

The Filipino Nurses Association in the Nordic Region

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Bridging Filipino Nurses in the Nordic Region

Internationally Educated Nurses in the Nordic Region moving to English Speaking Countries?

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The Nordic Region is best known for ranking high in the quality of life, clean air, happiness, education, health care system, democracy and freedom of speech (Finnish Meteorological Institute 2018; World Happiness Report 2021; Nordic Council of Ministers 2017). The constant high rankings of the Nordic countries in the international indices garner attention from foreigners in developing countries to seek greener pasture. Despite the consistent recognition from different international giving bodies and research organizations, the attractiveness of the international workforce for healthcare professionals remain a challenge in the region due to stringent guidelines and policies making it a barrier for highly competent foreigners to get into the labour market.

The salary in the Nordic Region for foreign nurses is considered competitive and decent in comparison to other Eastern and Western European countries. Employees are also covered under the national insurance system and are provided occupational health services from employers. Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) working and living in the Nordic countries also receive holiday compensations and enjoy paid vacations in their home countries away from the cold season.

The Filipino Nurses Association in the Nordic Region (FiNAN) frequently receives reports from private individuals, members and Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) on their intention to leave the Nordic countries or to move to other English speaking countries for several reasons. One of the most popular reasons is the **language barrier**. Although this reason is nothing new, the region needs to reflect in reviewing its language curriculum that is designed for healthcare professionals especially for nurses. Language training that does not match the needs of the recruited nurses in the workplace will affect their integration period, work interest and the ability to participate in important decisions for the welfare of the patients and the entire organization.

The **lack of a career pathway plan** for these nurses is the other reason why IENs leave the region. Although these nurses are encouraged to advance their studies, it is not properly credited upon accomplishment. There is no system recognizing the education that can benefit the workplace and no guarantee that the salary will increase unless otherwise negotiated with the current employer. This makes recruitment unsustainable.

While the region creates good policies for the welfare of its citizens, the vulnerable groups can be left behind in the decision and making process that would address their needs in health, education and labour systems. It is unfortunate that the region failed to recognize this problem for many years and it continues to lose globally competitive and highly skilful IENs that could be the solution to its nursing shortage.

The working environment plays a crucial role in the integration programme of these nurses. Proper orientation and support system will prevent the increase of attrition rates of recruited IENs in the workplace. It is vital that the workplace has a set of rules and guidelines, standard operating procedures, protocols and policies that IENs can refer to improve their decision-making while working independently as a nurse. Local nurses and nurse managers must recognize that these nurses are learning how to function and work according to the needs of the unit and organization as a whole. **Constantly blaming, criticizing the language ability and finding faults of the IENs** will discourage these nurses to stay in the workplace and thus reside to moving abroad where they are much accepted and recognized- this time in the English speaking countries.

But when is the right time to discuss? Can we afford to lose IENs and even local nurses during this pandemic period?

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