



Emotions and Economics

An Analysis of Philippine Media Coverage
of the Filipino Migration Experience

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This publication was made possible through support provided by the Nippon Foundation through the Sasakawa Endowment Fund. The opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Global Migration Media Academy–IOM.

Publisher: International Organization for Migration
17 route des Morillons
P.O. Box 17
1211 Geneva 19
Switzerland
Tel.: +41 22 717 9111
Fax: +41 22 798 6150
Email: hq@iom.int
Website: www.iom.int

Cover photo: Filipino returnees from the Syrian Arab Republic are welcomed back by government officials upon their return to Manila following a request from the Government of the Philippines to assist with the evacuation of these migrants. © IOM 2012/Ray LEYESA

Required citation: International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2023. *Emotions and Economics: An Analysis of Philippine Media Coverage of the Filipino Migration Experience*. IOM, Geneva.

ISBN 978-92-9268-604-8 (PDF)

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Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the rigorous efforts of author and journalist, Ana P. Santos, and her team of researchers, who skilfully put together an analysis of the Philippine media coverage of the Filipino migrant worker experience. A recipient of a Persephone Miel Fellowship from the Pulitzer Center in 2014, Ana has had her reportage on the intersections of gender, sexuality and labour migration rights published in *The Washington Post*, *The Foreign Policy*, *The Atlantic*, and Nobel Prize-winning newsroom, *Rappler*.

Thanks also go to Mercy Fulani, for crafting the illustrations that accompany the infographics in this report, as well as colleagues at the IOM Publications Unit, for providing support with language editing and layout.



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Definition of terms

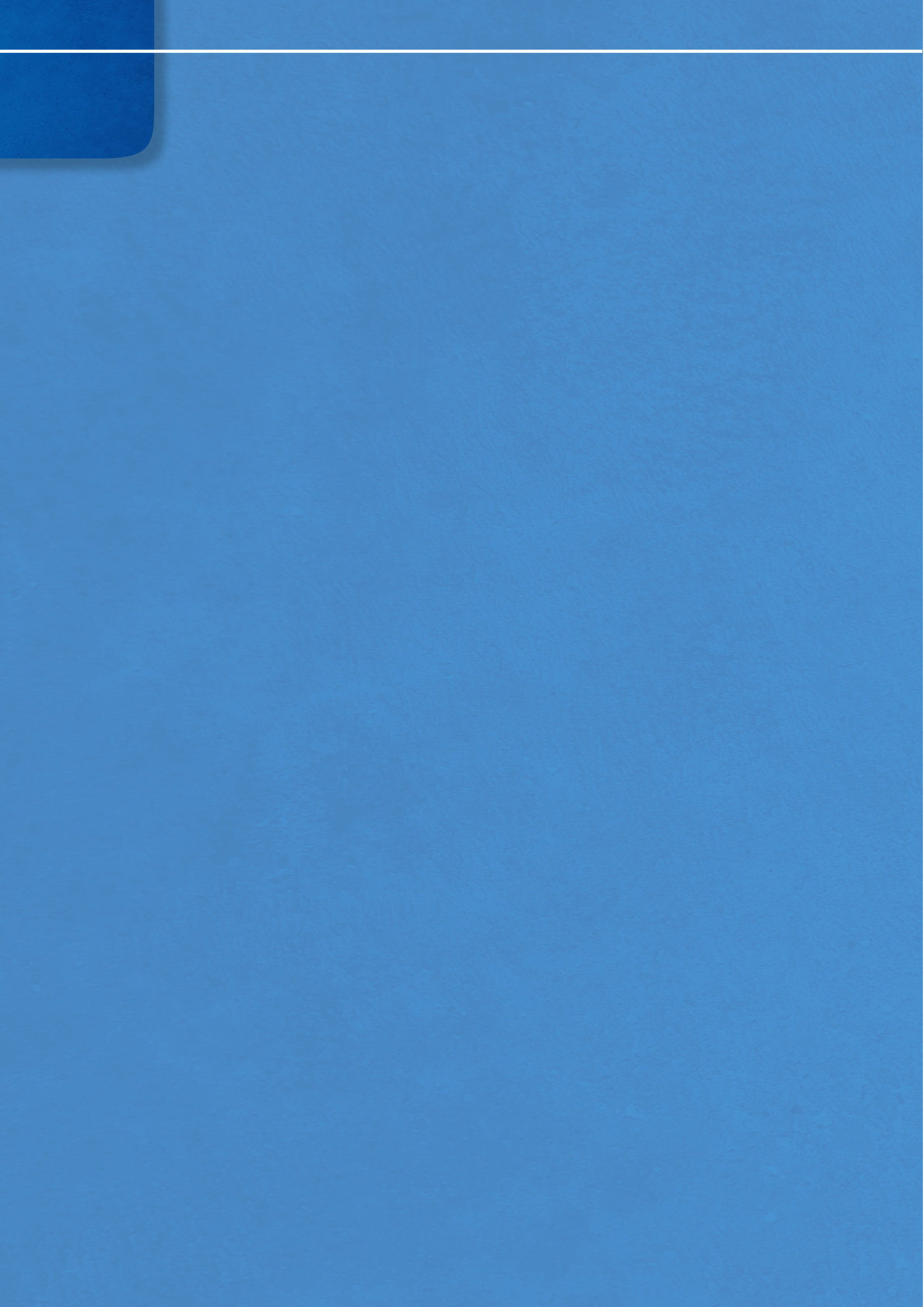
debt bondage	The status or condition arising from a pledge by a debtor of his [or her] personal services or those of a person under his [or her] control as security for a debt, if the value of those services as reasonably assessed is not applied toward the liquidation of the debt or the length and nature of those services are not respectively limited and defined. (IOM, 2018:43)
diaspora	Migrants or descendants of migrants whose identity and sense of belonging, either real or symbolic, have been shaped by their migration experience and background. They maintain links with their homeland, and to each other, based on a shared sense of history, identity, or mutual experiences in the destination country. (Ibid.:49)
exploitation	The act of taking advantage of something or someone, in particular the act of taking unjust advantage of another for one's own benefit. (Ibid.:68)
forced/compulsory	All work or service which is exacted from any person under the labour menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself/herself voluntarily. (Ibid.:75)
immigrant	From the perspective of the country of arrival, a person who moves into a country other than that of his or her nationality or usual residence, so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence. (Ibid.:103)
labour migration	Movement of persons from one State to another, or within their own country of residence, for the purpose of employment. (Ibid.:123)



migrant	An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common, lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for any of a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; and those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students. (Ibid.:132)
overseas Filipino worker (OFW)	A Filipino household member who is currently out of the country due to overseas employment. (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015)
migrant worker	A person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national. (Ibid.:136)
remittances (migrant)	Personal monetary transfers, cross-border or within the same country, made by migrants to individuals or communities with whom the migrant has links. (Ibid.:180)
repatriation	The personal right of a prisoner of war, civil detainee, refugee, or of a civilian to return to his or her country of nationality under specific conditions laid down in various international instruments. (Ibid.:182)
returning overseas Filipino	Filipino citizen returning to the Philippines from another country. This category includes OFWs, Filipino tourists and students, among others. (IOM, 2021:6)

Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CFO	Commission on Filipinos Overseas
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs (of the Philippines)
DOLE	Department of Labor and Employment (of the Philippines)
GDP	gross domestic product
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MAM Awards	Migration Advocacy and Media Awards
NGO	non-governmental organization
OFW	overseas Filipino worker
OWWA	Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration
POEA	Philippine Overseas Employment Agency
PSA	Philippine Statistics Authority
TESDA	Technical Education and Skills Development Authority



Executive summary



Overview

This research study examines current migration reportage and representation of Filipino migrant workers (or “overseas Filipino workers (OFWs)”) in Philippine media. It identifies and investigates dominant themes in the reportage of – and that were seen as significant to – OFW issues by major Philippine news organizations across three analysis periods.

Period 1: January 2007 to December 2009 (Arroyo administration)

The administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo set a target to “aggressively” deploy 1 million Filipino workers every year as part of the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (2004–2010) (Asis, 2017). This deployment target was outlined in Administrative Order 247 of 4 December 2008.

The analysis period is extended from an original six months to three years due to the considerably smaller amount of news content published online during this period. Thus, the analysis covers the period starting from January 2007, continuing until when the administrative order was released, and examines its coverage in the news until one year after.

Period 2: February to July 2018 (Joanna Demafelis case)

On 8 February 2018, the body of Filipino domestic worker, Joanna Demafelis, was found in a freezer in her employers’ apartment in Kuwait more than a year after she was reported to have gone missing. In response, President Rodrigo Duterte issued a total deployment ban of OFWs to Kuwait.

Period 3: March to August 2020 (outbreak of COVID-19)

The COVID-19 pandemic saw the largest repatriation of Filipino migrant workers to the Philippines in recent times.

The period from January 2007 to December 2020 is analysed as a baseline for examining the nature of the everyday coverage of and reporting on migrant workers’ issues across changes in administrations.

The key questions that outline the analytical framework for the dominant press narratives and themes are:

- (a) What is the range of media narratives and the dominant themes that characterize Philippine press coverage of Filipino migrant workers’ issues? (Filipino migrant workers are more commonly referred to as “overseas Filipino workers” (OFWs).)

- (b) Whose voices are included in the coverage?
- (c) How do these dominant narratives frame the representation of the OFW in the national psyche?
- (d) What are the gaps in the reportage vis-à-vis actual key migration issues in the Philippines? What are the opportunities for bridging the gap between reportage and public policy?

Methodology

This study utilizes available online resources from which to collect and collate examples of Philippine press coverage of labour migration. General keywords and hashtags (e.g. “OFW”), in combination with more specific ones for specific issues (e.g. “Joanna Demafelis” or, simply, “Demafelis”), are used as search terms to extract articles on Filipino labour migration from the two major broadcast networks in the Philippines, ABS-CBN and GMA, as well as online news outlets.

Due to COVID-19-related restrictions, print and broadcast archives could not be accessed and, as such, data collection and extraction for this study is limited to online sources. Given this, one limitation of this study is that it cannot capture stories that media companies were unable to migrate during the gradual shift from print to online publishing and, in the case of TV and radio broadcasts, cross-post to online platforms like YouTube.

Table 1. Media outlets across platform types¹

Platform type	Media outlets
Broadcast (TV and radio)	ABS-CBN GMA
Online news articles (excluding those on social media (see below))	<i>Rappler</i> CNN Philippines <i>PhilStar.com</i> (online version of <i>The Philippine Star</i>) <i>INQUIRER.Net</i> (online version of <i>Philippine Daily Inquirer</i> (also, “ <i>Inquirer</i> ” or “ <i>PDI</i> ”)) ABS-CBN GMA
Social media	Facebook Twitter

All news articles and TV and radio segments that emerge after a search using combinations of specific and general keywords for each media outlet are counted. The top stories are analysed for their dominant themes.

Key themes in online news articles are identified based on the most frequently used words, determined using an online word-counting tool from DataBasic.² As transcripts of news segments from TV and radio broadcasts are unavailable, social listening is utilized: TV and radio news content is streamed and listened to closely for frequently mentioned words to establish prominent themes. In addition, news tickers (i.e. text-based onscreen displays) are monitored for the most frequently appearing words, and the headlines of TV news segments are also reviewed.

Online data search and collection using keywords is conducted using an incognito browser, which disables search engine algorithms from ranking results according to the browsing

¹ Prior to the Government’s shutdown of its broadcast operations in 2020, ABS-CBN was the largest TV network in the Philippines, with 22 radio stations, including anchor radio stations in “Mega Manila” – DZMM and DWRR in the AM and FM bands, respectively. (Mega Manila consists of Metropolitan Manila (i.e. the National Capital Region), plus the adjacent Regions 3 and 4.)

GMA Network, Inc. (“GMA”), which runs *GMA News*, is a media conglomerate that started out as Republic Broadcasting System (RBS) in 1950. GMA became the first TV network to report the news fully in the Filipino language with its late-night newscast, “GMA Network News”, in 1998.

Rappler (a portmanteau of the words “rap” and “ripple”) is a Filipino-owned news website founded by 2021 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa, along with a group of fellow Filipino journalists, and technopreneurs.

CNN Philippines is a predominantly English-language channel on free-to-air TV, with broadcasts also available on cable and pay TV.

The Philippine Star (“PhilStar”), a leading daily broadsheet, first published on 28 July 1986. It is one of several Philippine newspapers founded after the 1986 “People Power” Revolution.

Philippine Daily Inquirer, also known as “*Inquirer*” and “*PDI*”, is an English-language daily broadsheet founded on 9 December 1985, in the last days of the rule of Philippine dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, becoming one of the first private newspapers to be established during the regime.

² The word-counting tool, used in the study, is available at <https://databasic.io/en/wordcounter/#paste>.

and search history. As a measure of public discourse – and owing to the Philippines’ high levels of social media use and engagement – Facebook posts and Tweets with substantial numbers of shares (or “Retweets”, in the case of the latter) are also analysed whenever available.

Interviews with key journalists are conducted to understand how their personal experiences in the field and newsroom constraints have shaped their reporting on OFW issues. Additionally, key informant interviews with government officials directly involved in labour migration, labour rights groups and NGOs, think tanks and OFWs are conducted to gather their insights on and observations of Philippine press coverage of labour migration.

Analysis

An analysis of the baseline period and the three news periods defined for this study reveals that media coverage of OFW stories is dominated by themes of “emotions” and “economics” – that is, these themes drive most of these stories. Breaking news featuring pronouncements of deployment bans or extreme cases of abuse and exploitation, such as rape and even death, are emotionally charged. Coverage outside of these situations focuses mainly on OFW remittances and how these contribute to the economy. This section analyses the factors that drive this kind of coverage and its implications on the representation of the OFW in the national psyche.

The language of emotions and economics and the framing of the Filipino migrant worker as “modern-day hero”

What constitutes an “OFW story” is typically framed around this language of emotions and economics. OFW news is dominated by, as mentioned, pronouncements of deployment bans and reports of OFWs being abused, killed or sentenced to death in their host countries. Such stories ignite a myriad of public emotions that range from panic and indignation in the case of deployment bans, and outrage, sorrow and pity in cases of harm and misfortune – even death – befalling migrant workers. The swell of public outcry compels the Government to make pronouncements about solutions to urgently address the problem at hand, but rarely does it result in a deeper investigation of the geopolitical landscape of labour migration and the interlinking factors that put OFWs at risk of exploitation.

On the converse side as emotionally charged coverage are reports on OFW remittance receipts and their significance to keeping the Philippine economy afloat. Notwithstanding the worldwide financial nosedive brought about by COVID-19, OFW remittances, which steadily flow in from more than 100 countries, keep the Philippines relatively insulated from “economic shocks”.

In summary, the themes of emotions and economics frame the OFW as a “modern-day hero” (Filipino: *bagong bayani*) – someone who endures much suffering to be an economic saviour to both family and country.

Sporadic and sensationalized nature of OFW news coverage

The reportage of OFW issues is similar to news coverage of crisis situations: Up-to-date reporting on developments as they unfold keep people informed and aware. The coverage of the murder of Filipino domestic worker, Joanna Demafelis,³ for instance, is dominated by blow-by-blow accounts of efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice. On the other hand, the coverage of COVID-19-related OFW issues is dominated by essential information about quarantine protocols for returning OFWs and the locations of quarantine hotels and testing sites.

The sporadic and sensationalized coverage of OFW issues frames labour migration as a crisis that only necessitates coverage in extreme situations of disruption of deployment and indignation over abuses against Filipino migrant workers. This kind of reporting is necessary, but limiting coverage to this results in missed opportunities for more in-depth follow-up stories that probe the structural issues of inequality that make labour migration such a compelling option for many Filipinos despite its myriad risks and uncertainties. Nor does it examine the complex systemic issues that plague labour migration, such as forced labour and debt bondage. Furthermore, this kind of spot-reporting and coverage leaves out the hard questions, such as why worker abuse and maltreatment – even death – remain rampant despite the extensive domestic and international legal frameworks to protect the rights and welfare of OFWs.

Lack of in-depth analysis of deeper issues

The OFW experience is shaped by an assemblage of factors, including actual global migrant labour conditions, the politics of country image and diplomatic relations between sending and receiving countries. These factors are moving parts of a whole – constantly changing and competing, with each point of their convergence defining workers’ lives.

The general organizational structure of newsrooms and the availability of data sources and resource persons who could be interviewed do not always support the wide aperture of research, examination and analysis needed to understand and report on the complex nuances of the OFW experience. Staff and freelance journalists interviewed for this study report that there is no dedicated OFW or labour migration news beat in most leading news outfits. Coverage of OFW news is generally subsumed under the labour or business desk because most of the coverage is concerned with the tracking of remittances. One

3 Joanna Demafelis was a 29-year-old Filipina migrant worker whose body was found inside a freezer in Al Shaab District, Kuwait in February 2018, a year after she had gone missing.

reason is that as advertising revenue shrinks, so does newsroom personnel, with staff journalists being assigned to cover multiple issues. The journalists interviewed for this study have all covered labour migration in addition to other news – that is, none of them have covered only labour migration.

During interviews, which took place on Zoom or via email or phone from April to June 2021, journalists cite the difficulty of securing consistent and reliable OFW statistics from government sources. To be specific, the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) uses deployment as a metric for counting OFWs. The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) uses the number of Filipino workers in a host country. At best, there is only an estimate of the number of undocumented workers. Quite simply, the numbers do not add up, making it difficult for journalists to understand how to interpret the statistics and possibly derive or understand trends based on the numbers.

Journalists also cite the difficulty of accessing OFWs who could be interviewed as a limitation to producing in-depth reports on labour migration that reflect the complicated nuances of Filipino migrant workers' lived experiences. Other journalists point out how the 2012 Data Privacy Act,⁴ which protects all forms of information, makes it difficult to establish direct contact with OFWs and/or their family members to arrange interviews.

Going beyond the “typical” OFW story

The Philippines' position as a global source of migrant labour is mirrored in both its government policies and media reportage of OFW issues. Labour migration and the deployment of migrant workers around the world is symbolic of the Philippines' participation in the global economy and, as many of those interviewed for this study point out, the commodification of Filipino workers.

While OFWs take on occupations that run the entire spectrum of job categories, prevailing media coverage of labour migration issues reinforces the image of migrant workers as destitute, helpless victims who lack agency and are unable to shape or somehow transform their oppressive conditions.

The result is a contradictory imagining of the OFW as a source of both national pride and national shame. Thus, the dichotomy of the valorization of the OFW as either a “modern-day hero” or a victim is one that leads to their “othering” by Filipinos. Labour migration is close to the heart and mind of every Filipino, but it does not resonate because of the resistance to be associated with dominant OFW narratives of poverty and victimization.

4 Republic Act 10173 (“Data Privacy Act of 2012”) of the Philippines regulates the way individuals' personal information is accessed and released.

Economists note that the global shake-up wrought by COVID-19 will slow recovery for sectors that employ a large number of migrant workers, such as manufacturing and hospitality. The future of work and labour migration has been recast and reset. Activists, migration scholars and journalists agree that this presents an opportunity to shift news coverage of migrant workers' issues from being sporadic and breaking to providing in-depth analysis that can help inform long-term solutions.

The mass displacement brought about by COVID-19 has obliterated many alternative livelihoods and the usual thinking on labour policies. Media reportage of labour migration and the realities of being an OFW should help answer the question, *Where do we go from here?*

Recommendations

The Narrative Analysis chapter of this study outlines the dominant themes that characterize the representation and reportage of Philippine media of OFW issues. The recommendations presented below outline opportunities and strategies for developing more in-depth and nuanced reporting on Filipino migrant workers' issues.

Provide journalism training that will enhance contextual reporting on labour migration

Best practices in labour migration reporting include framing the lived experiences of migrants in the context of policies that impact them. It also requires an understanding of the diplomatic relations that underwrite laws of both countries of origin and countries of destination of labour migrants; careful and accurate use of terminology; and sensitive use of images. Current gaps in news production on the subject of labour migration point to the need for additional training of journalists, which can take various forms. One initiative is the wide dissemination of media toolkits, such as *Reporting on Forced Labour and Fair Recruitment Migration* (produced by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020)), to media practitioners to enhance their own understanding of ethical and fair reporting on labour migration.

The dynamics of labour migration in countries of origin, such as the Philippines, requires a contextualized, country-specific understanding of regional and international migration. *Country Migration Report: The Philippines 2013* (IOM and Scalabrini Migration Center, 2013) can be updated and summarized into a media packet to provide the historical and contextual background needed to add depth and nuance to labour migration reporting.

Labour migration affects not only migrants but also their families. Partnerships with organizations that provide training for journalists can open up new perspectives on specific issues that affect migrant families and provide a new lens to examine labour migration. For example, the [Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma](#)⁵ of the Columbia Journalism School offered a workshop in 2019 that brought journalists together with scientists, policymakers and experts in early childhood development to examine how children are affected by displacement and family separation.

Another example was the Thomson Reuters Foundation's training course, "Reporting on Human Trafficking and Modern-Day Slavery in Nigeria", aimed at West African journalists who wished to deepen their practical skills and knowledge to improve on how they worked on their story ideas. The training was conducted by experienced Thomson Reuters Foundation journalists and subject matter experts.

Establish journalism grants to fund labour migration reporting

As media organizations continue to buckle under the multiple pressures of shorter news cycles and plummeting revenues, financing the reportage of time- and travel-intensive stories like labour migration will become too costly. Journalism grants can fund in-depth reporting on the underreported aspects of labour migration and encourage newsrooms to explore new reporting angles.

As journalists shared in this study, the provision of grants gives media practitioners the opportunity to immerse themselves in issues, familiarize themselves with the interplay of the laws of labour-sending and -receiving countries, and interact with migrants in their working environment to witness first-hand the factors that contribute to their vulnerability.

Partnerships with news organizations like Reporting ASEAN and the Pulitzer Center can be established to set up journalism grants that specifically focus on labour migration and give staff reporters and media outlets the resources to produce stories for publication in any of various media platforms, whether print or online, and taking the form of broadcasts, books, documentaries or podcasts.

In addition, partnerships with organizations like the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) can lead to the establishment of reporting grants that will fund stories that examine the gender-specific dimensions of labour migration and associated vulnerabilities.

5 The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma provides journalists with tools, skills and knowledge to carry out informed, innovative and ethical news reporting on violence, conflict and tragedy.

Train journalists on alternative approaches such as solutions journalism

Underexplored story angles that could diversify the coverage of migration issues beyond the usual stories about the economics of remittances and emotions of outrage or pity include migrant health, the contributions of Filipino communities abroad to their host countries and Filipino diaspora philanthropy – that is, the private donations of the Filipino diaspora community to various causes in the Philippines.

Such stories are a departure from traditional journalism, which prioritizes extreme or crisis situation stories. These issues can be analysed and written using the framework of what is known as “solutions journalism”, which highlights evidence-based stories of how people respond to problems. This approach is based on research that such solutions stories can shift the tone of public discourse from divisive to constructive and help lead to meaningful change.

Capacitate migrant workers to report their own stories

Community newspapers are the “eyes and ears” of local communities, bringing to light issues that may fall under the radar of bigger newspapers with a wider reporting scope. When migrant workers are trained to write and report on community issues, they bring in the perspectives and needs of migrant communities.

The SUN Hong Kong is a community newspaper that focuses on OFW issues, with stories written by OFWs who have been trained in the principles of journalism, the rigors of reporting and the technical aspects of writing. Community papers that have migrant workers themselves as staff members can serve as media outlets that amplify migrants’ voices and echo their collective aspirations and struggles.

Institutionalize awards that recognize best practices in telling migration stories across different platforms

Stories that shape perceptions of certain groups are not limited to journalistic reports. Movies, books and comics are all part of the realm of representations that inform the understanding of migration as a lived experience. Awards for ethical and compelling migration stories can encourage various content creators to explore and develop alternative forms of storytelling on migrant workers’ issues.

The Migration Advocacy and Media Awards, conferred by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), recognizes reportage that raises awareness of labour migration issues, advocates for the rights and welfare of Filipino workers and their families, and promotes a positive image of Filipinos overseas.

In an email interview on June 2021, the CFO said that more diverse migrants' issues have been tackled by the media since the conferment of the first MAM Awards: "There are now more investigative documentaries, features, movies, blogs featuring migration issues. There are also now more different platforms being used by media and its advocates – from traditional ways of reporting and broadcasting, to publishing on online platforms and social media."



A Culture of Migration

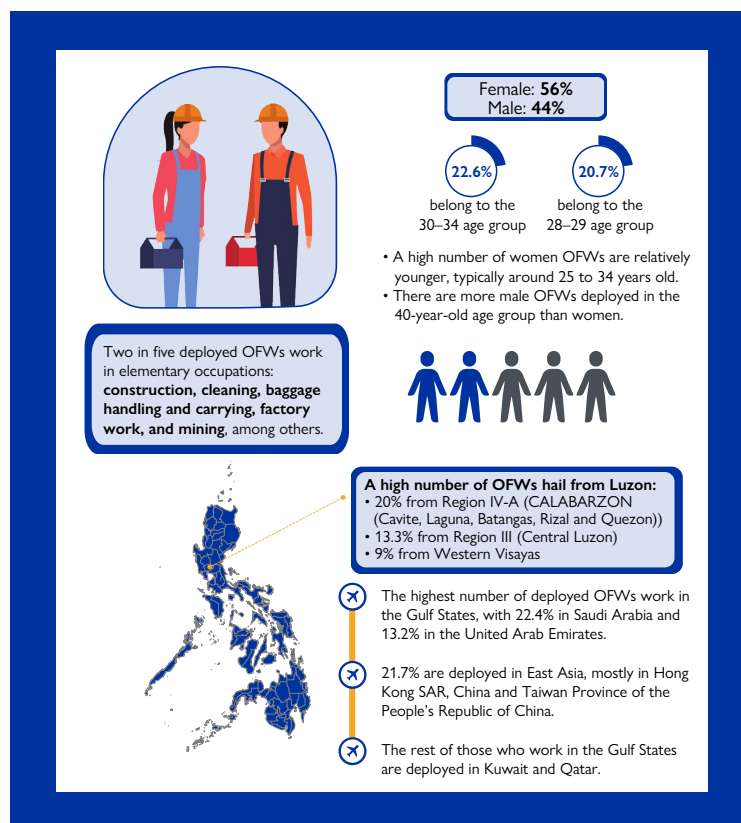


“Abroad” is both a destination and an aspiration

For many Filipinos, “abroad” is more than just a destination. It has been, for generations of Filipino families, an aspiration. This aspiration is defined by Carling and Schewel (2018) as “a conviction that migration is preferable to non-migration”, which varies in degree and balances personal choice and circumstantial coercion. This is to say that the imagined aspirations of migration or going abroad presents an internal conflict for Filipinos. On one hand, the deeply rooted desire to “go abroad” to work is seen as a ticket to a better life. On the other, it means long periods of separation from their loved ones, whom they dream of giving a better life to.

Roughly 12 per cent of Filipino households have a member who is a migrant worker, most commonly referred to as an “overseas Filipino worker” (OFW). Recent government statistics estimate that 2.2 million Filipinos were working abroad during the period April to September 2019. Majority were employed in low-wage, elementary occupations. One out of five Filipino (22%) are working in Saudi Arabia (Figure 1) (Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), 2020a). (See also Figure 2 and Table 2 for annual OFW deployment data.)

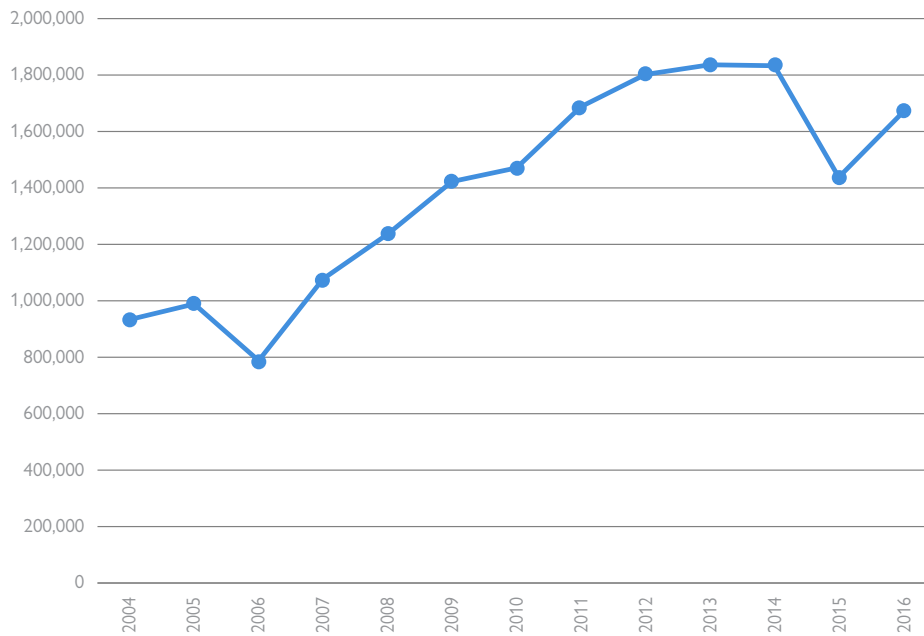
Figure 1. Snapshot of OFW statistics



Source: Data from PSA, 2020a.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

Figure 2. Deployment of overseas Filipino workers, 2004–2016



Source: Data from POEA, 2022.

Table 2. Deployment of overseas Filipino workers, 2004–2016

Year	Number of deployed overseas Filipinos workers
2004	933 588
2005	988 615
2006	788 070
2007	1 077 623
2008	1 236 013
2009	1 422 586
2010	1 470 826
2011	1 687 831
2012	1 802 031
2013	1 836 345
2014	1 833 000
2015	1 437 875
2016	1 669 511

Source: POEA, 2022.

“Filipino workers fill a wide range of jobs as entertainers, seafarers and those in the performing arts. I think it is only the Philippines that has covered the whole range of jobs, not just in skill, but also in geographic extent,” says Hans Leo Cacdac, head of the Overseas Workers’ Welfare Administration (OWWA), the Government’s lead agency in protecting the rights and welfare of Filipino migrant workers in a June 2021 Zoom interview.

Labour migration is at the heart and mind of every Filipino and is widely reflected in popular culture. Films about the delicate dynamics that OFW families navigate have recorded hundreds of millions of pesos in box office gross earnings, while countless songs and TV programmes are based on migrant workers oceans away from their loved ones.

“Everyone can automatically relate to an OFW story. Every Filipino has a relative who has left to work abroad – a grandfather, a niece, an auntie. That’s how rampant labour migration is”, says a segment producer for the popular, long-running Philippine TV documentary show, *Kapuso Mo, Jessica Soho* (roughly, “Of one heart with you, Jessica Soho”), during a phone interview in May 2021.

In the country’s international airports, designated OFW-processing lanes are open daily to facilitate and regulate the departure of the nearly 5,000 Filipinos leaving the country to work abroad (PSA, 2020b; Pazzibugan and Aning, 2020).

Filipino women are a formidable link in the global care chain of migration, in which women from developing countries provide much needed intimate labour, caring for the very young and the very old populations of developed nations (Pazzibugan and Aning, 2020). Government figures indicate that about half of the 4,000 Filipinos who leave the country every day to work primarily within Asia and the Middle East⁶ are women (PSA, 2020a; Lam and Yeoh, 2019). By these estimates, Filipino women migrants make a sizable contribution to the remittances pumped into the economy annually.

“Modern-day heroes”: the burden of valorization

For their sacrifice of working in faraway lands and enduring long periods of separation from their families, Filipino migrant workers have been anointed as *bagong bayani* or “modern-day heroes”. The theme of the OFW as modern-day hero is ubiquitous rhetoric that is embedded in government documents, programmes and pronouncements. Annually, the Government issues a Bagong Bayani Award to honor the country’s outstanding OFWs.

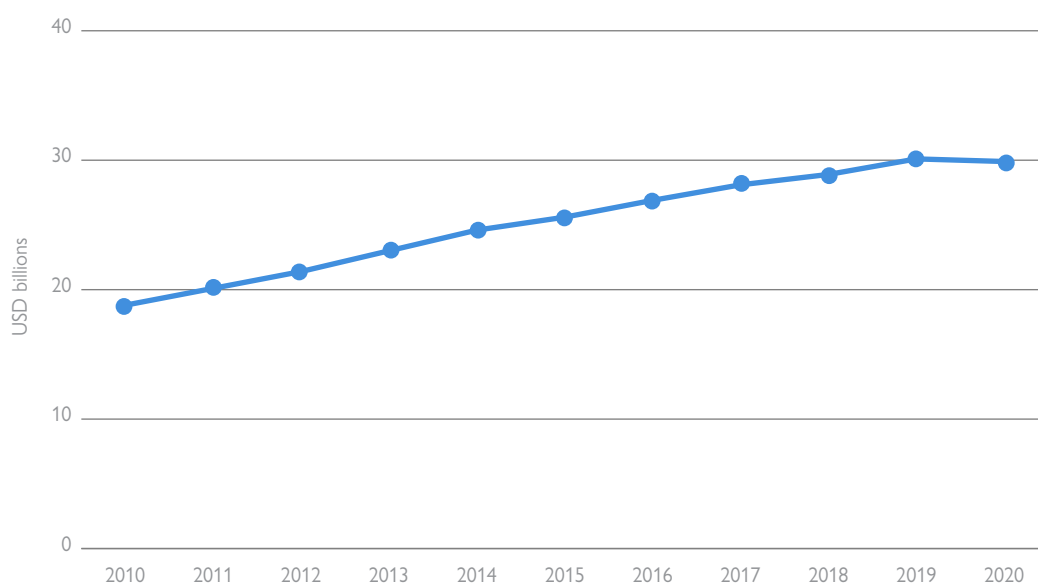
6 As the Middle East includes countries in both Africa and Asia, it is categorized as a separate destination region. In this report, “Asia” refers to the non-Middle Eastern part of the continent.

In dominant discourse, the valorization of OFWs as heroes underlies the Philippines' culture of migration, which began to take root when the Marcos administration first introduced its labour migration policy in the 1974 Labour Code as a short-term measure to plug gaps in the domestic job market. The State deployed Filipino workers to provide the “brawn and sweat” equity badly needed in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member States and marketed Middle Eastern countries as job destinations.

Poor labour conditions, worker exploitation and other forms of abuse by employers emerged as complications of cross-border employment, compelling the Government of the Philippines to implement regulation mechanisms to protect the welfare of Filipino labour migrants and institutionalize labour migration.

The Government's policy on labour migration is one of oversight, facilitation and protection. The deployment of Filipino migrant workers is a strategy to ease the pressures of domestic unemployment. Migrant workers' remittances totalled USD 29.9 billion in 2020, comprising about 12 per cent of the country's GDP for that year (Figure 3) (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), 2021). The Philippines is consistently ranked among the five countries (World Bank, 2018) that receive the largest volumes of remittances. Furthermore, myriad local policies and international treaties regulate and ensure the safety of Filipino migrant workers throughout an end-to-end migrant worker process, starting from recruitment to arrival and settling in their destination countries.

Figure 3. Remittances from Filipino overseas workers, 2010–2020



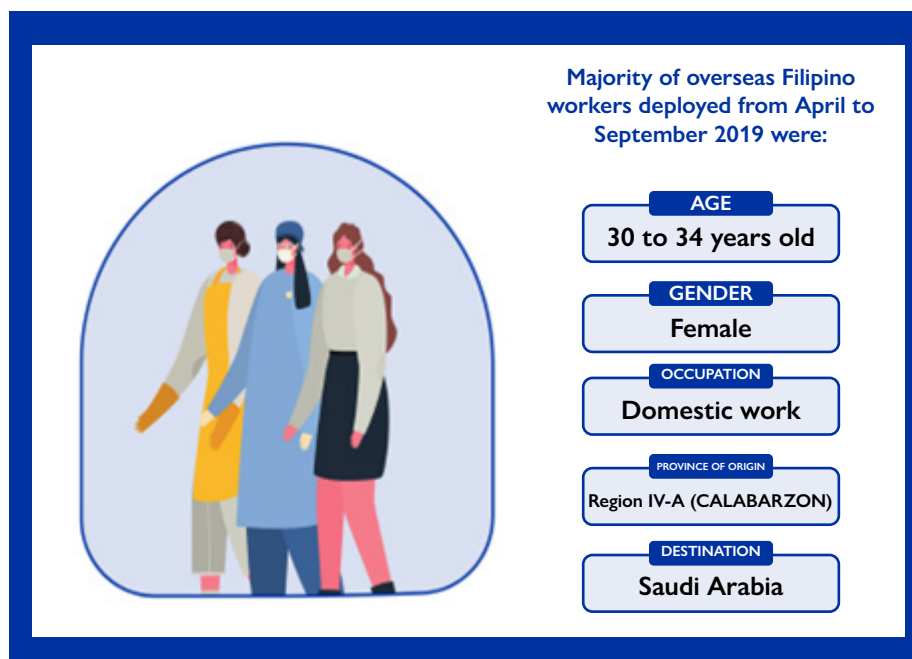
Source: Data from Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), 2020.

The protection of migrant workers is the cornerstone of Philippine labour migration laws and is incorporated in national development plans that have transcended various government administrations. “The welfare of our OFWs, we pioneer that. We are one of the countries that insist on frameworks and bilateral agreements that will define and protect the rights of our OFWs. Even if they are not legally binding, it is morally binding,” said Bernard Olalia, administrator of POEA, which regulates the recruitment and job placements of OFWs, in a June 2021 interview via Zoom.

However, some migrant jobs – such as domestic work – are riskier and more prone to abuse and exploitation than others. About 30 per cent of all OFWs are employed as domestic workers in the Middle East and Asia (Figure 4). The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2006a) reported that domestic workers in South-East Asia were suffering a range of abuses such as sexual assault, food deprivation and non-payment of wages. In 2020, the Philippines logged 4,302 cases of OFW maltreatment and 21,127 cases of contract violation in the Middle East alone, according to a report (Senate of the Philippines, 2021) by the Philippine Overseas Labour Offices (POLO) presented at a Senate Labour Committee hearing.

Despite the passage of laws and bilateral agreements meant to protect OFWs, these realities point out how labour migration is a delicate balance of maintaining diplomatic relations and safeguarding individual lives.

Figure 4. Snapshot of the OFW

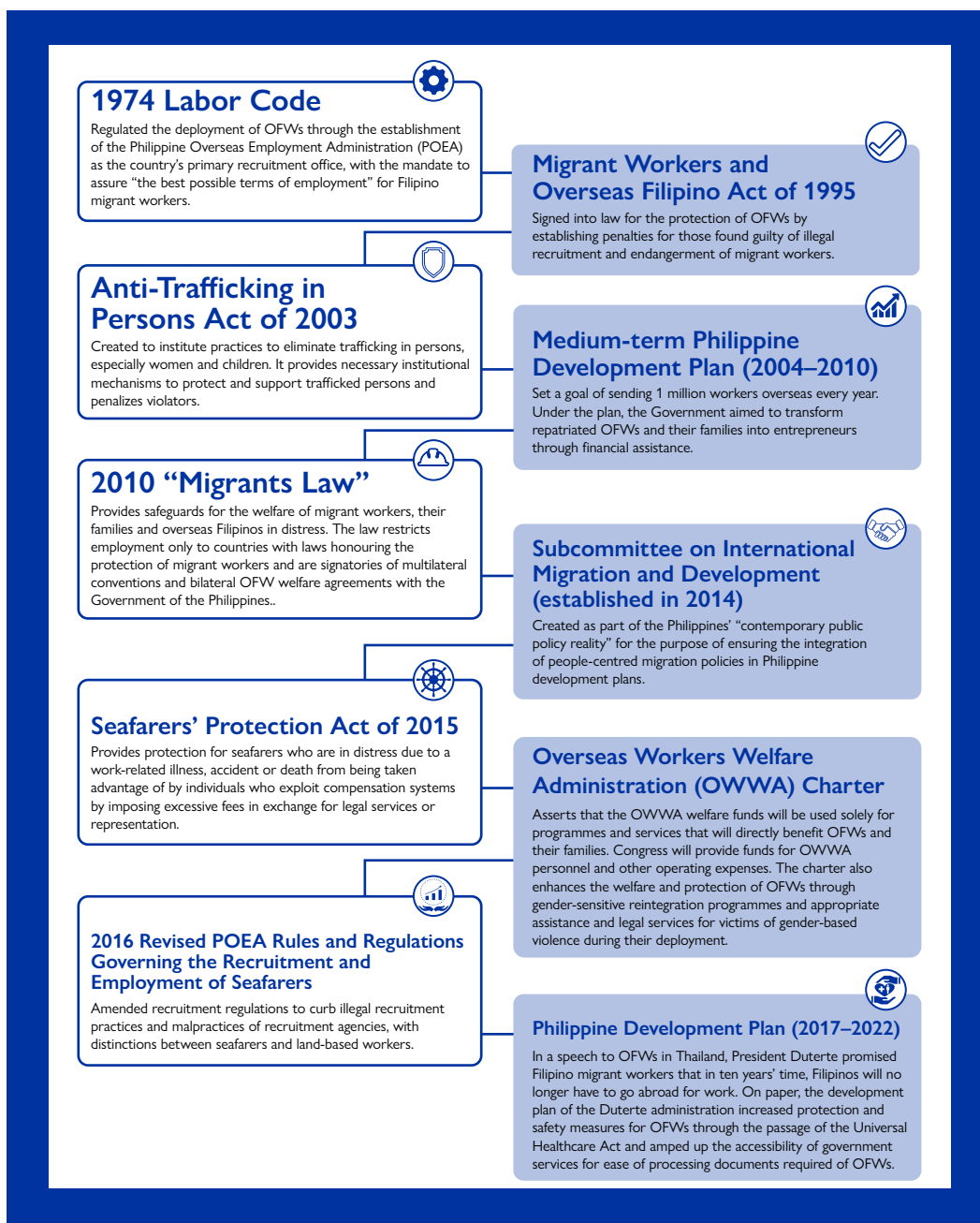


Source: Data from PSA, 2020a. This infographic was not formally edited by IOM.

A timeline of the Philippine and international labour migration legal and policy frameworks

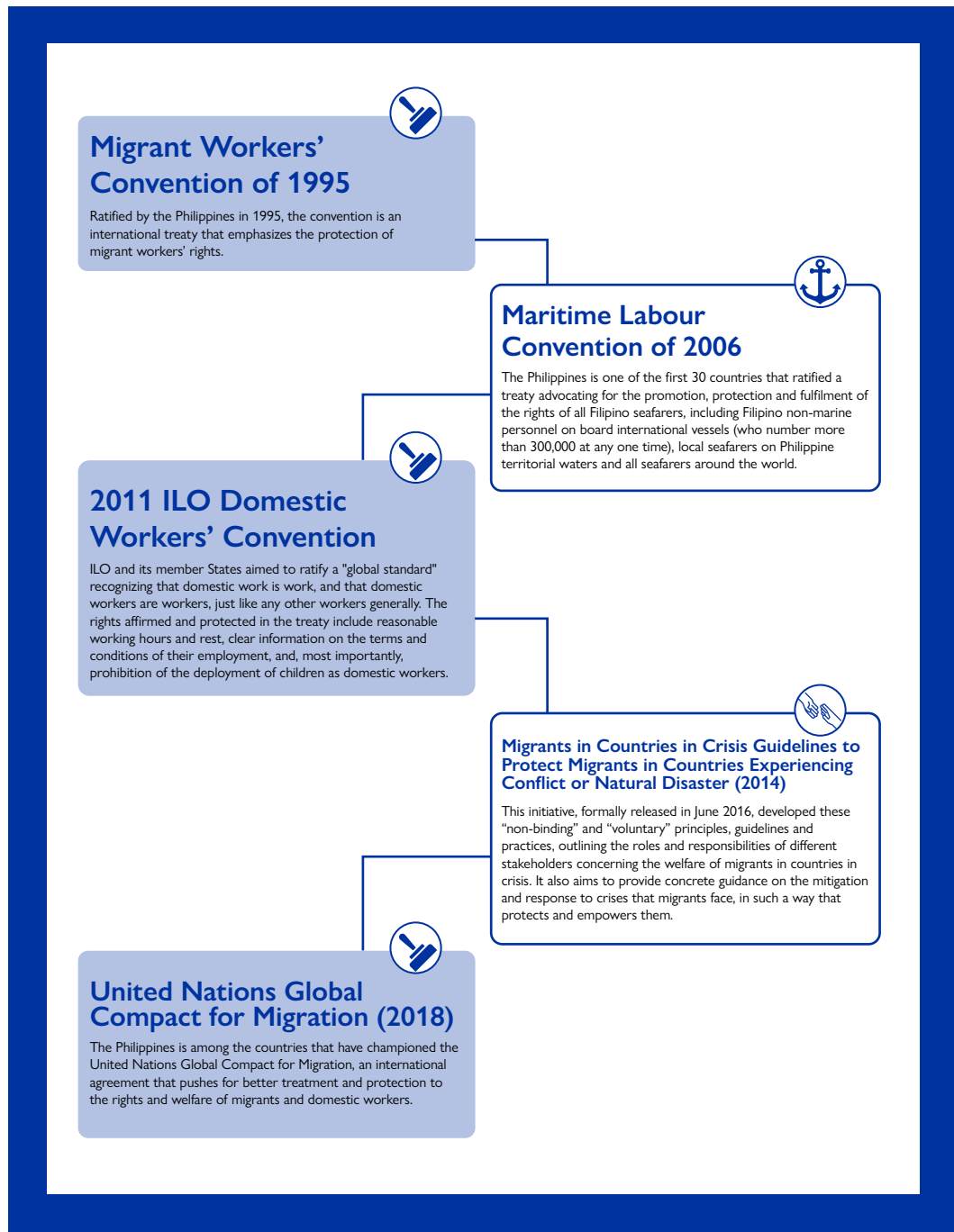
The Philippines has implemented various labour protection policies (Figure 5) and is a signatory to various international conventions (Figure 6) meant to safeguard the welfare of OFWs.

Figure 5. Philippine migration legal and policy framework



Source: Author's summary of information from Almojuela, 2016; Government of the Philippines, 1974; Philippine Congress, 1995, 2003, 2010, 2015 and 2016; Philippines, National Economic and Development Authority, 2004a and 2017; POEA, 2016.

Figure 6. International labour migration legal and policy framework



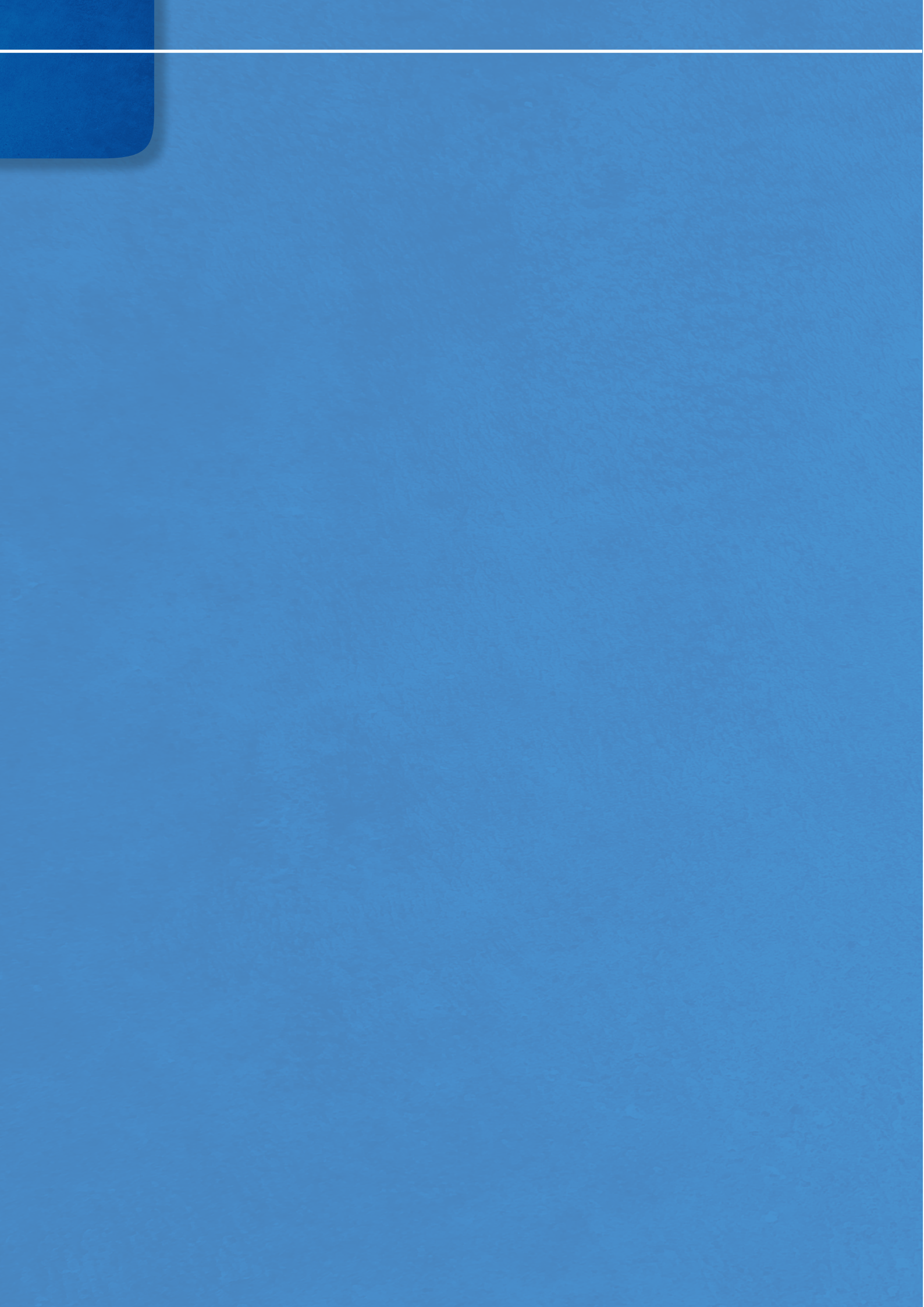
Source: Author's summary of information from ILO, 2006b and 2011; Migrants in Countries in Crisis, 2022; United Nations, 1990 and 2018.

Labour migration facilitation and protection

The ILO recognizes the Philippines as a model for labour migration regulation policies (Rodriguez, 2010). The country embodies good labour migration governance (OECD and Scalabrini Migration Center, 2017), particularly in the area of end-to-end regulation and facilitation of labour migration and protection of migrant workers. The Government of the Philippines has taken on the role of “authorized facilitator” of labour migration and works to ensure the ethical and legal recruitment and deployment of migrant workers, as well as the accessibility of labour and welfare desks in countries with large OFW populations (Rodriguez, 2010:21–23).

With the Government having facilitated the outflow of labour migration for more than 40 years, various sectors are calling for a comprehensive assessment of the hidden and long-term costs of labour migration. Among the issues raised are the retirement and reintegration back in the country of large number of OFWs from countries in the Middle East and Asia where roads to citizenship and residency are restricted. These OFWs will spend their most productive years working abroad, but will eventually return to and retire in the Philippines, where weak social protection institutions are insufficient to see them through comfortably in their twilight years.

The growing discourse that investigates the links between labour migration and genuine development of labour-exporting countries (Asis, 2017) and its impact on the lives of Filipino migrant workers makes labour migration a topic that is both politically and emotionally charged.



Coverage of Labour Migration in the Philippines



Studies point to three dominant media stereotypes of migrants: “the hero”, “the victim” and “the threat” (Triandafyllidou, 2017). Globally, discourse on migration is skewed towards a negative portrayal of migrants. Prominent discourse in countries of destination such as Italy alleges their “invasion” by immigrants (“the threat”) (White, 2015). Some American and Australian media organizations have similarly demonstrated simplistic, prejudicial coverage of migration.

In the Philippines, migrant workers are valorized as “modern-day heroes” who take on great lengths and sacrifices (Bautista, 2015). Academic Jean Encinas-Franco (2013) writes that the modern-day hero narrative portrays the OFW as one or more of these three archetypes: (a) “the victim”, whereby labour export is packaged as inevitable; (b) “the domestic helper”, whereby the struggles of female OFWs are seemingly normalized; and, lastly, (c) “poor”, whereby socioeconomic structures that affect one’s decision to migrate and the State’s promotion of labour export are downplayed.

Mass media plays an integral part in informing the public of the struggles migrant workers face. The modern-day-hero narrative is used throughout this study to analyse the press coverage of OFW issues and how it plays into the representation and perception of OFWs.

The media landscape

Philippine media has been described as the “freest” in Asia and enjoys greater independence compared to some of its neighbouring countries (Estella and Löffelholz, 2019, citing Freedom for Media, Freedom for All Network, 2018, and Johnson, 2018). The Philippine Constitution guarantees and safeguards press freedom and freedom of speech as a foundation of a democratic society (Government of the Philippines, 1987). However, press freedom has been tested time and again. In the mid-1970s, journalists endured the late dictator and former President Ferdinand Marcos’ crackdown on media practitioners since the onset of the martial law era. Those who wrote works critical of the Marcos administration were often met with military harassment and interrogation (Doyo, 2019). Some were detained and killed.

Unfazed by Marcos’ orders that criminalized dissent and muzzled media practitioners who exposed the depravity and corruption of his administration, the alternative press, especially print and radio, managed to publish reports unsullied by State propaganda (Mijares, 1976). These outlets were bastions of truth, and included *Radio Veritas*, whose consistent reportage ultimately led to the People Power Revolution (now known as the “EDSA Revolution”) from 22–25 February 1986, during which Filipinos ousted Marcos (Lucenio, 2021).

Today, a culture of impunity in the killing of journalists still looms over the Philippine media industry. The killing of 52 journalists in the Ampatuan massacre in November 2009 remains the single deadliest event for journalists in history (Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CFMR) and Freedom for Media, Freedom for All Network, 2019). With the gruesome massacre still very much in recent memory, the Philippines ranked among the most dangerous places in the world to be a journalist in 2010, second only to Iraq (Reporters without Borders, 2010).

The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) has recorded that at least 170 journalists have been killed since 1986 (ABS-CBN News, 2020). About half of the dead were freelance broadcasters. The 2021 *Reuters Digital News Report* took note of how Philippine media practitioners were repeatedly “red-tagged”,⁷ or labelled as “subversives”, by the Government using social media networks such as Facebook (Chua, 2021; Gleicher, 2020).

The continuous erosion of press freedom in the Philippines has continued under the current administration. Top government officials lambast media practitioners publicly. Laws, such as the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020,⁸ have been widely opposed by Philippine journalists for its threat to press freedom, or what the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility called its “overreaching prohibitions on expressive, as well as political freedoms” due to its potential chilling effect on all media practice (CMFR, 2020).

Rappler CEO Maria Ressa, who had been targeted for years by the Government, along with another journalist, was convicted guilty of cyberlibel by a Philippine court in June 2020. (*Rappler* is an online news network that has published investigative reports documenting the brutality of the State’s crackdown on illegal narcotics.) The decision “marked a new low in the Philippines’ protection of the freedom of expression and, in particular, the ability of an independent media to function in the country,” said David Kaye, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020). Journalists from alternative media outfits have also been embattled with lawsuits, as in the case of *Manila Today* editor Lady-Ann Salem, who spent time in jail in December 2020 for “illegal possession of firearms and explosives”. Salem was released on 5 March 2021 after a Manila court dismissed the charges against her for lack of merit.

Another massive blow to press freedom was the House of Representatives’ vote against the franchise renewal of ABS-CBN, the nation’s largest broadcaster, which led to the shutdown of all of the network’s TV and radio stations across the country. The closure of its TV and radio broadcast operations in May 2020 displaced at least 11,000 media

7 Red-tagging is the labelling of individuals or organizations as communists and/or terrorists and, thus, enemies of the State.

8 Republic Act 11479 (“Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020”) of the Philippines, which replaced Republic Act 9372 (“Human Security Act of 2007”), is a counter-terrorism law intended to prevent, prohibit and penalize terrorism in the country.

workers (Aguilar, 2020) and cut off millions of Filipinos from a source of vital news. In addition, Ressa was charged with multiple lawsuits ranging from cyberlibel to tax evasion. She was found guilty of one charge of cyberlibel through a retroactive application of the law (Barron, 2020) and has been arrested on two separate occasions. In October 2021, Ressa, along with Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her “efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace” (Nobel Prize Outreach, 2021).

The attack on journalists and the erosion of press freedom is a global trend that has a far-reaching impact on muzzling democratic freedoms, such as the right to advocate for government reforms that would dismantle the social and economic inequalities driving labour migration.

In the Philippines, the pattern of politically motivated harassment has expanded from attacks on journalists to the red-tagging of anyone critical of the Government, including leaders of OFW advocacy groups calling for better protections for migrant workers. In 2019, labour rights group Migrante International slammed accusations that the organization was acting as a recruiter for the New People’s Army. In a June 2021 Zoom interview, Migrante Chairperson Joanna Concepcion said that the red-tagging endangered not only members of the organization but also OFWs and their families (de Vera and Noriega, 2019).

Harassment by government leaders and the threat of arrest are not the only problems that plague the Philippine press. Much like newsrooms around the world, Philippine media is falling under the weight of dwindling revenues under an advertising revenue-dependent business model that has been dislodged by the proliferation of free news content on the Internet.

Bribery and corruption in the media industry also hound Filipino journalists. In 2004, journalist Chay Hofileña reported on the prevalent corruption between media practitioners and politicians who bribe them, touting the phenomenon as a “systemic problem” that is inalienable from the widespread corruption in the Government. Low wages and lack of job security drive the need for media practitioners to find ways to earn a livable wage (Magno, 2004).

Despite these challenges, Philippine media has remained fearless in upholding its mandate as the watchdog of public interest. Several works by Filipino journalists have received recognition for their coverage of the Duterte administration’s war on drugs. In 2018, Manuel Mogato and two other colleagues from the news agency Reuters were awarded the Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting in recognition of their “relentless reporting that exposed the brutal killing campaign behind Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte’s war on drugs” (The Pulitzer Prizes, 2018).

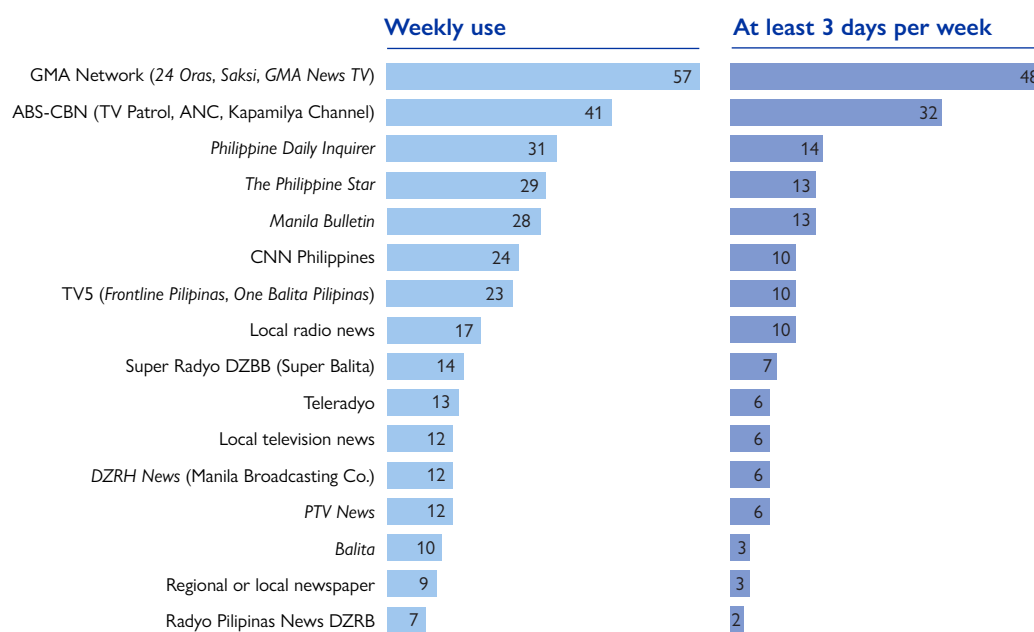
The Society of Publishers in Asia (SOPA) awarded photojournalist Raffy Lerma an Excellence in Photography Award in 2017 for the now-iconic photo entitled, “Lamentation”, an image of a grieving woman hugging the body of her partner who had been shot to death (SOPA, 2017). Media documentation of the drug war has been cited as evidence that moved the International Criminal Court’s decision in 2021 to open a full investigation into possible crimes against humanity based on allegations that police unlawfully killed thousands of civilians in carrying out its war on drugs. Photojournalist Ezra Acayan’s documentary reportage of the drug war was among those included in an exhibit in the Universal Periodic Review of the Philippines at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva.⁹

Even under the most trying of circumstances, Filipino journalists continue to bear witness and hold power to account, protecting democracy, freedom of speech and the people’s right to know.

Media penetration and consumption patterns

Up until the closure of its radio and free TV stations in 2020, broadcast media giant ABS-CBN, along with GMA, ruled print, TV and radio media as the “most watched, most listened to and most clicked” news organization (Figure 7). The two garnered a combined market share of 79.44 per cent in 2018 (Media Ownership Monitor, 2018).

Figure 7. Weekly offline reach of 10 Philippine news organizations



Source: Data from Newman et al., 2022.

9 The documentary reportage is available at www.lensculture.com/ezra-acayan.

According to a recent study, online media and social media are more prominently used in urban cities in the Philippines. About 72 per cent rely on online media, including social media, for news, while consumption of print media has dropped to 16 per cent (Newman et al., 2021). The Internet and especially social media platforms have largely replaced print as a source of news. The Philippines is among the world's top users of social media, averaging about 10 hours per capita daily. The Philippines' online media market is valued at USD 2.6 billion (Statista, 2023), with an Internet penetration of 67 per cent and a recorded 73.91 million Internet users in the country as of January 2021 (We Are Social, 2021).

OFWs rely heavily on social media as a news source. A 2014 study showed that OFWs turned to Facebook pages that focus on Philippine news for the latest information on the country's issues. This is attributed to Facebook's features that enable users to engage with the news by posting comments (Caguio and Lomboy, 2014). Another study cited that migrant workers find it more convenient to watch and consume the news on Facebook, as the social media app and platform allows them to communicate with their loved ones while browsing their feed (Ulla, 2021; Ong and Cabañes, 2018). OFWs have also resorted to posting urgent calls for assistance on Facebook when government channels were slow or unable to respond. When the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020 resulted in the closure of seaports and airport terminals, stranded seafarers marooned on their ships turned to Facebook to call for rescue. Media, in turn, picked up on these Facebook posts and turned them into stories calling for government action.

These observations underscore the complicated dynamics at play between social media and journalists. Filipinos show a high interest for news but low trust in Philippine media, according to Newman et al. (2021). This low trust is a result of disinformation weaponized to sow distrust in and discredit the Philippine press (Ong and Cabañes, 2018). Troll farms, "bots" and fake accounts contribute to the online harassment of journalists, who are labelled as "*press-titutes*" and fabricators of "fake news". For many Filipinos, social media is a source of news. For journalists, social media is a source of story leads, a way to access OFWs in distress and a platform that contributes to the erosion of public trust in media institutions.

Snapshot of Media Coverage of Migration Issues



Overview

This report examines the framing of migrant workers' issues and media representation of migrant workers in the Philippines through a qualitative narrative analysis of the coverage of OFW issues by major Philippine news organizations across three analysis periods that were identified as significant to migrant workers' issues (Table 3).

Table 3. Periods seen as significant to migrant workers' issues

January 2007 to December 2009	<p>The administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo set a target (Asis, 2017) of "aggressively" deploying 1 million Filipino workers every year as part of the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (2004–2010). This deployment target was outlined in Administrative Order 247 of 4 December 2008.</p> <p>(The analysis period is extended from an original six months to three years due to the considerably smaller amount of news content published online during these years. Thus, the analysis covers the period starting from January 2007, continuing until when the administrative order was released, and examines its coverage in the news until one year after.)</p>
February to July 2018	<p>On 8 February 2018, the body of Filipino domestic worker, Joanna Demafelis, was found in a freezer in her employers' apartment in Kuwait more than a year after she was reported to have gone missing. In response, President Rodrigo Duterte issued a total deployment ban of OFWs to Kuwait.</p>
March to August 2020	<p>The outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic saw the largest repatriation of Filipino migrant workers to the Philippines in recent times.</p>

The period from January 2007 to December 2020 is analysed to serve as a baseline for examining the nature of everyday coverage and reporting on migrant workers' issues across changes in administrations.

Considering the influence media has on setting the agenda and its role in exposing underreported issues and facilitating understanding of the social and political factors that underlie labour migration, the key questions that outline the analysis of dominant press narratives and themes are:

- (a) What is the range of media narratives and the dominant themes that characterize Philippine press coverage of Filipino migrant workers' (OFWs) issues during each period?
- (b) Whose voices are included in the coverage?
- (c) How do these dominant narratives frame the representation of the OFW in the national psyche?
- (d) What are the gaps in the reportage vis-à-vis actual key migration issues in the Philippines? What are the opportunities for bridging the gap between reportage and public policy?

Specific methodology

The specific methodology for the data collection throughout the three identified analysis periods, as well as the baseline period, are discussed in this section.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions on movement, which prevented access to print and broadcast archives, this study utilized available online resources to collect and collate media coverage of labour migration. General keywords and hashtags (e.g. OFW), in combination with specific keywords and hashtags for specific issues (e.g. “Joanna Demafelis” or “Demafelis”), were used to extract articles on Filipino labour migration across the two major broadcast stations, ABS-CBN and GMA, as well as online news outlets in the Philippines (refer to the footnote to Table 1 for more information on these outlets):

- (a) Broadcast (TV and radio)
 - (i) ABS-CBN
 - (ii) GMA
- (b) Online
 - (i) *Rappler*
 - (ii) CNN Philippines
 - (iii) *PhilStar.com* (online version of *The Philippine Star*)
 - (iv) *INQUIRER.Net* (online version of *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (also, “*Inquirer*” or “PDI”))
 - (v) ABS-CBN
 - (vi) GMA
- (c) Social media
 - (i) Facebook
 - (ii) Twitter

All news articles and TV/radio segments that emerged under the combination of specific and general keywords for each media organization were counted, and the top stories were analysed for dominant narrative themes.

To identify key themes, an online word-counting tool developed by DataBasic was used to identify words most commonly used in news articles.¹⁰ Due to the unavailability of transcripts of TV and radio news segments, social listening was utilized to examine radio and TV broadcasts (including tele-radio news). TV and radio news content was streamed and listened to closely for frequently mentioned words to track prominent themes. This included monitoring words that appeared in news tickers (i.e. the text-based display that appears on screen during a TV news broadcast). The headlines of TV news segments were also reviewed.

¹⁰ DataBasic is a free and open-source data analytics website developed by researchers at Northeastern University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The online search and collection using keywords was conducted on an incognito browser to keep search engine algorithms from ranking the results according to browser history or searches. As a measure of public discourse and owing to the Philippines' high level of social media use and engagement, when available, posts on Facebook and Tweets on Twitter that reached a substantial amount of shares were also analysed.

Interviews with key journalists were conducted to understand how their personal experiences in the field and newsroom constraints shaped their reporting on migrant workers' issues. Additionally, interviews with key media sources identified as government officials directly involved in labour migration, labour rights groups and NGOs, think tanks and migrant workers were conducted to gather their insights and observations on the press coverage of labour migration.

Narrative Analysis



Establishing the baseline (January 2007 to December 2020)

A scan of the top search results sorted by relevance in the News tab of the Google search engine were analysed. The results are presented in this section.

Dominant themes

The dominant issues in the coverage of Filipino migrant worker news during the period 2007–2020 are: (a) the extent to which OFWs experience dangerous or exploitative work conditions, (b) how their remittances contribute to the Philippines' economic growth, (c) cases of OFWs who were abused or sentenced to death, and (d) deployment bans.

In earlier years, particularly from 2007 to 2011, the most popular news coverage of OFW issues focused on advocacy events, such as OFW Family Day and recognition ceremonies for OFWs. In the years that followed, articles commonly included opinion columns that discussed the need for better legislation to protect and defend OFW rights. Around mid-2010 onwards, more issue-based coverage started to be made available online. Some topics that emerged as top search results for these years include the allegations of sexual abuse by Philippine embassy staff in the Middle East.

It should be noted, however, that one limitation of this study is that it cannot capture stories that media companies were unable to migrate during the gradual shift from print to online publishing and, in the case of TV and radio broadcasts, cross-post to online platforms like YouTube. Nonetheless, a common theme from the stories gathered is the dichotomy underlying the modern-day hero narrative: At home, the OFW is a hero to their country and their families; overseas, they are heroic victims who have to face abuse and maltreatment.

Editorials and opinion pieces about OFWs abused by their employers or sentenced to death cite gaps in the Government of the Philippines' ability to identify and prosecute illegal recruiters and traffickers, and to provide OFWs facing criminal charges in their host countries with legal assistance.

News coverage also emphasize how OFWs are a pillar of the country's economy because of their remittances and should be "paid back" with better legal safeguards and protections. In one 2011 column on *INQUIRER.Net*, the mandate to protect OFWs is described as a "highly sensitive and emotional political issue" for any administration (Doronila, 2011).

Another dominant theme is how the OFW is depicted as breadwinner and, thus, harbinger of hope to their family. Stories show the aspiration of economically uplifting their families as the main motivation for many Filipinos to work abroad and face potential risks in

countries with a history of exploitative work conditions and abuse. OFWs are sometimes also depicted as “milking cows” – another way to frame their role as breadwinners – in stories that discuss the pressures of family expectations and how OFWs religiously send money to their families back home, even at the cost of their own well-being.

Whose voices are included?

For most of early reportage tracked during this period, especially in the years 2007 to 2013, the dominant voices are that of government officials and authorities, mainly because coverage at the time is geared towards guidelines and announcements for OFWs and OFW events.

However, as issues regarding the welfare of migrant workers are given more attention from the mid-2010s onwards, the voices of migrant workers are written into articles more often. Thus, more stories told from the points of view of OFWs emerge. An example is *Inquirer's* August 2011 story of OFWs in the United Arab Emirates who become buried in debt because of their need to send money back home (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2011).

Characterization of the coverage

The articles analysed during this period highlight the depiction of Filipino migrant workers as either hero or victim. The OFW is a hero to their family, being its breadwinner, and to the country, as a saviour of the economy. However, in the countries that they work in, they are victims suffering a range of exploitation and abuse.

Unlike the wider global trend of media coverage that stigmatizes migrants, the contributions of OFWs as migrant workers are highlighted in local coverage, and a call for their increased protection is a consistent theme in news stories. However, it should be taken into account that these stories are written from the point of view of a labour-sending country.

According to Johanna Son, editor and founder of Reporting ASEAN,¹¹ a regional online news portal that covers ASEAN developments, location shapes country perspectives and assumptions about migrants. “The Philippines [i.e the coverage] has a lot of “sacrifice” elements – even when it [working abroad] is more of a desire for more opportunities. For the receiving countries, the view is that migrants are “lucky” or should be grateful to be allowed to work,” says Son in a July 2021 email interview.

However, while not stigmatized, the language used in writing migrant workers’ stories inadvertently reinforces the stereotypes of victimhood and inferiority associated with low-skilled work. The use of the terms “domestic helper” and “maid” is observed in several of

11 With offices in Bangkok, Reporting ASEAN is a homegrown, independent venue for the discussion and analysis of news and issues within South-East Asia. More information about Reporting ASEAN is available at www.reportingasean.net/about-this-website.

the older online news articles. More recent coverage reflected a change in terminology, with “domestic worker” and “household service worker” used most often instead.

The term “domestic worker” is preferred by migrant workers themselves because of how it acknowledges the importance of their jobs (Mathai, 2018). The use of “domestic worker”, compared to “domestic helper” or “maid”, is also recommended in *Reporting on Forced Labour and Fair Recruitment Migration*, a toolkit produced by the ILO for journalists that includes guidance on appropriate terms to use for a rights-based, gender-sensitive reportage of migration. By using the term “domestic worker” and shedding the use of “servant” or “maid,” the media can influence other sectors, especially government and employers of domestic workers, to view domestic workers as workers entitled to labour rights, including protection.

Period 1: January 2007 to December 2009 (Arroyo administration)

Background

Economists have referred to the global financial crisis of 2008–2009 as the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The subprime mortgage/housing market crisis in the United States had the world’s banking system to the brink of collapse. The economic impact of the financial crisis reverberated around the world. The United States, where an estimated 3.4 million Filipino migrant workers and immigrants are based, is among the largest sources of remittances to the Philippines (Jha et al., 2009). Domestically, the Philippines suffered losses in employment, wages and take-home pay, particularly in the manufacturing sector (Philippines, Senate Economic Planning Office, 2009; Balboa and Mantaring, 2011). At the peak of the economic crisis, a higher poverty incidence in the country was recorded, with more people going hungry as a result of fewer job opportunities.

In response, then President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo issued Administrative Order 247 on 4 December 2008 directing POEA to shift its focus from regulation to “full-blast efforts” to identify and “properly exploit” job opportunities in “Code Green” countries and territories – those that were aggressively recruiting foreign workers, such as Canada, the United Arab Emirates and Guam (United States). The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), a government agency offering technical education and vocational skills, was also directed to intensify its skills retraining programme to meet hiring needs of international job markets.

Parallel to this, President Arroyo also issued Administrative Order 248, which introduced a two-pronged strategy to reciprocate the “heroic efforts” of expatriate Filipino workers who were economically displaced by the crisis. First, the Government set up a PHP 250-million

Filipino Expatriate Livelihood Support Fund that returning OFWs could use for business start-ups or skills training. Second, job help desks (Gonzales (for *BusinessMirror*), 2008) were set up in all provinces to match returning Filipino workers with locally available jobs.

Labour rights groups slammed Administrative Order 247, which outlined government efforts to deploy Filipino workers to destination countries that were aggressively hiring labour migrants despite the financial crisis. Erwin Puhawan, officer for the NGO Kanlungan Center Foundation said, in a Zoom interview in June 2021, that the policy reduced Filipino migrant workers to “commodities”.

Dominant themes

At least 130 online news articles dating from 2007 to 2009 from two of the country’s biggest media organizations, GMA and ABS-CBN, present the deployment of OFWs as a boost to the Philippine economy.¹²

Table 4. Most commonly used keywords in online news articles during Period 1

Keywords	
Headline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OFW/OFWs • Arroyo • Filipino • abroad • <i>migrante</i> • jobs • Filipinos • remittances • 2008 • crisis
Body text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • workers • abroad • government • migration • overseas • OWWA • OFW/OFWs • Arroyo • children • Philippines

Note: Words identified by the DataBasic word counter as repetitions or singular/plural versions of words already mentioned have been omitted from the list.

12 TV and radio broadcast coverage during this period could not be accessed due to the limited availability online of TV and radio segments from 2007 to 2009.

The dominant themes in the top stories revolve around how OFW remittances prop up the Philippine economy, the social cost of migration to Filipino families, and how the Arroyo administration roll out policies complementing the Government's aggressive OFW deployment targets. Other stories also show the vulnerability of female migrant workers to abusive work conditions and how the lack of job opportunities back home could further fuel the desperation to go abroad. Stories that educate OFWs on illegal recruitment schemes are often lumped together with articles about their vulnerability to rights violations, such as a *GMA News*' in-depth report (*GMA News Online*, 2009).

Specific resources or how-to guides to avoiding these schemes are scarce in online mainstream media. OFWs could instead find information in alternative types of media that focus more on providing practical tips and resources for them. For example, on 3 October 2009, OFWGuide (an online blog for OFWs) published an advisory from POEA that included a list of names of illegal recruiters (OFWGuide, 2009). Online blogs for OFWs, such as OFWGuide, OFW Empowerment¹³ and Migrante Saudi Arabia,¹⁴ compile job application tips and warn about shady recruiters.

Online stories focusing on the lackluster domestic job market driving a large exodus of Filipino workers illustrate how some Filipinos were willing to enter danger zones like Afghanistan and Iraq as undocumented workers (*ABS-CBN News*, 2009). OFWs had been banned from working in Iraq since after the kidnapping of a Filipino driver in 2004. The ban was not lifted until 2013, after Iraq was declared "mostly safe" by the Government. Other stories touch on the fragmentation of Filipino families as a social cost of migration.

Online media coverage also include reports that bolster the Arroyo administration's "sales pitch" for Filipinos to work abroad. One story focuses on how a talent recruitment manager advises university students to enrol in "employable courses" and "to work abroad if one is after a more prosperous future" (Crisostomo, 2009). *GMA News* also runs a story about the labour department's pronouncement that Filipinos possess the necessary traits to make them "preferred" abroad.

There is little online news coverage on whether the Government has fulfilled its promises outlined in Administrative Order 248, such as providing OFWs displaced by the global economic crisis with financial assistance to set up their own businesses and/or match their skills with available jobs in their region. *GMA News* runs a story about an OFW group's concerns that the PHP 250-million stimulus package for repatriated OFWs could be open to corruption and misuse (Lazaro, 2009). The limited coverage makes it unclear whether

13 OFW Empowerment, a blog run by an OFW writing under the pen name, "BongA", posts news and announcements concerning OFWs and migrant workers from various Filipino news sites.

14 Migrante Saudi Arabia is an online blog site managed by Migrante International Saudi Arabia.

Filipinos who lost their jobs abroad were able to benefit from the Government's proposed reintegration programmes.

International media outlets that cover the OFW phenomenon focus on left-behind families and not just the overseas workers themselves. *The New York Times* goes into detail about the backstory of OFWs in a long-form piece about one family of intergenerational OFWs – a father and his children (DeParle, 2007). Their stories are interspersed with details about how labour migration has become part and parcel of the Arroyo administration's economic strategy and calls OFWs "heroes". The writer states, "[In the Philippines,] the political issue is not migration but migrant safety." Reuters publishes a human interest piece that explores the social cost of mothers who leave their children behind to earn a living as domestic workers abroad, saying: "It's also a huge emotional strain, with mothers feeling guilty about minding rich children overseas while leaving their own in someone else's care" (Crimmins, 2007).

Characterization of the coverage

Online news reports during this period are packed with figures for remittances and deployment targets. The impact of the global economic crisis is measured through drops in remittances and job cuts. The emotional and mental toll of the economic crisis on labour migrants highlight job insecurity as another precarity of cross-border work.

Notable about the coverage during this period is the focus on OFW groups that oppose Arroyo's labour export policy. Migrante, a left-leaning migrant workers' rights group, is commonly quoted in online news reports. It refers to OFWs under the Arroyo administration as "sacrificial lambs" being forced to work in places with track records of worker abuse and describes the "pimping of citizens" as a government strategy to save the economy from sinking.

"You will always hear the term "economic heroes" in most reporting on OFW issues. Sometimes there is an overemphasis on just the economic contribution. That's why we are quite harsh in our critique. ... Because, for us, is that the only way we look at OFWs – as cash cows?" says Joanna Concepcion, chairperson of Migrante. "From our organization's perspective, you can't talk about the exploitation of OFWs in any story without looking at the root causes of why they had to leave in the first place," she adds.

This criticism spills over onto blogs. In a blog post, OFW para sa Pagbabago¹⁵ (2008) calls out the Arroyo administration for reneging on its earlier promise to pave the way for OFWs to attain job security once they return to the Philippines. According to the writer, Arroyo's emphasis on OFW remittances is proof of the "painful reality" that the worth of OFWs is measured by the amount of money they send back to the country.

15 OFW para sa Pagbabago is an online blog site by Amado Maglayo, who posts commentaries on issues concerning OFWs.

Administrative Order 247 is blatant about marketing Filipino workers to countries with labour shortages. Labour rights activists still recall the emotional and political sting of the order, years after its issuance.

Erwin Rayoso Puhawan, Managing Trustee of labour rights group, Kanlungan Center Foundation, says that the Arroyo administration's aggressive target to deploy 1 million Filipino workers overseas solidified labour exportation as a national development policy. While the Government called on exploring job opportunities overseas, there was no strong counterpart move to develop the domestic job market. Further, Puhawan says that media framing of OFWs mirrored and echoed government policy: "It's like OFWs are a commodity, but we are talking about human beings here."

As Puhawan points out, under the Arroyo administration, TESDA, the Government's leading vocational training institute, offered a training programme for Filipinos to become "supermaids" – domestic workers who could accomplish multiple tasks like cleaning, cooking, first aid and more – and find work abroad with "families who will pay them more" (TESDA, 2006).

According to Puhawan, this was an example of how the Government's determination to promote labour migration did not consider the work conditions of the available jobs. "Job security is another problem with the "supermaid". If you're a migrant worker, you have no union. You're employed on a contractual basis."

There is scarce local online coverage of this "supermaid" programme, which amounts to a missed opportunity to investigate the repercussions of the Government's efforts to place Filipino workers in overseas jobs. On the other hand, there are also reports that touch on interventions. Pascua (2007) of *GMA News* writes about a school that aids the social and intellectual development of children left behind by OFW parents. Tan (2009), also of *GMA News*, publishes a story of how a legal helpline established by private citizens has helped at least 13 undocumented migrants return home.

Period 2: February to July 2018 (Joanna Demafelis case)

Background

News of Joanna Daniela Demafelis, an overseas Filipina worker, found dead inside a freezer in Kuwait surfaced in February of 2018. Demafelis, age 29 at the time of her death, decided to work in the Gulf State to help her family after their home was hit by the "Yolanda", a "super typhoon" in November 2013. Prior to becoming an overseas domestic worker, she was also employed as a domestic worker in Manila for eight years to help pay for her siblings' education.

More than a year had passed since she had last spoken to her family in the Philippines when she was found dead in Kuwait. Neighbours of Demafelis in Kuwait came forward to say that she had disclosed being abused by her employers. The prime suspects for her murder, a Lebanese and a Syrian national, were found and taken in for questioning by Lebanese authorities in the same month Demafelis remains were discovered.

Outrage over Demafelis' death was felt in the global Filipino community. President Rodrigo Duterte announced a total deployment ban on all Filipino workers to Kuwait and pleaded with the over-250,000 Filipinos workers in the Gulf country to return to the Philippines. It was to be the first in a series of flashpoints that threatened Philippine-Kuwaiti relations.

In the months that followed, bilateral relations between the Philippines and Kuwait were further strained when embassy officials rescued Filipino domestic workers who were allegedly abused by their employers. Videos of the rescue operation went viral on social media, and a diplomatic crisis exploded.

In a statement, the Government of Kuwait accused Philippine Embassy staff of "smuggling" Filipino domestic workers, "in flagrant violation of Kuwait's laws and international diplomatic rules". Kuwaiti authorities detained four non-diplomatic embassy staff and issued warrants of arrest for three Filipino diplomats. Additionally, the Government of Kuwait expelled the Philippine ambassador and cut off the water and electric supply to his official residence and recalled its envoy to Manila.

Caught in the cross hairs of this diplomatic row were some 260,000 Filipinos working in Kuwait, about two thirds of whom were employed as domestic workers. The Demafelis case is an example of the complex diplomatic relations and tensions that underwrite cross-border migration.

Dominant themes

There are at least 300 online articles, 34 TV news segments and 2 radio segments that focus on either the Demafelis case or on OFWs in Kuwait in general. Top stories focus on the actions of the Government following the death of Demafelis, which included a deployment ban, Philippine Embassy officials' covert rescue operations of domestic workers, which endangered the diplomatic ties between the Philippines and Kuwait, and a Philippine-Kuwaiti agreement that aimed to protect OFWs.

Table 5. Most common keywords during Period 2

	TV news segments	Online news articles
Headline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kuwait • OFW/OFWs • freezer • Joanna • Demafelis • <i>pamilya</i> (family) • <i>Pinay</i> (Filipino woman) • <i>labi</i> (remains) • <i>pinatay</i> (killed) • <i>natagpuan</i> (found) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kuwait • OFW/OFWs • Demafelis • Joanna • freezer • found • body • rescue • employers • slain
Body text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OFW/OFWs • Kuwait • <i>labi</i> (remains) • <i>pamilya</i> (family) • Filipino • ban • Joanna • <i>anak</i> (child) • employer • total (deployment) ban 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kuwait • workers • Demafelis • family • domestic • Joanna • Filipino • OFWs • rescue • death

Note: Radio is not included in the table, as there were too few relevant search results for the period.

Most of the news coverage focus on steps being taken by the Government of the Philippines to accomplish the following: (a) seek justice for the death of Demafelis, (b) repatriate OFWs from Kuwait experiencing abuse, and (c) sign a bilateral agreement with the Government of Kuwait to protect the labour rights of other Filipino workers in the Gulf State. There was little discussion or analysis of the *kafala* system, which governs all employment in GCC countries, Lebanon and Jordan (under this system, certain categories of migrant workers do not enjoy full protection by the host country's labour laws). Human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch have heavily criticized the *kafala* system, calling it a form of "modern-day slavery" because it gives the employer excessive control over the worker's movements (Mateo, 2021).

Aside from specific categories of migrant workers not covered by the host country's labour laws. As outlined by the ILO, under the *kafala* system, which regulates the relationship between employers and migrants, a work permit is linked to the employer,

who serves as a “sponsor” and guarantees the worker’s permit to work in the country. Without the employer’s sponsorship, the worker risks losing their worker status and becoming undocumented. In practice, the system prohibits workers from terminating their employment with abusive employers without their permission. Workers who attempt to escape from their employers risk being arrested for “absconding” (ILO, 2017).

TV coverage

There are 19 TV news segments about the Demafelis case in which the common theme is the Government of the Philippines’ response to the crime committed. Seven of these are mainly about how labour agencies in the country are addressing the injustice. The lack of response by the Government also emerges several times as a secondary theme. Most of the news segments involve Demafelis’ relatives and other OFWs who share how they tried to reach out for help in contacting her, only to receive little or no response.

TV news reports about the ban tackle the negative aspects of a policy – specifically, how many people and jobs would be affected. With over 250,000 OFWs in Kuwait, news stories about the struggle of migrant workers not being able to provide for their families because of the ban also emerge.

Another common theme in TV news coverage is the psychological impact of OFW abuse on their family members. Several TV reports feature Demafelis’ family also pleading for the Government’s support to bring justice for her. Later TV news segments show the arrival of Demafelis’ remains arriving at the international airport in Manila, met by mourning relatives.

Radio

Only two radio segments about the Demafelis case turn up in the online search. They focus on the Government with regard to OFW issues – specifically about how it is responding to the case, as well as the general rise in the number of cases of abuse against OFWs in Kuwait. Compared to TV, radio programmes often allot more time to discussing each news topic, even entertaining callers with their own issues to report. However, more specific descriptions regarding the types of worker violations and/or abuses (e.g. contract substitution and excessive work) experienced by migrant workers are sometimes enumerated but not discussed in detail.

Philippine radio, specifically on the AM band, is seen as a “national help desk” – that is, a venue for people to air complaints. A prominent radio broadcaster who has been in the industry for about 25 years shares that listeners view radio as a “shortcut” to bureaucratic processes and an outlet for compelling government officials to provide immediate assistance. The national help desk format benefits both listeners and broadcasters: “The audience for radio is mostly old people. The younger people listen to Spotify or YouTube. Serving as a resolutions desk helps radio maintain its relevance.”

Additionally, radio is known to be a highly accessible medium, especially in rural areas. Remote communities usually rely on radio programmes aired by local AM stations for real-time news. Data from the 2019 Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) shows that 74.7 per cent of Filipinos 10 to 64 years old in rural areas have high exposure to radio (PSA, 2020c). This is lower than exposure to TV content, at 94.4 per cent, but significantly higher than newspapers, at 56.5 per cent.

The veteran radio broadcaster further explains the nature of radio news to sensationalize issues because of the absence of visuals. She says that, to compensate, most radio stations tend to treat issues as police matters and focus on the more shocking aspects of a case, using attention-grabbing words to hook listeners.

Online

Online news organizations' coverage of the death and homecoming of Demafelis tends to consist of brief, blow-by-blow accounts of her case, starting from the discovery of her remains in a freezer in Kuwait, to the eventual return of her body to her hometown in Iloilo, in central Philippines. The souring diplomatic relations between the Philippines and Kuwait is also written in as additional context to the developing story.

Some stories and editorials (particularly from *PhilStar.com*) point to the culpability for Demafelis' death of her recruitment agency, which had closed down in 2016 due to "recruitment infractions". The editorial, "Where is the punishment?" (*PhilStar.com*, 2018), calls for the indictment and punishment of Demafelis' recruiters and the reform of the OFW recruitment process to deter illegal job placements. "Any reform will come too late for Demafelis and the Filipinas who reportedly committed suicide after being raped by their employers in Kuwait. But the reforms can save other OFWs. Especially when combined with the certainty of punishment for illegal recruiters", the editorial adds.

Follow-up stories report that the Government rules that Demafelis was a victim of deception after she was referred to her recruitment agency by a distant relative who earned a commission for every deployed OFW.

Both broadcast and online media also mention the *kafala* system in a few of their reports about the deployment ban to Kuwait. They give a few details that contextualize how Demafelis' poor work conditions and prolonged abuse were exacerbated by unfair work policies enabled by the *kafala* system – such as her employer's confiscation of her mobile phone, which may have prevented her from seeking help.

Whose voices are heard?

In general, because of the one-on-one interview format often seen in radio reportage, radio segments feature one resource person, usually a government official. TV news segments feature interviews with relatives of Demafelis and air statements of OFW groups like Migrante.

Table 6. Perspectives of Filipino overseas workers and/or their families presented in news stories and segments from Period 2

	TV	Radio	Online news articles
Number of stories and segments that present the perspectives of OFWs and/or their families	19 (out of 28 entries)	0 (out of 2 entries)	18 (out of 56 entries)

Meanwhile, online news provide blow-by-blow accounts of the Demafelis case and the Philippine Embassy debacle in staging “rescue operations” of domestic workers in Kuwait. Notable is the dominant use of the term “rescuing” in online media, referring to the embassy initiative as a “rescue mission” or “rescue operation” while explaining simultaneously how it breaks Kuwaiti law.

As for media coverage about Demafelis’ employers, online news reports from April 2018 show that a Kuwaiti court has sentenced her Lebanese and Syrian employers to death, two months after her body was discovered. Follow-up stories on Demafelis’ family was limited to their reaction to the Kuwaiti court’s pronouncement. At this time, headlines read, “Joanna Demafelis’ family wishes death for her killers,” (Talabong, 2018) and “Demafelis kin want to witness execution of Joanna’s employers” (Burgos, 2018).

Overall, media coverage during this period heavily focuses on the Government’s responsibility to resolve the diplomatic tension with Kuwait, a discourse narrative that is carried over to social media.

Social media and alternative social media channels

Of interest is the impact of social media and alternative social media channels run by political bloggers, whom the public turn to for information.

On Twitter, much outrage during this period is directed at the Philippine Embassy’s rescue operations, with netizens slamming the Government for its “insatiable desire for publicity”.

Political blogger “RJ” Nieto, author of the blog, *Thinking Pinoy*, posts videos of a Kuwait rescue operation. According to an editorial later published by *INQUIRER.Net* (2018), it was Nieto’s post that alerted Kuwaiti authorities. The editorial, entitled, “Rescue Caper” accuses public officials of using the “cinematic rescue” of an OFW as a candidate’s political platform in light of the upcoming midterm elections.

A popular blog, *Pinoy Trending News*, runs a story that largely features a political analyst’s Facebook post accusing foreign affairs secretary Alan Peter Cayetano as “having no shame”. He says that after his office’s social media blunder, Cayetano should have resigned out of *delicadeza*, a Filipinized Spanish word that roughly translates to “maintaining one’s dignity”. “When you run a covert operation, you don’t advertise it”, writes political analyst Edwin Jamora. Another site that fashions itself as a “social news blog” provides a relatively balanced coverage of the rescue operations, with articles on the Government’s diplomatic solutions (Politiko, 2018a) and the criticism (Politiko, 2018b) hurled by a lawmaker against Cayetano. It also runs a story (Politiko, 2018c) about how President Duterte picked his law school classmate as a special envoy to deal with the diplomatic row.

Political blogger Margaux “Mocha” Uson, who would be later appointed as an OWWA deputy administrator, also posts a video on her Facebook page, which has at least 5 million followers. The video shows President Duterte paying his respects at Demafelis’ funeral. The video, which garners at least 90,000 reactions and 4,000 comments, shows Duterte handing over half a million pesos to the family. “I am happy that the President went to our house and helped us to solve our problem,” Demafelis’ mother says in the video, referring to the financial assistance he provided.

The social media conversations surrounding Demafelis’ death all lament how many OFWs continue to be mistreated and victimized abroad. Some comments on the videos mentioned are about how Demafelis is not the first – nor would be the last – Filipino migrant worker to come home in a coffin.

Characterization of the coverage

While there is a large number of articles and news segments online that tackle Demafelis’ case, as well as the ensuing Kuwait deployment ban, the content of such media outputs remain mainly event-driven. Both online and broadcast outputs provide great detail about the crime that was committed, answering the *What*, *How*, *When* and *Where* aspects of the situation. However, the systemic factors surrounding Demafelis’ death, including the number of OFW abuse cases in the Middle East, and the lack of laws to protect migrant workers, are often left out of the narrative.

“Coverage of OFW issues still remains event-driven”, University of the Philippines Journalism instructor Adelle Chua says. “It is always focused on controversy. Reports do not address core issues, especially for newspapers that provide day-to-day coverage,” she adds.

As shared in an interview with a radio journalist, OFW issues are not something regularly reported on by radio stations. When they are reported on, the topics are often limited to what audiences might find interesting. “OFW issues are considered news that are sensationalized. They are only remembered, and they only surface the issue when someone is raped or killed”, she says.

Given the shock value and the wide coverage of the case at hand, however, the Government, particularly the President, is prompted to take action on the matter. A deployment ban to Kuwait is implemented, and talks of bilateral agreements begin to emerge. To lift the deployment ban, the finalization of a bilateral agreement towards protecting the rights of Filipino workers is pushed forward. Part of the agreement are provisions prohibiting employers from taking the travel documents of OFWs without their consent. The resolution to the Demafelis case, however, is not received very well by migrants’ rights groups.

For a country touted as “a model of putting mechanisms for protection,” the Philippines still sees cases of OFW abuse a year after Demafelis’ death, says Ellene Sana, the executive director of the Center for Migrant Advocacy.

After an apology from the Government of the Philippines, Kuwaiti and Philippine officials sit down to draw up a bilateral agreement that would protect the hundreds of thousands Filipino workers in Kuwait. The agreement grants the right of migrant workers to keep their passports and mobile phones, which are routinely confiscated by employers in Kuwait, in addition to food, housing, clothing and health insurance (BBC News, 2018). Additionally, employment contracts would be renewed only with approval from Philippine officials. After both countries sign the deal, the Philippines partially lifts the deployment ban to the Gulf State (Cabalza, 2018).

Period 3: March 2020 to August 2020 (outbreak of COVID-19)

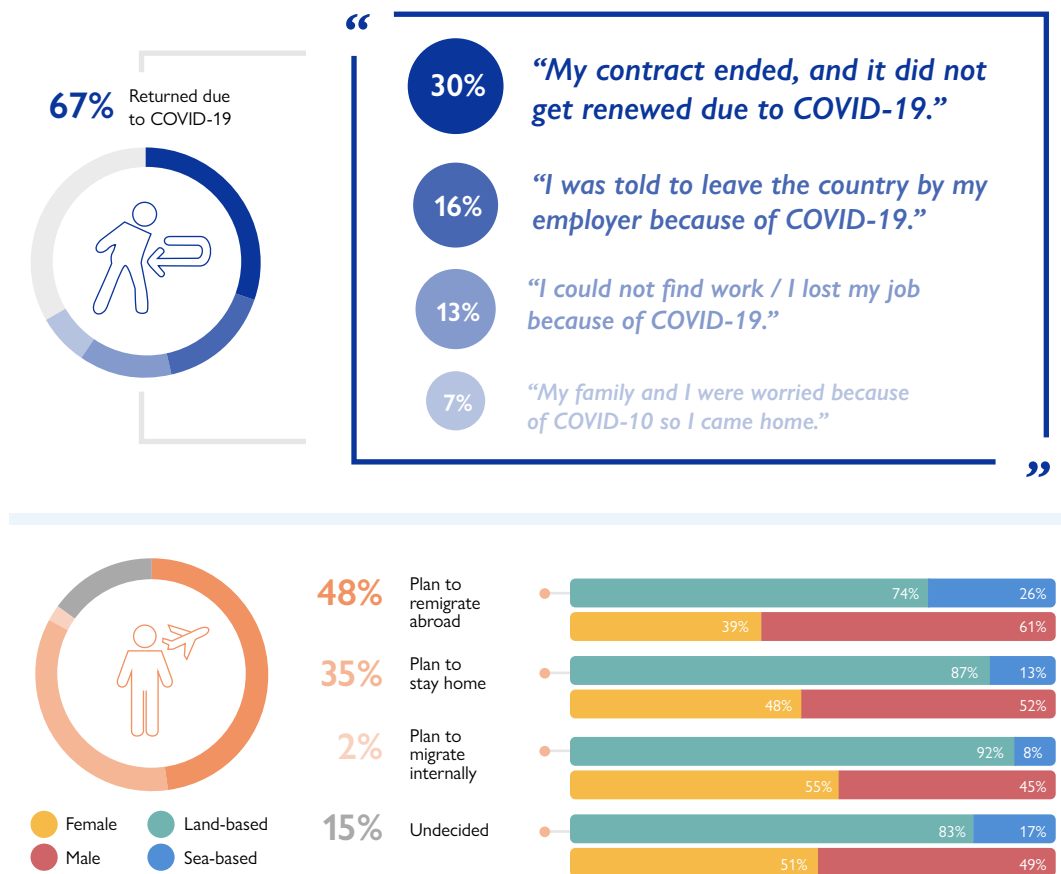
Background

The global lockdowns to stop the spread of COVID-19 resulted in millions of workers all over the world losing their jobs overnight. Anxious about the contagion and the uncertainty of access to health care, given their status as either temporary or undocumented migrants, Filipino workers scrambled to go back to the Philippines. However, as countries shuttered airports, a reported 100,000 OFWs were said to have been stranded in their host countries. Thousands of seafarers were marooned on their ships for months as countries sealed off their ports.

The number of returning OFWs reached 800,000 by the end of December 2020. Joblessness reached a record-high of 20 per cent. (Philippines, Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), 2020). A COVID-19 impact assessment study (IOM, 2021) that surveyed more than 8,000 returning OFWs showed the devastating economic displacement of COVID-19 on OFWs.

Of the number surveyed, about half were working in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and 67 per cent said that they returned to the Philippines because of COVID-19 (Figure 8). An overwhelming 83 per cent of OFWs reported being unable to find work within an average of three months after their repatriation, resulting in a massive drop in their household income. About 48 per cent said they planned to migrate for work again.

Figure 8. Impact of COVID-19 on OFWs



Source: Author’s elaboration. Data from IOM, 2021:18.

Note: Some percentages do not tally due to rounding.

The fear of contagion followed OFWs home. Migrant workers were seen as possible carriers of the virus and felt the brunt of varying and often confusing quarantine protocols. After being stranded in their destination countries, OFWs were required to undergo testing and a 14-day quarantine upon landing in the Philippine capital of Manila and another 14-day quarantine in their home provinces before being allowed to return to their homes. In some cases, due to delays in the issuance of test result certificates, many OFWs continued to stay in quarantine facilities even after completing their prescribed 14 days of quarantine.

Dominant themes

During the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines, there are at least 176 TV segments, 60 radio segments and 521 online articles covering how COVID-19 affects Filipino migrant workers.

Most of the coverage is about how migrant workers are at the centre of an outbreak of a global pandemic that have robbed them of their jobs and left them stranded in their destination countries or exiled in lonely quarantine on board ships. One media outlet refers to the mass repatriation of OFWs as a “diaspora in reverse” (Arguelles, 2020). The Government shoulders the cost of quarantine for the repatriated OFWs, but the dilapidated hotels that serve as isolation facilities are criticized. The health department buckles under the staggering number of OFWs returning to the Philippines. Test results are slow to be released or lost, and some OFWs find themselves locked in their hotels for months, pending a negative COVID-19 test result. There is little coverage of how the Government can work to resolve issues such as cases of wage theft or non-payment of wages due to widespread termination of OFW contracts, as a result of lockdown measures, and other labour grievances of migrant workers amid an economic downturn that has forced employers to let go of foreign workers to cut costs.

Migrant health becomes a central theme of news coverage during this period. Media regularly provides updates on OFWs abroad who have been infected by COVID-19. The fragility of the country’s health-care system is exposed when OFWs fiercely contest a proposed increase in premiums to the State health insurer. As OFWs from countries with high rates of infection return to the Philippines, migrant workers are shunned and discriminated against as possible carriers of the virus.

Table 7. Keywords and hashtags during Period 3

General keywords	OFW, OFWs, overseas, overseas labour, work abroad, migrant workers, forced labour, debt bondage, human trafficking, gender-based violence, domestic workers, seafarers
Specific keywords	COVID, quarantine, cash aid, virus spread, domestic workers, deployment
Hashtags	#COVID, #COVID19, #Seafarers

Table 8. Most common keywords during Period 3

	TV	Radio	Online news articles
Headline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 • OFW/OFWs • Saudi • Filipino • United Arab Emirates • <i>nawalan</i> (lost) • <i>trabaho</i> (job) • <i>dahil</i> (because) • <i>namatay</i> (died) • Arabia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OFW/OFWs • Saudi • home • COVID-19 • Philippines • bring • remains • quarantine • <i>tulong</i> (help) • NAIA (Ninoy Aquino International Airport) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OFW/OFWs • COVID-19 • DOLE • pandemic • home • returning • quarantine • Duterte • gov't • aid
Body text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OFW/OFWs • Saudi • Filipino • quarantine • test • COVID-19 • Arabia • restriction • Kuwait • Qatar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OFW/OFWs • quarantine • COVID-19 • <i>pasahero</i> (passenger) • test • swab • <i>trabaho</i> (job) • stranded • <i>bawal</i> (prohibited) • <i>papayagan</i> (to be allowed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OFW/OFWs • Quarantine • workers • pandemic • labor • government • assistance • died • PhilHealth • premium

TV coverage

The 21 analysed local TV news segments carry primary or secondary themes of OFWs as possible vectors of disease. TV news coverage discuss COVID-19 testing of repatriated migrant workers and how some OFWs who have earlier escaped from quarantine facilities later tested positive for the virus. An *ABS-CBN News* report shows village residents blocking the entry of buses filled with hundreds of Filipino migrant workers on their way home in the provinces.

Other prevalent themes are the negative effects of COVID-19 policies on OFWs. Mandatory testing and quarantine are heavily reported on by news outlets, which also highlight how migrant workers are suffering because of the poor implementation of some policies related to testing and quarantine.

Radio

The 13 radio news segments analysed show that the dominant themes circulate around the loss of income of OFWs. Similar to TV, radio news segments make use of both numbers and human angles to show how workers abroad and back home are affected by the global economic shutdown. In one radio news segment, stranded and unemployed OFWs in Saudi Arabia are shown digging through trash to find things to sell.

Online

Online coverage of the plight of OFWs during the pandemic is saturated with updates on the Government's initiatives to help OFWs and the number of OFWs who are either arriving home, are stuck in quarantine facilities or remained stranded abroad. A *GMA News* report describes how a migrant workers' group criticizes a government official's claim that the dumpster-diving of OFWs in Saudi Arabia to survive was merely done for "theatrics" (Rita, 2020).

While reports on OFW remittances are overshadowed by the abovementioned stories, there are still a few articles on the sharp drop in the amount of money OFWs are sending back home. One headline from *PhilStar.com* characterizes the plunging remittance receipts as the following: "Sharper drop reveals remittances meet their match in [the] coronavirus" (Magtulis, 2020).

In the midst of the chaos, panic and financial uncertainty brought about by the pandemic, the State health insurer issues a memorandum obligating OFWs to remit 3 per cent of their salaries every month as premium contributions in support of the Universal Health Care Act. The resistance from Filipino migrant workers around the world is marked by resentment and outrage.

An opinion piece published by *Rappler* criticizes how OFWs are being treated as “milking cows”, as “[T]he disabled Philippine economy largely depends upon OFW and immigrant remittances. ... Thus, there’s no reason to treat these “modern-day heroes” with insensitivity and overtaxation.” (Osi, 2020)

Media coverage follows the strong opposition of OFWs to the memorandum, which culminated an OFW-led petition that was able to gather 300,000 signatures. The uproar compels President Rodrigo Duterte to order the suspension of the collection of premium payments from OFWs. This issue with the State health insurer had also sparked outrage on social media, with most viral Tweets talking about the proposed hike as an added burden for OFWs.

The memorandum comes at a time when the State health insurer is already facing scrutiny over alleged misappropriation of funds (see, e.g. Jalea and Peralta, 2020). The incident also happens during the tenure of Health Secretary Francisco Duque, who has often been criticized by lawmakers and other government officials for the country’s overall pandemic response (CNN Philippines, 2020a). These issues receive extensive coverage in mainstream news outlets and fuel the opposition of OFWs to the memorandum.

Whose voices are heard?

Despite the numerous articles with the theme of OFWs being hit hard by the pandemic, there is no corresponding focus on OFW voices. Many stories rely on government sources and data to complete their reportage. For instance, among the 53 analysed online reports, only 13 feature OFW voices.

The nature of the coverage could be attributed to the pressure on the Government to urgently assist OFWs stranded in their host countries. Seafarers marooned on their ships are of heightened risk as port closures delay the replenishment of food supplies and drinking water.

The threat of contagion and passing on COVID-19 pose new challenges, both in acquiring information and complying with public health measures. Newsrooms issue directives to limit fieldwork and conduct interviews remotely.

On the other hand, there are some TV news segments reporting on how OFWs are calling for help amid being stranded or out of work. A report by *GMA News* show videos of migrant workers pleading to be given aid after catching the virus in Saudi Arabia. Because these videos have been posted online, news outlets from the Philippines are able to report on the issue, despite the affected migrant workers being overseas. As such, OWWA is able to respond to the issue and help the concerned OFWs. Cases such as these are indicative

of how vital social media has become to the production of news segments about Filipino workers abroad.

By sharing and posting their videos, OFWs – especially those in areas where media do not have access to, such as labour camps and fishing vessels – alert the media about their urgent need for assistance. It is worth noting that with training on the basics of journalism, OFWs can learn how to make use of social media to go beyond alerting news outlets to documenting and reporting on their own issues themselves – and, thus, telling stories centred around migrants’ voices and perspectives.

Social media

Social media has become a platform for OFWs to post videos where they talk about ways that other Filipinos abroad can “survive” going back home. Two videos on Facebook, which have garnered more than 9,000 and 1,000 shares respectively, list tips and advice for OFWs on surviving quarantine and getting the virus. “The peso now has shrunk in value, and there are less things that you can buy with it. So you should opt to bring canned goods and noodles with you when you go home instead of buying chocolates.” (OFW Join Force, 2020)

Social media has presented itself as a way for OFWs to communicate with one another on challenges concerning work. It has also become a way for media practitioners to find issues that need more amplification and, as it follows, coverage. Julius Cayabyab, a segment producer for GMA programme, *Kapuso Mo, Jessica Soho*, describes how much social media has helped them mine information for labour migration reporting.

Characterization of the coverage

The typical portrayal of the OFW has always been that of a hero or a victim who has endured sacrifices, but for the first time, OFWs are being discriminated against and stigmatized as being possible carriers of a virus. A number of reports highlighted the fear of locals about migrant workers bringing in COVID-19 and causing it to spread in their communities.

For online media, a recurring trend in news coverage is the topic of OFWs leaving quarantine facilities before completing the required quarantine period. In online news articles on this topic, words such as “escaped” or “fled” are largely used. Such language is similar to that used in describing persons fleeing detention. The context behind their leaving quarantine facilities, which may have to do with the poor conditions of some of them, as reflected in the excess of complaints, is not given much space for discussion. Additionally, this contributes to the representation of migrant workers as carriers of the disease.

Both online and broadcast coverage abundantly features the topic of COVID-19 restrictions affecting OFW remittances. The economic and business contexts of news on migrant workers during the pandemic are widely covered, showing how OFWs are still often solely seen as saviours of the economy, even as they endure bleak work conditions instead of being provided fair employment opportunities by the Government.

According to Ellene Sana of the Center for Migrant Adocacy, the pandemic could have been the opportunity to elevate the perception and representation of OFWs. Just as the world was beginning to look at food delivery drivers and supermarket packers with new appreciation as essential workers, the pandemic would be an opportunity to also advocate for better depiction and treatment of domestic workers outside of the modern-day hero narrative.

“We always say that caregivers and domestic workers are essential workers. But if we really cannot deal without them, why are we not seeing any difference in the treatment of domestic workers? The pandemic could have been the time to see domestic workers and seafarers as workers that are essential to our survival,” said Sana.

Discussion of Findings



“There’s actually a lot of gaps because the typical coverage of OFWs, it’s mostly centred on remittances, or restrictions and deployment bans. Those are the typical stories that come out. I think stories that would directly help the lives of OFWs or even just stories that would describe the daily lives of OFWs especially now that we’re in a pandemic and they’re one of the sectors most affected, I think that’s lacking.”

– Journalist, *PhilStar.com* (Zoom interview, June 2021)

Based on the analysis of the baseline, as well as the three news periods defined for this study, the dominant media coverage of OFW stories consists of breaking news driven by pronouncements of deployment bans and extreme cases of exploitation and abuse, including rape and even death. Coverage outside of these situations is mainly focused on remittances and their contribution to the economy.

This chapter analyses the factors that drive this kind of coverage and its implications on the representation of the OFW in the national psyche.

Breaking news and crisis coverage

Coverage of OFW issues is similar to that of crisis situations, where there are up-to-date reports of developments as they unfold. This type of reporting keeps people informed and aware, which is essential in crisis situations. COVID-19 coverage, for example, was dominated by news with essential information for returning migrant workers about quarantine protocols and locations of quarantine hotels and testing sites. The reportage of these developments also highlighted how many OFWs had to be quarantined for weeks, or even months, because of the delayed release of COVID-19 test results and exposed the gaps and limitations in the Government’s response.

The urgency and national outrage that underpin the coverage of a labour crisis situation, such as the death or execution of an OFW, pressure the Government to present a solution. In the case of Joanna Demafelis, a total deployment ban was issued as a knee-jerk reaction. While such actions are often criticized as band-aid solutions that only address a particular situation and do not probe underlying structural factors, for example, the implementation of labour protections in the host country or systemic issues that lead to debt bondage, news coverage can contribute to changes in legal and domestic frameworks.

“There’s no question that the media’s emphasis on (OFW) welfare and protection has led to laws. The Flor Contemplacion case led to the 2010 amendments in the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995. The Demafelis case led to a bilateral agreement with Kuwait. There’s no question that with media as a watchdog, there is a resulting public outcry and legislative will to improve policies for OFWs,” said Hans Cacdac, head of OWWA, the Government’s lead agency in protecting the rights and welfare of Filipino migrant workers.

However, the effect of any government policy on people's lives must be probed and investigated to evaluate if it lived up to its intended promise of safeguarding workers' rights. Often, the announcement of deployment bans or the arrest of perpetrators are treated as the solution to the problem.

As labour rights groups have pointed out, domestic worker abuse continued even after the purported resolution of the Demafelis case, which ended with the bilateral agreement with Kuwait and the arrest of her employers charged with her death. The dominant sentiment echoed by journalists, labour rights groups and migrant workers themselves was articulated by Ellene Sana, executive director of the labour rights organization, Center for Migrant Advocacy in a June 2021 phone interview when she said, "The question now to ask is why the problems related to abuse and exploitation continue despite the enactment of laws."

The Demafelis case, which led to a bilateral agreement with Kuwait, was received with lukewarm applause from labour rights groups, which criticized it as a means to pacify an enraged public. In 2016 – years before Demafelis' murder – Kuwait had already passed the Domestic Worker Law, which outlines rights to days off, vacation leave and a limit on working hours, in addition to establishing a minimum wage of USD 200, with transfer receipts as proof of payment (Kuwait Society for Human Rights, 2018). The law also prohibits employers from confiscating their workers' passports.

Human Rights Watch (2019) described the law as "falling short" because of its failure to outline enforcement mechanisms, such as inspections of work conditions in households and absence of sanctions against employers who confiscate passports or fail to adhere to regulations on working hours and rest days.

The nature of the media platform itself also shapes coverage. The online news cycle is shortened by the need to give continuous updates and the limited attention span of readers, who mostly access news on their phones. Thus, news is short and informative. In the case of radio, the absence of visuals means the medium is reliant on words and the vocal delivery of broadcasters. In addition to this, with radio standing in as a "national help desk" to resolve complaints and put government officials on the spot for an immediate resolution, radio coverage is sensationalized.

"On radio, language is sensationalized to hook listeners. Issues are treated like police matters. Radio stories are about OFWs that were raped, killed, trafficked or involved in drugs. OFW issues that are not sensational are not considered," said a veteran broadcast journalist in a June 2021 Zoom interview.

The visual representation of OFWs is also often limited to airport arrivals or grieving families welcoming the remains of a loved one. The findings of the 2021 State of Photojournalism in the Philippines report, released by the Photojournalists' Center of the Philippines, provide insight to the reasons for this. According to the report, the nature of newsrooms is that photojournalists – many of whom are freelancers – are relegated to a secondary role in which they simply document an event rather than developing a compelling visual narrative that can tell a story.

According to verbatims from photojournalists surveyed for the report, “Publications need to value their photojournalists. They should pay us right and value the content we create.”

Another photojournalist shared in a June 2021 phone interview, “It’s difficult to be a photojournalist in the Philippines. You love your craft but you are not justly compensated. The rate per photo, for decades, has not changed and does not even amount to PHP 500 (USD 10) per photo. That’s not enough to pay the bills.”

While the statement did not directly pertain to OFW coverage, a veteran photojournalist interviewed for this study confirmed that photojournalists interested in developing a visual narrative that would show the everyday lives of OFWs outside of crisis situations are held back by the prohibitive costs of following OFWs to their home provinces to spend time with them and their families.

“It’s always the economics aspect. I have many friends in the local press – the pay is too low and they are not regular employees. They are paid PHP 200–300 (USD 4–6) per photo – can you imagine that? [Even if] a photographer would like to do meaningful work, they just don’t have the resources to do so,” said Ezra Acayan, president of the Photojournalists’ Center of the Philippines in a June 2021 phone interview.

Acayan added that this, in tandem with networks using viral photos and images posted by citizens, affects not only photojournalists and the reading public. “If it isn’t user-generated content or photos, handout photos are used. There is a big drop in the quality of visual journalism. Readers could be better informed if outfits hired photojournalists who produce compelling and trusted work.”

The sporadic and sensationalized coverage of OFW issues frames labour migration as a crisis that only necessitates coverage in extreme situations of disruption and indignation. This kind of reporting is necessary, but limiting coverage to this kind of reporting misses the opportunity for more in-depth follow-up stories that probe the complex systemic issues plaguing labour migration such as forced labour and debt bondage.

Lack of in-depth analysis of deeper issues

The contours of the Filipino migrant worker experience is shaped by an assemblage of global migrant labour conditions, the politics of country image and diplomatic relations. As moving parts, this assemblage is constantly shifting and competing, with each point of their convergence defining workers' lives.

However, the general structure of newsrooms and the availability of data sources and resource persons to interview do not always support the wide aperture of research, examination and analysis needed to understand and report on the complex nuances of the migrant worker experience. Based on the interviews conducted for this study, there was no specific OFW or labour migration news beat. Coverage of OFW news is generally subsumed under the labour or business news desk because most of the coverage is concerned with the tracking of remittances. One reason for this is that as advertising revenue shrinks, so does the size of newsroom personnel, with staff journalists assigned to cover multiple issues. The journalists that were interviewed for this study, for example, have all covered labour migration in addition to other news. None of them covered only labour migration. The juggling of multiple stories across different beats, in addition to a shortened news cycle, results in most journalists reporting on the complex world of migration issues only when they are assigned to cover a major event and limits their opportunities to develop their expertise in the beat.

One veteran radio broadcast journalist in a June 2021 interview candidly admitted that coverage of OFW issues is expensive. "We had an OFW segment before but it did not last. The bill for long-distance calls was huge and there were no commercials coming in. Media is also a [business] and as a [business], it needs to consider revenue along with public service."

Journalists cited the difficulty of securing accurate data, as well as where and how they can access OFWs to conduct interviews, as a limitation to producing in-depth reports on labour migration that reflect the complicated nuances of Filipino workers' lived experiences.

Access to data, specifically the lack of consolidated government data, hindered the writing of stories with more depth and context. In a July 2021 press conference with the local media, Alcestis "Thetis" Abrera Mangahas, former ILO Deputy Regional Director for Asia-Pacific, presented a study that found that the problem lies in the Government's isolated monitoring systems and the offices' different procedures for handling cases and classification of OFWs.

In addition, lack of access to public data limited journalists from writing stories that offer insights into migration trends or interrogate statistics on contentious labour migration issues such as trafficking. Further, the limited data was a stumbling block to writing more

stories that would maximize the Internet as a platform to tell stories differently through charts, infographics and maps, or a combination of all multimedia tools.

In terms of statistics and data, there are several government offices, including POEA, OWWA, the DFA and the CFO, that hold databases of OFW information. Each agency uses different terminology, classifications and definitions of “migrant worker” so the numbers vary. The PSA is the central repository of the country’s statistical data compiled from different government agencies, but its webpages are often not updated.

“Data, in general, is hard to get here in the Philippines. There are not many open-data sources. The different government agencies each have their own efforts at data collection. So the DFA will have a different count from POEA. They’re not aligned in their dictionary terminologies for what is what and who is who. They’re talking about the same people but they can’t seem to consolidate the data,” said one *Rappler* journalist during a group interview via Zoom on June 2021. As an example, another *Rappler* journalist pointed out that some agencies do not make a formal distinction between OFWs on short-term contracts and overseas Filipinos who are permanent migrants.

Other journalists pointed to how the Data Privacy Act of 2012, which protects all forms of information, makes it difficult to get direct contact with OFWs and or their family members to arrange for an interview.

“We need information – even if it’s just the name of the OFW or a family member. But that in itself is already very hard – what more if you want access to an entire file,” said the *Kapuso Mo, Jessica Soho* producer.

An overlooked source of data and statistics seems to be think tanks like the Scalabrini Migration Center. “When we invite media people to our research dissemination activities, no one comes. My impression is that the media are more interested in groups like Migrante than research centers,” said Marla Asis, executive director of the Scalabrini Migration Center in an email interview on July 2021.

The prioritization of migrant worker groups may be a strategy for journalists to circumvent restrictive privacy laws to secure interviews and first-hand accounts from OFWs and their families.

Given the privacy laws and time constraints, the usual ways that journalists track down OFWs is through airports, either before their departure or upon their arrival; on social media, where some OFWs publicize their plight to call for immediate assistance; or through grassroot organizations and labour rights groups, which have direct contact with OFWs.

Case study 1: An in-depth story about undocumented Filipino migrant workers in Malaysia

*“People’s stories need to be situated in policy scenarios.
Policies do not exist in a vacuum.”*
– Camille Elemia, multimedia journalist (*Rappler*)

Rappler multimedia journalist Camille Elemia won the ILO 2017 Global Media Competition on Labour Migration for her exemplary media coverage of undocumented Filipino migrant workers in Malaysia.

A two-part report (ILO, 2018), comprising *Undocumented Migrant Workers: Hidden and Helpless in ASEAN* and *The Bleak Future of Undocumented Migrant Workers in ASEAN* (ibid.), was produced under the Reporting ASEAN Fellowship administered by the Probe Media Foundation and its partners.

The report exposed the various vulnerabilities faced by the estimated 5 million undocumented migrant workers in Malaysia because of their exclusion from the ASEAN [Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers](#). The agreement allows for the flow of skilled labour within the ASEAN region, however, there was an impasse between labour-sending countries (Philippines and Indonesia) and labour-receiving countries (Malaysia and Singapore) on the inclusion of provisions to protect undocumented migrants.

Elemia’s story illustrated the problem of contract substitution (see, e.g. ILO, 2018) – the practice of changing the terms of employment to which the worker originally agreed – through the stories of Filipino domestic workers, Fe and Erika. The women ran away from their employers, which is the most common reason why workers become undocumented labour migrants. Their work permits were cancelled and the two women became undocumented, living every day in fear that they would be discovered by immigration officers.

The report effectively showed how policies impact the lives of migrant workers. In Erika’s case, Elemia wrote that she had a child in 2016 and passed on her undocumented status to her then 11-month-old son. The child was at risk of being considered stateless under the law of the host country due to their having no documentary proof of identity, nationality or citizenship and could not get access to proper health care like immunization.

According to Elemia, funding for the story allowed her to report from Malaysia, interview undocumented migrants and get a first-hand account of how their lives are dictated by policies and the gaps in them.

“At the start of the assignment, I thought it would be difficult to get undocumented migrants to speak out, and I understood why. As undocumented migrants, they risk detention. I was surprised that there were many who came forward to speak on the condition of anonymity in the final report. I did three to five interviews with undocumented migrants. Not all of the interviews were included in the report, but all the interviews informed me on how to write the story.”

“It is helpful to have migration experts help guide journalists. My interviews were multifaceted and included interviews with psychologists, international labour organizations and experts from different fields. There is always the need to ensure independent reporting, but at the same time an issue as technical as labour migration is difficult for a journalist to grasp on their own. There is so much at stake – not just the lives of people but the diplomatic relations between countries.”

At the end of her reporting trip, Elemia referred Erika’s case to the DFA in the Philippines and the Malaysian Embassy. The two entities worked together to process identity documents for Erika’s son.

"I think, in general, we don't see enough of the human side of the story. Filipinos – in general, we tend to talk about OFWs as if they were commodities. I think it was back in 2012 when a senator referred to OFWs as our greatest export. Fast forward to today's pandemic and the Government is looking to export nurses in exchange for vaccines."

– Journalist, *Rappler* (Zoom interview, June 2021)

The Philippines' position as a global source of migrant labour is mirrored in both its government policies and media reportage of migrant workers' issues. Labour migration and the deployment of migrant workers around the world is symbolic of the Philippines' participation in the global economy and, as many of those interviewed in this study have pointed out, the commodification of Filipino workers.

While Filipino migrant workers take on occupations that run the entire spectrum of job categories, prevailing media coverage of labour migration issues reinforces the image of labour migrants as destitute and helpless victims who lack agency and are unable to shape or somehow transform their oppressive conditions. The result is a contradictory imagining of the OFW as both a source of national pride and national shame, the tensions of which are reflected in statements like the one made in 1995 by the Philippine labour secretary: "Domestic helpers, entertainers ... represent 95 per cent of all our problems for overseas workers." (Encinas-Franco, 2013). The labour secretary then proceeded to praise Filipino seafarers and nurses as exemplary labour migrants, glossing over any of the specific risks that come with their occupations.

The contours of national shame are shaped by a definition of "work opportunity" that translates to Filipino workers taking overseas jobs they are overqualified for – such as when public school teachers trade in lesson plans for jobs as domestic workers in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China or the Middle East – and a State-driven labour migration policy conceding a position of prestige to stave off the decline of the Philippine economy. As Keith Richburg (1995) wrote in the *The Washington Post*, "Filipinos were considered the wealthiest and proudest of Asians; today, they recoil under their new reputation as the region's chief supplier of maids and nightclub singers."

Thus, the dichotomy of the valorization of the OFW as either a modern-day hero or a victim is one that creates its own discord of "othering" among Filipinos. Labour migration is close to the heart and mind of every Filipino, but it does not resonate because of the resistance to be associated with the dominant OFW narratives of poverty and victimization. "I think if we can do more stories that humanize Filipino workers and not just paint them as lowly paid Filipino workers, then that would be really great. I think the most effective are stories that put a human face to a bigger issue, because it personalizes an abstract idea", said an Al Jazeera journalist.

Economists note that the global shake-up wrought by COVID-19 will make recovery for sectors that employ large numbers of migrant workers, such as manufacturing and hospitality, slow – dramatically reshaping the landscape of work and labour migration. Activists, migration scholars and journalists agree that news coverage about labour migrants should change as well.

Marla Asis of the Scalabrini Migration Center recommends that migration reporting should expand its focus to examine not only controversial or “celebratory” news, but also probe the everyday and commonplace. As the issues surrounding migration are not cast in black and white, nuanced insights of migration can elevate media coverage beyond the “time warp” of the reporting cycle to analyse the same issues from new angles. As an example, Asis cites that trafficking in persons is usually associated with women and children – but men and boys are trafficked, too. This often-limited view of trafficking in persons as gender-based violence or sex trafficking can also be why this topic and other forms of exploitation are not associated with the plight of migrant workers.

In addition, the “left-behind families” of migrants are typically viewed as problem-laden, while research findings reveal more diverse outcomes pointing to the need for an analysis of left-behind families that considers how they adapt to their situation over time and develop adaptive strategies.

Marlon Gatdula, chairperson of Migrante Saudi Arabia and a labour migrant for 18 years, said that stories about the aspirations of OFWs create points of resonance and portray OFWs as people outside of their occupational label of “labour migrant”, “domestic worker” or “construction worker”. “For all the OFWs we’ve spoken to, it’s always three goals: to own a home, to have the kids finish school and to start a small business. The ultimate dream is always to go home and be reunited with their families.”

Joanna Concepcion, chairperson of Migrante Philippines, the largest overseas Filipino worker advocacy group, said that the mass displacement brought about by COVID-19 has obliterated many alternative livelihoods and the usual thinking on labour policies. “How do we build economic development policies that are not dependent on exporting – literally – of our countrymen? I think that we should shift our generational mindsets. The culture, the mentality that “I will leave the country to work”, the reporting – it’s all connected. Stories should reflect the aspirations of Filipinos to stay in the Philippines. There isn’t much reporting that tries to find the answer to the question: *Where do we go from here?*”

Case study 2: Migrant life in Qatar

In 2019, the CFO awarded the Best Documentary Award to independent journalist Ana P. Santos for the animated film, *Imprisoned: Raising My Baby Behind Bars*, which is based on the personal journal shared to her by a Filipina corporate executive who was imprisoned for the crime of *zina*. In most Middle Eastern countries, *zina* laws criminalize sex outside of marriage and treat pregnancy as proof of the act.

“The documentary exposed the reality of *zina* laws while shedding light on the unexpected solidarity she found among other mothers who were in prison with her. The documentary is another eye opener, for exposing the problems faced by Filipinas in the Middle East,” said the CFO in conferring the award.

The documentary was part of a longer series of reports about migrant life in Qatar that was published in a special section of the *Rappler* website. The report was supported by a grant from the Pulitzer Center, which Santos said was crucial, as it allowed her to immerse herself in the reporting. Santos spent more than two weeks in Doha, Qatar.

“I spent about two weeks in Doha for this assignment and followed migrant workers to labour camps that were literally in the middle of nowhere. The migrant worker who agreed to meet me had to resort to giving me directions, by phone, based on landmarks we saw along the way. I followed female migrants charged with the crime of *zina* by the courts to the prisons where they were jailed with their babies, and to the Philippine consulate, where some sought shelter and protection. I saw that migrant women are disproportionately impacted by *zina* laws because, unlike expatriate women, they do not have the resources to quietly slip out of Qatar during the early stages of pregnancy to avoid detection. Most migrant women are not even in possession of their passports because their employers confiscate it.”

In between these places, Santos and a photographer she worked with spent time around Doha’s central boardwalk, called “The Corniche”, where migrant workers would spend their days off. The photo collage included photos of Nepalese migrant workers singing and dancing on a rented boat, called a *dhow*, and walking around the boardwalk in their stylish outfits.

“I was fortunate that *Rappler* supported a report series that included even everyday migrant worker experiences that are not normally considered as “news” by the international publications that I also write for.” According to Santos, the report series would not have been possible without the funding provided by the Pulitzer Center. “Reporting grants give journalists the gift of time to immerse ourselves in people’s lives and see where their stories will take us.”

Recommendations



In light of the findings of the study, the following recommendations are presented:

- (1) Provide journalism training that will enhance contextual reporting on labour migration. Best practices in labour migration reporting include framing the lived experiences of migrants around the policies that impact them. It also requires an understanding of the diplomatic relations that underwrite laws of both labour-sending and labour-receiving countries, the careful and accurate use of terminology, and prudent use of images. Current gaps in the production of news on labour migration point to the need for additional training of journalists on these matters, which can take various forms.
 - (a) A number of toolkits, such as *Reporting on Forced Labour and Fair Recruitment*, by the ILO, are available to media professionals to enhance their own understanding of ethical and fair reporting on migrant workers' issues.

However, the dynamics of labour migration in labour-sending countries, such as the Philippines, are specific and different, and require a contextualized, country-specific understanding of regional and international migration. *Country Migration Report: The Philippines 2013* (IOM and Scalabrini Migration Center, 2013) can be updated and summarized into a media packet to provide the historical and contextual background needed to add depth and nuance to labour migration reporting.

- (b) Labour migration affects not only migrants but also their families.

Partnerships with organizations that provide training for journalists can open new perspectives on specific issues that affect migrant families and provide a new lens to examine labour migration. For example, the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma of the Columbia Journalism School offered a four-day workshop in 2019 that brought journalists together with scientists, policymakers and experts in early childhood development to examine how children are affected by displacement and family separation (Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, 2019).

Another example is the Thomson Reuters Foundation, which provided a one-week training course in 2019 on Reporting on Human Trafficking and Modern-Day Slavery in Nigeria, so that West African journalists could deepen their practical skills and knowledge and work on their story ideas, with guidance from experienced Thomson Reuters Foundation journalists and subject matter experts (Opportunity Desk, 2019).

Due to the complexity of public international law, as well as the presence of conflicts among varying countries' regulations, it is essential to include such topics in the curriculum of journalism training workshops.

(2) Establish journalism grants to fund labour migration reporting.

As media organizations continue to buckle under the multiple pressures of shorter news cycles and plummeting revenues, financing the reporting of time- and travel-intensive stories like labour migration will become too costly. Journalism grants can fund in-depth reporting on underreported aspects of labour migration and encourage newsrooms to explore new reporting angles.

As journalists have shared in this study, the provision of grants gives journalists the opportunity to immerse themselves in issues, familiarize themselves with how the laws between labour-sending and labour-receiving countries interact and play into each other, understand the delicate balance of diplomatic relations and interact with migrants in their working environment and witness the factors that contribute to their vulnerability.

Partnerships with news organizations like Reporting ASEAN and the Pulitzer Center can set up journalism grants that specifically focus on labour migration and give staff reporters and media outlets the resources to write stories utilizing various platforms such as print, broadcast (traditional and Web), books, documentaries and podcasts.

In addition, partnerships with organizations like the International Women's Media Foundation (IWVMF) can establish reporting grants that will fund stories examining the gender dimensions and vulnerabilities of labour migration.

Topic-specific journalism grants

The Rainforest Journalism Fund, managed by the Pulitzer Center, supports reporting projects on tropical rainforests in the Amazon Basin, Congo Basin and South-East Asia over the five-year duration of the fund. In addition to the reporting grants, annual conferences are designed to “raise the level of reporting on global tropical rainforest issues such as deforestation and climate change and produce stories that make an impact.

Women Deliver, an international organization that advocates for the health, rights and well-being of women and girls, partnered with IWVMF to establish a journalism grant fund for stories that do not portray women and girls only as victims and recipients of aid to “address the need for reporting and increased media coverage of women and girls as agents of positive change in developing countries.

(3) Train journalists in alternative approaches.

The subject matter experts, labour rights advocates and journalists recommended other story angles that could diversify the coverage of migration stories beyond the usual stories of the economics of remittances and emotions, such as outrage and pity, during deployment bans and crisis situations. These include migrant health and the contributions of Filipino communities abroad to their host countries. Such stories are a departure from traditional journalism, which prioritizes extreme or crisis situation stories – because “where it bleeds, it leads”.

Nevertheless, issues relating to crisis situations can be analysed and written using the framework of solutions journalism, which highlights stories of how people respond to problems. Solutions journalism is based on research that solutions stories can shift the tone of public discourse, from divisive to constructive, and help lead to meaningful change. In terms of journalistic principles, a solutions story focuses on a response to a social problem that is backed with evidence and data that show its effectiveness, while balancing insights and lessons by also reporting on the limitations of the response.

For instance, the Solutions Journalism Network¹⁶ issue guide on health can guide journalists on how to use solutions reporting to enhance the coverage of complex health issues such as access to care and mental health disorders (Solutions Journalism Network, 2023).

To address the issue of discriminatory attitudes towards migrant workers being unwittingly perpetuated by European media, the Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) has partnered with the ILO to improve reporting on migrant workers’ rights and solutions journalism through the Fair Way Labour Migration Fellowship Programme¹⁷ for journalists working in the Gulf region, Jordan and Lebanon.

Portia Ladrado, a journalist and Metro Manila Coordinator of the Solutions Journalism Network in the Philippines, said that solutions journalism is still in its infancy stage in the Philippines, and part of its advocacy is to incorporate solutions into mainstream consciousness so it could be part of the norm. “There is no shortage of research on NGOs that are trying to help OFW communities. Within OFW communities themselves, there are unreported initiatives. OFWs are one of the most organized sectors. ... The idea that journalism is a tool for more solutions can be replicated across the world.” said Ladrado.

16 The Solutions Journalism Network is an independent and non-profit organization that advocates an approach that uses solutions journalism – an evidence-based mode of reporting on the responses to social problems founded in 2013 by David Bornstein, Courtney E. Martin and Tina Rosenberg.

17 The fellowship programme was launched by ILO in 2017 to improve reporting on labour migration in Arab States (for more information, see Ethical Journalism Network, 2017).

- (4) Build the capacity of migrant workers to report on their own stories.

Community newspapers are the “eyes and ears” of local communities and highlight issues that may fall under the radar of bigger newspapers with a wider reporting scope. When migrant workers are trained to write and report on community issues, they bring in the perspective and needs of migrant communities.

In the 1995, Filipino journalists Leo Deocadiz and Daisy Mandap founded *The SUN Hong Kong*,¹⁸ a leading Filipino community newspaper in Hong Kong SAR, China that features news about OFW issues, written by OFWs and is. Both Deocadiz and Mandap were journalists in the Philippines before moving to Hong Kong SAR, China and establishing the paper after seeing a gap in local news that target Filipino migrants directly. Under the stewardship of Deocadiz and Mandap, *The SUN Hong Kong* also conducts writing workshops that trains migrant workers on the rigors of reporting and the tenets of journalism.

Marites Palma, a domestic worker and one of *The SUN Hong Kong*'s writers, was featured in a feature article by *Coconuts Hong Kong* as one of the domestic reporters writing about the city's hidden stories (Turton, 2017).

“Even now when I read Filipino newspapers, there is a lot they do not understand because they do not live here, they do not know the laws and how things are done. There's not a lot of information that targets the Filipino communities abroad,” said Mandap.

“For the Filipinos in Hong Kong [SAR, China], their interests and hopes reflect their voice and collective aspirations. I think that's what any community needs, something that reflects them or champions their cause. Not just to inform but also to defend them, especially most Filipinos here are domestic workers who are vulnerable to either exploitation or discrimination,” said Deocadiz.

- (5) Institutionalize migration awards that recognize best practices in telling migration stories

The Migration Advocacy and Media Awards conferred by the CFO recognizes reportage that raises awareness on labour migration issues, advocates for the rights and welfare of Filipino workers and their families, and promotes a positive image of Filipinos overseas.

18 A leading Filipino newspaper in Hong Kong SAR, China founded in 1995.

According to the CFO, since the first conferment of the MAM Awards, more diverse migrants' issues have been tackled by the media: "There are now more investigative documentaries, features, movies and blogs featuring migration issues. There are also now more platforms being used by the media and advocates – from the traditional way of reporting/broadcasting to utilizing online platforms and social media."

Stories that shape the perception of certain groups are not limited to journalistic reports. Movies, comics and books are all part of the realm of representations that inform the understanding of migration as a lived experience. Awards for ethical and compelling migration stories can encourage various content creators to explore and develop alternative forms of storytelling of migrant workers' issues.

Kenneth Joe Uy, a nurse in the United Kingdom, uses his YouTube channel to share his migration story of using hardships and struggles as a tool to reach for his dreams. "A lot of Filipinos are a product of our situation. That has really made us work hard for our dreams."

Annexes



Annex A. Top search results for OFW news, 2007–2020¹⁹

2007 top 10 results

Note: Only the top two results are relevant (i.e. contains coverage of OFW issues) to the search.

1 Skilled workers desert Philippines

URL: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6194333.stm>

Overview: Several Filipinos have fled the Philippines because of the large disparity in salaries in the Philippines versus those abroad. There is also a shortage of health-care workers left in the Philippines because of these wage disparities. One such Filipino is Michael, a nurse working in the United Kingdom whose family dynamic suffers because he must work abroad. However, the Government of the Philippines denies promoting labour export, and Labour Secretary Arturo Brion says that his department is working on incentives to address the lack of nurses in the country.

2 OFW economic council formed to assist Ilonggos working abroad

(The actual Google search result was the article, “Iloilo hosts biggest gathering of CPAs” (www.thenewstoday.info/2007/04/18/iloilo.hosts.biggest.gathering.of.cpas.html). It contained a link to other articles, including “OFW economic council formed...”, which is now placed in the number 2 rank here.)

URL: www.thenewstoday.info/2007/04/18/ofw.economic.council.formed.to.assist.ilonggos.working.abroad.html

Overview: The Overseas Filipino Economic Council of Iloilo City was established to look after Ilonggo OFWs with labour concerns. The city government recognizes the potential of all 10,000 OFWs from Iloilo and would like to help protect their families and economic activities. It aims to better document Ilonggo OFWs, give them skills training and assist repatriated OFWs to make use of investment and business opportunities in the city.

¹⁹ In the News tab of Google (keywords: OFW, OFWs, overseas, overseas labor, work abroad, migrant worker/s). A copy of this annex is saved as a Word file in https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yDLi4Ri1apJ9qz86Y0UI_o01TedZ4HHeLy4I9Dfka2k/edit.

All hyperlinks were working at the time of writing this report.

2008 top 10 results

Note: The original third, fourth, eighth, ninth and tenth results that turned up in the Google News tab contained the acronym “OFW” but did not feature OFW news.

1 Why the Filipino is SPECIAL

URL: <https://thepinoy.net/?p=1882>

Overview: The piece enumerates profound qualities that make Filipinos special, and that they should express with pride to the rest of the world despite common negative connotations about Filipinos. These include their being brown-skinned, spiritual, timeless, spaceless, linguists, groupists, weavers and adventurers. It also talks about Filipino culture, including how most of their events, such as Filipino Christmas do not have clear-cut beginnings or endings.

2 Ninoy Aquino: A hero for all seasons

URL: <http://thepinoy.net/?p=1931>

Overview: The article touches on Ninoy Aquino’s death and the Filipino people’s wait for him to come back to the Philippines prior. It also argues that he was not exactly a hero made or born, but someone who became a nationally recognizable face to give a heroic dimension to Philippine society.

3 Twelve 2007 issues, twelve wishes for 2008

URL: www.thenewstoday.info/2008/01/04/twelve.2007.issues.2.html

Overview: The article recounts 12 public issues from 2007, while listing solutions to these problems as wishes for the new year in 2008. The twelfth issue listed talks about how former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo greatly utilized OFW remittances as her economic strategy and taking credit for such “achievements”, despite this leading the population towards poor conditions. It also talks about how she neither adequately invested in economic services, leading to more Filipinos to work abroad, nor raise foreign currency remittances to strengthen the peso against the United States dollar.

4 Raging Divas fire up OFW Family Day at SM City Iloilo

(The actual Google search result was the article, “A day with Miladay” (www.thenewstoday.info/2008/12/11/a.day.with.miladay.html), which contains a title link to the article now placed in the number 4 rank here.)

URL: www.thenewstoday.info/2008/12/11/raging.divas.html

Overview: The article endorses the upcoming performance of the Raging Divas at the SM City Iloilo Event Center on OFW Family Day.

(For the next search result, Google detected “Namets: A glimpse of our very own” (www.thenewstoday.info/2008/12/11/namets.html), with the keyword “OFW” comes from an embedded link to the article already listed in this number.)

2009 top 10 results

1 Labour migration in 2009: a terrible year to be an OFW

URL: www.bulatlat.com/2009/12/31/labor-migration-in-2009-a-terrible-year-to-be-an-ofw

Overview: The regime of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has changed the face of labour migration in the Philippines. It pursues its labour export policy aggressively, begging receiving countries to accept more OFWs. In the meantime, it is shirking its responsibilities to OFWs in distress, in many instances even becoming complicit in their abuse.

2 Arroyo regime’s failure to protect OFWs pushes Migrante to seek party-list seat

URL: www.bulatlat.com/2009/09/23/arroyo-regime%E2%80%99s-failure-to-protect-ofws-pushes-migrante-to-seek-party-list-seat

Overview: Migrante International (“Migrante”) promotes the rights of migrant workers, exposes anomalies in the Government and has been very vocal in its stand against the intensifying labour export policy of the regime. Through the Migrante Sectoral Party, Migrante promises to provide OFWs the protection that they deserve.

3 Trouble in paradise for 300 Filipino workers in the Maldives

URL: www.bulatlat.com/2009/09/10/trouble-in-paradise-for-300-filipino-workers-in-the-maldives/

Overview: OFWs have not been paid their salaries in the last five months. To survive, they collect rain water to drink and, for their meals, catch fish from the beautiful sea water of the Maldives. Back home, their families are starving while the Department of Foreign Affairs dilly-dallies.

4 “Wowowee” visits Dubai; kicks off 2009 TFC World Tours

URL: www.pep.ph/guide/tv/3309/wowowee-visits-dubai-kicks-off-2009-tfc-world-tours

Overview: Willie Revillame brought happiness to our kababayans in the Middle East when he visited Dubai for the first time on 30 January 2009. This visit marked the beginning of Wowowee's 2009 TFC World Tours, which is part of the fifteenth anniversary celebration of The Filipino Channel (TFC) and the fourth anniversary of the ABS-CBN noontime show. The event, "WowoWillie: 'Round the World ... Touchdown in Dubai!", was also part of Willie Revillame's birthday celebration.

2010 top 10 results

Note: The original fourth, tenth and twelfth results that turned up in the Google News tab contained the acronym "OFW" but did not feature OFW news.

1 Toiling far from home for Philippine dreams

URL: www.nytimes.com/2010/09/19/world/asia/19phils.html

Overview: OFWs have helped greatly in building infrastructure in the town of Mabini, Batangas and their remittances contribute greatly to the Philippines' economic growth. However, critics have said that the Government has an unhealthy dependence on remittances, disregarding the social costs of labour migration. It provides a human angle on the issue by showing the big houses that OFWs have saved up for, only for these to be left mostly empty and barely used because they live abroad.

2 UI-Phinma honors OFWs; lights Christmas tree

URL: www.thenewstoday.info/2010/12/22/ui.phinma.honors.ofws.lights.christmas.tree.html

Overview: The article touches heavily on OFWs being modern-day heroes, with their remittances helping the economy greatly, and the conditions they have to face abroad in order to provide for their families. This leads up to how the University of Iloilo (UI)-Phinma held a recognition activity to honor OFWs, especially those who are parents of students there.

3 BIR approves Philippines' REIT tax incentives

URL: www.tax-news.com/news/BIR_Approves_Philippines_REIT_Tax_Incentives___43946.html (inactive)

Overview: The article discusses how the rules and regulations to establish real estate investment trusts (REITs) were already approved by the Bureau of Internal Revenue so that companies can raise capital by listing their assets on the Philippine Stock Exchange under

an REIT. However, while dividends paid by the REIT would have a final tax of 10 per cent, there is an exemption for those paid to a domestic or resident foreign corporation or an OFW investor.

4 OWWA 6 needs 72 scholars

URL: www.thenewstoday.info/2010/07/07/owwa.6.needs.72.scholars.html

Overview: A total of 72 slots are allocated for Western Visayan scholars, 12 for each province, under the OFW Dependent Scholarship Program of OWWA – Region 6 for schoolyear 2010–2011. The programme aims to provide educational scholarships to poor but deserving dependants of OFWs.

5 People, the Philippines' best export

URL: www.economist.com/banyan/2010/02/09/people-the-philippines-best-export

Overview: The article goes into detail about how remittances from OFWs have been responsible for a great deal of the country's economic growth. Despite the global economic crisis, many OFWs in the service sectors continue to give remittances because their employers have become dependent on them. It also argues that this policy is not ideal for the long run, especially with domestic economic affairs being characterized by poor governance and corruption.

6 Pinoy Global Center at SM City Iloilo

URL: www.thenewstoday.info/2010/03/08/pinoy.global.center.at.sm.city.iloilo.html

Overview: The article endorses the opening of the Pinoy Global Center in SM City Iloilo, where OFWs are given special services, such as free video conferencing, free Internet and more. They could also work on remittances and foreign exchange here. It also talks about how the management hopes to include training for them on how to invest their benefactors' money.

7 Efren "Bata" Reyes dominates Spanish Open; pockets \$8,000

URL: <http://philboxing.com/news/story-40618.html>

Overview: Filipino billiard player Efren "Bata" Reyes wins the Spanish Open 9-Ball Championships and delights the OFW crowd watching the game to support him.

8 New scholarship open to OFW dependents

(The actual Google search result was the article, "PNPA admission test set" (www.thenewstoday.info/2010/08/31/pnpa.admission.test.set.html), which contains a title link to the article now placed in the number 8 rank here.)

URL: www.thenewstoday.info/2010/08/31/new.scholarship.open.to.ofw.dependents.html

Overview: There are scholarships from OWWA – Region 6 for dependants of OFWs with a monthly income equal to or lower than USD 400. Recipients are encouraged to pursue courses with high demand like those in the science and technology field.

9 Filipino workforce embracing entrepreneurial spirit

URL: <https://gulfnews.com/business/filipino-workforce-embracing-entrepreneurial-spirit-1.676274>

Overview: Jojie Dinsay of the Commercial Attaché at the Philippine Embassy in the United Arab Emirates says that a small segment of OFWs in the country are leaving traditionally secure jobs to start small businesses. The Philippine business community conducts seminars to promote these business. They hope that OFWs will not just do well in their jobs in the Middle Eastern country they, but that they would also be able to start businesses when they go home, so they can provide jobs that are much needed in the Philippines.

10 Filipino man found dead inside Gulf Air plane

URL: <https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/bahrain/filipino-man-found-dead-inside-gulf-air-plane-1.699355>

Overview: Marlon Cueva, a 36-year-old OFW was strangled by his own jacket on a plane when he was heading to Manila. Authorities are investigating if this was self-inflicted. They also relate this story to an incident in September of the same year when a newborn was found in the lavatory on a flight after their OFW mother left her baby there because she feared what her family's reaction would be.

2011 top 10 results

1 Weak options to protect overseas Filipino workers

URL: <https://opinion.inquirer.net/16595/weak-options-to-protect-overseas-filipino-workers>

Overview: The opinion column discusses how implementing a deployment ban on countries that have not signed international conventions on protecting foreign workers from abuse does not help guarantee better conditions for OFWs. Despite these countries not being big job destinations for Filipinos, the substandard economic state the country is currently in only makes more Filipinos need to work abroad. As such, this weakens the Philippines' leverage to get other countries' compliance with laws to guarantee that OFWs are free from abuse and maltreatment.

2 Is it really poverty that drives Filipinos overseas?

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/3310/is-it-really-poverty-that-drives-filipinos-overseas>

Overview: Not every OFW is driven by their poverty to work abroad, as some only want to join the trend to migrate. The great deal of money it takes to even engage in overseas work is also brought up to show that poverty is not the only reason for OFWs to go abroad. This piece talks about how OFWs invest – and actually gamble – a lot in order to leave the country and get foreign paychecks.

3 Philippines: Migrant workers put jobs before safety in Libya

URL: www.ipsnews.net/2011/04/philippines-migrant-workers-put-jobs-before-safety-in-libya

Overview: Migrant workers in Libya have to choose between the great safety risk of staying in the country or going back home, where wages are low. It also talks about how important it is to create more jobs for Filipinos within the country so that they do not have to seek greener pastures abroad.

4 OFW: overstaying filipino worker

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/4515/ofw-overstaying-filipino-worker>

Overview: Some OFWs stay in host countries beyond the allowed period. It argues that they should be responsible for going back home and should not intentionally break the law despite how hard it may be to leave their high-paying jobs.

5 Migrante bucks cutback in Philippine diplomatic posts

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/14699/migrante-bucks-cutback-in-philippine-diplomatic-posts>

Overview: Migrante International, an alliance of OFWs and their families, expresses anger over the Department of Foreign Affairs' plan to close down 12 Philippine embassies and consulates, as there already is a large disparity between the number of embassies and consulates and the number of countries where overseas Filipinos stay.

6 Filipinos in UAE caught in credit card trap

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/9791/filipinos-in-uae-caught-in-credit-card-trap>

Overview: The article talks about the phenomenon of foreign workers in the United Arab Emirates who end up with large credit card debts and get jailed because of their inability to pay them off. Foreign workers, who, in part, incurred huge debts helping their families back home financially, end up clogging jails.

7 Metrobank expands remittance service with MoneyGram International

URL: <https://business.inquirer.net/4145/metrobank-expands-remittance-service-with-moneygram-international>

Overview: Metrobank partners with MoneyGram International so its money transfer services would also be available to Filipinos overseas, stating that it is important for OFWs to be able to send money safely to the Philippines.

8 Certified as fit to work, OFW is sent back for medical reasons

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/12823/certified-as-fit-to-work-ofw-is-sent-back-for-medical-reasons>

Overview: Angelito Cabillon paid a great deal of money just to be able to work in Qatar, only to be sent back home after working for only over a month. Despite having a “fit to work” medical certificate from his agency, he was sent back home because of a lung scar. The story of Joseph Banaag, an OFW in Riyadh, who was sexually harassed and given a contract substitution, is also touched upon.

9 The Flor Contemplacion syndrome

URL: <https://opinion.inquirer.net/4234/the-flor-contemplacion-syndrome>

Overview: The article argues how obligations of solidarity and moral responsibility as Filipinos have led the country to express public anger over the failure of the Government of the Philippines to delay or completely stop the execution of an OFW such as Flor Contemplacion.

10 Undocumented Filipino workers face tighter screening

URL: <https://gulfnews.com/general/undocumented-filipino-workers-face-tighter-screening-1.800364>

Overview: OFWs based in the United Arab Emirates visiting the Philippines may have a hard time returning to their country of work, as the Government of the Philippines is tightening restrictions for those who travelled to the Middle Eastern country on a visit visa and then obtained employment.

2012 top 10 results

1 End of labor export

URL: <https://opinion.inquirer.net/35626/end-of-labor-export>

Overview: There are goals set to create more jobs in the Philippines to lessen the need for workers to go abroad, but expert advice shows that this can likely only happen when the country achieves economic development.

2 In Pictures: The misery of migrant workers

URL: www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2012/12/18/in-pictures-the-misery-of-migrant-workers

Overview: A collection of photos shows the processes that Filipinos must undergo to become OFWs and their poor working conditions abroad, as well as how families of OFWs back home are coping.

3 OFWs warned vs 'backdoor' exit

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/33321/ofws-warned-vs-backdoor-exit>

Overview: POEA tried to warn OFWs to try to steer away from recruiters who use exit points in the south, as these are often used by human traffickers.

4 OFW remittances promote mendicant culture

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/50520/ofw-remittances-promote-mendicant-culture>

Overview: Ted Unarce's documentary, *Mendicant Society*, investigates the impact of remittances on the children of OFWs, and the resulting effects on Filipinos' morals, principles and culture. Despite the Government stating that OFW remittances are needed for the economy, the documentary talks about the social cost of the growing OFW population.

5 OFW guide: The required 'Pre-departure Orientation Seminar'

URL: www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/pinoyabroad/248571/ofw-guide-the-required-pre-departure-orientation-seminar/story/

Overview: POEA is requiring OFWs to go for a pre-departure orientation seminar about boarding an aeroplane, how they should conduct themselves in their destination country and "the basics" of working abroad.

6 OFWs did it again

URL: <https://business.inquirer.net/63859/ofws-did-it-again>

Overview: OFWs have again brought a great deal of remittances to the Philippines, which is of huge help to the economy. The article also elaborates on some of the risks and the social costs that comes with increasing numbers of Filipinos choosing to work overseas.

7 Two OFW kids shine in int'l moot court tilt

URL: <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/blogs/the-inbox/two-ofw-kids-shine-int-l-moot-court-180042179.html>

Overview: Two sons of OFWs – Christopher Louie Ocampo and Neil B. Nucup – help get the University of the Philippines College of Law into the circle of world's top four law schools when they make it to the semifinals of the 2012 Jessup International Law Moot Court Championship. The story takes a human angle by going into how they coped growing up with their parents working abroad.

8 OFW saved from execution in Saudi Arabia

URL: www.bulatlat.com/2012/04/13/ofw-saved-from-execution-in-saudi-arabia

Overview: Rodelio Dondon Lanuza, an OFW who was jailed for unintentionally killing a Saudi national in self-defence from a sexual abuse attempt, is being released from prison. The Saudi Reconciliation Committee released him as he was on death row after his family and supporters raised PHP 35 million in blood money or “diya” to pay the victim's family.

9 DOLE: Safeguards in place for Saudi-bound helpers

URL: www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/pinoyabroad/276101/dole-safeguards-in-place-for-saudi-bound-helpers/story/

Overview: The new Standard Employment Contract (SEC) between the Philippines and Saudi Arabia can protect OFWs in the kingdom from abuse and exploitation, according to DOLE.

10 Strong peso to erode PH competitiveness – Balisacan

URL: www.rappler.com/business/strong-peso-to-erode-ph-competitiveness-balisacan

Overview: The Government of the Philippines is closely monitoring the appreciation of the peso, as it can possibly undermine the country's competitiveness – for example, by making Philippine-made products more expensive abroad, eroding the purchasing power of OFW remittances and more.

2013 top 10 results

1 Immigrants outnumber OFWs

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/69339/immigrants-outnumber-ofws>

Overview: Data has shown that permanent migrants have exceeded the number of OFWs by a small but significant margin, with many Filipinos also leaving for reasons other than work – such as marriage and educational opportunities.

2 'Embassy staff prostituting OFWs'

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/embassy-officials-prostitution-overseas-filipino-workers

Overview: Akbayan Rep. Walden Bello says Philippine embassy staff in posts in the Middle East are sexually abusing and prostituting distressed OFWs. Some officials are said to be running prostitution rings in Jordan and Kuwait, while others were caught in an intimate act with an OFW at the embassy shelter. DFA and DOLE officials are in touch with the victims.

3 DOLE: More OFWs coming home for good

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/75025/dole-more-ofws-coming-home-for-good>

Overview: With local companies starting to provide compensation and benefits comparable to what OFWs are receiving abroad, more Filipinos are expected to return to the Philippines for work.

4 Overseas Filipino workers – heroes at home, exploited abroad

URL: <https://newint.org/blog/majority/2013/04/25/overseas-filipino-workers>

Overview: The article talks about how several OFWs simply want to permanently return to the Philippines and work there instead of abroad, as they long for their loved ones, but the unemployment rate in the country, as well as the focus on labour export policies, makes it difficult for OFWs to leave their posts abroad.

5 Happy endings of OFW stories keep radio show going

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/73597/happy-endings-of-ofw-stories-keep-radio-show-going>

Overview: OFW stories with happy endings, such as reunions of families, have inspired Radyo Inquirer host Susan K to continue reporting OFW stories on her radio programme,

“Bantay OCW: Ang Boses ng mga OFW”. The article also elaborates on her process of looking for solutions to the problems OFWs come to her with, as well as awards the show has won.

6 Laments on the Filipino Diaspora

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/82987/laments-on-the-filipino-diaspora>

Overview: This provides a rundown of the situation of Filipinos who go abroad to work and the alarming percentage of the population who choose to work overseas. It also presents the solution of providing more jobs for Filipinos at home.

7 Amid sex abuse scandal, two veteran labour attachés named to Saudi POLO

URL: www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/pinoyabroad/322308/amid-sex-abuse-scandal-two-veteran-labor-attach-eacute-s-named-to-saudi-polo/story/

Overview: Veteran labour attachés are assigned to head the Philippine Overseas Labor Offices in Saudi Arabia after the sexual abuse allegations against Philippine officials.

8 Life is a struggle for OFWs

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/83963/life-is-a-struggle-for-ofws>

Overview: OFWs, especially mothers, suffer from being away from their loved ones, and husbands back home are becoming too dependent on their OFW partners.

9 CFO chief: OFW gender concerns should be part of development plans

URL: www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/pinoyabroad/312138/cfo-chief-ofw-gender-concerns-should-be-part-of-development-plans/story/

Overview: The CFO reminds participants in a preparatory Asia-Pacific meeting on gender and development in Thailand of the call to action to address the impact of international migration on women, children and their families.

10 Labour attaché in ‘sex-for-fly’ ring face probe/8 more Mideast enhoys ordered home amid sex abue reports

URL: www.newsflash.org/2004/02/hl/hl112443.htm

Overview: Labour officer Mario Antonio denies accusations of running a prostitution ring in Jordan and says he is ready for a full investigation on the matter, while asking the public not to assume anything until results of the probe are out.

2014 top 10 results

- 1 Forced remittance bill smacks of Marcosian law – Migrante

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/99850/forced-remittance-bill-smacks-of-marcosian-law-migrante#ixzz6yR3q0xXm>

Overview: A bill filed in the House of Representatives requiring OFWs to send money back to their families or dependants in the Philippines, or else their passport will not be renewed, has been described as a resurrected Marcos-era law by an international migrant workers group.

- 2 OFW remittances to increase by 8.5% in 2014 – Standard Chartered

URL: <https://business.inquirer.net/160057/ofw-remittances-to-increase-by-8-5-in-2014-standard-chartered>

Overview: Overseas remittance flows to the Philippines will likely expand at a faster pace of 8 to 8.5 percent in 2014 on improved global growth prospects and post-supertyphoon “Yolanda” (Haiyan) reconstruction, according to the British bank Standard Chartered.

- 3 What they don’t tell you about the OFW life

URL: www.rappler.com/voices/ispeak/ofw-life

Overview: “It isn’t whining to speak about OFW realities, nor does it mean that they are ungrateful for their overseas jobs; it’s simply a peek into our not-so-ideal lives.”

- 4 OFW groups seek TRO on integration of NAIA terminal fee into airfare

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/113619/ofw-groups-seek-tro-on-integration-of-naia-terminal-fee-into-airfare#ixzz6yR5sR6rr>

Overview: Several groups of the OFWs asked the Pasay City Regional Trial Court, on Tuesday, to issue a temporary restraining order, stopping the Manila International Airport Authority (MIAA) from implementing the integration of the airport terminal fee in the cost of international airline tickets starting 1 November 2014.

- 5 ‘I don’t feel like an OFW, just a girl with a camera’ shooting HK’s street life

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/106886/i-dont-feel-like-an-ofw-just-a-girl-with-a-camera-shooting-hks-street-life#ixzz6yaqoH0Yz>

Overview: The article presents a profile of Xyza Bacani, a Filipino overseas domestic worker and photojournalist in Hong Kong SAR, China.

6 The weight of an OFW “Yes” (iSpeak piece)

URL: www.rappler.com/voices/ispeak/weight-ofw-yes-shakira-son

Overview: OFWs have trouble saying no due to expectations set upon them.

7 OFW survival guide (iSpeak piece)

URL: www.rappler.com/voices/ispeak/ofw-survival-guide

Overview: Tips and advice on how to survive being an OFW.

8 Departing OFWs advised to get anti-polio vaccine

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/104489/departing-ofws-advised-to-get-anti-polio-vaccine>

Overview: POEA issues a medical alert for OFWs, urging them strongly to get anti-polio vaccines before leaving for their destination countries.

9 OFW experience: At what cost to family? (op-ed)

URL: www.philstar.com/opinion/2014/10/06/1376935/ofw-experience-what-cost-family

Overview: Newspaper columnist argues how the exodus of Filipinos to work abroad leads to broken families.

10 Violence and violations: OFWs and human rights

URL: www.philstar.com/opinion/2014/12/22/1405360/violence-and-violations-ofws-and-human-rights

Overview: The article details how human traffickers are targeting aspiring OFWs.

2015 top 10 results

1 Customs told: Hands-off OFW balikbayan box

URL: www.bulatlat.com/2015/08/24/customs-told-hands-off-the-ofw-balikbayan-box/

Overview: A Facebook page, “OFW Lounge”, urges OFWs to stop sending *balikbayan* boxes in protest of the Bureau of Customs’ threat to open and tax these boxes until it retracts the threat.

2 Aquino orders BOC: Only suspect OFW boxes must be opened

URL: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/715858/aquino-stops-random-physical-inspection-of-balikbayan-boxes#ixzz6ybpINKef>

Overview: Because OFW families view *balikbayan* boxes as an integral part of the family relationship, President Aquino ordered the Bureau of Customs not to open them unless they pose a threat to public safety.

3 Netizens: Balikbayan box is every OFW's 'love box'

URL: www.philstar.com/other-sections/news-feature/2015/08/24/1491694/netizens-balikbayan-box-every-ofws-love-box

Overview: Stricter inspections of *balikbayan* boxes, implemented by the customs bureau because of rampant smuggling of illegal items, spark outrage on social media. The article also elaborates how special *balikbayan* boxes are to the families of OFWs.

4 Tech-based services needed to protect OFWs – research

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/technology-labor-trafficking-usc-study

Overview: Research by the University of Southern California emphasizes how social media platforms that help OFWs connect with others and reduce isolation is needed. The Government of the Philippines and the private sector should also invest in technology-based services for OFWs to prevent misinformation from traffickers.

5 Ex-OFW, now business owner, tells OFWs: Plan your return

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/advice-ofws-have-exit-plan

Overview: In an interview, Lito Soriano, a former OFW who came back to the Philippines to build a recruitment business he now leads, talks about how overseas employment should lead to social mobility when other OFWs come back as well.

6 The inspirational, untold stories of OFWs

URL: www.rappler.com/bulletin-board/filipino-ofw-heroes

Overview: Western Union launches its campaign, “Heroes for Better”, about OFWs and their stories of struggle to leave the country to give them and their loved ones a better life.

7 POEA to recruiters: Use ‘electronic systems’ in hiring OFWs

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/poea-licensed-recruiters-need-step-up

Overview: POEA encourages recruitment agencies to use electronic systems, as this is a more transparent system that makes people more accountable.

8 'Slow' gov't process makes OFWs fall for illegal recruiters

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/slow-government-process-ofws-illegal-recruiters

Overview: Lito Soriano, an advocate for the ethical recruitment of OFWs, says that "speedier" illegal recruitment become a more viable option to aspiring OFWs because it takes much longer to go through the legal process.

9 SSS grants OFWs more time to file sickness notifications

URL: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/731876/sss-grants-ofws-more-time-to-file-sickness-notifications>

Overview: OFWs are given a longer period of 35 calendar days to file sickness notifications to be considerate of their limited time and accessibility to Social Security System offices while abroad.

10 In photos: 2015 Model OFW Family of the Year Awards

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/photos-owwa-model-ofw-family-award-2015

Overview: OFWs involved in civic engagement are recognized at the Model OFW Family of the Year Awards held at the Philippine International Convention Center.

2016 top 10 results

1 Gov't to put up OFW Bank

URL: <https://business.inquirer.net/221746/govt-put-ofw-bank>

Overview: The State-run Land Bank of the Philippines ("Landbank") plans to establish a so-called "OFW Bank," an offshoot of its planned acquisition of Philippine Postal Savings Bank ("Postbank").

2 Pimentel wants Senate probe into death of OFW in Saudi Arabia

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/koko-pimentel-senate-probe-ofw-death-avila-edloy

Overview: Senate President Aquilino Pimentel III seeks a Senate inquiry into the death of an OFW who was allegedly sexually abused by her employer in Saudi Arabia.

3 'Emotions preventing OFWs from financial success'

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/emotions-preventing-ofw-financial-success

Overview: A financial expert says many OFWs send most of their earnings to their families – and fail to save for themselves – because they feel emotions such as guilt and shame.

4 OFW remittances hit \$2.7 billion in March 2016

URL: www.rappler.com/business/economy/ofw-remittances-march-q1-2016

Overview: Personal remittances by OFWs reached USD 2.7 billion in March 2016, 1.4 per cent higher than in March 2015, says BSP Governor Amando Tetangco, Jr.

5 Señeres' family rejects poll substitution, but OFW party-list wants one

URL: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/763273/seneres-family-rejects-poll-substitution-but-ofw-party-list-wants-one>

Overview: The family of the late OFW party-list representative Roy Señeres and his political party file opposing manifestations on substitution at the Commission on Elections.

6 Aquino and the continuing plight of OFWs

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/president-aquino-plight-ofws

Overview: This story looks at whether President Benigno Aquino III was able to deliver on his promise to OFWs that by the end of his administration, working abroad will be a "choice rather than a necessity".

7 Doctors, healthcare professionals still highest paid OFWs

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/150028/doctors-healthcare-professionals-still-highest-paid-ofws%E2%80%A8>

Overview: Doctors are still the highest paid OFWs, while the engineering sector posts more job opportunities, a report shows.

8 DTI readies program for displaced OFWs

URL: <https://business.inquirer.net/214707/dti-readies-program-for-displaced-ofws>

Overview: After the oil crisis in Saudi Arabia, the Department of Trade and Industry forges a partnership with OWWA to come up with entrepreneurship programmes for Filipinos who have been repatriated from the Middle East.

9 OFW Jonard Langamin escapes death row, returns to PH

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/ofw-jonard-langamin-escapes-death-row-saudi-arabia

Overview: OFW Jonard Langamin is able to return to the Philippines after the Government of Saudi Arabia spares him from death row.

10 VIRAL: Crying 5-year old begs OFW dad to stay

URL: <https://news.abs-cbn.com/trending/11/15/16/viral-crying-5-year-old-begs-ofw-dad-to-stay>

Overview: A video showing a little girl crying because she does not want her OFW father to leave goes viral.

2017 top 10 results

1 OFW in Kuwait executed while asserting innocence

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/ofw-jakatia-pawa-execution-kuwait

Overview: OFW Jakatia Pawa is executed, even as she asserts her innocence, for the murder of her Kuwaiti employer's 22-year-old daughter.

2 OFW Jakatia Pawa's death a result of PH govt policy of delayed legal aid – Migrante

URL: www.bulatlat.com/2017/01/25/ofw-jakatia-pawas-death-result-ph-govt-policy-delayed-legal-aid-migrante

Overview: The OFW group Migrante demands an investigation of “neglectful” officials and changes in government policy. A domestic helper from Zamboanga City, Pawa had worked for five years in Kuwait when she was accused in 2007 and eventually convicted for the murder of her employer's 22-year old daughter. She was sentenced to death in April 2008; the verdict was upheld in 2013.

3 Pinay hanged in Kuwait for murder

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/152052/pinay-hanged-kuwait-murder>

Overview: A Filipino mother of two, convicted of killing her Kuwaiti employer's daughter, has been executed, insisting to the end that she was innocent of the murder 10 years ago.

4 Free OFW ID launched; DOLE yet to issue guidelines

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/ofws-id-launched

Overview: The Government launches the anticipated OFW identification card.

5 8 money mistakes why OFWs are struggling financially

URL: www.gmanetwork.com/news/pinoyabroad/news/609617/8-money-mistakes-why-ofws-are-struggling-financially/story/

Overview: OFWs struggle to save money and end up getting broke. The article gives tips and mentions the “*nakakahiya*” mentality and OFWs as milking cows.

6 Over 5,000 OFWs in Saudi repatriated as amnesty program ends

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/ofws-saudi-arabia-repatriated-amnesty-program

Overview: More than 5,000 stranded OFWs have been repatriated in the 90-day amnesty program of the Government of Saudi Arabia.

7 132 cases of abused OFW kids recorded

URL: www.sunstar.com.ph/article/407183/Business/132-cases-of-abused-OFW-kids-recorded

Overview: The Mindanao Migrants Center for Empowering Actions, Inc. (MMCEAI) in Davao City said that it has recorded a total of 132 cases of children of OFWs being abused and molested.

8 Lack of guidelines on newly launched OFW ID causes confusion

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/ofw-id-confusion-guidelines

Overview: The lack of implementing guidelines on the OFW Identification Card newly launched by DOLE has left many OFWs confused regarding its benefits and functions.

9 Bicolana OFW dies after serving ‘two masters’ in Saudi Arabia

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/bicolana-ofw-dies-riyadh

Overview: Ana Fe Velasco-Bania, an OFW who went to Riyadh in 2015 to work as a domestic helper, dies of a heart attack and is found to have bruises all over her body. She also served two households, in violation of her contract.

10 How OFWs can avoid getting buried in debt

URL: www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/ofw-tips-avoid-debt

Overview: PinoyWise International gives tips on how to manage debt and finances.

2018 top 10 results

- 1 Duterte mulls 'total ban' on OFW deployment to Kuwait

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/duterte-mulls-ban-ofw-deployment-kuwait

Overview: Duterte considers a ban on deploying OFWs to Kuwait following reported cases of sexual abuse.

- 2 OFW saved from UAE death row returns

URL: www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1052787

Overview: After serving four years in jail, Jennifer Dalquez, who was sentenced to death for murder but was acquitted in 2017, finally arrives home after the Government of the United Arab Emirates released her from prison.

- 3 OWWA launches OFW e-card for easier access to gov't benefits

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/owwa-launches-ofw-e-card-easier-access-government-benefits

Overview: The e-card reduces the number of documents needed when applying for programmes and services offered by OWWA.

- 4 Duterte threatened deployment ban if OFW in UAE executed: Bello

URL: www.bworldonline.com/duterte-threatened-deployment-ban-if-ofw-in-uae-executed-bello/

Overview: Labour Secretary Silvestre Bello III discloses that President Duterte would have declared a total ban on the deployment of Filipino workers to the United Arab Emirates had its government pushed through with the execution of Jennifer Dalquez.

- 5 OFW saved from UAE death row coming home to PH

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/215718-jennifer-dalquez-ofw-released-prison-uae/

Overview: OFW Jennifer Dalquez is set to be released from prison in the United Arab Emirates and will be repatriated back to the Philippines, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) confirms.

6 Toughening OFW protection (opinion)

URL: www.rappler.com/voices/imho/toughening-ofw-protection

Overview: The piece talks about how the successful repatriation of Jennifer Dalquez, the OFW saved from death row in the United Arab Emirates, sheds light on how far the Philippines has gone to protect OFWs.

7 DOST to launch assistance package for OFWs

URL: www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1044477

Overview: The Department of Science and Technology (DOST) is developing an assistance package for OFWs who plan to put up a technology-based enterprise and need technical assistance.

8 Scalded by employer: Abused Pinay in Saudi comes home after 4 years

URL: <https://news.abs-cbn.com/overseas/04/13/18/scalded-by-employer-abused-pinay-in-saudi-comes-home-after-4-years>

Overview: Fahima Alagasi, a 26-year-old domestic worker who was doused with boiling water by her employer in Saudi Arabia, finally returns to the Philippines.

2019 top 10 results

Note: The top two Google search results lead to the same article but use different links.

1 Another OFW killed in Kuwait; outraged DFA summons Kuwaiti ambassador

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/182732/another-ofw-killed-in-kuwait-ph-summons-kuwaiti-ambassador-to-express-outrage#ixzz6ybghdF8>

Overview: Another Filipino domestic worker in Kuwait has been killed allegedly by her employer's wife, the DFA says, adding that it has summoned the Kuwaiti ambassador to Manila to express its outrage.

2 Another OFW killed in Kuwait; outraged DFA summons Kuwaiti ambassador

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/182732/another-ofw-killed-in-kuwait-ph-summons-kuwaiti-ambassador-to-express-outrage#ixzz6ybgquORq>

Overview: Another Filipino domestic worker in Kuwait has been killed allegedly by her employer's wife, the DFA says, adding that it has summoned the Kuwaiti ambassador to Manila to express its outrage.

3 Agencies handling OFW matters may soon be under one office: DOLE

URL: www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1075907

Overview: The story is about the proposal to create a department for OFWs, and agencies being eyed for transfer are POEA, OWWA, the National Reintegration Center for OFWs and the DOLE International Labour Affairs Bureau.

4 OFWs now comprise 10% of Filipinos with HIV – ACTS-OFW

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/ofws-hiv-cases-march-2019

Overview: Of the 65,463 confirmed cases listed in the National HIV/AIDS Registry as of March 2019, 6,524 are OFWs, says ACTS-OFW.

5 Bishops support OFW Department creation

URL: www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1074875

Overview: An official of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines – Episcopal Commission on Migrants and Itinerant People (CBCP-ECMI) says the group supports the plan of President Rodrigo Duterte to create an OFW department.

6 Law signed deploying social workers attachés to major OFW markets

URL: www.bworldonline.com/law-signed-deploying-social-workers-attaches-to-major-ofw-markets/

Overview: PRESIDENT Rodrigo R. Duterte signed into law a bill requiring the presence of social welfare attachés in foreign labour markets with high concentrations of OFWs.

7 OFWs run to Supreme Court to contest mandatory SSS contributions

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/ofws-run-supreme-court-contest-mandatory-sss-contributions

Overview: OFWs file a petition with the Supreme Court seeking to nullify the requirement for them to pay Social Security System (SSS) contributions. Nine OFWs are represented by left-leaning lawmakers and the labour group Migrante.

8 Palace 'outraged' by rape of OFW in Kuwait

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/176253/palace-outraged-by-rape-of-ofw-in-kuwait>

Overview: A Kuwaiti police raped and assaulted an OFW. Malacañang expresses its outrage and assures government assistance to the family of the victim.

9 March OFW remittances rise 6.6% after end of Kuwait worker ban

URL: www.bworldonline.com/march-ofw-remittances-rise-6-6-after-end-of-kuwait-worker-ban/

Overview: Remittances from OFWs surged in March after a low base from a year earlier, when money sent home was dampened by a government-imposed ban on deployment to Kuwait.

10 Duterte signs into law OFW Handbook bill

URL: www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/03/03/1898235/duterte-signs-law-ofw-handbook-bill

Overview: President Duterte has signed into law a measure that mandates POEA to develop, disseminate and update a handbook on the rights and responsibilities of migrant workers.

2020 top 10 results**1** Murdered OFW in Kuwait wanted to go home months before death

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/murdered-ofw-kuwait-wanted-go-home-months-before-death

Overview: OFW Jeanelyn Villavende had repeatedly asked to be brought back home to the Philippines at least three months before she was beaten to death in Kuwait in December 2019. Villavende informed her recruitment agency of maltreatment and underpayment under her employer as early as September 2019.

2 OFW killed in Kuwait 'black and blue' when brought to hospital – Bello

URL: <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/182804/ofw-killed-in-kuwait-black-and-blue-when-brought-to-hospital-bello#ixzz6ybk30jXB>

Overview: The Filipina domestic worker who was killed allegedly by her Kuwaiti employer's wife was "black and blue" and already dead when brought to a hospital, labour Secretary Silvestre Bello III discloses.

3 Slain OFW in Kuwait was sexually abused, autopsy report shows

URL: www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/1/12/NBI-autopsy-sexually-abused-Villavende.html

Overview: An autopsy conducted by the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) has discovered that Filipina domestic worker Jeanelyn Villavende, who was killed in Kuwait recently, could have been sexually abused as well.

- 4** Duterte suspends higher PhilHealth premiums for OFWs, makes payments 'voluntary' – Roque

URL: <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/5/4/Duterte-lawmakers-suspend-OFW-PhilHealth-contributions.html>

Overview: President Rodrigo Duterte orders PhilHealth to suspend the collection of higher premiums from OFWs, citing the ongoing economic crisis.

- 5** 300,000 sign online petition opposing increase in OFW PhilHealth contributions

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/online-petition-opposing-increase-ofw-philhealth-contributions

Overview: Filipino migrant groups urge the Government to enforce a moratorium on all State collections from OFWs during the coronavirus pandemic and remove punitive penalties.

- 6** Higher PhilHealth rates for OFWs raise furor

URL: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1268995/higher-philhealth-rates-for-ofws-raise-furor>

Overview: Government officials, cause-oriented groups and OFWs themselves opposed PhilHealth's move to impose higher mandatory contributions from OFWs. An online petition on Change.org gained close to 300,000 signatures.

- 7** House approves OFW department bill

URL: www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/3/11/House-approves-OFW-department-bill.html

Overview: Lawmakers approve a bill that seeks to create a new agency for OFWs called the Department of Filipinos Overseas and Foreign Deployment. The measure stated that the new department will serve as the primary agency that will protect the rights and welfare of OFWs such as through regulating deployment to other countries and pursuing illegal recruitment cases.

- 8** NBI probes OFW in Taiwan who berated Duterte online

URL: https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/4/27/NBI-probe-OFW-Taiwan-cyber-libel.html?fbclid=IwAR1C0SHT1SGKGFGM_p3wplyNriMLscTVPqKNEa-1rYOHrWYxrjgNTyM85Co

Overview: A Filipina caregiver in Taiwan is under investigation for cyberlibel following her "nasty" Facebook posts about President Rodrigo Duterte online, Malacañang says. The worker has been petitioned for deportation by DOLE.

9 DOLE: 90,000 OFWs displaced worldwide due to coronavirus lockdowns

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/dole-ofw-displaced-worldwide-coronavirus-lockdown

Overview: Close to 90,000 OFWs have been displaced worldwide amid the lockdowns brought by the pandemic, DOLE said.

10 Task force pushes for P1.5-B financial aid to OFWs, workers hit by lockdown

URL: www.rappler.com/nation/iatf-pushes-financial-aid-ofws-workers-coronavirus-lockdown

Overview: The government body in charge of running the response to the COVID-19 pandemic is pushing for the immediate release of PHP 1.5 billion to fund financial assistance for overseas and local workers affected by lockdowns in Luzon and other parts of the country.

Annex B. Narrative analysis²⁰

Table A1. Narrative analysis summary table

Period	Search keywords (combination of general and specific terms)	Media outlet	Number of articles that appeared in search results
Arroyo administration (January 2007 to December 2009)	"OFW" + "Arroyo" or "deployment" or "economy"	ABS-CBN	58
		GMA	73
Pre-pandemic (February 2018 to July 2018)	"OFW" + "Kuwait" and/ or "freezer"	ABS-CBN	49
		GMA	58
		<i>INQUIRER.Net</i>	34
		<i>PhilStar.com</i>	65
		CNN Philippines	45
		<i>Rappler</i>	51
Pandemic (March 2020 to August 2020)	"OFW" + "COVID"	ABS-CBN	58
		GMA	98
		<i>INQUIRER.Net</i>	78
		<i>PhilStar.com</i>	76
		CNN Philippines	89
		<i>Rappler</i>	122

20 The complete of narrative analysis tables is available at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/14POYHx6y3P2YZcpuGU5HbdDrAfY9do6koviWaYf03jM/edit#gid=1381286966>.

Annex C. Migration Advocacy and Media Award Winners 2017 to 2019

The Migration Advocacy and Media (MAM) Awards was established in 2011 to show examples of some of the best practices of media outlets in raising awareness about migration among Filipinos and recognize the best migration stories. In particular, it recognizes works in the categories of print journalism, radio journalism, TV journalism, film media, interactive media and advertisement. The awards were conceptualized by the CFO in celebration of the Month of Overseas Filipinos, observed in December of each year, as well as International Migrants Day, also in the month of December. Awarded works from recent years are posted on the official website of the award-giving body.

In 2017, it awarded *Ako ay Pilipino*, a free monthly newspaper distributed to Filipinos living in Italy (MAM Awards Secretariat, 2017). It would also go on to win the Print Journalism Award (category: newsletter) in 2019 (MAM Awards Secretariat, 2019). Also in 2017, *Philippine Language Multicultural Family Music Radio*, broadcast in the Republic of Korea, was awarded Best Regular Radio Show on Migration. Hosted by Maria Genevie Kim, it provides information about both the Republic of Korea and the Philippines. The show also gives its audience a better idea of Korean culture and language (MAM Awards Secretariat, 2017).

Meanwhile, the MAM Awards recognized a radio show in America for its coverage of inspiring Filipino stories and events in 2019: *Buhay-buhay sa Amerika* (“Lives in America”), which was actually broadcasted by Spanish-language radio station, *Entre Mujeres Radio*, won the Radio Journalism Award (category: regular radio programme on migration) that year. On the other hand, “Laban.DH” won Best TV Programme Episode on Migration. Aired on *i-Witness*, the episode told the story of Filipino domestic workers and the violence they experienced living and working in Kuwait. This also provided a look into some of the challenges they would encounter upon getting back to their home country.

Table A2. Winners of the Migration Advocacy and Media (MAM) awards in 2017 and 2019

Category	2017	2019
Best newsletter	<i>Ako ay Pilipino</i> (Italy)	<i>The Migrant</i> (Germany)
Best newspaper	--	<i>Ako ay Pilipino</i> (Italy)
Best magazine	--	<i>VIA Times Newsmagazine</i> (United States)
Best book	<i>FEW: Financially Empowered Women</i> (Singapore)	<i>Bending without Breaking: Thirteen Women's Stories of Migration and Resilience</i> (Switzerland)
Best regular radio show on migration	<i>Philippine Language Multicultural Family Music Radio</i> (Republic of Korea)	<i>Buhay-buhay sa Amerika</i> (United States) <i>Luv2DMaX</i> (Kuwait)
Best regular TV show on migration	<i>CitizenPinoy</i> (United States)	<i>Kabayani Talks</i> (United States) <i>Pusong Pinoy sa Amerika</i> (United States)
Best TV show episode on migration	<i>Reporter's Notebook: "Hikbi sa Ibayong Dagat"</i> (Philippines)	<i>i-Witness: "Laban.DH"</i> (Philippines) <i>Reporter's Notebook: "Mga Nagkukubling Anghel"</i> (Philippines)
Best TV series on migration	<i>Tadhana</i> (Philippines)	<i>Tadhana</i> (Philippines)
Best interstitial TV show on migration	--	<i>Becoming Pinoy</i> (Philippines) <i>Lines and Letters</i> (Philippines)
Best documentary film on migration	<i>Mga Dayo: Stories of Filipinos in Myanmar</i> (Myanmar)	<i>Imprisoned: Raising My Baby Behind Bars</i> (Philippines)
Best blog on migration	<i>Who Takes Care of Nanny's Children?</i> (France, United Arab Emirates and the Philippines)	<i>The Global Carindera</i> (United States)
Best website on migration	<i>Ako Ay Pilipino</i> (www.akoaypilipino.eu) (Italy)	<i>Obrero</i> (www.obrerofilm.com) (New Zealand) <i>Pinoy Seoul</i> (www.pinoyseoul.com) (Republic of Korea)
Best advertisement	<i>Papa's Boy</i> (Philippines)	--
Best full-length feature film on migration	--	<i>Still Human</i> (Hong Kong SAR, China) <i>Hello, Love, Goodbye</i> (Philippines)
Special citation award	--	<i>Voice: Poetry by Youth of Kalihi</i> (United States)



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* All hyperlinks were working at the time of writing this report.

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International Organization for Migration
17 route des Morillons, P.O. Box 17, 1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland
Phone.: +41 22 717 9111 • Fax: +41 22 798 6150
Email: hq@iom.int • Website: www.iom.int