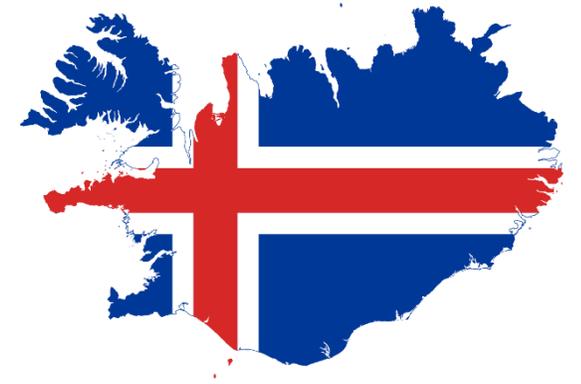




# **“I often experience lack of trust” : Lived experience of nurses from the Philippines in the Icelandic labor market**

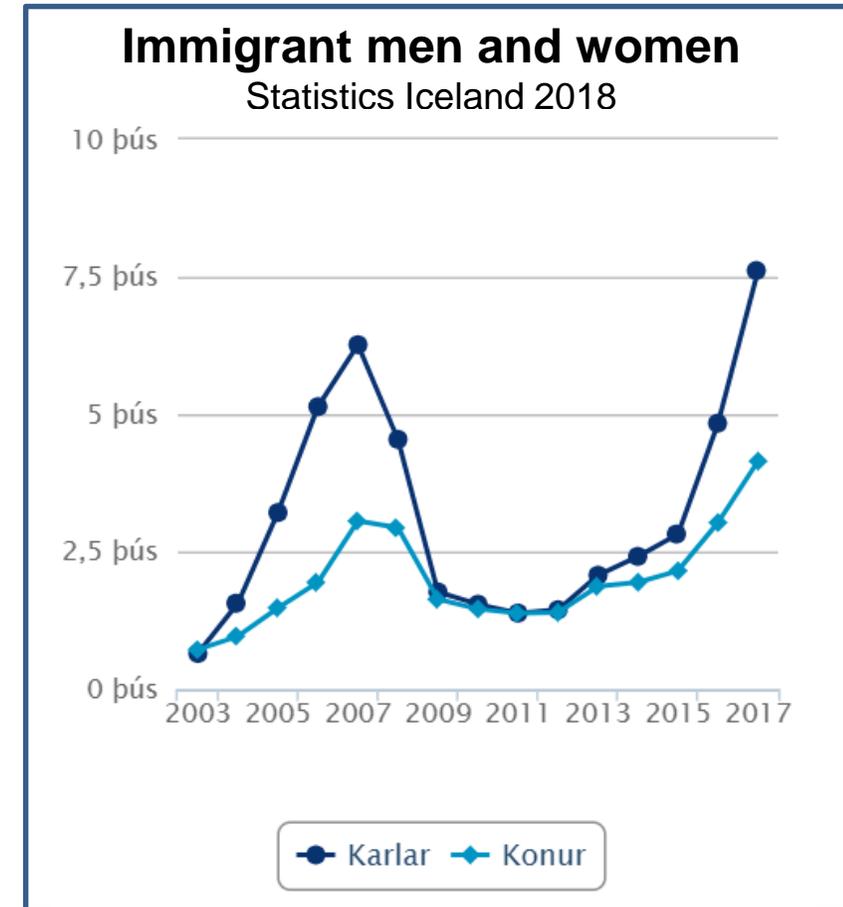
Dr. Erla S. Kristjánsdóttir &  
Thora H. Christiansen  
School of Business  
University of Iceland





# Immigrants in the Icelandic labor market

- 17.5% of labor market are immigrants
- Majority in low-paid jobs
- Level of education much higher than their jobs indicate; brain waste
- European skilled migrants in Iceland:
  - Struggle with language and exclusion from coworkers
  - Experience barriers to promotion and having their contribution acknowledged
  - Experience salary discrimination (Christiansen & Kristjánisdóttir 2016; Kristjánisdóttir & Christiansen, 2017)





## Labor shortage in Icelandic health care

- Education system cannot supply the needed number of nurses to fulfill the needs of an ageing population.
- Icelandic nurses increasingly turn to other professions in response to wage disputes (Ríkisendurskoðun, 2017).
- Not only dissatisfied with salaries:
  - 46% feel underappreciated by their supervisors
  - 43% feel that they are praised often for their work (Pálsdóttir, Helgason, Finnbogadóttir, 2018).



# Migrant nurses in the Nordics

- Largely positive experiences (Munkejord, 2017).
- Take the responsibility for conflict or thank tolerant coworkers (Olakivi, 2013).
- Struggle with language barriers and exclusion (Näre, 2013), but find strength in providing care (Magnusdottir, 2005; Munkejord, 2017).
- Job satisfaction based on relationship with coworkers and supervisors (Magnusdottir, 2005; Munkejord, 2017).



# Objective

To develop an understanding of how nurses from the Philippines experience **communication** and their opportunities to **contribute** and **integrate** to the workplace.





# Integration

- For integration to occur, interaction between migrants and the members of the receiving society is paramount (Kim, 2015; Kristjansdottir & DeTurk.
- Integration is a reciprocal, interactive process between the migrant and the new environment, and the migrants and members of the receiving society need to adapt themselves to each other (Evanoff, 2006).
- When the responsibility for integration is mainly put on the migrants, they will be marginalized, discriminated against and mostly ignored in the new environment (Kinefuchi, 2010).



# The Icelandic context: Immigrants in the labor market

- Immigrants are at a disadvantage in the labor market when it comes to getting jobs consistent with their education (Mattoo et al. 2008) - this also applies to Iceland (Christiansen & Kristjansdottir, 2016; Kristjansdottir & Christiansen, 2017).
- There is negative correlation between immigrants' educational level and their career advancement (Tharmaseelan et al. 2010).
- The key to being accepted into Icelandic society is to speak fluent and grammatically correct Icelandic (Christiansen & Kristjansdottir (2016) and Kristjansdottir & Christiansen (2017),





# The Filipino context: Filipinos educated for export

- Nursing schools purposefully produce nurses for work in other countries (Ortiga, 2014).
- Up to 70% of all Filipino nurses work outside their home country (Gardiner Barber 2008).
- The Philippines are the main ‘exporter’ of nurses in the world – meet Western societies’ increasing needs for care workers (Marcus, Quimson & Short, 2014).
- In Iceland, most new licenses granted to Filipino nurses and up to a third of the nursing staff in nursing homes comes from the Philippines (Directorate of Labor, 2017; Gunnarsdóttir, 2017)



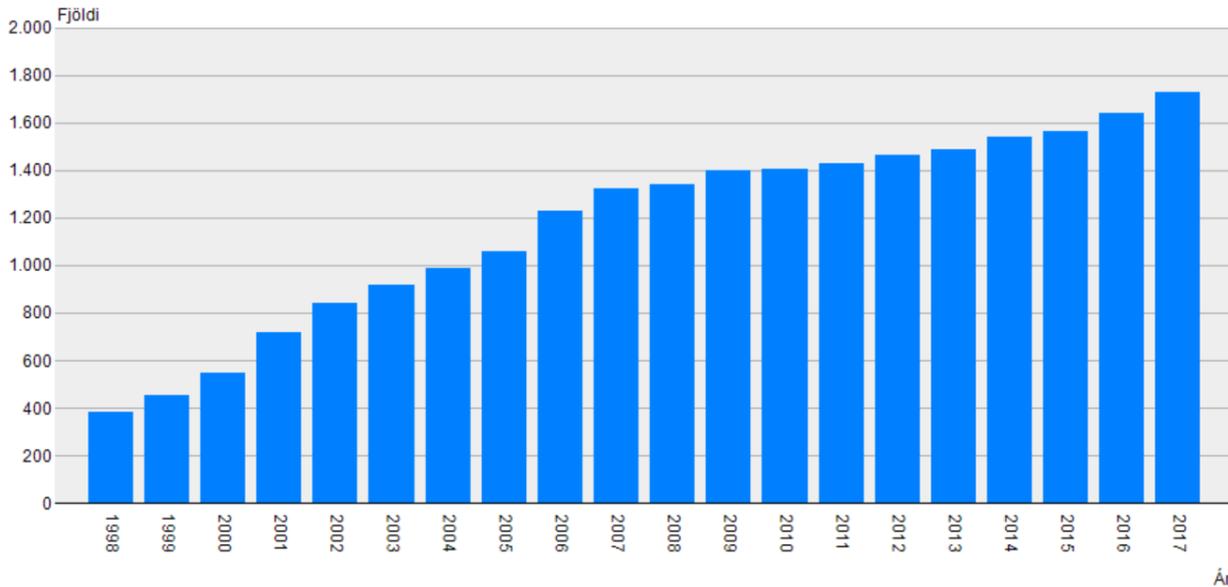
## The Filipino context: Ideal worker

- Promoted stereotype of the ‘perfect worker’: Obedient, loyal, docile, friendly, caring, flexible, and hardworking (Polanco, 2015; Terry, 2014).
- This creates expectations with foreign employers and pressures Filipinos working abroad to live up to the stereotype to satisfy their employer’s expectations (Terry, 2014).
- Connor (2016) showed how Filipino nurses working in the USA cope with such stressors:

All these mechanisms are rooted in Filipino culture; devotion to family, collectivism, maintaining harmony, Catholicism and fatalism, industriousness and hard work, loyalty and finally avoiding disagreement which could erode group harmony.



# Filipino immigrants in Iceland



Filipino Immigrants 1998 – 2017  
(Statistics Iceland, 2017)

- Largest group of immigrants come from Europe (Poland & Lithuania)
- Steady increase and largest Asian group from the Philippines
- The number of Filipinos has quadrupled in the past couple of decades
- Filipinos are a visible minority



# Research question:

*How do nurses from the Philippines experience **communication** in the work place, **contribution** and **integration** to the Icelandic labor market?*





## Participant information

- Eleven in-depth interviews with nurses from the Philippines.
- They have lived in Iceland from 2-25 years.
- The interviews were in English.
- Length: 40-75 minutes
  - Nine women, two men, from 24-51 years old.
  - The interviewees hold degrees in nursing.





# Methodology

- The interviews were analyzed and interpreted according to phenomenological methodology: *description, reduction and interpretation* (Lanigan, 1988; van Manen, 2016)
- Phenomenology is applied (Martinez, 2000) where experience is always analyzed contingent on the individuals themselves,



## **“...I often experience lack of trust”**

Many experience being treated with disrespect, like Anna says:

“...people tend to shout and say...you don’t understand me and you are a nurse...walk away...they tend to question what I have to say...that hurts.”

Elena, a nurse and assistant manager says:

“...practical nurse was irritated and I felt that she didn’t trust me...and does not believe in what I am doing...I try not to let it get to me... I often experience lack of trust...my competence is questioned...they look at me from the head to toe...”



## **“We are professional...I don’t get angry at work.”**

Rosa who is a manager on a shift in a nursing home explains her interaction with one of a resident’s relative who is requesting an Icelandic employee:

“...either you talk to me or you talk another day...because I am the manager now...she doesn’t want to talk to me, she wants Icelandic person to talk with...we are ‘professional’...I don’t get angry at work...you have this whole patience (small laugh)”



# “.... we really take care of our patients...it is more a calling”

They discuss the differences in work ethic between the Icelandic nurses and the nurses from the Philippines. The Filipino nurses seem more committed to their patients and see their profession as a calling, as

Lolita says:

...I am just like coming here ... smiling and always keeping myself sane ... and always like ... isolating my personal and family issues going to work because... I feel like this is my calling from God...to help people... Icelandic nurses are more concerned with getting paid and filing every minute worked...I wouldn't do that. It is just, it is more a calling, more on helping.





**“...I don’t want to open this with the supervisor...”**

Valentina talks about the difference of taking care of patients in the Philippines and Iceland but does not address it with her supervisor:

“...I don’t want to open this with the supervisor...it’s very hard to speak out if you are from other country.”

The nurses would appreciate more feedback.

Lolita says about her supervisor:

“...leaders are not so particular in giving feedback...even a good tap on the shoulder, ‘you are doing great’.”





# Discussion

## **Communication and interaction with supervisors, coworkers & clients:**

- Language barrier – feel distrusted and devalued, undermines confidence
- Visible minority – experience prejudice and everyday discrimination
- Cultural differences – face and dignity cultures manage conflict differently

## **Contribution of professional knowledge & expertise to the workplace:**

- Affirm professional identity and capabilities – quality care and calling
- Loyalty and hard work appreciated – but creates conflicts and may hold them back
- Avoid self-promotion – lack praise and positive feedback from supervisors

## **Integration in the workplace:**

- Feel responsible for adapting – hesitate to propose changes
- Smile despite feeling humiliated – saving face and maintaining group harmony
- Reciprocal integration needed – migrants and natives need to negotiate the norms



The director of one of the largest nursing homes in Iceland considers diversity an asset:

*“I am not sure that the local is always best. It is good to learn from others.”*

**Thank you!**

