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**Working Paper**

## Philippine International Labor Migration in the Past 30 Years: Trends and Prospects

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Philippine Institute for Development Studies  
*Surian sa mga Pag-aaral Pangkaunlaran ng Pilipinas*

## Philippine International Labor Migration in the Past 30 Years: Trends and Prospects

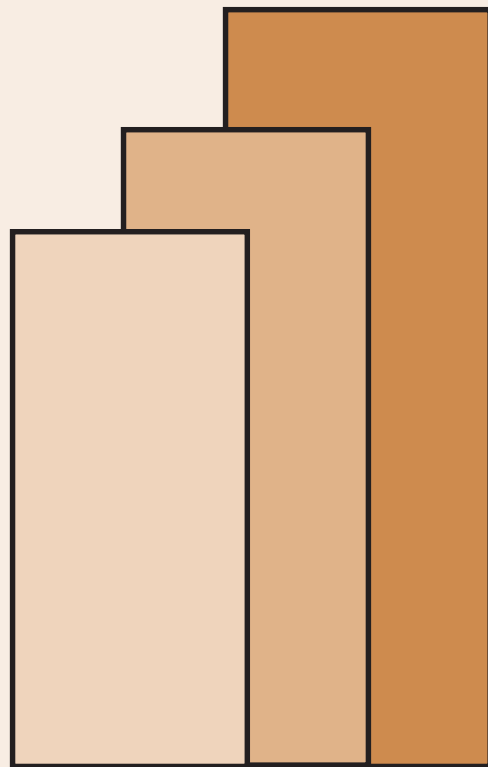
*Aniceto Orbeta Jr. and Michael Abrigo*

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**Philippine International Labour Migration in the  
Past 30 Years: Trends and Prospects**

Aniceto Orbeta, Jr. and Michael Abrigo  
October 2009

### **Abstract**

The paper characterizes how international labour migration became an enduring feature in the country's development. It presents data on the flow of temporary and permanent international migrant workers in the last thirty years. Characteristics such as destination, occupation, education, sex and age are presented. Using historical movements and motivations, the study then presented the likely prospects of the Philippine international labour migration market considering domestic and the global labour market developments. Long term and short term prospects were discussed and economic, demographic, political and environmental factors were considered as factors affecting the future flow of international migrant workers.

**Keywords:** International labour migration, Philippines

**JEL:** J61

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# **Philippine International Labour Migration in the Past 30 Years: Trends and Prospects**

Aniceto Orbeta, Jr. and Michael Abrigo<sup>1</sup>

Earlier version, May 2009

This version, October 2009

## **I. Introduction**

International labour migration has become an enduring feature of the country's development. From negligible flows occasioned by its colonial relationship with the US at the beginning of the century, recent flows have phenomenally increased in volume and have diversified in its destination. The question often asked is what is in store for the country given the prevailing trends in the flow of migrant workers. This paper tries to answer this question.

The flow of migrant workers dates back to the Spanish period, where Filipinos manned the ships of the Manila-Acapulco trade (Samonte, E., et al., 1995). There were subsequent notable movements mostly to the United States facilitated by the special colonial relationship between the two countries. But it was not until the 1970s when the number increased rapidly. Consequently, government made the protection of international migrant workers an explicit policy. This paper focuses on these more recent flows of migrant workers since the 1970s. This focus is dictated by the availability of data, as well as its relevance for discussing future prospects. There are, however, problems of comparability of the different data sources because of many reasons. To provide some explanation for these differences an appendix is provided.

The paper discusses the trends in labour migration in the last three decades in the next section. It uses available data to describe common themes that emerges. It then relates these themes with the underlying conditions of the country and the primary destination areas to identify the drivers of the flow of migrants. These are then used to describe the prospects in the near future.

## **II. Trends in International Labour Migration in the Last Three Decades**

### **A. Flow of Migrants**

The annual flow of migrants shows that temporary workers, particularly that of land-based workers, dominate in terms of volume (Figure 1). The annual total migrant flows increased from 50,000 in 1975 to more than a million by year 2005, with an average annual growth rate of 9.8

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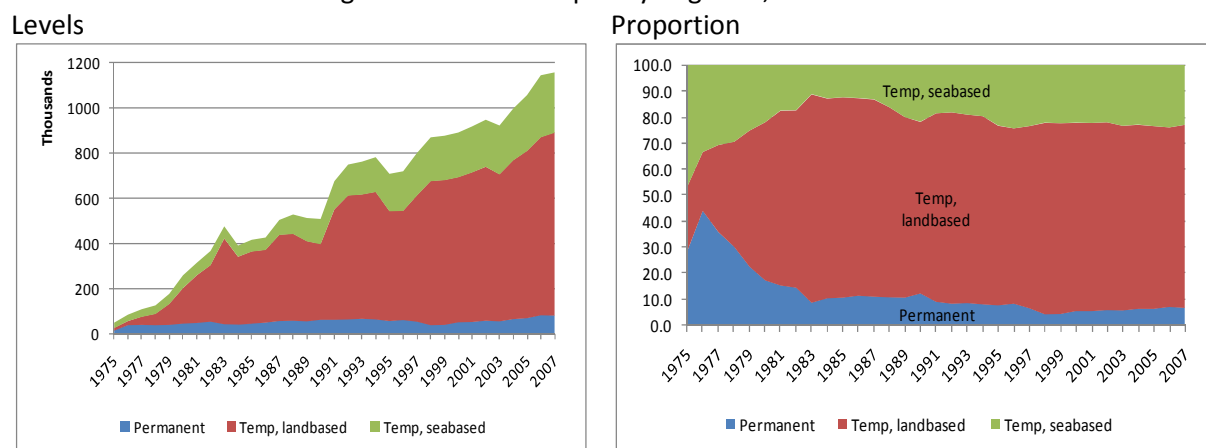
<sup>1</sup> Senior Research Fellow and Research Analyst, Philippine Institute for Development Studies. This is one of three papers on international migration in the Philippines prepared for the ILO, Bangkok. Views expressed herein are of the authors and does not necessarily reflects the views and policies of the ILO or of PIDS. We are grateful for the assistance provided by the officers at the POEA, CFO and NSO. However, all remaining errors are the sole responsibility of the authors.

percent between 1975 and 2007. The growth spurt in the period 1975-1985 of 21.1 percent has never been repeated as succeeding decades had single digit growth rates (Table 1).

The number of permanent emigrants leaving annually is steadily rising, except for some declines in the late 1990s. It increased from under 15,000 in 1975 to about 81,000 in 2007, or an average growth of 5.4 percent. Again, the decade 1975-1985 registered the highest annual growth rate in the flow of permanent emigrants at an average of 11.4 percent. Subsequent decades registered only about two (2) percent annual growth.

The number of land-based temporary workers leaving annually has likewise been rising. From around 12,500 workers in 1975, more than 800,000 land-based workers left the country in 2007. These, of course, include both new hire and re-hires. As shown in Table 1, the proportion of re-hires is slowly rising from 22 percent in 1985 to 25 percent in 2005. The flow of rehired workers shows the preference of employers for migrant workers with prior international experience. Except in 1985 to 1987 and in 1990 to 1992, rehired workers constitute majority of land-based workers since 1984. The boom decade of 1975-1985, which coincided with the construction boom in the Middle East as a result of the rise in the price of oil in 1973-74, registered the highest growth rate at an annual average of 32.4 percent. This was followed by growth of around four (4) percent in the succeeding two decades. The flow of sea-based workers was 23,500 in 1975, and increased to about 267,000 by 2007, or an average annual growth rate of about eight (8) percent. In 1985 to 1995, the flow of sea-based workers saw higher annual growth rate than the previous decade at 11.5 percent, before slowing down to four (4) percent in the subsequent decade.

Figure 1. Flow of temporary migrants, 1975-2007



Source of basic data: CFO, POEA

In terms of proportion, land-based workers accounts for a relatively stable share of 67 to 70 percent of all migrant flows between early 1980s and 2007. The share of permanent migrants, on the other hand, has been declining from about 44 percent in 1976 to around 12 percent in 1990, six (6) percent in 2000, and finally settling at seven (7) percent in 2007 (Figure 1). Sea-based workers comprised the largest share in 1975 (47 percent), before declining to 11 percent in 1983, and then steadily increasing to 23 percent by 2007. Land-based temporary migrant workers represent the biggest bulk of flows by share since around 1985.

Table 1. Flow of migrants, 1975, 1985, 1995, 2005

	Levels				Annual Growth			
	1975	1985	1995	2005	1975-2007	1975-1985	1985-1995	1995-2005
Total	50,527	418,053	709,816	1,057,643	9.8	21.1	5.3	4.0
Permanent	14,492	45,269	56,242	69,028	5.4	11.4	2.2	2.0
Temp, landbased	12,501	320,494	488,173	740,632	13.0	32.4	4.2	4.2
New-hire	na	160,815	214,157	289,981	3.0	na	2.9	3.0
Re-hire	na	159,679	274,016	450,651	5.2	na	5.4	5.0
Temp, seabased	23,534	52,290	165,401	247,983	7.6	8.0	11.5	4.0
	Percentage to total							
Permanent	28.7	10.8	7.9	6.5				
Temp, landbased	24.7	76.7	68.8	70.0				
New-hire	na	38.5	30.2	27.4				
Re-hire	na	38.2	38.6	42.6				
Temp, seabased	46.6	12.5	23.3	23.4				

Data for temporary, land based for 1975 refers to processed workers

Source: CFO, POEA

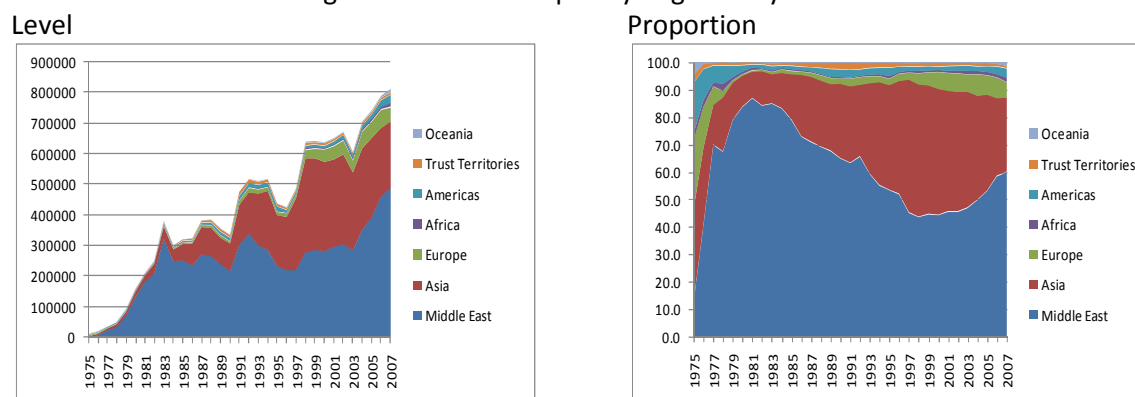
## 1. Characteristics of the Flow of Temporary Workers

**By Destination.** The distribution of the flow of temporary workers by destination shows the dominance of the Middle East, followed by Asia. From a low 1,500 migrant workers who left the country for the Middle East in 1975, it shot up to more than 300 thousand by 1983, declined to around 200 thousand in around 1990. The number fluctuated around the 200 to 300 thousand band in the 1990s and is observed to be gradually rising in recent years to over 400,000 by 2007. After the oil price hikes in 1973-74, Middle East countries went into massive infrastructure development financed by their oil wealth. This led to the construction boom that caused unprecedented rise in temporary migrant workers between 1975 and 1985. The subsequent decline was because of several lessons, among which are (a) policies to restrict foreign workers and encourage use of local workers; (b) completion of most of the basic construction projects (IOM, 2005), and (c) the Gulf war in 1990-91. Some of the reasons for the recent resurgence are (a) failure of policies to restrict flow of non-nationals and to encourage nationals to take up work done by foreigners (Shah, 2008), and (b) increase in emigration of Arabs into other regions, e.g. OECD countries, (IOM 2008).

The rest of Asia is another important destination. From some 4,200 temporary migrant workers in 1975 the flow to Asia increased to more than 300,000 in 1998, before declining to 220,000 in 2007. The rise in flows going to East and Southeast Asia in the late 1980s and early 1990s was because the newly industrialized countries (NICs) in the region resorted to labour importation to sustain their economic growth (Asis, 2005). The Asian financial crisis in 1997-1998 affected the flow but the restriction on the flow of entertainers both by POEA and destination countries, notably Japan, is an important reason for the reduction in recent flows to the region.



Figure 2. Flow of temporary migrants by destination



Source: CFO, POEA

In terms of proportion, the Middle East was the destination of around just 12 percent of workers deployed in 1975 but the share increased phenomenally to a peak of 87 percent in 1981 before slowing down to 43 percent in 1998 as other foreign markets for migrant workers develop. Lately, the flow of temporary migrant workers to the Middle East shows resurgence, with about 60 percent of all land-based temporary migrant workers going to the region in 2007. The rest of Asia, on the other hand, was the destination of around 34 percent of temporary migrant flows in 1975, but declined to as low as 10 percent in 1981. Since 1981, the flow of temporary migrants to countries in East and Southeast Asia has been steadily rising, regaining its share with up to 48 percent of flows going to the region in 1997, but then again declined since the Asian financial crisis, settling at around 27 percent in 2007. Europe was the destination of a fourth of all temporary workers in 1975, but declined to about six (6) percent in 2007. The Americas' share of Filipino workers was about 18 percent in 1975, which declined to four (4) percent in 2007.

The trend in the deployment of temporary migrant workers by destination country shows high but declining concentration of flow. This is true whether for both rehire and new-hire workers, or for new-hire workers only. With a normalized Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI)<sup>2</sup> of 0.4477 for all deployed land-based workers signalling high deployment concentration in 1984, the HHI declined to a more moderate 0.1212 in 2006. Likewise, with a highly concentrated market for new-hire workers with a HHI of 0.2948 in 1992, the flow of new-hire workers has dispersed to an increasing number of countries in more recent years, with HHI of 0.1277 in 2006 (Table 2).

Table 2. Concentration of flow of temporary migrants

	Both New-Hires and Rehires	New-Hire Only
1984	0.4477	-
1992	0.2742	0.2948
2000	0.1391	0.1373
2006	0.1212	0.1277

Source of basic data: POEA

<sup>2</sup> The HHI is used as a measure of market concentration, and is defined as the sum of squares of the market shares of all firms within the industry. An HHI of 0.10 to 0.18 indicates moderate concentration, while an HHI of greater than 0.18 indicates high concentration. See Agiobenebo (2004) for a more in-depth discussion on market structure and concentration indices.

**By Occupation.** In terms of occupation, the dominant groups are professionals, service workers, and production process workers, transport and labourers. The dominance of professionals in the 1975 was replaced by a notable spike in production process workers, transport and labourers in the 1980s and by service workers in recent years. The rise in the proportion of production workers is coincident with the boom in construction activities in the Middle East.

Theory tells us that migration flows are always the results of both “push” and “pull” factors. Clearly, among the primary pull factors are the demand for workers in destination countries. This is exemplified by the construction boom in the Middle East, which caused an unprecedented rise in temporary migrant workers between 1975 and 1985. During this period also we see the domination of men among the temporary migrant workers.<sup>3</sup> In recent years, the Middle East continues to be the primary destination of temporary migrant workers. Asia also claimed a noticeable increasing proportion in recent years.

Compared to the domestic labour market, the overseas contract work employs more professional workers. While the domestic labour market has a substantial proportion of workers in agricultural occupations there is not many of such workers in overseas employment. This may be for a variety of reasons. The most obvious is that the major destination countries in the Middle East and in East Asia, for example, are largely driven by the services and industrial sectors, unlike in the Philippines where the agricultural sector still contributes a substantial portion of national income.

Table 3. Distribution of temporary migrants and labour force by usual occupation

	1975	1980	1985	1995	2000	2005
<b>OFWs</b>						
Professional, technical and related workers	53.5	15.5	22.5	20.4	31.1	22.5
Managerial, Executive and Administrative Workers	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.2
Clerical workers	1.8	3.4	4.5	1.6	0.9	1.9
Sales workers	0.4	0.3	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.5
Service workers	22.0	14.9	27.1	37.8	36.0	47.1
Agricultural, animal husbandry, forestry, fishermen	0.9	1.0	0.4	0.5	0.2	0.1
Production process workers, transport and laborers	20.8	64.4	44.4	38.6	30.8	26.7
Total land-based	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Local labor market</b>						
Professional, technical and related workers	5.5	6.4	6.0	5.6	5.8	6.9
Managerial, Executive and Administrative Workers	1.0	1.0	0.9	1.6	2.3	11.5
Clerical workers	3.8	4.5	4.2	4.3	4.6	4.5
Sales workers	9.7	10.2	12.9	14.0	15.5	
Service workers	8.6	7.6	8.3	9.0	10.8	9.2
Agricultural, animal husbandry, forestry, fishermen	53.1	52.2	51.4	43.7	37.0	19.1
Production process workers, transport and laborers	18.1	19.3	19.3	21.8	23.8	48.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source of basic data: LFS various rounds for domestic labor market

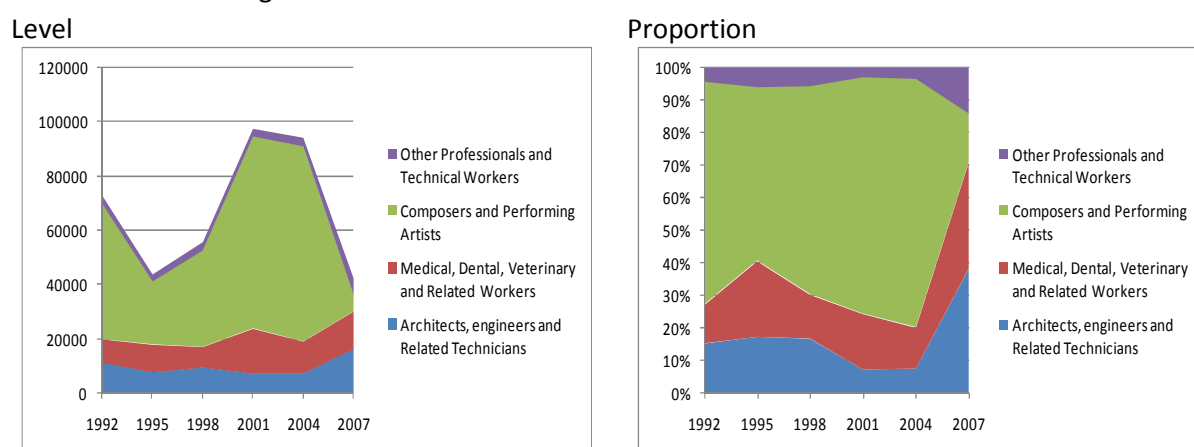
1975, 1980, 1985: Refers to processed workers, entertainers included in professionals, Mangahas (1987)

1995, 2000, 2005: Refers to new-hires only, POEA (2008)

<sup>3</sup> Is its instructive to recall that Stahl and Appleyard (1992) noted the placements in Middle East and North Africa: accelerated the fastest between 1975-83; fell precipitously during 1984-86; recovered in 1987-88; fell again during the Gulf War. [p422]

Using data from the POEA to disaggregate the professional group shows that the professionals among temporary migrant workers are primarily composed by architects and engineers, medical and allied health professionals, and composers and performing artists. Architects and engineers, and medical and allied health professionals are primarily employed in the Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia, while composers and performing artists are largely employed in East Asia, specifically in Japan. The sudden decrease in the proportion of professionals among the temporary migrant workers may be attributed to stricter policies by the POEA and in destination countries, especially in Japan, in the deployment of performing artists, resulting to the steep decline in their number (Figure 3). Service workers are predominated by maids and housekeepers in the low to semi-skilled class, deployed around the world, but with large concentrations in the Middle East and in East Asia. The rising share of service workers is perhaps because of increasing demand in destination countries as incomes rise.

Figure 3. Flow of New-Hire Professional and Technical Workers



Source: POEA

**By Education.** Another well-known characteristic of labour migration is its selectivity in terms of education. This is clearly shown using data on overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in the quarterly Labor Force Survey (LFS). More than half of the OFWs have at least some tertiary education. By contrast, only as much as a fourth of those employed locally during the same period have some college education. It has been observed that both permanent and temporary migrant flows are more selective of the more educated (Cariño, 1994b, Alburo and Abella, 1992).

Table 4. Distribution of OFW, Domestic labour force by education, 1988, 1996, 2006

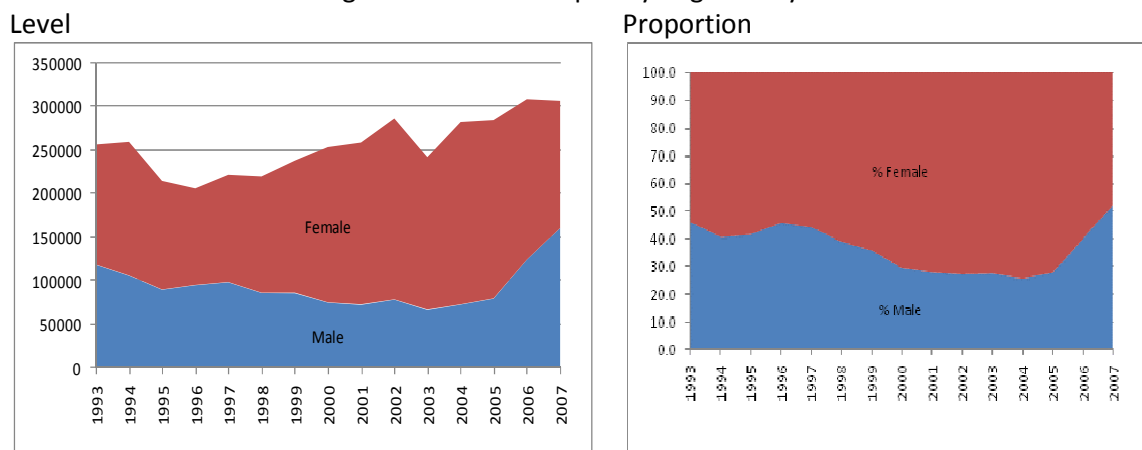
	1988	1996	2006/1
<b>OFWs</b>			
No Grade Completed	0.3	0.2	0.2
Primary	10.9	7.2	4.4
Secondary	34.2	32.8	32.3
Tertiary	54.6	59.8	63.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Domestic labor force</b>			
No Grade	4.0	3.2	2.0
Elementary	47.3	41.2	33.7
Secondary	29.6	32.7	37.7
Tertiary	19.1	22.9	26.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

1/ 2006 figures include migrant workers other than contract workers, i.e. other Filipino workers abroad with valid working visas or work permits, such as pilots, stewards, Filipinos working in the US, Taiwan, Saipan, etc. with a working visa

**By Sex.** Temporary migration has been dominated by women. Since 1993, data from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) shows that there have always been more female new-hires than males. The concentration of females even reached 74 percent in 2004 (Figure 3). Only in 2007 did male migrants surpass the number of female migrants.

It appears that the larger proportion of females is a fairly recent phenomenon. The high proportion of domestic helpers and entertainers has been pointed out as one of the causes of the high female to male ratio among the temporary migrants (Asis, 2006; Stahl and Appleyard, 1992). An earlier estimate puts the proportion of female workers in 1987 at 47.2 percent (Cariño, 1994b). This may be because the 1980s was the heyday of construction in the Middle East which is expected to demand more male workers. The recent rise of male temporary workers was perhaps on account of the restrictions on the fielding of entertainers both the POEA and destination countries in Asia, notably, Japan.

Figure 3. Flow of temporary migrants by sex



Source of basic data: POEA

**By Age.** Using data from the LFS on contract workers<sup>4</sup>, it is obvious that there is high concentration of prime age workers consistent with migration theory. Table 4 shows that as much as 70 percent of OFWs are in the ages 24 to 44. This is a high concentration considering that for the domestic labour force this group only constitute at much as 50 percent. It has been noted also that contract workers are usually in the prime age of the work force and are younger than the permanent immigrants and the country's population as a whole (Cariño, 1994b).

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix for discussion on Philippine international migration data

Table 5. Distribution of OFWs and domestic labour force by age, 1988, 1996, 2006

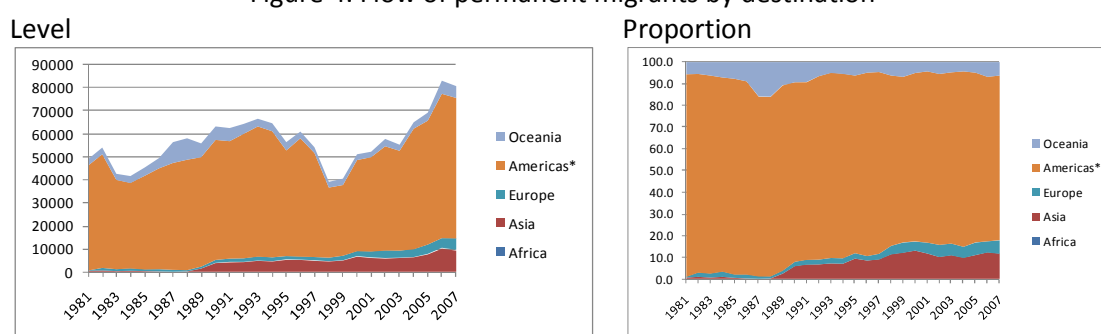
	1988	1996	2006/1
<b>OFWs</b>			
15 - 24 years	15.0	13.0	12.1
25 - 44 years	69.5	69.6	70.9
44 > years	15.5	17.4	17.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Domestic labor force</b>			
15 - 24 years	40.1	37.6	36.1
25 - 44 years	47.2	49.0	50.0
44 > years	12.8	13.4	13.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

1/ 2006 figures include migrant workers other than contract workers, i.e. other Filipino workers abroad with valid working visas or work permits, such as pilots, stewards, Filipinos working in the US, Taiwan, Saipan, etc. with a working visa

## 2. Characteristics of the Flow of Permanent Migrants

**By Destination.** It is not surprising that the destinations of most permanent migrants are developed countries. In the case of Filipino permanent migrants, this is clearly North America, particularly the United States. The concentration is such that the lowest proportion in the 26-year span from 1981 to 2007 is 76 percent and has gone to as high as 93 percent of all permanent emigrants flows (Figure 4). Other destinations are also recorded but these are far lower than the proportion going to North America. For instance, there are some noticeable increases in volume going to Asia particularly in recent years. Oceania and Europe also claimed some noticeable proportion of permanent migrants.

Figure 4. Flow of permanent migrants by destination



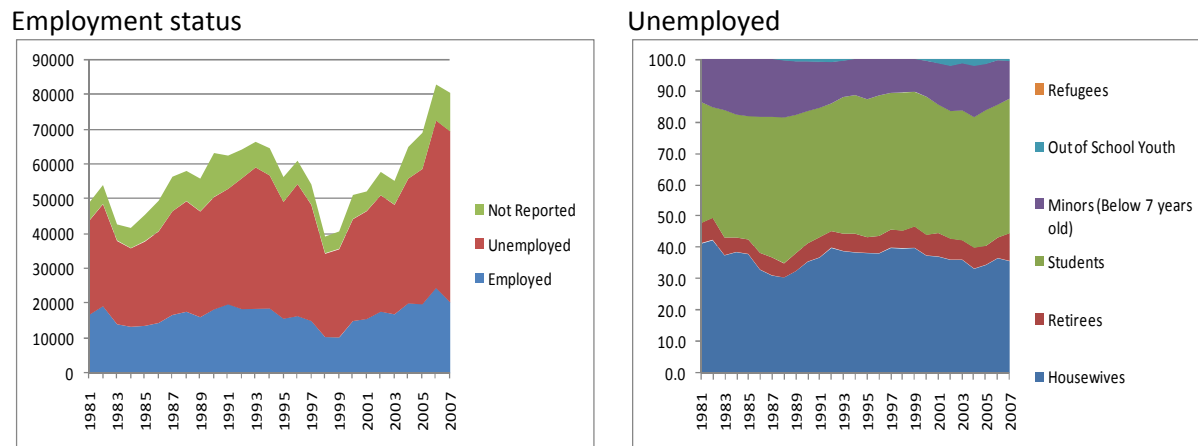
Source of basic data: CFO

Like that for temporary migrant workers, the flow of permanent migrants to other countries shows high but declining concentration. With a very concentrated flow, primarily to countries in North America, in the early 1980s (normalized HHI > 0.6000), the concentration of the flow of permanent migrants has declined considerably although remains highly concentrated in countries in North America and Europe in more recent years (normalized HHI = 0.3830 in 2006).

**By Occupation.** The composition of the flow of permanent migrants shows that the proportion of the unemployed is larger than the employed (Figures 5a and 5b). The largest groups

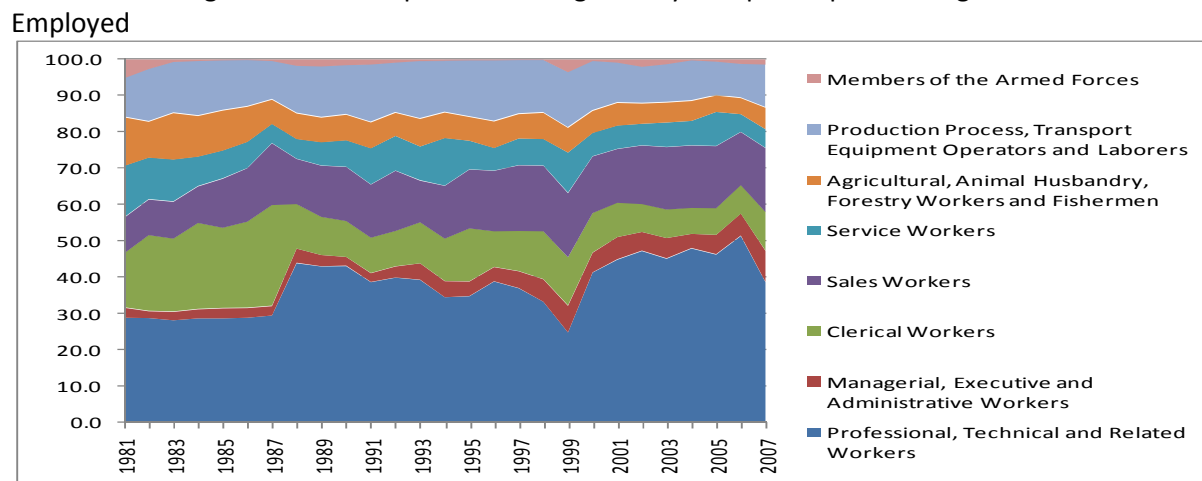
among the unemployed are housewives and students followed by minors (below 7 years old). This reflects the family reunification goal of permanent migration in the United States, the primary destination of Filipino permanent emigrants (Cariño, 1994a).<sup>5</sup> Among those who are employed, the biggest group are the professionals, followed by sales, clerical, and production workers.

Figure 5a. Flow of permanent migrants by employment status prior to migration



Source of basic data: CFO

Figure 5b. Flow of permanent migrants by occupation prior to migration



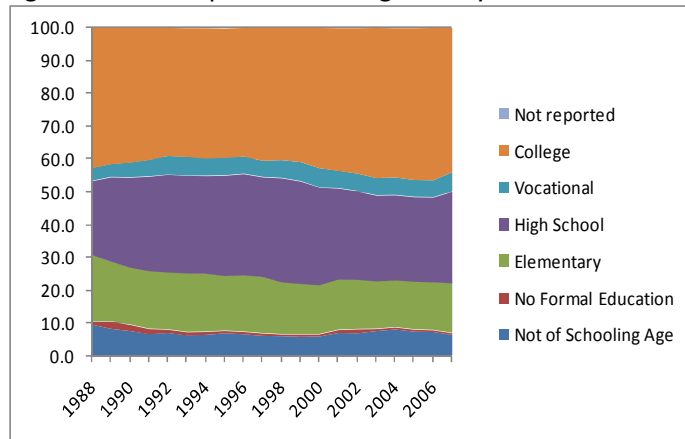
Source of basic data: CFO

The recognized primary pull factor in permanent immigrant flows is the immigration policy of destination countries (Cariño, 1994a, 1987, Tan, 2008). For instance, structure of the immigration flow in the US is attributed to the emphasis on family reunification as a goal of immigration policy. There is also the substantial proportion of housewives among permanent migrants. Finally, the US is also the destination of a substantial number of students. These explain the substantial number of dependents (housewives, children, students) and the unemployed among the permanent migrants. The large number of professionals among the permanent migrants might be because of more professional advancement opportunities that migrants expect in countries of destination over and above the differences in wages.

<sup>5</sup> Three goals are mentioned: (a) to facilitate family reunification; (b) to admit workers with skills needed by the economy; and (c) to permit entry of refugees (Cariño, 1994a).

**By Education.** Permanent migrants are highly educated. The largest group are those with at least some college education followed by those with at least some high school education (Figure 6). Again this reflects the selectivity of US immigration policy which wanted “to admit workers with skills needed by the economy.”

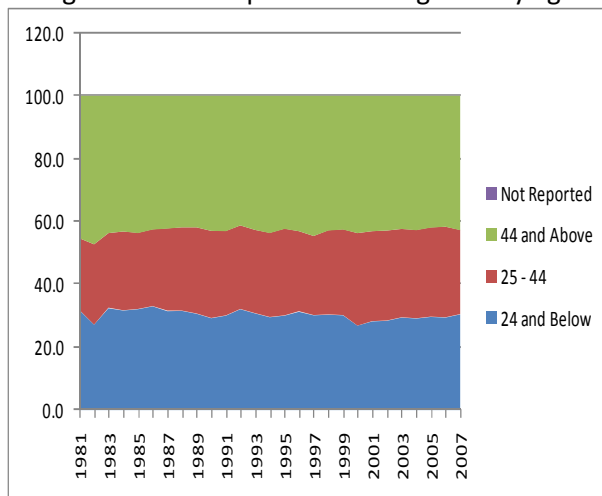
Figure 6. Flow of permanent migrants by education



Source of basic data: CFO

**By Age.** Migration theory predicts selectivity in favour of younger cohorts. Yet the largest cohort among the permanent migrants is the 44 years and above age group (Figure 7). Cariño (1994b) and Alburo and Abella (1992) gave similar observations. One reason for this is the emphasis on family reunification as a goal of immigration policy in the US - the main destination for permanent immigrants (Carino, 1994b). This explains the substantial proportion of housewives and parents among permanent migrants. Perhaps this also reflects the preference for the more experienced workers. There is also a noticeable proportion of retirees among the permanent migrants. Finally, the US is also the destination of a substantial number of students. These together explain also the substantial number of dependents (housewives, children, students) and the unemployed among the permanent migrants.

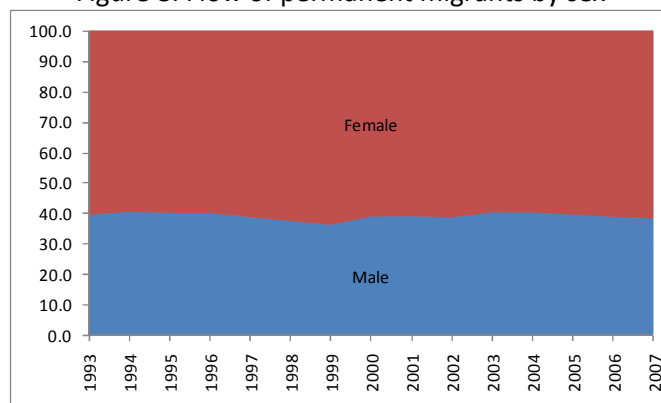
Figure 7. Flow of permanent migrants by age



Source of basic data: CFO

**By Sex.** The flow of permanent migrants is dominated by females. Never in the 14-year period between 1993 and 2007 had the number of men surpassed the number of women among the migrants (Figure 8). Earlier estimates show similar proportion. For instance, the 1986 estimate of the composition of permanent immigrants puts the proportion of females at 60.7 percent (Cariño, 1994b). Again this may be reflective of the considerable proportion of housewives among the permanent migrants. More recently, professional immigrants consist of nurses and midwives (Cariño, 1994b).

Figure 8. Flow of permanent migrants by sex



Source of basic data: CFO

## B. Stock of Migrants

The stock on the current series of migrant stock goes only as far back as 1997. There are rough estimates for earlier years but this pertains more to permanent migration to the US. Considering that the US is the primary destination of permanent migrants in earlier years and is still very much evident until today, these estimates may not be far off from the actual total volume of permanent migrants. As noted earlier, there are also not too many temporary migrants in earlier years and, owing to its circular nature, the stock of temporary migrants does not grow as much as permanent migrants.

Mangahas (1987), for instance, cites an estimate of the Population Reference Bureau of 1,051,600 million Filipino-Americans in September 1985. It was also mentioned that the 1980 US Census enumerated 781,894 Filipinos in America.

The recent record of migrant stock shows higher growth rate of permanent migrants compared to temporary migrants, while irregular migrants are on the decline. The stock of migrant Filipinos increased from 6.9 million in 1997 to 8.7 million in 2007 (CFO, 2009), representing an average annual growth rate of 2.2 percent. The 2007 stock estimate is about 10 percent of the population<sup>6</sup>.

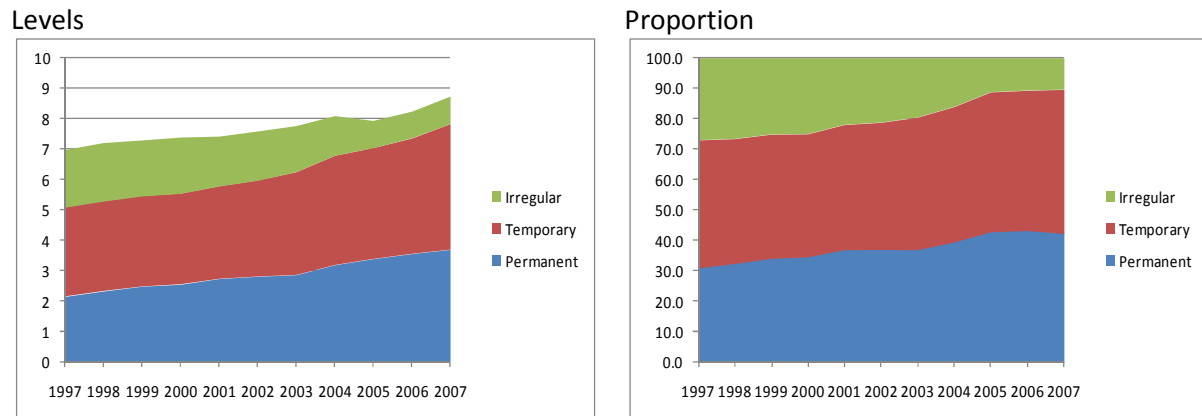
Between 1997 and 2007, the stock estimates of permanent emigrants show a higher average annual growth rate (5.4 percent), hence an increasing proportion of permanent immigrants (31 percent in 1997 and 42 percent in 2007), than any type of migrants. The proportion of temporary

<sup>6</sup> As of the last census in August 2007 the population count is 88.57 million.



workers grew more slowly (3.4 percent) and its share is likewise rising (42 percent in 1997 and 47 percent in 2007) although at a slower pace than that of permanent migrants. One obvious reason of course is that temporary workers go back to the country every so often, i.e. circular in nature, while permanent migrants by definition do not. The proportion of irregular workers appears to be declining with an average annual decline of 7.4 percent. Their share has gone down from 27 percent in 1997 to only about 10 percent in 2007.

Figure 9. Stock of migrants



Source of basic data: CFO

Lack of relevant data has prevented discussion on the other characteristics of the stock of permanent, temporary and irregular migration beyond the areas of destination.

### 1. Characteristics of the Stock of Permanent Migrants

**By Destination.** Filipino permanent migrants are mostly in developed countries. North America accounts for as high as 92 percent of Filipino permanent migrants stock even in late 1990s although this is seen to be declining in recent years to about 75 percent in 2007 (Table 5). Most of the permanent migrants go to the US and Canada. The share of Europe, Oceania and East Asia are, however, gradually increasing in recent years.

### 2. Characteristics of the Stock of Temporary Workers

**Destination.** Temporary workers consist of land-based and sea-based workers. The subsequent discussion obviously refers only for land-based workers. Most of temporary land-based workers also go to North America in the 1970s but since the 1980s the deployment to the Middle East and Asia have grown so fast that these areas account for majority of temporary workers in recent years. Table 5 shows that the Middle East is host to as much as 30 percent of the stock of temporary migrant workers, while as much as 40 percent are all over the rest of Asia. Europe also accounts for a considerable proportion (9-10 percent) of temporary workers, even higher than those in North America in recent years.

### 3. Characteristics of the Stock of Irregular migrants

**Destination.** A large proportion of irregular migrants are in North America although this is showing a declining trend (37percent in 1997 to 28 percent in 2007). East Asia is where another

large and an increasing group of irregular migrants are, with 30 percent of the stock of irregular migrants in 2007. Europe and West Asia (Middle East) have some irregular workers, with 9 percent and 10 percent in 2007, respectively, but are far behind the two leading destinations.

Table 6. Distribution of stock of migrants by type

	1997	2002	2007
<b>Permanent</b>			
<b>Number (000)</b>	<b>2,154</b>	<b>2,807</b>	<b>3,693</b>
Africa	0.0	0.0	0.1
East and South Asia	1.8	2.7	5.8
West (Middle East)	0.0	0.1	0.1
Europe	0.9	5.8	7.7
Americas*	93.2	83.4	79.7
Oceania	4.0	8.0	6.6
<b>Temporary</b>			
<b>Number (000)</b>	<b>2,940</b>	<b>3,168</b>	<b>4,134</b>
Africa	1.0	1.5	1.7
East and South Asia	32.6	25.8	18.1
West (Middle East)	33.7	39.7	49.7
Europe	16.4	14.4	13.4
Americas*	8.6	8.9	8.6
Oceania	1.3	1.6	2.1
Sea-based	6.4	8.1	6.4
<b>Irregular</b>			
<b>Number (000)</b>	<b>1,880</b>	<b>1,607</b>	<b>900</b>
Africa	0.2	1.1	2.1
East and South Asia	31.3	34.8	28.7
West (Middle East)	4.5	6.9	13.5
Europe	12.8	11.6	12.6
Americas*	50.4	44.2	39.4
Oceania	0.8	1.5	3.7

Source of basic data: CFO

### III. Prospects for the Philippine Labour Market

The future prospects for international migration are obviously dependent what has driven historical flows. These drivers and the prospects in both our own economy and the economy of our major destination countries will define the future migration streams of the country.

**Long Term.** Starting off with the domestic factors, Ducanes and Abella (2008a) identified four functional groups of push factors that will likely drive future flows of migration from the Philippines. These include economic, demographic, political and environmental factors. The economic factor is tied to our ability of the economy to extricate itself from its history of inconsistent (“boom bust”) economic growth. This has kept our per capita income growth low so that the catch up with developed countries income has been also slow. Disparities in per capita income have always been recognized as the major determinant of migration. Beyond the differences in wage rates, the limited growth may have also curtailed the opportunities of professionals for career advancement. Finally, the inconsistent economic growth record has hampered employment generation<sup>7</sup>. The demographic dimension consists mainly of the still high population growth and slow decline in fertility compared to her neighbors owing to a stop-go population program largely because to the continued opposition of the Catholic Church (see also, Carino, 1994b and Orbeta and

<sup>7</sup> Stahl and Appleyard (1992) pointed out that the slow growth in employment, particularly in the industrial sector means that the Philippine will continue to be dependent on the migration of workers.

Pernia, 1999). There is not much change that can be expected in this area if the recent public debate on the reproductive health bill is to be taken as an indication. Political dimension includes unrests particularly in the south (see also Asis, 2006). Again this is a long running problem that refuses to go away. Since the early 1980 the country has gone through several political adventurisms that contributed to the lack of political stability and pushing those on the end to migrate permanently to “safer and more stable” developed countries. Finally, the environment aspects consists of the frequency of intense storms visiting the country, the vulnerability of large coastal areas to sea level rise due to climate change and also flooding. The aspect on the typhoon is a given. There is virtually no known assessment of the likely impact of climate change on low lying areas.

There are those who believe the migration flows are largely demand determined. The demand in destination countries is largely shaped by their demographic and developmental needs. Aging in destination countries are expected to drive the demand for health workers. Income increases will make 3D jobs unattractive (i.e., reservation wages become too high) to natives. Advanced production systems are expected to demand highly skilled workers.

Tan (2009), for instance, is of the opinion that the migration is more determined by the demand and the effective migration policies of the destination countries rather than the availability of supply in source countries. The major flows of both permanent and temporary workers described earlier in many ways validate this assertion. For instance, the family re-unification policy of the US has clearly encouraged the flow of dependents in addition the flow of professionals which we expect an advance economy like the US would need. Had the policy been differently configured, the structure of the flow of permanent migrants would likely be different. In the same vein, the demand for construction workers during the construction boom in the Middle East opened the flood gates of flow of temporary migrants to that region. The rise in income in Middle East because of the oil price boom has rendered 3D job unattractive to locales in spite of the expressed desired of the government to reduce their dependence on foreign workers.

To these groups it is the structure of their demand and the subsequent migration policy that determines the flow of migrants and less because of the desire of migrants. Often the demand for migrants is not necessarily reflected in existing migration policy resulting into irregular migration. When there is a discrepancy between the demand for migrant workers and the official migration policy, the ranks of irregular migrants swell. As mentioned earlier the ranks of “recorded “ irregular migrants has been declining. This perhaps indicates that there is a declining discrepancy in general which may not be true in particular destination countries.

Abella and Ducanes (2009) have pointed out that multilateral initiatives, such as the ASEAN Declaration on the Promotion and the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers, becomes even more relevant with crisis and should not be abandoned because of the crisis. This cannot be overemphasized as countries tend to be inward looking in the face of a global crisis.

Finally, the increasing number of migrants among the population is expected to deepen (more in the same household) and widen (other households in the same geographic area) the scope of migration as earlier migrants will effectively reduce migration costs. This is often known in the recent literature as the network effects.

**Short-term.** What can we expect from destination countries in the near future?

In the case of the Middle East, particularly, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates (UAE), the paper by Shah (2008) is very instructive. The paper has clearly described the expressed desire of the region to lower its dependence on foreign workers which has been running for three decades now. At the beginning it was just construction workers. In later stages, another category of workers were needed, namely cleaning services, helpers and domestic services which the local as not inclined to do. The assessment points to a limited success of the program. The major difficulties are grouped into five, namely:

- 1) the lucrative nature of visa trading for the local sponsors, along with a ready and eager market of workers willing to buy such visas;
- 2) the continued reluctance of the locals to take up jobs that have come to be seen as “foreigner’s work” even though small attitudinal changes are beginning to be reported;
- 3) preference among nationals for public sector jobs that are almost guaranteed by virtue of nationality;
- 4) the near impossibility of the employer to fire inefficient national workers in the government sector, resulting in poor productivity and over-employment of nationals; and
- 5) the inherent contradiction between policies to limit the number of expatriate workers on the one hand and develop a thriving private sector that relies extremely heavily on the import of such workers to survive and flourish.

The reasons are a mix of personal attitude/preference issues and labor market characteristics. It is expected that achieving the expressed desire to lessen the dependence on foreign workers will be a “slow and tedious process.” This means that the demand for foreign workers in the Middle East will continue in the near future. In fact the trend is showing an increasing proportion in recent years.

What can we expect from Asia? The best way for a prognosis is to look at the how countries in Asia responded to labor shortage problems. Ducanes and Abella (2008b) summarized the historical responses to labor shortage of destination countries in the region, including, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia. They have identified six possible responses to labor shortage one of which is allow migrants to take on available jobs.<sup>8</sup> Their review of historical responses shows only Malaysia has extensively used low- and semi-skilled foreign workers in response to labor shortage. The responses of Japan and Korea are limited by their implicit preference for a homogenous society. As a form of an accommodation for growing demand, they have devised a trainee system as the avenue for admitting low-skilled workers. However, there were largely considered failures because of the proliferation of undocumented workers, rights violation and even trafficking. They have pointed out, however, that the demographic conditions (i.e., aging) of these countries may soon make these historically preferred responses untenable. Before then, we can only expect continued limited use of foreign workers in these countries.

What about the impact of the crisis? If there is one thing clear about the crisis it is that it is unclear when it going to end. Abella and Ducanes (2009) summarized the results of a regional conference organized to discuss the issue. They pointed out that the major labor importing countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar have accumulated enough reserves to finance their

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<sup>8</sup> The other five responses are: (a) make the existing employed labour units work more hours or postpone retirement, (b) entice the unemployed domestic labour units to take on the available jobs, (c) get those potential workers who are not in the labour force to take on the available jobs, (d) outsourcing is another alternative available, and (e) relocating those industries with labour shortage is also an alternative.

development program. The United Arab Emirates, however, is expected to have a declining growth. It has been pointed out that most of the open economies in South East Asia and East Asia will be hit hard by the crisis because of the slowdown in major markets. Given the global slowdown they expect that working conditions of migrant workers in general may deteriorate as they are likely to bear the brunt of the adjustment. They have pointed out, however, that the demand for health workers will continue to be strong. Similarly the demand for engineers may not decline particularly in countries that have accumulated enough reserves to continue on which planned infrastructure program, e.g. Saudi Arabia.

To the extent that global trade will decline because of the crisis, the demand for our seafarers is expected to decline. Note that we account for 27% of this 1.06 million strong market (Tan, 2009). If the slowdown is applied proportionally, we can expect significant drop in the demand for our seafarers. There are, however, other factors that may prevent the decline in trade to translate proportionally to a decline in the demand for Filipino seafarers.<sup>9</sup> Our relatively cheap officers may be preferred over more expensive ones from developed countries. A large proportion of OECD officers is aging (BIMCO/ISF, 2005) and will likely to be replaced by younger officers from Asia, particularly the Philippines. The impact on the country has been, up to this point, mild (Abella and Ducanes, 2009). Among the Southeast Asian countries, the Philippines is not as dependent on exports and FDI. This is perhaps one of the reason why the impact of the crisis on the country is likely to be mild (Yap, 2009). Whether it would remain to be so would likely depend on whether the crisis will end soon. If the crisis will linger, it would be much more difficult to escape its negative impacts. The foregoing has shown some positive as well as negative developments. Much of the Middle East which is the host of majority of our temporary migrant workers is expected ride the crisis using their accumulated reserves. The demand for health workers is not expected to slow down very much. We need, however, to watch the developments in the seafarer market as the slowing down of global trade will likely hit us hard being the dominant player in this market.

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<sup>9</sup> Appreciate the insights provided by Iris Acejo, graduate student at Cardiff University, UK and PIDS staff (on leave) on these issues

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### Appendix. Philippine International Migration Data

Data on Filipino international migration prior to the introduction of the government overseas employment program in 1974 has been scant and largely unreliable. Except for data from migrant destination countries, such as the US and Canada, very little is known of Filipino migrants during this period. As agencies involved in the migration process become more complex, however, so does the data that they produce. Indeed, the Philippines is one of the most advanced countries in terms of developing multi-level statistics on international migration. The government even has a technical working group which periodically evaluates the technical details surrounding the coverage of data as per type of Filipino migrant (IMDI, 2008). In 2008, the National Statistical Coordinating Board (NSCB) adopted an operational framework on counting Filipino international migrants in accordance with the UN Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, 1993 System of National Accounts, and Balance of Payment Manuals.

**Data Sources.** The Philippines has developed a sophisticated set of statistics on Filipino international migration (IMDI, 2008) through the government's various agencies. For the purpose of this paper, administrative data generated by the Commission on Overseas Filipinos (CFO) from leaving permanent emigrants and by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) on registered temporary migrant workers are used. The CFO likewise generates stock estimate of Filipinos abroad. Also used in this paper are survey data on migrant workers from the National Statistics Office (NSO).

Table I. Filipino Migrant Stock and Flow (in '000)

Type of Data		1998	2000	2002	2004	2006
<i>Stock Estimates</i>						
LFS	Survey	1,061	1,022	1,084	1,222	1,534
SOF	Survey	904	978	1,056	1,063	1,515
CFO, Permanent	Administrative	2,334	2,552	2,807	3,188	3,556
CFO, Temporary	Administrative	2,961	2,991	3,168	3,599	3,802
CFO, Irregular	Administrative	1,914	1,840	1,607	1,297	875
CFO, Total	Administrative	7,209	7,383	7,583	8,084	8,233
<i>Flow Estimates</i>						
CFO, Permanent	Administrative	39	51	58	65	83
POEA, Temporary	Administrative	832	842	892	934	1,063

Source of base data: LFS, SOF, various rounds; CFO; POEA; Data typing based on IMDI, 2008

Other major government agencies which collect, record and produce data on Filipino international migration include the NSCB, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the Overseas Worker's Welfare Administration (OWWA), the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), the Department of Tourism (DOT), and the Bureau of Immigration and Deportation (BID). The source, type and frequency of release of data by the above data-capturing agencies are discussed in detail in IMDI (2008). Foreign sources of Filipino migration data include



administrative and survey data from host countries, such as US and Canada, and compiled by multilateral organizations, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Statistical Division (UNStat) and the World Bank (WB).

**Data Capture and Estimation Procedure.** It is important to note that different agencies of government generate different types of data. The POEA and CFO, for instance, publish administrative data captured through forms provided by the agencies to prospective migrants in their capacity to monitor and regulate migration flows. The NSO, on the other hand, uses survey data and statistical estimation techniques.

POEA Data. The POEA is the lead government agency in managing the flow of temporary migrant workers. Using data-capturing forms during the pre-departure stage of temporary labour migration, the POEA are able to secure the characteristics of registered temporary migrant workers. Deployment data are captured through the Labor Assistance Centers of the POEA-DOLE located at Philippine exit points, i.e. international airports. Statistics generated by the POEA are published in an annual compendium, accessible through their website. These data, however, do not include the flow of irregular migrant workers.

CFO Stock Estimate. The CFO, in close coordination with the POEA and the DFA, publishes estimates of Filipino migrant stock in other countries. The CFO migrant stock estimate is administrative in nature being a compilation of (administrative) data on Filipino migration from different agencies of the national government and of other countries (IMDI, 2008). Sources of data for the stock estimate include: emigrant registration from the CFO, temporary migrant worker deployment from the POEA, on-site reports from Philippine Embassies and Consulates on number of passports issued, inter-marriages, assistance cases, and head count of nationals. Other sources of data are statistics on tourist arrival from the DOT, reports from Filipino associations and organizations abroad, reports from foreign embassies and consulates, and censuses of foreign governments of their immigrant population (Roma, 2008).

Using data from different sources mentioned, the CFO estimates the Filipino migrant stock in other countries by setting a base year  $t$  with an estimated stock of  $Bt$ . The estimated stock at time  $p$ , represented by  $Ap$ , is generated by adding the net total outflow of Filipino migrants from time  $t$  to  $p$ , represented by  $(Ctp - Dtp)$ , where  $C$  and  $D$  are total outflows and total return flows of Filipino migrants, respectively, to base stock  $Bt$ . The stock estimate is updated monthly using a moving total (Guerrero, 2008).

The current stock estimates however are not without limitations. Indeed, the CFO recognizes these limitations relating to the technique used, as well as to the inadequacy of migration data. Firstly, the reliability of the base data estimate is questioned. Secondly, return migration is not closely monitored, which results to the issue on double counting. Lastly, there is no comprehensive data on Filipino nationals who acquired foreign citizenships, as well as on second and third generation overseas Filipinos (Roma, 2008).

The current series on stock estimates covers the years from 1997 up to the present, and is disaggregated by migrant type, i.e. permanent, temporary or irregular migrant, and by host region/country.

NSO Surveys. The NSO is the primary statistical agency in “collecting, compiling, producing, publishing, and disseminating general purpose statistics” in the country. Collection of data on overseas workers by the NSO started in 1982 using a one-page rider to the Integrated Survey on Households (ISH). With the revision of the ISH in 1987, the one-page rider was discontinued. A column indicator for OFWS was instead added in the revised ISH or the Labor Force Survey (LFS) module to generate an estimate number of OFWs. The Survey on Overseas Workers (SOW) was resumed in 1991 with the increasing need for data on the characteristics of overseas workers. With the revision of the SOW in 1992, the survey was renamed Survey on Overseas Filipinos (SOF).

The LFS ask about the presence of overseas contract workers among members of the household of survey respondents. Basic demographic data of OFWs are gathered through the LFS, while other socio-economic and employment-related characteristics of OFWs are collected in the rider SOF. Aside from stock estimates and demographic characteristics of migrant workers, the SOF likewise captures the volume of remittances coursed through different channels, although only those sent from January to September of the survey year, to the household. The latter is used in the estimation of the raising factor used to bloat the amount of cash remittances sent through banks to capture the total amount of cash and non-cash remittances sent through both formal and informal channels, which will then be recorded in the Balance of Payments by the BSP.

Table II. Migrant Workers Demographic Characteristics

	CPH	LFS	SOF
<i>Total ('000)</i>	1,273	1,022	978
<i>Sex (%)</i>			
Male	51.0	53.1	53.9
Female	49.0	46.9	46.1
<i>Age (%)</i>			
15 to 24	18.9	12.4	12.1
25 to 64	68.5	86.9	87.6
65 and above	2.6	0.5	0.3
<i>Education (%)</i>			
Primary	19.7	5.1	6.0
Secondary	42.6	32.9	35.5
Tertiary	30.6	62.0	58.3

Source of base data: 2000 NSO Census of Population and Housing (CPH), LFS (October Round), and SOF

Being a rider to the October round of the quarterly LFS, the SOF adopts the LFS sampling design and weighting procedure, wherein sample households may not necessarily have an OFW member. As

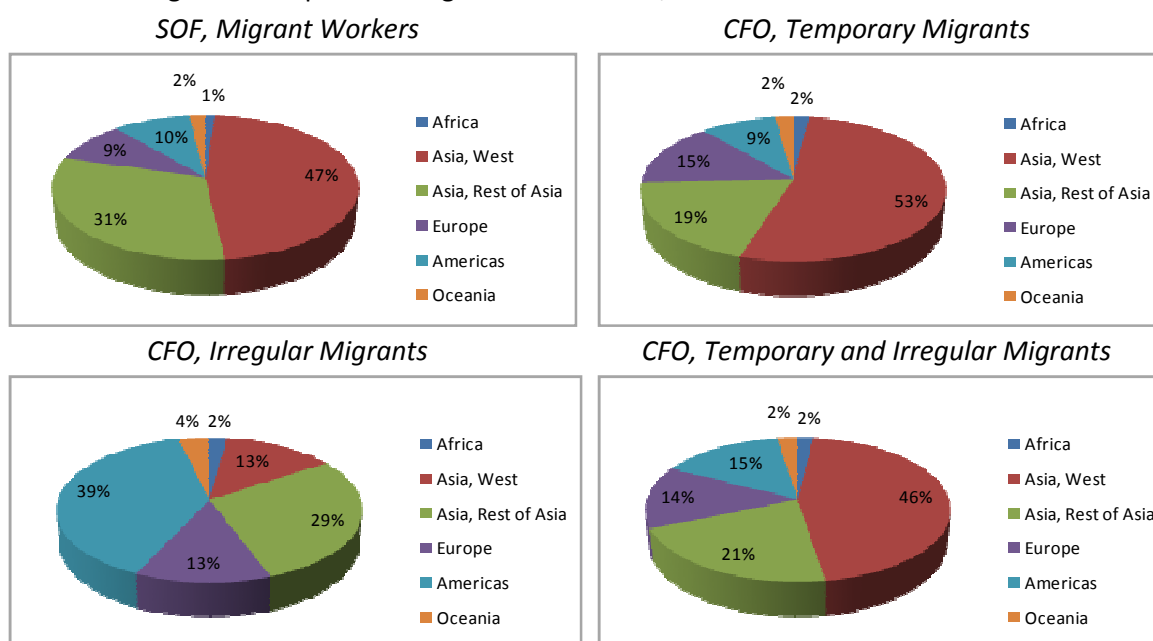
the sampling frame of the LFS is census-based, observers (see Ducanes, 2008) raise questions on comparability of SOF estimates across years. Reliability issues pertaining to the SOF compared with other government estimates are likewise mentioned.

**Data Comparability.** Also important to note is that the CFO stock estimate and the NSO surveys use different definitions of “migrant worker”. This has crucial bearing on each agency’s estimates.

The LFS asks whether a member of the household is an overseas Filipino, i.e. is outside the Philippines, without reference to the period the person left the country. Further questions in the rider SOF identify those persons who will be considered as migrant workers. The NSO defines “migrant worker” as any person who is presently and temporarily out of the country during the April 1 to September 30 of the survey year to fulfil contractual obligations to work for a specific period of time, or is presently at home on vacation but with an existing contract to work abroad.

Only those who have left the country within five years prior to the survey are considered. Not included in this definition are those working outside the country but are employed by the Philippine government, or are hired as consultants/advisers by international organizations. Not included also are immigrants to other countries, and those who are sent on training, scholarship or any other similar purpose by government or private institutions (NSO, 2008). Those who have worked in other countries but have left the country through backdoor means are captured by this definition (Collado, 2008). Since the column indicator for OFWs in the LFS is not bounded by the five-year reference period in the SOF, stock estimates using the LFS is expected to be larger.

Figure I. Comparative Migrant Destinations, SOF and CFO 2007 estimates



Source of basic data: SOF, 2007; CFO Stock Estimates, 2007

The CFO, on the other hand, differentiates three types of migrants. Firstly, there are permanent emigrants who are Filipino nationals who leave the country with the expressed intention of permanently settling in another country. Secondly, there are temporary migrants who are away from the country for at least six (6) months and are expected to return to the country at the end of their work contract. Lastly, there are irregular migrants who have left the country with or without proper documentation but have lost their legitimate status or have overstayed in another country (Roma, 2008).

Comparing the two agency's definitions, the NSO "migrant worker" is closest to CFO's temporary and irregular migrants combined, with the two estimates using different time references. Because the NSO's definition in the SOF limits inclusion to those overseas Filipinos who travelled outside the Philippines within the five-year reference period prior the survey, the estimates of the NSO is expected to be smaller than that of the CFO, notwithstanding the possible double counting in the latter.