

COMPLETION REPORT

The Movement of Southeast Asian Nurses and Caregivers to Japan under the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)

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This research focuses on the movement of Indonesian and Filipino healthcare providers to Japan under the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and aims to understand how Japan's health and migration policies affect healthcare delivery and their livelihood. One major criticism of the opening up of Japan's welfare services to foreigners has been the difficulty in passing the national nursing examination.

The low passing rate, particularly of nurses, has impacted on their ability to remain and serve the Japanese society. This raised concerns on whether the Japanese government views the initiative as merely an EPA exchange program or part of a long term solution to personnel shortages. In responding to criticisms, the government has made several changes to its policies on health and immigration by, among others, allowing a one year visa extension to third year candidates, easing the seven years working restriction imposed on certified foreign nurses and lengthening the time of the national exam as well as affixing hiragana to kanji characters in the exam questions.

On the selection procedures, JICWELS, the agency tasked to filter and match the candidates to prospective employers, has been working with their counterparts in Jakarta and Manila to strengthen the selection process. According to the agency's representative, it is now a prerequisite for prospective candidates to pass the lowest level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) before they are allowed to leave for Japan.

These changes are designed to improve the situation of the foreign nurses and caregivers in preparing them to meet the challenges and demands of the health industry and the working culture of facilities where they are placed. While Japan's health ministry acknowledges the shortage of nurses in hospitals, it has yet to acknowledge foreign nurses as an integral part of the solution. Improvements in policy initiatives by the health ministry and immigration department are, thus, limited. Proper monitoring of participating institutions is needed to ensure that the candidates are given ample support and time to prepare for the national exam. Language aside, cultural and religious barriers continue to test the assimilation process between the candidates and the institutions including their Japanese counterparts whom they work with. Inability to assimilate and be accepted has led some to quit and return home even after passing the exam. The issue is not merely about the exam but also about acceptance. As Japan continues to grapple with its aging society, it is necessary for the government to put more serious thought into the EPA program and strengthen the wellbeing of the healthcare providers who have chosen Japan to contribute their expertise and build their professional careers.

The numerous interviews, discussions and meetings attended throughout the project duration have provided me with valuable insights and further enriched my analysis and understanding of a rather complex issue. I would like to take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude and heartfelt appreciation to the Sumitomo Foundation for the opportunity, generosity and earnest support.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

Newspaper article:

“Give foreign nurses in Japan a boost by treating accord as long-term remedy for labor shortages,” *The Japan Times*, 2 February 2014.

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)