

Introduction

Migration has long shaped the nature of societies in East and South-East Asia. According to the UN Report on Migration in East and Southeast Asia, the mobility of the 12 million international migrants in the region has been driven by the need to seek gainful employment elsewhere. Migrants from China have been an especially important element in forming the economic, social and political landscape of South-East Asia and key economies in East Asia.

While international and large-scale internal population movements have been significant components of economic and social development in the region for a long period, current international migration is characterised by a number of aspects that are more recent. These have included the degree of precision with which policy makers have attempted to guide that migration, the gradual evolution of migration as an issue for bilateral and regional discussion, the enhanced interest in the situation and rights of the migrants themselves, and the greater public debate involved in formulating and implementing migration policies.

The more economically advanced countries have low or negative rates of growth of working-age population and record net in-migration. Once large-scale migration flows are established, it can be difficult for governments to alter them, due both to their commercial institutionalisation and to informal networks. These aspects of migration have assisted in the partial development of a regional labour market, especially in certain occupations such as construction workers and domestic workers. When the demand for foreign workers is great and government enforcement is inadequate, some migration for employment becomes irregular.

East and South-East Asia are regions with large economic disparities between countries. These disparities shape the migration flow and make it very difficult to establish coherent migration management policies. Governments in the region are trying to manage the supply of, and demand for migrant workers in a way that meets market needs and minimises irregular migration. While progress is being made in this regard, opportunities for regular migration remain limited, and employer and migrants react by working outside the existing legal framework.

Traditionally, immigrants living in the Philippines come mainly from India and China. Today, Chinese, Taiwanese, American, British, Australian, Japanese, Indian, Malaysian and Singaporean are among the nationalities that are most migrating to the Philippines. However, despite increasing numbers of immigrants, most of the country's attention and policies remains focused on emigration.

Since the 1970s, the Philippines — a country composed of about 7,000 islands inhabited by diverse ethno-linguistic groups and with a population of about 94 mln people— has supplied all kinds of skilled and low-skilled workers to the world's most developed regions. The Philippines is currently one of the 10 highest providers of immigrants worldwide.

With 9% of its population living abroad, the Philippines is famous for the large amount of its inhabitants who try their chances abroad every year. The development of a culture of migration in the Philippines has been greatly facilitated by migration's institutionalisations. The government facilitates migration, regulates the operations of the recruitment agencies, and looks out for the rights of its emigrant workers. More importantly, the remittances that workers send home have become a pillar of the country's economy.

Remittances

For countries like the Philippines, remittances are the main benefit of labour migration. Because of a global increase in wages, emigrants can send more money to their families in the Philippines. Whether it is consumed or saved, the money helps stimulate the economy. According to a 2011 World Bank report, In 2010, the top recipient countries of recorded remittances were India, China, Mexico, the Philippines, and France.

Remittances sent from Filipino emigrants play a substantial role in paying off the foreign debt. The currencies entering the Philippine's economy through remittances have actually surpassed the cash flow generated by the export sector. Moreover, the government is supporting and pushing deployment of the labour force which has reached around one million Filipinos per year.

Filipinos abroad:

Major Group	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Professional, Medical, Technical and Related Workers	63,941	41,258	43,225	49,649	47,886
Managerial and Administrative Workers	490	817	1,139	1,516	1,290
Clerical Workers	5,538	7,912	13,662	18,101	15,403
Sales Workers	4,261	5,517	7,942	11,525	8,348
Service Workers	133,907	144,321	107,135	123,332	138,222
Agricultural Workers	350	807	952	1,354	1,349
Production Workers	74,802	103,584	121,715	132,295	117,609
Others	996	3,906	10,613	494	1,645

Protecting workers abroad

NGOs for migrants in the Philippines and their networks abroad not only provide services and support to migrants, but, more importantly, they advocate for migrants' rights. The Philippines has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families. Among the countries of origin in Asia, the Philippines is also a leader in introducing several migration-related laws. These include:

- the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003, which establishes policies and institutional mechanisms to provide support to trafficked persons;
- the Overseas Absentee Voting Act of 2003, which gives qualified overseas Filipinos the right to vote in national elections;
- the Citizenship Retention and Reacquisition Act of 2003, which allows for dual citizenship.

Feminisation

Women migration is a developing trend in the Philippines. Indeed, since 1992, female migrants outnumbered men among the newly hired workers who are legally deployed every year. Not only do they compose the majority of permanent settlers, as part of family migration, but they are also as prominent as men in labour migration. This can be attributed to the fact that domestic helpers and entertainers are in demand globally. Migrant women face particular vulnerabilities. Aside from the usual problems that plague migrants, their jobs in domestic work and entertainment usually mean long working hours, surveillance and control by employers and abusive conditions, including violence and sexual harassment. Given the 'private' context in which they work, the problems encountered by migrants women in these sectors go largely unnoticed.

Labour market

Though clearly the labour force of the country has been increasing, the lack of supply for skilled workers, especially for specialists, has been viewed as a problem of labour migration. Other than the social issues being caused by Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and the people they leave in the country, the decrease in specialists

who choose to work abroad for higher wages has forced companies and even government agencies to hire less experienced workers for highly skilled jobs.

Already in 2005, Vera Songwe, a World Bank economist, expressed concern over the increasing number of skilled workers taking on unskilled work overseas, resulting in a serious brain drain, particularly in the health and education sectors. She said 1,000 private hospitals have been forced to close for lack of manpower over the past five years, and 6,000 doctors have shifted to nursing, which is in demand overseas. She added that 10,000 teachers have left for jobs abroad since 1988, and 32,000 teachers now work as maids in neighboring countries in Asia.

Between 2003 and 2005, The Philippine Airlines (PAL), lost more than 80 pilots, 20% of the airline's total number. The Philippine aviation industry is just one example of a spreading phenomenon that is fast undermining the Philippine economy. Low-skilled workers have long left the Philippines for higher-earning jobs abroad. But an expanding diaspora of the Philippines' best and brightest professionals is hitting the country's overall competitiveness and threatens to jeopardize the viability of entire sectors of the local economy. The specter of a growing *brain drain* is fueling new fears that the Philippines might be losing more skilled workers than it can afford in critical sectors of the economy, including health, aviation, mining, shipping, and port operations.

The Philippine government already estimates it needs an additional 4,100 agriculture researchers, 2,000 fishery and marine science experts, 1,300 biotechnology staff and nearly 1,000 energy and environmental scientists just to meet rising challenges from higher energy and food costs. Local observers, however, are more alarmed about the gathering brain drain and its long-term impact on the economy. According to Jesus Varela, a committee chairman with the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, business groups hold little hope of keeping the nation's top talent at home.

Urbanisation

The most dominant migration trend in the Philippines in recent years has been toward the urban, or more accurately the suburban, areas adjacent to Metropolitan Manila. The rapid migration of Filipinos from one part of the Philippines to another is not a new phenomenon, but mobility has been increasing. The city of Manila itself suffered a net outflow, further pointing to the trend toward suburbanisation. Urbanisation is an inevitable and irreversible process, and it is wise to plan for it. The problem is not rapid urbanisation but unbalanced urbanisation, i.e., the concentration of urbanisation in Metro Manila. About one half of the sample of a Filipinas Foundation Study moved to provinces other than the province of birth in the pursuit of employment and other economic opportunities. More importantly, it is shown that women outnumber men in urban migration, migration has resulted in the 'feminisation' of urban and metropolitan age-structures and possible 'masculinisation' in certain rural areas of origin.

Regardless of age or gender, health is a cross-cutting issue that, for a number of reasons is of significance to migration. First, the complex two-way causal nexus between migration and health is of considerable significance in developing an effective health policy. There has been little research on this issue in Asia; while population mobility may appear to be a contributing factor in the spread of disease, such a conclusion is ill-informed because the issue is much more complicated. If countries are committed to improving health, a better understanding of the causes of poor health, the risk factors associated with particular diseases and the related significance of international migration is needed, followed by effective interventions.

In conclusion

In a strange twist, the Philippines has become so successful as a labour exporter that it has failed to sufficiently develop and strengthen development processes. The target to send a million workers every year is a telling indicator that migration will remain an important part of the country's future development plans and prospects. While the Philippines cannot stop people from leaving, the country will need to explore how migration can be an instrument for development. In this regard, the Philippines can learn much from international discussions and reflections on migration and development taking place in other countries.

Main sources

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