EPF-PLCPD Parliamentary Study Tour on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health

5-10 August 2019, Manila and Tagaytay City, Philippines

The European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (EPF) in collaboration with the Philippine Legislators’ Committee on Population and Development (PLCPD) organised the field visit.
Seven parliamentarians from European countries completed a week long study tour to the Philippines to learn about reproductive, maternal, new-born, child and adolescent health (RMNCAH) in the Southeast Asian country. The participating Members of Parliament (MPs) are from Belgium, Finland, Germany, Norway, Portugal, and Spain.

Along with receiving comprehensive briefings about RMNCAH in the Philippines, the MPs held meetings with civil society, government officials, national parliamentarians and UN agencies. The delegation also made a number of site visits to observe the provision of RMNCA healthcare.

The week-long tour raised awareness amongst MPs from donor countries about the unmet sexual and reproductive health needs of Filipinos. In addition, the study tour provided a first hand-experience of how to deal with and overcome opposition on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

About EPF:
EPF is a network of members of parliaments from across Europe who are committed to protecting the sexual and reproductive health of the world’s most vulnerable people, both at home and overseas. It is the only pan-European framework for MPs wishing to forge consensus and collaborate on initiatives relating to sexual and reproductive health. EPF provide the expertise for UN agencies, inter-governmental organisations and non-governmental organisations that are interested in working with parliamentarians.

About PLCPD:
Philippine Legislators’ Committee on Population and Development (PLCPD) evolved out of the Philippine Parliamentarians’ Conference on Human Survival: Population and Development Plan of Action (PARLCON) convened in 1988 to address the most pressing issues by which human survival is anchored. PLCPD was formally established in December 1989 as a non-stock, non-profit foundation dedicated to the formulation of viable public policies requiring legislation on population and socio-economic development.
PARTICIPANTS LIST

Name: Aurora Madaula  
Country: Spain, Barcelona  
Member of the Parliament of Catalonia

Name: Frank Heinrich  
Country: Germany  
Member of the German Bundestag

Name: Georges Dallemagne  
Country: Belgium  
Member of the Federal Parliament of Belgium

Name: Norbert Neuser  
Country: Germany  
Member of the European Parliament

Name: Saara Hyrkkö  
Country: Finland  
Member of Parliament of Finland

Name: Sandra Pereira  
Country: Portugal  
Member of Parliament of Portugal

Name: Silje Hjemdal  
Country: Norway  
Member of Parliament of Norway
The first day of our study tour started off with a meeting with the PLCPD Secretariat. MPs learned about the organisation and the work they do in the Philippines. They also briefed MPs on the political situation in the country and what they could expect from the visit. After a great presentation from PLCPD the parliamentarians had many questions to ask about the political system and recent developments in relation to RMNCAH. The first visit took place in the Senate where the MPs met with Senator Risa Hontiveros from the opposition party. The MPs learned about the struggle and gains of getting the Reproductive Health bill adopted as well as other bills, such as the Teenage Pregnancy Bill and the Divorce bill. In 2012, the Reproductive Health Bill was finally enacted into law after a long process in the country’s legislature, known as “The Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012” or the RH law. However, for more than a year, its implementation was put on hold by opposing parties. Senator Hontiveros spoke about the challenges of the increasing numbers of HPV cases and teenage pregnancy in the country. She also addressed the issue of not having a law on divorce – being the only country in the world (except from the Vatican) without a divorce law.

After an insightful presentation by Senator Hontiveros, the delegation took the opportunity to discuss the topics and issues raised. Hon. Silje Hjemldal from Norway asked about youth participation and representation in the Philippines, and Hon. Saara Hyrkko from Finland asked what commitments the Philippines have made to the SDG agenda. Senator Hontiveros was also asked what role women play in politics in the Philippines.
DAY 2

On the second day of the Study Tour the MPs had a site visit to Navotas City where they met with Zone One Tondo Organisation, also known as ZOTO. ZOTO is a federation of urban poor community groups based in relocation sites and areas of demolition and works with the poorest of the poor in Metro Manila. After visiting the area the MPs were welcomed to ZOTO’s head office for a presentation on the establishment and history of the organisation and key issues they are working on. After several presentations a youth group performed a show for the parliamentarians. The youth group danced and sang about issues on sexual and reproductive rights, and how it is to be a young person in the Philippines. Afterwards the MPs had the opportunity to interact with the young people and ask them questions about their experience with SRHR services.

The MPs also visited the Family Planning Organisation of the Philippines (FROP) – the largest and most prominent non-governmental family planning organisation in the country. The visit started with a guided tour around the facilities before the MPs received a presentation from a youth representative on the different projects around the county for young people.
Day three of the study tour the MPs met with government agencies to learn about efforts in the country on RMNCAH. Dr. Juan Antonio Perez from the Commission on Population (PopCom) started the meeting by presenting the implementation plan for the national Plan on Population and Family Planning. He spoke about the high population growth in the country and stressed the importance of improving Family Planning to fight poverty.

Ms. Luz Ilagan from the Department of Social Welfare and Development spoke about commitments made in advancing policies in the area of RMNCAH. Commitments of particular concern were malnutrition and teenage pregnancy. During this meeting MPs learned that in the Philippines, over 500 adolescent girls give birth every day. The greatest unmet need for Family Planning is among 15-19 year old girls.

The MPs also met with civil society organisations who presented issues on HIV, teenage pregnancy, abortion and LGBTQI rights in the Philippines. Ralph Ivan Samson from Youth Peer Education Network Pilipinas, told MPs that every day, there are 42 new cases of HIV in the country, most of whom are between 15-24 years old. The need for parental consent to obtain contraception – even the condom – makes young people reluctant to protect themselves and thus vulnerable to HIV.

The delegation also learned about the work of the Catholics for Reproductive Health. Ging Cristobal from Asia and Pacific Outright Action International spoke about the violence, abuse and discrimination LGBTQI people face in education, employment, health, and access to legal and basic services.
In the afternoon the delegation met with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) representatives in the Philippines. UNFPA Representative Iori Kato welcomed our delegation and shared his gratitude to European donors – the biggest donors of UNFPA. Our delegation received a presentation on UNFPA’s work in the Philippines, which began back in the 1970s. The main concerns shared included the high number of teenage pregnancies in the country and how to reach out to the young population.

On the fourth day of the Study Tour the MPs departed for Tagaytay City where an issue orientation for legislators was organised. A total of 22 local and national legislators representing 11 different provinces and 8 different regions of the Philippines participated. The provinces and regions represented are:

- Eastern Samar, Eastern Visayas
- Province of Cotabato, Mindanao
- Province of Sulu, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region
- Province of Basilan, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region
- Camarines Sur, Bicol Region, Southern Luzon
- Province of Benguet, Cordillera Autonomous Region
- Province of Albay, Bicol Region, Southern Luzon Region
- Province of Palawan, Southern Luzon
- Lanao del Sur, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region
- Maguindanao, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region
- Province of Lanao del Sur, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region
DAY 4-6

The final two days of our study tour were spent in Tagaytay City for an issue orientation for legislators. Regional, national, and local policymakers participated in a fruitful discussion and presentations on how to strengthen the role of policymakers in SDG policy and action. Among other, Dr. Troy Gepte from the department of Health presented landmark laws on health in the Philippines. Despite progress, challenges remain, such as high out-of-pocket expenses and fragmented health systems.

Prof. Lulu C. Bravo presented issues and challenges in child health, immunisation and nutrition. She stressed the importance of immunisation as key driver for sustainable development and raised concerns in the decline in public confidence in vaccines, showing examples from the increase in measles in the Philippines.

Hon. Frank Heinrich from Germany asked questions about the vaccine movement and Hon. Saara Hyrkko from Finland stressed the importance of immunisation. The delegation of MPs stressed the need to work better together in order to become stronger globally against movements against human rights, immunization, and other important health topics.

Rep. Edcel Lagman, known as the father of the Reproductive Health Law in the Philippines opened the last meeting of the study tour, giving a memorable speech on Reproductive, Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health in the Philippines.

“The right to health also includes the right to reproductive self-determination”.
SOCIAL MEDIA COVERAGE

Georges Dallemagne

The Philippines, 2000 miles and almost as many challenges.

I'm coming back from a study tour in the Philippines at the invitation of the European Parliamentary Forum (EPF). Focus on what is called the health of reproduction, population growth, family planning, violence against girls, sexual trafficking of minors,...

My fellow colleagues are members of parliament from several European countries (Finland, Norway, Germany, Portugal, Spain). We are ten in everything with the...See more.

Sandra Meneses

Dimeces vaig tenir l’honor d’representar la delegació de Diputats de parlaments europeus a la seu de la @UNFPAp davant el seu representant, el sr. @oriunfpa i el seu equip. Vam discutir sobre drets sexuals i reproductius, drets de les dones.

Translated Tweet:

Sandra Pereira

@WithMrGonzalez

@EPF_5RR

Today our negotiation is visiting Samarihas and Mamasamayam-Zone One Tongi Oga Organization, also known as ZOO. ZOO is a federation of urban poor community groups based in slum areas and stress for demolition and work with the pocket of the poor in Metro Manille.

Translated Tweet:

Silje Hjelmeland

Rep. Edcel Lagman - the “father” of the Reproductive Health Law in the Philippines is opening today's meeting. “The right to Health also includes the right to reproductive self-determination.”

Translated Tweet:

Saara Hynkkö

@SaaraHynkkö

Europees het kansandustajat tutustuvat Filippinien äitivyöryystäytteeseen joka päivä 11 naista kuolee raskauden tai synnytyksen takia.Matkalla on myös Suomen eduskunnan Seksuaalioikeudet- ja kehityssyörynä jäsen @SaaraHynkkö. Tiesitko, että Väestölitto on ryhmän sihteen?
Earlier today, Sen @placaytano met with visiting parliamentarians from @EPF_SRR and gave them quick updates on the Duterte government’s support for the #RHLaw and efforts to address teen pregnancy in the Philippines.

Here at the Philippine Senate for @EPF_SRR delegation of European parliamentarians’ dialogue with Sen. @risahontiveros. The delegation is in PH for a week-long study tour on reproductive, maternal, newborn, child & adolescent health.

Today our delegation is visiting Samahan ng Mamamayan-Zone One Tondo Organization, also known as ZOTO. ZOTO is a federation of urban poor community groups based in relocation sites and areas for demolition and works with the poorest of the poor in Metro Manila.