

# **Citizenship Penalty in the Global South: Highly Skilled (Non-Western) Migrants and Mobility Pathways**

## **(Executive Summary)**

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### **1. Introduction and Context**

This study investigates the labor market discrimination experienced by highly skilled Filipino nurses in the UAE, highlighting how citizenship-based disparities—coined here as the “citizenship penalty”—adversely affect their wages, career progression, and employment security. While the Gulf region hosts large numbers of migrant workers from the Global South, most research has focused on low-skilled labor migration. This article sheds light on the structural barriers facing non-Western, *highly skilled* professionals. Specifically, it explores why Filipino nurses, despite their essential healthcare contributions, encounter wage gaps and professional immobility compared to similarly qualified Western expatriates.

Beyond local labor challenges, the article also examines the phenomenon of “transit migration,” wherein many Filipino nurses view the UAE as an interim step on the way to the Global North—particularly Canada and the United States—in pursuit of better wages, recognized credentials, and potential pathways to citizenship.

### **2. Methodology**

The research adopts a **mixed methods** approach:

- A. **Quantitative Survey (N=203):** Researchers administered a structured survey capturing demographic variables (age, gender, marital status, education), wage data, and indicators of

perceived discrimination. The sample included nurses with at least a bachelor's degree and work experience in the Philippines and the UAE.

- B. **Qualitative Interviews (n=30):** Semi-structured interviews probed personal narratives, shedding light on how wage disparities, limited career mobility, and precarious residency status shape nurses' career choices and migration aspirations.
- C. **Logistic Regression Analysis:** A regression model tested key predictors of nurses' intentions to migrate further (e.g., expected salary in the West and social networks abroad). The strongest driver of out-migration proved to be **expected earnings** in Western countries—significantly higher than UAE salaries.

### 3. Key Findings

#### A. **Citizenship Penalty and Wage Disparities:**

- Filipino nurses earn substantially more in the UAE than in the Philippines; however, they still face lower pay than Western colleagues with similar qualifications. Interviews reveal that nurses attribute this gap to the entrenched nationality-based valuation of skills rather than objective performance metrics.

#### B. **Limited Career Progression and Precarious Employment:**

- Despite meeting rigorous certification requirements (often dual registration in the Philippines and the UAE), many Filipino nurses experience stalled promotions, contract uncertainty, and limited upward mobility. This precarious environment fosters a sense of professional stagnation and insecurity.

#### C. **Transit Migration to the Global North:**

- Quantitative data show that **expected salary** in places like Canada and the United States is the principal motivator for onward migration. Nurses perceive the UAE primarily as a stepping stone to accumulate experience, international credentials, and savings before seeking permanent residency and higher wages in Western nations.

#### D. **Intersecting Vulnerabilities and Coping Strategies:**

- The dual burdens of wage discrimination and uncertain residency fuel high turnover. Many nurses employ “stepwise” or “serial” migration strategies—working temporarily in the Gulf to improve their resumes before moving to North America. Others navigate these transitions through professional networks, family ties, or recruitment agencies.

## 4. Policy Implications

### A. For Gulf Host States (e.g., UAE):

- **Transparent Wage Structures:** Standardizing pay scales based on credentials and experience can mitigate nationality-based disparities.
- **Career Advancement Pathways:** Creating mentorship, leadership training, and credential-recognition programs would help retain skilled non-Western workers.
- **Residency Reforms:** Providing more secure residency tracks for skilled healthcare providers could enhance workforce stability and reduce turnover costs.

### B. For Western Destination Countries:

- **Streamlined Credential Recognition:** Bridge programs and expedited nurse-licensing processes help foreign-trained nurses integrate into local healthcare systems and advance professionally (Aiken et al., 2004).
- **Ethical Recruitment Partnerships:** Collaborating with source countries to manage the “brain drain” effects can mitigate staffing crises at home while supporting global healthcare needs (Kingma, 2006).

### C. For the Philippines (Source Country):

- **Retention Incentives:** Improving wages, workplace conditions, and career opportunities in domestic healthcare would reduce the impetus for overseas employment (Lorenzo et al., 2007).
- **Support for Returning Nurses:** Government-led reintegration programs and recognition of international certifications may encourage experienced nurses to return, strengthening the national healthcare system.

## 5. Conclusion

The article’s findings underline how citizenship-based labor market stratification in the UAE disadvantages highly skilled Filipino nurses, even as the region depends heavily on their expertise. Because local wage and career barriers persist, many of these professionals view the UAE as a mere transit node toward North America. Addressing the “citizenship penalty” thus requires policy reforms at multiple levels—ensuring equitable labor practices in the Gulf, streamlining credential recognition in Western nations, and bolstering retention strategies in the Philippines. Ultimately, more inclusive and standardized labor policies can help reduce turnover, create stable healthcare systems, and honor the vital contributions of Filipino nurses in the Global South and beyond.

## References

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