

ABOUT UN WOMEN

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.

SITUATION OF WOMEN – OVERVIEW

The Republic of the Philippines is made up of over 7,000 islands in the Pacific Ocean. English is one of its official languages, and Roman Catholicism its predominant religion, with 81% percent of its population identified as Roman Catholics, 5 % as Muslims, and the rest with other Christian denominations or other religionsⁱ. It is one of the most populous countries with one of the fastest growing populations in the Southeast Asian region (93.6 million in 2010, with 49.7% female).ⁱⁱ

The Philippines scores relatively highly on global gender equality indices indicating an overall improvement in recent decades in the situation of women.ⁱⁱⁱ The adult literacy rate is one of the highest in the region, with a higher percentage of women completing secondary education or higher than men. Improvements have been made in women's political representation, where about 20% of parliamentary seats are now held by females.^{iv} The country has a vibrant civil society and a dynamic women's movement, a key factor in it becoming the first in the ASEAN region to ratify *the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)* in 1981.

THE PHILIPPINES

Legal Frameworks for Gender Equality – Gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution (1987), and forms the basis of legislation and national development plans targeted at the advancement and empowerment of women. The current *Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development 1995-2025* outlines what the government must do to enable women to participate in and benefit from national development. Beginning in the 1990s, a number of laws were enacted to strengthen protection for women and combat discrimination, such as the *Indigenous People's Rights Act of 1997*, mandating the representation of indigenous women in decision-making; the *Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003* which provides necessary institutional mechanisms against traffickers, and protection and support services for victims; and the *Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004*, which addresses abuse in the context of marital, dating or common-law relationships. In 2009, the landmark *Republic Act 9710* or the '*Magna Carta of Women*' was passed, a comprehensive anti-discrimination and gender equality law based solidly on CEDAW principles.

Poverty—While the overall poverty rate in the Philippines has decreased, many parts of the country, including the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), remain deeply affected, with people lacking access to basic goods and services, education and healthcare. The impact on women is significant, linked (as both cause and effect) to high maternal mortality and fertility rates, human trafficking, migration, and overrepresentation in the 'informal' employment sector, where women are especially vulnerable to poor working conditions, discrimination and exploitation.

Migration—The Philippines is a source country for migrants. As of 2009, about 8.6 million work overseas in permanent, temporary or irregular work^v. More women than men migrate, with a majority of them seeking employment as domestic helpers or caregivers.^{vi} Migrant women workers are often in precarious situations abroad, lacking adequate protections, and vulnerable to abuse and unsafe working conditions. In addition, the Philippine economy is heavily reliant on the billions of dollars in remittances sent home by migrant workers—an amount that surpasses foreign direct investment.

Violence against women — Violence rates are high, largely due to entrenched patriarchal attitudes and imbalanced power relationships within the family. One in five women have experienced physical violence since age 15, and 18% who have ever been married have been physically and sexually abused by their spouse. One in seven women agree that a husband is justified in beating his wife for certain reasons, with the most common being neglecting the children.^{vii} In addition, the Philippines is a source country for trafficking in persons—men, women and children are subject to sex trafficking, forced labour and involuntary servitude worldwide.^{viii}

Women in conflict situations — Decades-long armed conflict has plagued the ARMM, causing widespread civilian insecurity and displacement^{ix}, and exacerbating the already extremely high levels of poverty, and lack of access to basic services, clean water, sanitation, food aid and medical relief in the rural southern provinces. The majority of the displaced population is made up of Muslim and indigenous women and children.

UN WOMEN IN THE PHILIPPINES

The core of UN Women's programmes involves supporting the government and civil society to address discrimination against women and gender equality. Since 2004, UN Women has worked on:

Institutional capacity building within the government to formulate and implement legislation in accordance with CEDAW and other international instruments – This has led to the drafting and advocacy of six laws under a Priority Agenda. One of the most significant laws passed under this Agenda was the 2009 Magna Carta of Women. Through partnership with the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), UN women has supported initiatives to increase awareness of the Convention and develop capacity for its local and sectoral application.

Pilot initiatives to promote gender-responsive governance and empowerment of women to claim their human rights – One example is helping develop knowledge and capacity in the judiciary on CEDAW and on gender-sensitivity in the courts system, especially in the context of violence against women. With the Philippine Judiciary Academy and the Ateneo Human Rights Center, UN Women supported a series of trainings for court personnel, and helped develop an interactive *Bench Book*, which tracks decisions on women's rights cases, making relevant jurisprudence and legal reasoning available to judges.

Empower women's groups, with emphasis on the most excluded—such as ethnic minority and rural women, and

women migrant workers—to participate in development processes, and advocate for gender-responsive and rights-

based policies and legal protections – UN Women's focused support to these women has led to a growing body of research on rights and gender issues in their communities, and a sharpening of their advocacy agenda with local authorities. For example, indigenous women from the Maguindanao province have been able to lobby successfully for the passage of local ordinances which increase the marriage age from 14 to 18 and require an equal dowry amount for all social classes. In the case of Muslim women in the ARMM, research on early marriage has been used to highlight discrimination against girls and trigger dialogue with local officials.

Pilot savings and investment scheme for on-site and returning migrants –UN Women supported NGOs to set up women's savings groups to encourage financial management, build capacity for local enterprises to contain out-migration, and to provide entrepreneurial and technical skills training. UN Women is currently partnering with WAGI, Miriam College on a 4-country study on the social costs of migration and will support national advocacy efforts to pass the pending *Domestic Workers Bill* (Kasambahay Bill), and document good practices in gender-sensitive migration management and remittance policies of banks.

The Philippines is the first country in the region to adopt a National Action Plan on Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security – UN Women will be supporting the Government and women's groups in ARMM to implement the action plan, including to assure participation of women in peace processes, and monitoring and implementing humanitarian aspects of the plan.

ⁱ National Statistics Office, 2010., in <http://census.gov.ph/>.

ⁱⁱ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/tab1a.htm>, United Nations Statistics Division.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Human Development Report 2010 ranks the country at a 'medium' level of development (97 out of 169 countries), while its Gender Inequality Index (GII) ranks it at 78 (with lowest ranked 138). The World Economic Forum's 2010 Global Gender Gap Report ranks it 9th out of 134 countries.

^{iv} *Human Development Report, 2010*, United Nations Development Programme.
^v *Stock Estimate of Overseas Filipinos As of December 2009*. Philippines Overseas Employment Administration. This does not account for the number of migrants working abroad illegally.

^{vi} *2009 Overseas Employment Statistics*. Philippines Overseas Employment Administration.

^{vii} *2008 National Demographic and Health Survey*, National Statistics Office, Philippines.

^{viii} *Trafficking in Persons Report 2011*, US Department of State.

^{ix} According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, nearly 2 million people were displaced between 2000-2006.