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Migration and remittances have positive impacts on gender equality in the Philippines

A new study supports capacity-building activities with migrant associations to improve the living conditions of Filipino migrants in Italy

[Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic] The Study “Gender, Remittances and Local Rural Development: The case of Filipino migration to Italy”, published by the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Filipino Women’s Council (FWC), assesses the impact of remittances sent by Filipino migrants in Italy on local rural community development in the Philippines.

The study was carried out in Rome (Italy) and selected rural communities in the Philippines’ provinces of Pampanga, Batangas, Ilocos Sur, Oriental Mindoro and Tarlac. Researchers collected qualitative data during 2 round-table sessions and 132 in-depth personal interviews with 61 migrants in Rome and 71 members of migrant households in the Philippines.

The high feminization of migration from the Philippines was one of the reasons that the country was selected for a case study of the impacts of women’s migration. Moreover, Italy is the 6th most popular destination country amongst Filipino migrants (preceded by Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, and the United Arab Emirates) and hosts the largest number of Filipino migrants within Europe (followed by Spain, Greece, and Austria).

According to the Commission of Filipinos Overseas, there are currently 128,080 Filipinos residing in Italy (2006). “The Filipino community in Italy is more feminized than any other migrant group and is highly concentrated in the domestic service sector, characterized by its intense demand for foreign female labour. In cities like Rome and Milan, female Filipino migrants account for up to 70% of all Filipino migrants”, stated Carolina Taborga, Social Affairs Officer at UN-INSTRAW.

Of the 12.8 billion dollars Filipino migrants sent back to the Philippines in 2005, 44 million dollars were sent from Italy, making Italy the fourth largest source of remittances. According to the UN-INSTRAW/IFAD/FWC study, Filipino women in Italy send remittances back home more regularly than their male counterparts. In Rome, 85.3% of women and 64.7% of men interviewed stated that they sent regular remittances to the Philippines each month. In general, regular remittances involve sending fixed amounts of money, averaging between €300 and €400 per month, which represents roughly half of the minimum salary of €600 per month earned by Filipino migrants.

The study revealed that for most recipient households, these monthly transfers act as a kind of salary, representing between 25% and 50% of total household income. This money is used to cover basic consumption (food, clothes, electricity, etc.), education and health. When remittances are sent regularly they can also serve to pay a caretaker, a domestic worker or a person who will be in charge of dependent persons in the migrant women’s household.

“While women privilege investment in their children, particularly in education, men are inclined to invest in consumption goods, assets or property. However, if women succeed in covering basic consumption needs, education and health, they tend to invest in a house or in land for agriculture. As former tenants become land owners, these farmers are more willing



Filipino migrant in Italy
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to invest in technology for improving both the quantity and the quality of their harvests and for diversifying the types of products they cultivate,” pointed out Maria Hartl, Technical Adviser in Gender and Social Equity at IFAD.

When the migrant is married with children, remittances will usually be sent to the spouse. If both adults of the married couple go abroad, remittances are generally sent to the eldest child to administer, or to the children’s temporary guardian. This is also the case with migrant single mother. When the migrant has a choice, women are actually often chosen over men to receive and manage regular household remittances.

According to the migrants and household members interviewed, the reasons behind this trend are related to women’s traditional role as caregivers and domestic administrators in the Philippines and their consequent in-depth knowledge of the household’s basic needs. Women are perceived as “thrifter” and more responsible when handling money intended to benefit the household as a whole.

The study further demonstrated that migration and remittances have had a number of positive impacts on gender equality in the Philippines. First of all, migration seems to have economically empowered many women, as it has increased and diversified the employment opportunities available to them.

“Some women in this study were able to transition from unpaid subsistence agricultural work to the administration of small businesses, which has led to changes in their power and status in their households and communities of origin. Likewise, the investment of remittances in children’s studies has increased their levels of educational attainment, particularly among the daughters of migrants, opening up new opportunities for future generations of women,” stressed Carolina Taborga.



Research team in Mindoro
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The direct participation of the Filipino Women’s Council members in the collection and validation of the data was fundamental to supporting the capacity building activities of Filipino migrant associations. FCW participants were able to build on prior knowledge in this area, understand how could benefit the organizations’ future strategy, and raise awareness about the potential of remittance-based development amongst Filipino migrants and their families.

“With the insight we have gained from having participated in this process, it is now imperative that Filipino migrant associations are supported both financially and technically in the proposals they have developed to promote positive change and overcome current challenges to local/community development”, stated Charito Basa of FWC.

The UN-INSTRAW/IFAD/FWC study points to an urgent need for increased awareness among Filipino migrants -men and women- about available alternatives for sending remittances and their potential for promoting rural development in communities of origin.

In addition, the study calls for organizing public hearings, discussions, seminars etc. on remittance-based development in the Philippines and working with financial institutions to develop services specially targeted to women migrants/remitters and recipients.

[Download the study](#)

Additional resources

[Fact sheet on Remittances in Philippines](#)
[Fact sheet on Migration on Filipino Migration to Italy](#)
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