

Export on hold: Design-retract-design cycle on the foreign deployment of Filipino nurses in Covid-19 times

Abstract

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In liberal democracies, policymakers always aim for policy coherence to achieve desired policy outcomes. Increased collaboration, coordination and inclusion of different policy communities in the policy process are some ways to achieve policy coherence. While the outcomes are promising, these solutions are tested in designing policies during crises such as the pandemic. In this paper, I show how the Philippines' inter-agency task force in managing the Covid-19 pandemic designs policy that temporarily bans the deployment of Filipino nurses abroad. The Philippines is a labor-exporting country and has been a reliable source of foreign nurses in destination countries such as the US, Canada and the UK. However, the Covid-19 pandemic presents a daunting challenge for policymakers to uphold responsibilities to protect citizens from a health crisis versus migration as an economic development goal. This paper utilizes as data the transcripts from the inter-agency task force press conference from March 2020-March 2021. Drawing from policy coherence literature, I show how the task force engages in a "design-retract-design" cycle of designing policies for the temporary deployment ban of Filipino nurses abroad. Despite the "inter-agency" nature of the task force, representations from the nurse advocacies and professional bodies are not included among the policy elites, they are initially not consulted and most oftentimes their policy advice are not considered. The result is policy confusion, incoherent implementation and anxieties among policy actors, other policy communities and the affected nurses. This paper concludes on how policy coherence is far more difficult to achieve during crises and its implication to nurse export policies of the country.

Author's Bio

Exequiel Cabanda (*PhD, NTU Singapore*) is a postdoctoral fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Trained as a policy scientist, Exequiel's research focuses on nurse migration, health and higher education policies from the interdisciplinary reach of policy sciences, international political economy and labour studies. Before embarking on an academic career, he spent many years working in the government and private financial institutions in the areas of development finance, planning and corporate finance and agriculture policy research. He previously served as Lecturer at the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines. His selected publications appear in *Higher Education Policy*, *Asian Politics and Policy* and *European Journal of Higher Education*, among others.