

PRE-ARRIVAL SERVICES FOR FILIPINOS IN ALBERTA: BRIDGING GAPS IN IMMIGRANT SERVICES

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Executive Summary

Pre-arrival services are considered important in the settlement and integration of immigrants and newcomers in Canada. Recent studies have indicated that pre-arrival services by host countries and pre-departure services by sending countries significantly contribute to the adjustment and adaptation of newcomers in destination communities. These types of services ultimately benefit individuals and countries at both ends of the migration journey.

Filipinos comprise one of the largest groups of non-white immigrants and newcomers in Canada since the 1980s. Of all immigrant groups from non-western countries Filipinos are visibly marked as the “other” yet are considered “ideal’ workers in certain occupational categories like health and service industries where they are most concentrated. Their entry into the labour market as a ready workforce presumes a level of understanding about Canada. This research explores the pre-arrival services that Filipinos in Alberta have access to before immigrating to Canada. It also looks into the autonomous strategies they employ to make their migration to Canada successful in the absence of such services.

Interviews and focus group sessions involving 26 Filipino participants were conducted from August 2014 to February 2015 in Calgary, Edmonton and Lethbridge. Qualitative data reveals that Filipinos in Alberta invariably accessed pre-arrival services before arriving in Canada. These pre-arrival services can be classified into two types: formal and informal. Formal pre-arrival services refer to those provided by the government, either by the Canadian or Philippine governments. Informal pre-arrival services refer to those provided by church groups, placement or recruitment agencies, immigration lawyers, and family or other social networks. Shared culture across transnational space enables the extended Filipino kinship system to work to the advantage of those planning to migrate to Canada. Access to formal pre-arrival services, however, depends on the following factors: period of arrival to Canada, country of residence prior

to migration, and type of immigration program under which the Filipino newcomer is allowed entry into Canada.

This research also reveals that income class and human capital such as education, as well as social capital involving transnational social networks among Filipinos determine differential access to pre-arrival services, whether these are of the formal or informal type. Those Filipinos without any formal support prior to their arrival in Alberta have made use of varied strategies to find information to assist them in their settlement in the province.

In general, pre-arrival services defined early success in the settlement and integration of Filipinos in Alberta. These services eventually shaped the choices and decisions they made upon arrival, and were viewed positively, albeit lacking in many ways. Access to and participation in pre-arrival services provided Filipinos a gauge to determine the effectiveness of such services during the settlement and adjustment period in a new community. All Filipinos in the study are convinced that gender-neutral pre-arrival services provide a better integrative approach for inclusion in Canada, where both males and females are given the same quality of service and information. That said, a more effective stream of pre-arrival services by the Canadian government should be made available to all regardless of migration status.

Project Overview

Services, both pre-arrival and post-arrival, form an integral aspect of the settlement and integration of newcomers and immigrants in Canada. With its long history of immigration, the provision of services to newcomers in Canada by a corpus of government and non-government organizations is an essential aid that aims to fully enhance the productive capacities of immigrants, albeit with some deficiencies in service delivery (Richmond and Shields 2005). Since the 1970s, immigrant service organizations based in different communities across Canada have become designated frontline agencies to respond to the challenges of a growing multicultural society (Bonifacio 2008).

In Canadian practice, services provided to immigrants fall under settlement and integration services which “encompass activities that are specifically designed to facilitate the early economic and social integration of newcomers to Canada” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC] 2004). Citizenship and Immigration Canada offers four main settlement programs, namely, the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP), Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), the Host Program, and the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) for refugees. These generally comprise the post-arrival services in Canada.

Pre-arrival services to immigrants and temporary foreign workers to Canada, either by government agencies and non-governmental organizations or by private entities, have not been widely examined so far. As an emerging research theme, examining pre-arrival services is important for understanding various settlement strategies and integration by particular groups of immigrants and newcomers in Canada. Immigrants come from diverse groups and backgrounds with particular needs; not all of them access the services provided by settlement agencies, often designed for a particular prototype—that is, for a perceived homogenous immigrant group with similar needs like language instruction. For example, immigrants with competent knowledge of English, like Filipinos, will not access the LINC program.

Filipinos are arguably considered “ideal” immigrants (Barber 2008) for their ability to settle and integrate well into their adopted communities without much government support during their initial phase of settlement. I hypothesize that such positive outcomes are based on pre-arrival services and strategies that enable Filipino immigrants to negotiate settlement challenges upon arrival in Canada. However, the provision of pre-arrival services and strategies are rooted in the complex intersections of culture, gender roles, social capital, extended kinship systems, and transnationalism (Bonifacio 2013).

Alberta is a province that has long recruited foreigners, as temporary workers and immigrants, to fill the demand for much needed labour. Filipinos figure prominently in Alberta with 60,085 persons in a population of 3,610, 185 in the province speaking Tagalog (Filipino, Pilipino) as a mother tongue in the 2011 National Household Survey (Statistics Canada 2012). They represent one of the largest immigrant groups in the province. Based on immigration statistics from the Province of Alberta, the Philippines was the top source country of immigrants from 2007 to 2010, with a total of 18,925 Filipinos entering during this period (Government of Alberta 2011). As well, the Philippines was the top source country of temporary foreign workers (TFWs) from 2007 to 2009 with a total of 20,891 Filipinos (Government of Alberta 2011). Overall, in Canada, there were 29,539 Filipinos who arrived as permanent residents in 2013 (CIC 2014). However, a larger number of Filipinos, totaling 30,193, were granted temporary work permits in Canada in the same year (CIC 2014a).

Clearly, Filipinos in Alberta and Canada comprise one of the largest non-white groups who have been admitted as immigrants under a rigorous points system and as temporary foreign workers aiming to gain permanent residency under the criteria of the Alberta Immigrant Nominee program (AINP) or its federal counterpart. The presence of Filipino temporary foreign workers (TFWs) in the province suggests that they already have the skills that enable them to work immediately upon arrival. For instance, Filipinos, educated under an American-inspired educational system, utilize their facility in English to navigate the labour market. While knowledge of English is generally a good

indicator of easier settlement in Canada, it does not mean that new arrivals know everything about the country. Hence, the need to examine pre-arrival services.

This project aims to explore the pre-arrival services accessed to by Filipinos who first land in Alberta. Related questions include: are the pre-arrival services important to their migration to Canada? How did these preparatory services enable Filipinos to cope with the challenges of migration? Are these pre-arrival services marked by gender? Based on their experiences, what are the most needed pre-arrival services that Filipinos should have accessed or benefited from to make their settlement much better? Did their pre-arrival strategies mitigate the need for post-arrival services? These questions are important for determining how pre-arrival and post-arrival services could be integrated, or possibly connected, for the successful settlement and integration of all immigrants in Canada.

Data Collection Methods

In this project, interviews and focus group discussions were the preferred methods of data collection. Using a feminist approach to research (Hesse-Biber 2012) in which the lived experiences and narratives of Filipinos are recognized, the interviews of Filipino immigrants in Alberta provided in-depth information about pre-arrival services and strategies of settlement and integration. Feminist research gives emphasis to the perspectives of participants, namely their particular histories and subjectivities as immigrants from less developed countries, as well as the positionality of the researcher as being both an “insider and outsider” of the research—as a Filipino national and as a researcher. Focus group discussions with Filipino immigrants provided a venue for exploratory, discursive analysis of how particular groups of immigrants utilized pre-arrival services or strategies before their migration to Canada, their impact on their arrival in Canada, and the perceived relations between pre-arrival and post-arrival services provided to the immigrants. A total of 10 interviews were conducted in Lethbridge and Calgary, comprised of 3 males and 7 females who resided in Alberta for at least 3 years. A total of three focus groups were conducted in Edmonton: 1 focus group composed of 3 Filipino males, 1 focus group with 5 Filipino females, and 1 focus group that combined 4 Filipino males and 4 Filipino females. A total of 16 Filipinos participated in the focus group sessions; all of them had resided in Alberta for at least 3 years. In all, there were 26 participants in the study.

Data collected from interviews and focus group sessions were manually transcribed and organized into themes. Some participants were wary of using an audio recorder in the interview and focus group sessions. Duly recognizing their anxiety towards recording devices, I decided to take down notes instead. After each session, I provided a summary of the ideas presented and syntheses of discussions during the group sessions. Similarly, the research assistant in Lethbridge also took notes during the personal interviews for the same reason. The comfort level of participants during the interview sessions and the focus groups were given primary consideration.

As it is, the pre-arrival context has scarce scholarly materials to work with. Thus, an institutional ethnography (Smith 2005) of Philippine departure programs and Canadian pre-arrival activities could provide a complementary framework for analyzing the data. This type of ethnography leads to a more nuanced perspective of how Filipino lives are shaped by settlement practices and policies upon migration to Canada. The bases of the institutional ethnographic study are found in the online websites of the Philippine Overseas and Employment Administration (POEA) at www.poea.gov.ph and the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) at www.cfo.gov.ph. No actual on-site study of these agencies in the Philippines was conducted because of budgetary limitations.

As a pilot case study of pre-arrival services within a limited time frame and limited resources, the results of the interviews and focus group sessions are deemed significant. In qualitative studies, the personal experiences, insights, and group discussions make the data credible in probing pre-arrival services among Filipinos in Alberta.

Profile of Research Participants

The profile of respondents from the following cities in Alberta are presented using assigned pseudonyms to protect their privacy. Feminist research practice dictates that participants are given due recognition as subjects with own identities and experiences.

Calgary

Sandra is 40 years old and a nurse in the Philippines. She arrived in Canada under the Live-in Caregiver Program and worked as a nanny to two under 6 year-old children of a company executive six years ago. She is now employed in a health care facility for seniors.

Becky is 55 years old and a career professional in the Philippines before migrating to Canada with her family: her husband and three children. She now works in a retail outlet in a shopping mall.

Rina is 48 years old and a management graduate in the Philippines. She was hired as a temporary foreign worker five years ago. After three years she received her documents for the Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program (AINP). She is employed as a hotel worker.

Salvador is 57 years old and an engineering graduate in the Philippines. He arrived as a landed immigrant ten years ago with his family. He works in a consulting firm for the oil and gas industry.

Samuel is 29 years old and a temporary foreign worker in a fast food chain. He previously worked in Dubai as a contract worker. His sister encouraged him to migrate to Canada.

Edmonton

Angie is 55 years old and a former live-in caregiver. She was reunited with her two children in the Philippines after nine years.

Wena is 43 years old and was a temporary foreign worker employed in a hotel for three years before she received her nomination papers for permanent residency. She now lives with her husband and three children.

Nona is 29 years old and a nurse in a local hospital. She has a boyfriend in the Philippines and plans to go back home to marry him.

Samantha is 65 years old and was sponsored by her daughter to Canada. She has four other children left behind in the Philippines.

Cecilia is 48 years old and worked previously as a domestic worker in Singapore before being hired as a nanny five years ago. She lives with two other Filipinos in a shared housing accommodation.

Margarit is 39 years old and was an accountant in the Philippines before she arrived in Canada seven years ago. Her husband works as an engineer in Fort McMurray and was able to sponsor his family.

Cynthia is 42 years old and worked as a nurse in Saudi Arabia before coming to Canada as a live-in caregiver eight years ago. She is now reunited with her family after ten years of being away from them.

Eve is 54 years old and a supervisor in a hotel chain. She started as a housekeeper in this hotel seven years ago.

Norma is 42 years old and worked as a live-in caregiver for four years. She is employed in a seniors' home.

Jose is 57 years old and now works as an electrician in a manufacturing company. He is a licensed engineer in the Philippines. He was initially hired to work in a farm in northern Alberta.

Brandon is 49 years old and was sponsored by his wife who worked as a live-in caregiver. He works in a retail shop.

Manny is 36 years old and works in a hotel. He completed a degree in hotel management but works in the maintenance section.

Carlos is 50 years old and works as a janitor in a school. He has a degree in education in the Philippines.

Nestor is 65 years old and was sponsored by his daughter to Canada. He works part-time in a restaurant.

Romulo is 22 years old and arrived in Canada three years ago when his mother sponsored him and his two other siblings. He is a college student.

Ver is 44 years old and works as a mechanic in an auto dealership.

Lethbridge

Aster is 34 years old and worked as a nurse in a local hospital in Mindanao in the southern Philippines before migrating to Canada. She is now employed in a seniors' home in Lethbridge for the past four years.

Cathy is 31 years old and a registered nurse in the Philippines. She worked in Saudi Arabia as a nurse before migrating to Canada as a live-in caregiver five years ago. At present, she is completing her studies towards re-certification of her professional credentials.

Lily is 52 years old and a university graduate in the Philippines. She entered Canada as a temporary foreign worker and worked at a fast food outlet. After receiving her

documents for permanent residency after two years, she continued to work in the same outlet.

Vera is 55 years old and obtained a college-level education before coming to Canada as a temporary foreign worker four years ago. She still works in a food chain as a cashier.

Dan is 35 years old and a nurse by profession in the Philippines. He has been working as a nursing aide in a children's facility in Lethbridge for the last five years.

Review of Related Studies

Pre-arrival services is an emerging field of study within the scope of settlement and integration for international newcomers, including refugees, immigrants and migrant workers. In this section, the review of related studies is limited to the Canadian context. These studies include those contributed by scholars and institutions, including both the public and private sectors. But the rich collection of more recent sources on post-arrival services are excluded from the discussion (e.g., George 2002; Sadiq 2004; Lim et al 2005; Schellenberg and Maheux 2007; Lai and Chau 2007; Ruddick 2008; Vineberg 2012; McGrath and McGrath 2013; Maganaka and Plaizier 2015).

In discussing the needs of newcomers, it is often difficult to isolate the challenges and barriers that account for various shortfalls. For example, newcomers with English language difficulties may not find work, leading to income problems. According to the study by George et al (2004), the basic settlement needs of newcomers include a general orientation to Canadian life and establishing community connections; securing housing, employment and language training; and obtaining information on available services. Full political and social participation in the new society becomes of increasing importance in the later stage of adaptation and integration (George 2002).

These settlement needs do not arise after the movement from one country to another; rather, these are major concerns at the pre-arrival stage. The importance of continuity of services from the pre-arrival stage to the post-arrival stage have only recently been recognized and examined. In February 2015, the Migration Policy Institute Europe released a policy brief that looks at the potential of pre-departure programmes in relation to the labour market performance and other contributions of immigrants (Desiderio and Hooper 2015). It argues that cooperation between source and destination countries is important for the long term successful integration of migrants.

In Canada, Esses et al (2013) presented a report on the Alberta Settlement Outcomes Survey to Alberta Human Services that noted the types of services that are considered helpful prior to arrival in Canada. This report indicates a need for an assessment of foreign credentials prior to migration by over 60% of respondents in the survey. Such a service would have enabled them to make necessary adjustments in seeking employment upon arrival. Other pre-arrival services noted in this report include an orientation to Canadian culture and way of life. Further, the type of immigration category under which an individual enters into Canada affects the type of services needed. For example, professional and skilled workers prefer establishing connections with professional regulatory associations, while refugees need support in language training and translation services. In general, these pre-arrival services are considered helpful: assessment of international education and experience; skills training; connections with employers and professional associations; language assessment; orientation to Canadian culture; assistance in developing a plan before and after arrival in Canada; housing; and translation services (Esses et al 2013).

TD Canada Trust, a national financial institution, released a special report in 2012, “Knocking Down Barriers Faced by New Immigrants to Canada: Fitting the Pieces Together” (Alexander, Burleton and Fong 2012), which urged the federal government to increase the number of countries reached by the Canadian Immigrant Integration Program (CIIP), which offers pre-arrival services, and to establish the same services in Canada to follow through on these services. The countries included at the time of this report were China, India and the Philippines.

Bow Valley College in Alberta also published its findings in 2012 on the cross-regional development of the immigrant workforce in smaller communities in the province (Lodermeier 2012). In this report, immigrant participants indicated a need for pre-arrival information services regarding professional qualifications, employment, language training, banking, schools, and the political system, especially in rural communities. At this time, a consolidated package of information relating to services for newcomers in rural areas is generally absent.

Lozano and Friesen (2011) submitted a report on the pilot pre-departure orientation program for Bhutanese youth living at the UN-sponsored refugee camp in Nepal, bound for resettlement to Canada with their families. This pre-arrival service was delivered by the Immigrant Services Society of BC and the Vancouver Foundation. Based on their assessment of this three-day, pre-departure orientation program, they recommend its implementation worldwide for newcomer youth.

In Ontario, Chartwell Inc. and the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services (CREHS) released a final report in 2007 about their research project on the pre-arrival services funded by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. To enhance immigrants' understanding of settlement in Canada and to close their 'preparedness gap', they recommend the following pre-arrival services: employment information about the labour market, credential and licensing requirements; and assessment of credentials and language training (Chartwell Inc. and CREHS 2007).

These studies and reports from scholars, institutions and community organizations all demonstrate the critical role of pre-arrival services for international newcomers entering Canada under different immigration categories and at various age levels. Their recommendations will be echoed by Filipino immigrants in Alberta in the next section.

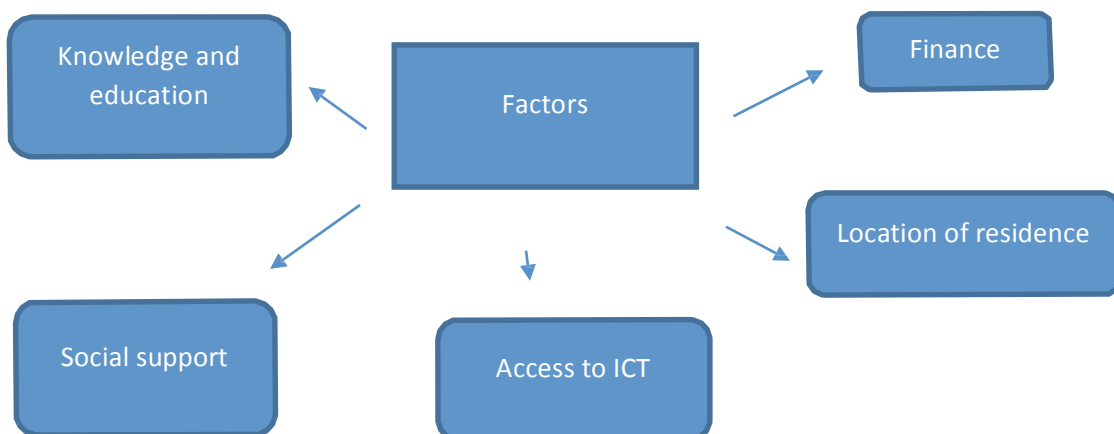
Pre-Arrival Services and Strategies of Filipinos in Alberta

This section on pre-arrival services has three sections. The first section deals with the different factors that are crucial in shaping the pre-immigration experience while in the Philippines. The second part outlines the types of pre-arrival services and mode of access in the home country or elsewhere. And, the third section briefly discusses the gender dimension of pre-arrival services.

Factors Shaping Pre-Immigration Experience

Filipino research participants in Alberta, regardless of year of entry, vividly remember their pre-arrival migration experiences. These include the preparation of documents, travel to Canada, and settlement in Alberta. The tedious documentary process of immigrating to Canada was met by the principal applicants and their families with high resolve. Going through the paper work with the Canadian Embassy in Manila or Cebu in the Philippines represented a new positive beginning into one of the most favoured destinations for Filipinos in North America.

Pre-arrival preparation generally differs based on financial resources, distance of residence to Manila, Cebu, or the nearest consular office, access to the Internet and technology, knowledge and education, and social supports and networks. (See Figure 1 below).



Having financial resources or access to resources is a key factor in decisions to migrate to Canada, both for temporary foreign workers and permanent residents. As the jargon puts it, “money runs everything.” The visa application and its accompanying documents require money to complete. Applicants have to go to various designated Philippine offices, mostly located in major cities, to secure particular documentation. Those coming from rural communities or outlying areas need to travel to the city to meet processing requirements. In many cases, applicants have to return several times to these offices to follow-up. For faster service, based on common knowledge, many resort to bribing local employees to ensure their papers are processed first or advanced in the paper queue. When all the required documents have been completed for the visa application, they travel to Manila or Cebu where the Canadian consular offices are located in the Philippines. Or, they send their visa documents (to the consular offices) by registered courier services. In most cases, however, a personal submission of the documents is preferred.

Based on the narratives of mixed, focus group participants in Edmonton, the following sentiments were raised:

“The problem in the Philippines is that processing is slow. *Pabalik-balik pa kami as POEA at OWWA. Hindi maganda at maayos ang sistema ng application*” [We have to go back many times to the offices of POEA and OWWA. The system of application is not good and orderly.]

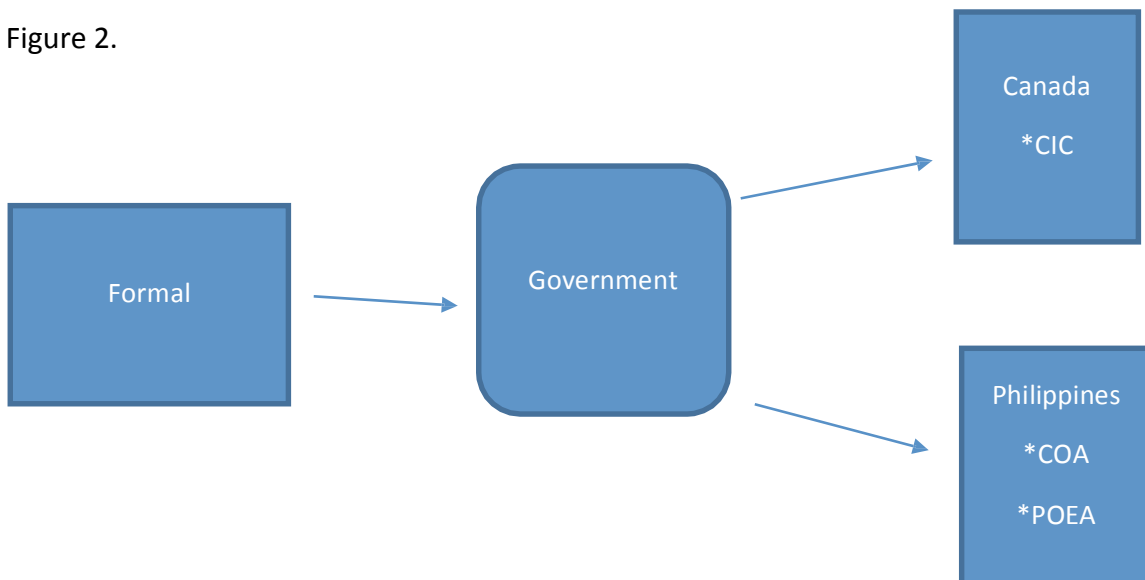
Access to the Internet and computer technology was another differentiating factor for pre-arrival services among Filipinos in the study. These tools enabled them to gain knowledge about immigration to Canada from websites and to contact family members and friends about their plans. Those without Internet connections at home, patronized Internet cafés in the neighbourhood. This also entailed money and time to gather the desired information. The ability to use the Internet and to discern whether information is useful or not hinged on the level of education of the Filipino would-be emigrants. Knowledge on which websites are reliable or have updated information was a critical aspect of their research skills. More importantly, to be able to understand what the information meant was dependent on their education.

Social support and networks are another key factor shaping the pre-immigration experiences of the Filipinos in Alberta. As the Philippines is an archipelago where major services are located in urban centres, the presence of family members and close associates in these areas helps those coming from rural communities and outlying areas. The collectivist nature of Philippine culture (Bonifacio 2013) dictates that family members offer temporary accommodation to kin groups doing business in their city. Many, but not all, Filipinos enjoy this cultural privilege that saves them money for lodging and other expenses. The offer of hospitality requires those helped to return the favour in due time. This is inscribed in the cultural value of having debt of gratitude (Bonifacio 2013). In most cases, kin members or associates leaving for Canada receive much support from them, that the experience becomes collective as well.

Pre-arrival Services

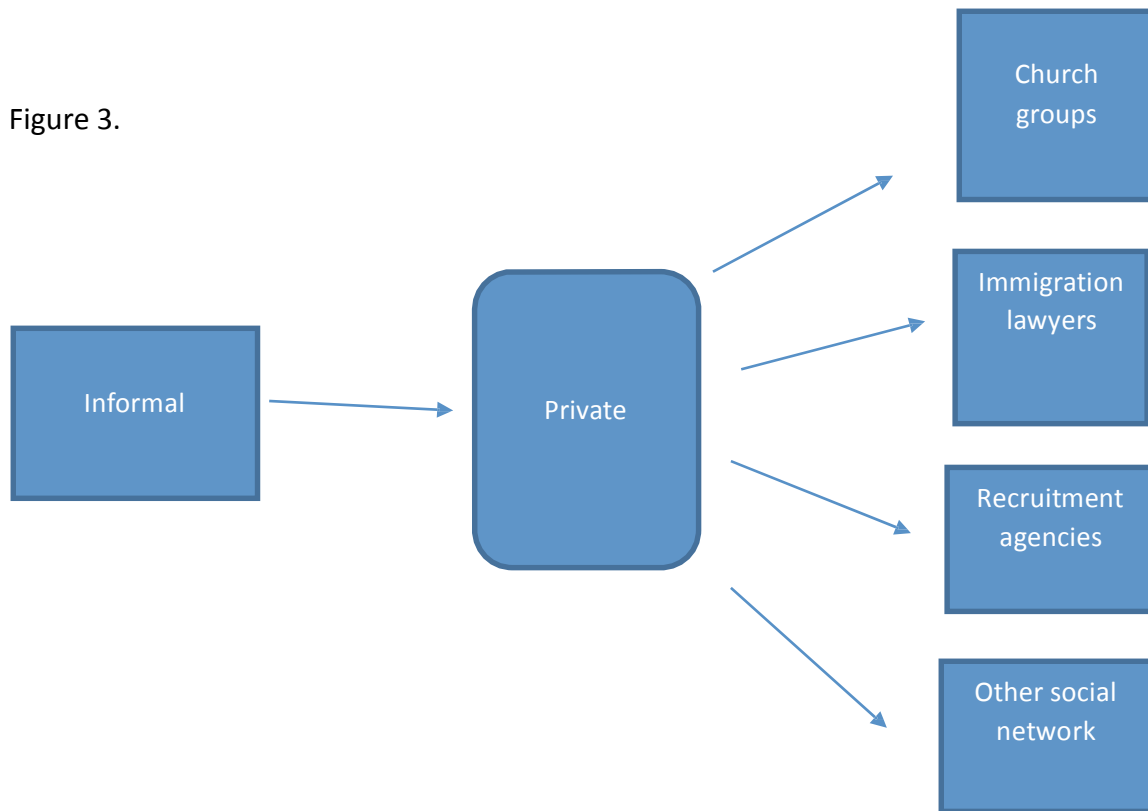
There are two types of pre-arrival services received by Filipinos in Alberta: formal and informal. Formal services refer to those services and assistance provided by the governments of Canada and the Philippines through their agencies (See Figure 2). Some of these formal services are compulsory.

Figure 2.



Informal services are those provided by private entities such as church groups, placement or recruitment agencies, immigration lawyers, and social networks. (See Figure 3). These informal services are not available to all would-be emigrants, and are not formally organized, but are often made available based on need or demand.

Figure 3.



a. Formal Services

In the Philippines, formal services are provided by the Commission of Filipinos Overseas (CFO) and the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA). CFO is an agency under the Office of the President, established in 1980 to promote and uphold the interests, rights and welfare of overseas Filipinos, as well as to strengthen their ties with the home country. Since its inception, it has fostered the sense of belonging of younger Filipinos in diaspora and nurtured ties with overseas Filipino communities through its programs and activities (Baggio 2008).

The core functions of POEA, as outlined on its website, are industry regulation, employment facilitation, worker protection, and general administration and support services. This agency was established in 1982 to take charge of the formulation, implementation, marketing and monitoring of overseas employment, regulation of recruitment agencies, as well as the retraining and reemployment of returning overseas workers (Tyner 2005). The rationale for creating POEA suggests the institutionalization of labour deployment of Filipinos worldwide, which makes the Philippines a “labor-brokering state” (Rodriguez 2010).

Both the CFO and POEA offer pre-departure orientation seminars (PDOS) to Filipinos leaving the country. Under POEA Memorandum Circular No. 3 Series of 1983, all Filipinos who are first time hires or re-contracted workers must attend a pre-departure orientation seminar. CFO takes charge of those permanently leaving the country while POEA handles overseas Filipino contract workers. These agencies issue documentation to enable Filipinos to depart for their destination countries.

Filipinos who have been granted a permanent resident visa are required to register with CFO prior to departure. Registration entails the submission of the following documents and requirements, as indicated on the CFO website, www.cfo.gov.ph:

1. Original and photocopy of passport (must be valid about six months before date of travel)
2. Original and photocopy of visa
3. One (1) 2x2 or passport-size photograph
4. One (1) valid identification card with photograph (e.g., SSS ID, GSIS E-card, PRC ID, driver's license, postal ID, ARC, etc.)
5. Photocopy of Immigrant Data Summary for USA-bound emigrant (must not be detached from visa packet) except for K visa holder
6. Original and photocopy of Confirmation of Permanent Residence for Canada-bound emigrant (must not be torn or signed before departure)
7. Original and photocopy of Certificate of Eligibility for Japan-bound emigrant
8. Original and photocopy of Nulla Osta (for Italy-bound emigrants)
9. Original and photocopy of letter of approval for Work to Residence visa (for New Zealand-bound emigrants)
10. Printed copy of Visa Grant Notification Letter (for Australia-bound emigrants)
11. Photocopy of employment contract (for immigrant workers)
12. Duly completed registration form for Emigrants or for Immigrant Workers

13. Payment of P400.00 registration fee
14. Attendance at the PDOS guidance counseling or peer counseling session (CFO)

Those between 13 to 19 years old are also required to register with additional documentation. This youth group attends a Peer Counseling Seminar to help them prepare and adjust to their new life in another country. Adults attend the required PDOS for two hours and apprise departing youth of the issues they will likely encounter in the course of their settlement and provide basic information on their rights and obligations in the adopted country. CFO also provides a Country Familiarization Seminar for au pairs bound for Europe and the United States. These country-specific sessions (e.g., USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Europe) are held either in Manila or Cebu on a first-come, first-served basis. A sticker is affixed in the passport of the emigrant after complying with registration and is, in turn, inspected by the Bureau of Immigration upon departure.

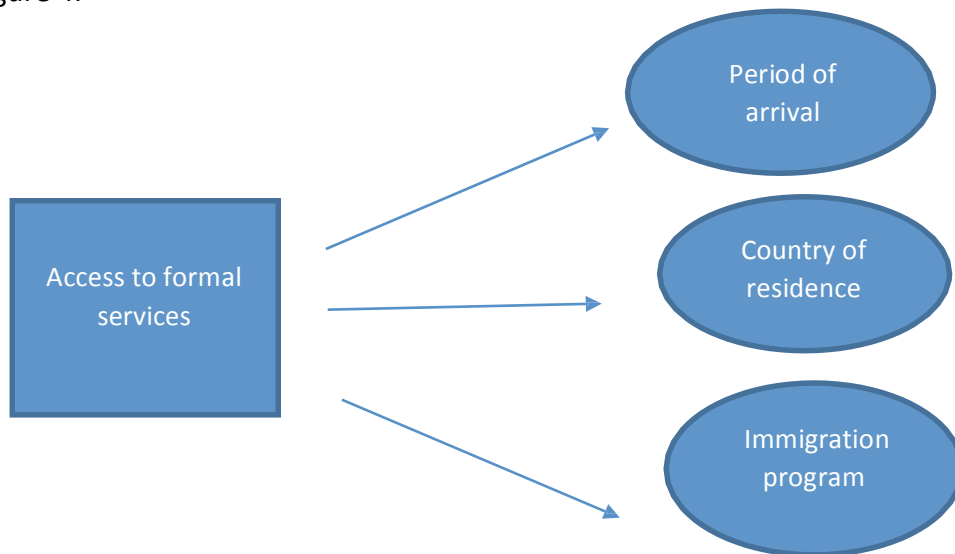
At the POEA, overseas contract workers or, as they are widely known, OFWs (overseas Filipino workers) also attend a required pre-departure orientation seminar. This two-hour, country-specific “primer” to work overseas has recently been transferred to the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) under the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). There are over 290 OWWA-accredited providers in the country for those Filipinos who are directly hired by foreign entities (Dinglasan 2012). Attendees submit documentation such as passports, contracts of employment and endorsements from the recruitment agency. After the seminar, they receive a certificate of attendance. OFWs are required to get a membership from OWWA, for which they are charged.

The government of Canada, through Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), launched the Canadian Immigrant Integration Program (CIIP) in 2007 as a pilot program, which then became a full program in 2010 (CIC 2013a). This voluntary program is administered by the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) (CIC 2013). CIIP has three components: a one-day workshop related to the job market in Canada, personalized planning, and on-line advice (ACCC 2008). The Philippines is one of the three initial countries with a Foreign Credential Referral Office to prepare would-be

immigrants destined to Canada; the other two are China and India. In the Philippines, CIIP is offered either in Cebu or in Manila and participants are provided with a handbook, *A Guide for Filipinos Migrating to Canada*. Fleras (2015, 287) noted the success of this program after four years whereby 62 percent of participants secured employment six months after arrival.

However, access to these formal services varies according to period of arrival, country of residence prior to arrival, and type of immigration program under which Filipinos enter the country (see Figure 4).

Figure 4.



In terms of period of arrival, the services provided by the Canadian government through the CIIP initiative are fairly recent. They are primarily for those Filipino emigrants with permanent residence visas like Dan in Lethbridge and Becky in Calgary. Dan attended the CIIP program four years ago, while Becky did so five years ago in Manila. Those who arrived more than eight years ago had no access to such a program from the Canadian government because this particular type of pre-arrival service did not exist.

Filipinos arriving directly from the Philippines have access to pre-departure

orientation seminars from the POEA and CFO. But those departing from a third country like Saudi Arabia or Dubai are presumed to have taken these orientation seminars and simply enter the desired country on their own.

As indicated earlier, pre-arrival services also depend on the type of immigration program that Filipinos utilize. Those with permanent resident visas have access to CIIP supported by the Canadian government but temporary foreign workers do not. POEA provides pre-departure seminars to Filipino overseas contract workers while CFO conducts the same for those with permanent visas.

The choice of immigration programs for Filipinos bound to Canada is also affected by their income class and level of human capital. Human capital in this context refers to the skills, knowledge, education, and experience that an individual possesses (Becker 1993; Keely 2007). Under the Canadian immigration points system, the principal applicant under the Federal Skilled Worker program has to demonstrate eligibility in terms of age, education, language, work experience, and adaptability. These eligibility requirements are arguably the same under the new online Express Entry system established in January 2015 where potential immigrants are assessed based on language, work experience, and education. There is a higher financial cost to applying under this program granting permanent residency entry to successful applicants and their dependents. Processing fees for permanent residence as of March 2015 are:

| | |
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| Principal applicant | \$475 |
| Souse/Common law partner | \$550 |
| Family member under 19 years old | \$150 |
| Right of permanent residence fee | \$490 (each for the principal applicant and spouse) |

Based on these fees, a principal applicant with a spouse and a child will pay a total of \$2155.00 for processing fees, or the equivalent of about six months or more of salary in the Philippines.

On the other hand, a Filipino opting to secure a worker's permit to Canada has to pay a fee of \$155. Canadian employers pay the cost of the Labor Market Impact Assessment Application (LMIA) at \$1000 for each temporary foreign worker that they hire, since June 2014. Previously, the fee for a Labor Market opinion (LMO), as the LMIA

was previously called, was \$275 (Maas 2013; MacGregor 2013). But there is anecdotal evidence that this cost is transferred to the worker upon arrival in Canada, especially by smaller enterprises. Or, the cost is somehow paid with contributions from the workers. Filipino temporary foreign workers must also comply with eligibility requirements for entry, such as work experience and language skills.

Both permanent and temporary residents bound for Canada have to submit proof of English proficiency; the preferred test is the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) costing 8,900 pesos or about \$255 per test. The level of required proficiency depends on the intended occupation of the migrant. It is possible to retake the IELTS many times to achieve the desired level of competence, thereby raising costs for Filipino applicants.

Arguably, any immigration program is affected by questions of class and status in the Philippines. While there are 3000 Filipinos leaving the country each day (Uy 2008), many more people would leave if they could. Only those with financial resources and education are able to work out a plan to leave the Philippines, either permanently or temporarily. The choice of which immigration route is most cost-effective is a prime consideration for many.

b. Informal Services

Filipinos in this study identified three prominent sources that provided informal pre-arrival services: church groups, placement or recruitment agencies, and other social networks.

Dan in Lethbridge utilized the services of an immigration lawyer after being victimized by fraudulent agencies in Canada. He depended on the advice of the immigration lawyer based in Canada regarding the required documentation for his application for permanent migration. Aster in Lethbridge initially depended on the information provided by her friends in Canada. But her past experience with fraudulent agencies, like Dan, made her decide to use an immigration lawyer to assist her in the application process.

Jose, Cecilia, Cynthia and Eve in Edmonton, as well as Cathy, Vera and Lily in

Lethbridge were assisted by recruitment agencies. They sent all their documentation to these recruitment agencies while they were still in the Philippines or another country. Cathy applied for migration to Canada while she was a contract worker in Saudi Arabia. She had to return to the Philippines before entering Canada after a successful processing of her papers in three months. Representatives of the recruitment agencies met them at the airport upon arrival in Calgary.

The majority of participants in Edmonton were primarily assisted by their own social network: family, friends, and associates. Assistance extended to finding employers directly, facilitating contact with recruitment agencies, and arranging temporary housing upon arrival. Angie and Norma were able to secure work as live-in caregivers through their friends already in Alberta. They provided them with information on how to comply with the requirements for securing a visa for employment. Brandon, Nestor and Romulo were sponsored by family members, including a wife, daughter and mother already in Alberta. These men relied on the guidance provided by their female kin on all matters through constant communication.

In Calgary, Samuel was able to work as a temporary foreign worker after being encouraged by his sister who was already in Alberta. Her sister gave him insights into the advantages of working in Canada compared to Dubai. By asking people, Samuel came into contact with a recruitment agency for a fast food chain. He had supplemental information about working in this industry through his sister. According to Samuel, in Calgary, “Filipinos trust other Filipinos, even a stranger who is a Filipino, to get information.”

As previously noted, migration entails costs. In fact, all of the Filipinos who arrived as temporary foreign workers paid certain fees for processing documents both in Canada and in the Philippines. These costs were on top of those required for securing documentation and travel expenses, locally and internationally. In many cases, the plane fares of Filipino temporary foreign workers were paid by their employers. But there are cases where plane fares were deducted from the monthly salaries of Filipino foreign workers in Canada. Only those pre-arrival services provided by church groups appear to be cost-free.

Church groups in the Philippines provide pre-arrival services to Filipinos who are members of their congregation. In a predominantly Christian country like the Philippines, Filipino emigrants are able to find support from associated church groups in Canada. The faith-based groups in the Philippines are able to facilitate the exchange of information about whom to contact in Canada. In fact, the church is the first community venue for social contacts upon arrival in Canada. As a sign of giving thanks for a successful migration journey, Filipino Catholics usually attend Sunday service. Salvador and his family did exactly this a week after arriving in Calgary.

The following narratives by the female focus group in Edmonton demonstrate the role of church groups:

“If there is no family upon arrival in Canada, then contact the church group. For example, since we are born-again Christians we contacted one from the same group in Canada.”

“We went to church in Edmonton a few weeks after our arrival. Then the priest announced, ‘Who want to become members of the Couples for Christ? We were members of this group in the Philippines so we went to the gathering space as directed. *Doon na kami nagkitakita* [we met them there].”

The extent of use of informal types of pre-arrival services also differs based on social capital. In this study, social capital refers to the social relations and transnational networks based on shared values and beliefs that foster cooperation (Bhandari and Yasunobu 2009). While the idea of social capital suggests reciprocity and mutual benefit between the parties involved, it is not always the case. Making use of social capital may simply not be mutually beneficial at the outset, but any assistance extended to Filipinos to achieve the goal of immigration is culturally construed as a form of gratitude to be repaid in some form later in life.

Gender and Pre-arrival Services

Gender is an important variable in immigration (Bonifacio2013). For example, it defines who decides to leave the country first and why; what type of job is available; and the vulnerability inherent in the choices made by men and women (Schrover and Yeo 2009; Anthias and Lazaridis 2000). However, in terms of pre-arrival services, all the

respondents in the study affirmed that gender is a non-issue since all persons, regardless of gender, must understand that preparing for a new life in another country is beneficial to all. That is, the wife and husband are both presumed to know what is expected of them to live in a new country.

According to Becky in Calgary, “there is no impact” about male and female expectations of pre-arrival services because these are considered “more technical stuff.” By this, Becky means that the information provided to prospective immigrants to Canada at this stage are important regardless of gender. Pre-departure orientation is addressed to all those leaving the Philippines and knowledge about the destination country and what to expect there is important to everyone. Becky further notes that “what matters most is the determination to come to Canada.” But women tend to have more social capital than men, which works to their advantage in securing support across borders (Gold 1995).

Both males and females in the Philippines are equally active in securing temporary and permanent routes of immigration. The gendered nature of available occupations - domestic workers in Hong Kong, or caregivers in Canada - tends to influence who migrates first and for what type of job. But whoever leaves first, either males or females, there should be no differentiation in the extent to which pre-arrival services, formal or informal, will be accessed. As the consensus among participants in Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge suggests, “individual actions” or *diskarte* (refers to being resourceful, way of approach or strategy) – and not gender – account for success.

Bridging Gaps in Immigrant Services for Filipinos

In previous studies (Bonifacio 2008, 2013), I have indicated that Filipinos as a group tend not to utilize the settlement services provided by immigrant-serving organizations upon arrival in Canada. They tend to depend on informal pathways, seeking support from family, friends, churches, recruitment agencies, and employers. This general finding of their use of post-arrival services is different from what is experienced at the pre-arrival stage. Based on the study of Filipinos in Calgary, Edmonton and Lethbridge, the pre-arrival services offered by formal and informal channels are equally significant. Filipino emigrants avail themselves of the services provided by the Canadian and Philippine governments, as well as those that other sources provide. Arguably, they need as much information and support as possible to make their move to Canada successful.

However, despite the availability of certain formal programs by the Canadian government and the Philippine government, as discussed in the previous section, there remain gaps in existing services at the point of migration to Canada. In this section, two formal areas where gaps in immigration services need to be bridged are discussed. The first area pertains to what needs to be improved on the side of the Philippine government, and the second area refers to what should come from the Canadian government.

Philippines: Not Enough

The standard pre-arrival service for any country by the Philippine government is the pre-departure orientation seminar (PDOS). This is a basic information session with some particularities depending on the destination country: usually specific to Australia and New Zealand, the United States and Canada, Japan, Europe and other countries, and the Middle East. For overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), the topics covered by the PDOS includes airport procedures, employment contracts and violations, offenses in destination countries, health, arrival concerns, and welfare programs offered by the Philippine government through OWWA. For Filipino emigrants, the topics

included in the PDOS by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) includes travel procedures, immigration regulations, cultural differences, employment, rights and obligations, and other basic information about settlement in a new country. Those marrying foreigners are given information about issues affecting cross-cultural relations, support for women in distress, and their rights as residents.

PDOS is a two-hour session. After attending this required orientation, Filipinos are off for their final departure from the Philippines. Handouts are distributed to attendees to follow-up on the information provided during the session. While PDOS is recognized as an important program by the government, Filipinos and practitioners alike (Gonzalez 2000; Mackenzie 2005), the scale and quality of PDOS needs to be improved to ensure that all departing Filipinos understand their rights in destination countries and the support available to them if needed. All focus group participants in Calgary and Edmonton considered the mandatory PDOS as another “money making machine” by the Philippine government with no reliable and consistent support for OFWs in time of need, or follow through regarding their whereabouts upon arrival in the destination country. It is presumed that having attended the two-hour session, Filipinos know exactly what to expect in their new country, but this is not always the case.

According to a focus group participant, Margarit in Edmonton, “the Philippine Consulate must also follow-up on what is discussed in PDOS” in Canada. In the excitement to leave the Philippines and embrace a new beginning, much of the information relayed to emigrants during the PDOS session is often forgotten. It was suggested that aside from consular services, like issuance of passports, the Philippine government also attempt to bridge the PDOS program with another follow-up program in Canada.

Aside from PDOS by the Philippine government, it is also possible to work with different foreign embassies in the Philippines to hold similar sessions for Filipinos entering their respective countries. A coordinated process between governments, that is the Philippines and the country of destination, could provide better pre-arrival services. Such collaboration could be made part of any bilateral agreement to ensure that Filipinos entering a foreign country are better equipped to deal with the

challenges of immigration.

On May 26, 2014, the *Orientation Booklet for Filipinos in Germany* was launched in Berlin by the University of the Philippines Alumni Association e.V. aimed at assisting Filipino newcomers. Similarly, the *Juan01 Guide to Germany* for Filipino nurses is produced by the Goethe-Institut Philippinen (UPAA Germany 2014). These are booklets distributed for free in Germany. However, there are no equivalent collaborative pre-departure sessions from foreign embassies in the Philippines. The Canadian government alone has a handbook, *A Guide for Filipinos Migrating to Canada*.

Canada: Still Not Enough

The Canadian government has recently established a pre-arrival service, the Canadian Immigrant Integration Program (CIIP) - primarily through the Foreign Credential Referral Office - based in selected countries, including the Philippines. CIIP is a step in the right direction. It primarily provides assessments of foreign credentials and knowledge about the Canadian labour market. According to Becky in Calgary,

“CIIP reiterated the need for Canadian experience and that we should be open to options in a ladderized job market. They did not directly say this but most companies prefer those with Canadian experience. So, we have to prepare ourselves to start from below, like at Tim Hortons.”

CIIP is an innovative program that demonstrates the need for government intervention to make the immigration streams more consistent with the realities of the labour market. Prior to 2007, immigrants assessed under the points system had the understanding that foreign credentials were translatable in the labour market at par with their work experience. But employment documentation for immigration purposes is one thing, while using those documents for actual employment is another. CIIP is, however, only available for Filipinos with permanent resident visas and not for OFWs.

Again, like the PDOS by the Philippine government, the CIIP is a pre-arrival service with no continuity of the program upon settlement in Canada. According to Becky in

Calgary, “there is no CIIP presence when we arrived in Alberta. They simply sent me a survey questionnaire.” Becky laments the fact that the CIIP gave participants high hopes and overly high expectations in their ability to find suitable jobs. She adds, “CIIP provided me the job description for my field, but it did not include the process for registration in Canada.” Aster in Lethbridge concurs with this observation: “I should have been advised that I need to upgrade my nursing degree from the Philippines to work as a nurse in Canada. While they are processing my papers, at least some information on what courses to take in order to work as a nurse.” When Becky and Aster arrived in Alberta, both had to use their initiative to find information about registration in their particular profession. They had no idea that it was an expensive and time-consuming endeavour.

The gap between the Philippine educational system and the Canadian educational system takes a toll on the aspirations of Filipinos to work in their desired profession. Finding schools for their children and how to access university student loans are other examples of missing information that they have to find out upon arrival. One Filipino parent stated that his son will not be able to enter university because he was unaware of the support provided by the government.

While job placement is the primary concern for those arriving in Canada with permanent resident visas, housing, education and financial management are the other three most pressing concerns. Filipino participants in Edmonton, Calgary and Lethbridge observed that these three concerns were not included in the pre-departure sessions with CIIP. Nona in Edmonton received an information package containing contact information about Canada, but not specifically for Alberta. Becky in Calgary was provided with a contact number for the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society. Like the rest of immigrants to Canada, finding accommodation upon arrival is a challenge without employment, referrals, and other required documents for applying for housing. Hence, Filipinos resort to various modes of housing arrangements depending on the immigration program under which they enter (Bonifacio 2014). For example, OFWs accept employer-arranged accommodation for a given period, while Filipino immigrants rely on home-stay with family, friends, or referred associates. It takes a while to be able to secure their own

accommodation after arrival.

At this juncture, one method for bridging pre-arrival services with post-arrival settlement issues would be to include a list of rental housing facilities and real estate agencies in the information package. This would be a good starting point for newcomers to establish initial contacts in Canada. It would be ideal to provide government-sponsored online portals for specific provinces of destination. This type of service would ensure that newcomers are accessing legitimate websites to enquire about housing and other vital information.

Canada has been an immigrant-receiving country since 1869 (Whitaker 1991). To establish a formal pre-arrival service in the 21st century is, arguably, a feat of politics, resources and commitment amidst rising antagonism towards immigrants in western societies. As in the past, the future of immigration in Canada will always be tied to economic prosperity (Simmons 2010) using stricter selection mechanisms to bring in the 'best from the rest of the world'. In doing so, it is crucial that the provincial nominee program (Government of Alberta 2014) also include pre-arrival service mechanisms in collaboration with the federal government. Involving different levels of government (Tolley 2011) in pre-arrival schemes would lead to the successful integration of newcomers. In the case of Filipinos in Alberta, either permanent residents or temporary foreign workers, inter-governmental cooperation would ensure better understanding of life in the province.

Conclusions

Immigration is a complex process that involves different stages: pre-migration, migration, and post-migration. Each of these phases is important in the lives of Filipinos and other immigrants to Canada. Based on this study of Filipinos in Calgary, Edmonton and Lethbridge, pre-arrival services is an area of concern as information and support services define and shape their experience upon arrival in the country.

There are two general types of pre-arrival services accessed by Filipinos in Alberta: formal and informal. Formal services are offered by the Canadian and Philippine governments while informal services are offered by private entities such as family, associates, church groups, placement or recruitment agencies, and immigration lawyers. Analyzing both types of services has provided a better understanding of the challenges of immigration to a new country. These services involve mandatory fees and incidental costs borne by Filipinos.

Access to formal pre-arrival services depends on a number of factors: period of arrival, country of residence prior to migration, and type of immigration program. Like formal pre-arrival services, the use of informal pre-arrival services varies, depending on human and social capital across transnational spaces. Financial resources, distance of residence, access to information and communication technology, and knowledge and education are also important factors shaping the pre-immigration experience of Filipinos.

While information about migration appears to be readily available and accessible to would-be immigrants, knowledge and education are still crucial aspects in understanding what information will be useful. The ability to find information on their own and to discern what is important depends on migrants' human capital. Gender is not considered an issue in the general scheme of these pre-arrival services; both men and women need to know what lies beyond their national borders.

Both the Canadian and Philippine governments conduct pre-departure orientation seminars; the former under the CIIP initiative since 2007 and the latter through its agencies,

POEA and CFO. These provide general information sessions about country-specific destinations, although CIIP tends to be more focused on labour market integration.

Based on existing, formal pre-arrival services by the Canadian and Philippine governments, there is a need to bridge the gaps between these programs and the post-arrival phase. On the side of the Philippine government, the two-hour orientation session (i.e., PDOS) is not enough to fully convey the information needed for settlement in a new country. Hence, the recommendation that collaborative, pre-departure orientation sessions by foreign embassies in the Philippines would enhance understanding of the challenges of living in a new country. Consular offices of the Philippine government in Canada could provide follow-up services to help Filipinos upon their arrival.

On the side of the Canadian government, there is a need to link CIIP, provided to Filipinos in the Philippines, with post-arrival services. Based on the narratives of Filipinos in Alberta, in addition to employment, there are three other concerns that were not dealt with by this program: housing, education and financial management. While labour market preparedness is important for settlement in Canada, it is likewise deemed important to include information about practice requirements in regulated professions. More importantly, the continuity of pre-arrival services into the post-arrival stage necessitates inter-governmental cooperation between and among the different levels of government in Canada, notably around provincial nominee programs.

In sum, pre-arrival services take manifold forms—the response of governments to protect the rights and welfare of immigrants and migrant workers, the generosity of individuals and groups sharing a cultural value or concern for successful adaptation in a new country, and the tenacity of individual Filipinos who are committed to finding the best possible information and supports in order to succeed. Along this multi-pronged path, pre-arrival services are an integral aspect of immigration assistance and should therefore be enhanced.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research project on the pre-arrival services of Filipinos in Alberta was conducted in a six-month period, from August 2014 to January 2015. Because of the short period, it is highly recommended that a more intensive follow-up study be conducted of pre- arrival services for the following groups:

1. temporary foreign workers
2. permanent residents
3. sponsored family members
4. youth
5. women
6. seniors

Aside from the perspectives of these groups of Filipino newcomers in Alberta, a policy analysis on the programs offered by the provincial government in Alberta and the federal government from 2007 to the present could provide the institutional background for immigrant services before arrival into the country. As well, a historical tracing of pre-arrival services conducted by certain church groups or community groups across borders suggests the extent of the need for multiple informal services.

As a pilot study, this project made it possible to better understand the mobile subject as an active agent, often autonomous and resourceful, to ensure that the move away from home is worthwhile.

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