



## SCHEDA DI APPROFONDIMENTO N° 31

### INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT 1 October 2007

**Maruja M.B. Asis**  
**Scalabrini Migration Center-Manila**

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*A cura di Sisifo Italia - Ufficio Stampa MIM*

Responsabile: Giuseppe Lanzi, 335.66.98.734 [giuseppelanzi@scalabrini.net](mailto:giuseppelanzi@scalabrini.net)  
Email: [development@scalabrini.net](mailto:development@scalabrini.net) WEB [www.meetingloreto.it](http://www.meetingloreto.it) [www.sisifoitalia.it](http://www.sisifoitalia.it)  
infoline: 071.7500256 – Fax 071.7501972

# INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT

EMIGRAZIONE, IMMIGRAZIONE, SVILUPPO  
10<sup>TH</sup> MEETING INTERNAZIONALE MIGRAZIONI

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Maruja M.B. Asis  
Scalabrini Migration Center-Manila



# OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

- Describe international migration trends and patterns in Asia, with a focus on international labor migration
- Discuss international labor migration policies of countries of origin and countries of destination in the region
- Outline the major issues attendant to international labor migration
- Focus of presentation: East, Southeast and South Asia

# INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION TRENDS

- Worldwide: 191 million international migrants (UN,2006)
- Asia: 53.3 million international migrants (28% of total)
- International migration has become a fact of life in Asia
- International migration links Asia to the rest of the world:
  - Source-region of new immigrants to countries of settlement
  - Source-region of international students
  - Source-region of migrant workers
- International labor migration is mostly intraregional, a major factor in regional integration

# INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION TRENDS

- 1970s: labor migration to the oil-rich Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain); mostly male
- 1980s: labor migration to the NICs in East and Southeast Asia; intensified intraregional migration, esp. in Southeast Asia; female migration became notable
- 1990s: female migration became more pronounced; migration of highly skilled and professional migrants became notable
- International labor migration is highly regulated – but *unauthorized migration* (including trafficking in persons, esp. women and children) is substantial
- the involvement of the migration industry (recruitment or placement agencies and related businesses) has been established since the 1970s



# COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN & DESTINATION

## ➤ Major countries of origin

- Indonesia
- Philippines
- Vietnam
  - **Burma**
  - **Cambodia**
  - **Laos**
- Bangladesh
- India
- Nepal
- Pakistan
- Sri Lanka
  
- China

## ➤ Major countries/areas of destination

- Gulf countries
- Brunei
- Malaysia
- Singapore
- Thailand
  
- Hong Kong
- Japan
- South Korea
- Taiwan

# STOCK & FLOW ESTIMATES of MIGRANT WORKER POPULATION: COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

## ➤ STOCK DATA

- Philippines: 3.8 million workers (+ 870,000 unauthorized migrants)
- Indonesia: 700,000 legal migrant workers
- Sri Lanka: 1.5 million

## ➤ FLOW DATA

- Philippines: 1.02 million (2006)
- Indonesia: 473,310 (2005)
- Vietnam: 78,000 (2005)
- Sri Lanka: 201,143 (2006)
- Bangladesh: 252,702 (2005)
- Pakistan: 183,191 (2006)
- Nepal: 183,682 (2005)
- China: 550,000 (nd)

# ESTIMATES of MIGRANT WORKER POPULATION: COUNTRIES OF DESTINATION

- Japan: 775,000 migrant workers (2005)
- South Korea: 394,511 (June 2006)
- Taiwan: 399,000 (2006)
- Malaysia: 2.6 million (Skeldon, 2006)
- Thailand: 1,989,964(2004 registration)
- Singapore: 756,000 (2006)
- Brunei: 111,000 (2006)
  
- Share of migrant workers to the overall work force of destination countries is significant
- Certain jobs/sectors became identified as “migrants’ jobs”; in the Gulf countries, this means private sector jobs

# Asia, A Region in Motion

- From about the 1980s, Asia became a site for significant female migration.
  - Philippines
  - Indonesia
  - Sri Lanka
- Labor migration is gendered.
  - Male migrants: agriculture/ plantation, construction, manufacturing
  - Female migrants: domestic work, “entertainment” sector
- Male migration and female migration have different consequences for the left-behind families.



## LABOR MIGRATION POLICIES: DESTINATION COUNTRIES

- The template of labor migration policies was established in the 1970s, the height of migration to the Gulf: the migration of **less skilled workers** is designed to be temporary:
  - LIMITED CONTRACT (2 YEARS)
  - MIGRANTS' TEMPORARY WORK AND RESIDENCE IN THE COUNTRY IS TIED TO SPECIFIC EMPLOYER/SECTOR (JOB/EMPLOYER TRANSFER IS RESTRICTED)
  - NO FAMILY REUNIFICATION
- East and Southeast Asian NICS adopted additional or certain measures to ensure the temporary arrangement:
  - LIMITING SOURCE COUNTRIES TO CERTAIN COUNTRIES
  - USE OF QUOTAS
  - USE OF LEVIES ("TAX" ON EMPLOYERS TO DISCOURAGE RELIANCE ON MIGRANT WORKERS)
  - PUTTING A CEILING TO THE NUMBER OF YEARS MIGRANTS CAN WORK IN THE COUNTRY

## LABOR MIGRATION POLICIES: DESTINATION COUNTRIES

- All receiving countries welcome highly skilled & professional migrants and extends rights to “foreign talent” to attract them (permanent residence, family reunification); they aim to bring in more HS/P migrants.
- Receiving countries have varying levels of (conditional) welcome regarding less skilled migrant workers and withholds rights to discourage them to stay.

Closed (NO ENTRY)

Open



Japan

Malaysia

Thailand

Taiwan

Singapore

S. Korea

HK SAR

- None of the receiving countries has stopped or slowed down in bringing in migrant workers.

## LABOR MIGRATION POLICIES: ORIGIN COUNTRIES

- Except for S Korea, the rest of the origin countries which sent workers to the Gulf in the 1970s are still seeking foreign employment for their nationals.
- Origin countries have elaborated their labor migration policies over the years.



- Temporary labor migration has been reframed in the age of globalization: as part of development strategies – indicated by targets to send more workers abroad, specifically to send more highly skilled & professional migrants.

## LABOR MIGRATION POLICIES: REGIONAL FRAMEWORK

- Migrants contribute to sustaining development in the countries of destination – may not be as widely acknowledged.
  - 2007 ASEAN Declaration of the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers

- Migrants contribute to their countries of origin: remittances have been significant (ca 2006).

India - \$26.9B (est)

Vietnam - \$4.8B (est)

Philippines - \$12.8B

Bangladesh - \$6.0B

Indonesia - \$1.9B (est)

Sri Lanka – \$2.1B (est)

- Impacts are most felt at household levels
- Concerns over remittance-driven economies

# STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR CONCERNS

- States are involved in labor migration – but government-to-government discussions have centered on regulating the exit, entry, work and stay of migrants.
- Employers are adopting global recruitment strategies.
- The migration industry is involved – recruitment and de facto overseer of workers' conditions. Irregular practices are major sources of migrants' vulnerabilities.
- Civil society is involved in advocacy for migrants' rights and providing support and assistance to migrants.
  - The role of the Catholic Church and Catholic-inspired organizations in Asia has been crucial.
  - Migrant NGOs have engaged in more transnational coalition-building.
  - In recent years, trade unions in some countries in the region are showing more interest in migrants' issues; partnership with migrant NGOs has been evident.
- For migrants and their families, the labor market has become globalized; likely to be increasing tensions between individual vs. "national" interests.

# CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

- The human rights situation of migrant workers in Asia has been described as one of “benign neglect.”
  - Female migration – domestic work is one of few options, but it is not considered as real work
  - Unauthorized migration, including trafficking, is increasing
- The protection and promotion of migrants’ rights continues to be an alternative vision, not mainstreamed in the approach to migration; associated with civil society concerns.
- The social costs of migration have to be addressed:
  - Origin countries: beyond deployment, targets and remittances
  - Destination countries: beyond recruitment
- More dialogue, more cooperation, more solidarity is needed to ensure a fair, equitable and humane deal for migrants and their families, countries of origin and countries of destination.