Vol. 25(2), 2025, pp.133-157, ISSN: 2072-0394(Print), ISSN: 2663-8886(Online)

Determinants of Female Migration from Philippine

Humera Sultana
Applied Economics Research Centre (AERC)
University of Karachi

Munazah Nazeer
Economics, College Education Department
Government of Sindh

&

Uzma Tabassum
Applied Economics Research Centre (AERC)
University of Karachi

Abstract

Globalization and increased market accessibility have expanded economic opportunities for both men and women to work abroad. Today, women make up approximately half of the global migrant population. Asian countries, in particular, are leading sources of paid domestic workers for the rest of the world. Female migrant workers face different obstacles in origin countries, such as low wages, long working hours, poor socioeconomic status, and push factors that push them into poverty-driven circumstances, by push factors to get a better working environment with handsome salaries, and by resolving their financial matters through pull factors. Similarly, Past migration decisions have significantly influenced current migration patterns. Female migrants have historically moved abroad as contract workers, housemaids, nurses, and factory workers. This paper aims to examine the current trends among Filipino female migrant workers. It will also explore the economic, non-economic, and demographic factors that affect migration. For the period from 2000 to 2020, the study employs Dynamic Panel Data analysis using the Generalized Method of Moments (GMM) technique. The Gravity Model approach is utilized to identify the determinants of female migration. The findings reveal that economic, non-economic, and demographic factors all have a significant impact on female migration.

JEL Code: F-22, J-71, J-16, C33

Keywords: International Migration, Discrimination and Economics of Labour, Panel Data, Domestic Workers, Gravity Model.

Introduction

Globally, migrants move for employment purposes from their origin to destination countries, and the nature of work differs with respect to gender. Male migrant workers move for miscellaneous jobs like professional, technician, clerical, unskilled, etc., while females search for jobs in household care, nursing, old age care, etc. Philippine workers are also among those who migrate for all those categories. According to the world migrant report, IOM (2020), the distribution of migrant workers has increased, with male migrant workers outnumbering female 58% and

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial 4.0 International License.

42% respectively, while the number in stock has reached around 258 million globally. In the Philippines, the total numbers of overseas workers are estimated at around 1.77 million, spread all over the world. The women migrant workforce reported around 1.06 million (Philippine Statistic Authority, 2022), that are increasing with the passage of time. Distribution of women migrant workers with respect to different age groups observed as 30-34 years around 22.4%, 35-39 years shows 20.5% meanwhile 45 and above age noted around 19.1%. Literature shows that mostly scholars agree to follow the late 1970s era, when the majority of female movements were accounted for because of the male migrants. Since the 1990s, a trend of female migrants has changed, and the shift is seen as a contract workers have seen by the database of migration, like fact and figures all over the world identified by (IOM, 2020; UN DESA, 2013; OECD, n.d.). The data of the past decade shows an increasing trend of female migrant workers. Since 1960-2020, the international migrant trend rose as the percentage share of female migrants from 46.6 percent to 49.0 percent, respectively, according to a recent United Nations report.

Occupation-wise, female workers are more vulnerable; they are often engaged in domestic work, providing services as house cleaners, baby sitters, nurses, and looking after old-age people, etc. Most of them are less skilled, uneducated, and unaware of their job's terms and conditions; Asian female migrants, particularly those from Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka, are especially vulnerable to exploitation due to their perceived vulnerability. Physical and verbal abuses, being paid less than the work performed, and excessive hours are the common difficulties faced by the migrant workers. International migration provides opportunities for females both economically and socially. Migrant workers play a vital role by sending remittances back to their home countries, which contributes to economic growth. In destination countries, they help fill labour market gaps. Remittances in the country-of-origin help alleviate financial constraints, stimulate economic activity, and reduce unemployment. For female migrant workers in particular, this support boosts confidence and promotes empowerment. However, these benefits are accompanied by challenges such as strict government regulations, exploitation by recruitment agents, and low wages, etc. (ILO, 2013).

Women in the 20th century gained greater individual identity, with increased freedom to pursue education and choose their own careers. A large number of female migrant workers come from Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and the Philippines, and primarily migrate to Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Lebanon, and Jordan. However, many of these women have faced various forms of exploitation in destination countries. Beginning in the 1980s, rising unemployment and financial pressures within households led many women to seek employment abroad in pursuit of better living standards for their families. However, most female migrant workers found jobs in limited sectors, primarily as housekeepers, maids, garment workers, caregivers, and cleaners. Migration is largely driven by push factors from the country of origin and pull factors from the

destination. While the decision to migrate often stems from push factors such as unemployment, these can be offset or influenced by the attractiveness of pull factors in the receiving country. For instance, unemployment in the home country may compel individuals to migrate, while job opportunities abroad serve as a strong pull. Additionally, political and socio-economic conditions—such as inadequate basic services, the pursuit of a better quality of life, improved healthcare, environmental safety, good governance, and other advantages also play a significant role in encouraging migration. The key factors influencing migration decisions can be broadly categorized into economic, non-economic, and demographic factors. Economic factors are further divided into macroeconomic indicators and labour market conditions. This paper examines variables such as foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, GDP per capita, the size of the agriculture, manufacturing, and services sectors, and the unemployment rate. The impact of these factors varies depending on both the country of origin and the destination. The Rest of the paper is divided into the following sections. After the introduction, the second section consists of a Literature review. Section three discusses the methodology and data collection. Analysis and estimation of the study are found in Section four, while Section five summarizes the conclusion and policy implications.

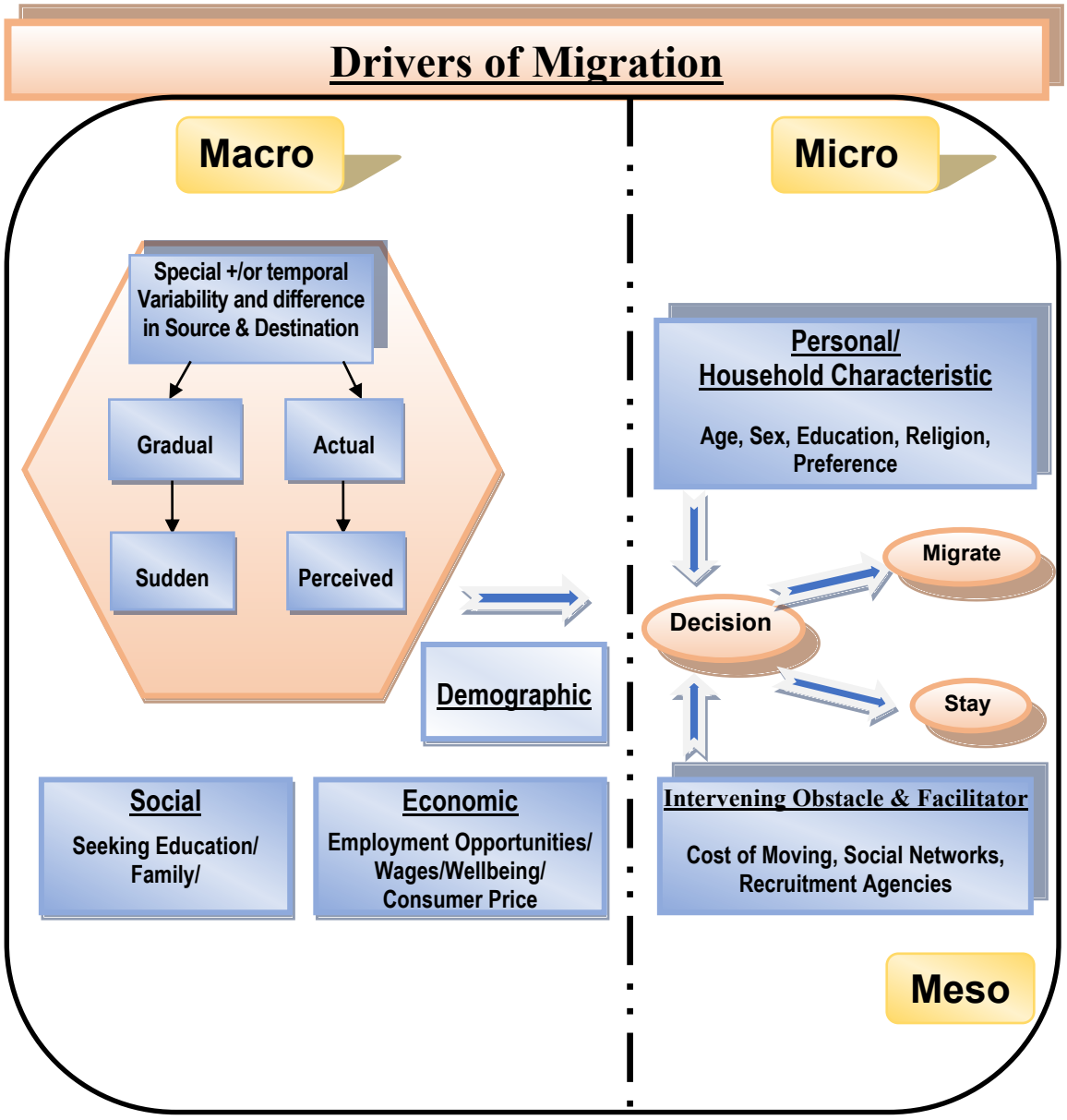
Theoretical Framework

A framework typically outlines the structure of a study, illustrating how key issues are addressed. This research adopts the migration framework proposed by Hunnes (2012), shown in Figure-1. The framework is divided into three levels: macro, meso, and micro. While the original model also highlights environmental impacts on migration, this study focuses primarily on the factors influencing migration decisions across all three levels. However, a few indicators have been excluded due to data limitations. At the micro level, migration decisions are influenced by individual and household factors such as age, gender, and educational background. Younger individuals often migrate in pursuit of educational opportunities, whereas adults are more likely to move abroad for employment purposes. Gender disparities in labour markets contribute to various forms of inequality, including wage gaps, differences in skill levels, working hours, and occupational segregation. Women are often paid less and are more likely to work in unskilled positions with working hours that exceed the average. These inequalities mirror those found in international labour markets. Religious and cultural factors also play a role, as female migrants are often drawn to countries with similar religious beliefs and social norms. Education is another key factor in securing employment abroad. As employment shifts from agriculture to non-agricultural sectors, there is an increasing demand for a skilled and educated workforce, an area where women generally lag behind men.

At the meso or community level, family and community interactions play a key role in facilitating migration. Social networks help by sharing job experiences, offering guidance to potential migrants, and supporting adjustment in a new environment. Issues related to

settlement can often be resolved through personal contacts or temporary community arrangements. Due to their generally polite and adaptable nature, women often adjust more easily to new surroundings. As a result, past community migration experiences, especially involving women, can significantly influence current migration decisions.

Figure-1: Framework of the Study



Source: Dana. E. Hunnes (2012)

At the Macro level, factors influencing migration decisions are divided into five categories; three key categories are discussed in detail by social, economic, and demographic factors. The author highlights that the interaction between social and economic elements, particularly through push and pull dynamics, plays a significant role in shaping migration decisions. Among them, economic well-being is the most influential factor, followed by wage disparities, inequality, poverty, and fluctuations in consumer prices. Higher GDP per capita in destination countries acts as a strong pull factor, attracting migrants with the promise of improved economic conditions and better job opportunities.

For the perspective of demographic factors such as fertility rates, which influence migration. A growing population can lead to higher unemployment and strain on essential resources like land, food, healthcare, and education. This demographic pressure creates an economic burden, which in turn becomes a driving force behind migration.

Research Objectives (RO)

The research objectives of the paper are as follows:

RO1: To analyze current trends among Philippine female migrant workers

RO2: To examine the economic, non-economic, and demographic factors influencing Philippine female migration

Research Hypotheses (H)

The following are the Research paper Hypotheses:

H1: There is a significant trend in the migration patterns of Philippine female migrant workers. Past migration decisions have significantly influenced current migration patterns.

H2: Economic, non-economic, and demographic factors have a significant influence on the decision of Philippine female workers to migrate.

Review of the Literature

Rodriguez and Tiongson (2001) examined the impact of earnings from temporary overseas migrants on household consumption and its effect on the labour supply of non-migrants. Using Probit estimation, the findings revealed that remittances generally reduce the labour supply of non-migrants and increase leisure time, although this effect varies by gender. The research also explored how wives in the

Philippines respond in the absence of their migrant husbands, often taking on greater responsibilities. Empirical analysis showed that migration influences the labour supply of non-migrants in two ways: where migration decreases non-migrant participation in the local labour market, and complementarily, where migration increases non-migrant labour supply by enabling investments in income-generating activities. Oishi (2002) approached the issues at three levels (micro, macro, and meso). The results indicate that the empowerment of women plays a significant role in migration decisions. The author suggests that at the micro level, an individual's willingness and motivation have a greater influence on migration than simply the demand for work. The study also finds that education, mobility, and employment opportunities drive international migration, which in turn promotes investment and human capital development, further increasing female labour force participation. Additionally, the study highlights how the cultural context in the Philippines and the deployment to destination countries are influenced by low wages and poor economic conditions in the home country.

The influx of women into the labour market began in 1990. Women usually engage in the labour market as nurses, health workers, and domestic workers. Push factors like high unemployment rate, uncertain economic conditions, and low wages have diverted the female workers to migrate to developed countries. The Middle East and Southeast countries are the top-most countries, while the USA has a high priority for that. Filipino women also face workplace exploitation; to some extent, the government has protected the vulnerable women migrants. The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA, 2013) was formed by the government for monitoring and handling visa-processing issues for the support of migrants. Syres (2003) emphasized the analysis of the situation of the Philippines' domestic workers. In 2000, about 75% domestic workers migrated to Hong Kong and Singapore. The government imposed a ban on its domestic workers, which caused an increase in demand for Sri-Lankan and Indonesian domestic workers. Regional comparison between the local and overseas domestic workers was also examined. The Finding shows that overseas domestic migrants were more educated and had a high socioeconomic position with better wage demands and experience. Piper (2005) discusses that due to changes in the labour market, mostly educated females prefer the qualified jobs with respect to their education. The author highlighted the causes of migrant workers, a large no of migrant movements seen due to the inflation in the service sector, and the rate of unemployment recorded around 6.8%. Further pointed out towards the sound policies and reforms that are need of time (World Bank, 2015; Mohyuddin, 2017; Pholphirul & Rukumnuaykit, 2010). Philippines Government implemented numerous laws and rules (ILO convention, UN convention, salary, age, minimum wages convention) to the protection of trafficking, violence, illegal recruitments, etc., for the domestic and migrant workers.

Activist Gina Mission highlighted that Filipino women workers commonly find employment abroad as house cleaners, babysitters, caregivers, and entertainers. With liberal culture and strong educational background, Filipino women workers are presented as compared to other developing countries, because their families provide them the opportunity to move alone as breadwinners for their Filipino families (Mission, n.d.). It is claimed that during 1995 overseas workers remitted 36$ million from Hong Kong workers, while male workers remitted an amount of only $ 1.2 million. In the Philippines, economic growth remained strong during the 1970s and 1980s but declined in the 1990s. Rapid population growth contributed to this slowdown by putting pressure on economic development. Low economic growth, in turn, led to reduced investment in human capital, reflected in poorer health and education outcomes. Additionally, factors such as high population growth, unemployment, trade liberalization, industrial decline, and a shrinking workforce worsened problems like poverty, income inequality, low wages, and limited access to social services, exerting a significant impact on migration (Orbeta et al., 1999; Aldaba, 2000; Mohyuddin, 2017; Philippine Statistics Authority, 2023).

Asian regions like South Asia, East Asia, and South East Asia have remained the major source of domestic workers for the destination countries since 1970. Dominance of male workers is seen in the labour market. Female domestic workers remained a minority in Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. During the 1980s, oil-rich Gulf countries experienced a growing demand for female workers, particularly in roles such as caregivers and domestic helpers. This demand was largely met by migrants from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. While male migrants were mostly employed in the formal sector, female migrants were predominantly absorbed into the informal sector. The study also examined labour protection policies, highlighting Taiwan and the Philippines as countries with legislation supportive of female migrant workers. Additionally, South Korea introduced a law regulating work permits to safeguard migrant labour rights (Asis, 2004; Amal, 2015; Buttorff et al., 2018; Ghosh, 2009; Yeung & Mu, 2020). The study explored recent trends in women's migration, both nationally and internationally, and identified various types of migration, including family migration, labour migration, marriage-related migration, and forced migration. It also examined the socioeconomic impacts of these migration patterns on the countries of origin. The findings indicate that migration has a positive effect on sending countries, primarily through remittances, which contribute to improvements in healthcare, education, income-generating investments, and poverty reduction. However, the study also highlighted some negative aspects of female migration, such as the risk of human trafficking.

Dustman observed the behaviour of married female migrant workers with respect to temporary and permanent migrants. The author found that temporary migrant workers have an opportunity to switch if the labour market is against the permanent migrants. The study used the Probit technique for estimation purposes, which indicates a

significant difference in behaviour between permanent and temporary migrants. The permanent and temporary migrants' behaviour shows that decision making matters in the process of permanent and temporary migrants, similarly as the present and past practice decisions matter or influence migrants (Dustman, 1997; Ferrer, 2015; UN Women, 2017). The author highlights the condition of the labour market between two countries, Bangladesh and Indonesia, and found a high share of Bangladeshi female migrants as compared to other Asian countries (Philippines, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan). For the comparative analysis between Indonesia and Bangladesh, the qualitative and quantitative techniques are used. Empirical results show that religion is a powerful indicator in Indonesia that does not restrict women from moving abroad, as compared to Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, social norms, illiteracy, language barriers, and government policies restrict women. However, lack of awareness, low knowledge, a sound patriarchal system, and restricted policies remained factors of hindrance (Ullah, 2007; Martin, 2004; Fleury, 2016).

Research Methodology

This section presents the estimation of the model, analyzing the factors influencing migration decisions. It also outlines the estimation technique used and provides a discussion of the data sources, along with a detailed description of the variables employed, as follows;

$$Emg_{ijt} = f(Mac_{ijt}, Lab_{ijt}, NMac_{ij}, Dem_{ijt}, Emg_{t-1ijt}) \quad \text{..... (A)}$$

As a whole Eq. A model showing the flow of migrants is a function of macroeconomic, labour, non-economic, demographic, and flow of lag-dependent variables. The detailed discussion on each variable is given as follows;

Macroeconomic Factors

$$Emg_{ijt} = f(Mac_{ijt})$$

The Emg_{ijt} shows the female flow of migrant workers with respect to *i* origin and *j* destination *t* represents the time period, while Mac_{ijt}. The macroeconomic conditions of both origin and destination countries are represented over time using indicators such as GDP per capita (PPP adjusted), foreign direct investment (FDI), inflation rate, and the relative size of the agriculture, manufacturing, and services sectors. These indicators are examined within the framework of migration theory, distinguishing between push factors (conditions in the origin country that drive people to leave) and pull factors (conditions in the destination country that attract migrants). For instance, a decline in GDP per capita in the origin country reflects worsening economic conditions and growing employment uncertainty, thereby acting as a strong push

factor encouraging migration. Conversely, a decline in GDP per capita in the destination country weakens its economic appeal, reducing its pull effect and, consequently, lowering migration inflows.

Labour Market Conditions

$$Emg_{ijt} = f(Lab_{ijt})$$

Lab_{ijt}, the variable captures labour market conditions**,** a key factor influencing migration decisions. The employment-to-population ratio is used as a proxy for unemployment. While direct data on unemployment would be more informative, it was often unavailable across countries and time periods, making this proxy a more consistent choice. A positive value of this proxy for the origin country indicates better employment opportunities, meaning a higher proportion of the population is employed, which is associated with lower migration rates, as individuals are less likely to leave when job prospects are favourable.

Noneconomic Factors

$$Emg_{ijt} = f(NMac_{ij})$$

$NMac_{ijt}$, this variable reflects non-economic factors that influence migration decisions, such as the geographic distance between origin and destination countries, which serves as a proxy for transportation costs and cultural or religious similarities. For instance, in Bangladesh, the migration patterns of female workers are shaped by government policies and prevailing social and cultural norms. Bangladeshi women are predominantly permitted to migrate to Gulf and Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Lebanon, where demand for their labour is partly driven by shared religious and cultural values. A greater distance to the destination country tends to reduce migration rates, as higher travel costs create financial barriers and make it more difficult for migrants, especially women, to maintain regular contact with their families.

Demographic Factors

$$Emg_{ijt} = f(Dem_{ijt})$$

Dem_{ijt}, variable captures demographic factors that influence migration decisions. The key demographic indicators considered in the study are education level**,** fertility rate**,** and population size. First, regarding education: individuals with higher levels of education or skills may not always be in high demand in destination countries,

especially in developed nations where the native population is already well-educated and skilled. In such cases, there is often a greater demand for unskilled labour, which migrants from less-developed countries may help fill. Second, a rising population in the origin country can strain limited resources and lead to higher unemployment, thereby increasing the pressure to migrate. In this context, population growth acts as a push factor, encouraging out-migration in search of better opportunities.

Lag Dependent of Female Flow of Migrant

$$Emg_{ijt} = f(Emg_{t-1ijt})$$

Finally, the Emg_{t-1ijt} results show that the lagged dependent variable of female migrant flow is included in the model, as migration decisions are often strongly influenced by family members, friends, and relatives. Previous migration experiences play a key role in shaping current migration choices, especially for women. Past migrants often assist new migrants by creating job opportunities through their absence, offering temporary shelter, and helping them in the job search process. Therefore, the model incorporates the lagged flow of female migrants, based on the hypothesis that the movement of new migrants is significantly influenced by the decisions of past migrants. This justifies the inclusion of past migrant flows in the final model.

Gravity Model

Newton's Law of Gravitation (1687) is used as the basis for the model of migration. Which two different forces between two bodies are directly proportional to their masses or sizes, but inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them;

$$M_{ij} = g \times \frac{P_i \times P_j}{D2_{ij}} \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots \text{(a)}$$

The modified law is referred to as the "Gravity Model" of migration, which was first adopted by (Lowry, 1966; Lee, 1966). In the model, M_{ij} represents migration flow from country i to j, while g in the model is the gravitational constant. $P_1$and P_2 are population, and d is the distance. Migration between the origin i to destination j remains directly related to the size of the origins and destination's population and is inversely related to the square of distance.

The gravity model approach is employed to identify the determinants of female migration. However, a major challenge in fully applying the gravity model is the lack of bilateral data on the female migrant workforce. To address this limitation, the

study estimates the model by incorporating macroeconomic, labour market, demographic, and gravity-related variables for both origin and destination countries. The analysis focuses specifically on outward migration from the Philippines to the rest of the world.

$$Emg_{ijt} = \varphi_0 + +\varphi 1_{ijt} \sum_{U=1}^{4} Macr_{ijt} + \varphi 2_{ijt} \sum_{V=1}^{3} Lab_{ijt} + \varphi 3_{ijt} \sum_{W=1}^{2} Dem_{ijt} + \varphi 4 Dist_{ij} + \varphi 5 Relg_{ij} + \epsilon_{ijt} \quad \text{.....(b)}$$

Variables Description

The study used the following indicators to explore the factors affecting migration decisions.

S.No.	Symbol	Variable Description
		Dependent Variable
1	Emg_{ijt}	Female migrant flow
		Independent Variable
2		Lag of Dependent Variable
3	$Macr_{ijt}$	**Macroeconomic variables** Current gross domestic production per capita (PPP) Foreign direct investment Agriculture sector value added Manufacturing sector value added Service sector value added Consumer price index (base year 2005)
4	Lab_{ijt}	**Labour Market variables** Employment to population ratio female Labour force participation rate female
5	Dem_{ijt}	**Demographic variables** Population ages 15-64 total Fertility rate total (birth per women)
6	$Dist_{ij}$ $Relg_{ij}$	**Gravity variables** Distance Religion

Estimation Technique

Many economic issues are dynamic by nature, and their relationship is characterized by the presence of a lagged dependent variable among the regressors. Due to the lag dependent variables, OLS is biased and inconsistent, even if the v_{it} are not serially

correlated. As y_{it} is a function of u_i, so is y_{it-1}. Anderson and Hsiao (1981) suggested first differencing the model to get rid of the u_i, and then using an IV method. This proposed method leads to consistent but not necessarily efficient estimates, because it does not make use of all available moment conditions and does not take into account the differenced structure of the residual disturbances Δv_{it}.

As Arellano and Bond (1991) proposed, a more efficient estimation procedure, and argue that additional instruments can be obtained if one utilizes the orthogonal conditions that exist between the lagged values of y_{it} and v_{it}. Take the first differences to get rid of the individual effects and use all the past information of y_{it} as instruments. Illustrate this: the model is used:

$$y_{it} = \delta y_{i,t-1} + u_{it} \quad \ldots\ldots\ldots\

Pre-multiplying the model in vector form with the matrix of all instruments, it gives

$$W'\Delta y = W'(\Delta y - 1)\delta + W'\Delta v \quad \ldots\ldots\ldots\

relevant variables were sourced from secondary databases, including the World Development Indicators (WDI), the United Nations (UN), and CEPII (Research and Expertise on the World Economy). The dataset covers the period from 2000 to 2020 and includes information on migration to 18 destination countries from the Philippines.

Determinants Influencing the Migration Pattern of the Philippine Female

Domestic work is the primary occupation for many Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), particularly women. This trend is largely driven by factors such as poverty, unemployment, and rapid population growth. Women and girls from remote rural areas are often compelled to leave their homes in search of employment, either in urban centers or overseas. Those who migrate as irregular or undocumented domestic workers frequently face some of the harshest conditions. Without legal protection, they are more vulnerable to mistreatment, including verbal and physical abuse, and are at higher risk of becoming victims of sexual exploitation [based on the findings published by the (Human Rights Watch report, 2008).

Domestic work is regarded as a major source of income for the working class, both within the Philippines and abroad. According to the International Labour Organization (Blackett, 2014), at least 1.9 million workers aged 15 and above are engaged in domestic work, with women accounting for four out of every five workers. Data on overseas deployment is provided by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration and International Organization for Migration, which indicates that domestic work was the top occupation for the new hires (POEA & IOM, 2013). The migration of women who find employment as domestic workers overseas has highlighted the need to protect workers in this sector.

The majority of female migrants from the Philippines move to countries such as Saudi Arabia, Canada, the UAE, and others, where they are typically employed in low-skilled jobs. However, certain professions, such as nursing, have also attracted skilled Filipino migrants. Young women often find work in the sales and service sectors, tourism, and business process outsourcing, not only to improve their own futures but also to support their families. Migrants tend to be relatively well-educated and benefit from stronger protections in destination countries, largely due to supportive government policies (Asis & Battistella, 2013).

Analysis of Female Philippine Overseas Workers

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, the regional percentage distribution of Filipino workers indicates that the mobility of female migrants from Asia was the highest, at 81.1% recorded in 2019 and increasing to 83.6% in 2020, based on their

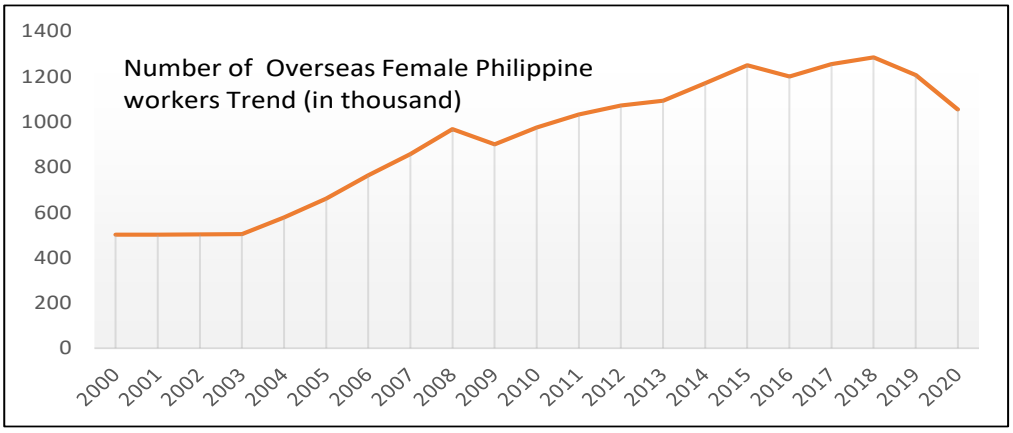
place of work. In terms of the ratio of female migrants, the figures were even higher, 90.9% in 2019 and 91.4% in 2020. The analysis of female Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) can be divided into several key segments: the trend over time, their destinations abroad, and the types of job categories where they are employed and fulfilling their responsibilities through available opportunities (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019).

a. Trend Condition of Philippine Female Migrant Workers

The year-by-year trend, as shown in Figure-2, illustrates the movement of Filipino workers to various destination countries. In the mid-1970s, only a small number of Filipinos migrated, primarily to the USA and Africa. However, during the 1980s, there was a significant increase in migration to Gulf countries, with men mostly working in construction and women employed as domestic helpers. Nearby countries such as Malaysia and Thailand also began attracting Filipino labour migrants due to growing demand in their industrial sectors.

After 1990, there was a notable rise in the number of female migrants heading to countries like Korea, Singapore, and Malaysia, particularly among women migrating for marriage. This trend opened up new pathways for permanent settlement and employment opportunities for other married women in the following years. By the 2000s, the majority of female Filipino migrants were working as domestic helpers and entertainers.

Figure-2: Philippine Female Migrant Workers Trend (2000-2020)



Source: Philippine Statistics Authority, Survey on Overseas

Japan has remained a preferred destination for Filipina entertainers. In 2006, the Philippine government implemented soft reform policies aimed at protecting

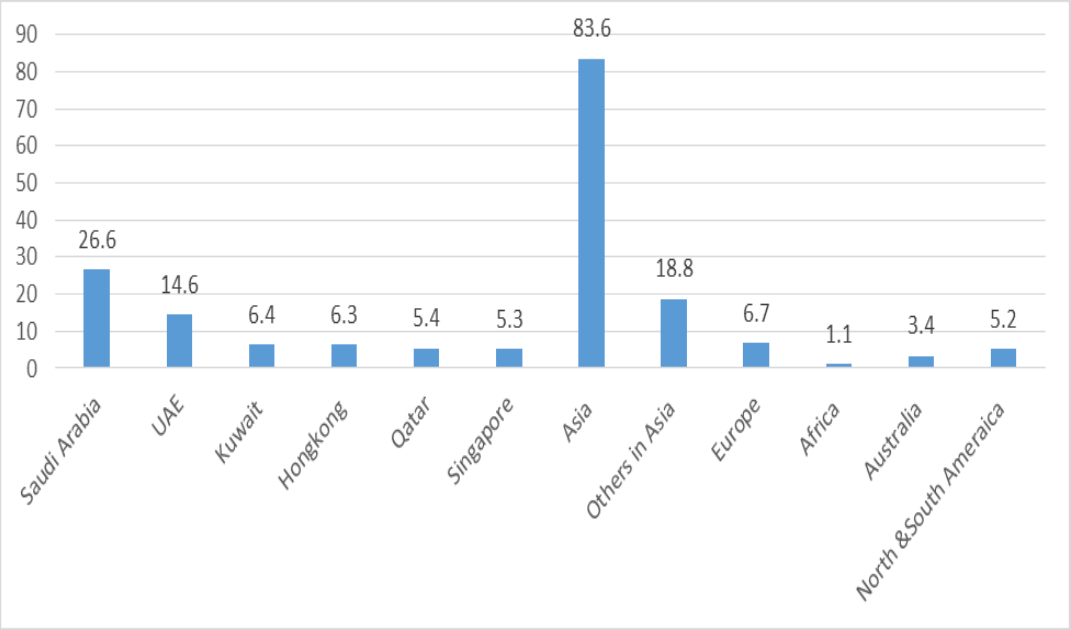
domestic workers by officially recognizing them as "household service workers," a move supported by Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). However, the introduction of stricter immigration policies by the Japanese government—partly in response to U.S. criticism over issues such as human trafficking, violations of sexual and reproductive health rights, and discriminatory laws—led to a significant decline in the number of Filipino migrant workers, especially after 2008.

Beginning in 2009, migration to Japan gradually increased again, largely due to the Japanese government's implementation of a household workers program. This upward trend was also supported by efforts from the Philippine government to safeguard and promote the welfare of domestic workers (Asis & Battistella, 2013). Both skilled and unskilled workers have remained dominant categories among female migrants, continuing to grow in number. Since 2018, bilateral agreements and expanding trade relations with Middle Eastern countries have further facilitated the migration of Filipina workers. A gradual upward trend was observed, though this slightly declined in 2019 and 2020. To ensure safer and more secure migration for women, the Philippine government introduced an online welfare system to enhance transparency and documentation (Alfie, 2020). Despite these efforts, recent statistics show a slight overall decline in the number of Filipina migrants heading to destination countries.

Destination for Female Migrants

The top destinations of female Philippine workers are in care work and domestic services, observed in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. Between 1970 and 1980, Australia, Malaysia, Japan, the UK, Hong Kong, and Singapore were among the top destinations for Filipino contract workers. The appeal of the United States stemmed from the 1965 immigration reforms, which encouraged Filipinos to migrate as family-based immigrants. During the 1970s, Gulf countries also saw a surge in demand for labour to support infrastructure development, which was met in part by workers from the Philippines. The majority of migrants during this period moved to the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Canada. In Japan, many female Filipino workers were deployed for entertainment purposes, while in Korea, migration was often linked to marriage and engagement. The movement of female Philippine migrants in 2020 showed the top for Asia (83.6%), Saudi Arabia (26.6%), and the UAE (14.6%). However, deployment for Europe accounted for around 6.7%, for North and South America (5.2%), and Australia (3.4%), respectively.

Figure-3: Destination of Overseas Philippine Workers



Source: Philippine Statistics Authority, Survey on Overseas (2020)

b. Category-Wise Migrant Workforce

In the 1980s, the majority of Filipina migrants were employed as sales workers, healthcare providers, and in various service sector roles. By the 1990s, labour demand shifted toward care workers in developed countries, particularly in sectors requiring highly skilled professionals such as nursing and information technology. Despite this growing need for skilled labour, unskilled work continued to make up the bulk of the migrant workforce. Between 1980 and 2004, a considerable number of Filipino women migrated to Japan to work as entertainers. Over the years, female workers began to establish a stronger foothold in the global labour market. Although male migrants continued to outnumber females until 2006, the mobility of Filipina workers steadily increased afterward. Table 1 outlines the major occupational categories of Filipina overseas workers. Notably, two out of every five are employed in elementary occupations. This category accounts for the highest share, representing approximately 70.3% of all Filipina migrant workers. Additionally, 12.6% are employed as service providers, while professional workers make up around 7.3%. A very small fraction, just 0.1% is engaged in skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery work.

Table-1: Percentage Distribution of Philippine Female Workers by Major Occupation

Major Occupation Categories	2020
Managers	1.4
Professionals	7.3
Technicians and associates	1.8
Clerical support workers	4.2
Service and sales workers	12.6
Skilled agricultural, forestry & fishery	0.1
Craft and related trade workers	0.7
Plant and machine operators	1.7
Elementary Occupation	70.3

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority, Survey on Overseas (2020)

Empirical Analysis

The empirical result of the study predicted that the past decision of migration significantly influences the current decision of migration, providing the base for the GMM analysis rather than a simple OLS. Focusing on pull factors: the finding reveals that the flow of female migrants in the past further attracts new hires or the current decision of female migration. As a one percent Increment in the lag dependent variable or past female migrant flow increases the current flow of migrants by 0.43 percent. The study expected the positive effect of real GDP per capita in origin countries; however, it predicted the negative effect of the log of real GDP per capita of destination countries. The results indicate a one percent increase in economic development, instead of attracting more migrants, reducing the migrant flow by 0.48 percent. The reason might be that the economy of the Philippines has seen too many downturns with high unemployment rates, which have motivated the Filipinos to take employment abroad without considering the economic development of the destination countries. The descriptive analysis also shows that the movement of females within Asia is comparatively higher than in the USA and Africa.

In the development of the country, agriculture, manufacturing, and service sectors play a crucial role. The result shows that a one percent increase in the value addition of the services sector at the destination will increase the flow of migrants by 0.011 thousand. As indicated above, mostly young female Philippine migrants are engaged in the sales and services sector and provide their services as nurses. Employment-to-population ratio is used here as a proxy for the unemployment rate. The result shows that the availability of jobs in destination countries attracts more migrants. The employment-to-population ratio shows a positive and significant effect on the flow of migrants. A one percent increase in the employment-to-population ratio increases the flow of current female migrants by 0.062 thousand, as shown in Table-2

Table-2: GMM – Dynamic Panel Data Estimation for Philippine

Factors	Coefficient	P-Value
Pull Factor		
Determinants		
Lag Dependent Variable: Log of Female Migrant Flow	0.43	0.00*
Macro-Economic Factors		
Log Real Gross Domestic Production Per Capita (PPP)	-0.48	0.083***
Agriculture Sector Value Addition	-.017	0.528
Manufacturing Sector Value Addition	-.012	0.601
Services Sector Value Addition	.011	0.076***
Labour Market Factors		
Employment to Population Ratio	.062	0.008*
Log Labour Force Participation Rate Female	-2.33	0.016*
Demographic Factors		
Population	.014	0.000*
Fertility Rate	-0.38	0.109***
Non-Economic Factors		
Distance	.0001	0.000*
Religion	-1.52	0.012*
Push Factor		
Economic Factors		
Log Gross Domestic Product Per Capita (PPP)	3.42	0.053**
Agriculture Sector Value Addition	.131	0.080***
Manufacturing Sector Addition	.057	0.271
Services Sector Value Addition	.036	0.483
Labour Market Factors		
Employment to Population Ratio	.053	0.560
Log Labour Force Participation Rate Female	-2.34	0.053**
Demographic Factors		
Population	.289	0.006*
Constant	-13.11	0.213
Number of Observations	310	
Wald chi2(18)	902.20	
Probability > chi2	0.000	
Sargan Test of Over-Identifying Restrictions	56.20	
Probability > chi2	0.620	

Level of significance *, **, *, represents 1, 5 and 10 percent respectively**

Labour force participation rate in the Philippines has remained around 61.9percent, whereas the employment rate goes to 90 percent according to the (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020). However, Females have a higher unemployment rate than males. The Female Labour force participation rate shows a significant negative effect. An increment of one percent in the female (LFP) Labour force participation rate

decreases the flow of migrants to about 2.33 thousand. This emphasizes that in newly industrialized countries, local females are entering the labour market and leaving less space for Philippine migrant workers. Among the demographic factors, population shows a positive and significant impact on the migrant flow. The result shows that a one percent increase in the population of destination countries causes an increase in the migrant flow by 0.014 thousand. The fertility rate shows a negative effect. A one percent increase in the fertility rate causes the migration rate to decrease by 0.381 thousand.

However, non-economic factors, according to the theory, predict that the higher the distance, the higher the travelling cost; meanwhile, the result shows that a higher distance doesn't influence the cost of migration. Precisely, a one percent increase in the distance between the origin and destination increases the amount of flow of migrants by 0.0001 thousand. According to the theory, the same religion attracts female migrant workers; the result shows significant but negative signs, which means that due to the absence of different religions in the developed countries, they do not get much attention regarding this factor for Filipino women. A one percent increment in the religion coefficient decreases the migration flow by 1.52 thousand.

Focusing on the push factors, the result shows that the log of the real GDP per capita is positive. This may be due to the remittances sent by the migrants. The development of the Philippines is highly based on the remittances of the migrants; hence, the government itself has adopted many policies to facilitate the migration process. The following results emphasized that a positive increment in the GDP coefficient impacts on migration is significant by 3.42

Among the economic sectors, the agriculture sector shows positive and significant results. In 2020, the Philippines experienced an economic downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sector contracted by approximately –0.2%**,** while the industry sector, which includes manufacturing, declined by around **–**13.1%. The services sector, typically the dominant contributor to GDP, also recorded a contraction of about **–**9.2%. In terms of labour distribution, urban women were generally more educated and often employed in clerical, administrative, and service-oriented roles, while rural women were more likely engaged in informal work**,** including domestic labour and agricultural activities.

Mostly females belonging to the agriculture sector migrate abroad in order to avail good employment. As one percent in the value addition increases the flow of migrants by 131 thousand. Among the labour market indicators, the labour force participation rate of females shows a negative and significant impact on migration. A one percent increase in labour force participation rate within the origin country reduces migration by 2.34 thousand.

Among the demographic factors, population shows a positive and significant effect on female migrant flow. Theory emphasized that the higher the population rate, the higher the migration rate. The result shows that a one percent increase in population increased the flow of female migrants by 0.289 thousand. The result concludes that females usually migrate for their family needs or for a good standard of living, and their family members incline them to migrate.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Overall conclusion highlights that education and skills play a crucial role for migrants, particularly women, as migration often occurs for employment-related reasons. Possessing strong skills increases the likelihood of successfully entering and competing in the labour market. Women from urban areas of the Philippines tend to have higher levels of education and are more likely to secure professional occupations. In contrast, the majority of the female workforce from rural areas often work as domestic workers. Many women migrate to support their families and, in doing so, can attain improved living standards. Economic factors such as GDP per capita, the size of the service sector, the employment-to-population ratio, and the log of labour force participation rate for females show statistically significant results.

Among demographic factors, population size and fertility rates show statistically significant effects, indicating that regions with larger populations and higher fertility rates may experience greater female migration flows. This could be due to increased economic pressures or limited local employment opportunities, prompting women to seek better prospects abroad. Similarly, among non-economic factors, religion and geographic distance also play a significant role. Religious and cultural norms may influence women's mobility, either encouraging or restricting migration, while distance can affect the ease or likelihood of moving to specific destinations. Furthermore, the lagged dependent variable of female migration flow demonstrates a reinforcing or path-dependent effect, suggesting that previous migration trends can influence future decisions. In other words, women are more likely to migrate when they see others from their community doing the same, benefiting from established networks and shared experiences that reduce the uncertainties and risks associated with international migration.

According to the study, governments and institutions need to establish effective mechanisms for training, awareness programs, and related campaigns specifically for female workers before migration. These initiatives are crucial in today's context. Additionally, well-negotiated bilateral agreements between origin and destination countries can play a key role in safeguarding migrants' rights and protecting them from exploitation. Furthermore, economic imbalances in the origin countries are a significant driving force behind migration. The government should take a positive

role in providing employment opportunities with incentives for people without gender differences. Overseas institutions can also be helpful for migrants through self-awareness programs, especially for females, to adjust to new places (destination countries).

References

Aldaba, F. T. (2000). *Trade liberalization and international migration: The Philippine case* (PASCN Discussion Paper No. 2000-04). Philippine APEC Study Center Network. https://archium.ateneo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1077&context=economics-faculty-pubs

Alfie, G. (2020). *Facts and perspectives: Women's labour migration from the Philippines*. Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW). https://gaatw.org/resources/publications/1076-facts-and-perspectives-women-s-labour-migration-from-the-philippines

Amal, M. (2015, March 9). Understanding Gulf women and the competing economy. *World Economic Forum.* https://www.weforum.org/stories/2015/03/understanding-gulf-women-and-the-competing-economy

Anderson, T. W., & Hsiao, C. (1981). Estimation of Dynamic Models with Error Components. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, *76*(375), 598–606. https://doi.org/10.1080/01621459.1981.10477691

Arellano, M., & Bond, S. (1991). Some tests of specification for panel data: Monte Carlo evidence and an application to employment equations. *The Review of Economic Studies, 58*(2), 277–297. https://doi.org/10.2307/2297968

Asis, M. B. (2004, January 14). *When men and women migrate: Comparing gendered migration in Asia* (CM/MMW/2003/EP.1). United Nations, Division for the Advancement of Women. https://static.un.org/womenwatch/daw/meetings/con%20sult/CM-Dec03-EP1.pdf

Asis, M. M. B., & Battistella, G. (2013). *The Filipino youth and the employment-migration nexus*. UNICEF Philippines & Scalabrini Migration Center. https://www.sdgfund.org/sites/default/files/YEM_STUDY_Philip_Youth%2C%20employment%20and%20migration.pdf

Blackett, A. (2014). The Decent Work for Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) and Recommendation (No. 201): Introductory note. *International Legal Materials, 53*(1), 250–266. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5305/intelegamate.53.1.0250

Buttorff, G., Welborne, B., & al-Lawati, N. (2018, January 18). *Measuring female labor force participation in the GCC* (Issue Brief). Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.

Dustmann, C. (1997). Differences in the labor market behavior between temporary and permanent migrant women. *Labour Economics, 4*(1), 29–46. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0927-5371(96)00025-5

Ferrer, A. (2015). Are married immigrant women secondary workers? *IZA World of Labor*, 2015(119). https://doi.org/10.15185/izawol.119

Fleury, A. (2016). *Understanding women and migration: A literature review* (pp. 1–55). http://atina.org.rs/sites/default/files/KNOMAD%20Understaning%20Women%20and%20Migration.pdf

Ghosh, J. (2009, April). *Migration and gender empowerment: Recent trends and emerging issues* (Human Development Research Paper HDRP-2009-04; MPRA Paper No. 19181). United Nations Development Programme. https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/19181/

Hansen, R. A. (1982). Simultaneous estimation of terrestrial eigenvibrations. *Geophysical Journal International, 70*(1), 155–172. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-246X.1982.tb06397.x

Human Rights Watch. (2008). *UPR submission: United Arab Emirates*. United Nations Human Rights Council. https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/highlights4-december2008am

Hunnes, D. E. (2012). Understanding rural to urban migration in Ethiopia: Driving factors, analytical frameworks and recommendations. *Journal of Global Health Perspectives*.

ILO. (2013). *ILO World of Work report 2013*. International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_202326.pdf

IOM (2020). *World migration report 2020*. International Organization for Migration. https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2020

Lee, E. S. (1966). A theory of migration. *Demography, 3*(1), 47–57.

Lowry, I. (1966). *Migration and metropolitan growth: Two analytical models*. Chandler Publishing Company.

Martin, S. F. (2004, December 2–4). *Women and migration.* In Consultative Meeting on "Migration and Mobility and How This Movement Affects Women." United Nations. https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/meetings/consult/CM-Dec03-Report.pdf

Mission, Gina (n.d.). The Breadwinners: Female Migrant Workers, http://gina.ph[WIN/ issues/issuel5/winl5a.htm.

Mohyuddin, S. I. (2017). Female migrant labor in the Philippines: The institutionalization of traditional gender roles in the name of economic development. *Pursuit: The Journal of Undergraduate Research at the University of Tennessee, 8*(1), Article 10. https://trace.tennessee.edu/pursuit/vol8/iss1/10

OECD (n.d). (Organization for Economic Co-Operation And Development) https://www.oecd.org/en.html

Oishi, N. (2002, March). *Gender and migration: An integrative approach* (Working Paper No. 49). Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California San Diego. https://ccis.ucsd.edu/_files/wp49.pdf

Orbeta, A. C., Jr., & Pernia, E. M. (1999). *Population growth and economic development in the Philippines: What has been the experience and what must be done?* (Discussion Paper Series No. 99-22). Philippine Institute for Development Studies. https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/187408/1/pidsdps9922.pdf

Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), & International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2013). *Country migration report: The Philippines*. POEA & IOM.

Philippine Statistics Authority. (2019). *FF2021-05: Overseas Filipino workers profile*. House of Representatives, Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department. https://cpbrd.congress.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/FF2021-05_OFWs.pdf

Philippine Statistics Authority. (2022, March 7). *2020 Overseas Filipino Workers (Final Results)*. PSA. https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/survey/labor-and-employment/survey-overseas-filipinos/node/166375

Philippine Statistics Authority. (2023, September 11). *Survey on overseas Filipinos (2019–2022).* Philippine Statistics Authority. https://psa.gov.ph

Pholphirul, P., & Rukumnuaykit, P. (2010). Economic contribution of migrant workers to Thailand. *International Migration*, *48*(5), 174-202. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2009.00553.x

Piper, N. (2005). *Gender and migration*. Paper prepared for the Policy Analysis and Research Programme of the Global Commission on International Migration.

Republic of the Philippine, Philippine Statistics Authority (2020), https://psa.gov.ph/.

Rodriguez, E. R., & Tiongson, E. R. (2001). Temporary migration overseas and household labor supply: Evidence from urban Philippines. *International Migration Review, 35*(3), 709–725. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2001.tb00037.x

Syres. Nichole. (2003). An Analysis of the Situation of Filipino Domestic Workers. *ILO Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour: Mobilizing Action for the Protection of Domestic Workers from Forced Labour and Trafficking in Southeast Asia* Survey of Overseas Filipino https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@ilo-manila/documents/publication/wcms_849714.pdf

Ullah, A. K. M. A. (2007). *The state of female migration flow in international labour market: How is Bangladesh doing?*

UN DESA. (2013). United Nation Department of Economics and Social Affairs

UN Women. (2017). *Women migrant workers' journey through the margins: Labour, migration and trafficking*. UN Women.

World Bank. (2015, January). *Philippine Economic Update: Making Growth Work for the Poor* (Report No. 93530-PH). World Bank. https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/EAP/Philippines/PEU%20Jan%202015%20PDF.pdf

Yeung, W.-J. J., & Mu, Z. (2020). Migration and marriage in Asian contexts. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 46*(14), 2863–2879. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1585005

Dr. Humera Sultana is an Assistant Professor/ Research Economist, Applied Economics Research Centre (AERC), University of Karachi, Pakistan.

Dr. Munazah Nazeer is a Lecturer, Economics, College Education Department, Government of Sindh.

Dr. Uzma Tabassum is an Assistant Professor/ Research Economist, Applied Economics Research Centre (AERC), University of Karachi, Pakistan.