

Philippine Red Cross

Case study 1. A returning migrant's journey

Hasan (not his real name) is 21 years old and a resident of Zamboanga City. He came from Sabah, Malaysia with his mother on July 2020. They lived in Sabah for more than 10 years. His family moved there in anticipation of a better future for him. However, it was far from what they dreamed for him. While growing up, he had no access to education and the family's status as undocumented residents deprived him of school and other services such as health and welfare, among others.

At the time of pandemic, the situation became worse and he has now returned to the Philippines, to a country which he has limited knowledge of, a language that he is not familiar with, and an environment very new to him. COVID-19 restrictions limit his movement and he has no work to support their needs with his aging mother.

Just like other returning migrants, Hasan needs support from the government not only for daily food support, but to find a job that would help them get through with the situation and help settle back in the country.

"I am interested to go to school, anxious to learn and speak local language and take any decent job, if only given an opportunity", says Hasan.

Case study 2. The long-haul flight

On 6 July 2020, J.S. arrived with her husband, both in their 70's, from Los Angeles, California.

Due to travel restrictions in Manila, their flight was rerouted to Cebu City, where they were stranded for three days in hotel at their personal expense. Swab tests were taken in Cebu in order to be allowed to board the plane to Manila. They arrived in Manila on 9 July and were advised to wait for available flights to their final destination Zamboanga. They were stranded again for eight days in Manila, all at their personal expense. On the 17 July, they took another swab test as a requirement for the next flight; this time they were flown to Zamboanga City. Because of the many cancelled flights due to the pandemic, the flight from Manila to Zamboanga was fully booked, compromising social distancing.

"What made my flight stressful was the uncertainty if the flight to Zamboanga will push through", she said.

They safely arrived in Zamboanga on the same day. After following all health protocols, including quarantine, they were then required to remain at home in quarantine for another 14 days because a passenger on the same flight tested positive of COVID-19 virus.

With the help of the Philippines Red Cross Barangay Emergency Response Team, the monitoring of their condition, and information on quarantine restrictions was made accessible.

Case 3. Experiencing lockdown in The City

Dennis (not his real name) is 37 years old and is from Ilocos Sur. He was stranded in Makati City during the lockdown in Metro Manila.

He had access to information from different news sites (CNN Philippines, ABS CBN News, GMA News, etc.), keeping him aware of the different restrictions in place. Physical access to services was a struggle for him during that time as the need to go to market to buy food was complicated by having to get permits from local government units in order to have a travel pass and there was also limited movement due to the curfew.

He had difficulty in finding a job as his contract with his previous employer ended two months prior to the lockdown. Most employers seized their operations, so even consultancy jobs were very limited. He used all his savings to survive. He had difficulty stretching the budget for the entire five months of lockdown. The good thing was that the local government unit of Makati City provided a one-time sum of five thousand pesos per individual which helped to purchase food.

His worst experience was related to mental health. Because of the uncertainty of the pandemic and the fact that there was no vaccine available that time, it was hard for him not to feel anxious and worry. He had no regular work and no source of income. He suffered from lack of sleep due to worrying, did less exercise because of limited mobility, and his food intake was limited in order to survive for the month/s.

He had a support system of family and good friends who he could talk to every day online. They also lent him some money to purchase food and medicines. Gardening and artwork were his other coping mechanisms.

“Hope, that is all I have during this time. Hope that this too shall pass. Hope that a brighter tomorrow will come. Hope that everything will change. And hope that we will all surpass this pandemic” says Dennis.