

Traversing the Laws: The Unregulated Movement of Filipino Migrants in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Thailand, like several countries in Southeast Asia, has been managing migration through policies that provide legal opportunities for labor mobility and restrict irregular migration; however, the country has been experiencing an increasing trend, not only in unskilled, but also skilled labour migration. This can be attributed primarily to labor and skills shortages in the country. Moreover, for the last five years, Thailand has a growing stock of Filipino migrants, and that an increasing number of them are irregular. Despite this trend, Filipino movement in the country has been unexplored. This research is a pioneering work in Thailand. It aimed to investigate and shed light on the trends of the movement in the country by focusing on the various factors that facilitated the movement and the various resources employed in order to remain in the country.

This study used multiple approaches to data collection over a period of six months in order to reach as many Filipino migrants as possible, and to cover different categories of migrants in different sectors. A survey of 354 Filipino migrants in various provinces and borders in Thailand was conducted. Then, 25 migrants were randomly selected from the survey for the in-depth interviews. Key informant interviews, a survey of irregular Filipino migrants at the Thai-Cambodian borders, and a survey of social networking sites were also done.

Findings from this research revealed new patterns of mobility, the characteristics of migrants and the different paths they took in order to move and remain in Thailand. Moreover, it was also found that many migrants move between different statuses, taking advantage of various mechanisms and resources in the process; from irregular to regular, or regular to irregular and back to being regular; thus, sustaining and perpetuating the movement from the Philippines to Thailand.

Keywords: unregulated migration, irregular migration, mobility transitions

INTRODUCTION

The temporary movement of Filipinos within Southeast Asia has been extensively documented, with much of the flows have been towards the more economically advanced countries of Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore. With the growing regionalism and development, richer countries have been increasingly reliant on labour from neighbouring countries within the region such as the Philippines to address labour shortages (Kaur, 2010). Thailand, for instance, has been a host to a significant number of unskilled migrants from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia (MOL, 2012), while Singapore and Malaysia have its share of foreign labour, particularly from Indonesia and the Philippines (POEA, 2010). In its 2010 report, the Philippines Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) showed that Singapore was among the top ten destinations of land-based Filipino workers with a number of migrant workers although flows to non-ASEAN countries are still more substantial (2010).

There have been extensive research studies discussing the trends and trajectories of Filipino movements, and their problems in destination countries in various regions of the world like Southeast Asia. In Thailand, however, much of the literature on migration has highlighted or is largely focused on low-skilled migration and irregular flows from the neighbouring countries within the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). Although policies for the recruitment of professional and skilled migrant labour were established in 1978, the agreements signed by the government were made with countries in the GMS under the guest worker program which constituted low-skilled and undocumented migrants (Numnak, 2005; Wongboonsin, 2006 in Kaur, 2007); thereby, neglecting the issues arising from the increasing presence of skilled foreigners in the country.

A shift in the trend of labour movements of Filipinos towards less-popular destinations within the region like Thailand and their increasing presence in the country,

therefore, are underexplored despite decades of growing movement into the teaching and non-teaching professions. This can be attributed to the insignificant volume of the movements resulting to the lack of attention by policy makers and government agencies responsible for managing migration. Another reason is the less restrictive entry and exit requirements generally given to nationals of ASEAN member countries, which also allow Filipinos to visit and leave Thailand easily. Lastly, this type of migration also has been occurring outside the framework of the formalized system established by the Philippine government making it difficult for government agencies in both countries to account for the number of those who remained and settled in Thailand; thus, posing a challenge in distinguishing a migrant from a tourist, and to monitor their conditions.

The type of migration system established between the Philippines and Thailand is one that has evolved over the last 40 years, but has been overlooked. Despite the long-standing cultural, economic and political exchanges between the two countries, the migration paths usually taken by migrants from the Philippines are towards more familiar routes in the region; Philippines to Singapore, or Philippines to Malaysia. Findings from this research revealed that Filipino movement to Thailand started in the 1970s where the number of migrants was very low and consisted of those who worked for international organizations or international firms, and a few missionaries and entertainers while some Filipino women migrated due to marriage with Thai nationals. Over the course of 20 years, a shift in migration patterns emerged, particularly as Thailand has been seen as an important tourist destination and a rising economic hub in the region. Data provided by the Embassy of the Philippines and Thailand's Immigration Office in Bangkok showed that more and more Filipino tourists are joining millions of others visiting Thailand in recent years. The growing number of formal and informal networks established by Filipinos in the country also highlights the increasing presence of Filipino migrants. Despite the fact that a migration system exists, how it was

developed presents some difficulties in explaining its internal mechanisms because unlike Singapore and Malaysia, no formal connections based on labour migration are present between the two countries. Several visits made to the Thai-Cambodian borders, and information received from key embassy officials and pioneer migrants revealed a steady increase in the number of irregular migrants and crimes involving Filipino migrants in recent years. Not only that, the fluidity of the movements in the country has been surprising and alarming considering the risk factors involved.

This paper, therefore, provides insights to the movement of Filipinos in Thailand and the migration system that has evolved and sustained over several decades, yet overlooked. It also present a better understanding of the consequences of migration for Filipino migrants in Thailand compared to their counterparts in other places in the region and across societies worldwide, and unravel the gap between a migrant's aspirations and the actual migration experience.

THEORY AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Several theories can be used to explain why migration occurs, offering various insights to explain the movement and its perpetuation. Structural and social processes were found inherent in various types of movements. Moreover, contemporary theories on migration show that the reasons for migration are also influenced by social networks. The selectivity and persistence of migration flows depend also on social networks and migrant institutions (Goss and Lindquist, 1995 in Parrenas, 2001). Migrants in Indonesia, for example, had access to loans in their local community which made their migration to Malaysia possible (Asis, 2004). The realization of or migration in itself is highly dependent on other factors such as financial and social resources in order to operationalize the 'intention to move'. In the Philippines, social networks, in fact, arrange, sustain and through time,

intensify the flows of migration. Sarausad's study on Filipino domestic helpers in Thailand also revealed the different institutions that have significant impact on their decision to migrate, such as the family and networks that facilitate their out-migration and integration (2003). Feedback mechanism, according to Mobogunje (1970, as cited in Blakewell, 2012), is also important in the formation of migration systems; whereby, information about the outcomes of a migrant's move at a destination is transmitted back to the original place. Linkages between two or several countries based on socio-cultural, political or historical ties allow migrant networks to develop, and even sustain for generations (Castles, 2000). This can explain the migration paths pursued by migrants. Sherraden and Martin (1994) pointed out that the decision to migrate is most likely made by a family rather than an individual, after weighing their resources, opportunities, and risks.

Individual characteristics and life-course circumstances also shape the migration experience of opportunity. Human capital theory suggests that younger and newly-graduated migrants, and better educated ones are more likely to move. This theory was supported by Kley (2011) in her article wherein she included a life-course perspective in her analysis of decision-making and action. Socio-demographic characteristics such as partnership, age or migration experience also influence migration decisions (Kley, 2011). Gender-selective demand for labour and other factors in origin and destination countries are seen as having led to the rising flows of women into specific sectors. Carling (2005) pointed out that gender has an impact on the desire and the choice to move as well as the realization of one's intention to migrate. Whatever is the reason for moving, studies showed that migration is beneficial to both migrants and their families as shown in the amounts of money migrants send home.

The mode of migration can vary considerably. Some migrate legally, others chose to be undocumented, while others were forced to move. Irregularities in migration can happen at different stages of the move, either at departure, transit, upon entry or return, and can be

done by the migrant or against the migrant (Wickramasekera, P., 2002). Regardless of this, there are accompanying stress and insecurities with any type of move. Moreover, the Global Commission on International Migration also noted that: 'From an economic perspective irregular migration is actually quite functional for many destination states. As a result of deregulation, liberalisation and flexibilisation, there is demand for various forms of unskilled and semi-skilled labour employed under precarious conditions' (as cited in Koser, 2005).

Drachman's stages of migration framework (1992) provides a starting point to explain the reasons for migrants' decision to move, and draws our attention to the process itself, and the social, psychological and economic substance of the movement. It can be argued that all migrants have an experiential past which can be captured in different stages or phases. However, due to the geographical proximity between Thailand and the Philippines, and the accessibility of air travel to and from these countries, the Filipino migrants in this study are more likely in an advantaged position and in control of their mobility as opposed to the more traumatic and stressful movements exemplified by Drachman. According to Cox (1985 in Drachman, 1992), some migrants undergo unexpected movement, whereas others go through a process of decision-making and preparing to move; wherein, a physical move is required and some transitions happen upon (re) settlement (p.75); as processes of change and adaptation. For instance, Cvajner and Sciortino argued that irregularity may be achieved at some point in time and then left behind (2010 in Kubal, 2012). Therefore, migrants can move between regularity and irregularity as a necessity or a form of agency (Kubal, 2012; Sarausad, 2013), directing us to a more complex process of migration. The migrants' motivations for moving have been realized as shown in this paper and they are seen as having gone through changes in their status.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Various methods were applied in this research in order to generate more migrants for this study and to identify the network or links among them, particularly the irregular migrants who are difficult to reach. These methods were also used simultaneously due to the inability of the researcher to obtain a list of all Filipino migrants from the Embassy of the Philippines and Thailand's Ministry of Labour. Although the Embassy has a database of migrants who came to obtain its services, the office maintains confidentiality of all the visitors; thus, the inability to acquire the names and location of the migrants necessary for randomly selecting a sample for this research. Moreover, the Ministry of Labour only provided a record of the number of Filipino workers issued with work permits according to the type of occupation and the business type of employers, not the list of registered Filipino migrants.

This research was conducted in various provinces in Thailand and in two border areas between Cambodia and Thailand. A total of 354 self-administered questionnaires were collected during the survey in the provinces of Chiang Mai, Bangkok, Phitsanulok, Chonburi and Pathumthani. The borders between Thailand and Cambodia: *Aranyaprathet/Poipet*, *Ban Pakard*, *Chantaburi / Phsa Prum* and *Ban Laem*, *Chantaburi / Daun Lem*, *Battambang* were also major points for investigation in order to account for the average number of irregular Filipino migrants extending their visas every day. These borders were chosen because of their short distance of approximately 4 hours from Bangkok compared to the borders between Thailand and Laos, and Thailand and Malaysia. At the surveyed borders, a head count of irregular Filipino migrants extending their visas was done during four (4) visits in 2011 as a primary source of data to estimate the number of irregular migrants crossing the borders of Cambodia and Thailand for visa extension. The author obtained permission from a travel operator to join a convoy of migrants crossing the borders by van between Cambodia and Thailand four (4) different occasions in September and October, 2011. Some migrants were

also asked through conversations on the average number of vans and Filipinos with them each time they went to the borders.

The most-frequented social networking sites by Filipino migrants on Facebook, ajarn.com, siampinoy.net, Global OFW Voices, filipinosinthailand.com were also surveyed to obtain more information regarding the migrants' situation in the country, their main concerns and other issues related to their migration. The author joined most of these networking sites in order to directly observe and analyze the topics discussed and the opinions of the members. Over 150 threads in these sites were surveyed and analyzed to strengthen the findings from the primary data. Caution was observed in asking questions or giving comments on these pages, maintaining professionalism and ethics in doing this survey. Permission for interviews was obtained from some members and confidentiality has always been maintained. The interviews conducted were made possible through various strategies employed in order to obtain as much information as possible to enable the researcher to do an in-depth analysis of Filipino migration in Thailand. Firstly, interviewees were chosen from those who answered the questionnaire. They were randomly selected through their contact numbers. Those who wrote their mobile phone numbers were randomly selected for the interview. Twenty-two surveyed respondents were interviewed by phone or face-to-face. There were no follow-up interviews; however, some answers of 5 interviewees were verified by SMS and telephone. For interviewees located in other provinces and were not free for face-to-face interviews, a phone interview was conducted. During the course of this work, the researcher, through the help of another interviewee, was able to interview in person the oldest migrant found so far in Thailand, at 80 years old, still actively engaging in productive activities, and youngest at 14 years old.

Another strategy employed in this method was to contact members of Filipino associations through the networking sites like Facebook. Through this site, the researcher

was able to interview three (3) teachers which lasted for about 1.5 hours. The main questions probed into their conditions of work, worries, experiences and plans for the future. A total of 25 in-depth interviews were done for this research which consisted of 12 males and 13 females.

Secondary data were obtained from the Ministry of Labour's Department of Employment, the Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines in Bangkok and websites of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) and the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA).

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Some terms used in this research need clarifications. Firstly, a *migrant* in the context of this study refers to a Filipino who has at least stayed in Thailand for one month and had extended his stay before the 30-day period of stay has elapsed. This term is used with due consideration to the motives or intention of staying at the time of the survey. To support the assumption of 'motives or intention of staying', or the theory of planned behavior proposed by (Ajzen, 1991 in Kley, 2011), a very important question was added in the questionnaire to verify that not only the respondent had stayed a month or more, but he/she had planned it; that is, necessary employment documents were organized beforehand (i.e., prior to departure from the Philippines).

Other important terms are used in classifying the migrants. *Irregular migrants* refer to those who are working without a work permit. These migrants entered Thailand legally and have been allowed to stay and extend their stay for a specified period of time; thus, none of them can be considered as 'illegal'. In contrast, *regular migrants* include those who are registered as foreign workers with the Ministry of Labour or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with an appropriate visa and work permit, those in non-remunerative works and residents

of Thailand. A third category, *semi-regular migrants* has been added in this research to highlight the unstable migrant status of several migrants who moved from being regular to irregular or vice-versa, and those who have been moving in and out of the regular-irregular categories several times brought about by transitions in their work employment.

Visa-run is another term that is mentioned often throughout this paper. It means leaving the country before the allowed period of 30-day stay runs out then returning for a renewed period of stay, usually 15 days. In Thailand, a *visa-run* to the borders can take only a day while a *visa-run* to a neighbouring country takes a few days.

PROFILE AND TYPES OF MIGRANTS

The survey sample consisted of 65% females and 33% males. Moreover, a greater proportion of migrants in the younger working age group of 20-34 comprised a majority of the total number, at 65%. Generally, several life events can be seen in this age group such as completion of schooling or achievement of a university degree, marriage, starting or looking for a job, and the ability to leave or separate from the family home, as revealed in some studies of Kley (2009) and Mayer (2004). In their studies, the authors revealed that younger persons have generally less psychic costs of migrating compared to older ones, and pursuing one's interests is highest in the younger groups. This was supported by Sjaastad (1992), stating that anticipation of a job or income at destination is highest among young adults.

Another interesting results generated from the survey are the concentration of migrants coming from similar backgrounds or shared regional similarities in terms of language and culture, such as those regions with similar dialects and socio-cultural backgrounds. Migrants from Regions V, VI VII and XI, are called *Visayans* because they speak several dialect distinctions that come from the same language, *Visayan*. This group has

a combined proportion of 33% compared with those from other regions. Another group of migrants came from the *Tagalog* ethnic groups in regions such as the National Capital Region (NCR), Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog Region, with a combined proportion of 34%. This particular finding supported the fact that ethnicity and migrant networks play a major role in Filipino migration to Thailand.

Another important finding in this study is that most of the migrants surveyed are educated, with around 80% of them have a university degree or higher. The other 20% have undergone vocational training of at least one year prior to migration. However, despite their educational attainment, around 50% of the migrants have salaries between 10,000 – 30,000 Baht (US\$330-US\$1,000) only. Moreover, a majority of them (around 50%) are in the teaching occupations, with very low percentages in other professional and engineering occupations. Employment in private households showed a higher proportion compared to other job occupations after teaching, at around 10%. On average, migrants spent between 1-4 years in Thailand (42%), while around 24% have been in the country for more than 5 years. Moreover, around 40 respondents have spent more than 10 years working in Thailand.

Results from the survey of Filipino migrants in Thailand also revealed that more than 80% of the youngest age group, 20-24 were single, and the proportion of those who are not married decreased in older age groups. A reverse trend is seen among married respondents, wherein higher proportion of married individuals is found in the older age groups. More than half of the respondents reported having dependents; around 46% of them have 1-5 dependents. Incomes from the different types of occupations also significantly vary, with migrants in the professional and technical occupations having higher salaries compared to clerical and household work. However, results showed that regardless of the type of occupations and experience (indicated by age and years of work), many of the Filipino

migrants are only earning between 10,000 and 30,000 Baht per month (US\$ 300 – US\$1,000).

The surveyed migrants can be categorized into three major categories: *irregular migrants*, *regular migrants* and *semi-regular migrants* (see Figure 1). *Irregular migrants* include those who, at the time of the survey, did not have the necessary work permit or legal documents that allowed them to work. *Regular migrants*, on the other hand, include those who, at the time of the survey, had the necessary work permit or legal documents that permitted them to work, stay, or undertake assignments in Thailand. However, quite a number of the regular migrant respondents have moved in and out of the regular-irregular status, depending on the condition of their employment. Moreover, findings from this research revealed a gray area in the dichotomous categorization of the migrants in this study. Several migrant respondents have legal visas to stay in the country, without the need for a visa-run to the borders; for instance, Non-immigrant Visa type ‘O’ (dependent visa), Non-immigrant Visa type ‘B’ (business visa) and Non-immigrant Visa type ‘Ed’ (education/student visa), but without permission to work; making them ‘semi-legal’, following the arguments made by Kubal (2012).

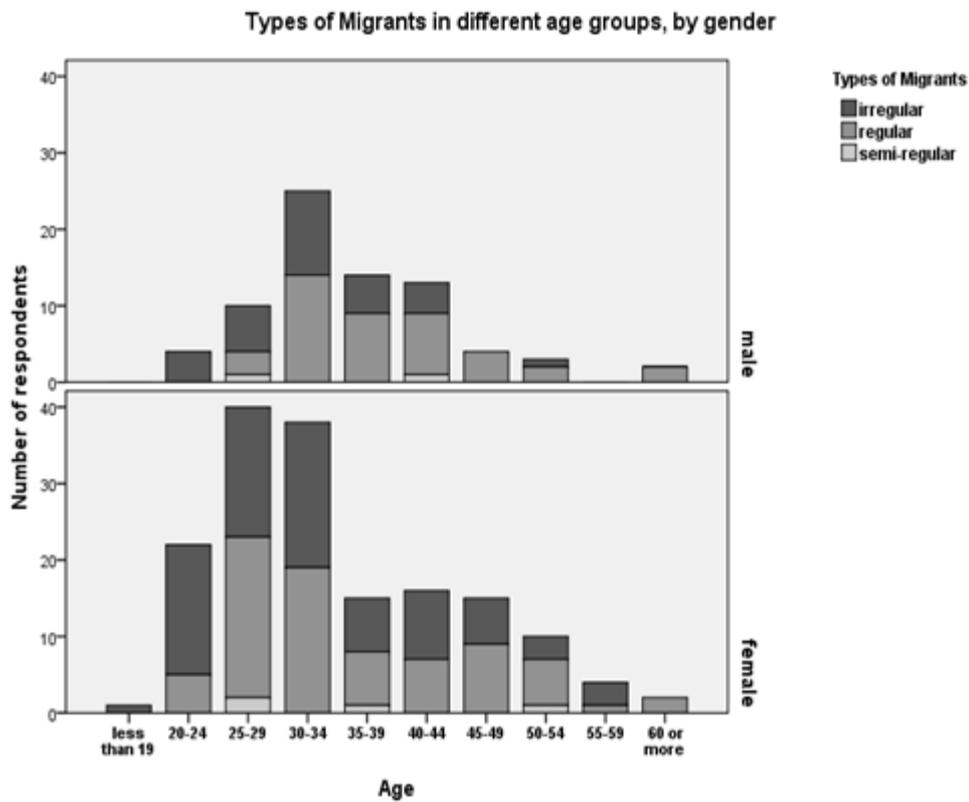


Figure 1: Types of Filipino migrants in various age groups, by gender
Source: Survey, 2011-2012

The above figure also reveals the concentration of the types of migrants in specific age groups. For both male and female migrant respondents, a larger proportion of those in the irregular status are found in the younger age groups, 20-24 highlighting the fact that newly arrived, younger migrants had difficulties securing a regular status due to the lack of experience and skills. The female respondents also were more prominent in various statuses compared to men. Moreover, among the female migrant respondents, it is clear that even in the older age groups, high proportions of females are still irregular. In-depth interviews revealed that recent policies on the hiring of skilled professionals particularly in the teaching sector have led to difficulties for some of those with non-teaching backgrounds to obtain stable employment tenure. Moreover, some teachers employed through agencies were terminated by the school or the agency without prior notice; making the migrant irregular once the work permit is cancelled.

The teaching category was also found to have had the largest proportion of both regular and irregular migrants compared to other occupational categories. Since some schools in Thailand are unable to process working visas to their foreign teachers due to their inability to meet the requirements imposed by the Ministry of Labour, some of the Filipino teachers are in irregular status. Moreover, migrants in household work are less likely to obtain a working visa as seen in the higher number of irregular domestic workers compared to regular ones. According to the interviewed migrants, being irregular is not a hindrance for Filipinos to obtain skilled work. Being irregular was also considered as a transitional status until such time that a better job that provides a work permit is secured.

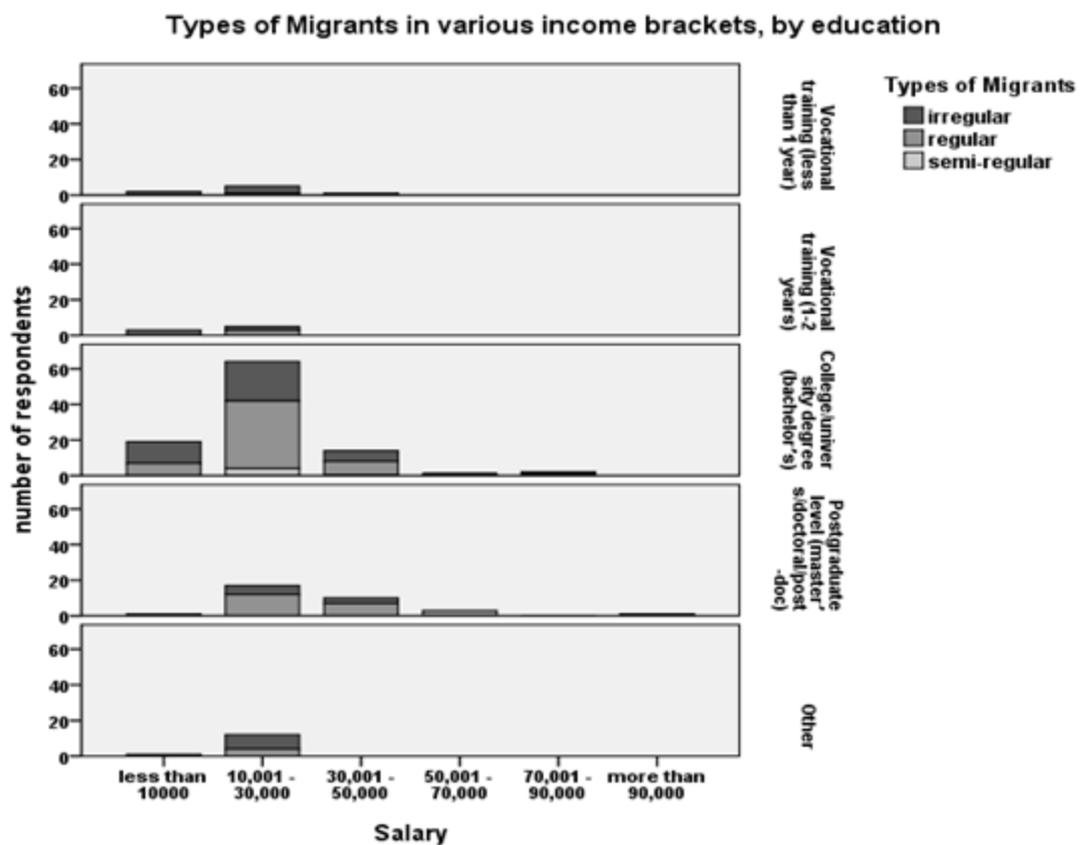


Figure 2: Types of migrants in various income levels, by educational level
Source: Survey, 2011-2012

Findings show that those with a university education are concentrated in the teaching occupation, with other migrants in various types of work. Some migrants with postgraduate

education (24 respondents) are in irregular status. The highest number of college-degree holders earned only between 10000-30000 Baht per month (US\$330-US\$1,000) as seen in Figure 2. Surprisingly, some of those who have a postgraduate degree were also in the lower income level. However, the number of irregular migrants in higher income groups is much lower as more and more regular migrants are found in high-income groups. Socioeconomic characteristics of the surveyed and interviewed migrants were also found to have contributed to the decision to move such as joblessness prior to migration, prospect of further studies or training, being sole income-earners and separation from the spouse. In fact, prior to migration, the respondents were in various types of occupations. However, current occupations in Thailand show a significant decrease in the number of respondents in similar type of work in Thailand. For example, the number of respondents whose previous jobs were in the managerial and health professional categories was very low compared to that before migration. A very significant increase in the number of respondents in the teaching category is also seen; from around 80 prior to migration, to about 125 after migration. This shows a shift from specific field of practice back in the Philippines to the most available occupation in Thailand; that is, teaching. A similar trend is also seen from the data in 2012 which was also provided by a key official from the Department of Employment at the Ministry of Labour.

THE MOVEMENT OF FILIPINOS IN THAILAND

The pre-migration and departure stage is considered to be a crucial step in a migrant's decision to move and the choice of Thailand as a destination. The movement of several Filipinos to Thailand is often seen as an individual personal mobility operating outside the Philippine government's labour migration framework. Results from this research show that much of the moves are primarily characterized by the desire to enter the country due to the

availability of some social capital and with the hope to build their economic and human capital. How it operates would generate an interesting discussion.

A thriving migration industry composed of illegal recruiters, teaching agencies, travel agents, transport operators and small-scale entrepreneurs, play a prominent role in facilitating movements of Filipinos in Thailand. Data obtained online from networking sites frequented by Filipinos and non-Filipinos, particularly teachers, show around 25 teaching agencies in Thailand; giving migrants more opportunities for employment. Moreover, travel agencies operated by Filipino migrants in Thailand also provide travel arrangements for prospective employees, relatives or friends of migrants as confirmed by all interviewees. There are also strong migrant networks that shelters or accommodates an increasing number of irregular or undocumented labour force from the Philippines. Some Filipino migrants work in enterprises owned by other migrants (compatriots) such as restaurants, Filipino-run schools and travel agencies; employers are of the same ethnic or national origin. These enterprises also have a strong ethnic concentration. The rising number of Filipino-owned small enterprises such as restaurants, shops and tour agencies around Thailand provided some forms of employment for those seeking a job abroad as waiters, shopkeepers, cooks and office assistants. However, these intermediaries not only facilitate movements but also perpetuate irregularity and intention to stay.

Leaving as tourists to find employment is considered unauthorized migration in the Philippines because the migrants circumvent the process requiring the submission of a standard labour contract, passing physical tests, attending pre-departure seminars, and contributing to the welfare fund (Battistella, 2002). However, Filipinos posing as tourists bound for other countries including Thailand are not required to go through the procedures required of overseas workers. Despite this, passengers run the risk of being offloaded (or not allowed to board their flights) due to insufficient supporting documents or after further

questioning by an immigration official. In response to the trafficking issues that also involved the Philippines, the government has tightened its departure procedures at airports, making this stage more difficult for prospective migrants leaving for Thailand.

Although departure from the Philippines can be challenging for migrants posing as tourists, this research shows that prospective migrants who have sufficient funds can easily purchase an air ticket and prove that they are 'tourists' despite the fact that their purpose may be for temporary employment. This is made possible with the help of family members, friends and colleagues already in Thailand who can provide supporting documents (sponsorship) for a tourist or dependent visa. They also provide the necessary information prior to departure such as how to answer questions posed by immigration officials and what documents to prepare. In some cases, arrangements are made to have a friend, or relative accompany a prospective migrant during the travel to ensure that it will be smooth or that support is available should problems arise prior to departure. Interviews also revealed that proper preparation for the trip is very necessary. First, it should be ensured that the flight itinerary gives the impression of a short holiday; for instance, a few days gap between the departure from and return to the Philippines. In other instances, hotel reservations are also made and 'show money' or proof of funds are prepared for the prospective migrants. They are also advised to pack lightly to avoid suspicions of intending to stay in Thailand. Many of the 'tourists' remained, and became regular or irregular migrants.

The timing of the move is seen also as important in ensuring that prospective migrants are able to secure a job immediately or within a short time after arrival. They either move after a job at the destination has already been arranged by their migrant friends or family members, termed as contracted migration (although they have not been formally contracted beforehand), or with the hope of securing a job in Thailand referred to as speculative migration (Tervo, 1998). Cheaper communications enabled migrants to transmit job

information quickly before it spreads to others and the ease in air travel made these arrangements possible. On the other hand, the move can also be seen as something of ‘a last resort’ depending on the circumstances of the prospective migrant at that time; for example, moving because of unemployment in the Philippines.

Once in Thailand, several visa options are available for those who wanted to stay and find employment opportunities. Responses from surveyed Filipino migrants showed that many of them have extended their visas more than once, either at the borders of Cambodia and Thailand or in Laos while awaiting employment. Travels to the borders for visa extension is made possible only through travel agents-cum- transport operators at a cost of around 700 Baht for a one-day visa run every 15 days at the Cambodian-Thai borders of Aranyaprathet/Pol Phet or Baan Pakard, Chantaburi / Phsa Prum. In fact, several of the migrants in the survey have been extending their visas at these borders and in Laos for more than 5 years. Three travel agents and transport operators popular among Filipino migrants can process various types of visas: tourist, student or retirement visas. A one-year student visa is available for Filipinos who do not want to regularly cross the borders for a fee of around US\$700 while older migrants who wanted to stay much longer in Thailand can apply for a one and a half year retirement visa for around US\$1,000 fee. Arrangements for a student or retirement visa can also be done by the agencies for those who intend to stay longer in Thailand and those who can afford the visa fees. Several areas in Bangkok, Pathumthani and Pattaya have become converging points for irregular migrants leaving for visa renewals in Cambodia and Laos. It takes approximately 4 hours to get to the borders of Cambodia and Thailand and another 4 hours to return to Bangkok. Going to Laos for a visa takes all night, and visa application is processed immediately upon arrival by the agent. For those who were employed through placement agencies, specific procedures with regards to employment conditions and work permit applications are in place.

Despite the absence of bilateral agreements with the Philippines, the Thai government's support in improving its educational system through the hiring of Western and Asian English teachers led to high demand for cheap, English-speaking teachers for primary and secondary Thai students in government and private schools, creating opportunities for Filipino migrants in skilled occupations particularly in education and teaching. Results from this study show that Filipino migrants are concentrated in areas where educational and skilled opportunities exist, such as in Chiang Mai, Phitsanulok, Chonburi and Bangkok. Moreover, educational attainment is found to be a significant factor in employment opportunities in the country as seen in the high number of university graduates with non-teaching backgrounds and those in non-teaching occupations prior to migration who are in the teaching sector.

Less-restrictive policies in entering Thailand and joining the labour market made migration less costly. Irregularity is not a major hindrance in finding a job, and hiring at the beginning in an irregular situation is common or well-accepted. Since the teaching sector is suffering from a shortage of local teachers, more and more Filipinos are joining this sector, as registered workers or in irregular status. Once the migrants have settled in Thailand and secured a work permit, family reunification is easily possible because immigration laws in Thailand allow registered migrant workers to obtain a dependent visa for their immediate family members and dependents. In-depth interviews and key informant interviews revealed that many migrants have at least a family member with them in Thailand.

TRENDS IN THE MOVEMENT

Since 2003, Filipinos have been the fastest growing foreign population with visas and work permits. In 2007, Filipinos were sixth for the number of foreigners with work permits which put them almost even with Americans. In 2002, there were 2,337 Filipinos with work permits in the kingdom, but by 2007 this had risen to 7,525, whereas Americans had 7,838

people with work permits that same year. The percentage share of work permits held by Filipinos has also increased from 3.3 percent in 2003 to 5.6 percent by 2007. The growth rate for Filipinos with work permits has been the highest since 2004 when it grew by 24.2 percent from the previous year (Huguet, 2009). By 2005, it had grown by 34.5 percent and still held the highest growth from 2006 to 2007 at 27.2 percent (Huguet, 2009). As reported by Thailand's Ministry of Labour, the number of registered Filipinos has continued to increase over the last five years, from 2008-2012 (MOL, 2012). The migrants are found in various occupational categories; with the highest concentration in the teaching sector. The data also revealed that the proportion of Filipinos in the teaching sector was highest, compared to those coming from Japan, the UK, China and India, and double that of the UK. Email communication with an immigration official also confirmed that the number of workers from the Philippines, China and India is increasing significantly; mostly, skilled workers (2012).

The presence of an increasing number of irregularⁱ Filipinos in Thailand and those involved in crimes has become a burden to the Philippine government primarily because of the financial costs it places on the government when they are in distress and need immediate assistance as revealed from interviews with key government officials. Media news and key informant interviews revealed that some Filipinos in Thailand were involved in drug trafficking, robbery and other crimes. In fact, the number of Filipinos in Thailand's prison has increased to 46 prisoners, with more female than male migrant prisoners. The Philippine Embassy in Bangkok has been handling several legal cases against Filipinos in the country by providing lawyers and translators.

In the last five years or so, some noticeable changes in migration policies have affected Filipino migrants significantly. For instance, policies regarding the extension of visas in Laos and Cambodia changed several times between 2009 and 2011. Nowadays, securing a work permit as a teacher in several primary and secondary schools has also created

some difficulties among regular Filipino teachers, particularly those with non-teaching backgrounds because of the constant changes in the requirements as revealed by interviewed migrants. Thailand's preparation for the launching of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by 2015 has some implications on skilled migration. Thailand's goal of becoming an Asian hub for international education, for instance, has certainly resulted to an increasing demand for foreign teachers or professionals proficient in English, and greater investment in the educational sector. At the same time, policy changes in the assessment methods and teacher employment to remain competitive have resulted to increased difficulties for less-qualified foreign teachers to secure regular employment tenure and/or benefits.

Apart from these, departures from the Philippines to Thailand have become more difficult in recent years as the Bureau of Immigration has established stricter screening procedures for departing Filipino tourists. Stories of being held up or offloaded at airports in Manila have also been revealed by other migrants. The pre-migration and departure stage, therefore, has become stressful for some Filipino migrants bound for Thailand. However, support from migrant family members and friends and reliance on their experiences in Thailand is one of the main motivations of moving. This provided prospective migrants with an assurance of lower risks and better opportunities. Because of the close proximity between the two countries, the costs involved in moving is perceived to be lower and going back home in case migration fails is also a lot easier; thus, the choice to move to Thailand. Resources are also seen as important once the migrant has reached the destination. Expectations from the migration experience are realized primarily due to the available monetary and non-monetary support from kin and non-kin relations; thus, the achievement of a migrant's goals.

The Ministry of Labour reported that compared to other nationalities (excluding Burmese, Laotians and Cambodians), the Philippines ranked 5th in the overall number of registered migrants in Thailand at 8,188, after Japan (27,511), China (9,754), UK (9,108) and

India (8,660), as of May, 2012. According also to the same report, the total number of registered Filipino migrants (i.e., those who received work permits) was 7,515 under the general category of migrants; the types of occupations are shown in the table below. The Philippines ranked the lowest in the number of migrants found in managerial and executive positions while highest in teaching, and business and entertainment professions.

Table 1: Types of Occupations of Foreign Migrants in Thailand from the 5 highest origin countries and their corresponding numbers, as of May, 2012 (MOL, 2012)

Occupations	Japan	UK	Philippines	China	India
Total	12,314	8,338	7,515	7,188	6,906
Managers	6,786	2,415	998	2,211	3,401
Board Committee and Executive Directors	2,324	1,630	98	1,187	1,949
Teachers and lecturers	556	2,823	4,632	1,606	328
Business professionals, journalists, singers and actors/actresses	518	270	727	360	175
Production and operations managers	279	124	56	186	143
General managers	140	205	31	41	91
Tourism and travelling sectors	192	41	44	104	206
Architects and engineers	288	95	100	199	102
Arts, entertainment and sports	65	145	174	56	26
Financial sectors and trading	127	68	20	45	27
Others	1,039	522	636	1,193	458

Source: Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour, 2012; Documents obtained during the key informant interview.

The trend of Filipino employment in various sectors in Thailand over a 5-year period, from December, 2008 – May, 2012 is presented below. The data from the Ministry of Labour

also showed that the categories of jobs for Filipino migrants have also changed over the last 5 years, from 2008-2012. In 2008, Filipino migrants were in 14 occupational categories; however, this reduced to 9 categories in 2009 and to 8 in 2010 and 2011. It can be assumed that the government has tried to regulate the recruitment of foreign labour, so as to ensure the employment of locals as well as to cope with the financial crisis that may have reduced domestic and foreign investments. From the table, it can also be seen that migrants are highest in the education sector; i.e., as teachers or teaching associates over the last five years. Jobs, classified as ‘others’, also had a high number of migrants during that period.

Table 2: Filipino Employment in Thailand, by occupation from 2008-2012

	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	Total
Teacher, lecturer and teaching professionals	1,237	1,218	1,087	1,267	945	5,754
Managers	1,196	986	0	44	840	3,066
Board committee and executive directors	0	146	972	968	134	2220
Business professionals, journalists, singers, actors/actresses	451	438	421	0	407	1,717
Technical engineers	230	227	199	193	183	1,032
Architects and Engineers	101	199	179	169	167	915
Physics, mathematics and engineering professionals	106	96	97	92	87	478
Workers in arts, entertainment and sports sectors	67	0	65	67	64	263
Associate operators in teaching	66	0	0	57	54	177
Clerks and officers	0	0	0	54	47	101
Private households with employed person (i.e., domestic work)	0	0	0	0	35	25
Financial institutions and trading	0	0	0	0	21	21
Doctors, dentists, vets, nurses and pharmacists	0	0	0	0	11	11
Others	350	470	360	251	194	1,625
TOTAL	3,554	3,780	3,424	3,118	3,189	17,065

Source: Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour, Thailand (2012); Documents obtained during the key informant interview.

TRANSITIONS IN MIGRANTS' STATUS

Transitions, or changes in a person's life after migration, is considered as the 'action phase' wherein motivations of moving has been realized; thus, understanding the challenges and circumstances of migrants groups are important (Pajares, 2008). For instance, some migrants may find themselves in an irregular situation during a certain period, but through time, are able to obtain regularity and social integration, while in other countries, many migrants have no chance of social integration and are in an irregular situation for an indefinite period (2008). This stage, therefore, has an impact on how a migrant perceives his experiences in post-arrival adjustments. Changes in employment status, regularity and life away from their families back home are important considerations to understand the actual experiences of migrants, and whether or not they have gained from their move abroad.

Because Filipinos bound for Thailand were only given a 30-day visa free permission to stay in the country, those who had to stay longer are required to secure an extension before the due date of stay elapsed by travelling to a neighbouring country such as Cambodia and Laos, or doing a *visa-run*. Some early migrants, who were also irregular migrants, were able to obtain a 2-month or 4-month visa extension through an agency at the borders of Cambodia and Thailand prior to 2010. Being irregular, or working without a valid permit, is not a hindrance for many migrants to find skilled occupations. It is an acceptable and transitional status particularly for new migrants. However, every Filipino migrant strives to obtain regular status, or to have a valid work permit because it provides not only economic benefits as an overseas worker, but also non-economic benefits such as the ability to invite and provide a visa for visiting family members or dependents, and to visit the Philippines regularly without the hassles at immigration counters. Moreover, making trips to visit family are seen as more costly for the irregular migrants because of the fees involved and the risk of not being able to get through the immigration on their return.

Being regular in some occupations is an agreement between the employer and employee. In some companies, schools or agencies, a foreign worker is given support to process a work permit or obtain a Non-immigrant Visa 'B' after the probationary period. One reason is that employers should be able to provide the necessary documents required by the Bureau of Investment or the Ministry of Labour. Another reason is that some employers want to make sure that a migrant will be employed after the probationary period (IDI#2, 30/M, April, 2012). This situation highlights the irregular status of a migrant at the beginning of his employment, and the change to a regular or registered status once the probationary period is met or when the employer is able to provide support to process the valid visa and work permit.

Due to the contractual nature of the employment, some migrants moved from a regular to irregular status due to non-renewal or termination of the contract. This would mean regular trips to the borders for a 15-day renewal of stay. Moving in and out of regularity or a return to irregularity can happen several times during a migrant's stay in Thailand, depending on the circumstance of his employment. Thus, several Filipino migrants in Thailand face an insecure status, vulnerable to frequent change. Data from the survey showed that many migrants had been in an irregular situation for a long time (Figure 4). It can be seen from the figure that, on average, about half of the migrants surveyed stayed in an irregular status between 1-4 years in Thailand. Quite a number of migrants remained irregular or had moved from regularity to irregularity after 4 years.

Migrant Status over a certain period by gender and length of stay

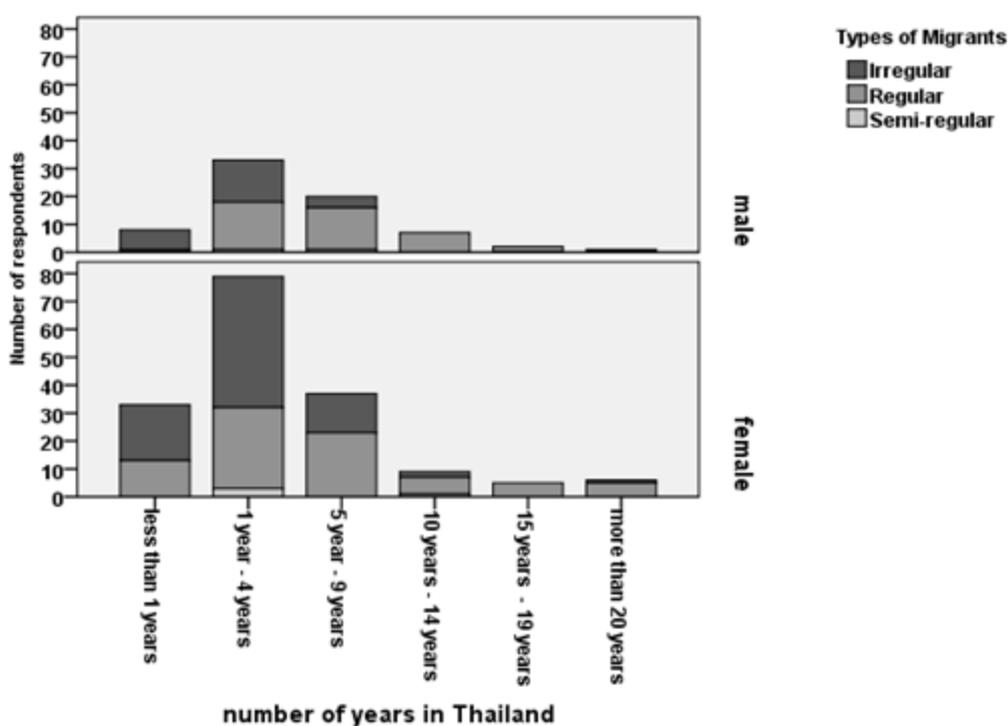


Figure 4: Migrants' status by length of stay and gender
Source: Survey, 2011-2012

Although Thailand recognizes irregularity, given the thousands of undocumented migrants in the country, it has become stringent in its migration policies towards other nationalities such as Filipinos and Africans, according to a travel operator who is also a Filipino migrant. Changes in Thailand's migration regulations also have a direct impact on migrants, particularly the irregular ones. In October, 2012, irregular Filipinos extending their visas at the borders of Cambodia and Thailand are getting only a 15-day visa extension during a one-day visa run instead of the usual 2-4 months visa extension Filipino tourists obtained in the past (IDI#1-8; Phone conversation with travel operator, February, 2012).

Email communication with a key informant also showed that policy changes are based on the government immigration policies and concerns of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (KI#8, email communication, September, 2012). Even so, more and more irregular migrants

are travelling to the borders every 15 days with the help of travel agencies. Concerns of safety in travelling and being apprehended by police increased the worries of irregular migrants.

To cope with this change, more and more irregular migrants found other indirect routes to regularity. Through a Filipino-owned travel agency, these migrants secured a student visa from the Royal Thai Embassy in Laos, making them registered student migrants. These migrant workers are now in a semi-regular status; that is, they are registered migrants because of their student status, but unregistered because their visa status does not permit them to work. The change in status is also accompanied by the change in working conditions. Domestic workers who obtained a student visa with the support of their Filipino employers and approval of a school are required to remain with the employers until the contract expires. Some employers require their domestic workers or employers to pay for the expenses by installments. This makes the migrant worker highly dependent on his/her employers. If the working conditions are not met or relationships turn sour, the employer can formally request the school to cancel the student visa, putting the domestic worker back to irregularity (Conversation with an employer, April, 2013).

There are several transitions or mobility within the regular-irregular situations that also gave rise to semi-regularity among several migrants in this study. Migrants found several ways of traversing the laws in order to remain in Thailand through the help of networks and intermediaries. The plight of irregular migrants crossing the borders for a visa-run is clearly illustrated in a video documentary done by a Filipino reporter; a transcript of which has been translated into English in the box below:

Box 1: Documenting Border Movements of Irregular Filipino Migrants

About 7 out of 10 Filipinos working in Thailand have a tourist visa. So apart from hiding, they also have to cross the border to Cambodia every two weeks to renew their tourist visa and continue working in Thailand. The News 5 team went with more than 50 Filipinos going to the border to renew their visa.

“It’s still early in the morning and some Filipinos are now gathered in a shopping mall somewhere in Bangkok, Thailand. They are going to cross to Cambodia to renew their tourist visa. The embassy of the Philippines recorded that around 15,000 Filipinos are in Thailand and 70% of them have a tourist visa.

Interviewee 1: *it was difficult at first but after some time, I am now used to it.*

Because of the number of Filipinos crossing the borders, some Filipinos have thought of making money out of it.

Interviewee 2 (agency/van operator): *They have to go out on the day the visa expires because they have to pay 500 baht per day if they overstay.*

Around 700-900 baht per Filipino is charged for the 15-day visa extension. This includes transportation, food and immigration processing fees. These border crossings have been happening for around 20 years in Thailand.

Interviewee 3 (Filipino travel agent): *Everyday, there are many Filipinos crossing to Cambodia to extend their visas, sometimes, 60, 50, 40, it’s not the same.*

The same agency has allowed us to follow our fellow Filipinos on their trip to Cambodia. We are now following the vans which are full of our fellow Filipinos to Cambodia. This is what they do every two weeks, to take a 4-hr trip in order to get out of Thailand and get into Cambodia, to get a two week extension to go back to Thailand. They do a stopover to rest, refill gas, have lunch and at the border come a lot of Filipinos for the purpose of having a stamp. Even the officers at the Cambodian borders know how to speak some Filipino words. The Filipinos do not need to get into Cambodia because at the Thai Immigration, their documents are being processed. After 10 minutes, the process is finished. A 4-hour trip and around 700 baht for transportation and others are the things our Filipinos have to deal with just to be able to stay in Thailand for work. In fact, many of our Filipino workers have been here for several years, and have been under this system just to continue working. It’s not even 30 minutes in Cambodia and our fellow Filipinos are now preparing to go back to Thailand. After 2 weeks, they will follow the same process: cross the border, get a stamp on the passport. For our Filipinos in Thailand, it is better to risk or take their chances in another country than to have nothing back in the Philippines.”

AKSYON an exclusive report and documentary on Filipinos at the borders (www.pinoy-ako.info)

CONCLUSION

Results from this research have shed light on the development of a migration system over a span of several decades which had been overlooked; the first group of pioneer migrants first arrived in the 1970s in very small numbers, followed by a gradual increase in succeeding decades. Due to the less restrictive migration policies in both countries and the initiative of the Thai government in building the language proficiency of its students, a rise in the number of Filipinos within the teaching sector can be seen. New patterns of mobility and the characteristics of those who migrated from the Philippines to Thailand were also identified in this paper. Distance, migration policies in both countries, perceived net benefits from migration, available resources and socio-economic conditions are the major factors that propelled migrants to move to Thailand. Demographic characteristics such as age and educational level were some of the underlying factors that have shown to have also motivated migrants to migrate. For example, most of the migrant respondents are educated, which shows the importance of human capital; thus, illustrating the fact that educated Filipinos are more likely to move than less-educated ones due to the perceived net benefit from human capital investments (i.e., schooling). Although the importance of human capital in migration has been supported by several empirical researches, results from this research showed that after the movement, migrants' education has relatively less influence on their position in the labour market and their salary, or that of their social mobility in Thailand.

Access to monetary and non-monetary resources derived from a migrant's affiliations to the migrant communities or social networks have reduced barriers to employment opportunities and other gains from the movement. Intermediaries are also seen as important in facilitating employment and regularity among those who intended to stay. However, constraints, such as the lack of resources and changes in migration policies in both Thailand and the Philippines have an impact on the realization of a migrant's expectations at

the initial and later years of stay in the country. Migrants were seen to be continuously having transitions or changes in their lives brought about by changes in migration policies, employment and other factors. Because of the absence of policies governing Filipino migration to Thailand, migrants follow the path of irregularity during the early years after arrival, while others continued to be irregular in later years, which contributed to their difficulties while in the country. Moreover, changes in migration policies in the country also led to changes in some of the migrants' status which resulted to their movement in and out of regularity even in later years.

Although the migration of Filipinos to Thailand has been gradual and insignificant in terms of numbers, as shown in this paper, several pressing issues need to be addressed by both governments of Thailand and the Philippines since these are recent concerns and arose mainly due to the lack of attention or interest on the part of the governments. Despite the fact that migration policies of the two countries are properly in place as far as irregular and skilled migration is concerned, efforts in controlling irregular migration of Filipinos in Thailand are lacking. There is a minimal response from Thailand with regards to unauthorized Filipino migration despite its many years of handling undocumented migration from its neighbouring countries in the GMS. At this stage, it is also premature to assume that the strengthened integration within the ASEAN through the AEC present better opportunities for migrants since there is no prospect yet for a bilateral agreement between the two countries that can manage their continuous movement in the country. Although it is possible for both countries to engage in bilateral agreements with regards to hiring skilled workers from the Philippines, formalizing the employment of Filipino workers in Thailand can only be done when there is a significant number of Filipino migrants in the country.

Thailand's preparation for the launching of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by 2015 has some implications on skilled migration. Its goal of becoming an Asian hub for

international education, for instance, has certainly resulted to an increasing demand for foreign teachers or professionals proficient in English, and greater investment in the educational sector. The goals of the AEC in 2015 promotes a freer movement of skilled labour in the future among the countries in the region, but this would mean marginalizing also those who do not meet the skills requirements; thereby, pushing migrants away from regularity. Therefore, it is necessary that the two countries should work together in enhancing their interest on this situation before irregular migration can become uncontrollable particularly as stringent measures at the borders in both countries do not seem to deter Filipino 'tourists' from coming and remaining in Thailand in the hope of finding better opportunities.

Thailand and the Philippines share in their responsibility on the perpetuation of this phenomenon particularly of irregularity. On one hand, lack of employment or career opportunities in the Philippines led to the motivations of migrants to seek for better economic and personal growth for themselves and their families, while on the other hand, Thailand's inability to handle skilled migration particularly due to its primary focus on unauthorized migration from the neighbouring countries within the GMS encouraged the formation of Filipino migrants networks and thereby, the perpetuation of unauthorized migration.

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