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Temporary Moratorium of PH Participation in the US Exchange Visitor Program

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

1. What is the U.S. Exchange Visitor Program (EVP)?

The U.S. Exchange Visitor Program is an international **cultural and educational exchange program** administered by the United States. It is **NOT** a pathway to **employment and migration** to the United States.

All Filipino EVP participants are **required to return to the Philippines** following completion of their programs to share the knowledge, skills, and experience they acquired in the U.S.

2. What is the Philippine EVP Committee?

The Philippine EVP Committee, which was created in 1956 through Administrative Order No. 191 and reconstituted on 17 January 1996 through Administrative Order No. 242, is an inter-agency body composed of various Philippine Government agencies created for the following purposes:

- a. administer the agreement between the Philippines and the U.S. covering the conduct of educational, scientific, and technological exchange program;
- b. coordinate Philippine participation in the EVP and properly channel the services of returned participants to the benefit of various government projects; and
- c. promulgate rules and regulations on the Philippines' participation in the EVP.

The Committee is composed of eleven agencies (DFA, DepEd, CHED, NEDA, TESDA, PRC, DOH, OP, DOST, DOLE, and CFO) with the Department of Foreign Affairs as the Chair, and the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) as the Secretariat. The decisions are made by the EVP Committee as a collegial body.

3. Why is the EVP Committee implementing a temporary moratorium on the participation of Filipino nationals in the EVP?

A temporary moratorium on the participation of Filipino nationals in the EVP is being implemented due to the urgent nature and life-threatening implications associated with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 which affected citizens and economies worldwide at an unprecedented scale.

It is incumbent upon the Philippine government to safeguard the safety and welfare of all Filipino citizens. Accordingly, the EVP Committee received numerous concerns and requests for assistance from Filipino J1 visa holders in the US arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

As of 21 June 2020, the Philippine Embassy and Consulates in the U.S. and the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) have received more than 600 requests for assistance from J1 visa holders, particularly interns and trainees, for return tickets to the Philippines, temporary accommodation, food and other basic needs, after their programs were prematurely terminated due to the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 300 have proceeded to return to the Philippines on their own, i.e., by sourcing funding from family, friends and other sources for their repatriation. Some have opted to stay, risking overextending their visa stay. They have all complained of lack of support from their agencies, sponsors and host institutions.

The pandemic thus highlighted the need to institute further mechanisms to ensure the safety and welfare of Filipino participants in the EVP.

There are also lingering complaints on exorbitant fees and deduction in salaries/allowances imposed by some agencies and sponsors which need to be addressed.

4. Is the moratorium a total ban on Philippine participation in the EVP?

No, it is not a total ban on Philippine participation in the EVP.

Those with active programs will continue their participation in their programs especially for those with proven existence of adequate mechanisms that ensure the protection and safety of participants.

5. What is the period of the temporary moratorium?

The moratorium took effect **immediately after** the publication of EVP Resolution No. 01-2020 on **25 May 2020**, and **shall remain in place for one year, or until six (6) months** after the travel restrictions as provided by the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) are lifted or accordingly revised, whichever is longer.

6. What will happen during the temporary moratorium?

During the temporary moratorium, the EVP Committee, in close cooperation with the U.S. Embassy in Manila (and the U.S. State Department through the Philippine Embassy in Washington D.C.) will closely examine Philippine participation in the EVP in order to formulate and adopt policies and mechanisms needed to enhance the protection of Filipino participants in the EVP.

The assessment will include possible exemptions for certain categories, which already have adequate safety measures in place for crises and emergencies.

Further advisories will be issued by the Committee on the progress of its review to determine programs which merit exemption from the moratorium and on the process of instituting new procedures and policies where needed.

Meanwhile, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), as EVP Committee Secretariat, will hold in abeyance the registration of Filipino nationals for the EVP. The processing of requests for the No Objection Statement (NOS) shall also be suspended during the moratorium period.

The Philippine Bureau of Immigration will not allow Filipinos J1 visa holders to depart for the U.S. if their passports do not bear CFO registration stickers.

7. Why does the moratorium cover all categories of the EVP when those who were affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic are mainly interns and trainees?

Intern, Trainees and Summer Work and Travel participants make up some 87% of all Philippine participants in the EVP and most concerns were raised by them when their programs were pre-terminated during the COVID19 pandemic crisis. The EVP Committee is ensuring that safety mechanisms are in place for all categories (i. e. teachers, scholars, students, etc.) and that difficulties experienced by Filipino interns and trainees during the COVID-19 pandemic will be avoided by all Filipino EVP participants in the future.

8. Why is the processing of No Objection Statement also suspended during the moratorium?

This is intended to ensure that all Filipino EVP participants return to the Philippines following completion of their programs to share the knowledge, skills, and experience they acquired in the U.S., in accordance with the objectives of the Exchange Visitor Program.

However, if the Committee received the complete documentary requirements of the NOS applicant before 25 May 2020, the Committee may still process the request.