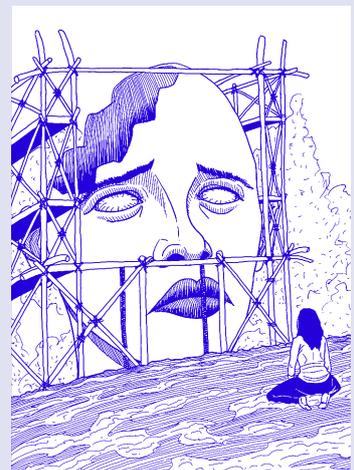




RETURN MIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES IN THE PHILIPPINES



REINTEGRATE STORIES

REINTEGRATION GOVERNANCE IN THE PHILIPPINES

Authors:

Rizza Kaye C. Cases

Slovak Academy of Sciences

Renchillina Joy Supan

University of the Philippines

Editor

Katie Kuschminder

*University of Amsterdam/
United Nations University
Institute for Environment
and Human Security*

Suggested Citation:

Cases, R.K. and Supan, R. J. et al. (2026). *Return Migrants' Experiences in the Philippines*. Reintegrate Stories. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.

Graphic artist:

Antonis Foradis

Layout:

Eks-Skolens Design & Tryk

Contact:

www.reintegrateerc.com

REINTEGRATE



UNIVERSITY
OF AMSTERDAM



Reintegrate Project and Reintegration Governance

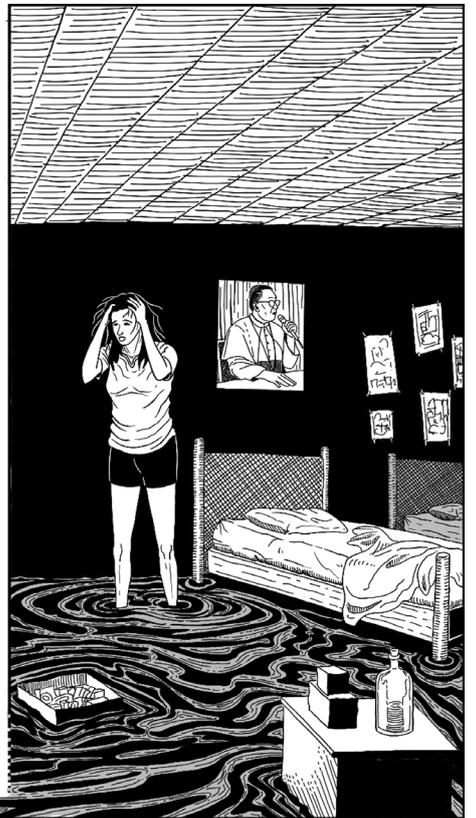
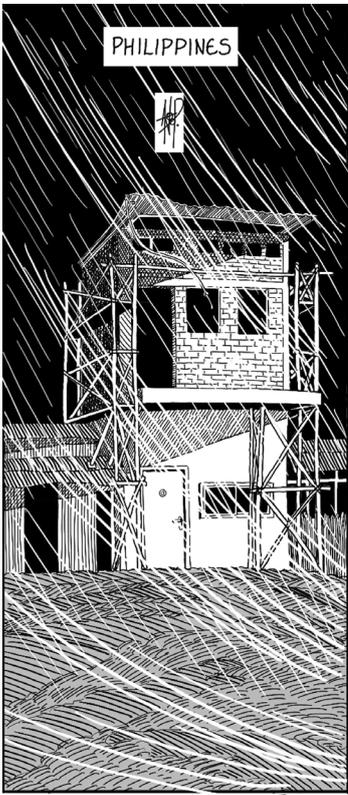
The Reintegrate Project aims to understand how reintegration is governed and how reintegration governance influences returnees' experiences. Many people do not have the right to stay in countries of migration and return to their countries of origin through different types of programmes and policies; this return can be chosen, or it can be forced. Little is known about how different countries govern the process of reintegration once people return and how return migrants experience their return and reintegration process. This study presents stakeholders' perspectives, alongside return migrants' experiences of return and reintegration in a comparative analysis across four case studies of Nepal, Nigeria, Serbia, and the Philippines.

Reintegration is defined in this study as *"the process in which return migrants are supported in maintaining their cultural and social identities by the host society and the whole population acquires equal civil, social, political, human, and cultural rights"*. (Kuschminder, 2017, p.43). This definition considers various domains of reintegration and places emphasis on the duality of responsibility between both returnees and the receiving society in facilitating reintegration.

A **reintegration policy** is defined *"as instruments intended to address the social, economic, and political needs of returnees to facilitate their reintegration into society"* (Kuschminder and Saguin, forthcoming). Reintegration policies are widely considered as implemented by different actors, reflecting different intentions and designs, and showing trade-offs between migrant protection and migration management objectives. **Reintegration governance** refers to *"the policies, practices, and institutions involved in the design, delivery, funding, implementation, and/or evaluation of processes to manage or support the returnees transition into the household, community, and broader society of their country of origin"* (Kuschminder, 2024). Reintegration governance thus includes multiple actors and their associated policies to implement reintegration.

STORY

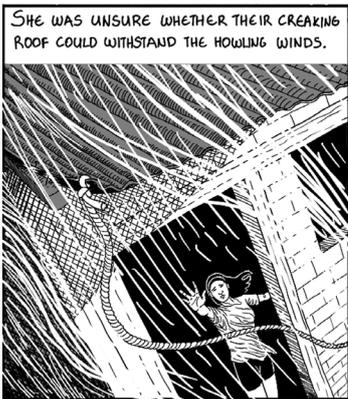
LINDA



MOM, WAKE UP THE CHILDREN. WE ARE FLOODED. I'M GOING FOR THE ROOF...



THEY CLIMB TO THE UNFINISHED UPPER FLOOR CARRYING AS MANY THINGS AS THEY COULD.



SHE WAS UNSURE WHETHER THEIR CREAKING ROOF COULD WITHSTAND THE HOWLING WINDS.



EVEN THOUGH THE MAKESHIFT ROOF WAS LEAKING, THERE WERE ABLE TO SPEND THE NIGHT...



THE NEXT DAY, FACED WITH THE FEAR OF HOMELESSNESS AND THE FUTURE OF HER CHILDREN, LINDA DECIDED TO MIGRATE ABROAD AS HER MOTHER SUGGESTED.



SHE HAD TO ENTRUST HER CHILDREN TO HER MOTHER, KNOWING IT WAS THE ONLY WAY TO KEEP THEM SAFE WHILE SHE WAS ABROAD.



AFTER MONTHS OF PROCESSING DOCUMENTS, THE DAY OF HER FLIGHT FINALLY ARRIVED. ALTHOUGH NERVOUS, SHE TRIED TO STEADY HERSELF, KNOWING THAT THIS SACRIFICE WAS FOR HER CHILDREN AND FAMILY.



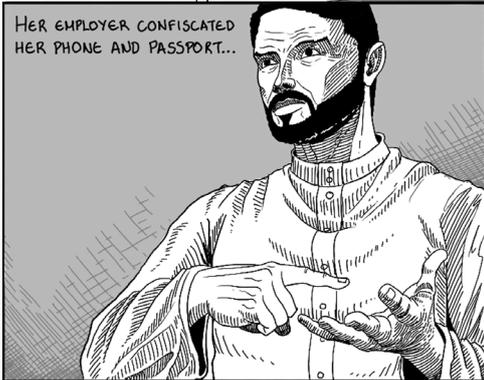
WHEN SHE BOARDED THE PLANE BOUND FOR SAUDI ARABIA...



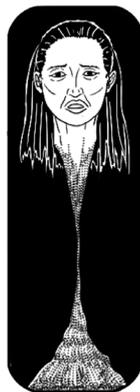
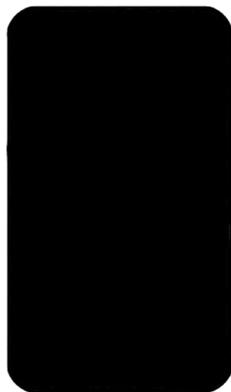
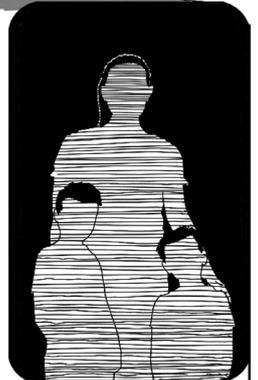
SHE LOOKED OUT OF THE WINDOW AND WHISPERED A PRAYER FOR STRENGTH AND SAFETY.



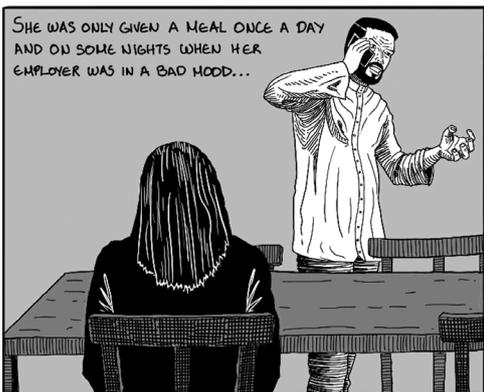
LINDA HAD TO ADJUST TO HER NEW LIFE AS A STAY-IN DOMESTIC WORKER



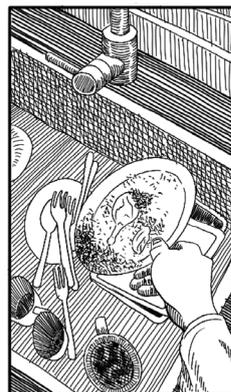
HER EMPLOYER CONFISCATED HER PHONE AND PASSPORT...



SHE WOKE UP BEFORE SUNRISE, CLEANED, COOKED AND WORKED LATE INTO THE NIGHT. YET, IT WAS NOT JUST ISOLATION SHE ENDURED, BUT INDIGNITY. LINDA FELT LESS THAN HUMAN...

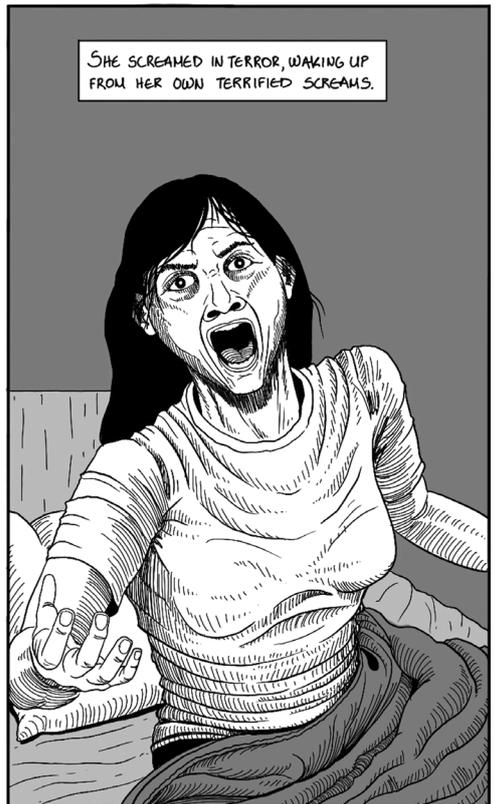
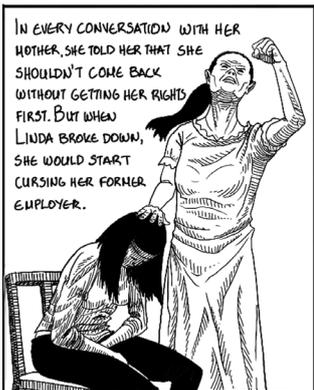
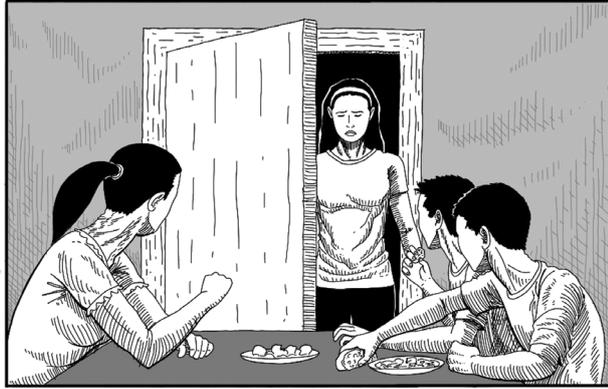
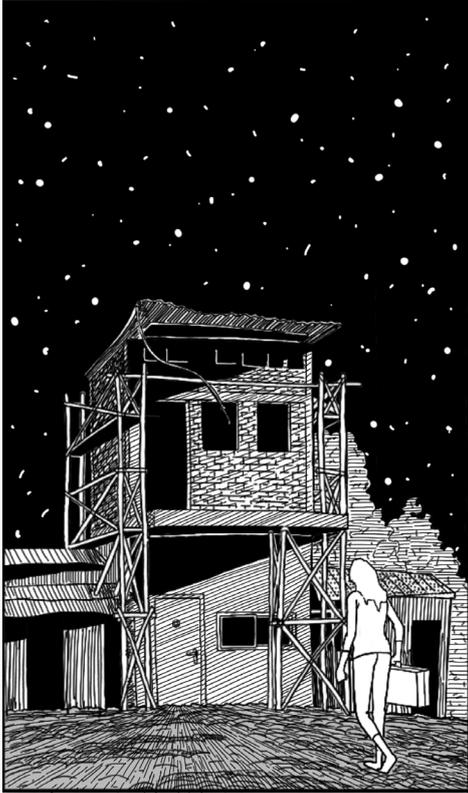


SHE WAS ONLY GIVEN A MEAL ONCE A DAY AND ON SOME NIGHTS WHEN HER EMPLOYER WAS IN A BAD MOOD...





STILL, SHE ENDURED THE MALTREATMENT, THINKING ABOUT HER UNFINISHED HOUSE, MORTGAGE, AND THE TUITION OF HER CHILDREN. SHE PATIENTLY COUNTED THE DAYS UNTILL HER CONTRACT WOULD END. BUT BEFORE THAT DAY CAME, HER EMPLOYER ABRUPTLY TERMINATED HER SERVICE. SHE WAS ORDERED TO PACK HER THINGS AND LEAVE, WITHOUT EXPLANATION...



HER MENTAL HEALTH DECLINED WITH THE FEELINGS OF HELPLESSNESS SINCE SHE COULDN'T FINISH THE HOUSE AND TAKE CARE OF THE CHILDREN, MAKING HER IRRITABLE.



ONE DAY, AN OLD FRIEND OF HERS WHO WAS A MEMBER OF AN NGO CAME TO SEE HER AND TOLD HER THAT SHE COULD INITIATE ACTION...



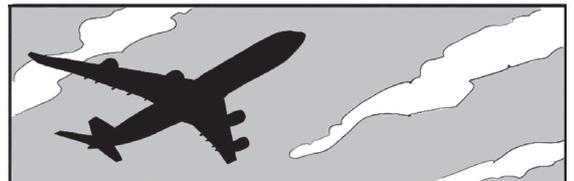
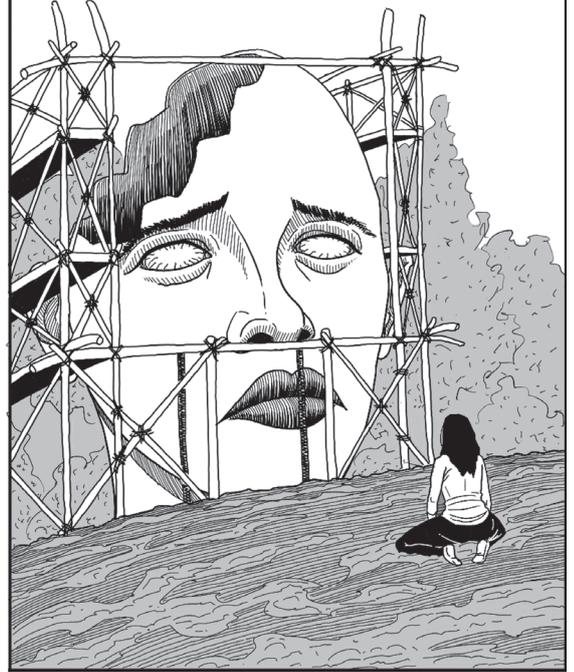
AGAINST THE RECRUITMENT AGENCY, BUT SHE WARNED HER THAT IT WOULD BE A TIME-CONSUMING PROCESS.



INDEED THE PROCESS WAS LENGTHY AND EXHAUSTING, COMPRISING MONTHS OF HEARINGS, PAPERWORK AND REQUIREMENTS. YET WITH THE HELP OF OWWA AND THE NLRC SHE PERSISTED. IN THE END LINDA WON HER CASE...



BUT LIFE DIDN'T BECOME EASIER FOR HER FAMILY...



Key Messages:

Linda's story shows how climate risks and financial insecurity push many Filipinos to work overseas. Even with strong protection policies, migrant workers can still face exploitation abroad, particularly as live-in domestic workers. As a distressed overseas worker, Linda had the right to get help when she returned home and to file a claim against her employer. With support from CSOs and the government she won her case, but her difficulties did not end there. Current policy frameworks treat climate adaptation, labour migration governance, and reintegration as separate domains, yet Linda's experience shows they are deeply interconnected creating enduring vulnerabilities.



REINTEGRATE



UNIVERSITY
OF AMSTERDAM



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission



UNU
EHS