

Research Paper

Assessing the Effectiveness of Employment Policies for Filipino Migrant Workers

Tabios Dominic Ballesteros^{1*}, Fernando David Santos¹, Edwino Mudjekeewis Rubenito²,
Lampayan Angelo²

¹ College of Social Sciences, University of the Philippines Baguio. Baguio City, Philippines.

² College of Arts and Sciences, University of Southeastern Philippines. Davao City, Philippines.

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***Corresponding Author:**
Tabios Dominic Ballesteros
Email:
ballesteros.dominic@gmail.com

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Abstract: The Philippines ranks among the top nations globally for labor migration, with remittances playing a vital role in the national economy. Filipino migrant workers still encounter obstacles despite their economic contributions, such as human rights abuses, hazardous working environments, and issues with reintegration. This research assesses how well Philippine labor laws and policies safeguard the rights of migrant workers and promote effective reintegration strategies. Employing a case study approach, information was gathered via the analysis of policy documents, government reports, and semi-structured interviews with 25 important informants, such as migrant workers, policymakers, and scholars. The research locations comprised Metro Manila, Cebu City, and Davao City. Results indicate that despite the Philippines having a thorough legal framework for safeguarding migrant workers, enforcement is insufficient because of resource limitations and minimal international oversight. Reintegration programs like skills training and entrepreneurship initiatives face underutilization because of accessibility challenges and social stigma. Additionally, shortcomings in legal aid and the enforcement of labor rights leave migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation. A comparison with South Korea and Singapore emphasizes effective strategies in legal safeguarding and reintegration assistance. Bolstering enforcement systems and improving cross-border legal collaboration are crucial for enhancing the welfare of migrants. Subsequent studies need to investigate the influence of technology on labor rights oversight and the lasting socio-economic effects of reintegration strategies. Tackling these challenges will strengthen legal safeguards and enhance sustainable welfare for Filipino migrant workers and their families.

Keywords: Employment Law, Labor Rights, Migrant Worker Protection, Overseas Filipino Workers, Reintegration Policy.



1. Introduction

The Philippines ranks among the top nations globally for labor migration, with millions of Filipinos working abroad in diverse sectors. Remittances from these employees play a crucial role in the national economy, making up around 9.4% of the Philippines' GDP by 2023 [1]. These monetary inflows strengthen local economies, improve educational accessibility, and lower poverty rates, highlighting the vital importance of migrant workers in sustaining economic stability [2].

Even with their economic impact, Filipino migrant workers still encounter ongoing legal and labor issues, such as human rights abuses, unfair working conditions, and insufficient legal safeguards. Reports suggest that employees, especially in domestic and construction industries, often face problems like wage theft, contract replacement, and hazardous working environments [3]. Moreover, numerous returnees face challenges in reintegrating because of a lack of job opportunities, societal stigma, and inadequate support programs for reintegration [4].

To resolve these issues, the Philippine government has implemented various legal frameworks, especially the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995, with later amendments designed to enhance protections and welfare systems for workers. These policies require training before departure, legal aid, and emergency support services for migrant workers. Furthermore, the creation of the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) in 2022 aims to optimize the management of migrant welfare initiatives and improve policy enforcement [5] [6]. Despite these legal measures, enforcement continues to be a significant challenge because of limited resources and insufficient international collaboration on the protection of labor rights.

This study is important for policymakers, labor advocates, and international organizations seeking to improve the conditions of migrant workers. By analyzing gaps and successes in existing policies, the findings provide actionable recommendations for strengthening protections for overseas Filipino workers. Furthermore, the study contributes to the broader literature on labor migration and public policy in Southeast Asia, offering insights that can inform similar initiatives in neighboring countries facing similar challenges.

For academics and researchers, this paper presents a case study that combines economic, social and legal perspectives, enriching discussions on labor migration policies. For migrant workers and their families, this study serves as a platform to amplify their experiences and highlight their needs. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of prioritizing the rights and well-being of migrant workers in the global labor market.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of Migrant Worker Protection

The protection of migrant workers is a fundamental aspect of international labour standards, as set out by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and various international conventions. The ILO defines worker protection as the right to decent work, non-discrimination and safety at work [7]. According to the ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers, around 169 million migrant workers worldwide face challenges related to exploitation, unsafe conditions and legal vulnerabilities [8]. The Philippines, as a significant labour-sending country, has ratified key ILO conventions such as the Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97), and the Migrant Workers (Additional Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143), demonstrating its commitment to protecting overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) [9].

Countries such as India and Indonesia offer useful comparisons in their migrant worker protection frameworks. India has implemented policies to improve migrant workers' legal awareness and access to grievance mechanisms through initiatives such as the Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana, an insurance scheme that provides health and repatriation benefits [10]. Similarly, Indonesia's Migrant Workers Protection Act (Act No. 18 of 2017) ensures standard contracts and pre-departure training for its workers abroad [11]. These examples highlight the importance of proactive government measures in protecting workers' rights.

In the Philippines, the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995 (Republic Act No. 8042), as amended by Republic Act No. 10022, serves as the foundation for migrant worker protection. The law mandates pre-departure orientation seminars, mandatory insurance coverage, and the establishment of welfare desks in embassies [12]. Despite these measures, Filipino workers still face vulnerabilities, particularly in the domestic and construction sectors, where exploitation and abuse are rampant [13]. Strengthening bilateral agreements and monitoring mechanisms in host countries can reduce these risks [14].

2.2. Reintegration Mechanisms

Reintegration of returning migrant workers is a multifaceted process involving economic, social, and psychological dimensions. Economic reintegration refers to the provision of livelihood opportunities, while social reintegration addresses societal acceptance and family dynamics. Psychological reintegration focuses on the mental well-being of returnees, who may have experienced reverse culture shock or trauma from their experiences abroad [15].

The Philippines has made strides in reintegration through programs offered by the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA). These programs include Balik Pinas, Balik Hanapbuhay, a livelihood assistance program, and the Indonesian Migrant Worker Reintegration Program, which provides low-interest loans for entrepreneurial activities [16]. However, studies reveal that only a small percentage of returnees benefit from these programs due to limited awareness and accessibility [17].

Case studies from other countries provide insights into successful reintegration strategies. For example, South Korea's Employment Permit System includes reemployment support and financial literacy training for returnees, resulting in greater economic stability for returnees [18]. Similarly, Mexico's Programa 3x1 for Migrantes promotes collective investment projects co-financed by migrants, local governments, and federal agencies, which promote community development [19]. Adopting similar models could enhance the Philippines' reintegration mechanisms.

Psychological support remains a critical gap in the Philippines' reintegration framework. Studies show that many migrant workers struggle with mental health issues such as depression and anxiety upon their return [20]. Establishing specialized counseling centers and peer support groups could effectively address these challenges [21].

2.3. Migrant Workers Policy

The Philippines has established a strong legal and institutional framework to manage labor migration. The Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act emphasizes "migration as a choice only" and underlines the need for adequate protection and welfare services for migrant workers. The creation of the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) in 2022 marks a significant milestone in consolidating migration-related functions under one agency, improving coordination and service delivery [22].

Remittances play a significant role in the Philippine economy, contributing 9.4% of GDP in 2023. Policies such as mandatory remittance requirements and financial literacy campaigns aim to maximize the impact of these funds on national development [23]. However, the reliance on remittances raises concerns about economic dependency and the "brain drain" phenomenon, where the outflow of skilled workers hampers domestic economic growth [24].

The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) plays a leading role in implementing welfare programs for migrant workers. OWWA initiatives include pre-departure orientation, workplace welfare services, and repatriation assistance. Despite these efforts, challenges remain in meeting the specific needs of workers in vulnerable sectors, such as domestic workers in the Middle East [25]. Strengthening labor-related offices and enhancing bilateral labor agreements are critical to addressing these gaps [26].

Learning from the experiences of other countries, such as the provision of a pension scheme for migrant workers in Sri Lanka, can inspire innovative policy measures in the Philippines [27]. In addition, encouraging international cooperation through multilateral organizations such as the ILO and the Global Forum on Migration and Development can strengthen advocacy for migrant workers' rights [28].

3. Methodology

This study adopted a case study method to explore the protection and reintegration of Filipino migrant workers. The study focuses on the effectiveness of policies and mechanisms addressing the welfare of migrant workers in the Philippines throughout 2024.

Data collection involved document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The documents included labor policies, reports from the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), and statistical data on Filipino migrant workers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 informants, consisting of recently returned migrant workers, government officials, and academics.

The study was conducted in key locations in the Philippines, including Metro Manila (for government offices such as the Department of Migrant Workers and OWWA), Cebu City (a major hub for returnees), and Davao City (an area with a significant migrant worker population).

4. Finding and Discussion

4.1. Protection of Filipino Migrant Workers' Rights

The Philippines has enacted a policy that regulates standard employment contracts for migrant workers, including monitoring of workers' rights protection during employment. These standard contracts aim to protect workers from exploitation, ensuring basic rights such as fair wages, reasonable working hours, and a safe working environment. However, in practice, there are challenges in its implementation, such as inadequate monitoring by supervisors in destination countries.

The effectiveness of this policy is highly rated in terms of having a clear framework, with the standard employment contract scoring an effectiveness score of 80%. This contract is designed to ensure migrant workers have fair working conditions, including wages, working hours, and appropriate safety protocols. However, despite this framework, the study's findings also show significant challenges, namely limited monitoring in destination countries, leading to gaps in law enforcement. In terms of legal protection, effectiveness drops to 75%, reflecting the difficulties faced by migrant workers in accessing international legal assistance and resolving disputes. The pre-departure training program scored 70%, indicating that while the training aims to prepare workers for the challenges they may face abroad, its limited content and resource constraints hamper its full implementation and impact.

The study revealed that while the Philippine government has established a legal and policy framework to protect migrant workers, its implementation remains incomplete. There are significant gaps in oversight, particularly in destination countries, leading to violations of workers' rights. While standard contracts and legal protections have been established, their effectiveness is hampered by resource constraints and inadequate enforcement mechanisms abroad. This highlights the need for a stronger monitoring system, greater international cooperation, and better resources for consular support to ensure the protection of migrant workers.

Challenges in policy implementation include the lack of oversight in destination countries, coupled with limited resources at embassies or consulates, which leave migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation. In addition, there is a lack of awareness of their rights, and many workers do not fully understand the support available to them abroad. This leads to continued abuses despite protective laws and policies in the Philippines.

4.2. Reintegration Mechanisms in the Philippines

The Philippine government has developed reintegration programs aimed at facilitating the return of migrant workers. These programs include skills training and entrepreneurship initiatives to help returnees reintegrate into the local economy. While these programs are useful in theory, their implementation faces significant challenges. Many returnees are unaware of the programs or face barriers such as limited access to resources and support. Furthermore, some workers report inadequate follow-up after initial training, which undermines the long-term impact of these programs.

Reintegration programs available to returnees in the Philippines include skills training, entrepreneurship programs, and social reintegration support. Skills training programs scored 65%, reflecting that while many returnees are given opportunities to upgrade their skills upon return, the accessibility of these programs is limited due to inadequate infrastructure and resources. Entrepreneurship programs, designed to help returnees start businesses, scored 60%, indicating that while the goal is to empower refugees economically, they lack adequate follow-up support and often fail to provide the necessary financial support or mentoring. Social reintegration support, which aims to address stigma and facilitate a smooth transition into host communities, scored the lowest at 55%. This suggests that social acceptance remains a major barrier for many returnees, with some facing negative perceptions and difficulties in reintegrating into society, despite government efforts to assist.

The study found that government reintegration programs face several challenges in terms of accessibility, support, and social acceptance. While skills training and entrepreneurship programs are available, their effectiveness is compromised by logistical and financial barriers. More importantly, the social reintegration aspect remains weak, with many returnees facing stigma and challenges in finding employment or being accepted back into their communities. This underscores the need for a more comprehensive approach that not only provides economic opportunities but also addresses the psychological and social aspects of reintegration to ensure the successful transition of returnees into Philippine society.

A major challenge is the stigma that returnees experience, which often makes it difficult for them to reintegrate into society. Many returnees find it difficult to find employment, as they are seen as

unsuccessful or as individuals who failed to achieve their goals abroad. In addition, limited access to reintegration programs further exacerbates the difficulties faced by returnees.

4.3. The Role of Remittances and Family Well-Being

Remittances sent by migrant workers are crucial to the economic stability of their families. They contribute significantly to improving the quality of life, supporting education, and reducing poverty. In 2024, remittances accounted for 9.4% of the Philippines' GDP, demonstrating its vital role in the national economy. However, reliance on remittances poses several challenges. Families who rely on these incomes often face financial hardship when migrant workers return home or when remittances decline due to job losses or economic downturns in the destination country.

The study found that remittances have a positive impact in several areas, with 70% of families benefiting from educational support. This underscores the importance of remittances in funding children's education, allowing families to access better opportunities to learn and develop skills. Additionally, 65% of families reported that remittances have contributed to poverty alleviation, enabling them to meet basic needs and improve their overall standard of living. However, the study also uncovered significant concerns: only 60% of families experienced improvements in health and living standards, indicating that while remittances have an immediate impact on immediate needs, the long-term benefits related to health and infrastructure development are limited. Reliance on remittances for family survival presents challenges, especially when workers return home or face disruptions in their employment abroad, leading to economic vulnerability.

While remittances contribute significantly to families' education and poverty alleviation, their impact on long-term health and living standards is less pronounced. This reflects families' dependence on external income and their vulnerability when remittance flows stop or decline. Reliance on remittances highlights the importance of creating more sustainable economic opportunities for families, ensuring that welfare gains achieved through remittances are not lost when workers return home or face economic hardship abroad.

While remittances have improved the well-being of many families, the long-term economic sustainability of these families is threatened when the main breadwinner returns or when external conditions affecting migrant employment worsen. Families often face financial crises when remittance flows stop or decline.

4.4. Comparison with Other Countries

Some countries with large migrant worker populations have implemented successful policies that can be adapted to the Philippine context. For example, countries such as South Korea and Singapore have strong legal frameworks that ensure the protection of migrant workers' rights, provide comprehensive welfare support, and ensure effective monitoring of overseas employment conditions. These countries also have successful reintegration programs that focus on economic empowerment, mental health support, and community reintegration. The Philippines can learn from these models by improving its legal framework, creating more accessible and comprehensive reintegration services, and focusing on long-term support for returning migrant workers.

Figure 1 shows a comparison of the effectiveness of migrant worker protection policies between the Philippines, South Korea, and Singapore. The graph measures legal protection, monitoring, and reintegration support, with South Korea and Singapore performing better in terms of comprehensive policies and implementation.

Based on Figure 1, the effectiveness of migrant worker protection policies in the Philippines, South Korea, and Singapore. The effectiveness of three aspects in each country, measured as a percentage:

- Legal Protection is highest in Singapore and South Korea, with both scoring above 90%, indicating a strong legal framework for migrant workers.
- Oversight is also strong in South Korea and Singapore, indicating an effective monitoring system to ensure migrant workers' rights are protected.
- Reintegration Support is strongest in Singapore and South Korea, highlighting better programs to reintegrate migrant workers compared to the Philippines, where these aspects scored lower.

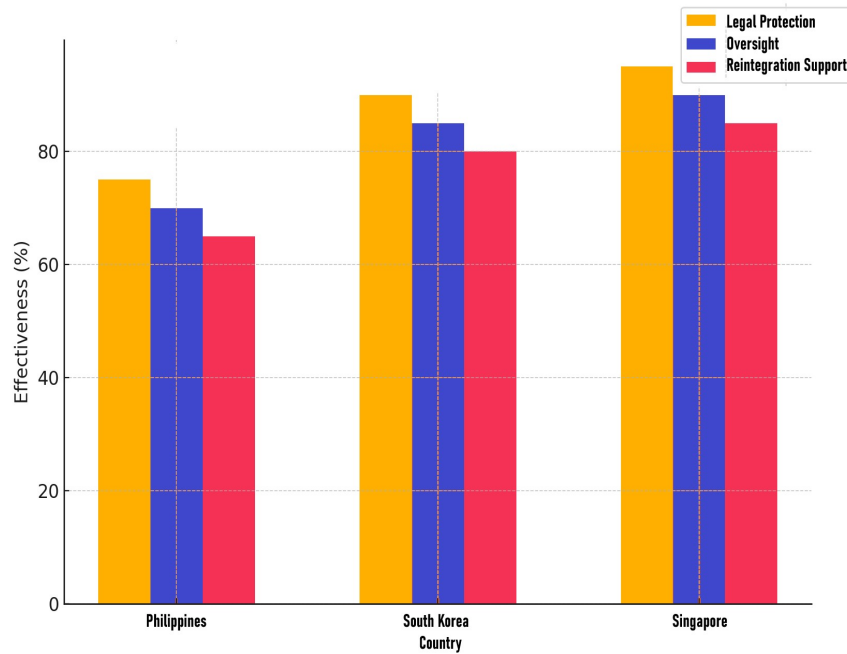


Figure 1. Comparison of Migrant Worker Protection Policies Across Countries

This study highlights the current state of Philippine migrant worker policies, focusing on the protection of their rights, reintegration mechanisms, and the socio-economic role of remittances. The findings provide important insights into the effectiveness of Philippine labor policies and areas for improvement, by answering the research question on the adequacy of the existing framework in protecting migrant workers and supporting their reintegration into society.

- First, the Philippines has established a clear policy framework, including standard employment contracts and pre-departure training programs, to protect migrant workers' rights. However, challenges such as limited monitoring in destination countries and limited resources in Philippine embassies and consulates hinder full implementation. This underscores the need for stronger international collaboration and better enforcement mechanisms to address these gaps.
- Second, reintegration programs in the Philippines, such as skills training and entrepreneurship initiatives, exist but remain underutilized due to accessibility issues and societal stigma. The study highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach that addresses both the economic and social aspects of reintegration, with an emphasis on follow-up support and measures to combat negative perceptions of repatriation.
- Third, remittances play an important role in improving the education and poverty levels of migrant worker families. However, the long-term impact on health and living standards is less pronounced, highlighting the economic vulnerability of families dependent on external income. These findings highlight the need for sustainable economic opportunities to reduce this dependence and increase family resilience.

These findings collectively highlight the complex challenges and successes associated with the protection, reintegration, and economic impact of Filipino migrant workers. They suggest that while significant gains have been made, there is still much room for improvement in terms of policy implementation and support structures available to migrant workers and their families.

5. Conclusion

The study highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach that addresses both the economic and social aspects of reintegration, with an emphasis on follow-up support and measures to combat negative perceptions of return. Third, remittances play a significant role in improving the education and poverty levels of migrant worker families. However, their long-term impact on health and living standards is less pronounced, exposing the economic vulnerability of families dependent on external

income. These findings highlight the need for sustainable economic opportunities to reduce this dependence and enhance family resilience.

The study provides valuable insights and also identifies several gaps that future research could address. First, understanding of the psychological impacts of migration and reintegration on workers and their families is limited. Future research could explore mental health support and community acceptance of returning migrant workers. Second, the effectiveness of international collaborations and bilateral agreements in strengthening the protection of Filipino migrant workers requires more in-depth investigation. Third, quantitative assessments of reintegration program outcomes, such as income growth or job stability, could provide stronger evidence to guide policymaking.

Comparative analysis with countries such as South Korea and Singapore suggests that the Philippines could benefit from adopting best practices in legal protection, monitoring systems, and reintegration support. These countries have achieved greater effectiveness through comprehensive frameworks and consistent implementation.

While the Philippines has made progress in protecting migrant workers and supporting their reintegration, significant challenges remain. Addressing these challenges requires a combination of better policy implementation, international cooperation, and innovative approaches to ensure that the rights and well-being of Filipino migrant workers are upheld throughout their migration journey and beyond.

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