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Nurse Migration to Ireland: An Overview. Nurse Migration Project Policy Brief 1

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Nurse Migration to Ireland: An Overview

Nurse Migration Project Policy Brief 1: February 2008

Background to the Nurse Migration Project

Ireland, historically a net exporter of nurses to countries such as the UK and the USA, began in the 1990s to encounter nursing shortages. As a result, employers initiated international recruitment campaigns to facilitate the migration of qualified nurses to Ireland [1]. Despite being a newcomer to overseas nurse recruitment, the rate of recruitment to Ireland in recent years has been rapid and remarkable. Overseas trained nurses, mainly from outside of the EU, are now an essential component of the Irish nursing workforce. However, there is little information available about them to inform workforce planning and policy making. Questions include: Where are they from? What skills did they bring to Ireland [2]? Where are they now working? Are their skills being well utilised? And – of crucial importance – do they intend to stay in Ireland? If they intend to move on, what are the reasons and what would encourage migrant nurses, who have undergone recruitment and adaptation programmes, to stay working in Ireland? The RCSI nurse migration project seeks to fill these information gaps, through qualitative and quantitative surveys of migrant nurses in Ireland. This policy brief is the first in a series of outputs, disseminating emerging and early project findings.

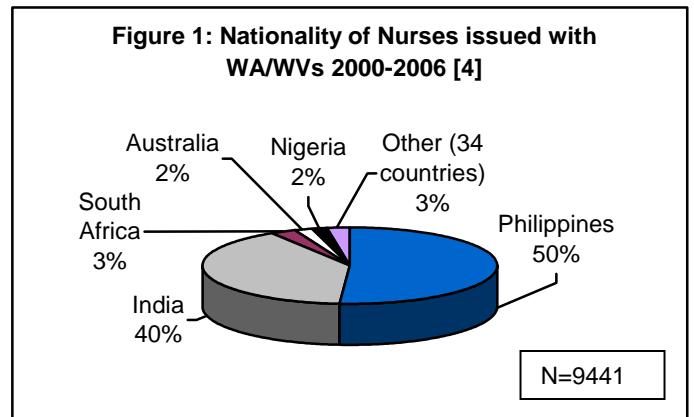
Data Presented

This policy brief summarises recent nurse migration trends, based on nurse registration data from the Irish Nursing Board [3] and work authorisation/work visa (WA/WV) data from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment [4]. It concludes with a brief discussion of the data deficiencies which currently restrict Ireland’s ability to fully understand the dynamics of nurse migration and to factor it into workforce planning strategies.

Work Authorisation/Work Visa (WA/WV) Scheme

To facilitate the migration of registered nurses to Ireland, nursing was one of the professions to benefit from the introduction of a ‘fast track’ working visa scheme in 2000. The scheme was introduced to enable skilled migrant workers and their families to migrate to Ireland. Analysis of data relating to the WA/WV scheme [4], which operated from 2000 to 2006 revealed that:

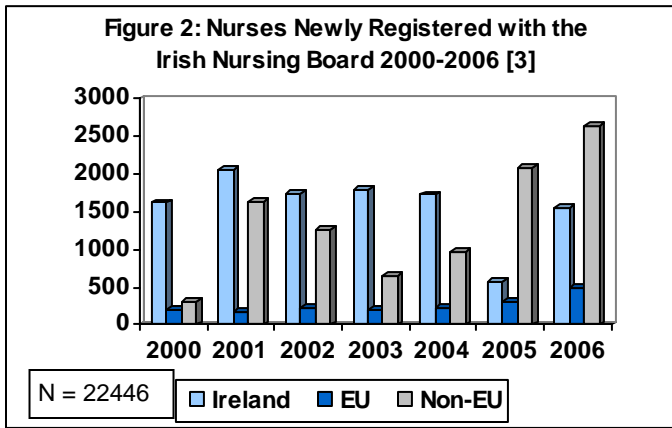
- Between 2000 and 2006, 9,441 nurses were issued with WA/WVs.
- 90% of those nurses were from India or the Philippines (see Figure 1).
- Nurses accounted for 60% of all skilled professionals issued with WA/WVs between 2000 and 2006.
- 2001, 2005 and 2006 were bumper years for overseas nurse recruitment in Ireland, with approx. 2,000 WA/WVs issued to nurses in each of those years.



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Irish Nursing Board Registration Data

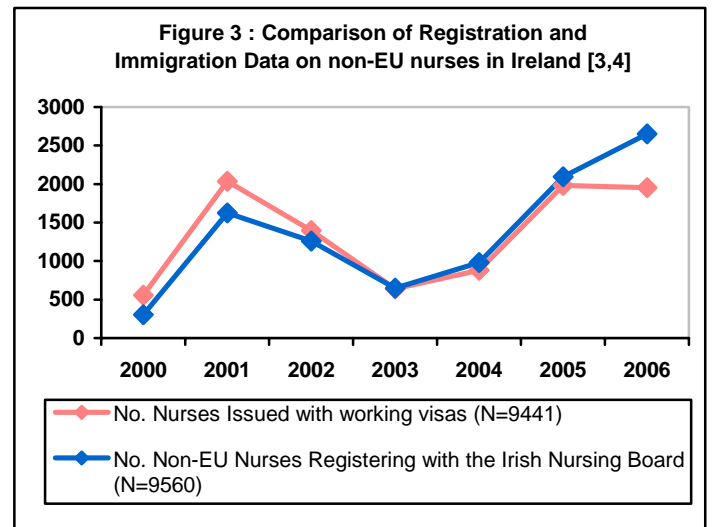
In order to practice nursing in Ireland, nurses must first register with the Irish Nursing Board. Although registration does not mean that the individual is necessarily working as a nurse in Ireland, it does indicate intent to do so. Analysis of registration data from the Irish Nursing Board [3] revealed:



- Between 2000 and 2006, 43% of new entrants to the register were non-EU nurses, with a further 8% from EU states other than Ireland.
- In 2000, 14% of new entrants to the register were non-EU. By 2006, non-EU nurses accounted for 57% of new entrants.
- In 2006, 21% of those on the active register were from overseas (EU and non-EU), mostly (16%) non-EU.
- 92% of non-EU nurses on the register, registered between 2000 and 2006.

What the data reveal

- Data on the number of nurses issued with WA/WVs visas between 2000 & 2006 show close correlation between the WA/WV and nurse registration data (Fig. 3) & enables us to present a reliable account of the rate of nurse migration to Ireland between 2000 & 2006
- Overseas nurse recruitment does not appear to have abated as had been widely expected following the once off demand for nurses created by the 'gap' year in nursing graduations in 2005.
- An increased local supply of nursing graduates in recent years has not diminished Ireland's need for migrant nurses.
- Ireland, until recently a net exporter of nurses, is quickly reaching nurse migration levels comparable to those found in countries with a much longer history of skilled immigration.



What the data do not reveal

- Data on the WA/WVs issued to non-EU nurses are only available up to December 2006 when the WA/WV scheme ended. More recent data on the visas issued to non-EU nurses is contained within a broad 'medical and nursing' category.
- Although the immigration and registration data presented indicates the *arrival* of migrant nurses to Ireland from 2000 to 2006, minimal data are available to track their progress through the Irish health system.
- No data are available on how many migrant nurses are employed as nurses in Ireland, in which sectors they work; or whether they have moved jobs or re-migrated since their initial registration and WA/WV acquisition.
- Buchan et al [6] highlighted the need for a broader range of nursing workforce data to understand the impact of nurse migration on the national nursing workforce. Such data are not readily available in the Irish context.

Conclusions

1. A pre-requisite to incorporating nurse migration into workforce planning is the need for comprehensive, detailed and consistent data collection that would enable policy makers to accurately: (i) quantify the scale of nurse immigration and emigration; (ii) assess how migrant nurses are utilised and the effects on the nursing workforce in Ireland; and (iii) track nurse flows within the Irish health system and broader social support services.
2. Consideration must be given to the long-term sustainability of Ireland's reliance upon overseas nurse recruitment, particularly in the light of global competition for nurses (see Policy Brief 2). As Kingma has stated, '*at any moment, recruited nurses can return to their homeland or migrate to another country if better conditions are offered*' [9].
3. Ireland should no longer rely on incomplete or anecdotal evidence to drive policy and practice in an area that is essential to the Irish health system and that has significant global implications.

Acknowledgements

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For More Information

The Nurse Migration Project is a HRB funded project (2006 to 2009) which involves both qualitative and quantitative surveys of migrant nurses. It is led by Dr. Niamh Humphries, Professor Ruairí Brugha and Professor Hannah McGee, Division of Population Health Sciences, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. Further information available from Dr. Humphries: nhumphries@rcsi.ie and in a forthcoming journal article: Humphries, N, Brugha, R and McGee, H., *Overseas nurse recruitment as an illustration of the dynamic nature of nurse migration*, Health Policy. (in press 2008). Further research updates will be released & disseminated in future Policy Briefs.