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# Analyzing the Characteristics of International Migration in the Philippines Using the 2018 National Migration Survey

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and Anna Rita P. Vargas*



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## **Abstract**

In spite of the significant contribution of international migration to the Philippine economy, there has not been any government survey that can provide a nationally representative information on such phenomenon until 2018 with the conduct of the National Migration Survey by the Philippine Statistics Authority. The 2018 NMS provides a reliable dataset that can be used to characterize migration phenomenon including international migration. This study took advantage of the presence of such data and examined the characteristics of international migration behavior of Filipinos for purposes of developing stylized facts and to put forward policy insights for improving migration-related, and other development policies. The results show that Filipinos have a greater tendency for international migration when compared to the global average. Filipino international migrants move when at their prime ages. Some sub-national regions like Ilocos Region, ARMM, Cagayan Valley and NCR, have either greater tendency or capacity for sending international migrants than others. Compared to the general population, IMs are relatively more educated. International migration by Filipinos is mainly driven by economic reasons. Many OFWs particularly women engaged in elementary occupations (61% of total). Majority of migrants leave children behind, many of who are minors. Nearly half of first-time migrants did not have a job prior to movement. Not all of the migrants used work visa in entering their destination, some used tourist visa while others did not need visa. An interesting finding is that majority of tourist visa holders who stayed at the destination for at least 3 months eventually changed their visa to work visa while at the destination. In terms of recruitment, although the most common way was through private recruitment agency (59%), a non-negligible 34.2 percent were directly hired by their overseas employer. Surprisingly, despite the need for written contracts, some (12.6% of the total) still risk to go to work abroad without a written contract. Having a written contract seems to be more prevalent among those who have achieved relatively higher educational attainment than those with lower attainment. There is also a greater tendency of not getting a written contract among those who were directly hired by the employer, those who did not need visa to enter the destination, and those who went abroad using tourist visa. In terms of reintegration, a non-negligible proportion (35%) of all returning migrants find it difficult to find jobs in the country upon return. Given these findings, it is important to create relevant policies and interventions that can reduce the potentially negative impacts of migration and risks. It is important to effectively raise awareness and educate prospective migrants on the work conditions on-site (for the sizable portion of migrant workers who are young, less educated and may not have adequate pre-migration experience and preparation) as well as the importance of having written, clear contracts prior to international migration.

**Keywords:** international migration, OFW, migration behavior, Philippine migration, migration policy

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# **Analyzing the International Migration Phenomenon in the Philippines Using the 2018 National Migration Survey**

***Aubrey D. Tabuga, Madeleine Louise S. Baiño, and Anna Rita P. Vargas***

## **1. Introduction**

For decades, the Philippines has been relying heavily on its millions of international migrant workers to keep its economy afloat. International remittances that OFWs remit to their families in the country comprise over 9 percent of the GDP in 2020. With the onslaught of COVID-19 pandemic and the massive repatriation of Filipino overseas workers that followed, the stability of remittances as a key source of disposable income is being threatened. Though surprisingly, remittance inflow to the Philippines was relatively stable in 2020 relative to forecasts despite the enormous impact of the pandemic on host countries' economies and the 75 percent reduction in the yearly deployment of migrant workers. Nevertheless, the pandemic also illustrated that a crisis of this magnitude can have significant impact on many migrant workers. In 2020, nearly 800,000 Filipinos return to the country as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This poses a challenge in terms of absorbing even a portion of these workers into the local economy that is already severely affected by the pandemic.

This study aims to revisit the issues confronting migrant workers and the Filipino households sending their members to work abroad. It takes advantage of the release of the first nationally representative survey on migration phenomenon – the 2018 National Migration Survey conducted by the Philippines Statistics Authority. The objective is to develop stylized facts about the recent migration behavior among Filipinos. The research questions this paper intends to inquire on are: 1) What are the characteristics of the Filipino international migration phenomenon?, and 2) What stylized facts can be gathered about the international migration experience of Filipinos in terms of motivations, recruitment, and migration process among others?

## **2. Some Recent Trends**

In 2020, the deployment of Filipino migrant workers has seen its sharpest decline in decades, reaching its lowest level since 1990. From nearly 2.2 million deployed workers in 2019, the year before the pandemic struck, official data show that deployment was only at 549,800 in 2020, lower by 75 percent. This figure is a meager one-third of the annual average in recent years. In the 14 years leading up to the pandemic, the Philippines was deploying an average of nearly 1.7 million land-based and sea-based workers, accounting for both new-hires and re-hires. At its peak in 2016 to 2019, an average of 2 million Filipino workers have been deployed. The sharp decline in 2020 is attributed mainly to the government-imposed travel restrictions to prevent the further transmission of COVID-19 both at the origin and at destination. The Philippine government suspended all kinds of travel following WHO's declaration of the pandemic in March 2020. To ensure that the healthcare system is able to bear the effects of the pandemic, it also issued a deployment ban on healthcare workers. And although a deployment ceiling on healthcare workers was later implemented, it was only in December 2020 that such was lifted.

Aside from these origin-based restrictions, host countries also imposed their own limits. A recent report noted that while Filipino workers were allowed to work in some 99 countries as of March 2021, there are still 104 countries which restrict the entry of Filipinos, though 77 of these impose exceptions for holders of employment contracts.

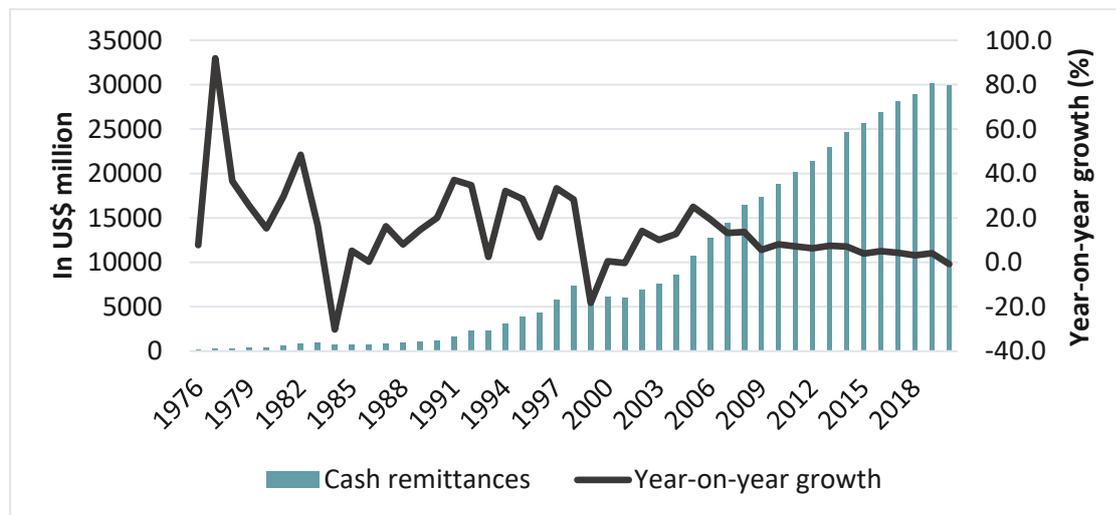
Pre-COVID, the deployment of overseas workers continues to increase though there have been some inflection points recently. A closer look at the growth rate of deployment by type shows a reduction in the number of new-hires as significant as that in 1995 when the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act was implemented. New-hires are defined as “OFWs who are starting a contract with a new employer. These migrants may have previously worked overseas, but the contract that they presently departing on is new, rather than renewed (p.11) (McKenzie, Theoharides, & Yang 2014). Majority of the outflow each year comprises of re-hires or those going back to their old employers.

The bulk of OFWs are under the category of elementary occupations and sales/service workers (74% of total new hires in 2016). Majority (77%) of all elementary occupation workers are in fact domestic helpers and cleaners; the largest group under service workers are waiters. Professionals account for only 6.4 percent of the total – the biggest groups are nurses (54% of total professionals), musicians/choreographers/dancers (14%), and engineers (11%). This pattern has been consistent in the past decades although the typology used by POEA did not distinguish the elementary occupations from managers and skilled workers. Service workers (where domestic helpers are counted in) and production workers (that include construction workers) take a huge proportion (83% in 2014) of the total deployment of new-hires.

The Middle East still hosts the largest proportion of OFWs at 60 percent based on 2017 data, though there has been a decline in its share in recent years. Meanwhile the share of the rest of Asia has increased. These two key destinations comprise an overwhelming 95 percent of total deployment. Saudi Arabia, the top destination of OFWs, had imposed entry ban for months, although the restrictions are gradually eased.

Meanwhile, the total yearly cash remittances have been steadily increasing in the past years, although the growth in remittances was shown to have become more stable. Despite higher reduction in the remittances as forecasted by various experts, the 2020 overseas remittance went down by a mere 0.8 percent.

**Figure 1. Trend in the overseas remittances received by the Philippines.**



Source: Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

The key data sources used for analyzing the characteristics of international migration by Filipinos in the past are administrative data from government migration agencies like the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, and Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, as shown in the preceding profiling. Prior to the conduct of the 2018 National Migration Survey, the Philippines Statistics Authority and its predecessor - the National Statistics Office have conducted the Survey on Overseas Filipinos (SOF) and also included rider questions in its Labor Force Survey about OFWs to provide a way for researchers and authorities to understand the extent of the phenomenon and shed some light on their circumstances. None of these surveys however had ever achieved an adequate sample to represent at the national level migrants – internal and international, and more in-depth information about salient aspects of the migration phenomenon.

While administrative data have certainly helped us get an understanding of the key characteristics of Filipinos’ international migration activities, such as the key destinations and the major occupations, there are other equally important aspects that require deeper understanding that have not been thoroughly analyzed due to the lack of a nationally representative survey on the migration phenomenon in the country. For example, it is important to get a notion of the key drivers and facilitators of international migration. This helps policy makers understand this social phenomenon more deeply and enables them to become more proactive in designing policies that address potential social and economic issues related to it. Furthermore, by analyzing migrant Filipinos’ circumstances and the living condition of their households or families at a scale that is reflective of the national situation, authorities can devise systems to address and anticipate social problems that may arise as a result of this phenomenon. Although the domestic literature is rich in the analysis of the migration phenomenon in the country, these studies either focus more on the effects or are based on survey data that are not nationally representative. There is certainly lack of understanding on the more in-depth aspects of international migration such as the circumstances of the households sending migrant workers, key drivers and facilitators, migration process, and migration experience. Analyzing the National Migration Survey is therefore essential in addressing these knowledge gaps.

### 3. Filipino Households with OFWs

The NMS defines OFW as “a Filipino who is engaged in or has been engaged (in the past 12 months) in a remunerated activity in a state of which he/she is not a legal resident, or on board a vessel navigating the foreign seas other than a government ship used for military or non-commercial purposes or on an installation located offshore or the high seas” (PSA and UPPI 2019, p.13). Its definition of international migration is “the physical movement of people involving a change of usual residence from one state or territory to another during a specified period of observation for economic, social, political and/or cultural reasons” (PSA and UPPI 2019, p.42). Likewise, the NMS defines a lifetime migration as “that which has occurred between birth and the time of the census or survey. A lifetime migrant is one whose current area of residence and area of birth differ, regardless of intervening migrations” (PSA and UPPI 2019, p.42). This paper also uses a more specific measure by the NMS and that is the lifetime migrant with at least three months duration of residence in the destination.

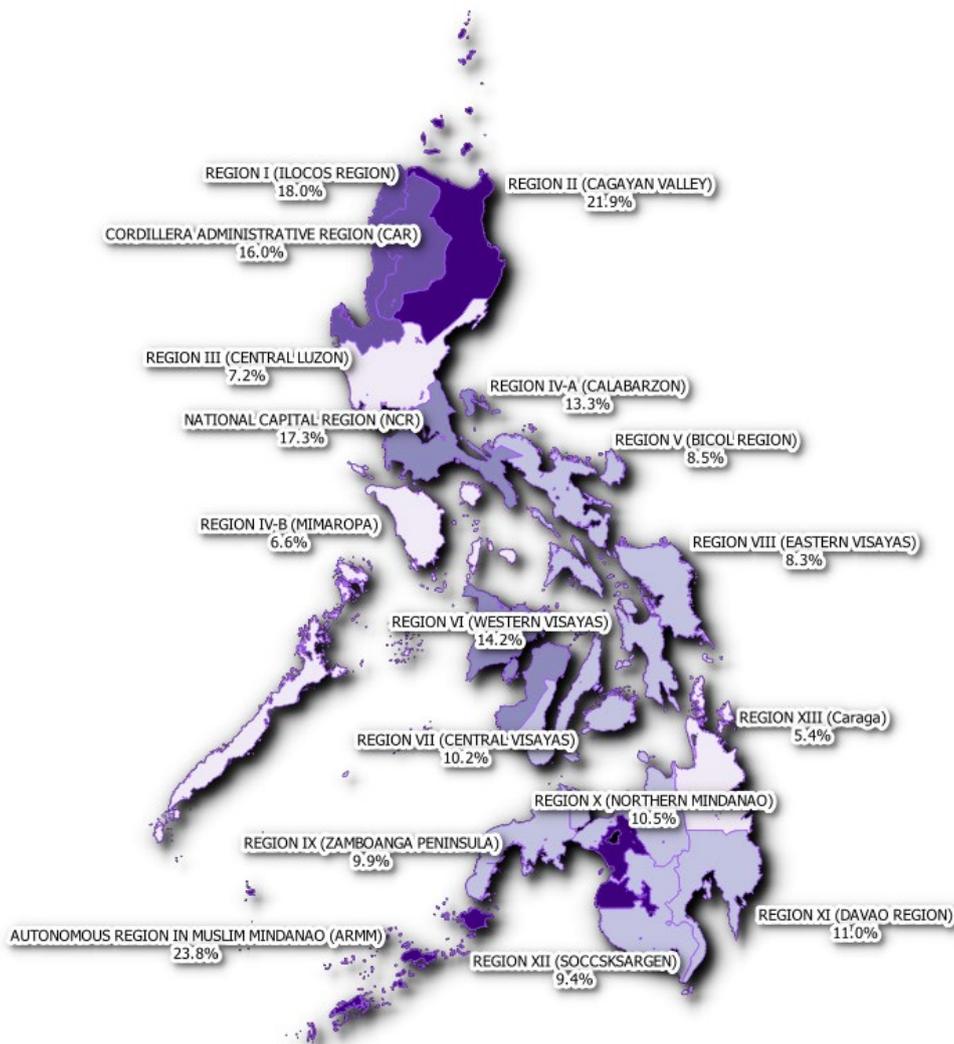
At the time of the survey, 9 percent of all households had at least one member who was currently out of the country. Twelve in every 100 households have been estimated to have had at least one OFW member either within the past 12 months or earlier than the past 12 months, 50.7 percent of which reside in a rural area. It is interesting to see that among the regions, ARMM has the highest proportion of HHs with OFWs at 23.8 percent of its total number of households. This is followed by Cagayan Valley (21.9%), Ilocos Region (18%), and NCR (17.3%).

**Table 1. Distribution of HHs with OFWs by place of residence.**

Household	Frequency	Percent
Households without OFWs	21,331,680	87.6%
Households with OFWs	3,016,865	12.4%
<i>Urban</i>	1,485,999	49.3%
<i>Rural</i>	1,530,866	50.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>24,348,545</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

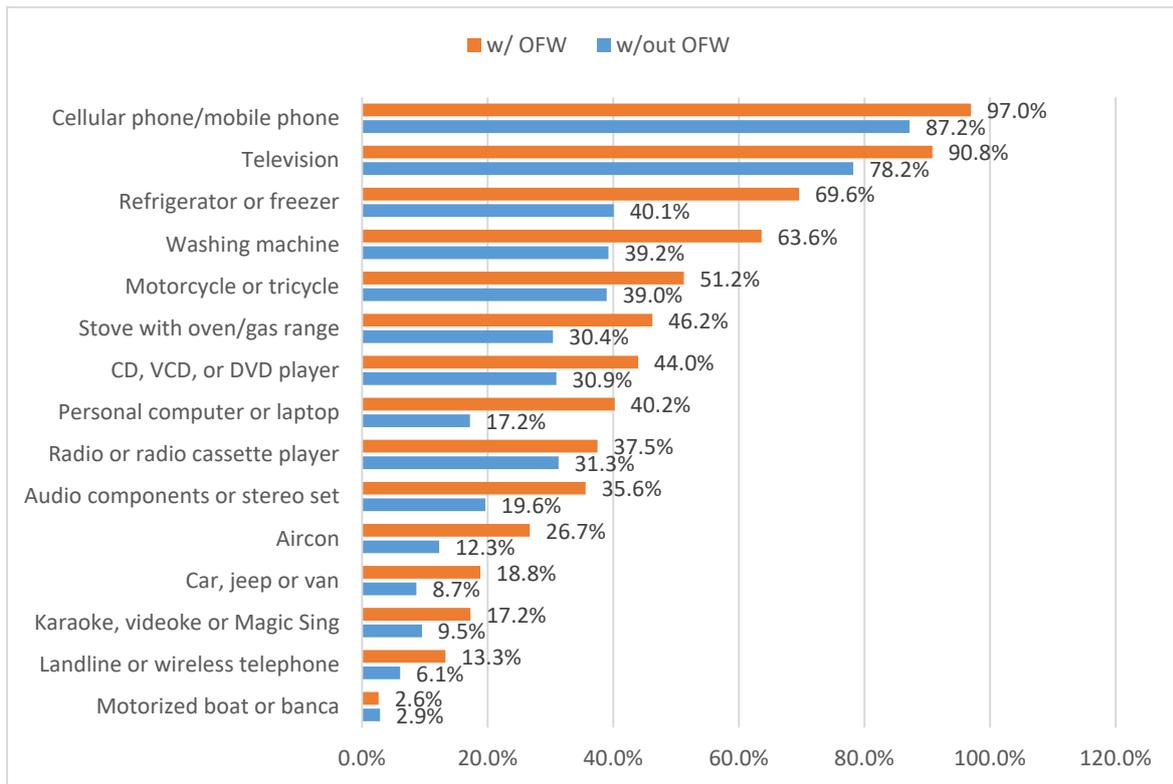
**Figure 2. Proportion of Households with OFWs.**



Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

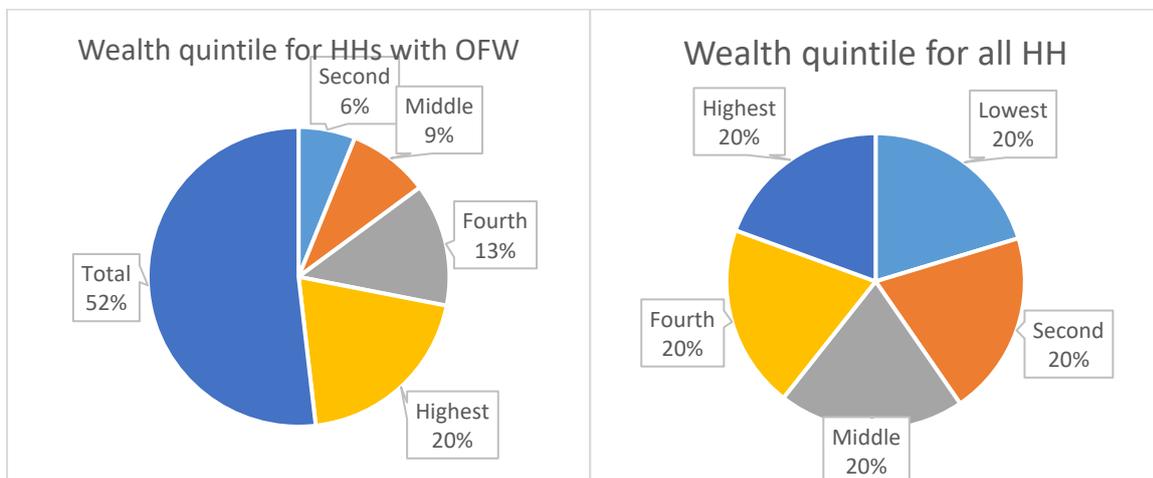
Without necessarily attributing the difference to the receipt of remittances from OFW members, households with OFWs have more assets and many of them belong to higher income groups. Only 4 percent of the poorest households had an OFW member; the corresponding percentage for the richest was 25 percent. Households with OFWs have higher percentages of house ownership (69% versus 57%) than those without OFWs. This is also the trend in ownership of all asset types except motorized boat (see Figure 3). Majority (64%) of all households with OFWs come from the fourth and richest wealth quintile (see Figure 4).

**Figure 3. Proportion of households owning assets by type of household and asset.**



Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

**Figure 4. Wealth quintile for all households and of households with OFWs.**



Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

## 4. Characteristics of Filipino International Migration

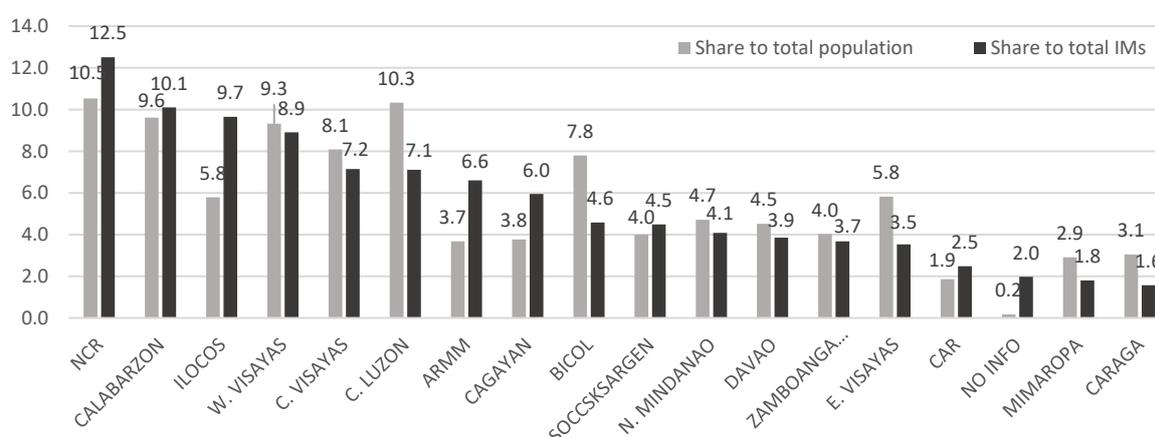
### *Characteristics of International Migrants*

The NMS shows that 6.5 percent of our population of 15 years and above have international migration experience that lasted for at least 3 months. This is significantly higher if compared to the global percentage of international migrants, at 3.5 percent in 2019, which shows the greater tendency by Filipinos to migrate internationally than the global average.<sup>1</sup> The survey likewise shows that 45 percent of the population of interest have not experienced moving to other places (within the country or in other countries) with a duration of 3 months. To be considered a migrant, the minimum border crossed is city or municipality.

More than half (54.7%) of the International Migrants (IMs) grew up in a barrio/rural area. With respect to origin regions, 12.5 percent of the IMs originated from NCR, the highest in all regions, followed by CALABARZON (10.1%), and Ilocos Region (9.7%). When the distribution of IMs by regional origin is examined, it was found that some regions have greater tendency for international migration than others. For instance, while Ilocos Region contributed only 5.8 percent to the total population of interest in 2018 (i.e. 15 years old and above), it contributed 9.7 percent of the total IMs (see Figure 5). Other regions with larger share in the total IMs than their share in the total population group of interest were – NCR, Calabarzon, ARMM, and Cagayan Valley. In contrast, there are regions with disproportionately lower share in IMs compared to their share in the overall population – these are Central Luzon, Bicol Region, and Eastern Visayas.

In terms of demographics, an overwhelming majority of IMs are young Filipinos - nearly 8 out of 10 international migrants are in their prime ages 20 to 39 when they first migrated (see Table 2). In terms of marital status, although the majority (54%) of IMs are married or in married-like status, a significant proportion of them are single (39%).

**Figure 5. Composition of IMs by region of origin, 2018.**



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/international-migrant-stock-2019.html>  
Retrieved December 17, 2021. Note that the Philippines' estimate uses the duration of three months while the UN uses 1 year duration in the definition of international migrants.

Note: NCR - National Capital Region; CALABARZON - Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon; SOCCSKSARGEN – South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, General Santos; CAR – Cordillera Administrative Region; MIMAROPA – Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, Palawan.  
 Source of basic data: NMS 2018

**Table 2. Distribution of IMs by age during the first move abroad.**

Age	Frequency	Percent
0-9	53,582	1.1%
10-19	367,647	7.7%
20-29	2,505,280	52.8%
30-39	1,228,837	25.9%
40-49	376,273	7.9%
50-59	110,236	2.3%
60-69	68,012	1.4%
70 and above	29,820	0.6%
No answer	5,610	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,745,298</b>	<b>100%</b>

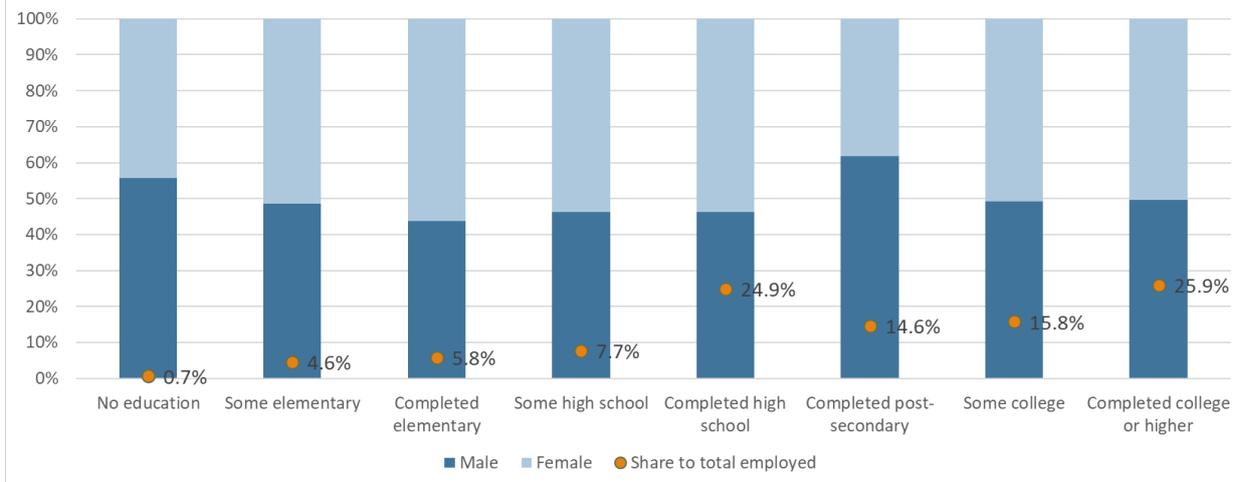
Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

The study found that about 81.2 percent of the total employed IMs have at least completed High School. More employed male IMs have completed at least a post-secondary school, but there seems to have an equal proportion of males and females who have some college experience or are college graduates. It is important to note that there are slightly more women among workers who have lower educational attainment.

Compared to the general population, IMs are relatively more educated. The set of international migrants is composed largely (56.3%) of at least post-high school educated individuals. In contrast, only 30 percent of the general population of 15 years old and above (which is nearly half the percentage of international migrants) have similar educational attainment. Comparing male and female migrant workers, there appears to be a greater share of highly educated male than female if we consider such those who have attained at least post-secondary education. There is not much difference between the sexes in terms of share of workers who have attained college education. If you look at women migrants as a group, there are more of them who have relatively lower education (having completed high school at best) compared to their male counterpart.

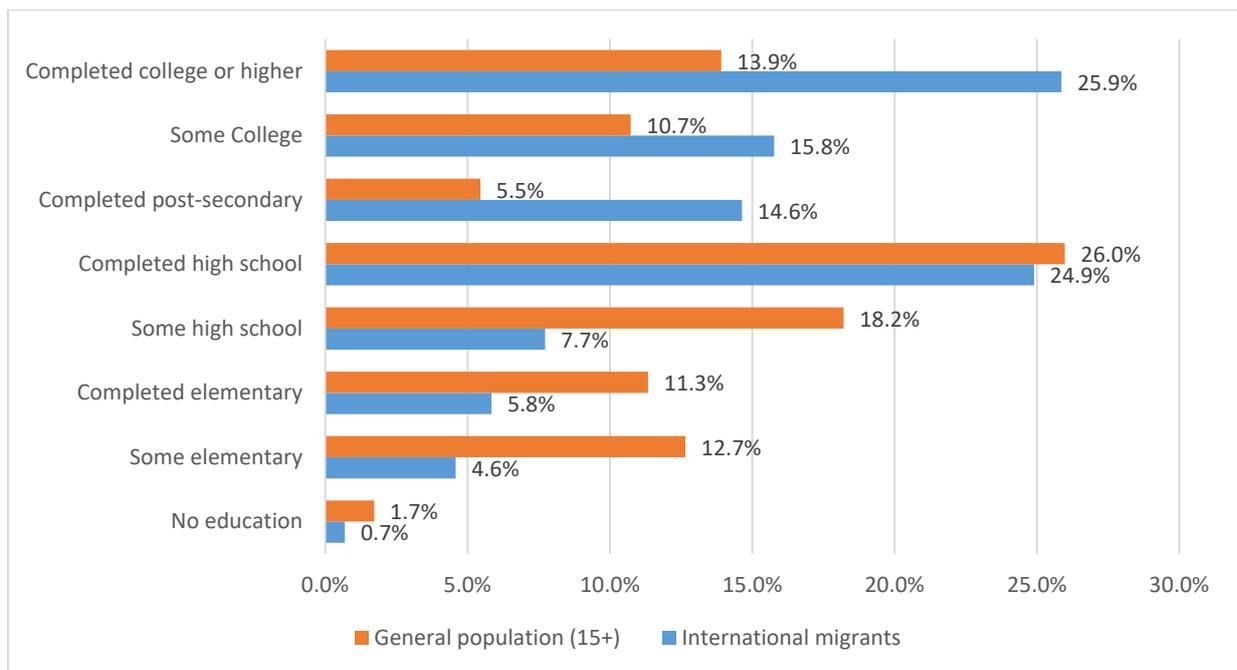
One of the key issues in international labor migration is when a migrant is seemingly forced to work in occupations not commensurate to his or her level of education. We found some evidence of such from this study. Of the total women migrant workers who were at least college graduates, 37 percent had elementary occupations at the destination while 24 percent worked as service and sales workers.

**Figure 6. Distribution of international migrants by sex and current educational attainment.**



Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

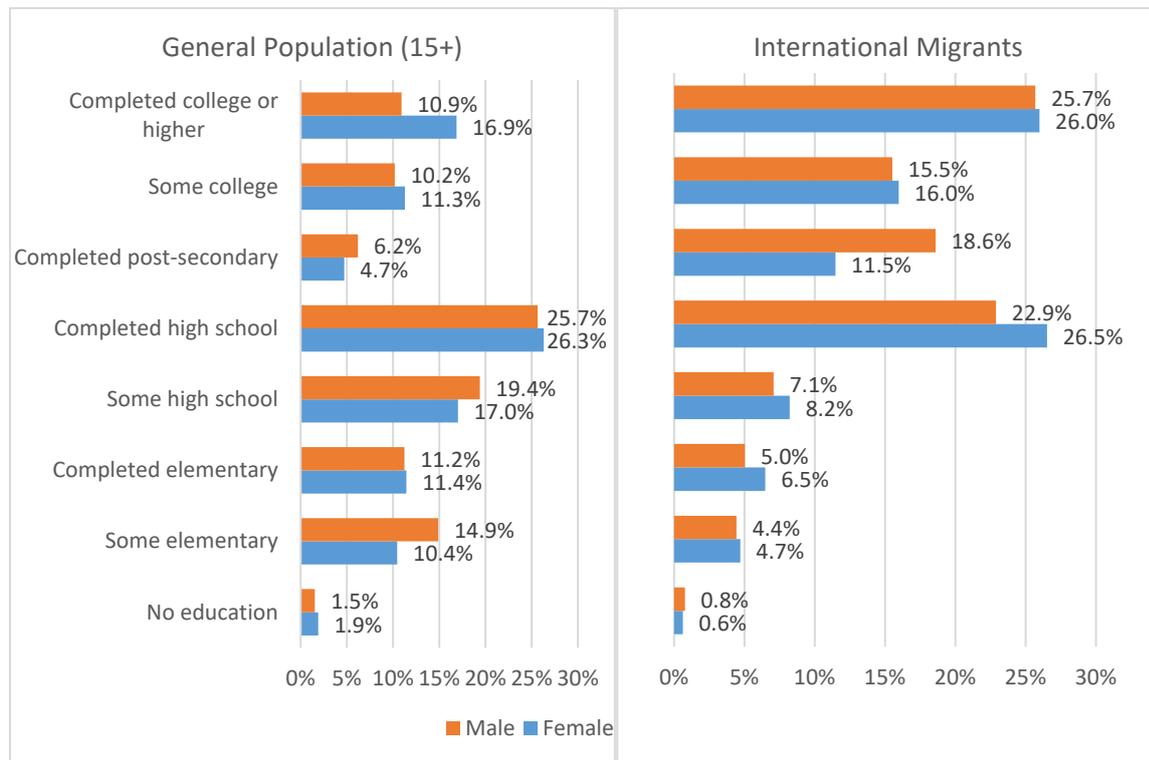
**Figure 7. Educational Attainment of population (15+) and international migrants, 2018.**



Note: Educational attainment of ages 15 and above during time of interview

Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

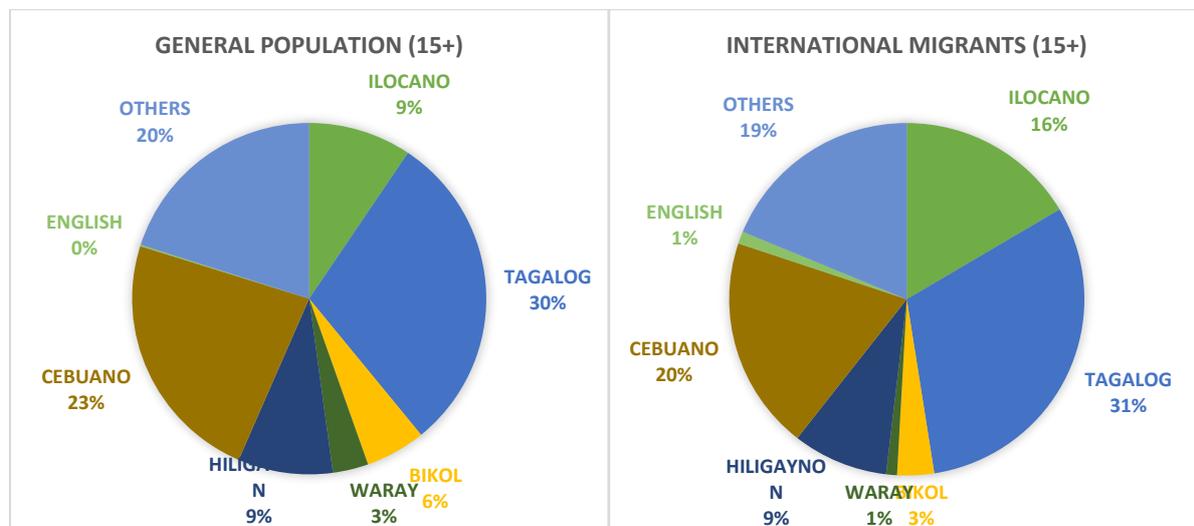
**Figure 8. Educational Attainment of population (15+) and international migrants by sex, 2018.**



Note: Educational attainment of ages 15 and above during time of interview  
 Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

Looking at the propensity to migrate internationally by various ethnic groups (as distinguished by their mother tongue), it can be observed that Ilocanos have higher likelihood to migrate than other groups. This is shown by this group’s relatively larger proportion of international migrants (i.e. 16%) compared to its share in the general population (9%).

**Figure 9. Distribution of population (15+) and international migrants by mother tongue.**



Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

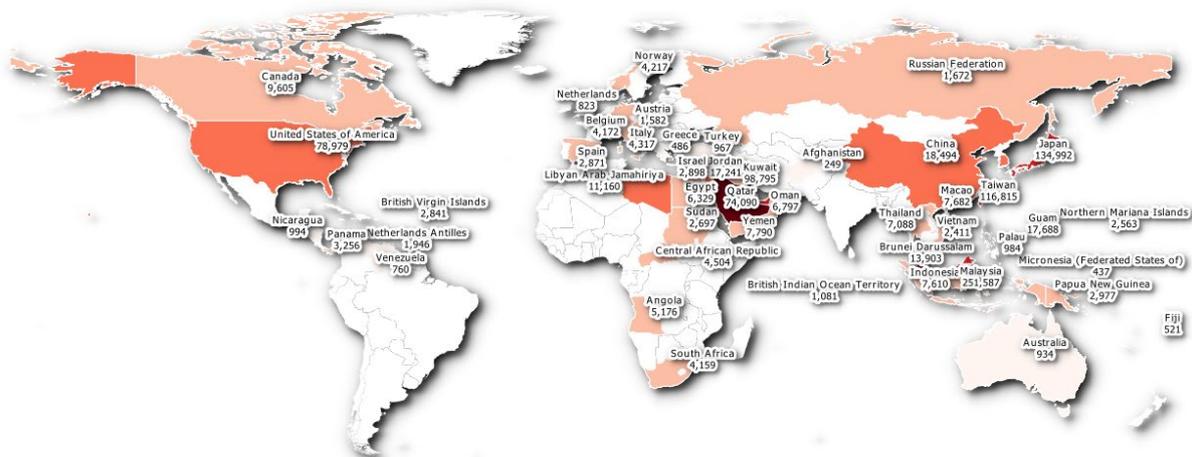
International migration by Filipinos is driven by economic reasons. Ninety-two percent of all those who had experienced moving internationally reported that their purpose for moving was employment, job change or job relocation. A very small percentage move internationally to live with children (2.1%) and for schooling (1.1%) (see Table 3). The top destinations international migrants first moved to/resided in are Saudi Arabia (22.6%), UAE (12%), Malaysia (7.5%), Japan (6.9%), Singapore (6.2%), Taiwan (6.1%), Kuwait (5.8%), Hong Kong (5.2%), United States (5%), and Qatar (3.9%).

**Table 3. International migrants' reason for moving**

Region	Frequency	Percent
School	52,218	1.1%
Employment/Job change/Job relocation	4,384,649	92.4%
Family business succession	19,916	0.4%
Finished contract	18,277	0.4%
Retirement	654	0.0%
Housing-related reason	38,061	0.8%
Living environment	8,824	0.2%
Commuting-related reasons	4,588	0.1%
To live with parents	51,505	1.1%
To live with spouse/partner	24,549	0.5%
To live with children	97,311	2.1%
Marriage	6,817	0.1%
Divorce/Annulment	5,967	0.1%
Health-related reasons	3,960	0.1%
Peace and security	11,875	0.3%
Other reasons	5,928	0.1%
Don't know/No information	5,920	0.1%
No answer	4,278	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,745,298</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

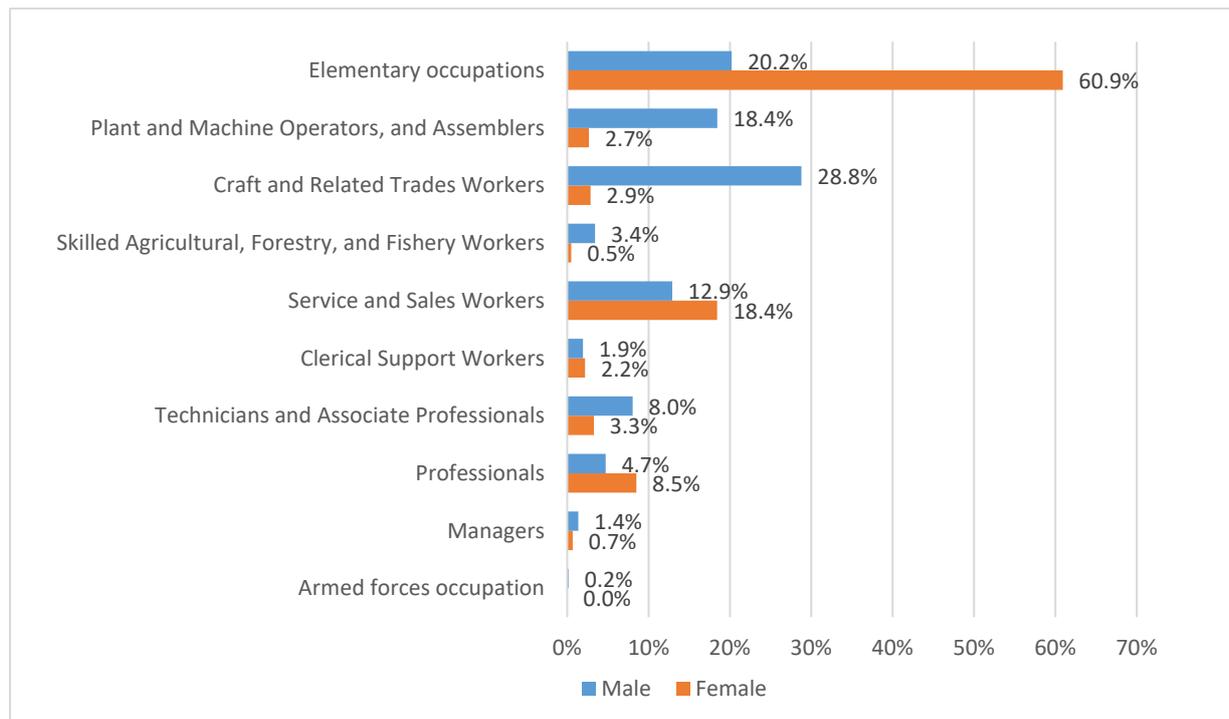
**Figure 10. Countries where international migrants first moved to/resided abroad.**



Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

Many OFWs particularly women engaged in elementary occupations (61% of total). The rest of female migrant workers are in service and sales (18%) and professional work (8.5%). The top occupation among male migrant workers was in craft and related trades (29%), followed by elementary occupations (20%), plant and machine operation (18%), service and sales (18%) and technicians and associate professionals (8%).

**Figure 11. Distribution of international migrant by sex and occupation during first country abroad**



Note: First job/occupation during first country abroad

Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

### *Pre-migration situations and motives*

How individuals and their households undergo the process of decision-making for moving abroad is of interest. The survey shows that amidst the culture of close family ties among Filipinos, the prevailing practice, at least based on the 2018 NMS, was that in most instances, it is the individual person who got decide to move internationally. In fact, 73.2 percent of the international migrants reported that they decided to migrate by themselves during their first migration.

Likewise, one of the important social issues related to international migration of a family member is its potential impact on the family. It is important to note that majority (63%) of IMs had children when they first moved abroad. Among those who had children living with the survey respondent, 91 percent of them had children aged below 18 years. If we focus only on international migrants who went abroad in the last 5 years, 69 percent had children prior to movement. Of those, 84 percent of them had children who were of minor ages.

Looking at the prior work experience is important in assessing the level of skills of migrant workers at the time of their first migration. The study found that majority or 51% had prior work before moving abroad for the first time. Specifically, they engaged in the following types of job/business: Service and sales (23.4%); Elementary occupation (18.8%); and Craft and related trades workers (15.6%), plant and machine operators (9.3%). This finding shows therefore that almost half of those going abroad to work there for the first time may not have the adequate skills and preparations for overseas job. A closer examination shows that such workers have relatively similar educational profile as those with prior work experience before moving abroad. Four in ten migrant workers without work experience were college educated. Majority of those in this group were 20 to 29 years old.

In terms of class of worker, 58 percent of the IM workers (who did have work prior to movement) worked for private establishment while they were still in the Philippines. Some 15 percent were self-employed without any paid employee and 14 percent worked for private households. Prior to working abroad, 68 percent had a permanent job while 27 percent had short-term or casual job.

**Table 4. Job/business of international migrants before moving abroad.**

Type of Job/business	Frequency	Percent
Armed forces occupation	10,002	0.4%
Managers	85,508	3.5%
Professionals	179,312	7.4%
Technicians and Associate Professionals	206,428	8.6%
Clerical Support Workers	138,911	5.8%
Service and Sales Workers	563,617	23.4%
Skilled Agricultural, Forestry, and Fishery Workers	175,119	7.3%
Craft and Related Trades Workers	376,283	15.6%
Plant and Machine Operators, and Assemblers	223,793	9.3%
Elementary occupations	452,374	18.8%
Total	2,411,347	100.0%

Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

It is likewise useful to understand international migrants' assessment of their financial situation prior to movement to gain a better view of their motivations or intentions. Surprisingly, majority or 53 percent reported that they thought their financial standing were deemed sufficient, 44 percent noted that it was less than sufficient, while 2.6 percent recalled that it was more than sufficient.

### *Migration Process*

One of the aspects that have not been adequately examined using nationally representative sample are the facets of migration process such as visa usage, any changes in the visa on-site, recruitment, and whether migrants engage in overseas work with proper documents or contracts which are essential for their protection and welfare. The survey data show that during entry in

first international movement, 71.3 percent of international migrants reported to have had work permit/visa in first country of destination while there are 15.3 percent who entered holding a tourist visa and some 4 percent did not need a visa.

If we focus only on IMs who have worked during their stay in the first country, it is important to note that 78.5 of them used work visa in entering the host economy, 11 percent used tourist visa while some 3 percent said they did not need visa. Users of student visa comprized only of 0.4 percent of the total.

At the destination, 92 percent reported that there was no change in their visa type while some 6.3 percent reported that they changed their initial visa to work visa. Put differently, 95 percent of the migrant workers who have changed their visa into work visa or permit helda tourist visa.

It is quite significant finding to see that majority (53.5%) of tourist visa holders who stayed at the destination for at least 3 months eventually changed their visa to work visa while at the destination. The host economies in which these visa changes (tourist to work visa) were prevalent were - UAE, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and South Korea. Of the workers who used tourist visa in entering Hong Kong, 92 percent eventually changed visa into work visa/permit (see Table 5). This proportion was high as well for UAE with 82 percent, Kuwait (90 percent), Singapore (73 percent), and Qatar (50%). Of the countries where Filipino workers did not need a visa for their first move abroad, Malaysia is the top destination with 73.4 percent, followed by Singapore (6.1%), and Australia (2.6%).

**Table 5. Countries where workers changed their visa from tourist to work visa/permit.**

Country/territory	No. of workers (changed tourist to working)	Total no. of workers with tourist visa (during entry)	Proportion of tourists that changed their visa permit to work visa
United Arab Emirates	89,032	108,346	82.2%
Singapore	51,703	70,977	72.8%
Japan	856	58,287	1.5%
Malaysia	11,973	26,364	45.4%
South Korea	3,950	24,069	16.4%
Hong Kong	19,946	21,678	92.0%
Jordan	5,337	15,724	33.9%
Qatar	6,881	13,752	50.0%
Kuwait	9,926	12,334	80.5%
Saudi Arabia	4,327	10,713	40.4%
Yemen	0	8,296	0.0%
Lebanon	7,557	7,557	100.0%
Macao	477	7,126	6.7%
United States	2,882	6,619	43.5%
China	1,814	5,315	34.1%
Canada	3,067	4,491	68.3%
Norway	0	4,217	0.0%
Thailand	1,462	3,843	38.1%

Taiwan	0	3,717	0.0%
Brunei	1,532	3,111	49.2%
Syria	3,065	3,065	100.0%
Laos	0	2,989	0.0%
Italy	1,383	2,900	47.7%
Oman	2,217	2,681	82.7%
Iraq	0	2,236	0.0%
Austria	0	1,582	0.0%
Papua New Guinea	1,474	1,474	100.0%
Iran	1,448	1,448	100.0%
Angola	1,265	1,265	100.0%
Bahrain	1,034	1,034	100.0%
Indonesia	748	1,031	72.5%
Nicaragua	0	994	0.0%
Palau	984	984	100.0%
Netherlands	0	823	0.0%
South Africa	0	591	0.0%
Greece	190	443	42.9%
Afghanistan	0	249	0.0%
Spain	206	206	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>236,735.15</b>	<b>442,532.61</b>	<b>53.5%</b>

Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

It is also useful to examine the use of other types of visa such as for instance the student visa which may relate to the issue of “brain drain.” The international migrants who used student visa in entering their first country of destination who eventually worked comprised only of 0.4 percent of the total IMs, as already mentioned. This estimate yields around 18,000 individuals. Of this number, half have at least completed college education, while 37 percent had some college education. It is important to consider that eight in every 10 student visa holders who eventually worked in the destination were women. Student visa holders who worked at the destination were mainly service and sales workers (71%), 13 percent worked in elementary occupations while 8 percent worked as plant and machine operators.

How migrant workers were recruited is also of interest. Of the estimated 3.9 million IM workers, 59.2 percent were hired through private recruitment agency. A non-negligible 34.2 percent were directly hired by the overseas employer. Those who were hired by government to government mechanisms comprised a very small percentage at 1.8 percent. The common approaches of how migrants got in contact with employers or the recruitment agency were face-to-face walk-in (46%), employer/recruitment agency initiated contact (27%), and through relatives whether here in the country or abroad (24%). Only 3.7 percent were made through classified ads whether in print or in the Internet.

Another aspect of the process that is important from the viewpoint of policy is the presence of a written contract prior to movement. The presence of a written contract provided by the employer or recruitment agency that is consistent with the POEA standard employment contract is important for security purposes. It is notable that though 87.4 percent of IM workers were provided with written contracts, some 12.6 percent did not have a written contract. Among those without contract, 59 percent were males while 41 percent were females.

Having a written contract seems to be more prevalent among those who have achieved relatively higher educational attainment than those with lower attainment. Probing more deeply, it seems more likely for male migrant workers to not have a written agreement than for female as shown by a higher percentage of male workers in such a situation. More educated workers are less likely to move abroad without a written contract. Based on this data, there is also a greater tendency of not getting a written contract among those who were directly hired by the employer. To illustrate, 24 percent of the migrant workers who were hired directly were in a position of not knowing the exact terms of the engagement. Among those who went through recruitment agency, 4.2 percent (or 97,800 persons) did not have written contracts.

Among the classes of migrant workers, the self-employed had highest proportion of those without a contract document that can protect them. It is a bit surprising that only 8 percent of workers in private households did not have a contract to hold on to in times of need. Among the types of job/business, those skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers had the highest proportion of those without a contract. In contrast, the occupation groups with highest proportion of those with written contract were 1) professionals, and 2) plant and machine operators.

In terms of the costs incurred, this study found that one-third of the migrant workers paid contract fee while the rest, 68 percent, reported that they did not pay contract fees. Most (46%) of those who paid for their contract fee did go through private recruitment agency.

**Figure 12. Characteristics of migrant workers by contract status**

	With written contract	Without written contract	Total
<b>By sex</b>			
Male	83.7%	16.3%	100.0%
Female	90.5%	9.5%	100.0%
<b>By educational attainment</b>			
No education	35.6%	64.4%	100.0%
Some elementary	57.6%	42.4%	100.0%
Completed elementary	77.3%	22.7%	100.0%
Some high school	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Completed high school	89.7%	10.3%	100.0%
Completed post-secondary	94.4%	5.6%	100.0%
Some college	89.4%	10.6%	100.0%
Completed college or higher	93.0%	7.0%	100.0%
<b>By recruitment type</b>			
Direct hire by employer	75.8%	24.2%	100.0%
Private recruitment agency	95.8%	4.2%	100.0%
Others	56.1%	43.9%	100.0%
<b>By visa/permit during entry</b>			
Did not need visa	26.3%	73.7%	100.0%
Tourist visa	69.0%	31.0%	100.0%
Work visa/permit	95.9%	4.1%	100.0%
Student visa	90.9%	9.1%	100.0%

Fiancé/e visa	12.9%	87.1%	100.0%
Immigrant visa	24.1%	75.9%	100.0%
Seafarer's visa	95.9%	4.1%	100.0%
Residence permit	58.3%	41.7%	100.0%
Others	21.5%	78.5%	100.0%
<b>By class of worker</b>			
Worked for private household	91.9%	8.1%	100.0%
Worked for private establishment	84.9%	15.1%	100.0%
Worked for government/government-controlled corporations	89.8%	10.2%	100.0%
Self-employed without and paid employee	14.8%	85.2%	100.0%
Employer in own family operated farm or business	67.0%	33.0%	100.0%
Worked with pay in own family-operated farm or business	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Worked without pay in own family operated farm or business	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>By type of job/business</b>			
Armed forces occupation	72.9%	27.1%	100.0%
Managers	88.8%	11.2%	100.0%
Professionals	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%
Technicians and Associate Professionals	84.3%	15.7%	100.0%
Clerical Support Workers	86.5%	13.5%	100.0%
Service and Sales Workers	85.9%	14.1%	100.0%
Skilled Agricultural, Forestry, and Fishery Workers	57.3%	42.7%	100.0%
Craft and Related Trades Workers	88.1%	11.9%	100.0%
Plant and Machine Operators, and Assemblers	95.6%	4.4%	100.0%
Elementary occupations	86.7%	13.3%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>87.4%</b>	<b>12.6%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

### *Migration Networks and Assistance Received*

It is known from the literature that social networks facilitate the migration process of prospective migrants by providing them various types of assistance. In fact, migrants look toward their own friends and relatives for support rather than seek assistance from institutions. Most first time migrants did not have relatives or friends in the destination country. The survey data show that 62 percent move to a country where they have no relatives or friends and only 23 percent have had relatives. For those who have received assistance from their networks, the common types of assistance that networks provided were food and/or lodging (where 42.5 percent of those with networks reported getting this type), transport payment (22%), loan or money (19.5%), and assistance with movement documents like visa (15%).

**Table 6. Type of assistance provided by friends and/or relatives during their move to and residence in the first country of destination.**

Type of assistance	First country abroad
Helped to obtain visa/residence permit	15.20%
Paid for transportation	22.40%
Provided food and/or lodging	42.50%
Provided money/loan	19.50%
Provided information about work possibilities/referral	10.40%
Helped to find work	19.20%
Helped to find accommodation	9.00%
Provided full support until you found a job	7.40%
Others	2.40%

Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

Majority of OFWs did not receive assistance from any institution during their move to and residence in the first country abroad. As seen in Table 7, only 3 percent received assistance from the Philippine embassy/consulate, 2.2 percent received assistance from the government of the host country, and 1.8 percent from Filipino associations/communities. Additional data from the NMS showed that the proportion of OFWs who received assistance from the Philippine embassy/consulate and the government of the host country have declined in the past five years, but assistance from other Philippine government agencies increased.

Of the few who received assistance from institutions, 25.4 percent received help in obtaining their visa or residence permit (see Table 8), 27 percent received assistance on their food and/or lodging, 22 percent received money or loan, and 17 percent received transportation assistance.

**Table 7. Proportion of OFWs who received assistance from Institutions during their move to and residence in the first country abroad.**

Institution	Percent (%)
Philippine embassy/consulate	3.00%
Other Philippine government agencies	1.40%
Philippine NGOs	0.20%
Foreign NGOs	0.40%
Host country government	2.20%
Filipino associations/communities	1.80%

**Table 8. Type of assistance received from institutions.**

Type of assistance	Percent (%)
Helped to obtain visa/residence permit	25.4%
Paid for transportation	16.9%
Provided food and/or lodging	26.7%
Provided money/loan	21.8%
Provided information about work possibilities/referral	3.4%

Helped to find work	5.3%
Helped to find accommodation	5.7%
Provided full support until you found a job	2.0%
Others	10.8%

Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

### *Return Migration*

The process of return migration is an important aspect of this inquiry regarding the migration phenomenon. Return, whether voluntary or forced, refers to the return of migrant workers from a country of destination back to the country of origin. According to the 2018 ILO guidelines on migration statistics, “return international migrant workers are defined as all current residents of the country who were previously international migrant workers in another country or countries.... The minimum duration of labour attachment abroad for a person to be considered as a return international migrant worker [is] relatively short, such as 6 months” (ILO, 2018b, p. 15).

Return is closely linked with reintegration, which is the reintroduction and reinsertion of a migrant to the community of origin. According to The Return Migration and Development Platform of the European University Institute, reintegration is a “process through which a return migrant participates in the social, cultural, economic and political life of the country of origin” (Cassarino, 2014b, p. 184).

The Philippine government has instituted several social services, support mechanisms, and migration networks to help reintegrate returning overseas Filipinos. The Department of Labor and Employment established the Philippine Job Exchange Network (Phil JobNet) to provide a listing of job vacancies that can be utilized by returning OFWs seeking local employment (Public Services International, 2015). OWWA has been organizing the OFW Family Circles (OFCs) to serve as a support system to OFWs and returnees, as well as their families, for their psychosocial needs. The NMS inquired upon international migrants’ awareness in the migration networks organized by the government as a strategy for reintegration. The result, however, shows that three-fourths of all international migrants were not aware of such networks. In fact, only over one-fifth (21.4%) were aware of such networks, though they were not members. There is a very small percentage, 2.2 percent, of those who were both aware and current members of migration networks.

Returning OFWs experienced difficulties upon their return. Almost one-third (35.5%) of them reported that they have difficulty finding any job upon their return, 6.3 percent had difficulty finding jobs that correspond to their skills, 5 percent had difficulty establishing business, and 2.3 percent had difficulty reintegrating into the society (see Table 9).

The survey also inquired on those who have received some support from the government for and upon return. It is important to note that 96 percent of the IMs did not receive any support, only 3.6 percent reported that they received support from the government. Welfare support (e.g. transportation assistance) (42.1%), Financial support (36%), and Livelihood support (16.9%) are among the types of support received from the government.

**Table 9. Difficulties experienced by OFW upon return.**

Awareness	Experienced difficulty	Did not experience difficulty	No answer	Total
Difficulty to find any job	35.5%	64.3%	0.1%	100.0%
Difficulty to find job corresponding to skills	6.3%	93.6%	0.1%	100.0%
Difficulty to re-integrate into society	2.3%	97.6%	0.1%	100.0%
Difficulty to establish a business	5.0%	94.8%	0.1%	100.0%
Mismatched skills acquired abroad with jobs in the Philippines	1.9%	97.9%	0.1%	100.0%
Security issues/peace and order	1.2%	98.6%	0.1%	100.0%
Others	12.5%	87.4%	0.1%	100.0%
No/None	48.9%	50.9%	0.1%	100.0%

Source of basic data: PSA 2018 National Migration Survey

## 5. Summary and Recommendation

This study took advantage of the existence of a nationally representative survey to analyze the characteristics of Filipino international migration, focusing mostly on labor migration. The following statements are put forward as stylized facts in relation to the international migration phenomenon.

- Filipinos have greater tendency for international migration compared to the global average. The NMS shows that 6.5 percent of our population of 15 years and above have international migration experience that lasted for at least 3 months, a rate higher than the global average.
- Filipino international migrants move during their prime ages. An overwhelming percentage (nearly 80 percent) of international migrants comprised of young individuals aged 20 to 39.
- Some sub-national regions like Ilocos Region, ARMM, Cagayan Valley and NCR, have either greater tendency or capacity for sending international migrants than others. Looking at the propensity to migrate internationally by various ethnic groups (as distinguished by their mother tongue), it can be observed that Ilocanos have higher likelihood to migrate than other groups.
- Compared to the general population, IMs are relatively more educated.
- International migration by Filipinos is driven by economic reasons. Ninety-two percent of all those who had experienced moving internationally reported that their purpose for moving was employment, job change or job relocation.

- The decision to migrate usually rests on the migrant himself or herself (73% of the responses). In some instances, the decision was either jointly made by the migrant and spouse or by immediate family members.
- Majority of migrants leave children behind. Majority of them had children of minor ages.
- Around half had domestic work before moving abroad for the first time; the other half did not have a job prior to movement.
- Not all international migrants who had worked during their stay in the first country entered the destination using work visa. Some 11 percent used tourist visa while 3 percent did not need a visa.
- The tourist visa is being used to gain entry and eventually obtain job at the destination. Majority (53.5%) of tourist visa holders who stayed at the destination for at least 3 months eventually changed their visa to work visa while at the destination.
- In terms of recruitment, the most common way was through private recruitment agency (59%). However, a non-negligible 34.2 percent were directly hired by their overseas employer.
- Many OFWs particularly women engaged in elementary occupations (61% of total).
- Despite the need for written contracts, some (12.6% of the total) still risk to go to work abroad without a written agreement. Having a written contract seems to be more prevalent among those who have achieved relatively higher educational attainment than those with lower attainment. There is also a greater tendency of not getting a written contract among those who were directly hired by the employer, those who did not need visa to enter the destination, and those who went abroad using tourist visa.
- A non-negligible proportion (35%) of all returning migrants find it difficult to find jobs in the country upon return.

Given the abovementioned findings, it is important to raise awareness and educate prospective migrants on the importance of having written, clear contracts prior to international migration as well as ensure that they clearly stipulate the worker's benefits. The problem of non-provision of clear written contracts seems to be associated with direct hiring mechanisms, and lower level of education of migrant workers. Prior to deployment, concrete and effective efforts must be invested in capacitating prospective migrant workers especially those who do not have adequate prior work experience, those in elementary occupations, and less educated ones. It is also important to intensify/improve enforcement of policies. A non-negligible number of migrant workers are without written contracts even when they go through the private recruitment agencies, and this must be investigated more deeply and addressed effectively. The

Philippine government must effectively enforce agreements with host countries particularly in ensuring the provision of workers' employment contract.

Furthermore, greater efforts of disseminating and promoting government and other initiatives related to return and reintegration are urgent because an overwhelming proportion of returnees were not aware of these initiatives particularly the networking mechanisms.

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