



OVERSEAS WORKER – A NEED OR A WANT?

Marian Baltazar
Class of 1980 University of the Philippines Manila
AB Political Science

To be an Overseas Worker is one of the dreams that most Filipinos share with each other and sometimes even going to the point of living abroad and migrating. One cannot discount the fact that many Filipinos equate working abroad as a road to acquiring wealth, to have a good life or it may even hold a brighter future for every individual. Being an overseas worker also means having better opportunities in a foreign land, thus threading the road to success. Of course there are a thousand and one reasons as to why some Filipinos prefer working abroad but it is almost always because of financial reasons and dreaming of a good future not only for themselves but for their families as well.

At present, the Overseas Workers are called the country's "modern-day heroes", simply because they become the streamline of the influx of billions of dollars in the Philippines. They have become a boost to our economy and have propped it up too by means of their dollar remittances. Not withholding the fact that it is not only the money that our migrants abroad bring home to our country but they also brought home honor and fame to our country because we Filipinos excel in various fields of work. Labor Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas commented too that the overseas Filipino workers have become an emerging economic class of Philippine Society.

Philippine Statistics show a consistent growing rate of Filipinos from all walks of life going abroad for different overseas jobs. Moreover, it also shows that we are one among the top foreign workers in the world. Hence, Filipino workers are of great demand abroad and we supply much of the labor force needed in other countries, examples of which are UAE, Canada, Australia, US and more. The life of an overseas worker entails a lot of sacrifice and is a very tough one too since you are leaving behind all your loved ones. Their jobs are not even stable for they are only contract workers, that is, no assurance on how their jobs will end. Of course the dollars that they earn and send to their families proves to be beneficial and rewarding. This being the matter, makes it more a need rather than a want.

In a way, we can say that they are winners in their own right but on the other hand, they are also losers.

Then working abroad does not always give full beneficial returns to these Overseas Filipino Workers. They don't always get the perfect job that they really want. With their financial gains also come sad-ending stories, disadvantages and sometimes even a perfect damage. Some of them may be lucky enough to get a very kind employer, others may not. Some may get high-paying jobs and get the chance to bring their families with them but some may not. Extremes and mishaps even happen, example of which is a Dept. of Foreign Affairs "global situationer" report having a count of 4,775 Filipinos who are being held in prison (a quarter of them are women). There are also cases of abuse against our Filipina domestic helpers and I prefer not to elaborate further for I know that we are very much aware of these cases. It is more of a choice now rather than a preference. The question still remains, is the financial gain tantamount to all the inevitable sacrifices that an overseas worker undergo?

Questions for discussion:

1. Is being an Overseas Worker more of an advantage or a disadvantage?
2. How can you say that they are considered the country's "modern-day heroes"?
3. What are the privileges that an Overseas Worker enjoy?
4. Is it more than of a need or a want to become an overseas worker?
5. Are their compensation as an overseas worker worth their efforts?