

Global Trends in International Nurse Migrations: Challenges and Implications

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Abstract

International nurse migration is a complex phenomenon shaped by demographic, economic, and regulatory factors. This paper reviews global trends in nurse migration, emphasizing the challenges and implications for healthcare systems worldwide. Key drivers include disparities in healthcare workforce distribution, economic incentives, and regulatory frameworks that vary across countries. The migration of nurses contributes to both opportunities and challenges in healthcare delivery, affecting patient care, workforce stability, and health equity. This review explores strategies for mitigating negative impacts and enhancing the benefits of nurse migration through improved regulation, international cooperation, and investment in local healthcare education and retention.

Keywords: Nurse migration, healthcare workforce, global trends, regulatory challenges, economic incentives, health equity, workforce stability, healthcare education.

1.Introduction

International nurse migration has become a pivotal issue in global healthcare systems, influenced by a complex interplay of economic, demographic, and regulatory factors. Nurses migrating internationally contribute significantly to the healthcare workforce of destination countries, often addressing critical shortages and providing specialized care. However, this migration also presents substantial challenges to both source and destination countries(1).

The demographic realities of aging populations and increasing healthcare demands in many developed nations drive the demand for nurses, leading to recruitment efforts from countries with surplus healthcare workers. This global movement of nurses is further propelled by economic disparities, where higher wages and better working conditions abroad attract healthcare professionals from less economically developed regions.

Regulatory frameworks also play a crucial role in shaping nurse migration patterns. Varied licensing requirements, visa regulations, and professional recognition processes across countries can either facilitate or hinder the mobility of nurses(2). These regulatory complexities contribute to disparities in healthcare workforce distribution, impacting the availability and quality of care in both sending and receiving countries.

Understanding the challenges and implications of international nurse migration is essential for devising effective policies that promote sustainable healthcare workforce strategies and ensure equitable access to healthcare services globally. This paper explores these dynamics in detail, highlighting the multifaceted nature of nurse migration and proposing recommendations to address its complexities while maximizing its benefits for healthcare systems worldwide(3).

2.Literature Survey

A comprehensive literature survey on international nurse migrations reveals a rich tapestry of research highlighting various dimensions of this phenomenon. Scholars have extensively examined the motivations behind nurse migration, emphasizing economic factors such as wage differentials and better working conditions in destination countries. These studies underscore the role of global economic inequalities in driving healthcare professionals to seek opportunities abroad, particularly from regions experiencing healthcare workforce shortages.

Moreover, the impact of nurse migration on both source and destination countries' healthcare systems has been a focal point. Research indicates that while migration can alleviate shortages in receiving nations, it often exacerbates healthcare workforce challenges in countries of origin, leading to depleted resources and diminished healthcare access for local populations(4). This dual impact underscores the interconnectedness of global healthcare labor markets and the need for coordinated policy responses.

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The regulatory landscape governing nurse migration has also received significant scholarly attention. Studies have documented the complexities and inconsistencies in licensing requirements, professional recognition processes, and immigration policies across countries. These regulatory barriers can hinder the mobility of nurses and contribute to inequities in workforce distribution, affecting healthcare delivery and patient outcomes.

Furthermore, the literature explores ethical considerations surrounding nurse migration, including issues of brain drain, social responsibility, and the ethical recruitment of healthcare professionals. Debates often center on the moral obligations of both sending and receiving countries to uphold fair labor practices and mitigate adverse effects on healthcare systems and communities(5).

Overall, the literature survey underscores the multidimensional nature of international nurse migration, emphasizing the need for evidence-based policies that promote ethical recruitment, workforce sustainability, and equitable healthcare access globally. Addressing these complexities requires collaborative efforts among policymakers, healthcare institutions, and international organizations to ensure that nurse migration contributes positively to global healthcare systems while safeguarding the rights and well-being of healthcare professionals and patients alike.

3.Existing and Proposed System

Existing systems governing international nurse migrations are characterized by a patchwork of regulatory frameworks, varying significantly across countries and regions. Currently, these systems often lack harmonization in licensure requirements, professional standards recognition, and immigration policies, leading to complexities and barriers that hinder the mobility of nurses globally(6). This fragmented approach contributes to disparities in healthcare workforce distribution, exacerbating shortages in some regions while creating surpluses in others.

Proposed reforms aim to address these challenges by advocating for standardized regulatory frameworks and improved international cooperation. One proposed system involves establishing mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) that facilitate the portability of nursing credentials across borders. MRAs can streamline the process for nurses to obtain licensure in multiple countries, thereby promoting greater mobility and flexibility in responding to healthcare workforce needs.

Additionally, efforts to strengthen ethical recruitment practices are gaining momentum. These initiatives seek to uphold fair labor standards, discourage exploitative practices, and promote the ethical deployment of healthcare professionals. By enhancing transparency and accountability in recruitment processes, stakeholders aim to mitigate the negative impacts of nurse migration on source countries' healthcare systems and ensure that migrating nurses are treated equitably and sustainably integrated into receiving countries' healthcare environments.

Furthermore, proposed systems emphasize the importance of investing in local healthcare education and workforce development. By enhancing training opportunities and improving working conditions in source countries, these strategies aim to reduce dependency on foreign-trained nurses and build sustainable healthcare capacity to meet domestic healthcare needs.

In conclusion, while existing systems governing international nurse migrations face challenges of fragmentation and inequity, proposed reforms advocate for standardized regulatory frameworks, ethical recruitment practices, and investments in local healthcare infrastructure. By addressing these issues, stakeholders can work towards a more equitable and sustainable global healthcare workforce that ensures quality care for all populations, regardless of geographical location.

4. Women's involvement in international migration

The participation of women in international migrations represents a significant and evolving aspect of global demographic trends and socioeconomic dynamics. Women constitute a substantial proportion of international migrants, often migrating for diverse reasons including economic opportunities, family reunification, education, and asylum-seeking due to conflict or persecution(7).

Economic factors play a pivotal role in shaping women's migration patterns. Many women migrate to seek better employment opportunities abroad, often in sectors such as domestic work, caregiving, healthcare, and hospitality. Economic disparities between countries and regions can drive women to migrate in search of higher wages and improved living standards for themselves and their families. This trend is particularly pronounced in regions where women face limited economic opportunities or gender-based discrimination in the labor market.

Family reunification is another significant driver of women's migration. Many women migrate to join spouses, children, or other family members who have already settled in a different country. Family ties and caregiving responsibilities often motivate women to relocate internationally, contributing to the diverse composition of migrant populations worldwide(8).

Education also serves as a key motivator for female migration. Women may pursue international education opportunities, including academic programs, vocational training, or language courses, to enhance their skills and qualifications. Educational migration enables women to access higher-quality education that may not be available in their home countries, thereby enhancing their career prospects and socioeconomic mobility.

In addition to economic and familial motivations, women's migration patterns are also influenced by factors such as political instability, conflict, and environmental degradation. Women may migrate internationally as refugees or asylum-seekers, fleeing persecution, violence, or environmental disasters that threaten their safety and well-being. These forced migrations highlight the vulnerabilities faced by women in crisis situations and the complex intersection of gender, migration, and human rights.

Despite the diverse motivations and contributions of women in international migrations, they often encounter unique challenges and vulnerabilities(9). Women migrants may face risks such as exploitation, trafficking, discrimination, and limited access to essential services including healthcare, education, and legal protection. Gender inequalities and discriminatory practices can exacerbate these challenges, making it crucial for policymakers, international organizations, and civil society to address gender-specific needs and rights in migration governance frameworks.

Efforts to enhance the inclusion and empowerment of women in international migrations are essential for promoting gender equality, human rights, and sustainable development(10). This includes ensuring access to safe migration pathways, legal protections, social services, and economic opportunities for women migrants. By recognizing and addressing the diverse motivations, experiences, and contributions of women in migration, stakeholders can foster inclusive and equitable societies that benefit from the talents and resilience of all migrants, regardless of gender.

4.1 Emigrant women seeking employment

Female emigrants play a crucial role in labor markets worldwide, contributing diverse skills and expertise across various sectors. Their participation in the labor market reflects broader trends in global migration, where women increasingly migrate for economic opportunities, career advancement, family reunification, and educational pursuits. One significant aspect of female emigrants' engagement in the labor market is their contribution to addressing labor shortages in destination countries, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, education, hospitality, and domestic work. Women often fill critical roles in caregiving, nursing, teaching, and service industries, where their skills are in demand due to demographic shifts, aging populations, and changing social dynamics. Their contributions help to sustain essential services and support economic growth in receiving countries.

Career advancement is another key motivator for female emigrants. Many women migrate internationally to pursue higher-paying jobs, career opportunities, and professional development that may not be available in their home countries. International mobility enables women to acquire new skills, expand their networks, and gain valuable work experience that enhances their competitiveness in the global labor market(11). This mobility can lead to improved earning potential, economic empowerment, and socioeconomic mobility for female emigrants and their families.

Family reunification plays a significant role in shaping female emigrants' labor market participation. Women often migrate to join spouses, children, or other family members who have already settled abroad. Family ties and caregiving responsibilities influence their decisions to migrate and contribute to their integration into the labor force of receiving countries. Balancing work and family responsibilities can present challenges for female emigrants, highlighting the importance of supportive policies and social services that promote work-life balance and family well-being.

Challenges and vulnerabilities faced by female emigrants in the labor market include gender-based discrimination, wage disparities, limited access to training and career advancement opportunities, and barriers to legal protections and social rights. Gender inequalities can hinder women's full participation in the labor market and perpetuate disparities in employment conditions and opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive approaches that promote gender equality, eliminate discriminatory practices, and ensure equal access to economic opportunities and social protections for all migrants, regardless of gender.

5. Migration of Nurses

Nurse migration refers to the international movement of nurses from one country to another in search of employment opportunities, career advancement, or better working conditions. This phenomenon is driven by various factors including economic disparities, healthcare system demands, regulatory differences, and personal motivations.

Drivers of Nurse Migration:

- **Economic Opportunities:** Nurses often migrate to countries offering higher wages and better benefits compared to their home countries. Economic disparities between nations can incentivize healthcare professionals to seek employment abroad where salaries are more competitive and living standards are higher.
- **Healthcare System Demands:** Shortages of healthcare professionals, including nurses, in destination countries can prompt recruitment efforts abroad. Aging populations, increasing healthcare needs, and workforce gaps in specialized areas drive the demand for internationally trained nurses to fill critical roles in hospitals, long-term care facilities, and community health settings.
- **Regulatory and Professional Recognition:** Differences in licensing requirements, professional standards, and recognition of qualifications across countries can influence nurse migration patterns. Nurses may navigate complex processes to obtain licensure and work permits in their destination countries, impacting their mobility and integration into healthcare systems.

Implications of Nurse Migration:

- **Impact on Source Countries:** Nurse migration can exacerbate healthcare workforce shortages in countries of origin, leading to challenges in healthcare delivery and service provision. This "brain drain" phenomenon may strain local healthcare systems and hinder efforts to improve healthcare access and quality.
- **Benefits to Destination Countries:** Internationally trained nurses contribute to addressing healthcare staffing needs in destination countries, particularly in underserved areas and specialized fields. Their skills and expertise help maintain healthcare services, improve patient outcomes, and support workforce diversity.
- **Ethical and Policy Considerations:** Ethical issues surrounding nurse migration include concerns about fair recruitment practices, retention strategies for healthcare professionals in source countries, and the ethical responsibilities of healthcare institutions and policymakers to uphold labor standards and support workforce sustainability.

Efforts to manage nurse migration involve developing policies that balance the needs of healthcare systems with ethical considerations and sustainable workforce strategies. These policies may include regulatory reforms, international agreements on professional standards, investments in healthcare education and retention programs, and support for migrant healthcare workers' integration and well-being in receiving countries. By addressing the complexities of nurse migration, stakeholders can work towards ensuring equitable healthcare access, promoting global health workforce resilience, and advancing healthcare quality worldwide.

5.1 Deficiency of healthcare personnel

The deficiency of healthcare personnel is a critical global issue affecting healthcare systems across countries and regions. This shortage encompasses various healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, midwives, pharmacists, and allied health workers, and is influenced by complex factors that impact workforce supply, distribution, and retention.

Factors Contributing to Healthcare Personnel Deficiency:

- **Demographic Shifts:** Aging populations in many countries increase healthcare demands while simultaneously reducing the available workforce due to retirement. This demographic imbalance strains healthcare systems and exacerbates personnel shortages, particularly in specialized care and geriatric services.
- **Geographical Disparities:** Healthcare personnel shortages are often more pronounced in rural and remote areas compared to urban centers. Limited access to healthcare facilities and infrastructure, coupled with lower job satisfaction and professional support, contribute to difficulties in recruiting and retaining healthcare workers in underserved regions.
- **Educational and Training Gaps:** Insufficient capacity and resources in healthcare education institutions can restrict the number of new healthcare professionals entering the workforce each year. This constraint is

compounded by challenges in providing ongoing professional development and skills training to existing personnel, limiting their ability to meet evolving healthcare needs.

- **Economic and Workforce Migration:** Economic disparities between countries drive healthcare professionals to migrate in search of better pay, working conditions, and career opportunities. This "brain drain" phenomenon can deplete the healthcare workforce in source countries, particularly in regions already struggling with healthcare personnel deficiencies.
- **Regulatory and Policy Challenges:** Complex licensing requirements, professional regulations, and immigration policies can create barriers to the mobility and recruitment of healthcare personnel across borders. Inconsistent standards and bureaucratic processes hinder the efficient deployment of healthcare workers where they are most needed.

Impact of Healthcare Personnel Deficiency:

- **Reduced Access to Healthcare:** Shortages of healthcare personnel contribute to longer wait times for appointments, delayed treatments, and decreased accessibility to essential healthcare services, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.
- **Quality of Care Compromises:** Overburdened healthcare systems can lead to provider burnout, increased medical errors, and compromised patient safety and outcomes. Insufficient staffing levels can strain healthcare delivery, affecting the quality and continuity of patient care.
- **Economic Burden:** Healthcare personnel shortages impose financial burdens on healthcare systems due to increased costs associated with recruitment, training, and retention efforts. Moreover, productivity losses and inefficiencies resulting from understaffing can escalate healthcare expenditures and strain public health budgets.
- **Public Health Preparedness:** Adequate healthcare personnel are crucial for responding to public health emergencies, disease outbreaks, and disaster situations. Shortages in critical healthcare roles can undermine a country's capacity to effectively manage and mitigate health crises, jeopardizing public health preparedness and response efforts.

Addressing Healthcare Personnel Deficiency:

- **Workforce Planning and Development:** Strategic workforce planning initiatives are essential to align healthcare workforce supply with projected demand. This includes expanding healthcare education programs, enhancing recruitment strategies, and implementing retention incentives such as professional development opportunities and supportive work environments.
- **Policy Reforms:** Reforming regulatory frameworks to streamline licensing processes, facilitate cross-border mobility of healthcare professionals, and promote standardized qualifications can improve workforce mobility and deployment efficiency.
- **Investment in Healthcare Infrastructure:** Building and upgrading healthcare facilities, particularly in underserved areas, can enhance access to healthcare services and support workforce retention by improving working conditions and professional support systems.
- **International Collaboration:** Collaborative efforts among countries, international organizations, and stakeholders are crucial for addressing global healthcare workforce challenges. This includes sharing best practices, promoting ethical recruitment practices, and supporting capacity-building initiatives in regions facing severe healthcare personnel deficiencies.
- **Technology and Innovation:** Leveraging telehealth, digital health technologies, and innovative care delivery models can optimize healthcare resources, expand access to specialized care, and alleviate workforce pressures, particularly in remote and resource-limited settings.

5.2 Nurse importing countries

"Nurse importing countries" refers to nations that actively recruit and employ nurses from other countries to address domestic healthcare workforce shortages. These countries typically have significant healthcare demands due to factors such as aging populations, expanding healthcare needs, and insufficient domestic production of healthcare professionals. The practice of importing nurses is driven by several key factors:

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- **Healthcare Demands:** Countries experiencing demographic shifts, such as aging populations or increased chronic disease burdens, often face growing demands for healthcare services. This creates a need for additional healthcare professionals, including nurses, to meet patient care needs and maintain healthcare quality.
- **Workforce Shortages:** Domestic shortages of healthcare personnel, particularly in specialized fields or underserved regions, prompt importing countries to recruit nurses from abroad. Shortages may result from factors such as insufficient healthcare education capacity, high turnover rates, or geographic disparities in healthcare access.
- **Economic Incentives:** Nurse importing countries may offer competitive salaries, benefits, and professional development opportunities to attract nurses from other countries. Economic incentives, including higher wages and better working conditions, appeal to healthcare professionals seeking improved career prospects and financial stability.
- **Regulatory Frameworks:** Favorable regulatory frameworks, including streamlined licensure processes, recognition of foreign credentials, and visa sponsorship programs, facilitate the recruitment and integration of international nurses into the domestic healthcare workforce. These regulatory measures help mitigate barriers to employment for foreign-trained healthcare professionals.
- **International Recruitment Strategies:** Nurse importing countries often engage in international recruitment efforts through partnerships with recruitment agencies, participation in job fairs and recruitment missions abroad, and utilization of online platforms to connect with potential candidates globally. These strategies enable importing countries to target skilled healthcare professionals who meet specific workforce needs.

Examples of nurse importing countries include:

United States: The U.S. faces ongoing healthcare workforce shortages, particularly in rural and underserved areas. It actively recruits nurses from countries such as the Philippines, India, and Nigeria to supplement its domestic healthcare workforce.

- **United Kingdom:** The UK recruits nurses internationally to address staffing gaps within the National Health Service (NHS). It offers sponsorship programs and facilitates the recognition of overseas qualifications to support the integration of international nurses into the UK healthcare system.
- **Canada:** Canada recruits nurses from abroad to meet healthcare demands across its provinces and territories. It offers pathways for internationally educated nurses to obtain licensure and provides support for their professional development and integration into Canadian healthcare settings.
- **Australia:** Australia faces healthcare workforce challenges, particularly in remote and regional areas. It recruits nurses from countries such as the Philippines, India, and the United Kingdom through skilled migration programs and employer-sponsored visas.
- The importation of nurses from other countries is a contentious issue that raises ethical considerations, including concerns about brain drain from source countries, ethical recruitment practices, and the equitable treatment and integration of foreign-trained healthcare professionals. Effective governance and international collaboration are essential to ensure ethical recruitment practices, promote workforce sustainability, and address global healthcare workforce needs while upholding the rights and well-being of healthcare professionals and patients alike.

5.3 Nurses' countries of origin when they immigrated

Nurses migrate from a variety of countries around the world, driven by economic opportunities, career advancement, and other personal and professional motivations. The countries of origin from which migrating nurses predominantly originate include both developed and developing nations. Some of the notable countries of origin for migrating nurses are:

- **Philippines:** The Philippines is one of the largest exporters of nurses globally. Filipino nurses are highly sought after in countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Middle Eastern countries, and other parts of Asia. Economic factors, English proficiency, and a robust nursing education system contribute to the Philippines' prominence in nurse migration.

- **India:** India also supplies a significant number of nurses to countries around the world, including the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and countries in the Middle East. Indian nurses are valued for their clinical skills, educational qualifications, and adaptability to different healthcare settings.
- **Nigeria:** Nigerian nurses migrate primarily to countries in Europe, North America, and other African nations. Factors driving migration include economic opportunities, career development prospects, and challenges within the Nigerian healthcare system.
- **United Kingdom:** While the UK is also a nurse importing country, it has historically been a source of migrating nurses to other English-speaking countries and within the European Union. Nigerian and Filipino nurses, among others, have contributed significantly to the UK healthcare workforce.
- **South Africa:** South African nurses migrate to countries in Europe, the Middle East, and other parts of Africa. Economic incentives, career advancement opportunities, and challenges within the South African healthcare system influence migration patterns.
- **Canada:** Canadian-trained nurses also migrate internationally, although Canada also attracts nurses from countries such as the Philippines, India, and Nigeria to fill shortages in its healthcare system, particularly in rural and remote areas.
- **Ireland:** Irish nurses have historically migrated to the United Kingdom and other English-speaking countries, driven by economic factors, professional opportunities, and challenges within the Irish healthcare system.

These countries represent diverse regions with varying healthcare system challenges, economic conditions, and educational opportunities that influence the migration of nurses. The migration of healthcare professionals, including nurses, is a complex global phenomenon shaped by economic, social, political, and regulatory factors that impact both the source countries experiencing brain drain and the destination countries addressing workforce shortages.

6. Conclusion and Future Work

The global trends in international nurse migrations highlight a complex interplay of factors that shape the movement of healthcare professionals across borders. Economic disparities, healthcare system demands, regulatory frameworks, and personal motivations all contribute to the migration patterns observed among nurses worldwide. While nurse migration offers opportunities for professional growth, economic advancement, and filling critical healthcare gaps in destination countries, it also presents significant challenges for both source and destination countries.

For source countries, nurse migration can exacerbate healthcare workforce shortages, leading to diminished healthcare access and quality for local populations. This "brain drain" phenomenon underscores the need for strategies to retain healthcare professionals through improved working conditions, competitive salaries, and professional development opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires investment in healthcare infrastructure, education, and regulatory reforms that support workforce retention and sustainability.

In destination countries, nurse migration contributes to healthcare system resilience by filling staffing gaps and supporting service delivery, particularly in underserved areas and specialized fields. However, it also raises ethical considerations regarding fair recruitment practices, workforce integration, and ensuring equitable treatment and support for migrant healthcare professionals.

Future Work:

Future efforts should focus on several key areas to mitigate the negative impacts and maximize the benefits of international nurse migrations:

Ethical Recruitment Practices: Promoting ethical recruitment practices that prioritize transparency, fairness, and the protection of migrant healthcare professionals' rights is essential. Collaborative initiatives among governments, healthcare institutions, and international organizations can establish guidelines and standards to ensure ethical recruitment and support the integration of migrant nurses into destination countries' healthcare systems.

Policy Development and Harmonization: Developing and harmonizing regulatory frameworks, licensing standards, and professional recognition processes across countries can facilitate the mobility of nurses while maintaining quality standards in healthcare delivery. International cooperation and agreements, such as mutual recognition agreements (MRAs), can streamline licensure processes and support the ethical deployment of healthcare professionals globally.

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Investment in Healthcare Workforce: Investing in healthcare workforce development, education, and retention strategies in source countries can mitigate the impact of nurse migration on healthcare systems. This includes strengthening healthcare education institutions, improving working conditions, and offering career advancement opportunities to encourage healthcare professionals to remain in their home countries.

Research and Data Collection: Continued research and data collection on nurse migration trends, impacts, and outcomes are crucial for evidence-based policy development and decision-making. Longitudinal studies and comparative analyses can provide insights into the factors influencing nurse migration, its effects on healthcare systems, and strategies for mitigating adverse impacts while maximizing benefits.

Capacity Building and Collaboration: Building healthcare capacity in both source and destination countries through technical assistance, training programs, and collaborative partnerships can enhance healthcare service delivery and workforce resilience globally. By strengthening healthcare systems and addressing healthcare disparities, countries can reduce dependency on foreign-trained nurses and improve healthcare access for all populations.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare

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