

Chapter 1

Japan's Kaigoryugaku Scheme: Student Pathway for Care Workers from the Philippines and Other Asian Countries

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Japan's *Kaigoryugaku* Scheme: Student Pathway for Care Workers from the Philippines and Other Asian Countries

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Abstract

While Japan has the highest percentage of elderly citizens in the world, its dependence on foreign care workers has been negligible compared to other countries facing a similar issue. In recent years, the country has implemented several foreign care worker schemes set to alleviate the worsening shortage. In this report, we focus on the student pathway for foreign care workers (*kaigoryugaku*) that is an offshoot of the addition of 'care work (*kaigo*)' in the visa categories in the Revised Immigration Law (2017). We describe the care work student scheme and its emerging trends in detail and explain the differences between the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) schemes, particularly in terms of regulation and the role of the public sector. We also discuss how private intermediaries or facilitators are involved and collaborate to recruit, train, and hire international students. In the final section, we summarise the discussion and make suggestions on how the government, both at the national and local levels, can complement the efforts of the private sector to make the scheme work to meet the current and future demands for labour in the care sector.

Keywords: international migration, care work students, Japan, foreign worker policy

1. Introduction

Addressing the severe shortage of workers who will look after the increasing ageing population has become one of the most pressing issues in many countries today. Japan is no exception. The country has the highest percentage of citizens aged 65 years and above, estimated at 28.1% of the total population as of August 2018 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Statistics Bureau website, 2018). Its dependence on foreign care workers has been negligible compared to other countries facing a similar issue. In recent years, however, the country has shown dramatic changes in its foreign worker policy. In the care work sector, it has introduced several schemes (or pathways) for foreigners to participate in the labour market. Indeed, the past two years have seen radical changes in policy related to foreign workers, particularly in the market for unskilled and semi-skilled workers.

In this chapter, we focus on the student pathway for foreign care workers (*kaigoryugaku*, referred to hereafter as the care work student scheme) that allows international students who finish a 2-year care work training course to convert their visa into 'care work', a new visa category created in the revision of the Immigration Law in 2017. After introducing the available pathways and describing the care work student scheme in detail, we look at the emerging trends in student enrolment/admission into Japanese language schools and care worker training (or vocational) institutions. We then discuss the roles of the national and local government units (LGUs) and show that unlike the national government-led Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), the current care work student scheme is largely private-led. The information presented in this report is valid as of March 2019, and for the latest changes and revisions in the schemes, the reader is recommended to refer to the pertinent official websites.

In section 4, we highlight the roles of some Japanese stakeholders that facilitate recruitment, education/training, and employment, or the 'intermediaries'. In the final section, we summarise and make suggestions on how the government, both at the national and local levels, can complement the private sector's efforts to sustain the scheme and contribute in the alleviation of the shortage of care workers in the country.

The findings in this report are based on interviews and data gathered during fieldwork from May 2018 to February 2019.¹ The authors obtained ethical permission to conduct the study from Ryukoku University in April 2018.

1.1. Trends in foreign workers' policy and the labour market for care workers

a) Recent transformations in Japan's foreign workers' policy

Japan's labour shortage problem is not isolated to the care work sector. It is part of the larger problem covering the entire economy and, thus, must be understood within this context. The shrinking population, the ageing citizens, the 2020 Olympics, and a significant increase in the number of foreign tourists are all compounding and aggravating the country's labour shortage problem. In this section, we introduce the recent reforms in the immigration law and other related laws that are designed to alleviate the shortage in other sectors as well.

Three significant developments attest to the transformations in Japan's foreign worker policy. It must be noted, however, that the current administration does not see these as comprising an 'immigration policy', which is defined as a long-term migrant settlement programme (Komine, 2018). First, under the Abe administration, the 'alleviation of the labour shortage' was explicitly cited for the first time as the reason to take in foreign workers, especially in the 14 sectors in dire need of unskilled and semi-skilled labourers (Nikkei News Online, 2018).² Until recently, most of the foreigners who worked in Japan were de facto workers whose statuses of stay (visas) were based on two types – those in which the kind of job and period of stay were largely unrestricted (type 1), and those in which the type of job and the period of stay were highly restricted (type 2) (for details, see Komine (2018)). Examples of the first type (type 1) were foreigners whose status was on the merit of either having a spouse who is a Japanese national or parents or grandparents who have Japanese blood (Nikkeijin). The latter (type 2) included students, technical

¹ A part of this study was conducted in collaboration with the Ryukoku University Sociocultural Research Institute project (FY2018–2019) entitled 'International Migration of Nurses from Myanmar: Implications on the Domestic Labor Market, Health System and Japan as Destination'.

² The 14 industries are care work, building cleaning, farming, fishery, food and beverage production, food service (such as restaurants, cafes, and bars), material fabrication (such as metal casting), industrial machinery production, electronics and electric appliance related, construction, shipbuilding and marine equipment, automobile maintenance, aviation services, and lodging (hotels).

interns and trainees, and candidate workers under bilateral EPAs (see section 1.2 for the details of these programs). While these people actually worked and even became essential sources of unskilled or uncertified workers in many sectors, the government indicated that the aim for admitting them was not to alleviate the labour shortage, but for other purposes, such as study, technology transfer, and international cooperation.

In the past 10 years, there have been diversification and reforms of the foreign worker labour recruitment schemes (highly skilled professionals, students, technical trainees, and government-to-government agreements). In 2012, a programme for highly skilled foreign professionals (*kodojinzai*) was launched. Under this scheme, applicants are screened using a point system based on educational and work qualifications, age, salary, and bonus points on individual achievements, such as Japanese language proficiency, the number of patents owned, and the university of graduation.

The government has also introduced reforms in the Technical Intern Training Program in care work. For example, more measures are being put in place to improve the working conditions of the trainees, protect their rights, and provide pathways to career development and permanent residency. Care work is now included in the list of sectors that can accept technical trainees. The government is also exploring other source countries that can provide skilled, unskilled, or semi-skilled workers under bilateral memoranda of cooperation, like for example, with India³ and Myanmar⁴.

Lastly, in the past, Japan's labour policies (both towards *de jure* and type 2 *de facto* foreign workers) did not make provisions to encourage long-term stay in Japan.⁵ However, the Abe administration has been exerting efforts to provide a more accessible pathway for permanent residency in Japan for 'qualified' foreign workers. Rules regarding the duration of the visas and their extension have been relaxed for some categories. For example, previously, technical trainees were allowed only three years of stay, after which

³ India sends technical interns under the 'Memorandum of Cooperation between the Office of Healthcare Policy, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of Japan, The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the Republic of India in the field of Healthcare and Wellness', which was signed on 29 October 2018. https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/kenkouiryoku/pdf/h301029_india_hc.pdf (accessed 30 September 2019).

⁴ The Japanese government concluded a memorandum of cooperation on specified skilled workers with the government of Myanmar on 28 March 2019. <https://www.jitco.or.jp/en/news/article/592/> (accessed 30 September 2019).

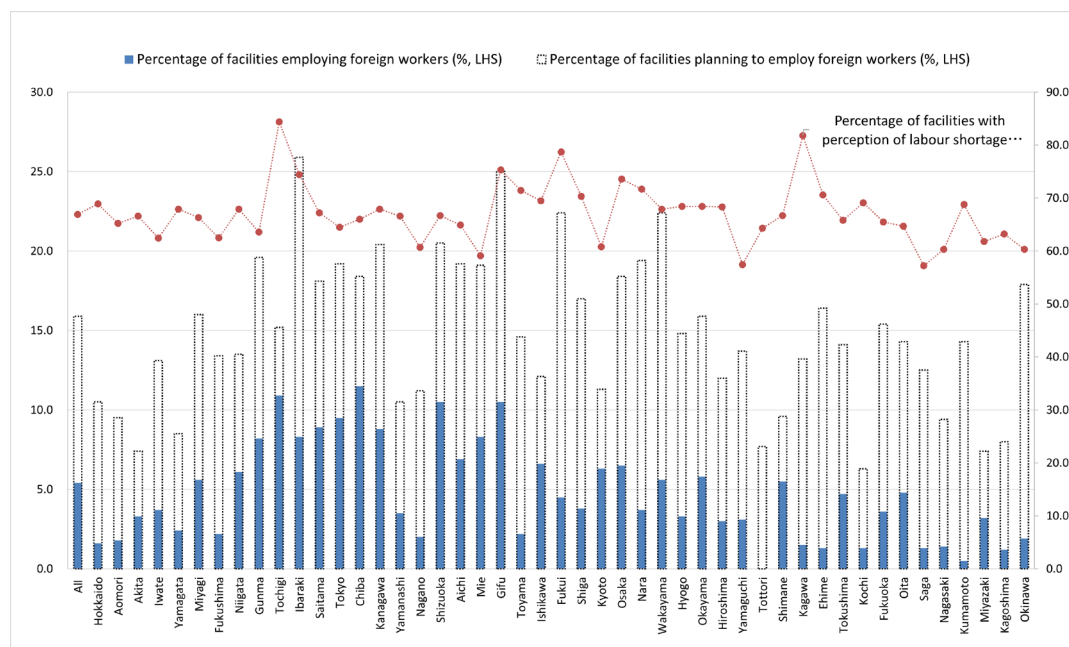
⁵ The immigration law required 10 consecutive years of residence in Japan, five of which as a worker, to be able to apply for permanent residency, except in exceptionally meritorious cases or in the case of being a spouse or dependent of a Japanese national.

they had to return to transfer the technology learned in Japan to their home countries. Now, they are allowed to stay longer provided they meet the requirements regarding their skills and language proficiencies. These changes are a deviation from the country's policy trend of hiring foreign workers on a mainly temporarily basis. Indeed, given the current demographic and economic circumstances, Japan's alternatives in solving the labour shortage problem have narrowed such that relaxing rules to encourage and retain foreign labour migration has become inevitable.

b) Current trends in the labour market for care workers

As mentioned above, the severe labour shortage is the primary reason for further opening of the care work labour market to foreigners. In Japan, an index comparing the number of jobs available to the number of workers seeking jobs, or the effective job offer to job seeker ratio, is used to measure the severity of the labour shortage. A value exceeding 1 suggests a labour shortage, while a higher value means a more severe shortage. The ratio for all sectors in the third quarter of 2018 stood at 1.63 (163 job offers per 100 job seekers). However, the rate for the long-term care sector (only for jobs in facilities, excluding homecare) was much higher, at 3.69 in the same quarter of 2018 (Japan National Council of Social Welfare, 2019). In a nationwide survey conducted in 2017 of 8,782 long-term care facilities by the Care Work Foundation (2018) regarding workers' perception of a labour shortage, 66.9% gave a positive reply (see Figure 1.1). The opinion appeared to be strongest amongst facilities in Tochigi and Kagawa prefectures (at more than 80% of all facilities), but further studies are necessary to determine whether the shortage is felt more in rural (or less-populated areas) rather than urban areas (or more-populated areas). In some cases, especially in rural areas, the shortage in the workforce resulted in the closing down of facilities. To resolve the issue, employers have intensified their efforts to attract students, former local residents, and other potential entrants in the labour market, but the market has not shown a remarkable response.

Figure 1.1: Percentage Share of Facilities with a Perception of Labour Shortage and Employing/planning to Employ Foreign Workers by Prefecture (2017)



LHS = left-hand scale, RHS = right-hand scale.

Note: n = 8,707.

Source: Compiled by the authors from survey data conducted by Care Work Foundation (2018).

The severe shortage is expected to worsen by 2025, when the baby boomers born in the 1950s will reach the age of 75 years old (which is termed as the '2025nen monдай' in Japan). By this time, the ratio of those aged over 75 years old (the old-old group) is expected to reach its peak. Moreover, one out of five seniors (65 years old and above) may have dementia. Both groups will need more intensive, more specialised, and more frequent long-term care services. The task, therefore, is to address not only the current shortage but also the demands of the market in the medium-term and beyond 2025.

On the other hand, despite reports and data reflecting the severity of the labour shortage and the government's efforts to solve it, there are considerable variations in the facilities' attitudes towards employing foreigners. Figure 1.1 shows the low percentage of facilities that are already employing foreigners. For all of Japan, only about 5.4% (national average) were employing foreign care workers in 2017, with only Chiba, Tochigi, Shizuoka and Gifu prefectures registering more than 10%. There are also wide variations in terms of the percentage share of facilities that have plans to employ foreigners. At the top is Ibaragi, in which 25.9% of facilities within the prefecture expressed their intention to employ foreign

care workers, as opposed to 15.9% of all facilities across the country (Figure 1.1). We can partly attribute the low rate to their hesitation due to a lack of experience dealing with foreign workers and perceived difficulties in communication and in dealing with cultural differences. These restrictive labour policies, as well as these seemingly passive attitudes of long-term care facilities, brought about the minimal number of foreigners working in the long-term care sector and the low dependence on foreigners to fill the shortage. There are no official data on the number of foreign care workers, but Kakuta (2017) estimated that there are only a total of 3,500 foreigners in this sector, with 42% of them born in the Philippines.

1.2. Pathways for foreign care workers

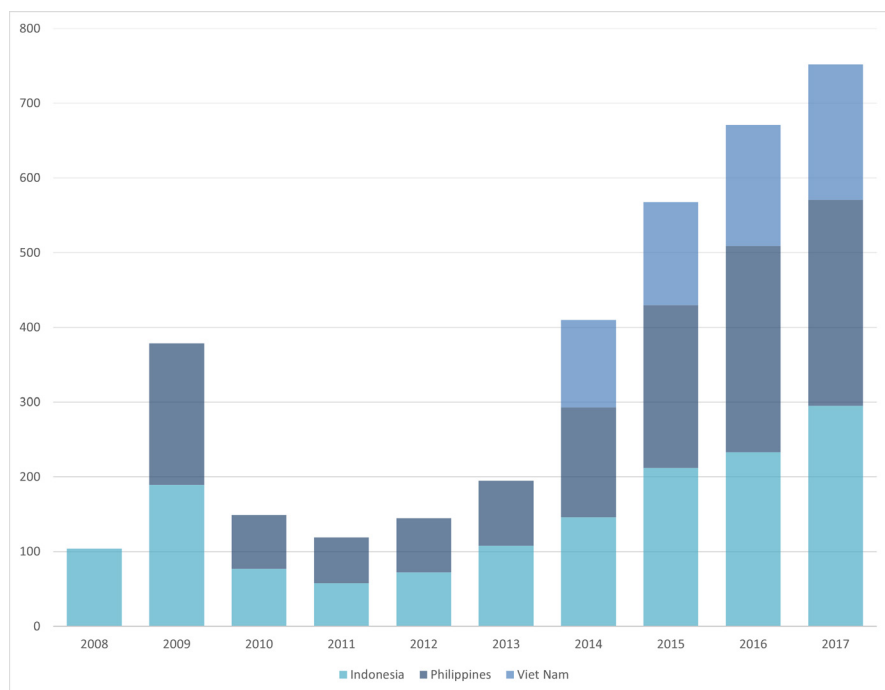
At the policy level, the administration has been trying to introduce and improve the paths in which foreigners can participate in the care workers' labour market. They can be categorised based on their status of stay. Until the mid-2000s, foreign care workers comprised permanent and long-term residents who held residence statuses that did not have restrictions on the type of activities or number of hours they were allowed to work. Especially for Filipino women who came to work in the country in the 1980s and 1990s and are now married to Japanese, care work has become not only a source of living but also provides a sense of self-worth and belongingness in the Japanese society (for details, see, for example, Carlos (2005; 2010).

Meanwhile, in 2008, the first batch of certified care worker candidates from Indonesia arrived under a bilateral agreement (EPA). They are considered 'candidates' because they do not possess a Japanese national license for care workers. Initially, the candidates obtain the visa for 'specific activities' which is valid for four years. During this period, they work in a long-term care facility while preparing for the licensure examination. They can take it only after completing a 3-year training as a care worker in Japan. Passing it will entitle them to work as a full-time certified care worker, but if they fail after their second attempt, they have to return to their home country. Aside from Indonesia, the Philippines (since 2009) and Viet Nam (since 2014) also deploy its graduates of nursing or caregiver courses under the scheme.

The EPA programme for nurse and caregiver 'candidates' was officially designed to promote bilateral economic cooperation between Japan and the three countries mentioned above, but stakeholders of this programme seem to have the common

presumption or belief that the programme was developed to alleviate the labour shortage. Now in its tenth year, the scheme does not seem to contribute considerably in alleviating the shortage through the employment of foreign care workers. This is partly due to the setting of a quota of 300 people per year per sending country, which is small considering the growing labour demand. The major reason, especially during the first few years of the scheme's implementation, was the high cost and lack of manpower to manage the programme on the ground. The Japan International Corporation of Welfare Services (JICWELS) (2018) reported that until FY2017, a total of 3,529 candidate care workers arrived, and 781 are scheduled to arrive in FY2018. The detailed annual number of arrivals from 2008 to 2017, as shown in Figure 1.2, reveals a sudden and significant decline during the first half, then an increasing trend in the last five years of its implementation. The recovery was the result of amendments in the scheme around 2013–2014, such as, for example, strengthening the Japanese language training programme and increasing the amount and kinds of subsidies extended to the host facilities. JICWELS also periodically conducts hearings with the candidates and the facilities to identify and address problems on the ground.

**Figure 1.2: Arrivals of Certified Care Worker Candidates under the EPA
(FY2008–2017, per country)**



Note: The fiscal year (FY) begins in April and ends in March of the following year. It also coincides with the academic year.

Source: Compiled by the authors from JICWELS website.

On the labour supply-side, while the scheme has been gaining more popularity amongst long-term care facilities, the number of foreign applicants has been on the decline every year, even sometimes less than the number of slots offered by long-term care facilities. For example, in the case of the Philippines, during the first matching in 2009, there were more than 5,000 applicants. However, for the 2018 matching (pairing), the number went down to 511. On the other hand, the number of offers from employers went up to 643 workers, and eventually there were only 288 successful matches in the same year (JICWELS, 2018).

High attrition and low retention rates are also a source of concern. As of March 2017, a cumulative total of only 506⁶ passed the licensure examination (JICWELS, 2018). Out of those who passed, a considerable number had already quit their job, either to return to their home country or work in another destination. In fact, of the 355 who passed until January 2016, 105 have already left Japan (MHLW, 2017). Some who chose to work in other destinations expressed their concern about the long time they would need to wait to obtain permanent residency and to bring their families to Japan. Another issue was regarding the absence of a career path from certified care worker to registered nurse. Under the current system in Japan, the Filipino care workers who are nursing graduates in their home country do not qualify to take the nursing license examination in Japan.

One issue from the point of view of long-term care facilities is the list of strict requirements imposed on employers in terms of the number of EPA workers that can be recruited, the composition and number of staff (for example, the percentage of certified care workers employed in a facility), and the type of setting. The scheme may also not be sustainable because of the high cost of training, which is jointly borne by the Japanese government and the long-term care facilities, and also the lack of teachers, staff, and resources to be supplied by the facilities that are necessary for the training and exam preparations of the candidates. As a result, there was a high concentration of EPA workers employed by large groups of facilities in Kanagawa, Okayama, Aichi, Osaka, Chiba, and Tokyo. About 45% of the Filipinos were also deployed to these areas (Kubota, 2019). Facilities belonging to the same welfare organisation hire candidates who gather once or twice a week for group language studies or exam reviews.

⁶ The figure is the total of candidates from Indonesia and the Philippines.

Another attempt to increase the supply of foreign workers was the revision of the TITP in 2017 to include care work. The requirements are an N4⁷ Japanese language proficiency and some experience in care work (in the case of the Philippines, a nursing degree or caregiving National Competency II (NCII)⁸ course) from designated developing countries (Philippines, Viet Nam, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, and Indonesia, amongst others). The employers usually provide the trainees with language lessons and on-the-job training without formally enrolling them in vocational or language schools. Based on the recent revision, the trainees are allowed to stay and work in Japan beyond three years, up to five years and extendable under some conditions.

1.3. The care work student (*kaigoryugaku*) scheme

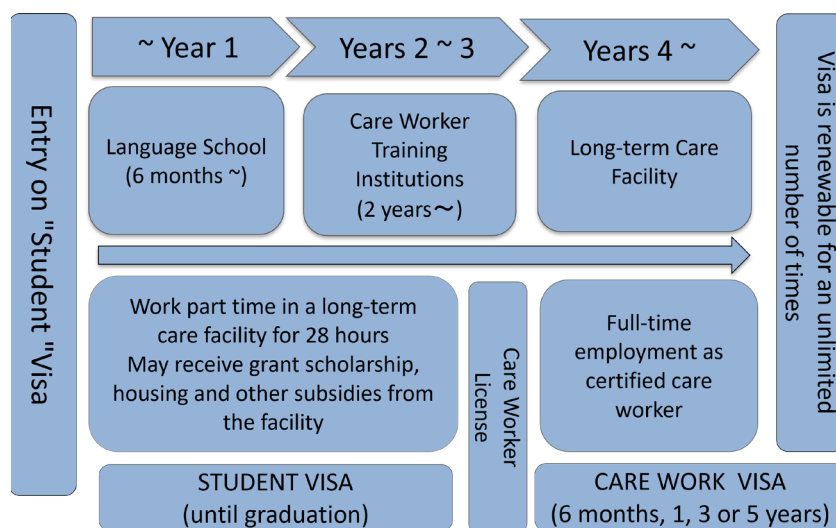
a) The scheme

The care work student pathway resulted from the creation of the 'care work' visa category in the revised Immigration Law (2017). Foreigners who have graduated from a 2-year course offered by care worker training institutions in Japan are eligible to apply to the scheme. Moreover, as an interim provision, students who graduate by March 2022 are automatically given a certified care worker license, even without passing the licensure examination, as long as the person works in a long-term care facility for five consecutive years. The duration of the visa is a minimum of one year and a maximum of five years; however, there is no limit in the number of times the visa can be renewed. The care work visa also allows its holder to bring their family to Japan. This development paved the way for the active recruitment of foreigners as students of care work (*kaigoryugakusei*).

⁷ Under the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), non-native speakers of Japanese are evaluated and certified based on five levels of proficiency, the easiest of which is N5, followed by N4, N3, N2, and the most difficult level, N1.

⁸ In the Philippines, the Caregiving National Competency II (Caregiving NCII) is a 6-month technical-vocational course that trains workers in the Philippines in the provision of care and support for children, elderly and people with special needs. For details, please refer to the website of Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) (<http://www.tesda.gov.ph>).

Figure 1.3: The Care Work Student Scheme



Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) (2018).

How a foreigner can become a certified care worker via the student pathway is shown in Figure 1.3. The person has to comply with the usual requirements to obtain a student visa, such as proof of acceptance from the learning institution (a university, training institution, or language school)⁹ and a certificate from a guarantor in Japan. This visa is valid for the duration of the course in which the person is enrolled. In the case of students of Japanese language schools, the visa is valid for at least six months, and for care worker training institutions (*senmongakko* or a college), the visa is valid for two years. In many cases, the long-term care facility acts as guarantor.

To enter a care worker training institution, the student has to have an N2 language proficiency level (see footnote 6 above) or be enrolled for at least eight months in a Japanese language school in Japan. The second option is common amongst Filipino students. Language schools and care worker training institutions charge almost the same amount of tuition fees, about ¥800,000–¥850,000 yen (about US\$7,200–US\$7,700) per year, although students have to pay more to the latter because of the related fees for practicum and for the use of facilities and learning materials. A student is allowed to work for a maximum of 28 hours per week during school term and eight hours a day during school holidays, usually in the sponsoring long-term care facilities.

⁹ Universities and training institutions set their own Japanese language proficiency entry requirement, which is usually N2 or N3.

This scheme is quite similar to the programme for caregivers offered in Canada. However, the Canadian arrangement (as of 2016) provides a faster route to working full time and obtaining permanent residency than the Japan version (as described in Nourpanah (2019)). The caregiver/aged care programme requires only seven months (minimum) of study. The student is allowed to work 20 hours per week during the term and unlimited hours during school break. After completion of the program, the student is given a temporary working visa, the validity of which will be equal to the length of the full-time study in Canada. This visa is 'open', which means that it is not tied to any employer or type of job, but the easiest job to find is as Personal Support Worker. Once the graduates have their temporary work permit, they can apply for permanent residency depending on their skill level, province of employment, and hours worked. If their temporary work permit expires while waiting for the approval of their permanent residency application, they can apply for the 'bridging work permit'.

Moreover, there is also a difference in the career pathway for care work students who are nursing graduates in their home country. In Canada, they are allowed to take further studies and testing to become a registered nurse once granted permanent residency. On the other hand, in the case of Japan, currently, it is difficult for an overseas-educated nurse, especially from the Philippines, who has taken the care worker pathway (either via EPA or student) to take the nursing licensure examination in Japan, because they cannot fulfil some requirements on nursing practicum and other subjects (with the exception of candidate nurses under the EPA).

In contrast to Japan and Canada, currently, student visas for care workers cannot be converted to working visas in Australia and New Zealand. After graduation from a course in Aged Care (Certificate in Aged Care Level 3 or Level 4), students need to return to their home country unless they obtain a visa based on other merits, such as family petition or marriage. The reason is that these countries do not classify care work as a sector with a skill shortage. Currently, the primary sources of foreign labour in the long-term care sector in these countries are permanent residents or dependents of nationals or permanent residents who can easily find work even without training or licenses in care work or aged care.

In these countries, international students who hold a nursing degree overseas can work temporarily in a long-term care facility while working on their nursing bridging or adaptation course or, sometimes, a college nursing degree. Once they complete the

course and become registered, they can function as a registered nurse and convert their visa into 'skilled migration' or 'employer sponsorship' visas, and later into permanent residency. They are free to change employer anytime so many leave care homes to work in hospitals (Carlos and Ozanne, 2019).

b) Trends in the enrolment of international students in care work

Since discussions about the creation of the new 'care work' visa category began in around 2014 in Japan, the care worker training institutions have been experiencing a remarkable increase in the enrolment of international students. In Table 1.1, we can see that the number of students reached 1,142 in FY2018, more than 67 times as many as the figure for FY2014. On the other hand, the number of Japanese students was continuously on the decline in the same period. In FY2018, international students comprised about 17% of the total student population. Such a dramatic increase in the number of international students contributed positively to the survival of these institutions where a trend of continually decreasing enrolment has been detected. In FY2018, only 44.2% of the total admission quota was filled, prompting some institutions to close down. The number of institutions

Table 1.1: Trends in the Number of Students Admitted in Care Worker Training Institutions (FY2014–2018)

Fiscal year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of training institutions	406	379	401	396	386
Admission quota	18,041	17,769	16,704	15,891	15,506
- (%) of quota filled	57.5%	50.0%	46.4%	45.7%	44.2%
Actual admission (total)	10,392	8,884	7,752	7,258	6,856
- number of international students	17	94	257	591	1,142
- as (%) of total	0.2%	1.1%	3.3%	8.1%	16.6%

Note: The fiscal year begins in April and ends in March of the following year. It also coincides with the academic year.
Source: Compiled from Japan Association of Training Institutions for Certified Care Workers (2018).

decreased from 406 in 2014 to 386 in FY2018.

The nationalities of students have also become more diverse. Based on data from the Japan Association of Training Institutions for Certified Care Workers (2018), students from Viet Nam and China registered the most significant number of care work students (Table 1.2). In recent years, however, the number of students from countries such as Nepal (95), Indonesia (70), and the Philippines (68), the sending countries of care workers, has also been on the rise (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Number of International Students Enrolled in Care Worker Training Institutions per Country of Origin (FY2013–2018)

Fiscal Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Viet Nam	2	2	39	114	364	542
China	11	12	27	53	74	167
Nepal	1	0	15	35	40	95
Philippines	0	1	0	28	35	68
Republic of Korea	2	0	2	3	23	31
Myanmar	0	0	6	5	10	34
Sri Lanka	0	0	1	2	1	47
Indonesia	0	0	0	0	4	70
Others	5	2	4	17	40	88
Total	21	17	94	257	591	1142

Note: The fiscal year begins in April and ends in March of the following year. It also coincides with the academic year.
Source: Compiled from the Japan Association of Training Institutions for Certified Care Workers (2018).

This number of enrollees in training institutions, however, is expected to increase in the next few years as more potential care work students now enrolled in Japanese language schools achieve the required language proficiency level to enter training institutions. Indeed, there has been a substantial increase in students from current and potential (targeted) care worker-sending countries, such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Viet Nam, and Myanmar, enrolled in Japanese language schools as shown in Table 1.3.¹⁰ Lastly, Table 1.3 also shows that the number of students from Viet Nam in Japanese language schools has already exceeded that of the students from China. This trend is expected to continue as Japanese private nursing homes and local governments, such as Chiba Prefecture, Saitama Prefecture, and Yokohama City actively recruit care work students in Viet Nam.

¹⁰ Currently, in the case of students from Nepal and Sri Lanka, few are engaged in care work; many of them work as part-time staff in convenience stores, packed lunch (obento) factories, and hotel cleaning services.

Table 1.3: Number of International Students Enrolled in Japanese Language Schools (FY2013–2018)

Fiscal Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
China*	18,250	16,118	17,655	19,248	20,166	16,922
Viet Nam	8,436	13,758	15,715	17,334	14,761	14,440
Nepal	3,095	4,779	6,301	3,973	3,372	3,537
Republic of Korea	2,386	2,081	2,041	1,763	1,696	1,545
Taiwan	1,425	1,837	2,070	1,970	1,951	1,786
Myanmar	414	520	1,067	1,390	1,343	1,257
Indonesia	386	485	594	753	842	835
Sri Lanka	346	619	1,102	1,536	2,146	1,976
Others	310	3,470	4,302	4,311	4,436	4,487
Philippines	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	583	535
Total	37,918	43,667	50,847	52,278	50,892	47,320

Note: The fiscal year begins in April and ends in March of the following year. It also coincides with the academic year.
Source: Compiled from Japan Student Services Association (2018).

* Excluding Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan for statistical reasons.

c) Regulation of the scheme

In the case of the EPA, the Japan International Corporation of Welfare Services (JICWELS) is designated to be the sole agency that can recruit candidate care workers, in collaboration with the sending country's exclusive government agency appointed to screen applicants. This agency was established under the sanctions of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) to implement the Japanese government's technical cooperation projects with developing countries, especially in Southeast Asia. Aside from recruitment and matching, it also conducts on-site inspections of host long-term care facilities and implements support services for candidate care workers, such as language training and reviews for the licensure examination.

On the other hand, for technical intern trainees, the government entrusts the actual recruitment and management of trainees to the supervising or implementing organisations,

which are in turn monitored by the Organization for Technical Intern Training (OTIT). The OTIT was established by the MHLW in 2017 to take on the following responsibilities: accreditation of technical intern training plans, primary screening of the applications for the licenses of supervising organisations, receipt of notifications of implementing organisations, evaluation of reports from supervising or implementing organisations, as well as onsite inspections and support and protection for technical intern trainees (OTIT website, n.d.).

Unlike the EPA and TITP, the care work student scheme is not comprehensively regulated by any single national agency in Japan. Instead, three national agencies (ministries) are involved. For the issuance of a student visa, the applicant must go through screening by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) Immigration Bureau. The MOJ also monitors the number of hours (maximum of 28 hours per week) that students work, and imposes sanctions (such as the non-renewal of student visas or non-conversion of visas from 'study' to 'care work') on those who violate the regulations. On the other hand, Japanese language schools are under the supervision of the Association for the Promotion of Japanese Language Education, an incorporated foundation established with the approval and under the guidance and assistance of the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports (MEXT), the MOJ, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). Finally, the MHLW accredits care work training institutions and spearheads the creation of foreign care worker schemes in response to labour market demands and the needs of the long-term care sector. In the case of the Philippines as the sending country, since people are deployed as students and not as workers, they do not go through the procedure prescribed and required of overseas workers by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration.

Rather than the national government, the LGUs seem to play (or are expected to play) a vital role in the scheme. According to documents published by the MHLW in January 2018, the LGUs are expected to provide support to Japan-based stakeholders and students through a matching support entity, such as a council (*kyogikai*). The council, comprising of representatives from long-term care facilities, care worker training institutions, the certified care workers' association, and other private stakeholders under its jurisdiction, is delegated to gather and share information. The council is also expected to organise and coordinate orientation programmes for stakeholders. However, there are no specific provisions on whether its role can go beyond these liaison and promotional activities to cover monitoring, policing, and regulating the scheme, which, in the absence of a national agency, is deemed crucial for the success and sustainability of the care work student scheme.

d) Intermediaries in the care work student scheme

Another striking difference between the student scheme and the EPA scheme is the channel in which foreign workers are matched and recruited. As mentioned above, unlike in EPA in which only one government agency in each country (Japan and the sending country) is designated to undertake the matching and recruitment of potential care workers, private organisations become the primary facilitators of recruitment or 'intermediaries' of the care work student scheme.

Within the context of Japan's care work student scheme, we use the term 'intermediaries' to connote the private institutions (stakeholders) that are involved in the recruitment of care work students to Japan. They include the language schools, care work training facilities, long-term care facilities and foundations based in Japan, universities and colleges in the sending countries, and also the student/labour recruitment or manpower agencies and informal agents (individuals such as relatives, friends) in both countries.

These intermediaries are diverse in many aspects. First, there are intermediaries based in the sending country, or Japan, or in both countries (when a Japanese intermediary sets a branch or office in the sending country). They also vary in terms of their goals; long-term care facilities' main goal is to secure the labour force, which is rising sharply in demand, while for care worker training institutions in Japan, one of the major motives is to meet its admission quota. The goal of commercial student placement or manpower/recruitment agencies is primarily to gain profits from facilitating the mobility of students. Foundations offering free language training and schooling declare that their aim is to promote good relations between the two countries and contribute to the economic development of the sending country.

Some intermediaries recruit exclusively and directly for their own company or organisation's member facilities or schools, while some offer their services even outside their own, like in the case of a manpower agency. Finally, the intermediaries provide a broad scope of services; an intermediary may engage in recruitment only; while others deal with recruitment and training or education, or, in another case, recruitment, training, and employment. They also vary based on the tools that they use in recruitment, via word of mouth, social media or direct interaction with the students.

The role of private intermediaries is vital in the care work student scheme in the absence of a government intermediary. The Japanese market for foreign care work students is new; thus, reliable information about the conditions in both the supply and the demand sides is scarce. There are also limits and delays in accessing market information by the facilities and students because of language difficulties. In the international labour market, vast geographical distances separate sellers from buyers. In such cases, working with local intermediaries and forming a network of vertical and horizontal chains covering both countries amongst intermediaries make recruitment faster and more efficient. In the absence of government regulation regarding accreditation and guidelines on what organisations or institutions are allowed to act as intermediaries, there has been a mushrooming of such intermediaries.

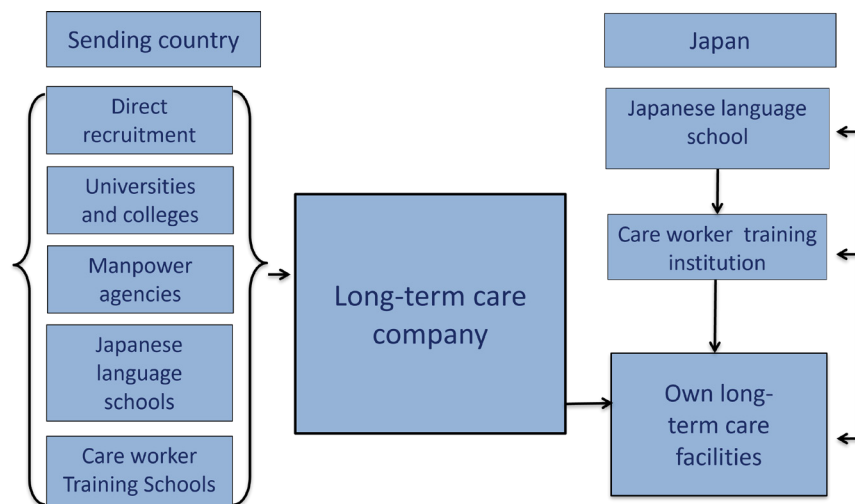
1.4. The intermediaries of the care work student scheme

In this section, we look more closely at how these intermediaries operate and collaborate to facilitate the mobility, work, and study of care workers from the Philippines. We gathered information through interviews with the managers of intermediaries and also from official websites. We also conducted interviews with Filipino students currently studying in a language school or training facility.

a) Long-term care facilities

Company Y, which owns numerous long-term care facilities in Western Japan, is one of the pioneers in bringing in foreign care workers to Japan as students. It started sponsoring five nursing graduates 10 years ago (enrolled first in a language school, then later in a care worker training school), the same year when the first group of candidate care workers under the EPA arrived from the Philippines. The company maintains a global human resources section and looks after care work students from the Philippines and Viet Nam, many of whom are still enrolled in a Japanese language school. Its staff periodically visits other intermediaries, such as Japanese language schools, manpower agencies, care work training schools, universities, and so on in the sending countries. The company also works closely with intermediaries in Japan, such as language schools, care worker training schools, and the local social welfare council, which extends its support through financial subsidies.

Figure 1.4: Recruitment Pattern of Company Y (an example)



Source: Compiled by the authors.

Figure 1.4 shows an example of how student recruitment is carried out in collaboration with a local manpower agency in the Philippines. The agency keeps a pool of potential care work students to whom they teach the Japanese language for a fee. Company Y visits the agency's branches to conduct the screening of documents, interview potential applicants, and give orientations about the company and explain the study-work scheme. The records of those who passed the testing are then brought back to Japan and processed at the Immigration Bureau for the issuance of the 'Certificate of Eligibility'. A letter of guarantee signed by the representative of the facility or the company and proof of an offer of admission (obtained from a collaborating Japanese language school or care worker training school) are also submitted. The certificate, once released, is sent to the manpower agency, which in turn submits it to the Japanese Embassy or Consulate for the application of the student visa. The agency also makes the students' travel arrangements. Company Y and the student jointly shoulder the service fees charged by the agency and other incidental and processing fees.

Company Y provides students with a part-time job in one of its facilities for a maximum of 28 hours a week. They are paid by the hour with a rate higher than the minimum wage. The company also provides subsidised furnished housing and utilities (water and electricity) and supplies them with a WiFi modem for free. Students also receive free commuting passes between the residence, the school, and the facility. They gather several times a year to participate in an orientation about Japan's way of life and culture, care

work, and also about the company. While in the language school, students have to pay for their tuition fees, but if they are accepted into a care worker training college, the company pays for their tuition fees, either partially or in full. The students do not need to pay back the tuition fees if they work in one of the company's branches full-time for five years after graduation.

b) Foundations (general incorporated associations)

General incorporated associations also act as intermediaries in the case of students from the Philippines.¹¹ One example is that of a foundation initiated by a president of a group of long-term care facilities and a care worker training school. Its members, many of them long-term care facilities, pay an annual membership fee to avail of the services of the foundation, such as conducting seminars and providing advice in training and employing foreign workers. It also organises Philippine study tours aimed at expanding networks with local intermediaries (such as high schools, Japanese language schools, universities, care worker training schools) and promoting (advertising) the long-term facilities that the tour participants from Japan are affiliated with.

Together with local Philippine partners, the foundation opened a Japanese language school in the Philippines. The students, all of them nursing graduates, studied on a full-time basis. They also get free tuition, housing, and a stipend. Of the members of the first batch, three were chosen based on their performance in school and on language and were sent to Japan to enrol in a Japanese language school. Two who achieved C-level in the Test of Practical Japanese¹² were allowed to enter a care worker training school and are expected to graduate in March 2019.

In Japan, one of the association's member facilities became the sponsor of the two students, providing free tuition fee, subsidised housing and a monthly allowance. The students may choose to work part-time for up to 28 hours a week. After graduation, they will be employed full time by the same facility, and, based on verbal agreement, they are expected to work there for three years.

¹¹ A general incorporated association (ippan shadan houjin) in Japan is an entity whose activities and legal standing are quite similar to a foundation or non-governmental organisation.

¹² Commonly known as the J-Test, C-level is roughly equivalent to N2 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test).

c) Japanese language schools

The role of Japanese language schools is crucial in the care work student scheme because in most cases, international students do not have the Japanese language proficiency level to enter a care worker training institute. In the case of School N, which has a Japanese language department and a care worker training department, it not only actively recruits and educates international students but also matches the students with their future (after graduation) employers that in turn provide them with a tied scholarship.

The programme works as follows: students, usually those who already have nursing education, are recruited from the school's own or affiliated language schools in the sending country. In Indonesia, the school has an arrangement with local universities and colleges to introduce the programme to their graduates and it maintains an office in two universities to handle inquiries about studying and working in Japan. In the case of the Philippines, it accepts students through a manpower agency that also owns a language school where applicants (usually graduates of nursing) learn basic Japanese.

The language school looks after the students, from opening a bank account to applying for the residency permit card, settling in the school dormitory, and securing a part-time job in a nearby facility. A few months before their graduation from the language course, the school organises an event in which students undergo matching or pairing with long-term care facilities that are willing to sponsor their care work education and employ them full-time after graduation. Students decide based on the salary and working conditions, the location (prefecture and city), and work setting (long-term care, disabled or rehabilitation). While students are enrolled in the school's own care worker training department, they are encouraged to work part-time in the sponsoring facility during school breaks and during practicum (when possible). Now in its third year, the matching programme has attracted facilities from all over Japan.

d) Manpower agency in the sending country

Manpower Agency M is one of the most popular local intermediaries for care work students in the Philippines. It was established as a sending organisation for technical intern trainees to Japan and has now expanded its business to Japanese language training, Japanese-English language translation and interpretation services, business consultations and development, Philippines and Japan visa assistance, and Japan study-work-live (Japan

Student, Japanese Language Training and Japan Caregiver) programmes. In addition to care work, this agency recruits Filipinos as technical trainees and interns for the hospitality (hotels) sector. This agency, which maintains offices in Manila, Davao, and Cebu, has affiliations with technical intern trainees' accepting organisations, consulting and referral agencies, manpower and outsourcing companies, and vocational and Japanese language schools in Japan. In the case of care work students, the graduates of medical- and health-related courses, such as nursing, are preferred. The agency offers them free Japanese lessons and processing of documents, and also a 'fly-now, pay-later' package for those who cannot afford to pay for the pre-departure expenses.

The manpower agency usually conducts recruitment activities through social networking services, particularly Facebook, through its website and by word-of-mouth. The typical process that potential students undergo is as follows: First, those interested are invited to attend a one-day career orientation programme to familiarise themselves with the available pathways to Japan, the requirements, as well as the estimated time and costs for deployment. Those who decide to avail of the agency's services are then required to enrol in the Japanese language and cultural training. This programme, which is registered with the Philippine Technical and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), takes three months full-time to complete and costs approximately US\$300. The student pays for the language and culture programme fees, assistance in the processing of documents, one-way airfare, and other necessary expenses for deployment to Japan. The manpower agency also charges the language school or the long-term care facility that sponsors the student in Japan with recruitment fees.

1.5. The care work students' perspective

Private stakeholders, both in Japan and the sending countries welcomed the launching of the care work student scheme. Even before the passing of the bill, intermediaries had already begun recruiting potential students through social media and TV advertisements and were offering Japanese language lessons. The students' responses have also been overwhelming as they entertain high hopes of being able to work in Japan after their studies.

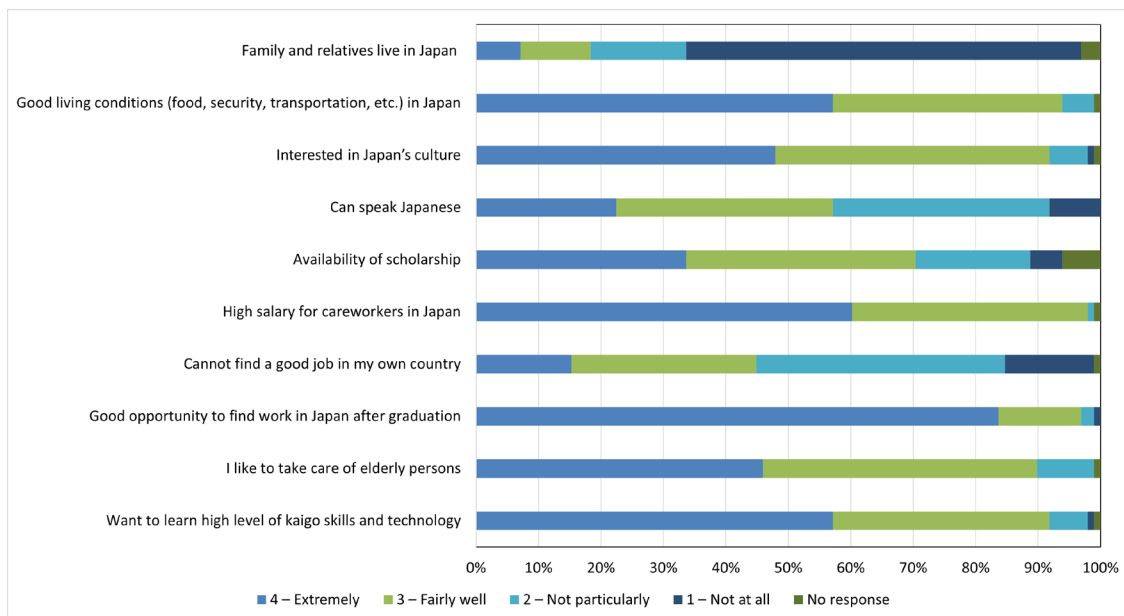
In order to capture the current conditions and perceptions of the care work students from the Philippines, we implemented a survey in September 2018 during an orientation seminar for care work students in Western Japan. In the survey, we asked questions

regarding their educational and employment background, motivations to study in Japan, current concerns regarding their life and study, perceptions on being part-time care workers, and their future plans. Here, we present the partial results of the initial survey of 98 respondents, 84.7% of whom are female; 88.7% are aged between 25 and 34 years old, and 86.7% are unmarried. Regarding their educational background, 58.2% have a Philippine nursing license, and 67.3% are graduates of a four-year Bachelor of Nursing degree in the Philippines. Since the scheme has just been implemented recently, many (94.8%) of those who answered the survey arrived in Japan between February 2017 and August 2018.

a) Motivations to study in Japan

Figure 1.5 presents the responses of the students when asked the question, 'To what extent do the following reasons for studying *kaigo* in Japan match your own?' When the percentage of those who answered 'extremely' and 'fairly well' were added, economic-related reasons, 'high salary for care workers in Japan' (98.0%) and 'good opportunity to find work in Japan after graduation' (96.9%), topped the list. Many Japanese consider care work as a low-paying job, but the respondents did not think so, probably because they were comparing it with other countries or regions, such as Taiwan and Singapore, where nursing aides and live-in caregivers receive less. It could also be because of their perception that salaries in Japan, in general, are much higher than in the Philippines. Coming to Japan as students is part of the respondents' 'migration project' with the goal of getting hired in Japan in the future.

Figure 1.5: Motivations to Study Care Work in Japan (n = 98)



Note: Answers to the question: 'To what extent do the following reasons for studying *kaigo* in Japan match your own? (1 – Not at all, 2 – Not particularly, 3 – Fairly well, 4 – Extremely).

Source: Authors' calculations from survey data (2018).

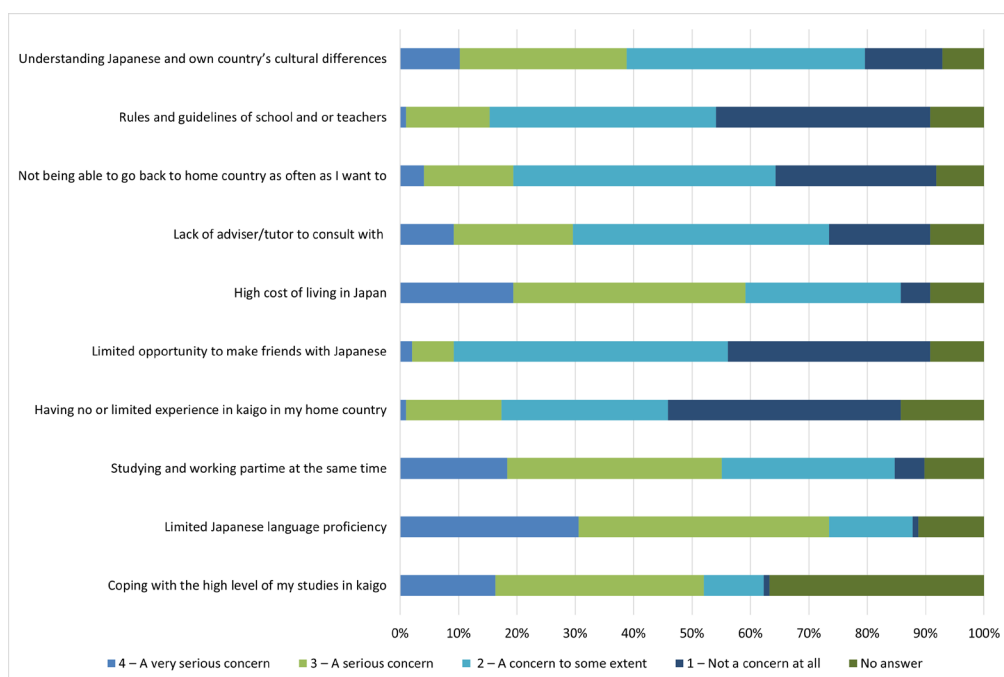
The quality of life in Japan is also one of the strong motivations for the care work students. One student interviewed said that she appreciated the convenience of trains, feeling safe walking the streets even at night, and also the freshness and wide variety of food choices. Many students also expressed a liking for Japanese food. They seemed to enjoy being immersed in the Japanese culture. One interesting result from our survey is that 91.8% of the respondents (some of those who answered 'extremely' and 'fairly well') feel that their interest in the Japanese culture (especially popular culture, such as manga and cosplay) favourably influenced their decision to come to Japan. In contrast to this, previous similar surveys implemented amongst Filipino professional nurses, care workers and nursing students (see, for example, Carlos (2013:15) and Nakai, Goto, and Carlos (2008)), interest towards Japanese culture did not appear to have a strong influence in the respondents' decision making. Our result indicates how Japan has been gaining success in promoting its culture in Asia and how 'soft culture' can be utilised to attract young foreign workers to the country.

Finally, more than half (57.1%) of the respondents answered that being able to speak Japanese motivated them 'extremely' or 'fairly well' to come to Japan. The students' desire to learn the Japanese language is proof of their interest in Japanese culture. Moreover, they also felt an advantage in knowing the language, especially when going back to the Philippines. They thought they could easily find good-paying jobs in call centres that handle Japanese customer services and as bilingual staff for Japanese-owned companies.

b) Concerns and issues as care work students

In the survey, we also asked the students about several foreign care workers' concerns and issues. The replies ranged from 'not a concern at all' to 'a very serious concern'. Capturing which concerns affected them the most will allow policymakers and stakeholders to address the concerns in an effective and timely manner. Figure 1.6 shows our results.

Figure 1.6: Issues and Concerns of Care Work Students (n = 98)



Note: Answers to the question: To what extent do you consider the following as your concern (problem/issue) as a *kaigoryugakusei* in Japan? (1 – Not a concern at all, 2 – A concern to some extent, 3 – A serious concern, 4 – A very serious concern).

Source: Authors' calculations from survey data (2018).

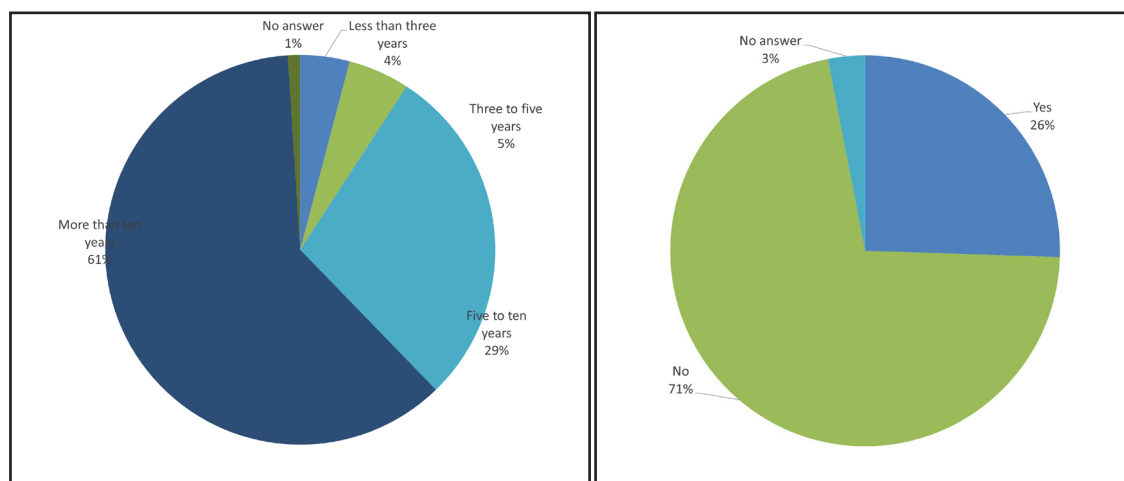
As predicted, most (73.5%) of the respondents thought that their limited Japanese language proficiency was a 'very serious' or 'serious' problem, primarily because they arrived just recently (within six months from the time of survey). They also felt anxious about how to cope with their lessons held in Japanese when they enter a care work training school. One male respondent also mentioned that he could not imagine how he could manage to do the elderly residents' documentation and charting without command of the Japanese language. Indeed, the language problem has been a long-standing issue for all Filipino care workers, regardless of the pathway through which they joined the Japanese labour market.

The high cost of living, studying, and working (part-time) at the same time, and coping with the high level of their studies in care work were also important issues for the respondents. Given their limited number of hours to work part-time and the many expenses they need to pay, such as their tuition fees and housing and daily needs, many of the language school students said they find it hard to make ends meet. It also emerged from informal interviews that many of them remit money to their families back home to support them and pay off some loans they contracted to finance coming to Japan.

c) Future plans

As mentioned above, one of the main issues in the EPA is the high attrition rate, even in the case of those who have already obtained the license. Considering that the severe labour shortage is an issue that is expected to haunt Japan for quite some time, and the time and the cost of training care workers, it is ideal that the students remain in Japan for long. To inquire about how care work students think about their future, we asked how long they aspire to work in Japan for and their desire to work in another destination. The survey shows that 61.2% want to work in Japan for at least 10 years. Furthermore, 28.6% plan to stay in Japan between 5 and 10 years (see Figure 1.7). One reason for this trend is the number of years, usually three to five, that is required by the sponsoring facility to write off their student loans. One respondent also mentioned that she plans to stay for at least five years so that she can apply for permanent residency and bring her family to Japan.

Figure 1.7 (a) Planned Duration of Working in Japan (left) and (b) Plan to Work in Other Countries (after Japan) (right)



Note: Answers to the question: (a) After you graduate and obtain the license, how long do you plan to work as care worker in Japan? (b) Do you have any future plans to work in other countries (after Japan)?

Source: Authors' calculations from survey data (2018).

Within the context of the culture of migration and unpredictable and ambiguous foreign worker policies in popular destinations, it is common for an immigrant to work from one transit destination to another until that person reaches the most desired or the final destination (for details, see Carlos (2013)). When we asked the students if they have plans to work in another destination (after Japan), three out of four answered in the negative. The reasons that the respondents gave were geographical proximity between the Philippines and Japan, their fondness of Japanese culture and way of life, and the availability of a secure job when they graduate. These findings imply that the care work student scheme can be a potential long-term solution to the labour shortage as long as their concerns are addressed.

1.6. Summary and policy suggestions

In this report, we introduced the care work student scheme formalised in 2017 as one pathway for foreign care workers in Japan. Under the scheme, they must enrol in a care worker training institution in Japan for two years. During that time, they are permitted to work for 28 hours, usually in a long-term care facility that sponsors their study and stay in the country. Upon graduation and passing of the national licensure examination (with a special exemption for those who graduate by March 2022), they obtain the 'certified care worker' license. They then convert their student visa into 'care work', which allows them to work full time, usually in the same (sponsoring) facility. The visa is initially valid for a maximum of five years and is renewable.

This scheme is the second formal pathway for foreign care workers in Japan. The first was the EPA scheme in which candidate care workers from Indonesia (since 2008), the Philippines (since 2009), and Viet Nam (since 2015) are recruited to Japan to work in a long-term care facility for three years, after which they are allowed to take the national licensure examination. Passing the test will entitle them to stay in Japan to work, otherwise (in principle), they must return to the home country. The third scheme is the technical internship scheme in which foreigners are trained to become care workers on the condition that they return to their home country to share what they learned in Japan.

One of the most striking differences between these schemes lies in the roles that the national and LGUs assume in its operation and regulation. First, JICWELS in the case of EPA, and OTIT in the case of TITP, are entrusted by the Japanese government to comprehensively implement the rules and regulations and monitor the respective schemes. In the case of care work students, there is no single public entity with such roles. Second, while matching and recruitment in EPA are done solely by the agencies representing the governments of Japan and the sending country, in the care work student scheme, these tasks are left to various intermediaries from the private sector. In this report, we introduced several intermediaries and explained how they collaborate to bridge the students who are eager to work in Japan and the schools and long-term care facilities that are keen to admit or hire them.

Currently, the scheme is mostly private-led, with many intermediaries from the private sector forming networks to facilitate their recruitment, training, and employment. From our interviews, it appeared that many Japanese stakeholders prefer this scheme over the EPA or TITP because the graduates are systematically and intensively trained in the Japanese way of care work in a *formal* school setting. They can also obtain a better command of the Japanese language, including technical terms.¹³ While it takes two years before they can work full time, being students not only enables them to acquire the skills but also provides them with a good and comprehensive understanding of the long-term care insurance system and Japanese laws, opportunities to learn the Japanese way of doing things, and understanding of the language and culture, giving them more confidence in their work. The students interviewed did not feel uneasy with the obligation to work full-time for three

¹³ During our fieldwork, some EPA candidates pointed out their concerns with regards to the way they learn the language and care work skills because of lack of time (they have to study and work at the same time) and non-cooperative host institutions.

to five years after graduation in exchange for a scholarship from a facility. They were even happy that they would have an employer after graduation. These observations from the private stakeholders suggest that this pathway may gain more popularity in the future. In our initial preliminary findings regarding the perceptions of care work students from the Philippines, we found that they are attracted not only with the economic rewards but also by the good quality of life and popular culture of Japan. Many also expressed their intention to remain in Japan as candidates for more than five years. As students, they are most concerned with their Japanese language proficiency and the high cost of living. These suggest that the scheme can potentially supply a stable labour force in the care work sector in the long run, as long as their concerns are properly and immediately addressed.

To further promote and sustain this scheme, we recommend that the public sector, in its various capacities, complements the efforts of the private sector. There is a need, however, to carefully examine what roles they can take on. In the case of the national government, it can establish an agency or at least assign a lead agency for which the potential functions can be the comprehensive coordination and monitoring of activities conducted at the LGU level. It can also act as the coordinating body amongst the three ministries involved in the scheme. Another possible role that this national agency can take is to support the LGUs to spearhead its activities, such as establishing a local matching support entity. Assistance is essential, particularly for smaller LGUs with a small budget and staff who have limited experience in facilitating the recruitment, looking after international students, and dealing with different cultures.

There is also a need to look at the inconsistencies that arise from the various schemes. For example, while EPA candidates are allowed more time than is normally allotted to take the written part of the licensure examination, care work students do not have the same privilege. Lately, the Japanese government also approved the 'specified skills number 1' visa, another scheme for foreign care workers. As the number of available options increases, there is a need to clearly lay out their commonalities and differences to help foreign care workers and employers decide the best option. There is also a need to examine the possibility of shifting between schemes, like, for example, in the case of a care work student or EPA candidate wanting to convert the student visa into the 'specified skill number 1' visa. A national inter-agency council can be organised to address these issues.

As mentioned above, in the care work scheme, the LGUs, rather than the national government, are expected to play a more central and active role. Currently, there have been diverse reactions from the LGUs. While some have been very active, even acting as a go-between amongst stakeholders in the sending country and Japan, there are also LGUs that do not have collaboration yet with private stakeholders within their jurisdiction. This attitude is understandable as the constituency expresses mixed reactions towards hiring foreign care workers. The extent of the labour shortage also varies amongst LGUs, and there are areas where, so far, the local labour force can fill up vacant places in care work. LGUs have their social welfare and economic priorities as well as resource limitations. In these cases, LGUs would instead take a 'wait and see' stance and organise their activities later after learning from the shortcomings, and adopting good practices from the LGUs that were involved earlier on.

The LGUs can adopt activities similar to those of other LGUs that have run pioneering programmes of collaboration with private stakeholders. In the case of Osaka Prefecture, it created a council that drafted a set of detailed guidelines for the smooth implementation of the scheme. The guidelines contain provisions about the terms of student scholarships and loan schemes (for example, who can avail of them, how they must be administered and repaid, and so on) and rules and limitations (particularly labour and immigration laws) that facilities must be aware of when employing the students as part-time care workers. Japanese stakeholders are also encouraged to exert efforts in assisting the students to lead a healthy and comfortable life in Japan, like, for example, by establishing student consultation counters and counselling and listing down important points in dealing with the cultures and religions of the sending countries. It also introduces the legal aspects, concerns, and implications in cases of recruiting as a consortium (a group of facilities and schools) and via a manpower or recruitment agency. Finally, it also contains rules to be followed in hiring former students as full-time employees after graduation in terms of, for example, drafting the employment contract, determining the salary, and so on (Osaka Prefecture Social Welfare Council, 2018). These guidelines are critical not only in the smooth operation of the scheme but also in promoting the welfare of the foreign care workers.

On the other hand, Hokkaido's Kamikawa district's case is an example of how smaller LGUs can pool their resources to promote the scheme. In December 2018, three municipalities, namely Higashikawa, Horokanai, and Takasu, allied to create the Council for Fostering Foreign Nursing Care Workers' Human Resources Development. The council, whose

members are representatives from each LGU and eight long-term care facilities within the area, will work together to assist foreign care work students. It announced that it would provide a scholarship amounting to ¥2.5 million per student that will be used to subsidise the tuition fees and cost of living from fiscal year 2019 (Nikkei News Online, 2018).

There are also cases when LGUs act as the coordinator between the local and sending countries' major stakeholders. For example, Yokohama City concluded MOUs with the LGUs of Ho Chi Minh, Danang City, and Hue Prefecture, as well as with several universities and care worker training institutions in these areas. They will collaborate in recommending and deploying students to Yokohama City. For its part, Yokohama City will coordinate with the local facilities in providing part-time jobs and, later on, full-time jobs to the students. The city will also subsidise students' tuition fees in the language and care work training schools, and also their rent while housed at a public apartment complex (Yokohama City website, 2018). Indeed, there are numerous ways and avenues that the public sector can contribute to making the scheme work. The success of the scheme does not only depend on the private sector's and the care work students' efforts but also in the way that the government sector, especially the LGU, complements and addresses their concerns. Addressing the needs of the students and protecting their welfare, both as students and workers, are also keys for their retention. Japan, being the country with the highest proportion of the elderly population and a shrinking workforce, is challenged to seek effective ways on how public–private active collaboration and coordinated support can be carried out alongside exploring alternative feasible schemes to accommodate foreign workers in the care sector.

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