Shortbook : Accepting Foreign Nurses and Careworkers under the EPAs
(Yasuko Yamada, Center for Documentation of Refugees and Migrants Staff, August 15, 2010)

Japan started to accept nurses and careworkers from Indonesia and Philippines under the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) in 2008. As of June 2010, the numbers that had entered Japan in that framework reached about 680 Indonesians and 310 Filipinos. Among the reasons for the agreements, there was strong demand especially from the Philippines, and the issues of ageing society with fewer children and lack of careworkers were rising in Japan.

The legal requirements of entry as a nurse candidate are a nurse qualification license in the home country and having more than two or three years of work experience as a nurse. On the other hand, careworker candidate must be either graduate of nursing universities, colleges or schools, or graduate of higher education and qualified careworker in their country. According to the Japan-Indonesia EPA or the Japan-Philippines EPA, there are differences in the requirements. The details of the text of each EPA are available in the URL below.

Basically all candidates are required to take six months of Japanese-language training, and after that they begin to work at hospitals or caregiving facilities. By the EPAs they are guaranteed to be paid salaries equivalent to their Japanese counterparts, although pay levels differ among accepting institutions. Their legal status of residence in Japan is “Designated Activity” (TOKUBETSU KATSUDOU), and their maximum period of stay is three years in the case of nurses and four years in the case of careworkers. If they pass the Japanese national license examination within the admitted period of stay, they can extend their stay, working formally as a nurse or careworker not a “nurse or careworker candidate.” Up to now, only two Indonesian and one Filipino nurse out of 336 examinees have passed the national license examination of nursing. The main hurdle of passing the examination for them is learning Japanese kanji and the technical terms included in the questions. Therefore, the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare has begun to review of the exams, such as putting an explanation to the technical terms, or using phonetic spelling of words alongside kanji. However there is also opposition from those who are concerned that the lack of proficiency in Japanese may cause medical accidents.

Accepting foreign nurses and careworkers under the EPAs has just started, so there are many challenges to be dealt with. For example, one main challenge for recipient organizations is how to prepare a study environment for foreign nurses and careworkers to pass the national license examination. In many accepting facilities, their Japanese staffs are helping candidates to study for national exam. Recently, it has also been pointed out that the motivation of candidates varied depending on their aim, that is, whether they want to settle down in Japan with a Japanese license or just work for three or four years and return home. From point of view of the sending countries, their nurses and careworkers contribute to increase the remittance to their country, but the phenomenon may lead the problem of nurse-drain from countries.

Points of Interest:
1. EPA in general, the entire text of EPAs and their negotiation process can be found at:
   http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/fta/
2. Newspaper article regarding foreign nurses and careworkers under the EPAs can be found at:
   http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20100511i1.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed:%20japantimes%20%28The%20Japan%20Times%29%20All%20Stories%29

Bibliography:
The Sasakawa Peace Foundation. Shi dou sura Gaikokujinzai Niyoru Kango/Kaigo –Uke ire koku To Okuridashikoku No Tai wa [Starting Nursing Care and Care giving by Foreign Talents -dialogue between recipient countries and sending countries], 2009. (Japanese)