

Gender, Migration and Development in the Philippines – A Policy Paper



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FOREWORD

Women have been long part of migratory flows, usually as dependents, but in recent years, increasingly and more visibly as economic providers for families. This ‘feminization of migration’ is one of the most significant developments in recent international migration for which investigation is needed to understand the impacts on women’s empowerment, gender roles, family structures and relationships, amongst others.

This trend has prompted various stakeholders to look at the migration phenomenon more closely, recognizing that there are differences in the opportunities and vulnerabilities that men and women migrants face at all stages of their migration experience. Despite this, a gender perspective is still lacking in the migration and development discourse. Policies and programs are therefore limited in contributing to reducing gender inequalities, and may in some instances, even perpetuate or aggravate existing inequalities.

This paper seeks to highlight the situation of Filipino women migrant workers and explore their contribution to migration and development. It does so by examining their financial remittances and how these can potentially underwrite asset-building. It discusses migrant women workers’ social and political contributions to their communities of origin and urges key actors in the field of migration and development to better analyze migration and development using a gender lens. Increased awareness and enhanced understanding will hopefully encourage target groups to devise and adopt a model of development that is people-centered, rights-based and grounded in the principle of gender equality.



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INTRODUCTION

In the last forty years, the Philippines has recorded one of the most active emigration flows. At present, these flows have cumulatively resulted in about 10.4 million Filipinos abroad (CFO 2012) in more than 200 countries and territories. Embedded in these flows are the purpose and outcomes of migration. For purposes, migration can either be permanent or temporary which could be translated to a change in abode or work. For outcomes, the key target of migration from the perspective of Filipinos has primarily been economic, or more specifically, improvement in the socio-economic class where they are members of. Migration has been viewed this way for decades, and loss in the social and human dimensions that accompany migration are usually not focused on. In particular, feminization of migration is one of the important characteristics of this out-migration trend. Nicola Piper (2008, 1292) argues that the term refers not only to the number of women working abroad but also to their huge participation in key migration routes. Additionally, it can mean the marked autonomy of migrant women as workers and family breadwinners, compared to their role decades ago when they crossed borders as mere dependents (UN-INSTRAW 2010, 36).

In the Philippine context, heightened globalization, lack of local economic opportunities, policies, demographic shifts and the concomitant change in women's role in host countries have propelled this exodus. From the years 2001 to 2010, 60 per cent of newly hired land-based¹ temporary workers were women (DOLE 2011, 11) who are in domestic work and caregiving jobs. Recent data from the POEA (2013) indicate that household service workers (HSW)² and nurse professionals are the top two occupational categories of new hires among Filipino women migrant workers (WMWs).

With economic improvement of their families as key objective, migrant workers and WMWs in particular, have to face significant changes in cultures, environments and work conditions. Vulnerabilities among WMWs have led to rights violations and victimization. Such is observed in the Philippines

- 1 The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) disaggregates categories for temporary migrants into sea-based and land-based workers to account for the different sets of policies and guidelines governing their deployment abroad.
- 2 Since 2006, when it launched a series of reforms to improve skills and provide greater protection for Filipino domestic workers, the Philippine government refers to the latter as household service workers.

where reports of abuses and exploitation by the media are no longer out of the ordinary. While these are valid and a cause for concern, this report takes on a different focus, for parallel to Filipino women’s migration is the rise of remittances and their contribution to the economy. It is possible that the economic improvement in families brought about by their remittances and their contribution to the economy can help mitigate the vulnerabilities and the downsides associated with female migration. Likewise, it is important to know how to harness the said remittances “properly” so that resources generated can wisely be diverted into productive use. Furthermore, this may reduce the necessity for working abroad, as well as the associated risks and vulnerabilities, especially among WMWs.

In this regard, this paper seeks to explore the extent of influence and role of Filipino WMWs in migration and development. It does so by examining their financial remittances and specific means by which these can potentially underwrite asset-building. Moreover, it discusses the social and political contributions they bring to their communities of origin which could possibly impact development.

The report is organized as follows: a) Introduction, b) Data and Trends on Women Migrants Workers and their Economic Contribution, c) Framework to Analyze WMWs’ Economic Contribution, d) Analysis using National and Local Surveys, and e) Conclusions and Recommendations.

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