

# Philippines

## "My investment right now is my son"

The migration of a family member is a household endeavor. In 1983, Faith had just graduated from university and was working for a government agency, when her aunt and cousin in Italy urged her to join them abroad. Her father had passed away when she was young and Faith was the eldest of five children. Therefore, she recognized the great financial help she could provide her family. "I had no father and that was one of the reasons I left because we needed help to put my brothers and sisters through school." Besides wanting to help with her siblings' education, Faith wanted to experience life outside of the Philippines. No one in her family objected to her leaving, so she left as a tourist in 1985 to work in Rome. Fortunately, in 1987 Faith was able to legalize her stay once the Italian government offered amnesty for irregular migrants. Within her first five years in Rome, she managed to send all of her siblings to university; yet, due to the labor situation in the Philippines, they all ended up as domestic workers in Italy. Together, she and her brothers and sisters support their mother in Lemery, Batangas.

Faith has worked in a number of different jobs, starting as a domestic worker, caring for the elderly and now working in a hotel. Initially she thought that working in a household would be simple; she did not anticipate the difficulties she encountered. Her first employer was a lawyer who only spoke English, making it difficult to communicate with him. In subsequent jobs, however, this was not the case. Faith taught herself Italian, "I would often ask myself 'why do I always hear those words? What do they mean? I learned through conversation.'" Most Filipino migrants in Italy do not have any formal language or cultural training prior to moving there. While other Overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) may receive some kind of orientation, this is not the case for people of Lemery, who migrate as a result of family reunification or for those who enter the country through different channels.

Faith had a child in Italy, but due to her work situation she made the difficult decision to take him to the Philippines and have her mother raise him. She would see him every two years when she returned home for vacation or whenever she needed to renew his papers in Italy. Understandably, she felt that he was distant from her while he was growing up. Faith is happy that her mother always reminded the child of whom his mother was, by talking about her and showing him her pictures. Their relationship significantly improved when he lived with her for two years at university. During their time together in Rome her son realized the reality of his mother's life abroad. "That was the time when he realized how hard life was here and that's when he started to understand me so he no longer felt distant from me." He decided to continue his university studies in the Philippines and he expressed to his mother that if possible, he would not like to become a domestic worker or caregiver in Italy.

Over her 23 years in Italy, Faith has managed to purchase a number of properties and homes that she rents out, as well as a mango farm. Every month she sends remittances that will pay for her investments, her mother's medical treatment and her son's university tuition. Her mother has played an important role in identifying land investment opportunities, and also manages the remittances. "My investment right now is my son, so I've stopped looking for other investment opportunities for right now."

Faith hopes to return to the Philippines before the official retirement age to enjoy the fruits of her investment and to start a small business. She also would like to spend more time with her son and she knows that there will be continual support for her mother from her siblings who will stay in Italy. "I've thought of setting up a business. I am business-minded. I always wanted to have a little grocery store or something like that. Someday when I have saved and when I can't take the work here in Italy anymore, I really want to start a business in Lemery. If I do it now it will be difficult because it is hard to trust someone to manage anything in the Philippines, especially since my mother is ill who else can I trust? So it will probably happen when I leave here and I can manage it in the Philippines."

It is her goal to be able to have something sustainable as a means to support herself and to live a better life in her community with her mother and son.



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**The Philippines is one of the largest labour export countries in the world. In 2008, 10% of Filipinos were working abroad. In 2006, Italy had the second largest Filipino migrant population after the UK with 128,000 permanent residents, 84,000 temporary workers and an estimated population of 20,000 irregular workers. The feminization of migration from the Philippines is evident: and of the 26,000 Filipinos in Rome, 16,000 were women. A response to the demand for domestic helpers and caregivers due to the integration of Italian women into local labour market, most Filipina migrants work in domestic and care work.\***

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