



Research Snapshot:

Hiring and Integrating Foreign-Born Nurses and Personal Care Assistants in Long-Term Services and Supports



Research bridging policy and practice

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Research suggests that an expanded migrant/immigrant labor pool presents one strategy for meeting future workforce needs in the field of long-term services and supports (LTSS). But recruiting foreign-born workers and integrating them into the culture of an LTSS organization can be a complex undertaking that brings with it both benefits and challenges.

During 2017, the Global Ageing Network and the LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston studied issues associated with expanding the foreign-born LTSS labor pool across the globe. This research snapshot provides an overview of that study's findings, including the benefits, challenges, and promising strategies associated with recruiting and retaining foreign-born workers and integrating them into the organization. These findings are based on an environmental scan and interviews that LTSS Center researchers conducted with LTSS providers in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

For more information about key study findings, read the [full report](#).

Recruitment and Hiring Approaches

LTSS providers interested in hiring migrant/immigrant workers often begin by recruiting foreign-born individuals who already live in the host country. This practice is particularly appealing to providers that are required by law to conduct resident labor-market tests and advertise vacancies locally before they can recruit workers directly from other countries.

Recruiting nurses: Nurses may be hired internationally through formal channels, including recruitment and employment agencies. These agencies handle the bureaucratic aspects of attracting and employing foreign-born workers, and are responsible for certifying the legal status of nurses and processing immigration paperwork.

Some providers have concerns about the high costs of working with recruitment agencies. Others question whether those agencies are adequately regulated, use practices that are ethical and transparent, and recruit high-quality workers. In addition, providers may not feel comfortable with the tendency of recruitment agencies to distance the employer from the worker-selection process.

Recruiting personal care workers: Personal care workers tend to be recruited through informal social networks that link migrants in destination communities with job-seekers who are still living in their communities of origin. These networks can offer providers an inexpensive referral-based hiring system that connects migrant workers with LTSS employment opportunities. The networks can also reduce the risk of hiring new staff because current employees who recommend members of their social network for a job have a stake in the success of those recruits.

Benefits Associated with Employing Migrant Workers

Foreign-born LTSS workers bring numerous benefits to employers and care recipients. These include:

Quality of care: Research and interviews with providers indicate that hiring foreign-born workers in eldercare positions does not always have a direct impact on quality of care. However, providers that reported such an impact said that it was largely positive.

Well-suited workers: Employers and care recipients have many positive perceptions of migrant care workers, and view them as having characteristics that make them well-suited for the LTSS sector. Workers often come to their jobs with extensive informal experience because they were raised in cultures that expect younger adults to care for their aging relatives.

Staff diversity: Foreign-born employees help LTSS organizations create a richly diverse workplace and build a culturally competent system of care that meets the needs of an increasingly diverse consumer population. This diversity exposes staff members and care recipients to different cultures, varying perspectives, and new ideas.

Positive relationships: Providers use positive terms to describe the relationships between foreign-born workers and their colleagues and care recipients.

Enhanced recruitment: By tapping into networks of migrant/immigrant nurses and personal care workers, LTSS providers can create a pipeline of workers to fill labor shortages and allow LTSS organizations to continue providing services.

Low turnover: There is some evidence that foreign-born workers demonstrate more loyalty, and experience less turnover, than native-born workers.

Integrating Workers into the Organization

The quality of care provided by migrant/immigrant care workers, and the relationships they develop with co-workers and residents/clients, will depend on how well these workers adapt to their host country and the LTSS workplace. Providers can help migrant workers adjust to the culture of the organization and the local community by providing appropriate orientation, training, and workplace supports.

Orientation: A strong orientation process is a key component of any effort to acclimate foreign-born workers to an LTSS organization. The most effective orientation programs pair foreign-born workers with colleagues who share their language or culture and who can:

- Help foreign-born workers better understand current practice and the expectations of supervisors,
- Alleviate any sense of isolation that workers might feel, and
- Increase workers' access to learning resources.

Cultural competency training: Foreign-born care workers may benefit from training that helps them understand the role of older adults in the host country, how to care for older adults, death and dying practices, and how to interact with older persons who are living with dementia.

Workplace supports: Cultural competency training can be reinforced by implementing policies and procedures that:

- Incorporate cultural competence practices into delivery and receipt of services;
- Reinforce the value of each employee and the contributions that different cultures bring to the workplace;
- Offer foreign-born workers information and access to community resources that can help with settlement and other issues;
- Support foreign-born workers by taking cultural differences into account when conducting performance evaluations, allowing flexibility in scheduling, establishing small work groups that ease workers' adjustment to the workplace, and pairing workers with clients from similar backgrounds; and
- Empower supervisors to help foreign-born workers gain essential knowledge about cultural and organizational norms.

Challenges for Employers and Workers

Despite the numerous benefits associated with bringing migrant/immigrant workers to LTSS settings, workers and employers also face challenges in several areas.

Working Conditions: Like native-born workers, foreign-born workers find LTSS jobs to be stressful due to demanding work schedules, resident/client health issues, inadequate staffing levels, and heavy workloads. In addition, foreign-born workers may encounter exploitation and abuse, including irregular employment terms, conditions, and practices. Migrants/immigrants are especially vulnerable to this exploitation and abuse if their immigration and/or employment status is problematic, if they work directly for older people and their families, or if they lack familiarity with their rights, or with the legal system that could help them protect those rights.

Language and cultural differences: Difficulties in spoken and written communication represent one of the greatest challenges associated with employing foreign-born workers to care for older adults. Language difficulties extend beyond grammar, vocabulary, or knowledge of terminology, and might include lack of familiarity with slang and colloquialisms, difficulty comprehending certain dialects and accents, and an inability to understand speakers who use unfamiliar intonations or who speak rapidly.

In addition, foreign-born workers may have cultural expectations about day-to-day behaviors and experiences that are different than native-born workers. These differences, along with language difficulties, can affect service delivery, create serious relationship problems with colleagues and care recipients, and increase conflict or stress in the workplace.

Providers can take steps to resolve language and cultural barriers by:

- Developing rigorous language-based requirements and providing training programs that build communication skills and help migrant workers adjust to and better understand their new cultural and care environments;
- Working with outside groups to address language and cultural differences within the organization;
- Engaging residents of LTSS settings to help foreign-born workers improve their language proficiency and communication;
- Providing additional supervision and support to address any cultural and language barriers; and
- Encouraging employees to discuss their concerns and talk about cultural differences that may have contributed to misunderstandings in the workplace.

Racial and ethnic discrimination: Foreign-born workers can experience racial and ethnic discrimination from employers, colleagues, and care recipients. Employers can address discrimination through education and one-on-one interaction between migrant/immigrant workers and the managers, colleagues, or care recipient/family members who instigate discriminatory actions. Employers can also:

- Help co-workers and care recipients understand the importance of foreign-born workers to the organization;
- Acknowledge and accept full responsibility for the discrimination a worker experiences;
- Defend workers when they experience racially abusive behavior;
- Educate and provide written warnings to care recipients, family members, and staff; and
- Raise awareness about support mechanisms for workers experiencing discrimination in the workplace, and make these support mechanisms available to foreign-born workers.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Providers who hire foreign-born workers reap many benefits, including the ability to provide quality care while diversifying the workforce and building a culturally competent system to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse consumer population. But this hiring practice also brings with it numerous challenges, including the need to address communication difficulties, cultural differences, and instances of discrimination and exploitation.

LTSS providers can resolve many of these challenges by offering appropriate orientation, training, and support to foreign-born workers, and by developing cultural competence on the part of workers, employers, and consumers. Employers also can be proactive in monitoring and addressing discrimination and conflicts in the workplace.

Finally, it is important for providers to remember that many common fears about hiring foreign-born workers are unwarranted. Most foreign-born workers take pride in their work and want to do it well. And most providers report positive experiences in the employment of these workers.