



Over 8,000 workers affected by Boracay closure receive promised aid from DOLE

Aklan, Philippines. Following the total shutdown of operations in Boracay to tourists last 26 April 2018, the Department of Labor and Employment pledged to provide assistance to the estimated 17,735 workers expected to be displaced by the closure. As of 10 August 2018, 13,679 applications were received by the Department, and over 8,000 workers affected by the temporary closure of the island were endowed with the promised aid from DOLE.

Financial support, employment facilitation, and trainings are available to qualified applicants to the Boracay Emergency Employment Program (BEEP) Adjustment Measures Program (AMP). Last 13 July 2018, DOLE amended the BEEP AMP guidelines relaxing the requirements, increasing the offered assistance, and simplifying the operational procedures of the program. This fast-tracked the processing of thousands of applications received by the agency since it commenced operations last 24 May 2018.

Arlene Bansuli, a retained employee of Crafts of Boracay Inc., recounts how the sudden closure of Boracay displaced many of the employees at her workplace – including herself. “All of us were affected,” she explains, “Many of us were retained at first but eventually a number of those that were left were also suspended.”

“I was one of those asked to remain, but I have been assigned to work for only five days a week for a rate less than what I used to receive.”

Jose Julius Ledesma was neither so fortunate. As an employee of Citi Appliance, the closure of Boracay led to his suspension from work. “I wasn’t prepared when it happened,” he says sadly, “It has affected us gravely indeed.”

Kenny Francisco from Hotel Soffia Boracay explains how even retained workers suffer from the temporary closure of the island: “In Boracay, visitors translate to service charges. More visitors mean more service charge for the staff. Normally, we get service charge four times each month. These days, we only receive our basic salary.”

“Goods are expensive here, and the cost of living is high,” he further says, “So you struggle. We’ve had to borrow a lot of money.”

Ms. Bansuli echoes his concerns. “The cost of living in Boracay is high. Even during the closure, goods and utilities remain costly.”

The amended guidelines of the BEEP AMP allots beneficiaries, both retained and totally displaced, financial support of Php 4,205.50 per month (50% of the prevailing



minimum wage in the region) for a maximum period of six months. This is in contrast to the original stipulation that retained workers were to receive only Php 2,102.75 per month (25% of the prevailing minimum wage in the region) provided in lump sum covering a three-month period.

Maria Rosario Samson, manager of Boracay Terraces Resort, was more fortunate than most. She, at least, was given the option to keep or temporarily lose her job during the closure. "I guess you could say I volunteered myself; I left so others who needed it more could keep their jobs."

A resident of Boracay since graduating from college in Manila, Ms. Samson had never been unemployed in the past 15 years she has been living in Boracay. She expresses her understanding of why the closure was necessary for the island's good, but voices out frustration as well at the situation it has put Boracay residents in.

"I provide for my family of eight," she said. "It has greatly impacted us breadwinners."

As soon as they were acquainted with the DOLE program of assistance for Boracay workers, Bansuli, Ledesma, Francisco, and Samson decided to pursue applications to the BEEP AMP.

Mr. Francisco found out about the program through social media. Left without a job in Boracay, he had gone back to his hometown to look for work opportunities during the six-month closure.

"It helps sustain us," he says of the assistance, "It helps put food on the table and pay for bills."

For Ms. Samson, the financial support helped address her unemployment concerns as a resident of Boracay Island.

"To go elsewhere and look for job there for just the six-month closure period is a great hassle," she said. "I'm trying to find a job here in Boracay because I really don't want to leave, so the financial assistance helps me out."

"I use the money as capital to buy and sell stuff online, as I look for work," she shares. "Every little bit helps during this time."

Ms. Bansuli is thankful the financial assistance came to her when it did. "Classes were about to start," she explains. "From the financial support I received, I was able to set aside money for my children's tuition as well as buy them supplies for school. The rest I used to pay the bills."



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Mr. Ledesma sums up their sentiments regarding the BEEP AMP in just one line: “We're very thankful that the Department was able to give us this assistance somehow.”

Ms. Samson nods her agreement, “I'm very thankful to DOLE.”

The Department of Labor and Employment encourages all workers affected by the temporary closure of Boracay Island to apply for the BEEP AMP. It's offices nationwide are ready and equipped to provide assistance to all displaced workers.

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