

# **The Social Dimensions of International Migration in the Philippines**

## Findings from Research

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The Philippines' fame as the top source country of workers for the global labor market has invited equal measures of wonder and wariness. On the one hand, the presence of Filipinos in virtually all the countries and territories the world over has been heralded as proof of the demand for Filipino workers.<sup>1</sup> The attainment of the deployment target of one-million workers in 2006 (which continued in 2007) was met with much self-congratulation by government officials in the country. On the other hand, dissenting voices in Philippine society see the phenomenon as the inability of the state to provide decent jobs and incomes, forcing its people to find better life prospects elsewhere. These polar views are emblematic of the debates over the reading of

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<sup>1</sup> The cover of the 2007 Annual Report of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, which is incidentally the agency's 25<sup>th</sup> year, proclaims, "Celebrating 25 years of dedicated service to the overseas Filipino workers, the world's number one" (POEA, 2007).

international labor migration and its impact on the country's present and future destiny. Although working abroad or going abroad has become routine in the Philippines – a strong indication that indeed a culture of migration has taken root in Philippine society (Asis, 2006a) – concerns over the social costs of migration predominate in the public discourse.

This chapter reviews research-based evidence on the social dimensions of international migration in the Philippines. It is a selective review which focuses on issues and concerns which have implications for the migration-development nexus. The presentation of key research findings is divided into two major sections: for research findings that are fairly established, the review extracts some policy challenges while for issues that have not received research attention, some suggestions for future research are indicated.<sup>2</sup> A brief presentation on the phenomenon of international migration in the Philippines and as a topic for research scrutiny provides an introduction to the main body of the chapter.

## **International Migration in the Philippines**

### *International Migration as a Fact of Life*

That international migration is huge in the Philippines is evident in many facets of the nation's life. Almost 3,000 Filipinos leave for overseas jobs daily, and everyday, Filipinos at home receive a regular dose of news about the triumphs and tribulations of Filipinos in other parts of the world. Perhaps no other country accords its overseas population the honor and recognition as does the Philippines: June 7 is Migrant Workers Day (a government-designated event to commemorate the passage of the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995), the first Sunday following Ash Wednesday is National Migrants Day (an initiative of the Catholic Church), the month of December is Overseas Filipinos Month (spearheaded by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas), December 18 is International Migrants Day (an initiative

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on theoretical and methodological issues on migration studies in Asia (most of which is relevant to the Philippines), see Asis and Piper (2008) and Asis (2006). The review noted the proliferation of migration studies in the region, but significant gaps in linking empirical evidence with theory remain. The need for interdisciplinary and transnational approaches, among others, was stressed.

of civil society; it is now a global celebration, which started in the Philippines in 1997). The government considers overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) as *bagong bayani* (the “new heroes”) in appreciation of the sacrifices they make to support their families, and by extension, the nation’s economy.

International migration from the Philippines is more than the migration of workers, although the OFW phenomenon has been the most prominent and most debated.<sup>3</sup> The Philippines is not only a major source-country of workers and professionals, it is also among the major contributors of new immigrants to traditional countries of immigration: the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Immigration to these countries also started in the 1970s and has not abated since then; unlike labor migration, however, the role of the state is not as visible. Large-scale and state-organized overseas employment originated in the 1970s when the Philippines, along with other Asian countries, responded to the call for workers by the oil-rich Gulf countries. The migration of Filipino overseas contract workers (OCWs, as they were called at the time) to the Middle East in the 1970s extended to the newly industrialized countries in East and Southeast Asia in the 1980s and later to the rest of the world. Over the years, the idea of working abroad spread from a few pockets of the country in the 1970s to the whole archipelago.<sup>4</sup> Table 1 captures the rise of international labor migration over the years and its economic significance to Philippine society.

International labor migration from the Philippines has some characteristics that distinguish it from other origin countries in Asia. One, Filipino migrant workers are more widely distributed in the various world regions compared to other Asian migrants. Two, Filipino migrants work at various occupations, ranging from less skilled to highly skilled and specialized work. Moreover, Filipinos have secured a niche in nursing, seafaring, and domestic work. Three, in general, Filipino mi-

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<sup>3</sup> The overseas Filipino population includes permanent settlers (including those who marry foreign nationals) and various types of temporary migrants (such as migrant workers and student migrants). The term overseas Filipino refers to a Filipino based abroad while the term OFW specifically refers to temporary migrant workers. A related term, overseas contract worker (OCW), was widely used earlier, which specifically refers to legally deployed workers. The term OFW includes those who are legally and not legally deployed.

<sup>4</sup> For details, see Asis (2006a; 2008).

TABLE 1  
ANNUAL DEPLOYMENT OF FILIPINO WORKERS BY SECTOR  
AND REMITTANCES, 1975-2007\*

Year	Land-based*	Sea-based*	Total Deployed*	Amount**
1975	12501	23534	36035	103.00
1976	19221	28614	47835	111.00
1977	36676	33699	70375	213.00
1978	50961	37280	88241	290.85
1979	92519	44818	137337	364.74
1980	157394	57196	214590	421.30
1981	210936	55307	266243	545.87
1982	250115	64169	314284	810.48
1983	380263	53594	434207	944.45
1984	300378	50604	350982	658.89
1985	320494	52290	372784	687.20
1986	323517	54697	378214	680.44
1987	382229	67042	449271	791.91
1988	385117	85913	471030	856.81
1989	355346	103280	458626	973.02
1990	334883	111212	446095	1181.07
1991	489260	125759	615019	1500.29
1992	549655	136806	686461	2202.38
1993	550872	145758	696030	2229.58
1994	564031	154376	718407	2630.11
1995	488173	165401	653574	4877.51
1996	484653	175469	660122	4306.64
1997	559227	188469	747696	5741.84
1998	638343	193300	831643	7367.99
1999	640331	196689	837020	6794.55
2000	662648	198324	841628	6050.45
2001	662648	204951	867599	6031.27
2002	682315	209593	891908	6886.16
2003	651938	216031	867969	7578.46
2004	704586	229002	933588	8550.37
2005	740,632	247,983	988,615	10689.00
2006	788,070	274,497	1,062,567	12761.31
2007	811,070	266,553	1,077,623	14449.93

SOURCES: POEA and BSP as cited in Asis (2008); data for 2006 and 2007 are from [www.bsp.gov.ph/statistics/spei/tab11.htm](http://www.bsp.gov.ph/statistics/spei/tab11.htm) and [www.poea.gov.ph/stats/2007stats.pdf](http://www.poea.gov.ph/stats/2007stats.pdf), accessed on 11 September 2008.

grants have more years of education compared to other Asian migrants. Their human capital and access to social capital (thanks to social networks) are enabling factors that contribute to the empowerment of Filipino workers. Finally, women are an important component of labor migration from the Philippines. From a predominantly male migration in the 1970s, female migration started in the 1980s and accelerated in the 1990s. Between 1992 and 2006, women migrants outnumbered among the newly hired land-based workers. The reduction in entertainer migration from 2005 (due to a change in Japan's policy), the introduction of stiffer requirements in the deployment of household workers in 2007, and the construction boom in the Gulf region have recently increased the demand for male workers. The gender balance tipped to about 50-50 in 2007 and there are indications of higher levels of deployment of male workers in 2008 (Uy, 2008). As to whether this will be a temporary change is too early to tell at this point.

The appreciation of the Philippines as a destination country of international migrants is overshadowed by the much larger emigration flows originating from the Philippines. At least two collected volumes, *The Philippines as Home: Settlers and Journeyers in the Country* (Asis, ed., 2001) and *Exploring Transnational Communities in the Philippines* (Miralao and Makil, eds, 2007), paint a portrait of the Philippines as a destination country. Among foreign nationals, the Chinese and the Indians have a long history of migration and settlement in the Philippines (see Chu, 2001; Yande, 2001; Thapan, 2001). In the early 1900s up until World War II, the Philippines received migrants from Japan (see Azurin, 2007). This historical backdrop has been lost in the larger migration flows from the Philippines to Japan from the late 1970s. Following World War II, the Philippines hosted some 5,500 Russian refugees who temporarily stayed in Tubabao Camp, Guiuan, Samar (now Eastern Samar) during the period, 1949-1953 (Ilieva, 2001). This was reprised in the 1990s, when Palawan welcomed Vietnamese refugees (Evangelista and Evangelista, 2007), one of few examples of local integration of refugees.

In the 1990s, the arrival of Korean tourists became noticeable, which coincided with the time that Filipino workers were finding their way in the Korean labor market.<sup>5</sup> From a trickle in previous decades, the number of Korean visitors surged like a wave during this period.

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<sup>5</sup> For details about Koreans in the Philippines, see (Miralao, 2007; Makil, 2007; Kutsumi, 2007).

By 2006, Koreans topped the list of foreign visitors to the Philippines, outnumbering arrivals from the US, who include overseas residents and workers (Damazo, 2007).<sup>6</sup> Aside from the usual tourists, Korean visitors include retirees, missionaries, and students. The creation of Korean communities in different parts of the country suggests that some settlement is taking place. A remarkable development is the arrival of young Koreans coming to the Philippines to enroll in short-term English language programs (usually a two-month program, which can extend into a longer period). The Koreans' choice of the Philippines as a tourist-cum-educational destination offers possibilities for a different kind of tourism. Relying on the Philippines' comparative advantage in the English language (although there is a need to sustain this advantage), this kind of tourism and its potential for generating jobs should alert policymakers about alternatives to overseas employment. In all, the past and present experiences of the Philippines as a destination country can serve as points of reference in how Philippine society treats foreigners, and what this response reflects about Philippine society and its people. For a fuller understanding of the migration-development nexus, a comprehensive view of the Philippines as an emigration country and as an immigration country (and as a transit country) is vital.

### *International Migration as a Research Issue*

The unfolding of international migration over the years has engendered considerable data collection and research activities in the country.

In the area of data collection, government agencies involved with international migration have taken great strides in tracking *departures* and *emigrations*. Compared to other countries in Asia, the Philippines stands out in terms of the amount of international migration data collected, the variety of government agencies involved in collecting migration-related information, and attempts at coordinating and harmonizing the collection, reporting and sharing of international migration sta-

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, South Korea is now the Philippines' biggest source of foreign direct investment, followed by Japan and the US. In 2006, South Korean investments amounted to US\$1.2 billion, accounting for a third of US\$3.5 billion total investments (Damazo, 2007).

tistics (*see* Asis, forthcoming).<sup>7, 8</sup> The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) are the main government agencies involved in data collection activities. The POEA collects data on the volume, composition, intended occupation, and destination of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) while the CFO collects data on the volume, composition and destination of permanent migrants, including Filipinos leaving to marry or married to foreign nationals. Remittances from overseas Filipinos are collected and reported by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP). While inter-agency efforts are underway, much more needs to be done in order to reach common definitions reconcile discrepant estimates and maximize the usefulness of collected data to enhance policymaking. Aside from collecting more information, efforts must be also exerted in the processing of data.

In general, the Philippines has fairly good data on emigration or international migration *from* the Philippines, but data on international migration *to* the Philippines are sorely lacking, and data on the *return migration* of Filipino workers are virtually non-existent. Although the Philippines is mainly a country of origin, it is important to take a holistic view of the country's international migration experiences. The Philippines is not a prominent destination country for settlers, but it attracts short-term international visitors (*see also* Tigno, 2001). The country's bid to promote medical tourism and to position the Philippines as a retirement haven, among others, sets the stage for a possible increase in the number and diversity of international visitors; migration data systems must be able to capture these emerging trends. Recent measures introduced by the Bureau of Immigration to simplify visa applications and to lengthen the period of stay of non-immigrants in the country (*see* Asis, forthcoming) suggest a likely increase in international migration to the country. Also, it must be stressed that in the context of globalization, a country can be simultaneously origin, transit and destination.

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<sup>7</sup> The Philippines is part of the Migration Information System in Asia (MISA) Project supported by the International Labour Organization Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. MISA is part of the Asian Regional Programme on Governance of Labour Migration and is coordinated by the Scalabrini Migration Center. MISA has 13 member countries or territories.

<sup>8</sup> For other reviews of international migration data in the Philippines, *see* Cariño (1987) and Castro (2007).

Since labor migration is temporary, the return of Filipino workers is a given. Thus far, data on the volume and composition of return of Filipino workers are largely unknown. Battistella (2004) attempted to come up with an estimate of return migration, but this was not followed up by similar efforts. One potential source of data on return migration is the arrival or disembarkation card that must be submitted by arriving passengers at points of entry. The disembarkation card contains data that can be used to derive basic information on estimates of return migration and the profile of returnees.<sup>9</sup> Although data are collected, they are not processed, and are thus not usable for research purposes. As will be discussed in a later section, return migration presents a challenge not only for data collection but also in terms of policies and programs. RA 8042 has provisions to support the return and reintegration of OFWS, but the implementation (and outcome) of reintegration programs so far has been uneven. The issue of measuring the return of the broader overseas Filipino population also needs further consideration. The return visits of Filipinos who have settled in other countries may be also significant, particularly when these visits can be occasions to promote the transfer of knowledge, innovations and good practices.

As a research issue, international migration in the Philippines also appears to be widely studied by Filipino academics and international scholars alike (Asis and Piper, 2008). At least three bibliographies on international migration studies in the Philippines have been compiled, reviewed and published (Saito, 1977; Scalabrini Migration Center, 1996; Perez and Patacsil, 1998). Also, reviews of international migration studies in the Philippines have been undertaken by Go (2002) and Asis (2002a, 2006). From about the 1980s, migration studies in the Philippines are mostly about international labor migration to the neglect of internal migration. The latter also raises research and policy which should be attended to. In the context of diverse population movements, privileging international migration over internal migration is myopic. In terms of scale, more people migrate internally than internationally. Also, issues on remittances, brain drain/brain gain, social costs, family

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<sup>9</sup> The bottom part of the disembarkation card is marked "For Philippine Overseas Workers/Balikbayan Use Only." There are three pieces of information asked of returning workers: OCW ID Number, Date of Last Departure, and Reason for Returning to RP [the choices are: contract terminated, vacation/on leave, health, and others (specify)]. One way to measure return migration is to match arrival cards with departure cards.

separation, among others, are not limited to international migration, although they have received more scrutiny in the cross-border context.

## **Key Findings Relating to Migration and Development**

### *What Research Findings Indicate*

#### The momentum for future migration is set

Many factors point to more migration in the future. Economic considerations continue to fuel the migration intentions of Filipinos. A 2004 study of departing migrant workers noted that lack of job opportunities; irregular employment and low wages still dominate the reasons for migration, suggesting the persistence of push factors that compel Filipinos to look beyond the Philippines to survive or to improve their conditions (Asis, 2005). The institutionalization of migration, however, is also important in shaping migration decisions. Those considering overseas employment can find support from the government and the private sector to realize their migration intentions. The state-led labor migration program that started in the 1970s has established legal and institutional structure to facilitate migration. Initially, labor migration was heavily oriented to seeking labor markets, but this was later tempered by initiatives to protect migrant workers. The Philippines has passed two laws to promote the protection of migrants, namely, the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995 (Republic Act or RA 8042) and the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003 (RA 9208), and it enacted two laws to promote the political rights of migrants, namely, the Overseas Absentee Voting Act of 2003 (RA 9189) and the Citizenship Retention and Re-acquisition Act of 2003 (RA 9225). In addition, the Philippines has ratified various international instruments, including the International Convention to Promote the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. The Philippines has built an elaborate bureaucracy that deals with the various aspects of international migration: OFWs are under the purview of the POEA, the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), and the Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs while permanent settlers are the primary responsibility of the CFO (for details, *see* Asis, 2008). The recent target to send a million migrant workers every year (NEDA, 2004) sends a pro-migration signal, a move that departs from

the previous official stance that migration is supposed to be temporary. Sec 2 (c) of RA 8042 categorically states that "... the State does not promote overseas employment as a means to sustain economic growth and national development." This has not been amended. Nonetheless, the new policy recognizes labor migration as part of the government's development strategy in the context of globalization.<sup>10</sup>

Aside from the state, other institutions in Philippine society are supportive of international migration. There are more than 1,000 recruitment agencies which are in the business of promoting worker migration – for a fee. Educational institutions also promote migration through programs that promise students employment opportunities abroad. Nursing schools (more than 400) and maritime schools (more than 100) have proliferated in response to global labor market needs, a development that has raised concerns over the quality of education provided by these institutions.

Families and households have also become attuned to international migration and highly responsive to global labor market prospects. Once a family member starts to migrate, other members tend to tread the same pattern. Labor migration, thus, is simultaneously an economic and social process. Working abroad becomes part of the family's livelihood strategies (Porio, 2007), which is made possible by the flow of information and support extended by earlier cohorts of migrant family members to aspiring migrants. From the standpoint of networks, the 8.7 million overseas Filipinos are the personal links of millions of Philippines-based Filipinos to the outside world.

Nationwide surveys conducted by Pulse Asia reveal a growing percentage of adult Filipinos wanting to migrate. Moreover, working abroad someday is already part of the imagined future of young children. In the 2003 survey of children in the ages 10-12 years old, 47.3 percent said that they had plans to work abroad someday; the children of OFWs were more likely to report that they had plans to work abroad someday than the children of non-migrants (60.4 percent vs. 47 percent) (ECMI/AOS-Manila, OWWA, SMC, 2004).

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<sup>10</sup> The message of former Labor Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas in the *2001 POEA Annual Report* presages a renewed emphasis on the deployment of Filipino workers. While pursuing the welfare of OFWs, she also stated an equally important thrust: "... What we probably need now is a greater focus on marketing and how to ensure that the deployment of our workers can be done faster, better, and at the least cost to them. We probably also ought to set the ground rules for being able to meet market demands very quickly" (as cited in Asis, 2008:198).

### *Policy Challenges*

- Stemming the tide of international migration is up against very strong currents of personal interest (which is widespread), economic reasons (the wage gap between the Philippines and other countries), and the influence of social networks (which facilitate migration). Individual decisions to migrate may be beneficial to aspiring migrants and their families, but these may have societal ramifications. The government's deployment-oriented policy encourages Filipinos to seek opportunities in other countries. As to how continued deployment of workers and professionals will contribute to development is as yet an untold story. Based on the lessons from former emigration countries turned immigration countries, their development did not rest on deployment and/or remittances but on embarking on comprehensive development policies and programs (e.g., *see* Asis, 2006b). To identify necessary and sufficient conditions to sustain development, it might be helpful to explore policy options for the country's development prospects under two scenarios: (1) where there is no international migration; and (2) where there is continuing international migration.
- The Philippines should explore the possibility of forging development cooperation with countries that recruit Filipino workers and professionals. Memoranda of agreement or bilateral agreements with countries of destination can be expanded to ensure that the development prospects of the Philippines are not jeopardized by the recruitment of Filipino human resources.
- The Philippines may not be able to compete with the wages offered by other countries, but it can attempt to expand non-wage benefits and opportunities. The government needs to explore ways to improve opportunities for Filipino workers to acquire a house and lot. Having one's own house is central to the Filipino concept of well-being; and it ranks among the top investments of OFWs. Access to affordable housing can help retain experienced human resources in the country.

### Educational and work aspirations are oriented to international migration

Migration prospects are molding the educational and work aspirations of the Filipino population. The most obvious evidence in recent years is the phenomenal popularity of nursing. While nursing had always been a popular choice, the recent surge is much bigger and the primary motivation seems more linked to migration chances, i.e., as nurses, they

have better chances of working abroad and they can petition other family members to join them.<sup>11</sup> The phenomenon of doctors studying to become nurses seems to be peculiar in the Philippines. The fact that there are programs designed for doctors studying to be nurses reflects the responsiveness of educational programs to labor market demands. As the popularity of nursing surges, the enrollment in medical schools has declined. The commercialization of nursing programs has raised questions about the quality of training and has spawned another industry, the mushrooming of nursing review centers, to coach ill-prepared graduates to pass the nursing licensure examination. Those who do pass the examination add to the oversupply of new nurses. Similar patterns have been observed in the seafaring sector, another occupation that has been identified as a Filipino niche. Maritime schools flourished, producing large numbers of seafarers, who then have difficulty finding placements. Due to overproduction, the Philippines has excess numbers of entry-level nurses and seafarers, who cannot be absorbed by the local economy. At the same time, the country lacks specialized nurses and officers, who are in great demand domestically and internationally.

As individuals and families make plans about education and work based on jobs that are needed abroad, there is the danger that the needs of the domestic labor market will be overlooked. If left unchecked, the country may end up with an educated but unemployed population because their training or skills do not match the needs of the domestic labor market. At the same time, the country will be short of certain skills and will be hard pressed to meet critical skills to support or promote development. The government's goal to deploy more highly skilled and professional migrants must consider the implications of this policy on the country's development prospects in general and human resources needs in particular. As it is, nurse migration has affected the health delivery system – some rural clinics and hospitals have reportedly shut down or the staff members are overburdened because of the departure of nurses (e.g., Lorenzo et al., 2007; Galvez-Tan et al., 2005).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In 2007-2008, a total of 632,108 students were enrolled in nursing programs, up from 486,233 in 2006-2007 (*The Manila Times*, 13 June 2007).

<sup>12</sup> In the roundtable discussion with government agencies involved in human resource development, the reported "shortage" of nurses in the country was specifically the shortage of experienced nurses. According to the representative from the Department

The nursing situation has received the most attention; the impact of professional migration in other sectors is not known. The “poaching” of Filipino pilots by other international airlines hogged media attention several years ago, prompting the government to require a six-month notice of resignation instead of the usual one-month notice. The migration of professionals can go unnoticed because they can bypass POEA. For example, those leaving as immigrants or as tourists (who later adjust their status in the receiving countries) need not go through POEA. Student migration can also lead to professional migration in view of recent policies in immigration countries offering residence to international migrants who have completed studies. The country can stand to

#### *Policy Challenges*

- The concentration of tertiary students in nursing programs and maritime courses can result to a highly imbalanced portfolio of the country’s human resources. An assessment of the stock of current and future human resources against current and future needs is in order. Among the questions for consideration are: What skills and competencies does the country need over the short-term and over the long-term? What is being done *now* to meet those needs? What resources are required to ensure that the country will have a sufficient supply of trained personnel to meet the needs of the domestic labor market?
- While decisions about career options are largely individual decisions, educational institutions can play a crucial role in exposing students to different career and occupation paths. Career guidance may be integrated in the curriculum and extra-curricular activities in schools. Also, incentives in the form of scholarships can be offered to encourage students to consider less popular fields of study.
- Entrepreneurship can be given more attention as an occupational or livelihood option, especially among young people. The demands and rewards of entrepreneurship should be promoted as a viable alternative to paid employment and overseas employment.

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of Health, the country has many nurses (considering the large number of graduates every year); what is shrinking is the pool of experienced nurses.

lose this talent pool. A systematic mapping of the country's human resources and the needs of various sectors will be useful in determining the supply of workers against the demand for workers by specific sectors.

Family impacts are mixed: economic benefits co-exist with emotional displacement

In the Asian context, family reunification is not allowed for migrant workers in less skilled occupations. Temporary labor migration, thus, has created transnational families, i.e., families whose members are located in different locations. The human rights violations of Filipino workers abroad and the separation of family members have generated anxieties in the Philippines since the migration of workers to the Gulf region in the 1970s. The participation of women in migration from the 1980s has upped the ante on family impacts because their departure creates a void of carers in families and households. The separation is feared to have adverse consequences on marriages and parent-child relationships. The migration of unmarried migrants does not disrupt or rearrange family roles as does the migration of married migrants, especially women.<sup>13</sup>

The impacts on children left behind have been examined more closely than the impacts on marital relationships.<sup>14</sup> A 2003 nationwide study was jointly undertaken by the ECMI/AOS-Manila, SMC and OWWA (2004) focused on children in the ages 10-12 years old, including children in migrant and non-migrant families.<sup>15</sup> The survey of 1,443 children revealed that children of migrants were doing better than children of non-migrants in terms of material indicators. Also, children of migrants were found to perform as well, if not better, compared to children of non-migrants in academic and health indicators.

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<sup>13</sup> See Parreñas (2006; 2001), Asis, Huang and Yeoh (2003), Pingol (2001), Arellano-Carandang et al. (2007), Dizon-Añonuevo and Añonuevo (2002) for a discussion on the repercussions of female migration on the left-behind families.

<sup>14</sup> Pingol (2001) focused on the left-behind husbands; part of the Asis, Huang and Yeoh (2004) study discussed the perspectives of the same group.

<sup>15</sup> The study was limited to children who belong to two-parent families. Children of migrants were divided into: children of migrant mothers; children of land-based migrant fathers; children of sea-based migrant fathers; and children whose parents were both working abroad.

Findings from the study suggest that children benefit from remittances, as evidenced by children of migrants being more likely to attend private schools, their greater participation in extra-curricular activities, and better physical health indicators. The emotional aspects, however, paint a different picture. Children of migrant mothers in particular are most affected compared to other groups of children, a finding which also showed up in an earlier study by Battistella and Conaco (1998). The trade-offs between the benefits from remittances and the care of children was also examined in Edilion (2008). Part of the 2003 study included focus group discussions (FGDs) with older children (adolescents) as well as with left-behind spouses. Results from the FGDs pointed to painful emotional issues that are not adequately captured by surveys. Although communication between family members has been made faster and cheaper by ICT developments, the family members left behind long for their families to be together or to be “complete” (*see also Arellano-Carandang et al., 2007*).

Overall, the family impacts of migration present a mixed picture – migration can benefit families economically, but at the same time, the separation robs family members of the shared life that families long for. Although the departure of fathers also requires adjustments, on the whole, families are generally able to cope in the absence of fathers because mothers assume father roles as well. The migration of mothers results in new living arrangements as left-behind families try to fill the caregiving functions traditionally assigned to mothers. When mothers leave, fathers do not assume caregiving functions; instead these are passed on to other female relatives, mainly grandmothers, aunts and daughters.<sup>16</sup> The 2003 study pointed out that if a family member has to work abroad, children (as well as husbands) would prefer that mothers remain at home (ECMI/AOS-Manila, SMC and OWWA, 2004). From their case studies of families of migrant women, Arellano-Carandang et al. (2007) suggest programs for young children, adolescents and fathers to help them cope with the absence of mothers. Thus far, the focus has been on the care of children left behind. The care of elderly parents and relatives has been less discussed in the literature. The relatively young

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<sup>16</sup> An ongoing study on the health and well-being outcomes of transnational migration is currently underway in four Southeast Asian countries: the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. All four countries carried out a survey of 1,000 households in the months of April-July 2008. The project is coordinated by the National University of Singapore and University of St. Andrews; the Philippine component is implemented by the Scalabrini Migration Center.

and elderly, especially grandmothers, assume the role of parenting and caring for the left-behind children. As they age and as their health conditions deteriorate, OFW families will have to grapple with the care of the elderly.

#### *Policy Implications*

- Families are reluctant to seek psychological support from outside the family circle. Programs that tackle the problems and responses to psychological and social issues can be developed for radio and television to deliver key messages to OFW families.
- The school can be an avenue for delivering programs to OFW families. The 2003 study found that children seek out their teachers when they have problems. In this regard, teachers may need some training or materials in counseling to enable them to guide their students. School programs and activities can be launching pads for information-education drives on parenting, financial literacy, and other relevant topics.
- Existing community-based organizations, such as church or parish-based organizations, can be also tapped to introduce programs for OFW families.
- Children of OFWs have concerns, which policies and programs must respond to. Some examples of innovative approaches targeting children include the formation of children's savers' clubs (a project of Atikha), organizing the sons and daughters of OFWs (an example is Anak Batangueño, an initiative by the Lipa Archdiocesan Council for Migrants and Mission), or using theater as a learning and creative exercise (an example is Teatro Akebono, a theater group of former entertainers and Japanese-Filipino children, formed by the Development Action for Women Network).

#### Migrant workers bear the costs of migration

Although the Philippines has introduced protective and empowering mechanisms to promote migrants' rights (e.g., see Asis, 2008), these are not sufficient because of enforcement problems and lack of parallel efforts in destination countries. A basic source of the vulnerabilities of migrants is defined by supply and demand factors. There are many aspiring workers vying for limited jobs in the global labor market, a situation that is exploited by the unscrupulous practices of the migra-

tion industry and employers, as well as the involvement of unlicensed agencies, smugglers and traffickers. The concentration of women migrants in unprotected sectors provides more cause for concern over their well-being. In 2007, the Philippines implemented several measures to protect domestic workers: increasing the monthly minimum wage from US\$200 to US\$400, removing the placement fee, and requiring workers to undergo language and cultural training. The move was met with protest by employers and recruitment agencies; some NGOs criticized the government for the money-making training program and for depriving women of employment opportunities. POEA data in 2007 reveal a sharp drop in the deployment of domestic workers, which was compensated by an increase in the deployment of skilled workers. There are suspicions that while deployment through official channels has gone down, deployment through unofficial channels may have increased.

NGOs have contributed significantly in raising awareness about the conditions of migrant workers at all stages of the migration process. In support of their advocacy work, NGOs also conduct research, generating useful information on the working and living conditions of migrants; in the process, NGOs have also emerged as producers of knowledge on migration issues in Asia (Asis and Piper, 2008). Among countries of origin in Asia, the Philippines has the most number of NGOs addressing migration issues (Scalabrini Migration Center, 1997), and in destination countries, specific NGOs have been established to respond

#### *Policy Challenges*

- There are concerns that the target to send a million workers every year may compromise the government's resolve to promote the protection of the rights of migrant workers. The growing OFW population should be matched by the allocation of more resources to ensure that the protection of migrant workers is not sacrificed.
- The government should continue to pursue bilateral and multilateral agreements with destination countries to ensure that pre-departure efforts are sustained by necessary measures on-site and upon the return of migrant workers. Cooperation with other origin countries is vital in negotiating with destination countries.

to the needs of Filipino migrant workers. The presence of the Catholic Church in destination countries is also a lifeline to Filipino migrants, many of whom are Catholics. Aside from providing spiritual support and links to other Filipinos, most churches develop programs and services for migrants, which Filipino migrants access (Asis, 2002b). A factor that contributes to the empowerment of migrants is the formation of migrants' associations. By providing them with capacity-building programs and other support, these associations can realize their potentials to be agents of change for Filipino communities overseas.

### *Issues for Further Research*

#### Return migration is a big unknown

As mentioned earlier, there are no estimates on how many OFWs have returned to the Philippines. If the measure of return migration is returning permanently, or "for good" as migrants call it, the scenario is best described as a moving picture instead of a static photograph. One complication is the tendency of OFWs to extend their contracts, turning temporary overseas employment into de facto "regular" employment. This is supported by deployment data from POEA which indicate that rehires constitute more than half of the annual deployment of land-based workers.<sup>17</sup> Migrants may start out with a plan to return home after a certain period of working abroad. In reality, once migrants have experienced working abroad, their return plans turn into an open-ended timeframe. Migrants are wont to say that they will continue to work abroad for as long as their health will allow them to, or if they have accumulated enough savings, or once their children have completed college education (e.g., Asis, 2001; Baggio and Asis, 2008).

Under the regime of temporary labor migration, return to the home country is structural for migrant workers in less skilled occupation, i.e., they are not allowed to settle in their countries of employment.<sup>18</sup> For this group, Battistella (2004) proposed a typology of returnees: success-

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<sup>17</sup> In 2006, 60 percent of land-based workers were rehires; in 2007, rehires comprised 61.3 percent (computed from data on total deployment, new hires and rehires among land-based workers).

<sup>18</sup> It is different for highly skilled and professional migrants, who are allowed to bring their family members and are offered residence in destination countries.

ful returnees, i.e., those who returned home after completing their contract; those who returned prematurely due to work-related problems or emergency situations in the domestic front; and those who returned home because of external crises, such as the 1981 Gulf War or the 2006 conflict in Lebanon. The schema is a useful starting point in defining different types of return migrants and in identifying their needs. More reflection and research are needed to refine this typology. Additionally, notions of return migration must be examined more closely. For some migrants, return migration may be the final stage that signals the return to the home country and the end of migration. For other migrants, the end of the migration episode in one destination may be followed by migration to another destination. Other than temporary migrant workers, the concept of return migration may be extended to migrant workers in other contexts (e.g., access to residence by migrant workers in Italy and Spain may have implications for return migration) and permanent migrants. The growing literature on transnationalism suggests that permanent settlers engage in temporary return migration through visits; other permanent settlers return to their origin countries at time of retirement.

Among government-initiated programs for migrants, the track record of reintegration programs in the Philippines has not been very encouraging. The latest attempt to reinvigorate the government's reintegration program is the establishment of the National Reintegration Center for OFWs (NRCO) in 2007. Acknowledging the difficulties faced by returning OFWs, the "new" reintegration program aims to "... systematically gain more from the new attitude, skills, knowledge, assets and technologies of our migrant workers to promote brain gain and drive the economy forward to a higher plane" (see <http://www.nrco.dole.gov.ph/About.aspx>). Unlike past approaches (which focused on individual reintegration), the new reintegration program brings in the "brain gain" aspect of return migration. However, as suggested earlier, the program should consider the different needs and resources of returning migrants. Not all migrants succeed in their migration project. Those who have been trafficked, those who experienced abuse, and those who had traumatic experiences abroad need economic and psychological help to rebuild their lives. In order to assess the development potentials of return migration, will have to take into account the profile of those who migrate and their occupational experience overseas, which will determine what they will bring back with them when they return to the Philippines. As regards the OFW

population, it is high time that baseline research on the scale and profile of return migrants is undertaken. An analysis of departure and arrival cards as mentioned earlier is one possibility; or questions on return migration may be included in existing surveys (such as the Labor Force Surveys) or in future censuses. It will be easier to design follow up studies once some baseline information has been collected. As regards to return visits or the return migration of permanent settlers, NRCO can coordinate with government agencies that have had experience in cooperating with overseas Filipinos – the CFO (LINKAPIL Program, among others), the Department of Science and Technology (which implements the Balik Scientist Program), and the Department of Tourism (which, among others, offers heritage tours targeting overseas Filipinos). An assessment of the strengths and limitation of existing programs can serve as a basis for moving forward.

There is a need to assess the development potentials of return migration

Upon their return to the Philippines, economic reintegration is the primary concern of migrant workers (e.g., Asis, 2001; Dizon-Añonuevo and Añonuevo, 2002). Prior to migration, migrants aspire to save enough money to start a business, a dream that is not easy to realize or to sustain. In a study of female return migrants, 40 out of 100 respondents started a business, mostly in sales and services (Asis, 2001). Only 11 out of the 100 respondents went into paid employment upon their return; many of those who did not engage in economic activities planned on returning to work abroad.

Considering that most migrants work at less skilled occupations abroad, the prospects of brain gain are not optimistic. In the case of women migrants, with most of them engaged in domestic work, even if they had undergone skills training while they were abroad, their background as domestic workers poses a disadvantage. Given the low wages in the local labor market, domestic work in the Philippines is not an attractive option for returning domestic workers. Those who had worked as entertainers carry a stigma, which narrows their chances of seeking paid employment upon their return to the Philippines (e.g., Asis, 2001).<sup>19</sup> In their assessment, working abroad has been worthwhile

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<sup>19</sup> The Development Action for Women Network has developed reintegration programs for former entertainers to Japan (see <http://www.dawnphil.org>).

because they were able to help their families, and the experience helped them acquire a better sense of their strengths; for those who were involved in church activities and organizations, they also learned leadership and organizing skills. These newfound competencies, however, do not translate into marketable skills in the Philippine labor market. Back in the Philippines, their livelihood options are limited to self-employment and returning to work abroad. Returning male migrants encounter the same challenges, although they are less burdened by the low regard for domestic work or the stigma of entertainment work that affect women. The baseline study mentioned earlier can probe the needs and plans of these return migrants, which can be useful in the formulation of reintegration programs.

A recent research probing democratization through migration suggests that returning OFWs who had experienced living in a society that is able to meet the needs of its citizens (regardless of the political system of the host country) inclines OFWs to be more demanding of the Philippine political system (Kessler and Rother, 2008:1). In a survey conducted in 2006 – 1,000 OFWs who had returned from Japan, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Hong Kong, and another 1,000 departing migrants – 65 percent of OFW returnees as compared to 73 percent of the departing migrants stated that “democracy was always preferable to any other kind of government.” Qualitative data collected as part of the study uncovered that respondents were greatly disappointed by Philippine democracy: “They felt neglected and discriminated as poor and/or uneducated citizens and they experienced the political system as exclusively serving the interests of the elite” (Kessler and Rother, 2008:1). The authors also noted the divide between public discourse in the Philippines about the exploitation of OFWs and the return migrants’ positive regard of their stint abroad. Since most migrants were able to achieve their goals, even if they had experienced difficulties, they assessed their time abroad positively.

Concerning the migration of highly skilled workers and professionals, there are various issues concerning brain drain/brain gain implications and prospects that need to be uncovered. Some examples are: an inquiry on the transfer of knowledge and skills from migrants returning from overseas employment and those who pursued advanced studies abroad, and an assessment of transfer of knowledge and skills from visiting overseas Filipino professionals. A comparative study of programs, schemes and incentives by other countries to en-

courage their nationals to return (either permanently or on a temporary basis) and share their expertise in their home countries can be insightful.

Migrants are interested in contributing to humanitarian and development programs

Until recently, research interrogating the development impact of migration has focused on remittances; recent research has explored migrant giving and social remittances. Exploratory studies on migrant giving (also referred to as diaspora philanthropy) in the Philippines suggest an interest by overseas Filipinos to contribute to humanitarian and development programs in the country (e.g., Opiniano, 2005; Powers, 2006; Silva, 2006; Baggio and Asis, 2008).<sup>20</sup> The CFO's Link to Philippine Development Program (see Roma in this volume) is perhaps a pioneer in the Asian region in instituting a program to encourage and facilitate overseas Filipinos to support development projects in the home country. Overseas Filipinos, either individually or as organizations, are contributing to various causes in the Philippines without going through the CFO or other government entities (see Añonuevo; Alayon; Rispens-Noel; and Basa in this volume).

The interest of Filipino migrants to share their resources has cultural underpinnings, derived from the values of *bayanihan*, *damayan* and *pakikipagkapwa*. These motivations, however, were hindered by migrants' reservations about corruption and distrust in government institutions (e.g., Baggio and Asis, 2008). The Scalabrini Migration Center, in cooperation with Fondazione ISMU (Initiative e Studi Sulla Multietnicita) in Italy, the University of Valencia in Spain, and the Commission on Filipinos Overseas in the Philippines, embarked on a project to explore how Filipino migrants' associations in Italy and Spain on the one hand, and Philippine government institutions (including local government units) on the other, can cooperate to support development processes in the Philippines.<sup>21</sup> In Italy and Spain, the research phase of

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<sup>20</sup> See also <http://www.filipinodiasporagiving.org>.

<sup>21</sup> The project, Migrants' Associations and Philippine Institutions for Development (MAPID), is supported by the European Union, under Aeneas Grant Contract NO. MIG R/2007/13-548(11). The project is divided into three phases: research in 2008; the devel-

the project aims to know more about migrants' associations and Filipino migrants' integration in the receiving countries, their transnational practices, and future plans; in the Philippines, the research probes into awareness of the migration-development nexus by officers and key staff of migration and development agencies and local government officials, and the documentation of migrant giving, migrant investments and models of partnership between overseas Filipinos and local institutions. The project is an opportunity to expand knowledge about migrant giving by Filipinos outside of the US context, which has received the most attention thus far. Further research should focus on preparing and strengthening the capacity of government institutions in integrating international migration in development planning and in engaging with overseas Filipinos. Research should also include an assessment of good practices in other contexts (e.g., see Delgado Wise and Garcia Zamora in this volume) and their relevance in the Philippine setting.

Absentee voting has low turnout; citizenship law has few takers thus far

Among the origin countries in Asia, the Philippines has gone the farthest in extending political rights to its overseas population through absentee voting and the dual citizenship law. Qualified overseas Filipinos cast their votes for the first time in the May 2004 presidential election; they had another chance to vote in the 2007 election for senators and sectoral or party-list representatives.<sup>22</sup> The participation of overseas Filipinos in the elections thus far fell below expectations (Cariño, 2007). Proponents viewed the overseas Filipino vote as an "intelligent vote" and as above the fray of vote-buying and patronage policies.<sup>23</sup> In the 2004 and 2007 elections, 364,187 and 504,110 (excluding 18,404 seafarers) registered, respectively (Aguilar, 2007). In terms of voter turnout, in 2004, 65 percent or 233,092 of registered voters cast their votes;

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opment of training programs and materials and the conduct of training programs in 2009; and dissemination activities in 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Absentee voting is reserved for national elections, i.e., for president, vice-president, senators and sectoral or party-list representatives.

<sup>23</sup> Critics, however, also point out that overseas Filipinos may be out of touch with issues in the Philippines.

in 2007, only 21 percent or 81,732 of those who registered actually voted (Senate of the Philippines, 2008). In light of this, some observers are calling for the scrapping of what they consider as a costly exercise. Supporters of absentee voting, on the other hand, argue that administrative and logistical constraints discourage overseas Filipinos from exercising their right to vote.<sup>24</sup> Instead of scrapping it, they urge for reforms that will make registration and voting more accessible to overseas Filipinos.<sup>25</sup>

The minimal participation of US-based Filipinos is interesting considering that the National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA) was among those which lobbied for the passage of absentee voting (Aguilar, 2007). He suggests that the transnationalism of US-based Filipinos is familial, ethnic, or national, but not political. In contrast, the more active participation of OFWs in absentee may derive from their limited incorporation in their countries of employment. In practice, the two laws seeking to incorporate overseas Filipinos in the national fold works out differently – absentee voting is more likely to involve OFWs whereas the citizenship law caters more to permanent immigrants (Cariño, 2007). Initial analysis of absentee voting has highlighted the problematic provisions and implementation of the law. A study on the factors that influence overseas Filipinos to exercise the right to vote should aid in identifying facilitating and constraining factors. In the future, it will also be interesting to determine the extent and impact of political transnationalism on the electoral process.

Since the citizenship retention and re-acquisition law was enacted in 2003, more than 51,000 have reacquired their Filipino citizenship (*Asian Migration News*, 1-31 August 2008). It is no secret that this law was passed with a view to attract investments by permanent settlers. It is too soon to assess the law's impact on the country's development prospects. At some point, it will be valuable to explore the motivations of permanent settlers to reacquire Filipino citizenship; a comparison

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<sup>24</sup> Personal voting and the requirement to submit an affidavit to return the Philippines three years after registration are among the problematic issues (Cariño, 2007). Voting by mail was allowed in only three countries in the 2004 elections – Japan, Canada and the United Kingdom. In 2006, the Supreme Court ruled that *dual citizens* need not establish residence in the Philippines to qualify to register as an absentee voter (CFO, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Senators Manuel Villar and Aquilino Pimentel authored Senate Bill 2333 to address the flaws in the absentee voting law. The bill “provides that qualified overseas Filipinos, including seafarers, will have the option to vote either personally or by mail or by any other means as may be allowed by law” (Senate of the Philippines, 2008).

with those who are not interested in reacquiring Filipino citizenship will be equally insightful. Such a study will contribute to an understanding of the meanings of citizenship and transnationalism. Another topic for future research is the impact of the citizenship law on investments, including migrant giving and the transfer of social remittances. Also of interest are the views and practices of citizenship of Philippines-based Filipinos in the light of the country's long and extensive experience with international migration.

## Conclusion

Research can be a tool to inform policymaking in order to maximize the potential benefits and minimize the potential threats of international migration to the development prospects of the Philippines. As the previous discussion shows, research can contribute in defining problems and issues, assessing policy options, and suggesting emerging trends. Despite the volume of migration research in the Philippines, the link between evidence-based knowledge and policymaking is rather loose. A study by Go (2002) on the impact of research and policymaking on migration questions in the Philippines suggests the limited influence of research on migration policies. Interestingly, the study noted that the lobbying of NGOs and public opinion seemed to exert more bearing on migration policies than do research outputs. With their advocacy orientation, NGOs actively seek government accountability and action, which puts them in closer contact with government agencies. The engagement with government can range from confrontational to cooperative. One notable development in the NGO-GO relationship is the formation of the Consultative Council on OFWs (CCOFW) in 2001, an attempt to formalize the dialogue between NGOs and government agencies on issues affecting OFWs. The dialogue was suspended at some point when some NGOs raised questions over some policy issues – Omnibus Policy of OWWA, the transfer of Medicare from OWWA to PhilHealth, and the \$25 OWWA membership fee collected from OFWs.<sup>26</sup> The dialogue has resumed. Although it encounters problems from time to time, overall, it provides the possibility of engagement between these two important stakeholders.

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<sup>26</sup> For details, see the website of the Philippine Migrants Rights Watch, <http://www.pmrw.org>.

A similar mechanism for dialogue between the research community and government agencies can enhance the use of evidence-based knowledge in policy formulation. Given the complexity and multifaceted dimensions of the migration-development nexus, policy formulation in this area stands to benefit from research inputs. In the face of budget constraints, government agencies tend to prioritize services over research and data, which are regarded as “luxuries.” On the contrary, research and data are essential to help steer policymaking towards more effective and responsive actions. Similarly, research can contribute to advocacy work. In an imperfect, contentious and politicized world, evidence-based knowledge offers a lens to see things more clearly.

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