

# YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND MIGRATION



International  
Labour  
Office

## COUNTRY BRIEF: PHILIPPINES



## Youth labour market overview

Youth aged 15-24 account for more than 17 million of the overall 92.3 million Filipino population<sup>i</sup>. With the 25-29 age group, the young generation in the Philippines comes up to 27.5 per cent of the total population. Almost one in three Filipino youth (29.4 per cent) comes from poor families.

As an increasing number of young people are entering the labour force, the demographic pressure exacerbates tensions on the labour market, impacting youth labour market outcomes. The 15-24 youth labour force participation stands at 46.5 per cent and is 20 points lower than the overall working age population. The youth unemployment rate is more than twice as high as for the population as a whole (Table 1).

**Table 1. Employment Indicators, 2011 (percentage)**

	Total	Youth (15-24)
Labour Force Participation Rate	64.6	46.7
Employment Rate	93.0	83.7
Unemployment Rate	7.0	16.3
Underemployment Rate	19.3	17.6

*Source: Bureau of Labour and Employment Statistics, 2012.*

Labour force participation rates of young workers have slightly picked up in the past two years, possibly as a result of nascent recovery from the economic crisis. This is accompanied by a slight decrease in youth unemployment. Unfortunately, much of the reason for this apparent improvement is the increasing engagement of young people in part-time work. The share of youth working part-time (less than 30 hours per week) increased to 33.2 per cent in 2012<sup>ii</sup>.



The situation is more critical for women. The labour force participation of young women (35.9 per cent) is lower than that of young men (57.1 per cent). Rates of employment and unemployment of young men and women differ by two to three points in favour of young men. Women also tend to be more involved in informal activities, including microenterprise development with unregistered or unregulated establishments.

In the beginning of 2013, the National Economic and Development Authority highlighted that if the Philippines want to address the lack of decent jobs for Filipinos, it must first address the mismatch between skills and demands on the labour market. Enrolment in secondary and tertiary education has displayed an upward trend since 2005. However, 10 per cent of elementary school children as well as 12 per cent of high school-aged youth are not attending school. Technical vocation education and training programmes help low-skilled young people acquire skills to improve their employment chances. But important skills mismatches have been identified between vocational schools programmes and labour market requirements. This is also true for tertiary education. The country shows for instance an important surplus of graduates in business, nursing and education but shortages in other fields<sup>iii</sup>.

An additional issue for young Filipino workers is the long and uncertain school-to-work transition period, especially difficult for the least qualified. It takes a college graduate one year and a high school drop-out 3 years to find a first job and up to two years to find a permanent job for the college graduate, as compared to 4 years for the high-school drop-out<sup>iv</sup>.

## Main features of youth migration

The Philippines has decades of history with international migration. The international stock of Filipino migrants represents 10.5 million people, among which 47 per cent are permanent migrants and 43 per cent are temporary migrants<sup>v</sup>.

Around one in five permanent international migrants belongs to the 15-24 age category. Permanent migration of young Filipinos mainly occurs in the context of family migration, either leaving or reuniting with parents. Permanent migrants also include those leaving for marriage purposes. Over the period 1989-2009, roughly 370,000 Filipinos migrated as partners of foreign nationals, with the great majority (91 per cent) being women and almost a third (29 per cent) being aged between 20 and 24<sup>vi</sup>.



As regards labour migration, the number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) has reached 2.2 million in 2012. Among them, 8.2 per cent are below 24 years of age and 24.1 per cent are between 25 and 29<sup>vii</sup>. This distribution can be partly explained by the minimum age requirement for overseas work – 18 years old for most occupations and 23 years old for domestic workers. Like for all OFWs, domestic work is the main occupation of young migrants abroad.

At the turn of the century, in relation to a growing international demand for domestic workers, the Philippines had become one of the few origin countries where women formed the majority of overseas workers (over two-thirds of the OFWs). The proportion of women in OFWs has fallen to nearly half in recent years (48.3 per cent in 2012), which could be partly attributed to a side-effect of Filipino policies fighting trafficking. Among young

Filipino migrants though, the gender distribution is more skewed in favour of women as 56.4 per cent of the 15-29 OFWs are women<sup>viii</sup>.

Favourite destinations for Filipino young migrant workers are countries within Asia and the Middle-East, just like for the overall migrant population. The top destination countries are: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Malaysia, followed by Europe, Singapore and North and South America. The value of social networks is highlighted in a youth migration study<sup>ix</sup> which shows that destination countries coincide with those chosen by prior migrant workers, especially as regards Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Focus group discussions with youth<sup>x</sup> bring forth economic purposes as the main reason behind the decision to go abroad and in particular a desire to help or improve family welfare. Professional growth, the desire to become more independent, and the opportunity to experience a new way of life also feature among the main motivations. Most potential young migrants intend to return to the Philippines.

Education does not play a prominent part in Filipino migration. UNESCO estimated at 8,443 the number of Filipino student migrants in 2008<sup>xi</sup>. Financial constraints are probably the main reason behind these modest numbers. Students from high income families and students from well-endowed universities are more likely to participate in student migration and academic exchange. According to the 2011 US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, the recent development of overseas internships and on-the-job training programmes in sectors such as hotel and restaurant management and business administration may be a form of trafficking or labour recruitment in disguise. The Commission on Higher Education of the Philippines has started to look into the issue of protection and promotion of student migrants.

In 2011, around 1 million Filipinos were in an irregular situation abroad - 10 per cent of the overseas Filipino population<sup>xii</sup>. The absence of

gender- and age-disaggregated data does not allow an estimation of the proportion of youth among irregular migrants. But trafficking is the major challenge as regards illegal Filipino migration, and most of the time those subject to trafficking are women, particularly young women and children, who generally come from large families with low incomes. Trafficking goes now beyond the commercial sex industry and covers forced labour as well as debt bondage, which can also affect legal migrants, including skilled migrants.

Irregular and legal migration can thus share common points as regards the working and living conditions of migrants. As reported by the Philippine Foreign Service and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, the main problems encountered by young OFWs across all regions include mistreatment, wage arrears, abuse, long working hours and lack of days off, as well as underage domestic workers in the Middle East.

## **Programmes, policies and institutional framework**

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International migration was initially considered by the Philippines government as a means of increasing labour market opportunities for Filipino workers. The first overseas employment programme was launched by the government in the 1970s and was envisioned as a temporary measure to face the rising unemployment rates following the first oil crisis. However, this programme became permanent because of the sustained labour demand from the Gulf countries, the opening of new labour markets in other regions, the tensions on the domestic labour market and the benefit of remittances for the development of the country (remittances in 2012 amounted to 21,4 billion USD).

As migration has now become a livelihood strategy for households and individuals, and under the pressure of civil society organizations, governmental focus, while style encouraging employment abroad, has shifted towards the protection of Filipino workers and their families abroad.

In the past few decades, a comprehensive institutional and legal framework has been put in place, governing all stages of migration

from pre-departure to return and reintegration. The *Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995* aims at promoting the protection and welfare of OFWs. It has been amended several times and most recently in 2010 in order to introduce measures such as forbidding to send workers to countries that have not been certified as safe destinations, and requiring recruitment agencies to purchase insurance coverage for their enlisted workers. Other important migration-related pieces of legislation, such as the *Anti-Trafficking Act of 2003* and the earlier *Anti-Mail Order Bride Act (1990)* reinforce efforts towards the protection of Filipino migrants.

However, the enforcement of this legislative framework has met various obstacles, including the lack of adequate resources, monitoring problems, and the sheer number of migrant workers. The dual mandate of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, which involves increasing deployment of Filipino workers while enhancing their protection, is not always easy to sustain and economic pressure often tilts the balance in favour of deployment.



Gender-sensitive considerations are included within the *Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act*, and legislation such as the *Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act* contains specific components focusing on women. The Philippines was also the second country to ratify the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) – a convention setting the

framework for decent work for migrant domestic workers – thus providing an example for neighbouring countries.

Youth concerns have not been mainstreamed to the same degree as gender issues and there is no specific youth perspective in the many programmes, services and initiatives promoting the protection and well-being of OFWs. Minimum age requirements have nonetheless been established: all OFWs must be above 18 years old, and at least 23 years of age to be eligible for domestic work. OFWs below the minimum age have to be repatriated without delay, and the responsible recruitment agencies are exposed to stiff penalties for the deployment of underage migrant workers.

### *Box 1. Alternatives to Migration: Decent Jobs for Filipino Youth*

The Joint Programme *Alternatives to Migration: Decent Jobs for Filipino Youth (2009-2012)* was launched and implemented by the IOM, UNICEF, ILO, and UNFPA, under the auspices of the Spanish government-funded Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F).

The programme targeted disadvantaged youth in four provinces of the Philippines stricken by a combination of poverty, high migration rates, and high incidence of out-of-school youth. It supported the Filipino government in developing a productive and competitive young labour force through the creation of opportunities for education, employment, and sustainable livelihood.

The Programme's achievements include improved policy coherence through the involvement of all stakeholders on youth, employment and migration, and increased access to career guidance on safe migration, vocational training and entrepreneurship.

<sup>i</sup> National Statistics office. *2010 Census of Population and Housing*.

<sup>ii</sup> ILO, 2013. *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013*.

<sup>iii</sup> ILO. *Country Report on Youth and Migration – The Philippines*. (forthcoming).

<sup>iv</sup> Asian Development Bank.

<sup>v</sup> National Statistics Office, 2011 and 2012 Survey on Overseas Filipinos.

<sup>vi</sup> National Statistics Office.

<sup>vii</sup> Based on National Statistics Office, 2011 and 2012 Survey on Overseas Filipinos.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> ILO. *Country Report on Youth and Migration – The Philippines*. (forthcoming).

<sup>x</sup> The MDG-F Joint Programme (see box 1) undertook seven focus group discussions with 64 young Filipinos aged 15-24, in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao.

<sup>xi</sup> UNESCO, 2010. *Global Education Digest 2010: Comparing Education Statistics Across the World*.

<sup>xii</sup> National Statistics Office, 2011 and 2012 Survey on Overseas Filipinos.



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