vulnerability to labor and sexual exploitation, the Sisters saw the need to provide a safe environment for the children while their parents were at work.

The Good Shepherd Phuket Town Learning Center was established in 2010 to provide educational programs and childcare for the children of migrant workers. A factory owner offered the use of a vacant lot for the center. In its first year, the center had 20 students, all of whom were from Myanmar. However, with the volatile conditions in Myanmar, migration to Thailand continued. Escalating tensions in Myanmar in recent years resulted in a surge in displaced persons and migrants arriving in Thailand. Often, they do not have a proper work visa. Today, the center caters to 400 children, which includes not only recent arrivals but also the children of migrants who had been in Thailand for a long time.

The learning center offers kindergarten and primary school education (Grades 1-5), based on the educational curriculum of Myanmar. Beyond basic education, the center offers vocational training courses to youths aged 12 to 18, providing vocational training courses to equip the students with valuable skills and as an income-generating project for the center. Sister Lakana Sukhsuchit, RGS, played a pivotal role in expanding the scope of the educational initiatives of the center.

Presently, the center has a team of 25 dedicated teachers. One of the teachers was a former student of the center. Her journey from being a

student to kindergarten teacher underscores the transformative impact of nurturing individuals who later contribute to the community's growth and well-being.

The center operates solely on volunteers and donations from various non-governmental organizations and other churches. This collaboration forms the backbone of the center's ability to create a lasting and meaningful difference in the lives of the students it serves.

Source: Interview with Sister Lakana Sukhsuchit



Most of the students in the learning center are children from Myanmar migrant families. Photo from Sister Lakana Sukhsuchit

PROMOTING HUMAN DIGNITY AND COMBATING TRAFFICKING, ESPECIALLY OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Actor: Good Shepherd Sisters Thailand

Location: Pattaya, Chonburi, Thailand

Further Information: <https://womencenterpattaya.org/>

The Good Shepherd Sisters Thailand established the Fountain of Life Women's Center in 1988 to support the women and children vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in Pattaya, Thailand. A popular beach resort, Pattaya's thriving tourism sector has a shady side that exploits women and children and robs them of dignity. Migrants, both internal and international, comprise a large share of workers in Pattaya. The center offers education, vocational training, healthcare, counseling, healing, and support in a safe and nurturing environment.

The founding of the center was part of the campaign to end violence against women and prevent human trafficking crimes and sexual exploitation. Cognizant of knowledge as power, the center offers training on self-awareness of human dignity and human rights, which orients participants to human trafficking and how to prevent it. This program has been updated to cover trafficking via online and digital platforms and how prospective migrants can protect themselves from scams. The legal advice training aims to raise awareness about laws and their rights. Providing shelter, counseling, and skills training (such as cooking and traditional Thai massage) are interventions aimed at providing women who have gone through hardships with healing and skills to help them start income-generating activities.

More than thirty years since its founding, the center has fostered awareness about safe migration, contributed to curbing trafficking through its various educational campaigns, and supported survivors of trafficking, exploitation, and gender-based violence in their process of healing and restoration of human dignity. The congregation has gained partners and collaborators along the way. The implementation of various initiatives has been made possible because of the dedication of the staff and volunteers.

The center works with government agencies in Thailand such as the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Human Development and Human Security, Ministry of Labor, and the local government of the City of Pattaya, ensuring coordinated efforts to combat human trafficking in the grassroots and at institutional levels. The Sisters also collaborated with NGOs such as A21, Beginnings Foundation, the Pattaya Orphanage, and the Diocese of Chanthaburi. These partnerships promote the sharing of information and resources that contribute to sustained efforts to fight human trafficking. The support of partners has also enabled the center to continue to accompany and empower women and children to rise from hardships.

Sources: Interview with Sister Piyachat Boonmul; <https://womencenter-pattaya.org/>



The center hosts seminars and awareness programs for women, empowering them with self-awareness of human dignity and rights, and raising awareness about human trafficking. Photo from Sister Piyachat Boonmul

DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING
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