

MIGRATION PATHWAYS

Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA)

Overview

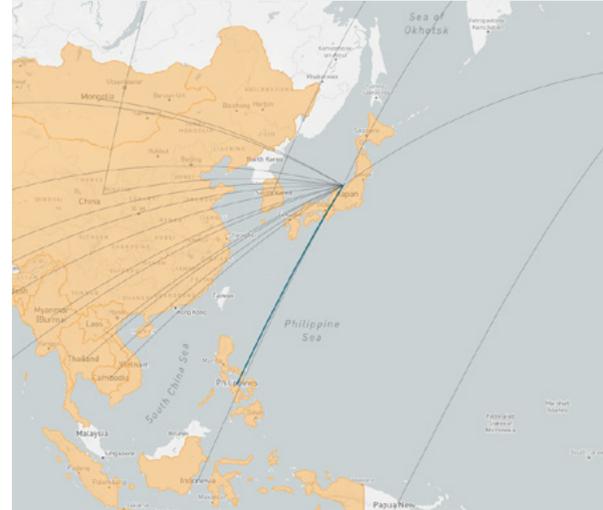
This program was developed to facilitate the exchange and migration of Filipino nurses and other healthcare workers to work in Japan for up to three years.

Why was it started?

The Philippines is a major exporter of healthcare workers, especially nurses and nurse practitioners. Because of high immigration barriers, Japan has remained a difficult market for foreign healthcare workers, despite significant internal shortages. The Japan–Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) was a response to these challenges.

How does it work?

The Japanese government funds the program. The Philippines Overseas Employment Administration manages the initial screening and the interviews of Filipino applicant, selecting a list of candidates. The Japanese International Corporation of Welfare Service matches them with participating Japanese hospitals. After both the applicant and employer agree to terms and conditions for training and work, they sign a contract. Candidates complete three months of Japanese language training in the Philippines, followed by six months of additional language training and an introduction to Japanese nurse training courses. After the six-month training in Japan, each candidate is dispatched to a designated hospital.



Country of Destination
JAPAN

Country of Origin
PHILIPPINES

Skill
NURSING AND CAREGIVING 

Skill Level
HIGH

Timeline
2009–ONGOING

Beneficiaries
500

Countries all around the world utilize migration pathways to train and bring over workers with needed skills. The CGD Migration Pathways database documents these pathways to promote innovation in this space. To explore the database, visit GSP.cgdev.org.

Until they pass the Japanese national board examination for nurses (NBE), they are considered a “nurse candidate;” meaning that they are expected to work as apprentice as they continue studying the Japanese language and nursing practices. They also receive a salary equivalent to that of a Japanese counterpart. To be able to work as nurse in Japan, candidates must pass the national examination. Nurse candidates have a chance to take the NBE once a year for three years. Candidates who passed the national examination will be recognized as registered nurses (RN), and qualified to work in Japan. Once they become registered nurses, they have to receive the same salary as that of Japanese.

What impact has it had?

In early 2010, when the first batch of Filipino nurse candidates took the NBE for the first time, only one passed. Results did not improve in the following years, with only 7 percent of candidates passing the programs requirements since 2009 (1 out of 59 in 2010 and 1 out of 113 in 2011). The poor results elicited harsh criticisms from Japanese politicians and mass media, which unanimously pointed out the candidates’ limited Japanese language proficiency. Indeed, low passage rates primarily reflect the time-limited training and language testing requirements prescribed by the trade agreement, as the six-month language training is not enough for foreign nurses to master Japanese and work in clinical settings. As a consequence of the low passage rate, the attractiveness to hospitals to participate in the program is very low.

Further readings

Hooper, K. 2019. *Exploring New Legal Migration Pathways: Lessons from Pilot Projects*. Migration Policy Institute, Washington, D.C. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/exploring-new-legal-migration-pathways-lessons-pilot-projects>

Shun, O. H. N. O., Yoneno-Reyes, M., & Hirano, Y. O. 2016. “Chronic First Aid: The Scheme for the Movement of Filipino Nurses under the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA), 2009-2016.” *Asian Studies: Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia* 52 (2). https://www.asj.upd.edu.ph/mediabox/archive/ASJ_52_2_2016/Ohno_Chronic_First_Aid_Scheme_Filipino_Nurses_JPEPA.pdf

Yagi, N., T. K. Mackey, B. A. Liang, and L. Gerlt. 2014. “Policy review: Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA): Analysis of a failed nurse migration policy.” *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 51 (2): 243–50. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0020748913001491>



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