

## **The Feminization of International Migration Among Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs): Trends, Outcomes and Challenges**

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### **Abstract**

The paper examines the different dimensions of the feminization of international migration as a recent trend in the Philippines. It identifies the factors determining female migration over the years; the types of migration; and recent trends. Finally, the paper highlights how overseas work impacts on the personal and family life of migrant workers as well on the economy in general.

**Keywords:** Female migration, overseas Filipino workers, feminization of migration

### **Introduction**

The feminization of migration is a recent trend in which gendered patterns are changing, and more and more women are migrating for labor or marriage. The percentage of female migrants worldwide has risen from 46.7 percent in 1960 to 49.6 percent as of 2005, according to United Nations statistics.<sup>1</sup>

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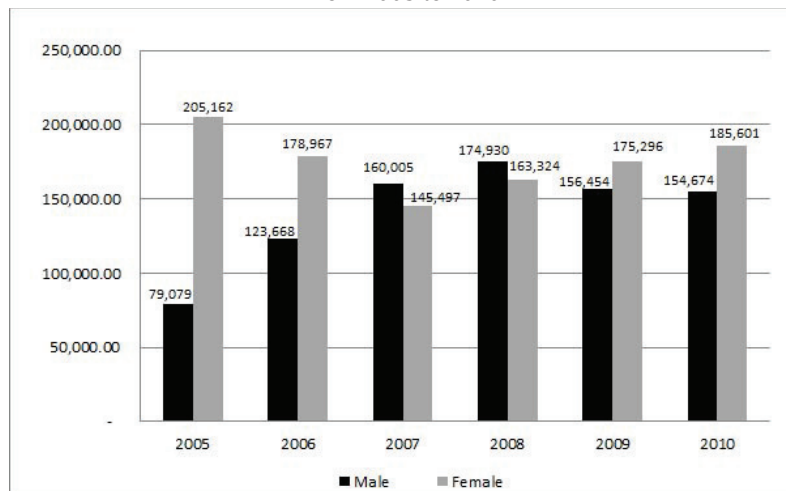
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With more than 70 percent of Filipinos working abroad belonging to the female gender, it has become obvious that overseas migration has taken on a woman’s face. This has been the situation for the last four years. When the Philippines adopted its labor export policy in the 1970s, female workers going overseas comprised only 12 percent of the migration pie. The share steadily became bigger, rising to 48.2 percent in 1987, to 55 percent in 1993, and even to 64 percent seven years ago. Filipino women workers are scattered among 197 countries as domestic helpers, caregivers, entertainers, nurses, clerical and sales workers, and professional and technical employees.<sup>2</sup>

### Dimensions and Dynamics

As illustrated in Figure 1, from 2005 to 2010, the increase in women migration exceeded that of their male counterparts in the years 2005, 2006, 2009 and 2010. Female overseas workers numbered 72 percent in 2005; 59.14 percent in 2006; 47.61 in 2007; 48.28 in 2008; 52.84 percent in 2009; and 54.54 percent in 2010. On the other hand, there were only two years wherein the number of male overseas workers exceeded women—by 9.06 percent in 2007 and 10.74 percent in 2008.

Figure 1: A dramatic rise in number of women over male workers overseas, from 2005 to 2010

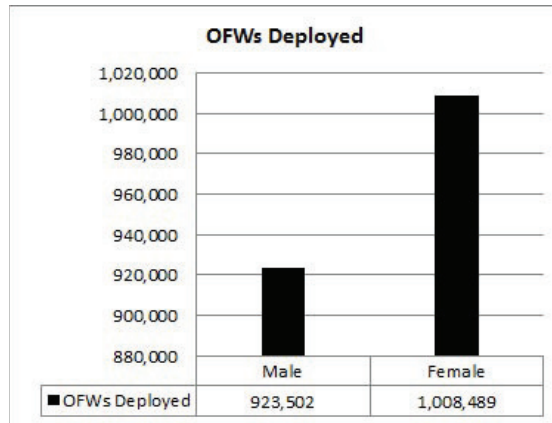


Source : Philippine Overseas Employment Administration

Figure 1 also shows the decline of female OFWs from 2005 to 2007, and an increase again from 2008 to 2010. For male OFWs, there was an increase from 2005 to 2008, a decline in 2009, and an increase again in 2010.

**Factors determining female migration.** In 2010, the Philippine Overseas Employment (POEA) reported that a total of 185,582 female workers left the country for foreign employment opportunities. From 2005 to 2010, more and more females left the country, totaling 1,008,489.

Figure 2: Number of overseas Filipino Workers deployed, from 2005 - 2010, by sex



Source : Overseas Workers Welfare Administration

Continuous job opportunities abroad are usually considered more attractive than equal or slightly better opportunities in the country. This is one of the determining factors why more Filipinos leave the country. Most of these opportunities are open to women, particularly for clerical, sales and service workers, medical personnel, and domestic helpers. It is argued that there is inequality between men and women in terms of job opportunities. According to Floro (2002), the overwhelming emphasis given by market economics has created a bias in the type of productive activities considered “economic.” Economic considers mainly activities of greater concern to men. It tends to ignore economic activities such as the household production of non-marketed goods and services vital for social reproduction. Much of these activities are still done within the household and are

essentially based upon unpaid female labor. A significant aspect of women's activities, though clearly productive, is not taken into account in the measurement of aggregate economic indicators such as the gross domestic product, nor in discussion of economic problems and policies. Women and families remain absent as well in micro-level discussions of economic matters, with the individual as the unit of analysis. The "rational economic" individual has been ascribed characteristics shaped by the male experience, the male way of thinking, and the male way of relating world.<sup>3</sup>

Females are characterized to be excellent in nurturing; thus, foreign countries prefer women in medical fields such as nurses and caregivers. The demand for nurses is a major pull factor, especially to meet shortages in wealthier countries. In 2005, an estimated 85 percent of employed Filipino nurses were working abroad.<sup>4</sup> In Singapore, 30 percent of the nurses registered in 2003 were born outside the country.<sup>5</sup>

Several types of push and pull factors may influence people in their movements, including environmental, political, economic and cultural. Asia is one of the world's largest supplier of female domestic workers, with Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines being the largest exporters. Many of these women become domestic workers in other Asian countries as well as in other regions, especially the Middle East and Europe.<sup>6</sup> The ILO reports that in 2005, there were 200,000 foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong and 155,000 in Malaysia.<sup>7</sup>

Poverty and the lack of job opportunities are two causes of unemployment rate increases in the country. These are push factors that lead to more women leaving the country. The desirability of a place or place utility is one of the factors based on the social, economic or environmental situation, often used to compare the value of living in different locations.

**Types of migration.** In 2010, the Commission of Filipino Overseas (CFO) reported an estimated 9.4 million Filipinos were permanently living abroad, an increase from an estimated 7.9 million permanent Filipino migrants in 2005. Permanent migrants refer to Filipino migrants and legal permanent residents abroad. Permanent migrants may be Filipinos who are Filipino citizens, who are Philippine passport holders, or who have been naturalized citizens in the host country. They may be dual citizens or legal permanent residents abroad whose status in the host country does not depend on work contracts.

Immigrants continue to increase annually. Data for emigrant and immigrant status according to gender is not recorded by the CFO.

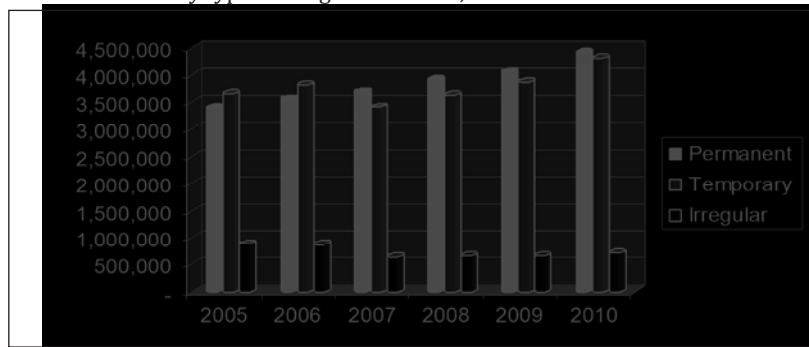
Table 1: Number of Filipinos Working Overseas by Type of Migration Status, from 2005 - 2010

Year	Permanent	Temporary	Irregular	Total
2010	4,423,680	4,324,388	704,916	9,452,984
2009	4,056,940	3,864,068	658,370	8,579,378
2008	3,907,842	3,626,259	653,609	8,187,710
2007	3,693,015	3,413,079	648,169	7,754,263
2006	3,556,035	3,802,345	874,792	8,233,172
2005	3,391,338	3,651,727	881,123	7,924,188

Source: Commission of Filipino Overseas, 2005 – 2010

There are also regular and properly documented overseas Filipinos who are temporary migrants. This is based on the employment-related nature of their status in the host country. Temporary migrants include contract workers, intra-company transferees, students, trainees, entrepreneurs, businessmen, traders and others who stay abroad for six months or more. These migrants are popularly referred to as “overseas contract workers (OCWs)” or “overseas Filipino workers (OFWs).”

Figure 3: An upward trend of Filipinos working overseas by types of migration status, from 2005–2010



Source: Department of Foreign Affairs, Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, Commission on Filipino Overseas.

Irregular migrants are those whose stay abroad is not properly documented. They also do not have valid residence and work permits. They can also be overstaying workers or tourists in a foreign country. Migrants whose status has been undocumented for six months or longer fall into this category. A nondiscriminatory label for these migrants is “undocumented migrants”. In Filipino international migration parlance, these migrants are called “TNTs” (*tago nang tago or always in hiding*).

### **Migration Trends**

**Occupational trends.** As seen in Table 2, there is a stable increase of OFWs in the field of administrative and managerial work; however, it can be seen that there are more males in this field.

For jobs related to agriculture, animal husbandry and forestry workers, fishermen and hunters, men still dominate as shown in the increasing number of male workers from 2006 to 2009; however, a decline in 2010 is also noted. A growth in the number of women workers from 2005 to 2008 is also observed.

For clerical and related work, female OFWs dominate. An increase in number from 2005 to 2008 for both male and female is clearly seen; however, a drop in the number of female OFWs from 2009 to 2010 is noted in this field, similar to the figure of male migrants.

Males dominate the field of production and related work, transport equipment operation and labor, where there is an increase in male OFWs from 2005 to 2008 and a decrease from 2009 to 2010. For female OFWs, there is an increase of their number from 2005 to 2006, a decrease in 2007, an increase again in 2008, a drop in 2009, and an increase again in 2010.

Males dominate the field of professional, technical and related work. From 2005 to 2008, there is an increase in number; however, a decline from 2009 to 2010 is noted. For female workers, however, there is no noticeable trend since the number of workers either increases or decreases.

For the field of service work, women dominate; however, from 2005 to 2007, there is a noted decrease in number. From 2008 to 2010, there is a sudden increase in number of employment. For male service workers, their number is inversely proportional to the females'. It can be seen also that majority of the service workers are domestic helpers.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of male and female Filipino overseas workers in various occupational categories, from 2005 to 2010.

JOBS	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		2010	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Administrative and managerial workers	77.76%	22.24%	64.63%	35.37%	62.76%	37.24%	68.65%	31.35%	61.78%	38.22%	59.00%	41.00%
Agriculture, animal husbandry and forestry workers, fishermen and hunters	88.86%	11.14%	88.72%	11.28%	91.70%	8.30%	79.91%	20.09%	79.84%	20.16%	93.32%	6.68%
Clerical and related workers	35.84%	64.16%	41.35%	58.65%	35.01%	64.99%	35.67%	64.33%	35.11%	64.89%	48.50%	51.50%
Production and related workers, transport equipment operators and laborers	69.12%	30.88%	77.47%	22.53%	83.56%	16.44%	83.92%	16.08%	82.68%	17.32%	80.92%	19.08%
Professional, technical and related workers	30.39%	69.61%	62.12%	37.88%	66.94%	33.06%	78.84%	21.16%	77.77%	22.23%	83.29%	16.71%
Sales workers	30.23%	69.77%	43.60%	56.40%	32.14%	67.86%	36.85%	63.15%	37.93%	62.07%	51.70%	48.30%
Service workers	8.49%	91.51%	11.77%	88.23%	21.38%	78.62%	19.57%	80.43%	16.39%	83.61%	12.96%	87.04%
Domestic helpers	1.12%	98.88%	2.43%	97.57%	7.99%	92.01%	6.12%	93.88%	3.67%	96.33%	2.40%	97.60%
Teachers	21.47%	78.53%	30.34%	69.66%	8.19%	91.81%	28.28%	71.72%	28.25%	71.75%	30.65%	69.35%
Medical personnel	6.72%	93.28%	10.75%	89.25%	10.66%	89.34%	11.37%	88.63%	10.76%	89.24%	12.13%	87.87%
Engineers	96.50%	3.50%	96.15%	3.85%	96.02%	3.98%	96.01%	3.99%	97.17%	2.83%	97.62%	2.38%
Total	29.32%	70.68%	42.47%	57.53%	54.08%	45.92%	54.32%	45.68%	49.80%	50.20%	47.79%	52.21%

Source: Philippine Overseas Employment Administration

Females dominate the field of sales workers; however, there is a noted drop in female migrants from 2009 to 2010. This is also observed among the male migrants.

Females again dominate the teachers' category; however, from an increasing number from 2005 to 2008, their number decline from 2009 to 2010. For male teachers, no particular trend is observed since their number fluctuates within a single year.

Among medical personnel, women again dominate, with a marked difference between the numbers of male and female migrants. However, each year the trend in female migrants changes—it increases, then decreases, and increases again the following year. For male medical personnel, there is an increase in their number from 2005 to 2008, a decrease in 2009, and an increase again in 2010.

Male migrants dominate the engineers' category. Both male and female migrants increased in number from 2005 to 2008, but decreased from 2009 to 2010.

Table 2 shows that the job category affects which gender will dominate in a certain type of job. It is observed that men dominate in the fields of administrative and managerial work; agriculture, animal husbandry and forestry, fishermen and hunters; production and related work, transport equipment operation and labor; professional, technical and related work; and engineering. This is due to the stereotype that such jobs are men's work. On the other hand, clerical and related workers, sales workers, service workers, teachers, medical personnel and domestic helpers tend to be female.

**Trends across continents.** Illustrated on Table 3 are the percentage ratios between males and females working in other countries. Evidently, females have comprised an average of 56 percent of the total number of migrant workers for the past six years; this suggests that females have better opportunities abroad than males.

Comparing the figures on Table 3, we note that in Africa, almost 100 percent of migrant workers are male, while in Asia nearly 90 percent of migrant workers are female. Generally, based on the deployment records of POEA, the category of production and related workers, transport equipment operators and laborers is dominated by the male migrant workers in Africa; on the other hand, female migrant workers dominate the category of service worker in Asia. The number of male and female migrants are almost equal in the other continents, except for Oceania, which is comparable to Africa.



Table 3: A comparative distribution of male and female Filipino overseas workers in different continents, from 2005 to 2010.

CONTINENT	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		2010	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Africa	97%	3%	94%	6%	97%	3%	98%	2%	98%	2%	99%	1%
America	45%	55%	54%	46%	49%	51%	53%	47%	55%	45%	53%	47%
Asia	19%	81%	30%	70%	29%	71%	26%	74%	21%	79%	24%	76%
Europe	37%	63%	44%	56%	37%	63%	35%	65%	36%	64%	26%	74%
Middle East	32%	68%	43%	57%	61%	39%	57%	43%	52%	48%	50%	50%
Oceania	91%	9%	92%	8%	91%	9%	89%	11%	82%	18%	86%	14%
Trust Territories	58%	42%	58%	42%	66%	34%	61%	39%	71%	29%	82%	18%
Percentage ratio of TOTAL	28%	72%	41%	59%	52%	48%	52%	48%	47%	53%	45%	55%

Source: Philippine Overseas Employment Administration

Women's migration decreased at an average rate of 11 percent from 2005 to 2010. The largest drop in international migration is seen in the years 2006 and 2007, with an average decrease of 15 percent. It is obvious in Table 3 that there is a huge decrease in terms of percentage of international migration in Middle East; however, it remains to be one of top three Continents of destination.

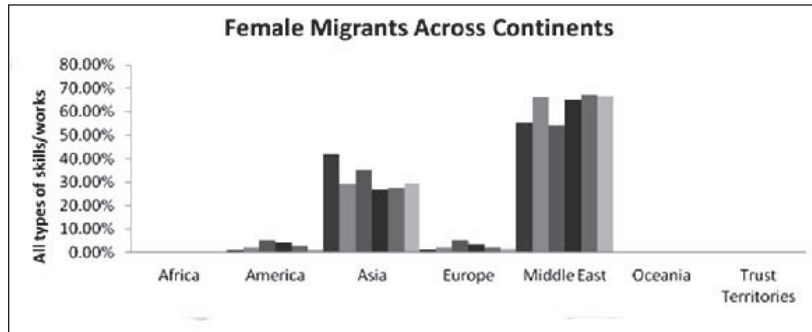
Table 4: Share of female Filipino overseas workers per year and per continent, from 2005 to 2010.

Continent	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Africa	0.03%	0.08%	0.04%	0.05%	0.06%	0.07%
America	0.92%	2.07%	5.39%	4.15%	2.82%	1.46%
Asia	41.91%	29.24%	34.91%	26.79%	27.34%	29.73%
Europe	1.40%	2.18%	5.23%	3.41%	2.22%	1.84%
Middle East	55.52%	66.15%	54.11%	65.23%	67.31%	66.72%
Oceania	0.03%	0.08%	0.17%	0.28%	0.16%	0.13%
Trust Territories	0.19%	0.19%	0.14%	0.09%	0.08%	0.05%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
FEMALE Annual Employment Rate		-11%	-19%	12%	8%	6%

Source: Philippine Overseas Employment Administration.

As illustrated in Figure 4, the tremendous decrease in the percentage of female migrants in Middle East in 2007 is almost the same as the percentage increase in 2008. Following this year is a gradual growth in the percentage of migrant women in the same continent. As also shown in Table 4, there is a notable decrease in the percentage of migrant female workers in some other continents starting 2008 as compared to the Middle East.

Figure 4: Cluster comparisons of female Filipino migrants across continents from 2005 to 2010



Source: Philippine Overseas Employment Administration.

One possible factor behind the significant decrease in 2007 in the Middle East was the board resolution issued by POEA under Series No. 03 of 2012. Portions of the resolution are quoted below:

WHEREAS, Section 5 of Republic Act No. 10022 authorizes the POEA Governing Board after consultation with the Department of Foreign Affairs to terminate or impose a ban on the deployment of migrant workers in pursuit of the national interest or when welfare so requires;

WHEREAS, Governing Board Resolution No. 8, series of 2007, was issued suspending the processing and deployment of all workers bound for Iraq and Afghanistan because of the unstable peace and order situation in the said countries...

This resolution contributed to the great decrease in the percentage of migrant workers traveling to the Middle East. The imposed ban for all types of jobs in this continent factors greatly in the decline in female migration to this region.

Table 5 shows the top ten destinations of migrant workers occupying service workers' jobs. Service workers include cooks and related workers; service workers; housekeeping and related service workers; domestic helpers and related household workers; caregivers and caretakers; and other related service jobs. At most, a large number of female workers were deployed to some of the countries in the

Middle East or in Asia. As shown in the table, the largest number of female service workers were in the countries of Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Kuwait, with an average rate of 19 percent of the total of migrant workers in the top ten countries of destination.

Table 5: Share of Filipino female service workers in the top countries of destination from 2005 to 2010.

Countries	Annual					
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Hong Kong	15.31%	20.07%	31.29%	20.31%	23.08%	22.68%
Taiwan	10.51%	9.09%	9.53%	7.29%	5.73%	5.10%
Malaysia	0.81%	0.50%	0.58%	0.26%	0.39%	0.88%
Saudi Arabia	20.92%	26.03%	18.32%	23.25%	25.57%	21.64%
Kuwait	17.96%	21.04%	11.69%	10.74%	14.32%	17.92%
United Arab Emirates	14.50%	2.16%	17.86%	26.15%	19.77%	18.84%
Lebanon	10.38%	8.05%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Qatar	5.56%	8.25%	5.04%	9.12%	8.08%	9.75%
Bahrain	2.06%	2.47%	1.89%	1.50%	2.05%	2.17%
Israel	1.99%	2.34%	3.80%	1.37%	1.00%	1.01%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

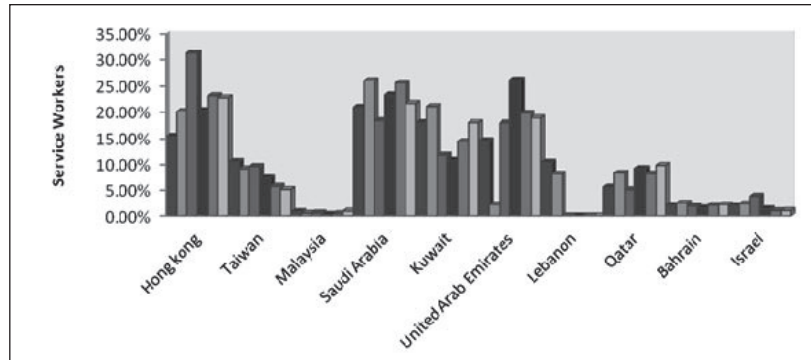
Source: Philippine Overseas Employment Administration.

Figure 5 shows how the number of Filipino female overseas workers fluctuates per country of distribution between 2005 and 2010.

The highest percentage of service workers for the last six years, relative to other countries, was in Hong Kong. Hence, the most notable increase was posted in 2007 with an average percentage of 31 percent over the total of service workers in the said year.

However, the great decrease of international migration for service workers was observed in Lebanon from 2007 to 2010, where the number of migrants dropped from eight percent to zero percent in 2006 of the total number deployed to the top ten destination countries.

Figure 5: A cluster comparison of female Filipino workers in countries in Asia & Middle East from 2005 to 2010.



Source: Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA)

As discussed above, the main reason for the great percentage drop of female workers was the board resolution issued by the DOLE in 2007, banning all travel and all types of jobs from the Philippines to certain countries.

There was also a large percentage drop of female service workers in the United Arab Emirates in 2006, wherein an average 13 percent decrease was noted. However, in 2007, there was a renewed increase in the percentage of female service workers.

## Institutions

Different institutions in the Philippines may contribute to the promotion of jobs outside the country that may result in the increase of overseas workers. Of these, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) and the Commission of Filipinos Overseas (CFO) mainly serve our OFWs.

The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) serves many functions. It regulates the industry by issuing licenses to private recruitment agencies and ship manning companies to engage in overseas recruitment and manning. It arbitrates complaints and cases of reported violation of POEA rules and regulations, except for money claims, filed against recruitment and manning agencies, foreign principals and employers, and overseas workers. It also implements a system of incentives and penalties for private sector participants; sets

minimum labor standards; monitors overseas job advertisements on print, broadcast and television; supervises the government's program on anti-illegal recruitment; and imposes disciplinary actions on erring employers and workers and seafarers.

For employment facilitation, the POEA accredits/registers foreign principals and employers hiring Filipino workers; approves manpower requests of foreign principals and employers; evaluates and processes employment contracts; assists departing workers at the ports of exit; develops and monitors markets and conducts market research; conducts marketing missions; enters into memoranda of understanding on the hiring of Filipino workers with labor-receiving countries; facilitates the deployment of workers hired through government-to-government arrangement; and provides a system of worker's registry.

For workers' protection, the POEA holds public education and information campaigns; conducts pre-employment orientations and anti-illegal recruitment seminars nationwide; conducts Pre-Deployment Orientation Seminars (PDOS) to workers hired through the government-to-government arrangements and name hires; provides technical assistance in the drafting of bilateral and multilateral agreements; provides legal assistance to victims of illegal recruitment; prepares OFW global mapping and profiling; implements gender-sensitive programs; networks with non-government organizations, workers' organizations, etc.; and provides repatriation assistance.

The POEA's program thrust includes continuing agency education, and agency performance evaluation/ranking and classification system improvement through pre-application orientation seminars and seminars on best recruitment practices; implementation of comprehensive case management program by conciliation; adjudication; monitoring of appeals; and enforcement of decisions. It facilitates one million OFW deployments through the dispatch of technical marketing missions; intensification of marketing intelligence work; pursuit of bilateral/multi-lateral agreements; encouragement of visits of foreign government and employers; strengthening of linkages with education and training sector; enhancement of coordination with host governments; and enforcement of policy on skills competencies. For workers' protection, the POEA has the global OFW mapping and profiling; intensification of AIR campaign by pre-employment orientation seminars; illegal recruitment free-LGUs; multimedia information and education program; legal assistance to IR victims;

surveillance/entrapment operations; arrests; and prosecution and closure of establishments. The POEA also implements incentive programs for victims and witnesses of illegal recruitment; handles payment of docket fees and other court or legal fees, and employment without placement fees; and provides on-site remedies to OFWs to file complaints against employer or agency.

The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) has a two-fold mandate: delivering welfare services and benefits, and ensuring capital build-up and fund viability. Its objectives are to protect the interests and promote the welfare of OFWs in recognition of their valuable contribution to the overall development effort; to facilitate the implementation of the provisions of the Labor Code concerning the responsibility of the government to promote the well-being of OFWs; to provide social and welfare services to OFWs, including insurance, social work assistance, legal assistance, cultural services and remittance services; to ensure the efficiency of OWWA fund collection, viability and sustainability through sound and judicious investment and fund management policies; to undertake studies and research for the enhancement of OFWs' social, economic and cultural well-being; and to develop, support and finance specific projects for the welfare of OFWs.

The Commission of Filipinos Overseas mainly provides assistance to the President and the Philippine Congress in the formulation of policies and measures concerning or affecting Filipinos overseas; develops and implements programs to promote the interest and well-being of Filipinos overseas; serves as a forum for preserving and enhancing the social, economic and cultural ties of Filipinos overseas with the motherland; and liaises on behalf of Filipinos overseas with appropriate government and private agencies in the transaction of business and similar ventures in the Philippines.

### **Bilateral Agreements**

From 2005 to 2010, the Philippines was able to sign bilateral agreements with different countries, particularly Bahrain, Canada, Saskatchewan, Japan, Jordan, Korea, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Libya, New Zealand, Qatar, Spain and United Arab Emirates. The bilateral agreements aim to promote cooperation and set standards

between Philippines and destination countries for human resource deployment and development.

These bilateral agreements, which are binding to both countries, regulate the different aspects of employment standards. Hence, upon execution of these agreements, which define protective measures among the different jobs being offered, more workers, particularly women, are encouraged to find employment abroad. This is evident by the above illustrated statistic, which shows an increasing number of women migrating and working abroad.

### **Experiences of Women OFWs**

Migrant women around the globe have their own stories to share about their personal experiences abroad. These experiences can be either classified as positive or negative, and occur from the day they leave the country until they return. From the research conducted and the review of the articles related to this study, the researchers were able to obtain some vital information on the positive and negative experiences—both personal and work-related—of the women OFWs abroad.

**Positive.** Along with the higher salaries and better benefits abroad, women acquire what they call “unforgettable experiences”. These experiences, often documented by electronic cameras or video recordings, make an indelible impact upon the women, and they often share these with their friends, relatives and families in the Philippines through conversation and “chitchatting.” Here are some of the documented interviews obtained from the Internet on the shared ideas and experiences of these OFWs:

*Rachel: “There are better employment opportunities abroad with higher pay. Working locally will not earn us as much to cope with the rising costs of commodities and getting better education for our children.”*

*Nina: “It is difficult to work abroad but the decision is made much more difficult when the family is left behind. If you can bring your family or spouse with you abroad, do so. Find work for your spouse too. Stick together if at all possible.”<sup>8</sup>*



Both Rachel and Nina vouched for the better employment opportunities abroad. As they affirmed in their statements, these opportunities help them provide a better life for their families. Another opportunity cited in their testimonials is the chance to bring their family abroad with them. This means that the opportunity is not only limited to the one working abroad. The positive impact extends to their family in the form of better living conditions, better education for their children, and of course, exposure to international cultures and broader horizons.

The lifestyle of the entire family instantly changes once one of them is able to work abroad. Another testimonial from the Internet illustrates how one family was able to build up their savings while enjoying the other benefits of foreign employment:

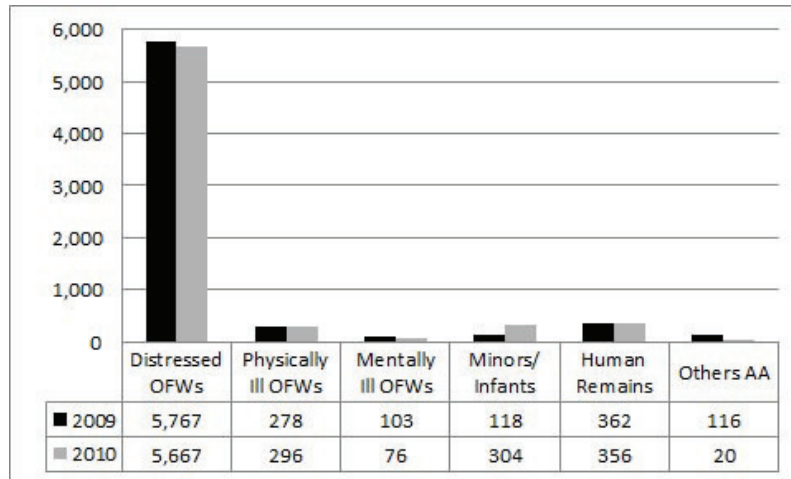
*Jona: "Not only are our kids' tuition fully paid, we can now afford to invest in an educational plan. If we were both employed locally and living on standard pay, maybe we wouldn't be able to go beyond maintaining a savings account. We can now buy our children the toys they like. However, getting a huge monthly remittance is not always a good thing..."<sup>9</sup>*

These are just a few testimonials on the benefits of working abroad. As described by some of the workers, they normally gain career enhancement, access to economic and educational opportunities for their families left in the Philippines, and broadened personal perspectives through exposure to different cultures, traditions and practices.

**Negative.** Today, overseas Filipino workers are considered modern-day Filipino heroes due to their contributions to our national economy in the form of dollar remittances. At the same time, they are able to provide for the needs of their family. However, these workers also live in uncertainty with regard to their employment and security in a foreign country, and some are maltreated and abused physically, verbally or sexually.

Data from the OWWA, the lead government agency tasked to protect and promote the welfare and well-being of OFWs and their dependents, give an illustration for 2009 to 2010. In Figure 6, between 2009 and 2010, the OWWA extended repatriation assistance

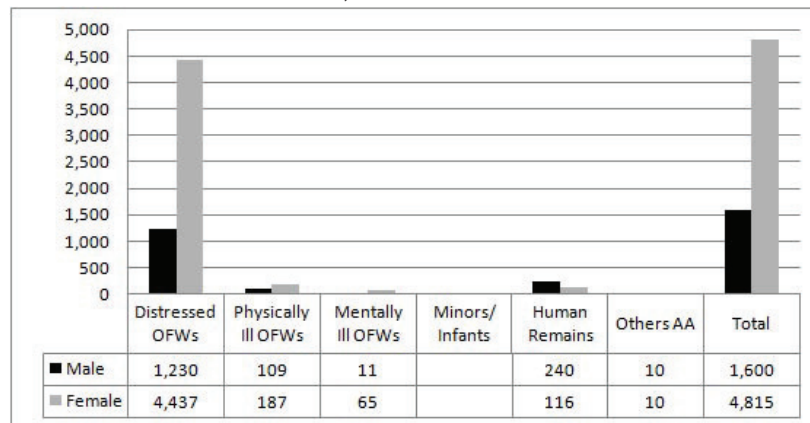
Figure 6: Total repatriated and airport assisted OFWs, from 2009 to 2010



Source: Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, 2009 – 2010

to a total of 13,463 by advancing air tickets for their return flights to the Philippines. Of the total number of repatriated OFWs, 718 were human remains. Distress due to labor exploitation and other welfare issues or complaints were the primary reasons for the return of majority of the workers. Most of these cases involve sexual, physical and emotional abuse, poor health conditions, withheld salaries and

Figure 7: Total repatriated and airport assisted OFWs according to classified cases, Year 2009 to 2010



Source: Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, 2010.

contract violations. Majority of the incidents happened in the Middle Eastern countries. Such experiences of abuse, which for many OFWs are a daily occurrence, may cause physical and mental illness in the victim, particularly those who have undergone the most grievous cases of maltreatment.

Most of the distressed OFWs are women since there are more women than men abroad. OWWA gives assistance in emergency situations by facilitating the immediate repatriation of distressed OFWs, medically ill OFWs and human remains, as well as other means of support such as financial and airport assistance, domestic transport, temporary shelter and local government support.

### **Consequences of International Migration: Opportunities and Challenges**

**Career growth.** According to the survey, there are several ways in which OFWs can advance their careers.

First, they can save enough money and use it to establish a small business here, such as a bakeshop or dry-goods store, that they can manage upon their return. The government also helps the OFWs in this endeavor by conducting seminars on business and entrepreneurship for OFWs.

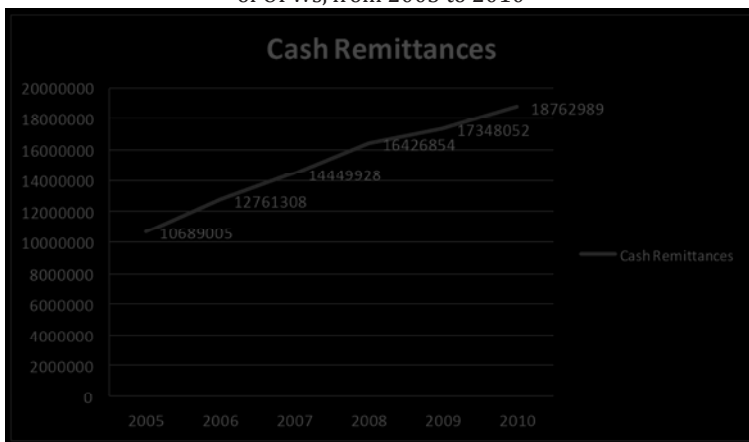
OFWs coming back to the Philippines can also opt to continue their education, given that they now have the resources to pursue further studies.

On the other hand, some OFWs who live in the provinces can acquire more land that they can lease to farmers.

Other OFWs can also choose to migrate permanently to other countries where the work opportunities are better, bringing their family along. This is especially true for OFWs in Hong Kong, who eventually migrate to Canada since it is easier to go to Canada from Hong Kong. Once in Canada, they begin to process their family's papers to bring them into the country.

**Economic Importance.** As seen in Figure 8, there is an increase of cash remittances from our OFWs between 2005 and 2010. During this period, the OFW cash remittances rose to 43 percent of the GDP. According to the World Bank, the Philippines is the world's fourth largest recipient of remittances in 2010.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 8: An increasing trend of cash remittances of OFWs, from 2005 to 2010



Source: World Bank

**Brain drain.** The previous sections of this paper discussed some of the various factors behind the increasing rate of international migration especially among female workers. These push factors, such as the lack of opportunity in the Philippines, lead to many women and men searching for employment abroad.

The rising number of women who are searching for opportunities abroad is widely being felt in different parts of the country. The number of applicants queuing in the different international recruitment agencies, hoping for a possible job abroad, is constantly increasing, triggering a rapid growth in the number of recruitment agencies.

A significant, negative effect of this migration on the country is the loss of its working professionals, particularly those in technical positions, who leave the country for high-paying jobs abroad. These professionals, including licensed doctors, engineers and nurses, take advantage of the opportunities abroad without considering the needs of the country. Even worse, some of these professionals set aside their extensive knowledge and training to shift to other types of job abroad—jobs that could be accomplished by those who have not completed their high school and/or college education. A practicing licensed doctor in the Philippines might shift to a nursing course to get a job abroad, or a Masters degree-holder might apply for a job as a service worker. In other situations, people frequently choose to give

up furthering studies or to leave their high employment positions to take up an offer that may not even be appropriate to their skill set and functions.

This phenomenon, wherein an individual is not able to utilize her training and technical expertise in her chosen employment, has been referred to as “brain drain.” Filipino talents are not being utilized to their full potential, as people forego opportunities to practice their chosen professions and further develop their skills for all-too practical reasons. In other words, Filipino overseas workers are more willing to offer their services abroad rather than here in the country. As a result, the country loses what could have been an invaluable asset in the form of professional service, scientific inventions and research products, or the utilization of the citizens’ unique talents.

**Personal risk.** Traditionally, Filipino women, particularly married women, stayed at home and took on household and child-rearing chores while the men went out to work. However, as time went by, women were pressured to seek work in order to support their family. In many families, the oldest female works to help support her siblings’ basic and educational needs. Many are working mothers who are raising their children alone, or whose husbands are unemployed. Such family situations help push these women to seek work outside the country.

Working outside the country poses greater risks for women compared to men, as attested by numerous news reports. These risks include trafficking, physical maltreatment, sexual abuse, and so on. However, the economic opportunities abroad outweigh the risks for many Filipino women, especially those who belong to poor families. These brave women are risk-takers. However, many end up paying a great price as their decisions impact their families and their personal lives.

**Effect on the family.** Perspectives on the impacts of international migration have been widely discussed in studies conducted by various groups and researchers. According to a study by Patricia Cortes (2011), while parents leave mainly to provide for their children economically, most of these parents do not consider the negative effects of their decision on their family. These effects are heightened in light of women’s migration. In Cortes’ discussion on the effects of international migration on the children left behind

in the Philippines, she pointed out that daughters often assume the responsibilities of the absent mother, including the household chores. This has detrimental effects on their education, particularly for the daughters of poorer families who cannot afford to hire a household helper. The study quotes one such daughter, a passage also taken from Parrenas (2003):

“I had a very difficult time when my mother left. I am the oldest and I had to take over her work at home. I had a hard time adjusting and juggling my studies and my housework. Before my mother left, I did not have to do anything when I got home from school. I would play with friends before I headed home. Mom helped me with my homework. Well, that stopped. Now my grades are not so good anymore. It is because sometimes I cannot study because of all the housework that I have to do.”

The child's testimony emphasizes the great challenge of women's emigration in terms of the educational prospects of the children left behind particularly girls. It also shows how women must weigh the advantages and disadvantages of going abroad.

## **Conclusion**

Many factors contribute to the future of international migration. The economic consideration continues to play a large part in driving Filipino migration. A 2004 study of departing migrant workers noted that lack of job opportunities, irregular employment and low wages are still the dominant reasons for migration, suggesting the persistence of push factors that compel Filipinos to look beyond the Philippines in order to improve their living conditions.<sup>11</sup> As it has also been noted, a growing number of migrant workers occupy jobs other than service work.

As work opportunities that offer higher pay and better benefits continue to expand abroad, and while the Philippine economy remains stagnant, we can expect that the trend of Filipino migration to other countries will continue to rise, just as it has in the past five years.

This study examined the different aspects of international migration. In the previous parts of the paper, the dimensions and

dynamics of international migration were defined and presented. The different factors that contribute to international migration were also given full attention in this study. The pull and push factors that trigger international migration were discussed and explained. In addition, the three types of migration—irregular, temporary and regular—were also elucidated in this paper.

Empirical evidence shows that overseas migration has taken on a woman's face. The feminization of international migration is continuously increasing over the years, resulting in significant changes in gender patterns. Many intervening opportunities abroad opened up for women, including jobs as clerical workers, sales and service workers, medical personnel and domestic helpers, which had the highest number of Filipino female workers. However, the most distressed migrant workers abroad are women; they are exposed to physical maltreatment, verbal and sexual abuse, labor exploitation and others.

Nevertheless, international migration has greatly impacted both the personal lives, families and relatives of the OFWs, and the country itself. The effects of migration are both positive and negative, and the benefits and advantages of international migration are currently being weighed against the negative effects on the individual, the family and the country.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Morrison, Schiff & Sjöblom (2008): *The International Migration of Women*. Washington: The World Bank. Page 2

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/73403/pinoyabroad/overseas-migration-has-taken-the-face-of-a-woman>

<sup>3</sup> Floro, Maria Sagrario. "Feminist Economics: A Resource Book Integrating Feminist Perspectives in the Economic Theories and Analytical Assumptions." (Edited by Jo Ann Maglipon). A Project of FDC, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Elgado-Lorenzo, F.M. "Table 6: Estimated Number of Employed Filipino Nurses by Work Setting, 2003." P.17 in "Philippine Case Study on Nursing Migration," by F.M. Elgado-Lorenzo. 2005. Presentation to the Bellagio Conference on International Nurse Migration, Bellagio, Italy, 5-10 July 2005. Website: [www.academyhealth.org/international/nursemigration/lorenzo.ppt](http://www.academyhealth.org/international/nursemigration/lorenzo.ppt), last accessed 23 May 2006

<sup>5</sup> Buchan, J., T. Parkin, and J. Sochalski. 2003., "International Nurse Mobility: Trends and Policy Implications," p.18. Geneva: Royal College of Nurse, World Health Organization, and the International Council of Nurses. SWOP

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<sup>6</sup> Hugo Graemo. 2005. Migration in the Asia-Pacific region: A paper prepared for the Policy Analysis and Research Programme of the Global Commission on International Migration, Global Commission on International Migration. P.18

<sup>7</sup> IOM. 2003. Preventing Discrimination, Exploitation and Abuse Women Migrant Workers: An Information Guide. Geneva: International Labour Office. Cited in United Nations. 2005. 2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration (A/59/287?Add.1, ST/ESA/294), p.59. New York: Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations

<sup>8</sup> Working Abroad: the Joys and Challenges by Jazer Basan, <http://www.smartparenting.com.ph/mom-dad/ofw-resources/working-abroad-the-joys-and-challenges> , last accessed September 13, 2012

<sup>9</sup> Working Abroad: the Joys and Challenges by Jazer Basan <http://www.smartparenting.com.ph/mom-dad/ofw-resources/working-abroad-the-joys-and-challenges> , last accessed September 13, 2012

<sup>10</sup> <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1110315015165/MigrationAndDevelopmentBrief13.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.smc.org.ph/MAPID/MAPID%20CD/Philippines%20pdf%20file/I.2.3%20The%20Social%20Dimensions%20of%20International%20Migration.pdf>

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