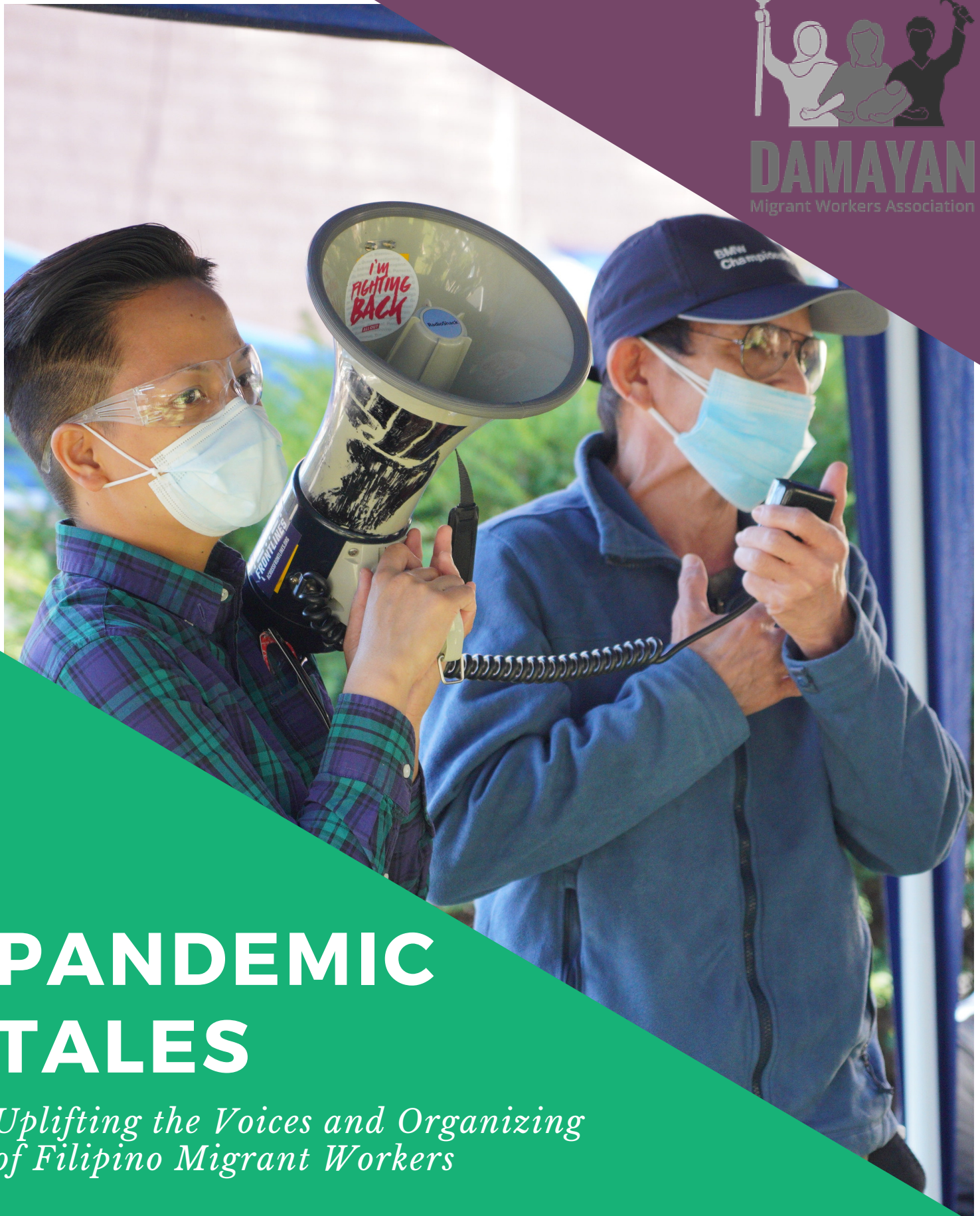




**DAMAYAN**  
Migrant Workers Association



# PANDEMIC TALES

*Uplifting the Voices and Organizing  
of Filipino Migrant Workers*

PREPARED BY DAMAYAN MIGRANT WORKERS ASSOCIATION AND THE STUDENTS OF  
PANDEMIC TALES AT BARNARD COLLEGE AND COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

## ***Pandemic Tales: The Course***

This report is a product of a course that is funded by Columbia University's Collaborative to Advance Equity Through Research (CAETR) and Barnard Engages New York: Collaborative Partnerships to Promote Sustainable Change program. Barnard Engages, which is supported by the Mellon Foundation, seeks to foster long-term collaborations between Barnard faculty members and students and community-based organizations. The course was designed jointly by Premilla Nadasen and Damayan staff with the intention of supporting Damayan's organizing efforts. Damayan asked the students to conduct interviews with Damayan members, mainly labor trafficking survivors, and Damayan staff members to assess the impact of the pandemic on the Filipino community and chronicle Damayan's support services and organizing efforts in New York. Students conducted interviews, transcribed them, and wrote this report in collaboration with Damayan.

## ***About Damayan***

Damayan Migrant Workers Association is a Filipino migrant worker-led organization established in 2002. "Damayan" means "helping each other" in Filipino. Damayan's mission is to "promote the rights and welfare of Filipino migrant workers; build worker leadership at the grassroots level; to combat labor trafficking, labor fraud and wage theft; and to demand fair labor standards to achieve economic and social justice for all." [1]

Damayan's vision of justice — born out of centuries of colonization and neocolonialism of the Philippines, forced migration, labor trafficking, and systemic racism — is fundamentally anti-neoliberalism, anti-trafficking, worker led, feminist, and intersectional. At its core, Damayan is fighting for economic and social transformation, which means addressing the systems and structures that perpetuate the oppression of migrant Filipino workers and following the leadership of workers most impacted by labor trafficking and exploitation. Damayan provides Know Your Rights training on workers' and immigrants' rights; political education such as the Workers Academy, to raise the political consciousness of and develop leadership among its members. Damayan provides critical services and educates, organizes and mobilizes Filipino migrant workers and labor trafficking survivors. Services range from accessing legal and social services, to incubating a migrant workers' cooperative that creates dignified and sustainable employment options for its member-owners. Through grassroots organizing and alliance work, Damayan builds "Baklas: Break Free from Labor Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery," [2] a campaign to help labor trafficking survivors break free from their trafficking situation and dismantle the economic and social structures that enable labor trafficking. [3] Damayan works at both individual and structural levels because genuine change and justice means collective social transformation.



# INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated families and communities all across the world. Unsurprisingly, poor, working class, and Black and Brown people, especially undocumented migrant workers, have been hit the hardest. The Filipino community in the US faces infection and death rates disproportionate to their population size. Yet, their stories are sidelined in major media. According to a report released by National Nurses United, although Filipinos make up about 4% of registered nurses in the US, they account for a startling 31.5% of COVID-19 related deaths among nurses.[3] Filipinos in other front-line jobs, care work, or service industries are even less visible, despite the emphasis during this pandemic on frontline ‘heroes.’ The people hardest hit have been low-wage Filipino migrant workers and labor trafficking survivors, which is the constituency that Damayan represents and that we interviewed for this report. They experience both precarious legal standing and limited state-based and labor protections, leading to their vulnerability, economic marginalization and increased susceptibility to various kinds of violence. Accurate data about how this community has fared is very difficult to gather, which is one reason why these interviews and this report are important.

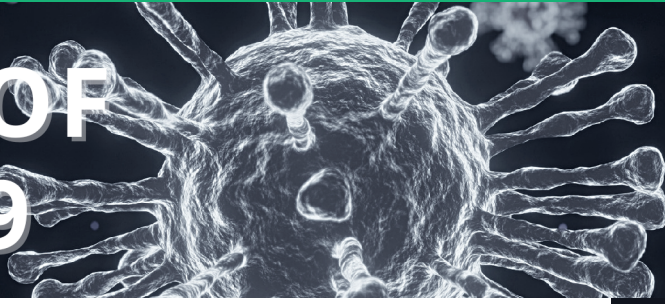
The goal of this report is to amplify the stories of these frontline workers and organizers, humanize the statistics, and illuminate the impact of exclusion from government protection. These stories reflect the current struggle to survive this pandemic, but they also speak to larger histories of exploitation and discrimination. More specifically, they are directly connected to the history of US colonialism, racism, neoliberalism, and labor trafficking in the Philippines. These stories also exemplify histories of resistance, resilience, transnational care, and community support. It is our hope that in telling these parallel stories of both neglect and resilience, the reader comes away with a more complete picture of the Filipino experience and an understanding of the urgency of this work.

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# IMPACT OF COVID-19



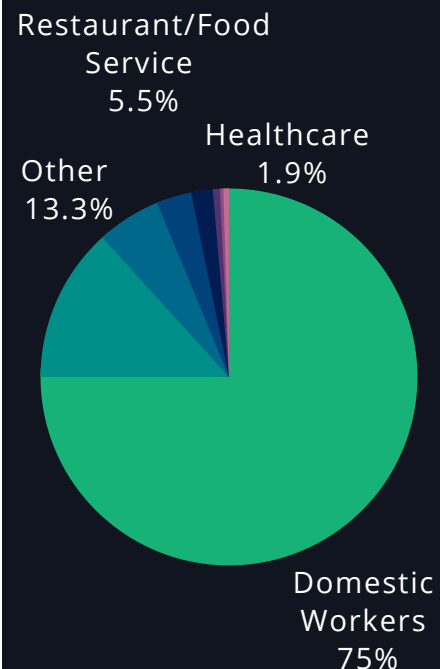
## Overview

Across the globe, the pandemic led to an unprecedented public health crisis, job loss and financial, food, and housing insecurity. As of March 2nd, 2021, over 74 million people in the US, reported loss of work due to the pandemic.[4] Unemployment doubled, rising to 6.2% of the US population.[5] Filipinos in the US, many of whom are employed in low-wage service sector jobs such as domestic work, experienced these strains disproportionately, and, despite this, had limited access to government emergency benefits. Eighty percent of people who applied to Damayan for emergency food and financial assistance reported job loss and 24% reported increased expenses due to the pandemic. Of the 370 community members interviewed by Damayan between July and September 2020, the labor breakdown is as follows: 75% domestic workers, 13% other, 5% restaurant/food service workers, 3% retail workers, 2% healthcare, and 1% construction/day laborers or drivers. According to Damayan's survey, 88% of members reported being unable to afford food/groceries after the pandemic hit.

Because of the ongoing impact on the economy and workplace safety, these workers face increasing insecurity. The financial crisis experienced by Filipino migrant workers in New York has both a local and a global impact. Many Filipino migrant workers support family members living in the US and send remittances to support family in the Philippines. As the economic situation became more dire, migrant workers found it sometimes impossible to fulfill their roles as family breadwinners.

Interviews with Damayan community members provide more insight into the economic impact of the pandemic on the workers' everyday lives.

## Damayan Members' Occupations



Source: Damayan City Fund Survey

## *Health Impact*

COVID-19 has disproportionately infected and killed people of color, including the undocumented Filipino immigrants. Like indigenous, Black, and Latino communities, the Filipino community has also been devastated, especially people living in the neighborhoods at the 2020 pandemic epicenter in Queens. Based on Damayan's survey in March and April 2020, more than 80 members of their community had been infected: 20 had severe symptoms, 6 went to the ICU, and one died from the virus.

Contracting, fear of contracting, and/or exposure to COVID-19 was traumatic for Damayan members and their loved ones. They experienced anxiety, fear, stress, and severe financial consequences. Damayan members employed as domestic workers — babysitters, elderly caregivers, and housekeepers — are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 because they work in private homes. Although CDC safety protocols recommended or mandated quarantining at home and maintaining a six-foot distance, Damayan members were “essential” workers whose jobs often required them to be in close proximity to other people in their homes. Thus, they were more likely to be exposed, putting themselves and their family members at greater risk. Damayan member and labor trafficking survivor Bainie Mama spoke of these risks:

**“So my friend, she is a housekeeper and her employer didn't tell her that they had COVID. My friend got so scared and very upset because she was made to continue working in a house where her lady boss got sick of COVID, then gave the virus to her husband who got sick too, and sadly, he did not survive. So, the COVID is real and deadly and we need to be very careful.”**

The little girl who Bainie cared for was exposed to COVID-19, which impacted Bainie's interactions with her own family members. Her employers told her:

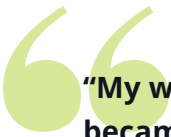
**“Somebody tested positive in her school and now you cannot come to our house because you need to be quarantining too.’ I was so scared, I said ‘oh my god what am I gonna do with my fiancé's parents, I don't want them to get it in case I have it.”**



These experiences instilled fear in Bainie:

**“I have to be careful too. No matter how young or old we are, we don’t know how our bodies will react if we get the virus. Some people have severe symptoms while others get very mild symptoms. It could be a matter of luck and if you don’t get it that’s good. So yeah, the pandemic is really, really a difficult time for me.”**

Damayan member and labor trafficking survivor Manny shared the experience of taking care of his wife when she was exposed to and likely contracted COVID-19:



**“My wife was a part time elderly caregiver and sadly, the elderly man became positive of the virus. That day she came home, the elderly American was rushed to the hospital. The next day, the wife of the elderly called her and informed her that her husband was positive of the virus. So we have confirmed that my wife was exposed and all of us worried: how will my wife survive and about spreading the virus to myself and our daughter. I watched the news closely everyday and I am aware that when somebody dies of COVID, loved ones can not come to see the body and will not have the opportunity to say goodbye and give last respects and these thoughts are so terrifying for me.**

**We know we had to quarantine and with our housing conditions we already know that it will be extremely difficult. Myself, my wife, and our daughter are living in an apartment where there is only one bedroom and there is no living room. Quarantining in our tiny apartment and isolating my wife who has become very sick, will be so challenging and scary. We isolated my wife in the sole bedroom, my daughter slept near the kitchen and I slept near the door.**

**My wife was so scared to go to Elmhurst Hospital because at the time our community was the epicenter and so there were so many severely ill patients. I took care of her at home, with the best of my ability. I bought healthy food with my little money, cooked her meals, brought food to her bedroom door while carefully observing the safety protocols.**

...I encouraged my wife to quarantine for 21 days. We have only one bathroom. Every night, obviously, I clean the whole apartment using the sanitizer or sometimes the alcohol. So I use the alcohol on everything, all of the steel in the bathroom and everywhere in the apartment. So I always sleep late and then wake up early in the morning because I need to prepare breakfast for my wife.



— MANNY, DAMAYAN MEMBER

Being separated from sick family members was difficult for Damayan members who were part of a close-knit community, as Damayan member and labor trafficking survivor Joyce described:

**“My sister contracted COVID last December. For a month, we didn’t see each other. It was heartbreaking, but at least it was not as bad. Sometimes, the fear of contracting COVID is more scary than when you contract COVID with milder symptoms.”**

### *Unemployment and Increased Labor Exploitation*



**7 out of 10** Damayan members experienced job loss or partial unemployment at the beginning of the pandemic.

By September 2020, **8 out of 10** members experienced long-term unemployment.



Based on a Damayan survey in March and April 2020, seven out of ten workers experienced job loss or partial unemployment. In September 2020, Damayan’s follow-up survey found that eight out of ten workers were experiencing long term unemployment. Unemployment was one of the most difficult consequences of the pandemic.



The complete loss of income had a direct impact on the lives of migrant workers. Damayan co-founder and executive director Linda Oalican explained,

**“During the COVID-19 pandemic, so many workers lost their jobs. They didn’t know how and where to get food to feed themselves and their families. Then the landlord wanted to kick them out of their homes. Life was very hard for our members and what enabled Damayan to provide emergency assistance to our members, especially to the survivors, is the trust of our community which we have solidified by staying deeply connected to our base during the pandemic.”**

Some members had to contend with multiple job losses within a household. Damayan elderly member and labor trafficking survivor Alfred recounted,

**“In March of 2020, I lost my job and my wife lost her job too, and so we were really very worried at the time. My wife and I cried together as my wife said that she doesn’t want to die like how other people are dying.”**

Damayan members who lost their jobs had difficulty coping with the financial crisis in part because they did not have access to credit. As Damayan member and labor trafficking survivor Sherile Pahagas remembered,

**“I always remember what my ex-boss told me:  
“Sherile, in this country if you don’t have credit,  
you are nothing.””**

The needs of Filipino migrant workers for emergency governmental assistance during the pandemic was slowed down by bureaucracy and inaction or simply not addressed. For many members, the government failed them when they needed the support most. Joyce said,

**“For me, the government, not just the Philippines or New Jersey, needs to respond right away. Not working for a month is not a joke. Unemployment takes too long to be approved. I ended up calling the city government before I received unemployment. The government needs to respond right away when there is a big issue that affects a lot of people. It's hard for us because we don't have a source of income. They need to respond right away because they need to do their job.”**

While documented unemployed workers struggled against the red tape of governmental unemployment assistance, undocumented workers were cut off from this assistance completely. Celso, a Damayan member and labor trafficking survivor, expressed,

**“No one was supporting me because I don't have access to the government emergency financial assistance, because they don't allow us to have access to the government COVID resources. So during the pandemic, we were just barely surviving.”**

Some members who faced more severe financial problems decided to self-deport back to the Philippines. Other members struggled between their need to make a living and return to work and their fear of contracting COVID-19 when they return to work.

Lydia Catina, Damayan organizer and case manager, described the increased abuses and labor exploitation that migrant workers experienced during COVID-19, as workers had very few options and were forced to take any work that they could during the pandemic, rendering them more vulnerable to exploitation:

**“We have a member who is also a trafficking survivor and was working as a live out part time housekeeper for three days a week. At the height of the pandemic last year, her employer asked her to stay in the employer's house seven days a week, but the worker would just get her usual pay for only three days per week. The employer did not allow her to leave the house and commute to home because she might bring the virus to her workplace. That is only one example and sadly so many workers, some of them are survivors, were forced to work as stay-in but they were not getting paid for the number of days and hours that they spent and worked at the employers' house. The workers were aware that the employers were abusing and taking advantage of them but they were scared to complain and assert their rights because they were afraid to lose their jobs amidst the pandemic.”**



**— LYDIA CATINA, DAMAYAN ORGANIZER AND CASE MANAGER**

After losing her nanny job in March, Sherile could not find a job for months. She shared her own experience of exploitation during the pandemic before she finally secured a new nannying position in December:

**“I’m getting stressed, because my employers keep on adding to my work but they don’t increase my pay. I wash all of their clothes but now I am washing bed sheets, and I don’t get paid for that...Some employers just keep on taking advantage of workers and we have to say yes to keep our jobs. Give them one hand, and then they will take all of you.”**

Sherile’s employers knew that she was dependent on that job at a time when nannying positions were difficult to secure, and took advantage of her situation to increase her workload without increasing her compensation or giving her the full-time hours they promised to when they hired her. Many Damayan members have experienced similar circumstances, where employers leverage the fact of the migrant workers’ precarious financial situations to exploit them.

## *Family Life*

Damayan members have also experienced difficulty in their day-to-day family lives due to the burden the pandemic has placed on childcare and family relationships. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, one in five adults[6] reported that they were not working during the pandemic because they did not have access to childcare.

This was the case for Joyce who lost her job in New Jersey at the start of the pandemic. She needed to return to work in order to financially support her son, but was fearful that doing so could jeopardize his well-being because of uncertain safety conditions in daycare centers. Returning to work depends not only on her financial situation but also the health of her son.

Joyce considered the impact the lack of day care had on her work life:



**“It’s really hard for me because even though I want to work full time, I cannot leave my son to anyone. I don’t know if they are safe or what...because I don’t know if daycares are safe enough for my son.”**



Joyce decided to move to Utah to live with her sister with the hope that her sister could help care for her son so that she could work part-time. The makeshift childcare arrangement severely limited her ability to work even though she needed the money. Joyce explained,

**“In Utah, I'm working in a restaurant... I'm a server. Sometimes I work five hours a day for three days. And if I can do four days as a server for five hours in a day, it's really good, but sometimes it doesn't happen because there's no one who's going to take care of my son.”**



— JOYCE, DAMAYAN MEMBER

According to the Pew Research Center, 52% of employed parents with children under 12 found that parenting had become more difficult during the pandemic.[7] Many parents, especially mothers, experienced worse mental and emotional health. One Damayan member, a mother of two young children, reported that looking after them in isolation was so stressful that at times it felt like it could give her “a stroke”:

**“They don't listen to me. It's really hard to handle, especially because we cannot go out. There's nothing else to do.”**

Childcare is expensive, and often out of reach for low-income families. On average, these families spend 30% of their budgets on childcare.[8] During the pandemic, with high unemployment and few childcare options, many parents reported cutting back on food and other necessities in order to make sure their children are fed.

Celso shared his experience of job loss and food and housing insecurity. Before the pandemic, Celso worked 40 hours a week as a baker, and now only works 12 hours a week. His employer cut his hours, vacation time, and other benefits when the pandemic began. His biggest concern, however, was the health and safety of his daughter. To secure her needs, Celso said “sometimes I don't eat.” When asked about what it was like to parent in the last year, he said:

**“Parenting is so hard because you need to focus on her every time, because if something's happened to her, you feel like you're dying inside. That's why it hurts, it is really hard to be a parent.”**

## ***Mental and Emotional Health***

In addition to the health and economic impact, the pandemic also had a devastating impact on the mental and emotional health of migrant workers. Many were anxious about the unpredictability of what the next day would hold, or if they would even live to see another day. Celso recounted,

**“All the problems are with me. I don't understand what was happening. I'm always praying every night, crying, What's going on?”**

The stress and anxiety took a physical toll on some of the interviewees. Damayan worker leader Jhean Basco explained,

**“You're tired, you're stressed, but your body is not tired, so you can't sleep. You're thinking about: what is happening in the Philippines, what is happening here?”**

Mental and emotional health problems were aggravated by unemployment, health concerns, undocumented status, and family care responsibilities during the pandemic. Some interviewees were fearful about contracting COVID-19 or even receiving a positive COVID-19 test because of pre-existing health conditions. As a result, they avoided getting tested, even if tests were available to them. When Celso felt sick in December 2020, he avoided going to the hospital out of fear of contracting COVID-19 from the hospital. He remembered,

**“I did not go to the hospital, I did not make an appointment because I was afraid, because so many people were dying, and the death toll in the hospitals is going up. That's why I was scared to go there, because I'm not sure if I'm going to be one of them.”**

Worried about the pandemic and its fallout for childcare, parents expressed deep concerns about the safety of their children and their ability to provide for their families. Celso shared,

**“It's too hard to think of the future because my daughter and I don't have food at the table. I feel anxious, I don't know what I am going to do. They said it's going to stop in July, the hot season, but no, it continues. I can't think about where I can get food after the pandemic.”**

Interviewees shared similar concerns about living with elderly or high-risk household members. Bainie, who is living with her fiance's older parents has worried that,

**“Because I am living with my fiance's parents... I worry about getting COVID from my work as a babysitter, I don't want to get them sick.”**

For many, the additional stressors of the pandemic contributed to previous trauma from their immigration-related concerns and labor exploitation. Bainie recounted her experience of living with her traffickers before COVID-19 and the physical and emotional toll it took on her;

**“I worked for my employers for more than a year, I thought I got tired of it and It was so hard for me. I was not allowed to go out. I was overcome with sadness everytime I looked out the window because all I could see was very small people on the ground, their apartment was all the way on the 22nd floor. I got so thin because of too much work and taking care of four children. Finally, I asked their permission to let me go back home to the Philippines but they told me I had to finish my job contract with them. I remember when I was alone with just one of the kids — because the three others went to school — after I cleaned up around the house, I just sat by the window and I was so sad because I could only see the river and the buildings. I could not go out at all because I'm not permitted to go outside. I decided my only option was to escape..”**

Over a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, people are dealing with the mental and emotional health-related consequences of confinement. But for Bainie and many other trafficking survivors who have endured extreme isolation and being locked in their employers' homes, confinement is not a new trauma and will not end with the pandemic.

Although Bainie has successfully escaped from her traffickers, she reflected on how she still struggles with her trauma. She now lives in Maryland and, before the pandemic, she would take a bus to New York for Damayan meetings. But even now, years after escaping her traffickers, she said,

**“Every time I go to New York, memories from my trafficking experience keep coming back to me. Sometimes I’m sad to go to Manhattan because [the traffickers] lived in Manhattan...”**

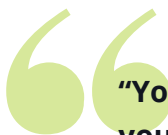
Even while quarantining in another state and after successfully securing her T-visa (temporary visa for officially designated human trafficking survivors) in 2020, she reflected,

**“...I started to calm down [after] I got my T-visa. But of course my trauma is still around. But I’m trying to forget it.”**



— **BAINIE**, DAMAYAN MEMBER

Labor trafficking survivors remain resilient despite the trauma that they experience during the pandemic. Some seek professional help to cope with the compounded trauma of trafficking, abuse and the pandemic. Sherile, who began therapy after surviving labor trafficking, continued with it even after they made the switch to virtual sessions to help her handle the stress of losing her job and the pressures of family life during the pandemic. She values therapy as a source of strength and an outlet for her emotions:

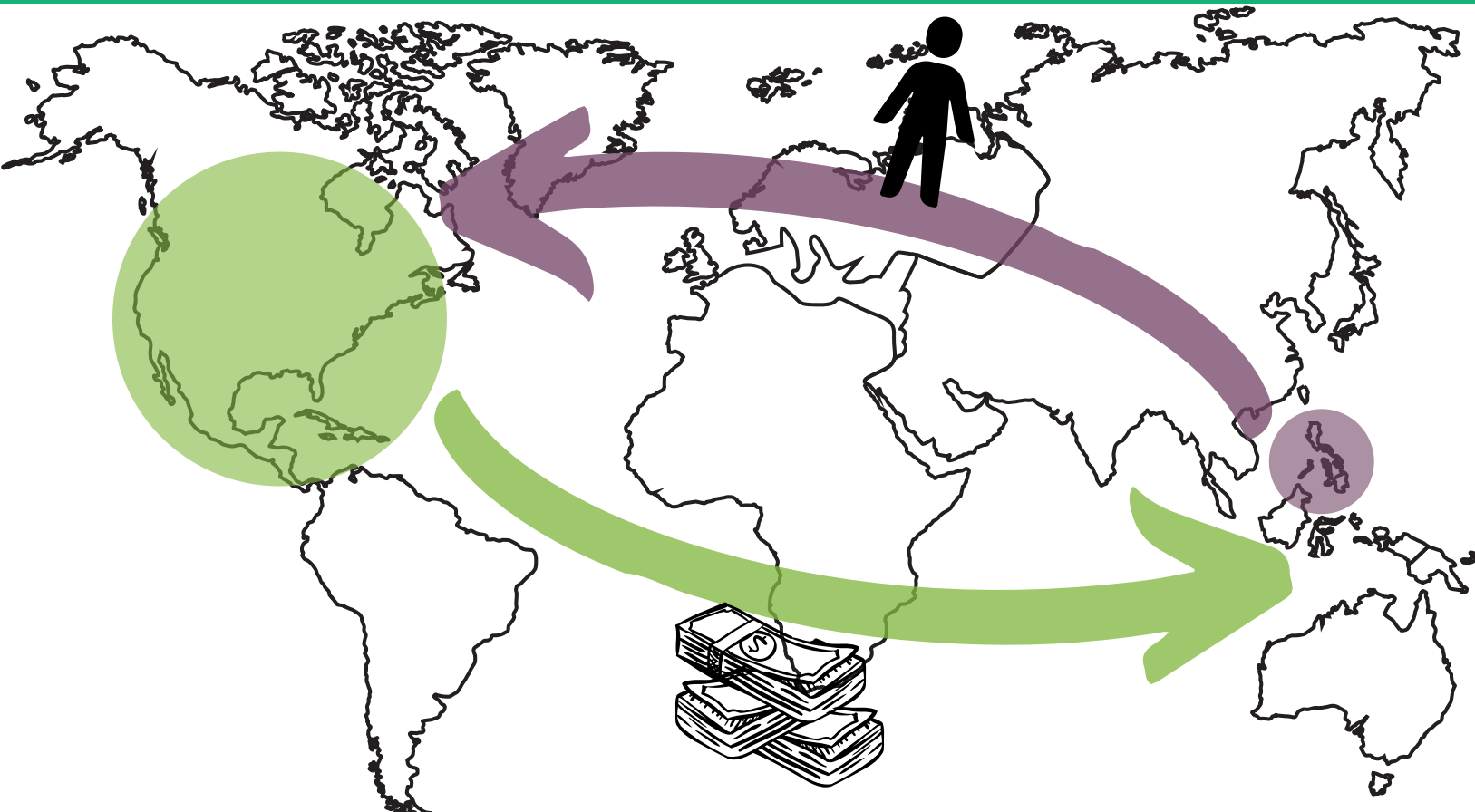


**“You can voice out things you’re keeping in your brain that’s bothering you... [My therapist] is so proud of me. [She says] “I don’t know Sherile how you survive with those things.”**



— **SHERILE**  
DAMAYAN MEMBER





## *Remittances and Transnational Support*

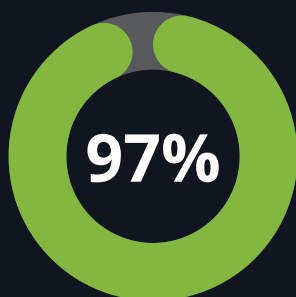
The repercussions of COVID-19 have been felt not only in the local households of Damayan members, but globally among their transnational families in the Philippines and elsewhere. The economy of the Philippines relies on the export of workers; around 10% of the Filipino population lives and works outside of the Philippines.[10] Filipino migrant workers are forced to find work abroad to support their families because of the limited economic opportunities on the islands.

The export-oriented, import-dependent Philippine economy creates transnational families that are separated by long distances but are still strongly connected emotionally and financially. Workers abroad support family members in the Philippines. Bloomberg News reported that remittances to the Philippines totaled \$29.9 billion in 2020; and for the first time in two decades there was a slight drop and more than 400,000 Filipinos returned home, likely due to the pandemic.[11] These remittances are sorely needed because people living in the Philippines face even greater hardship due to COVID-19.

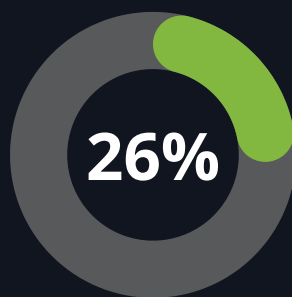
According to a survey done by Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), 89% of households in the Philippines have received support from the government and of those households, 97% received food supply and 45% received cash assistance. Twenty-six percent of respondents say they have had to limit meal portion sizes more than once in the past week. Many cited a lack of access to internet and inadequate devices and learning materials as educational barriers for children learning virtually.[12]



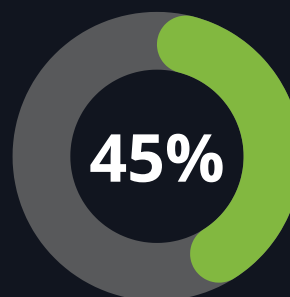
89% of households in the Philippines have received support from the government. Of these households,



Received Food  
Supply



Limit Meal  
Portion Size



Received Cash  
Assistance

For many Damayan members in New York, the economic hardships of the pandemic impact their financial responsibilities to their families in the Philippines. Jhean noted,

**“I also have to support my family in the Philippines but I experienced difficulties sending them money because everywhere is locked down in the Philippines.”**

Fortunately, she has been able to send money home with the help of her employer.

Still, the weight of personal responsibility for migrant workers living abroad came up throughout the interviews. Celso regularly sends money to support his parents, but has been unable to do so because of the pandemic. In his words,

**“I'm the eldest and the breadwinner in my family in the Philippines... The past year, I did not send money to them and this made me feel so sad because back home, there is no work for them so they just stay at home and they depend on my remittances for their basic needs. I also worry if they get sick because they don't have health insurance.”**

Celso felt an obligation to his family, but his reduced hours during the pandemic made it impossible for him to fill that role of breadwinner. He had to prioritize his immediate expenses, but the circumstances of his parents were always on his mind.

Alfred also explained that, although he struggled to take care of all of his immediate family's needs here in the US,

**“Myself and my wife are still sending money back to the Philippines to help our relatives, my wife's relatives, my relatives, who are asking for our support. The pandemic has caused a tremendous effect on the economy all over the world, millions of people lost their jobs.”**

Damayan organizer and case manager Lydia discusses how she has sent more money to her family during disasters:

**“My family in the Philippines do not have an adequate source of income. So I have my aging parents, my brothers and their families too, particularly during the pandemic and when the Philippines was hit by typhoons. My family's farmland, with the crops, was destroyed. So my expenses are really high. At the same time, here in the US, I have to keep myself and my husband healthy, eating healthy food, taking our vitamins and spending on disinfectants and cleaning agents to keep our shared apartment safe from COVID.”**

For some, the pain of family separation was a harder burden to bear than sending regular remittances to loved ones in the homeland. Jhean shared,

**“It’s hard when you’re far and your loved ones are back home. You can’t even hug them to comfort them in the middle of this pandemic...The only thing you can do is to call them and send them financial support. That’s it.”**



**– JHEAN BASCO  
DAMAYAN MEMBER**

Family separation takes a toll on the children and family members of migrant workers. Damayan lead organizer and case manager Riya Ortiz reflected on being separated from her mother,

**“When I was eight or 10, my mother went abroad to work as a domestic worker. I had no idea what was going on. All I knew was that I was about to lose my mother and my family was about to get separated...I remember when my mother left, our house just became gloomy, like so gloomy. And then I realized it was trauma, but I didn’t [have the] language [for] it back then.”**

These quotes capture a common sentiment among many of the interviewees that their concerns extend beyond US borders. The pandemic has deepened economic insecurity, created more pressures on extended families, and limited opportunities to visit and connect in person. While all the interviewees live in the US and are directly impacted by the circumstances where they reside, their biological families are transnational. They feel the impacts of COVID-19 not just in the US, but back home in the Philippines and other places like Canada, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and other countries that participate in the Filipino labor-brokerage system.



The header features a dark background with white chains and fists. On the left, a chain loops around the edge. On the right, two fists are shown breaking through chains. The title 'LABOR TRAFFICKING AND MODERN DAY SLAVERY' is written in large, bold, white, sans-serif capital letters across the top.

# LABOR TRAFFICKING AND MODERN DAY SLAVERY

Filipino migrant workers and survivors of labor trafficking constrained by immigration restrictions and a precarious legal status experience the most severe labor abuses and exploitation. Many, whose visas are tied to their employer, found themselves suddenly undocumented and unable to legally work in the US after escaping from their traffickers. Some people worked but were unaware that their employers did not renew their work authorizations or visas.

Manny migrated to the United States in 2007 through the H-2B program, which “permits employers to temporarily hire nonimmigrants to perform nonagricultural labor or services” for a limited period of time[9]. In order to remain in the United States, H-2B visa holders must renew their statuses by moving to various states for seasonal occupations. Manny relocated to Louisiana after he was hired by a new agency. However, he discovered that the agency lied to him and his coworkers about obtaining approved working permits for them, which is required to renew their visas.

**“Our working permit must be approved before we work in another state... We didn't know that our rollover visa was already denied until one time when we asked for so long and [discovered that] we don't have that visa approved. And then finally they told us and sent us a copy of denial. And that's the beginning of our suffering... After that, we moved since we were already denied and then [the agency] said they made an appeal. But it's so hard for us to believe them because time is already running out and we're almost done working. So from Louisiana, we moved to another state to find another employment... This is the beginning of when we were undocumented aliens, when you don't have the approved visa. After that, they call us undocumented.”**

Manny's employers forced him into undocumented status by failing to renew his visa. He eventually discovered that he was eligible for a T-visa, and successfully worked with Damayan to file his case. He was approved in June 2017, and has since been reunited with his family in the United States.

The process of securing a T-visa is not simple. It requires that the trafficked migrant worker cooperate with law enforcement in an investigation against their trafficker, an often painful and difficult process. After she had dramatically escaped the diplomats who exploited and abused her, Bainie remembers her fear about filing for a T-visa, but also her determination to see the process through.

**“Last year, 2020, I filed my application for a Trafficking visa and later in the year 2020 I received the Request for Evidence from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. It was so scary. I said oh my god what's gonna happen now? Before they filed my T-visa application, my lawyers called and said ‘Hey Bainie, are you ready for this?’ I said “Yes! I am ready. Whatever happens, I am ready. I'm ready for the fight.’ So I will never give up.”**

Under the Trump Administration, Damayan and its members started seeing applications for T-visas get denied more frequently. Riya Ortiz said:

**“Under Trump, when someone is applying for a change of status... and [that individual loses] the case, you can be issued an NTA [Notice to Appear] and you can get tracked for deportation.”** said Riya.

This meant that filing for a T-visa came with serious risks for trafficking survivors. The legacy of Trump's immigration policies are still felt in the Biden administration, directly affecting Damayan and its members who are seeking a T-visa and other forms of immigration status.

Poverty and unemployment are the root causes of labor migration that relegate migrant workers to labor trafficking. In the US, the exclusion of Filipino migrant workers from federal and state labor laws, racial and immigration-related discrimination, extreme isolation of domestic workers, diplomatic immunity, and devaluation of domestic work perpetuates modern-day slavery.

At least one out of ten Filipino workers leave their homeland to find work overseas. The majority become low wage workers in receiving countries like the US where they become vulnerable to labor trafficking and modern day slavery.

Filipino migrant workers, particularly domestic workers, work in industries where there is little to no workers' rights and protection. Domestic workers in the US, like agricultural workers, are excluded from the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) that protects the right of workers to unionize, and although covered by the Federal Labor Standards Act (FLSA), find that this policy is rarely enforced. Many migrant workers do not have adequate knowledge about US labor laws and are not fully informed about workers and immigrant rights. Filipino migrant workers sometimes become undocumented and find themselves in a more precarious position without the legal protections of either the Philippine or US government.



# NEOLIBERALISM, CAPITALISM, AND UNDOCUMENTED LABOR



***“Disposable labor, disposable lives.”***



**— RIYA ORTIZ,  
DAMAYAN ORGANIZER**

The disproportionate impact of the pandemic and subsequent economic crisis on Filipino migrant workers is a product of long-standing inequities that have been exacerbated by the recent events. The disposability of undocumented Filipino labor in a neoliberal capitalist system that only valued people for their “productivity” and denied them basic survival resources became starkly visible.

Their disposability took several forms. Some Filipino migrant workers were no longer needed and thus were either laid off or had hours reduced. If they were “essential,” they were expected to work in dangerous and unsafe situations, putting themselves and their families at risk.

In addition, their disposability was indicated by limited access to government assistance. Filipino migrant workers had little political clout and uncertain legal standing. As guest workers whose visas were tied to their employers, they were beholden to employer demands and lost their legal standing once they lost their jobs. Filipino guest workers had neither the protection of the US or Philippines government and were often denied social assistance.

Damayan believes that real change requires addressing these systemic and structural issues.



# DAMAYAN'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Damayán's work has always combined providing critical services, educating, organizing and mobilizing Filipino migrant workers and labor trafficking survivors around issues that directly affect them. Since the pandemic began, Damayan has prioritized providing emergency relief for its members, especially for the undocumented migrant worker members who are particularly vulnerable to the devastation COVID-19 has brought. Pandemic relief under the CARES Act excluded undocumented immigrants, and this pushed Damayan to find other resources to help their undocumented members access emergency relief funds and food assistance. Linda explained,



**"Damayan is not primarily a service organization. Before COVID, we were mainly an organizing and advocacy organization, but at the moment of life and death situation that COVID created, any genuine and accountable workers organization will do what Damayan did... we did not hesitate to drop, to freeze some of our regular programs to enable us to pivot to emergency humanitarian aid to help our suffering community members ."**

OVER

**500**

*care packages were distributed among Damayan members*

OVER

**1,200**

*community members benefitted from care package distribution*

To provide emergency financial relief to distressed Filipino migrant workers, Damayan applied for and distributed \$146,000 emergency cash relief from New York City and about \$400,000 from the Coronavirus Care Fund of the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA). From April to September 2020, Damayan launched an online fundraiser and raised over \$15,000 that enabled them to give more than 500 care packages that benefited more 1,200 community members. The care packages contained groceries, personal protective equipment (PPE), and disinfectants. They were delivered directly to workers' homes and at in-person distribution events, prioritizing the COVID-positive, immunocompromised, elderly families with children. This was particularly significant for the undocumented migrant workers who were left out of the federal emergency relief. Linda said,

**“Most undocumented Filipinos are not aware that because of the pandemic, they have the right to receive emergency assistance and access services from the city and other community resources. They are not familiar with navigating the government and community resources. So we did extensive outreach, Know Your Rights training, online monthly workers meetings, and webinars on immigrants and workers rights to inform and empower our community members during the pandemic.”**

The lack of government support for undocumented people and mixed-status families during the pandemic is a clear structural form of exploitation. Damayan re-organized and intervened to provide services and support that the government failed to supply. In doing so, the organization ensured that the Filipino community could remain resilient in the face of crisis, regardless of status. For many interviewees, Damayan's support was life-saving, supplementing necessary services that couldn't be found elsewhere. Joyce, who lost her hotel job in March 2020, received one of the first care packages from the organization. Joyce remembered,

**“In the beginning, I couldn't believe that there was help, but Damayan was able to help us with our basic needs with the groceries, and I was very, very thankful for that... When the pandemic hit, I saw Damayan, not only there for people who are documented, but also for people like me, who are undocumented... And I really appreciate Damayan, because even though that's not their job, they are able to pick up and raise money for the groceries.”**

Damayan also adapted to help community members navigate health-related obstacles. Damayan arranged pickups for medications, PPE, disinfecting supplies, and other necessities for elderly and immunocompromised members. Taking all necessary safety precautions, Damayan organized a distribution event for the packages at the Elmhurst Baptist Church in Queens, New York City. Although Damayan expected 100 people to show up, over 300 people attended.



They encircled the church's block, indicating that the need for support was much higher than previously estimated. In addition to handing out the care packages, volunteers talked about Damayan's mission and programs for new members, offered information on other resources attendees could utilize, and created referrals for those struggling with rent and their landlords. After receiving assistance, many Damayan members were eager to find a way to assist others. Alfred noted how,

**"Damayan helped me because I cannot go to the hospital to pick up my medications [...]. I only pay two dollars, which is a very good deal for me."**

Finally, Damayan educated members about the risks, precautions, and symptoms of COVID-19, circulating informational material to ensure that the community was well-equipped to protect themselves and their loved ones. Yet again, Damayan stepped in where the government failed, and provided effective, multilingual, and accessible public health education. The organization partnered with Dr. Victor Sta. Ana, a Filipino-American doctor in New York City, to provide emergency online consultations and referrals for community members who were affected and needed immediate assistance with medication and other health concerns. They also assisted unemployed members in locating pharmacies and hospitals that provided affordable alternatives for treatments and medications.

For workers who were unjustly terminated from work and robbed of their wages, Damayan ran a legal clinic in collaboration with The Legal Aid Society to educate the workers on how to reclaim stolen wages and practice self-advocacy in unfair work relationships. In addition, Damayan assisted members in adjusting to the virtual world by helping them set up hotspots, WiFi, and remote work stations.

Finally, for workers experiencing emotional stress, Damayan connected them to resources for emotional support. Lydia explained,

**“Many of our survivor members suffered from increased anxiety and depression during the pandemic and so we refer them to our partner, Womankind, and a pro bono psychiatrist for trauma, mental health, and psychiatric evaluation and support. Workers who experienced heightened emotional and mental stresses found that talking directly to professionals and medical doctors gives them the guidance to do the right things that they need to help themselves.”**

Interviewees highlighted how Damayan’s support has gotten them through the pandemic. Alfred remarked,

**“...The presence of Damayan in our life is very good because it calms us down when we're hearing somebody that becomes so desperate and does not know what to do to survive the pandemic. What have you done to survive the pandemic? Then we learn, so I can do this, do that. So in a sense, we become tranquil because we are getting all the information and we become hopeful that things can really happen and can help people like us. It fills up the part in our heart, which is very good.”**



**— ALFRED**  
DAMAYAN MEMBER



Between the financial and social services offered by the organization, Damayan provided a support system at a time when many migrant workers struggled to provide for themselves. They offered direct services, food and financial assistance, legal and medical referrals, as well as knowledge about how to navigate government agencies. These were parts of a cycle of care that builds resilience in Damayan's work. For many members, giving up has never been an option. Even now, as they face immense financial stress and other pressures, Damayan members remain resilient. Bainie described,

**“But you know if I just try to remember, it feels so exhausting. But like I said, don't give up your dream. To give up your dream is not an option. So always keep moving forward and you will find something, you will find a better way.”**



# COLLECTIVE STRUGGLES AND COMMUNITIES OF CARE



Through its COVID-19 humanitarian relief, Damayan became a space where migrant workers developed systems of mutual aid and become involved in the struggle for workers' rights, Damayan served as a support system for migrant workers who have been hard hit by COVID-19 by disseminating material aid, advocating for those who lost their jobs, and assisting people with navigating government programs.

Communities of care and networks of support are important for the survival of Filipino migrant workers and trafficking survivors who are often isolated and have nowhere to turn for assistance. The commitment to mutual aid and collective struggle is rooted in the belief that everyone should be treated with respect and dignity as workers and immigrants.

Linda described the connection that many Filipino domestic workers feel when seeing another “kababayan” in a similar vulnerable and exploitative work situation. “Kababayan” is a Filipino word referring to fellow countrymen. Migrant workers, particularly domestic workers, are inextricably linked to a shared history of neocolonialism, forced migration, family separation, labor trafficking and becoming marginalized low-wage workers in the US. Through the communities that they create here in the US, Filipinos build a network of kababayans for mutual support and empowerment. Jhean stated,

“

“Being a Filipino, you will always share what you have with your roommates in the shared apartment and your kababayans in the community.”

”

— LINDA, DAMAYAN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



**“I like to help, when kababayans call for help, it makes me feel good to be always there for them. To be with them, even if they're just asking for simple things, you have to show them that you're there, and that you care for them.”**

Many workers described Damayan as a family; for example, Joyce, stated the following:

**“For me, Damayan means to me like my second family. When I found Damayan, I was so stressed and I didn't know if I would still be able to live here in America for a long time because of my legal status. I didn't know who I was going to trust at the time because I got scammed by my fellow Filipinos as well. I didn't know if I could trust Damayan because I didn't know Damayan at the time. But I tried to trust again and I trusted Damayan to help me fight for a humanitarian visa to legally stay in the US.”**

In her interview, Joyce described how her mistrust and fear of other Filipinos impacted her ability to receive the aid that she needed. Damayan enabled Joyce to feel a sense of belonging and to alleviate the stress and anxiety that comes with being a migrant domestic worker, including fear of losing employment or immigration status. Damayan's emergency relief during the pandemic and its commitment to organizing and worker empowerment has enabled it to serve as a network of support for migrant workers, be a vocal and determined advocate, and to foster deep roots in the Filipino community.

Damayan's ability to create networks of support between its organizers, leaders and legal and social service providers, and the members and labor trafficking survivors in crisis, has been crucial to its effectiveness as an organization. The formal, yet uniquely personal nature of this relationship-building effort, as cited by many interviewees, gave Damayan members the opportunity to receive the assistance that they needed while in turn having the opportunity to give back to their members. Most importantly, Damayan exemplifies the transformation from top-down forms of providing care into a horizontal, mutual support system that is united by the unique intersection of class, race, and gender that underlies the experiences of Filipino domestic workers.

“This is not charity work. During the pandemic, we pivoted to direct emergency services as part of our organizing and empowerment strategy. We give services to educate, organize and mobilize our community members, especially the labor trafficking survivors... and this is also a very deliberate decision on our part in the beginning of the pandemic, that we will not just talk about the ills of capitalism, we will do something concrete to manage the ills of capitalism and provide a lifeline to our community members during the pandemic...”

— RIYA, DAMAYAN LEAD ORGANIZER







# ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE

“

“Damayan believes that labor abuses and exploitation are rooted in an unjust economic and social system and genuine change can only happen when the workers who are directly affected get organized and become leaders for genuine change.”[19]

”

— DAMAYAN WEBSITE

While Damayan shifted to provide emergency humanitarian aid and assistance during the pandemic, Damayan’s main strategy to advance its work is grassroots organizing and worker empowerment. Damayan’s ongoing campaign “Baklas: Break Free from Labor Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery,” educates survivors about labor trafficking and gives them the tools to transform their situation. Uplifting the stories of survivors can serve as a model for the survivors and encourage them to seek justice and dignity and hold their traffickers accountable. Participants in Damayan’s Workers Academy, a four-part workshop series for migrant and immigrant Filipino workers, share individual and collective stories of migration, learn about immigration and labor rights, and understand the importance of joining a workers organization.

Damayan also provides political education and leadership development training to raise the political consciousness of its members and empower them to advocate for themselves. Notably, workers don’t just advocate for themselves, but rather use their skills to empower others in similar situations and become part of a broader collective committed to social change. Manny described the role of community in his transition from Louisiana, where he had been trafficked, to New York:

**“Most of my coworkers and friends are in Louisiana and since I came to New York, many of them also moved here. So we really help each other to survive here in New York. And finally, after gaining a lot of experiences, especially the unforgettable experiences that I encountered, I learned how to survive already. And then I introduced them to Damayan. In our Filipino community, every time we have birthdays or Christmas or New Year, we are celebrating as a family in one house, sharing food and karaoke!”**

When speaking about his desire to be a leader, Celso similarly expressed a desire to assist others:

“

**“I want to be one of the Damayan leaders. I love giving advice to my fellow kababayans, helping them learn how to be strong and I need to give a helping hand to others who are struggling. Even if I have no money to give, I just lift them up, lift their feelings... In Damayan, many are trafficking survivors. They all experience violence in their lives. It's good if I can help them to make them feel better.”**

”



— CELSO  
DAMAYAN MEMBER

Damayan’s role as both a provider of care and incubator of leadership is a testament to the strength of the community and the power of organizing. Lydia notes how important it is for community members to become empowered and learn how to speak for themselves. It is especially crucial in these times that Damayan members know their rights when speaking to their employer. Lydia emphasizes that, as a trafficking survivor, she knows the importance of feeling empowered when working for an employer in a country where the system is hard to navigate. She described the Damayan workshops she leads:

**“We educate survivors and community members that, regardless of immigration status, they have basic workers rights in the US and we encourage them to assert their rights to their employers and outside in the public to protect themselves. To help workers protect themselves, we encourage them to attend our monthly webinars or monthly workers meetings to get the know your rights training that they need. I encourage them to stay connected to Damayan and the community so that they can be updated about what's going on.”**

Other members lean on the Damayan community for support and keep going. As Bainie shared,

**“Damayan really changed my life. Then four years [after my trauma], I was again working as a babysitter... and I was not sure if I can still do this job, after my sad and horrible experience when I was trafficked. Damayan said, don't give up, you can be a good babysitter again and I said okay, I will keep reminding myself that I am a survivor and I am a strong person.”**

Damayan empowers, protects, and advocates on behalf of Filipino migrant workers. It has always been a pillar of resilience and community care for Filipinos in New York, especially in times of crisis. Our interviews illustrated how Damayan and its community need each other now more than ever. In fact, they are one and the same: Damayan is the community, and together with the survivors and members, the fight for a more just future for Filipino migrant workers continues. As Manny explained,

**“So I'm very thankful for Damayan for all those efforts and reaching out to the Filipino communities here in times of need. That's why... we always prayed for them and were very thankful for their kindness and support for us.”**





## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

As of mid-April 2021, over 56 million people in the US have been fully vaccinated, but COVID-19 cases are still rising in some states and the public is being alerted about a possible fourth wave of COVID-19 from the variants. Low-income Filipino migrants are still fearful of contracting the virus.

Over a year into the pandemic, the Filipino im/migrant community continues to suffer from the economic fallout: about 70% are still jobless; many are experiencing long-term unemployment and have mental and emotional health issues. Although many people are getting government financial support, undocumented im/migrants, including Filipinos, keep falling through the cracks.

Amid the continuing crisis, Damayan is vigilant about the possibility of again pivoting to direct services and assisting people who will be vulnerable to a new wave of COVID-19: the elderly and the immunocompromised. As a small grassroots organization, Damayan does not have the capacity to provide direct services long-term and so it is necessary to employ a more sustainable strategy to help undocumented im/migrants access financial and emergency resources during the pandemic.

The rise of anti-Asian hate and violence is compounding the vulnerability and oppression of migrant Filipinos, especially domestic workers. To address this, Damayan will help build solidarity with organizations and movements nationally in the US and locally in New York. It hopes to educate and raise the political consciousness of community members to help them connect the struggles of labor trafficking survivors, undocumented migrant workers, and Black communities encountering racism and police violence. Damayan is committed to educating its base about the shared systemic vulnerabilities of all people of color, especially during the COVID-19 crisis.

As vulnerable migrants employed in frontline occupations, domestic work, and service industries — jobs that subject them to health risks, discrimination, and exploitation — the pandemic has especially impacted their employment, housing, family life, and physical, mental and emotional health. Filipino migrant workers have struggled to survive this pandemic amidst a living historical legacy of colonialism, systemic racism, and labor trafficking.

Yet, as Linda reminds us, the pandemic is not the biggest challenge that Filipino migrant workers face; rather, it is part of the protracted fight against labor trafficking and modern day slavery. Labor trafficking survivors recount pre-pandemic experiences of isolation, abuse, mental trauma, job loss, housing, and food insecurity, and adverse health consequences. In Linda's words,

**“This pandemic is severe... its impact is global, but human trafficking, labor trafficking and modern day slavery is a far worse problem... than COVID, because this problem is rooted in the economic and political structures affecting the relationships of the poor countries that send migrant workers and rich countries that need, receive, and exploit cheap migrant labor.”**



**— LINDA OALICAN**  
*DAMAYAN CO-FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR*



Damayan's organizing and worker empowerment is designed to fight for short term goals and to address the systemic nature of the problems confronting undocumented Filipino migrant workers in the US. Damayan believes it is essential to fight for services, provide resources to promote the rights and amplify the voices of labor trafficking survivors, and develop worker-leaders who contribute towards long-term structural reforms and genuine change.

The interlocking crisis of health, unemployment, racist police violence and the anti-Asian hate and violence, has created a historic opportunity for systemic reforms and organizing marginalized communities. Together, impacted communities need to mitigate the systemic vulnerabilities of working-class Black, Brown and Asian communities that made them disproportionately bear the brunt of the pandemic, unemployment, systemic racism and state violence.



# DAMAYAN'S DEMANDS

**Damayan believes that everyone, regardless of immigration status, deserves health care and economic security especially in this pandemic moment. To that end, Damayan demands that the City and State of New York:**

- Allocate tax dollars at the city and state level to serve the basic needs of undocumented immigrant communities in NYC. Provide food, PPEs, emergency cash assistance, medical, mental health and social services assistance to all New Yorkers regardless of immigration status, during the pandemic.
- Mandate hazard pay for essential workers, particularly for the domestic workers who work as babysitters, nannies, housekeepers and caregivers during the pandemic.
- Create a Fund for Excluded Workers in New York City. Excluded workers are the immigrant workers that are not included in the Federal Government Emergency Relief Fund. The Fund shall be part of the regular budget of New York City.

**To address the precarious legal standing of undocumented migrant workers and trafficking survivors, create avenues for advocacy, and give them greater legal protections, Damayan demands that:**

- The US State Department share the registry of A-3 and G-5 domestic workers with anti-trafficking grassroots organizations like Damayan.
- The Department of Labor design mechanisms for full enforcement of labor laws in the homes of diplomats and consular employers.
- The US Citizenship and Immigration Services end the automatic cancellation of work visas of A-3 and G-5 domestic workers who leave their diplomatic employers to break free from labor trafficking.
- The expansion of T-visas issued to workers fighting for U-visas.
- The Secretary of the Department of State suspend the countries of diplomatic and consular traffickers from the US A-3 and G-5 visa programs as provided in the 2008 Renewed Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA).
- The trafficker's diplomatic immunity be waived through the action of the US Department of State or through the diplomat's sending country.
- The Philippine Consulate renew the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and fund and implement the Anti-Trafficking Working Group.

# APPENDIX

## *Interviewees*



**Linda Oalican** is the Executive Director and co-founder of Damayan. As a community organizer for 51 years and a domestic worker for 18 years, she champions domestic workers' and immigrants' rights in New York City through Damayan's vision, services and strategies.

**Riya Ortiz** is the Lead Organizer and Case Manager of Damayan. As a queer immigrant Filipina and daughter of a domestic worker, she has 25 years of organizing experience in the Philippines and in the United States. Riya currently lives in Queens, New York City.



**Lydia Catina** is an Organizer and Case Manager at Damayan. She migrated to the United States on a R-1 visa as a missionary and is a labor trafficking survivor.

**Alfred** is a Damayan member from the Philippines. He migrated to the United States "looking for a greener pasture". He is the former driver to an ambassador and a labor trafficking survivor. He lives with his wife in New York City and is unemployed.



**Celso** is a Damayan worker leader from the Philippines. He migrated to the United States to support his family. He is a labor trafficking survivor and a single father with a young daughter.



# APPENDIX

## *Interviewees*

**Jhean Basco** is a Damayan worker leader from Bicol, Philippines. She migrated to the United States in 2014 as a domestic worker of an ambassador. Jhean is a labor trafficking survivor and currently works as a housekeeper in New York City.



**Sherile Pahagas** (left) is a Damayan member from the Philippines. She was a trafficked domestic worker of a diplomat.

**Bainie Mama** is a Damayan member from Mindanao, Southern Philippines. She is a labor trafficking survivor who was trafficked by a diplomat.



**Manny** is a Damayan member from Cavite, Philippines. He migrated to the United States in 2007 as a hotel worker and is a labor trafficking survivor. He currently lives in New York City with his wife and daughter and is unemployed due to the pandemic.

**Joyce** is a Damayan worker leader from the Philippines. She migrated to the United States to work as a hotel worker. She is a labor trafficking survivor and currently lives with her young child.



**Karen** is a Damayan member from Laguna, Philippines. She migrated to the United States as a domestic worker for a family. She is a trafficked domestic worker and currently works as a part-time housekeeper for various families in New York City.

# APPENDIX

## *Pandemic Tales Course: Students*

Stories have power. They provide the reader with a glimpse into the experiences of another. When employed correctly, they allow the most marginalized to take control of the narrative in movements for economic and social justice. In some instances, they even serve as an avenue for healing and empowerment. We, the students from Pandemic Tales, want to acknowledge that we were tasked with relaying the stories of others - a responsibility we don't take lightly. We use direct quotes whenever possible and situate them within relevant contexts, but ultimately, these are not our stories. We are incredibly grateful to the Damayan members for participating in this process and trusting us to compile their stories. As students at Columbia University and Barnard College, we also want to acknowledge the many privileges and resources at our fingertips. Columbia and Barnard are both internationally recognized, elite private institutions that are tied to the global processes of profit and exploitation discussed in this report. Along that vein, we want to highlight that while these are individual stories, they are part of global trends and should not be understood as isolated instances. This report is just a glimpse into the legacy of a centuries-long process of conquest, exploitation, and exclusions, but also resilience and resistance. This has been a humbling experience, and we want to thank the Damayan organizers and members for allowing us to do this work with them.

### **Sharmie Azurel (she/her)**

Barnard College 2023

Sharmie is a sophomore from Los Angeles majoring in Race and Ethnicity Studies and Human Rights. She is interested in pursuing law school in the future and advocating for the Filipino and Asian community. Sharmie is passionate about immigration reform and organizing with Damayan this past semester.



### **Olivia Fine (she/her)**

Columbia College 2021

Olivia is a senior from Huntington, NY. She studies human rights with a focus on climate justice and migration. In the fall, she will begin law school to become a public interest lawyer. She is grateful to Damayan for all she has learned from them about organizing, advocacy, community, and social transformation.



### **Sophie Gillard (she/her)**

Barnard College 2023

Sophie is a sophomore from Houston, Texas, majoring in Anthropology. Her primary academic interest is migration policy. She is so grateful for the Damayan members for welcoming the Pandemic Tales students and being such wonderful collaborators.



# APPENDIX



## **Hana Kaur Mangat (she/her)**

Columbia College 2022

Hana is a junior, originally from the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. She is studying Urban Studies and Education and hopes to work in public policy. Hana is very excited to work with Damayan because she is passionate about immigration justice & storytelling.

## **Elyse Mara (she/her)**

Barnard College 2022

Elyse is a Junior from Phoenix, Arizona. She is an Urban Studies Major with a concentration in Public Health and a Minor in Spanish. She is passionate about labor justice and collective liberation, and plans to continue volunteering with Damayan.



## **Kaili Meier (she/her)**

Barnard College 2021

Kaili is a senior from Berkeley, California. She is majoring in Political Science. She is grateful for the opportunity to work with Damayan and to learn from them and with them.

## **Andre Villaflor O'Quinn (he/him)**

Columbia College 2022

Andre is a junior from the San Francisco Bay Area majoring in Urban Studies with a specialization in Economics. As a leader in the Filipinx community at Columbia, Andre is grateful for the opportunity to learn from Damayan this past semester.



## **Yosephina Peters (she/her)**

Barnard College 2022

Yosephina Peters is a third year Barnard student from Oakland, CA majoring in Urban Studies and Sustainability and minoring in Dance and German. She is involved with the Black Organization of Soul & Solidarity as well as the Multi-heritage Society hoping to uplift the voices of the marginalized and is excited to be working in solidarity with Damayan.

# APPENDIX

## **Areej Qadeer**

Barnard College 2023

Areej Qadeer is a sophomore studying Urban Studies & Public Health on the pre-medical track. She is interested in the intersection of science and social justice.



## **Megan May Rivera (she/her)**

Barnard College 2021

Megan May is a senior from Jersey City, New Jersey studying American Studies and Education. She is a proud Filipino student who previously served as the President of Liga Filipina, Columbia University's sole Filipino cultural club.

## **Narizza Sullano Saladino (she/her)**

Columbia College 2021

Narizza is a senior from the Big Island of Hawai'i double majoring in Anthropology and Ethnicity and Race Studies. She appreciates Damayan and her Pandemic Tales class for the space they cultivated this past spring.





# APPENDIX

## *Pandemic Tales Course: Instructors*



**Premilla Nadasen**  
Professor of History  
Barnard College

### **Courtney Scott**

Columbia University 2021

Courtney is an oral history masters student at Columbia University and a teaching assistance for Barnard Pandemic Tales. When not telling stories in sound, film, or words, Courtney has spent most of the last decade working as a nanny in New York.



### **Destiny Julia Spruill**

Columbia University 2020

Destiny is the Arts and Media Assistant at the African American Policy Forum.



# APPENDIX

## *Damayan Staff*



**Linda Oalican** is the Executive Director and co-founder of Damayan. As a community organizer for 51 years and a domestic worker for 18 years, she champions domestic workers' and immigrants' rights in New York City through Damayan's vision, services and strategies.

**Riya Ortiz** is the Lead Organizer and Case Manager of Damayan. As a queer immigrant Filipina and daughter of a domestic worker, she has 25 years of organizing experience in the Philippines and in the United States. Riya currently lives in Queens, New York City.



**Jules Grifferty** is the Communications and Database Management Coordinator of Damayan. Their role is to center the expertise and voice of migrant workers and organizers in the movement narrative through story-telling.

# APPENDIX

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