

**Assessing the Effects of Border  
Enforcement Measures Since the Start of  
the COVID-19 Pandemic on Migrants  
Aiming to Enter Japan.**

Preliminary Descriptive Report  
(Version 1 – 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2021)

**Jacques Wels, PhD**

**METICES Discussion Paper Series**

**2021/4**



METICES Discussion Paper Series aims to promote research within the METICES research centre at the Université libre de Bruxelles. An affiliation to the centre is required to publish within the DPs. There is no restriction on submitting these papers simultaneously to other working paper series and/or scientific journals. Articles published as Discussion Papers are not peer-reviewed and the publication reflects the views only of the author(s).

METICES Discussion Paper Series vise à promouvoir la recherche au sein du centre de recherche METICES de l'Université libre de Bruxelles. Une affiliation au centre est nécessaire pour publier dans ce DP. Il n'y a aucune restriction à la soumission simultanée de ces textes à d'autres Discussion ou Working Papers et à des revues scientifiques. Les articles publiés sont des documents de travail qui ne sont pas soumis à une évaluation scientifique et reflète seulement les vues de leur(s) auteur.e.s

Centre Metices  
Université libre de Bruxelles  
Avenue Jeanne 44 - CP 124  
1050 Brussels, Belgium

Copyright @ the author(s).  
Discussion papers cannot be reproduced without permission of the author(s).

# Assessing the Effects of Border Enforcement Measures Since the Start of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Migrants Aiming to Enter Japan.

Preliminary Descriptive Report (Version 1 – 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2021)

## Jacques Wels

Université libre de Bruxelles (Belgium), METICES centre & University of Cambridge (United Kingdom)

Avenue Jeanne 44 – CP124 - 1050 Brussels, Belgium

[jcqwels@gmail.com](mailto:jcqwels@gmail.com)

## Abstract:

Border enforcement measures implemented by Japan in April 2020 in response to the spread of COVID-19 have had an impact on migrants. Even though Japan has implemented measures to resume international travel in October 2020, these were paused in December 2020. As a consequence, many migrants who planned to come to Japan for work, study or personal reasons were unable to do so with no clear vision about what is going to happen in the coming months. Through a snap online survey made between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2021 (N=425), data were collected to better investigate the health, financial and trust impacts of travel limitations. Results from the study show major effects of border enforcement measures on mental health (with important level of stress for migrants) and, to a lesser extent, on physical health, lack of trust for the communication of the Japanese government and the Japanese administrations and a major impact on the financial situation of migrants not able to enter Japan. On the flip side, the survey shows up that 9 migrants out of 10 did not give up on willing to enter Japan and that trust in Japanese embassies and employers (for those planning to work in Japan) is high. The study raises six major policy points to discuss and emphasises the need to pay attention to the conditions of migrants who are not able to move to Japan for their job, school or partner.

## Summary

<i>Structured summary (English)</i> .....	5
<i>Structured summary (français)</i> .....	6
<i>Sturctured summary (日本語)</i> .....	7
<i>About the author</i> .....	8
1. <i>Background</i> .....	9
2. <i>Data collection</i> .....	10
3. <i>Sample composition</i> .....	11
4. <i>Descriptive results</i> .....	11
4.1. <i>Financial consequences</i> .....	11
4.2. <i>Health and wellbeing</i> .....	13
4.3. <i>Communication with Japanese institutions</i> .....	14
4.4. <i>Partner, children and relationship</i> .....	16
4.5. <i>Expectations about border enforcement measures</i> .....	16
5. <i>Preliminary policy implications and points to address</i> .....	18
5.1. <i>Restore trust</i> .....	18
5.2. <i>Investigate financial loss for individuals, companies and the states</i> .....	18
5.3. <i>Children, family and love are an issue</i> .....	19
5.4. <i>Exceptions to the travel ban</i> .....	19
5.5. <i>To favor remote work and study</i> .....	19
5.6. <i>Resuming progressively international travel in a context of higher vaccination rates and lower fatalities</i> .....	19
<i>Conclusion and further steps</i> .....	20
<i>Conflicts of interest</i> .....	21
<i>Data privacy</i> .....	21
<i>References</i> .....	22
<i>Tables and figures</i> .....	23

## Structured summary (English)

**Background:** The study aims to investigate the impact of the travel bans implemented by Japan since April 2020 on migrants' health, quality of life, wellbeing and financial health.

**Data:** An online survey was spread through social media targeting migrants to Japan who are not able to enter Japan or have been affected by travel bans prior entering Japan this year.

**Sample composition:** The sample consists in 425 respondents (on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2021) and is equally distributed across gender with nationalities from different countries including particularly the United States, France, Canada, Germany, Philippines, United Kingdom, India and Indonesia.

**Preliminary findings:** The study shows up negative consequences on the financial situation of the majority of respondents compared with their situation one year ago; a negative impact on health of border enforcement, particularly in terms of mental health; poor self-rated communication from the Japanese government and, to a lesser extent, Japanese administration but good communication with local embassies and employers in Japan; lack of consideration for those having an intimate relationship, partner or spouse in Japan with a few respondents mentioning child(ren) or a pregnant partner in Japan; mixed expectations about the future of border enforcement measures that translate a great feeling of uncertainty.

**Policy recommendations:** The study brings up six policy recommendations reflecting what was observed in the data. First, restore the trust between the Japanese Government and migrants. Second, investigate further the costs of border enforcement measures for individuals, host companies and institutions and countries of origin. Third, taking into consideration personal relationships and treat those with children as a top priority. Fourth, to clarify the exceptions to border enforcement measures and the administrative requirements for those it applies to. Fifth, promoting remote work and study from abroad when possible by not postponing the start of the contract or courses. Sixth, to resume progressively international travel with a particular focus on those who already received a Certificate of Eligibility or hold a valid visa and already took engagements to come to Japan.

**Further investigation:** One key message flowing from the study is that little or even no attention has been given to the wellbeing of migrants aiming to enter Japan. More data on such a matter could be produced to better inform policymakers and citizens about the potential harms caused by border enforcement measures.

## Structured summary (français)

**Contexte :** L'étude vise à étudier l'impact des interdictions de voyage mises en place par le Japon depuis avril 2020 sur la santé, la qualité de vie, le bien-être et la santé financière des migrants.

**Données :** Une enquête en ligne a été menée par le biais des réseaux sociaux auprès des migrants pour le Japon qui ne peuvent pas entrer au Japon ou qui ont été touchés par les interdictions de voyage avant d'entrer au Japon cette année.

**Composition de l'échantillon :** L'échantillon se compose de 425 répondants (au 3 mars 2021) qui sont répartis de manière égale entre les sexes et sont des nationaux de différents pays, particulièrement les États-Unis, la France, le Canada, l'Allemagne, les Philippines, le Royaume-Uni, l'Inde et l'Indonésie.

**Résultats préliminaires :** L'étude révèle des conséquences négatives sur la situation financière de la majorité des personnes interrogées par rapport à leur situation d'il y a un an ; un impact négatif sur la santé de l'application de la loi aux frontières, en particulier en termes de santé mentale ; une mauvaise communication de la part du gouvernement japonais et, dans une moindre mesure, de l'administration japonaise, mais une bonne communication avec les ambassades locales et les employeurs au Japon ; un manque de considération pour ceux qui ont une relation intime, un partenaire ou un conjoint au Japon, quelques personnes interrogées mentionnant un ou des enfants ou une partenaire enceinte au Japon ; les mesures de contrôle aux frontières traduisent un grand sentiment d'incertitude.

**Recommandations :** L'étude présente six recommandations liées à ce qui a été observé dans les données. Premièrement, rétablir la confiance entre le gouvernement japonais et les migrants. Deuxièmement, enquêter davantage sur les coûts des mesures de contrôle aux frontières pour les individus, les entreprises et institutions d'accueil et les pays d'origine. Troisièmement, prendre en considération les relations personnelles et traiter en priorité les personnes ayant des enfants ou s'occupant d'enfants. Quatrièmement, clarifier les exceptions aux mesures d'application aux frontières et les exigences administratives pour ceux auxquels elles s'appliquent. Cinquièmement, promouvoir le télétravail et les études à distance depuis l'étranger lorsque cela est possible en ne reportant pas le début du contrat ou des cours. Sixièmement, reprendre progressivement les voyages internationaux en mettant l'accent sur ceux qui ont déjà reçu un certificat d'éligibilité ou sont titulaires d'un visa en cours de validité et qui ont déjà pris des engagements pour venir au Japon.

**Investigations complémentaires :** L'un des principaux enseignements qui ressort de l'étude est que peu, voire aucune attention n'a été accordée au bien-être des migrants qui souhaitent entrer au Japon. Des données supplémentaires sur ce sujet pourraient être produites afin de mieux informer les décideurs politiques et les citoyens sur les préjudices potentiels causés par les mesures de contrôle aux frontières.

## Stuructured summary (日本語)

**研究の背景。**本研究は、日本が2020年4月以降に実施した渡航禁止措置が、移民の健康、生活の質、ウェルビーイング、経済的健康に与える影響を調査することを目的としています。

**データの提供。**今年日本に入国できない、または入国前に渡航禁止の影響を受けている日本への移住者を対象に、ソーシャルメディアを通じてオンライン調査を槍玉に挙げた。

**サンプル構成。**サンプルは425人の回答者（2021年3月3日時点）で構成されており、特に米国、フランス、カナダ、ドイツ、フィリピン、英国、インド、インドネシアを含む様々な国の国籍を持つ男女に均等に分布している。

**予備的な調査結果。**この調査では、回答者の大多数が1年前の状況と比較して財政状況に悪影響を及ぼしていること、国境取締りの健康、特にメンタルヘルスに悪影響を及ぼしていること、日本政府や日本政府からの自己評価は低い、在日大使館や雇用者とのコミュニケーションは良好であること、日本に親密な関係やパートナー、配偶者がいる人への配慮が不足していること、日本にいる子供や妊娠しているパートナーについて言及した回答者は少数であったこと、国境取締り措置の将来に対する期待が入り混じっており、大きな不確実性を感じていることなどが明らかになった。

**政策提言**本研究では、データで観察されたことに関連して、6つの政策提言を提起している。第一に、日本政府と移民との間の信頼関係を回復すること。第二に、個人、受入企業、機関、出国国のための国境強制措置のコストをさらに調査する。第三に、個人的な関係を考慮し、子を持つ者や通う者を最優先に扱うこと。第四に、国境強制措置の例外と適用される者の行政要件を明確にすること。第五に、契約や講座の開始を先延ばしにしないことで、可能な限り海外からのリモートワークや留学を促進すること。第六に、既に在留資格認定証明書を取得している者や有効なビザを保持している者で、既に来日のための契約を結んでいる者を中心に、段階的に海外渡航を再開すること。

**さらなる調査を行う。**本調査から導かれる重要なメッセージの一つは、日本への入国を目指す移民のウェルビーイングにはほとんど、あるいは全く注意が払われていないということである。このような問題に関するより多くのデータを作成して、政策立案者や市民に、国境強制措置によって引き起こされる潜在的な危害について、より良い情報を提供することができるだろう。

## About the author

*Jacques Wels is a sociologist of employment and is mainly interested in the relationship between the labour market and health. He has worked for various institutions such as the World Bank, the University of Cambridge and the Free University of Brussels.*

*Jacques Wels est sociologue de l'emploi et s'intéresse principalement à la relation entre marché du travail et santé. Il a travaillé pour différentes institutions telles que la Banque Mondiale, l'université de Cambridge et l'université libre de Bruxelles.*

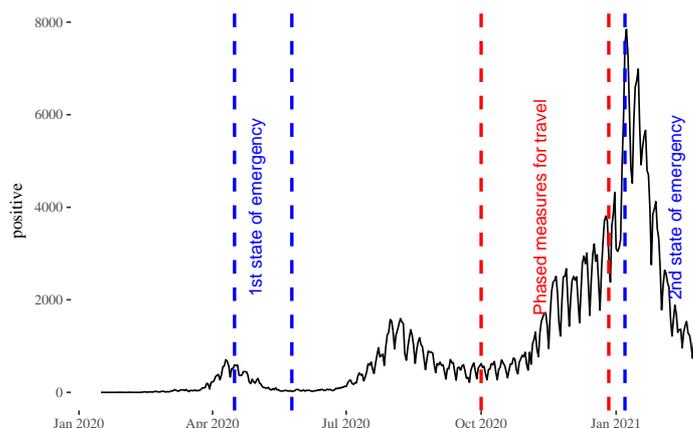
*Jacques Wels は雇用社会学者であり、主に労働市場と健康との関係に関心を持っている。世界銀行、ケンブリッジ大学、ブリュッセル自由大学など、さまざまな機関に勤務。*

## 1. Background

This idea to collect data about the health and wellbeing of migrants who were banned entering Japan during since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 did not come from nowhere. As a researcher, I was awarded a contract by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) to carry on with my research in a Japanese university and have, myself, experienced the suddenly closed borders of Japan. Looking around, on social media and newspapers, I have discovered a world of migrants let behind. And to realize that little was known about them and that, for almost a year, some have waited with no consistent information to take back a life that was paused against their will. The purpose of this study is to offer some lights on their experience and to analyze the impact of massive and unique border enforcement measures on their quality of life. More precisely, the aim of the study is to analyse the human, financial and health impacts of the border restrictions implemented by Japan since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020 and to inform policymakers, academics and individuals about the potential arms caused by the current border enforcement measures.

One thing for sure is that the measures implemented to control the spread of COVID-19 have had or could have so-called side effects on people's health that are underlined by a growing number of studies, including, to name just a few, the impact of work arrangements (1,2), the gender discrepancies in health outcomes during the pandemic (1,3–5) but also long-term mental health issues, suicides, violence and so on (6). Among these effects, migration – or, rather, migration control – is a major concern though often viewed under the framework of access to health system (7) and social security in the host country or when moving back to the country of origin (8). No studies have looked at the situation of those affected by border enforcement to control the spread of COVID-19 since February 2020 even if the relationship between internal (9) and international mobilities and the spread of COVID-19 is largely discussed in recent literature (10,11). Migrant workers are, indeed, those who could be the most affected by the COVID-19 situation (12) both because they are more likely to lose their job because of business closures but also because they might not be able to enter or re-enter the country where their employment is. But this is also the case of international students who could be the most vulnerable when no accurate support is provided by their host country (13,14) but could also struggle to join the country where they intended to study.

**Figure 1 Number of positive PCR tests in Japan from January 2020 to March 2021, States of Emergency and Phased Measures for Resuming International Travel**



The practical background about travel restrictions to Japan can be shortly summarized as in figure 1. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2020 Japan declared a State of Emergency for several prefectures including Hokkaido and the Tokyo area. The State of emergency ended on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2020. At the same time, the Japanese authorities implemented a travel ban for most travelers from all around the world that applied to tourists, students and workers. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2020 (about 6 months after the start of the first State of Emergency), Japan implemented phased measures for resuming cross-border travel for workers and students with compulsory quarantines of 14 days (15), PCR tests (before and after boarding), daily health monitoring for 14 days through Line (the Japanese equivalent of WhatsApp or WeChat) and follow-up by the institution in charge of the migrant (school, institution or business) through a written pledge involving the responsibility of those institutions in case migrants were breaking the rules. In late December and due to the spread of new COVID-19 variants, particularly from the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil, the Japanese authorities decided to close the borders to some countries particularly affected by these variants and, in January 2021, phased measures for resuming cross-border travel were stopped until the end of the second state of emergency that was declared on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 2021 (16) in first instance. This practically translates into two travel bans for migrant workers and students: a first border enforcement of six months between April 2020 and October 2020 and an ongoing travel ban since January 2021 with no certainty so far about what is going to happen next. The only window for workers and students to travel to Japan over the last year was between October 2020 and December 2020. Consequently, it can be assumed that many potential migrants to Japan, including workers and students, have been affected by the current situation.

## 2. Data collection

To assess the impact of border enforcement measures on migrants, data had to be collected as there is no available existing data on this matter in the case of Japan. This study uses data that were collected using between the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March midnight (GMT+1) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2021 (10pm) through an online questionnaire spread via social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Reddit, primarily through online groups bringing together individuals preoccupied by the current Japanese migration policies. Results presented in this report were those collected on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020 (N=425). The answers rate was surprisingly high as it reached 260 respondents 13 hours after the launch of the study which

clearly indicates a great reactivity of respondents that can be imputed to the current context of uncertainty and the impact it has on their lives. Answers should be considered as representative of the current mindset of those aiming to enter Japan or those who have entered Japan since April 2020.

### **3. Sample composition**

Respondents' ages range from 18 to 61 with a mean at 28.25 and a median at 26 which translates a relatively young population that is principally due to the number of students who answered the survey. Gender is almost equally reported with a proportion of 44.5 percent of male respondents and 52 percent of female respondents (3.5 percent of the sample declared 'other' or 'prefer not to say'). The main self-declared current statuses of occupation are employed (40.7 percent), student (21.6 percent) and unemployed (24.5 percent). Information was collected about the country of current residence (at the time of the survey) and the country of nationality (dual nationality was not allowed here) with almost similar distribution after removing those currently residing in Japan (9.6 percent of the respondent). The main countries of nationality are the United States (26.6 percent), France (8 percent), Canada (6.3 percent), Germany (5.4 percent), Philippines (4.7 percent), United Kingdom (8.7 percent), India (4.5 percent) and Indonesia (3.8 percent). The maximum level of education ranges from no education to PhD/doctorate with a majority of respondents holding a bachelor from a higher education institution (half of the sample). This is one major limitation of the study: the sample tends to include those with high levels of education with very few respondents with primary or secondary education only (7.5 percent), which indicates few information about the so-called low-qualified workers. Among this sample, some have already been to Japan before (74.1 percent) under a status of resident (for 53.8 percent of them) or under a tourist status (46.2 percent). 83.5 percent of the sample has friends in Japan, 30.4 percent has a partner, spouse or boyfriend / girlfriend in Japan. These partners are of Japanese nationality for 70.6 percent of them.

There are many reasons why respondents wanted to be in Japan, but three major reasons pop out of the survey: for study purpose (23.3 percent), to fill a position in the private sector (14.1 percent) or in the public sector (16.7), for family reasons (12 percent) and to carry on with research, teaching or educational activities (16.9 percent). 6.1 percent of the sample declared needing to be in Japan for personal reasons (about 7 percent). In the case of students, it was asked what kind of degree they intend to enroll to in Japan: 51.5 percent declared being a graduate / master student and 20.2 percent being a Japanese language student.

### **4. Descriptive results**

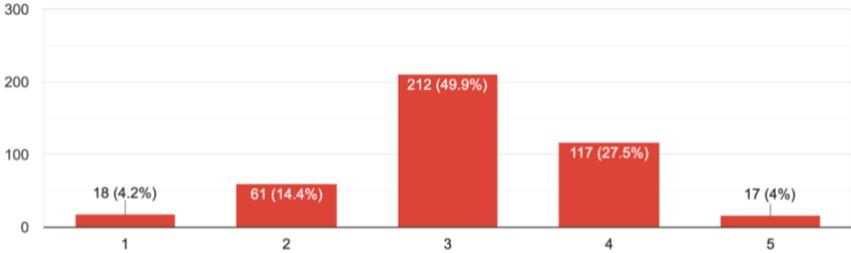
The study focuses on four main aspects: financial consequences, health and wellbeing, communication with the Japanese authorities, partner, children and relationship and expectations about the future of the border enforcement measures.

#### **4.1. Financial consequences**

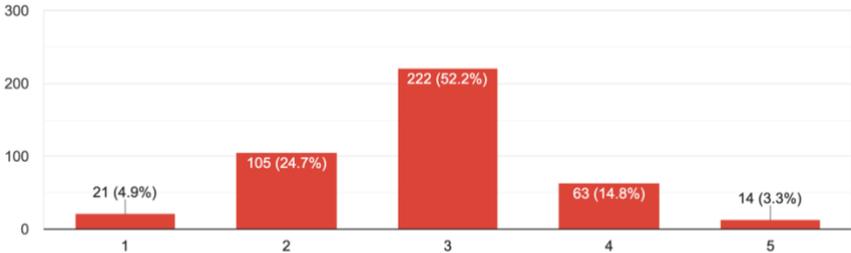
The financial consequences of the travel enforcement measures is hard to evaluate as the COVID-19 has had economic harms in most countries, independently from whether people planned to move or not. To better understand this, three questions were asked. The first question is about the current overall financial situation (ranging from 1 'very poor' to 5 'very wealthy') one year ago and the current financial situation at questionnaire time. Not

surprisingly, there is a difference between the self-perception of financial condition one year ago and at questionnaire time. The current situation has a negative impact on respondents' financial situation, increasing the categories '1' and '2' by about 10 percent and reducing by 10 percent those in category '4'.

**Figure 2** On a scale from 'very poor' to 'very wealthy', how would you qualify your overall financial situation one year ago?

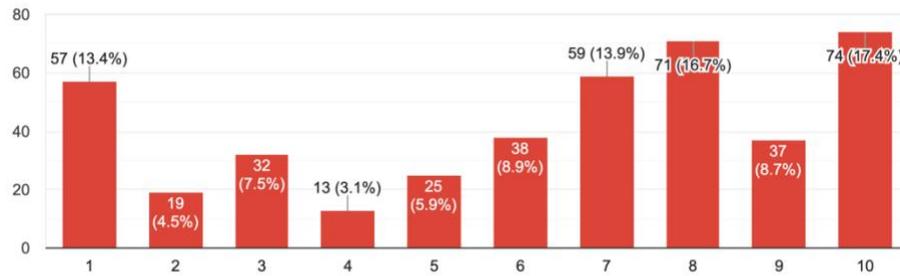


**Figure 3** On a scale from 'very poor' to 'very wealthy', how would you qualify your current overall financial situation?



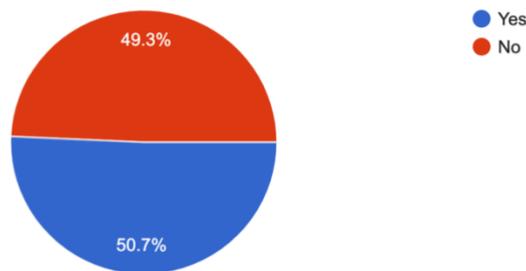
One way to look at whether the current border enforcement measures have had a direct impact on self-perceived wealth was to simply ask the following question: has the travel ban had consequences on your financial situation? Answer modalities, on a Likert scale range from 1 (no consequences) to 10 (very negative consequences). The overall surveyed population is well distributed across the different modalities with a relatively high percentage of people declaring no consequence on their financial situation (13.5 percent) but a majority of respondents who declare that the travel ban has had negative consequences on their financial situation: the sum of categories 8, 9 and 10 accounts for 42.8 percent of the sample. Results were replicated removing those who were able to enter Japan during the last year with no effects on the distribution (the sum of categories 8-10 accounts for 39.5 percent).

**Figure 4 Has the travel ban had consequences on your financial situation?**



Another financial impact of the current situation is that some of the respondents had to cancel their stay in Japan. They account for 50.7 percent of the sample. What is interesting is when looking at whether they had to bear the cost of such a cancellation. 50.2 percent did not (costs were reimbursed, no prepaid or there was an insurance), meaning that 49.8 percent of the sample who cancelled their stay in Japan had to bear part or the totality of the costs.

**Figure 5 Since April 2020, have you had to cancel a stay in Japan?**



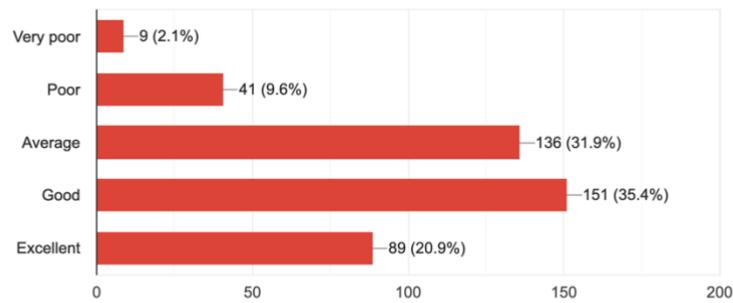
Some solutions exist, though. Among those who already have a worked contract in Japan but cannot enter the country, 37.1 percent declare that they are working remotely from their home country or another country than Japan and get paid anyway. This translates into a 62.9 percentage of workers who are not able to carry on with their Japanese work outside Japan.

#### **4.2. Health and wellbeing**

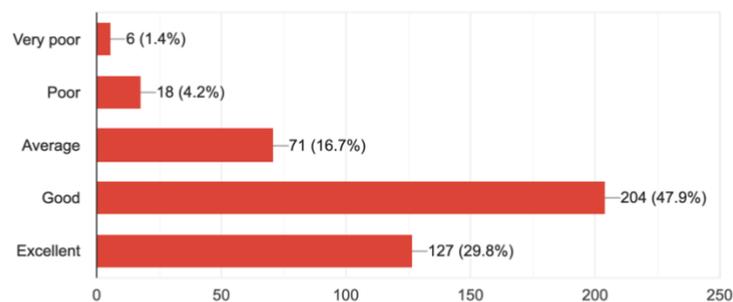
Health and well-being were calculated using four variables: self-perceived health (one year ago and at interview time), impact on stress level, sleep quality, physical health and quality of life. Figures 6 and 7 and table 1 exhibit the principal results on this matter.

First, it can be observed that self-reported health one year prior the questionnaire was better than the health at survey time with a much higher proportion of respondents reporting an excellent or good self-perceived health. As for the financial situation, the question is to know whether border enforcement measures have affected health and how.

**Figure 6 Nowadays, how is your health in general?**



**Figure 7 One year ago, how was your health in general?**



Looking at table 1, what can be observed is that the travel ban has had a self-reported impact on physical health in 56.2 cases out of 100. However, estimates about the mental and psychological health are much stronger as it has affected sleep quality, quality of life and level of stress of respectively 78.5, 95.1 and 98.8 percent of the respondents.

**Table 1 Impact of travel ban on physical health, sleep quality, quality of life and level of stress**

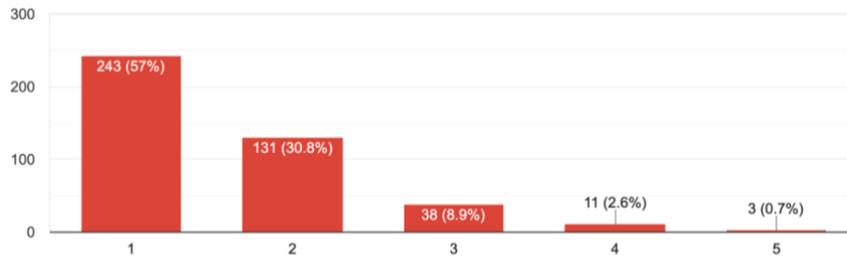
Do you feel the current travel ban has had an impact on your...	Yes	No
... physical health ?	56.2	43.8
... sleep quality ?	78.5	21.5
... quality of life ?	95.1	4.90
... level of stress ?	98.8	1.20

### 4.3. Communication with Japanese institutions

Communication with Japanese institutions was evaluated across four variables looking respectively at the Japanese Government communication, experience with Japanese administrations, Japan embassies in origin countries and current company for those who planned to work in Japan.

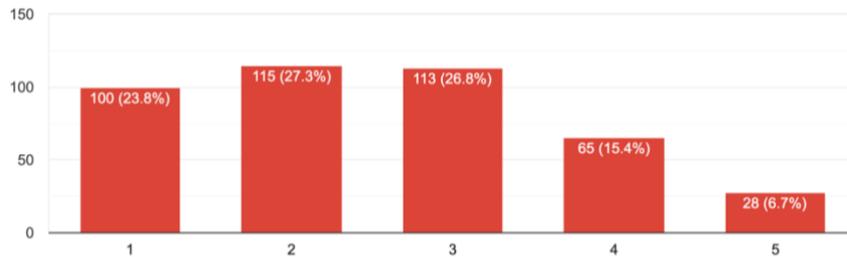
Regarding the official communication of the Japanese government about the current travel ban, respondents were very dissatisfied with a high share of respondent (57 percent) declaring that the official communication was very poor. Less than 1 percent of the sample declared that it was very good.

**Figure 8 How would you rate the official communication of the Japanese government about the current travel ban? (from 1. very poor to 5. Very good)**



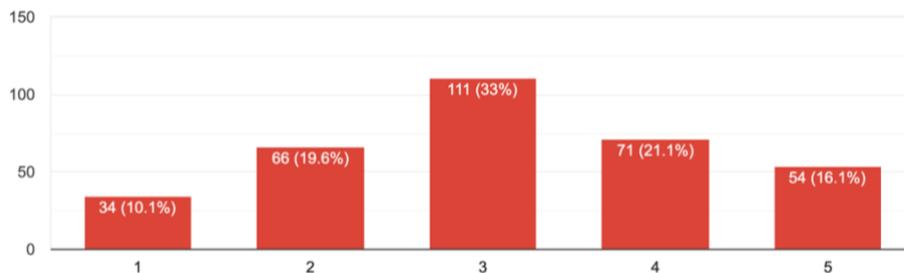
Results were most balanced when asking about the communication with the different Japanese institutions and administrations in charge of migrants' applications. 23.8 per cent of the sample found it very poor against 6.7 percent who found it very good. Summing up categories 1 and 2 and categories 4 and 5 (3 being the median category), one can assume that 51.1 percent of the sample was dissatisfied, and 22.1 percent was satisfied.

**Figure 9 How would you rate your communication with the different Japanese institutions and administrations in charge of your application? (from 1. very poor to 5. Very good)**



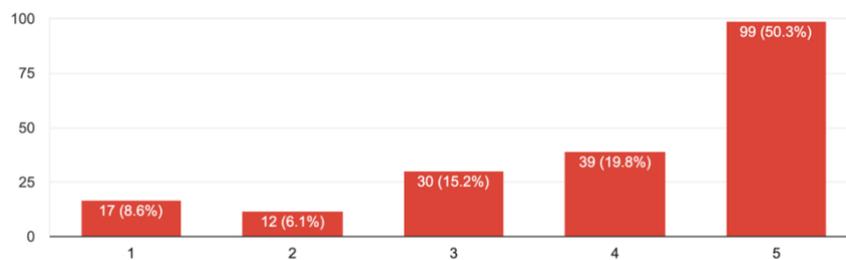
Results are much better when looking at the experience with a Japanese embassy. Among those who contacted the Japanese embassy, 10.1 percent estimated this experience very poor and 16.1 percent found it very good. However, it has to be mentioned that those contacting an embassy are more likely to be those who already obtained a Certificate of Eligibility (CoE), which tend to decrease the size of the sample replying to this question.

**Figure 10 How would you rate your experience with the Japanese embassy you contacted? (from 1. very poor to 5. Very good) [only for those who declared they contacted their embassy]**



Finally, it was asked to those who planned to come or came in Japan for work what they thought about the support provided by their employer for applying to a Certificate of Eligibility or Visa. As mentioned above, the phased measure to resume international travel was associated with stricter rules including the necessity for the companies (public or private) to provide a written pledge and offer support and follow-up to migrants. Results indicate that this experience was positive for most respondents with only 8.6 percent of the sample who found it very poor.

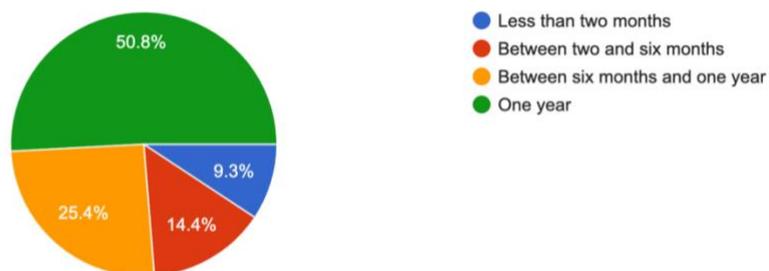
**Figure 11 How would you rate the support your employer gave you to deal with the process of applying for a Certificate of Eligibility (CoE) or Visa? (from 1. very poor to 5. Very good) [Only for those who planned to come to Japan to work in the private or public sector]**



#### 4.4. Partner, children and relationship

For those having a partner (whatever the status of the relationship is), it was for how long they have not seen each other since the start of the travel ban policy in April 2020. 50.8 percent of the sample did not see its partner for one year, 25.4 percent between 6 months and one year and 23.7 percent for less than six months.

**Figure 12 For how long haven't you seen your partner, spouse or boyfriend / girlfriend since April 2020?**



A small number of respondents (2.1 percent – 9 cases) has a child or several children currently in Japan. In 71 percent of the cases, that is the partner or spouse who takes care of the child(ren). For not breaking the anonymous nature of the data and given the small size of the respondents with children, further information could not possibly be disclosed.

#### 4.5. Expectations about border enforcement measures

Finally, a part of the questionnaire aimed to investigate the expectations of the respondents regarding border enforcement measures. At the time questionnaires were filled, the second state

of emergency was supposed to be ended by the 8<sup>th</sup> of March with uncertain and possible resumed international travels under the phased measures established in October 2020.

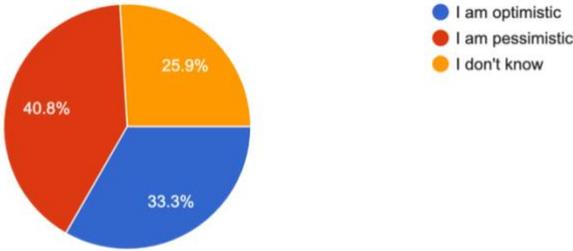
A first question was about estimating the main reason why border limitations were a problem for the respondents and included six modalities: ‘I miss my friends’, ‘I miss my family, child(ren) or relatives’, ‘my professional future is uncertain’, ‘I am in financial precarity’, ‘I have troubles staying in my own country’, ‘other (please specify)’. 53.8 percent of the sample declared that the current situation bothered them because it made their professional future uncertain, followed by 17.2 percent who declared missing their family, child(ren) or relatives. Both professional future and interpersonal relationships account for about 70 percent of the reasons for the trouble caused by travel restrictions. Interestingly, as the question was open to the modality ‘other’, a large share of the respondents (about 20 percent) indicated other types of reasons among which two particularly pop out: a relationship with a spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend or partner, on the one hand, and the impact a delayed arrival in Japan could have on study, work advancement (due to a relatively long period of unemployment) or pregnancy, on the other hand.

**Figure 13 What bothers you the most with the travel bans implemented by the Japanese government?**



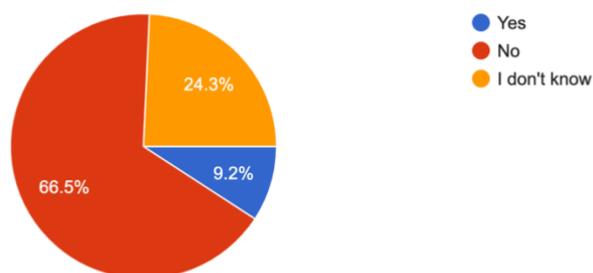
After a decrease in positive detected COVID-19 cases at the time of the survey, it was asked to respondents whether they were optimistic about the fact that international travel to Japan would resume soon: 33.3 percent of the sample was optimistic against 40.8 who were pessimistic and 25.9 who did not know, which translates a high degree of uncertainty.

**Figure 14 Are you optimistic about the fact that international travel to Japan for workers and families will soon resume?**



Finally, given the current border enforcement measures, it was asked to respondents whether they would cancel their plans to go in Japan in the future. About one respondent out of 10 declared that they would not go to Japan anymore due to the current border situation, 24.3 percent did not know but 66.5 percent of the sample did not plan to give up on going to Japan.

**Figure 15 Did you decide not to go in Japan anymore due to the current border situation?**



Interestingly, just a few respondents (7.5 percent of the sample) took legal advices from a lawyer or an association to help them out with border enforcement measures.

## **5. Preliminary policy implications and points to address**

Japan is in a particular situation compared with the rest of the world. On the one hand it has, in comparison with European countries, the US or Brazil, relatively low detected COVID-19 positive cases with, however, a sharp increase in December 2020. On the other hand, it aims to organize during Summer 2021 the Olympics that were planned in Summer 2020 but were postponed. These two factors contribute explaining why Japan wants to secure a low number of reported cases in the coming months and why migration might be considered as an issue that could, in some cases, translate in an apprehension in resuming international travel. However, tourist visas have been cancelled and will not resume until the autumn 2021 and many measures were taken to control international travel and narrow the spread of COVID-19 that it could potentially cause. In such a context, informing the authorities and the public about the effects border enforcement measures have had on migrants is of interest. Based on the above-mentioned preliminary results, six main points deserve consideration.

### **5.1. Restore trust**

Results from the survey indicate communication issues from the Japanese government and, to a lesser extent, from the Japanese administration in Japan. By contrast, the experience with Japan embassies abroad and companies in Japan is more likely to be rated as positive. There is a window for improvement in two ways. On the one hand, the Japanese government and administrations could work to increase transparency on what is their policy regarding travel ban and state clear objectives in terms of migrant acceptance to avoid uncertainty. On the other hand, a possibility to do so is to transfer some competencies to local Japanese embassies that seem to communicate much better with migrants than institutions in Japan do, but further data would be needed to assess such potentialities.

### **5.2. Investigate financial loss for individuals, companies and the states**

The travel restrictions implemented since April 2020 have had an impact on Japan based companies aiming to attract foreign workers and on universities and language school aiming to recruit students as well as on individuals' finances. Travel bans have negatively affected companies, schools and universities in Japan with potential financial loss that this study did not investigate. At an individual level, the study emphasizes two points.

First, a large part of the sample is now unemployed and is likely (depending on the country, the type of Welfare State and individuals' social rights) to receive unemployment benefits

and other types of social expenditures. Put in another way, many countries in the World are now providing benefits to students, workers or families that should basically be in Japan and would not benefit from these if borders were open. These benefits create costs for Welfare States, and this could be avoided by a more flexible approach of migration policies. Second, a large part of the sample is affected by financial issues caused by the travel ban that are amplified by the uncertainty of the current situation. Japan should clarify when borders will reopen, justify its decision and take in charge part of the costs related to unemployment and travel cancellations

### ***5.3. Children, family and love are an issue***

A part of the sample has an unofficial partner, legal partner or spouse in Japan and most of these partners are Japanese nationals. This is not understood by Japanese authorities as a key factor for allowing migration with possible damages on mental health and physical health for both foreign and Japanese nationals. Also, a small but significant part of the sample actually has a child or several children in Japan and is not able to enter Japan due to travel limitations. This is a major issue to be addressed by the Japanese government. Even though official documentation from the Immigration Services Agency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs seems to indicate that special exceptions apply for these situations, the dataset shows that some are actually affected by the travel ban with sometimes young children in Japan that they cannot see. Allowing those to enter Japan as quickly as possible should be a top priority.

### ***5.4. Exceptions to the travel ban***

Under the current border enforcement measures, several exceptions allow some specific migrants to enter Japan based on special circumstances as defined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Immigration Services Agency. This applies to humanitarian workers, health care workers and professors aiming to enter Japan to fill a position in a Japanese teaching institution, for instance. But the rules related to these exceptions such as the administrative process to be allowed a visa based on these are unclear. Clarification would reduce confusion for migrant workers and reduce the burden of Japanese administrations.

### ***5.5. To favor remote work and study***

Just a small part of the workers who are unable to enter Japan work remotely from their home country. Without being the ultimate remedy to border enforcement, private and public companies such as schools could consider pushing further, when possible, for remote work to avoid mental and physical health issues and financial burden for migrants. However, it has to be mentioned that the decision to implement remote work/study could be fostered by an official message from the Japanese authorities, as it is the case when pushing towards home working during the state of emergency.

### ***5.6. Resuming progressively international travel in a context of higher vaccination rates and lower fatalities***

Most respondents in the survey had or applied for a Certificate of Eligibility to be able to ask for a valid visa at their local embassy. One can therefore expect that those who have received a Certificate of Eligibility have concrete reasons that were approved by Japanese authorities to move to Japan and should be allowed to enter Japan in a gradual way. The next step could be to determine to what extent, how and under which circumstances further Certificates of Eligibility should be delivered. Resuming progressively international travel could be done through a concrete agenda that would allow, progressively, accepted migrants to enter the country and determine on which basis further certificates should be

provided. This is a key issue to tackle detrimental health effects engendered by border enforcement, particularly regarding mental health and quality of life.

### **Conclusion and further steps**

Data presented in this report are preliminary and have not been subject to an in-depth statistical investigation that would look at the associations across variable, endogeneity, sample representativeness and statistical significance. Further research based on this dataset will aim to establish statistically significant relationships between borders limitations, quality of life, financial health, general health and mental health.

I would like, to conclude, to particularly thanks all those who answered this survey, sometimes in very difficult material conditions. The purpose of this study was for their voice to be heard by Japanese authorities, Japanese citizens and the international community as, as demonstrated in this report, they are all affected by the current situation. One major point I would like to raise is that this survey has generated a great interest with answer rates much higher than expected and many comments on social media thanking me. This reflects, in my humble opinion, a lack of consideration for those who are currently facing border enforcement measures in Japan and in other countries as well. Paying attention to those who have organized a transnational life, live, study, work or love abroad is a top priority that further studies should pay attention to and policymakers should consider much further.

## **Conflicts of interest**

This study is not financed by third parties, did not receive support from any institution and is carried out independently from any Japanese or foreign institutions, nor public or private.

## **Data privacy**

Data from this study have been anonymously collected and stored within a private secured drive by the author of this paper. Under no circumstance the data will be shared by the lead researcher. Results are reported taking into consideration the small sample size and not allowing individuals to be recognized within the data presented in this report. Request to access the dataset will be consistently refused but the author could share macro data, plots or aggregated estimates. Participants to the study have the right to contact the study lead ([Wels.Jacques@ulb.ac.be](mailto:Wels.Jacques@ulb.ac.be)) in case of concern with anonymity or diffusion of the data.

## References

1. Wels J, Hamarat N. Are employment arrangements implemented during the first wave of COVID-19 associated with better health outcomes for women aged 55 and over? METICES Discuss Pap Ser. 2021;3:17.
2. Wels J, Hamarat N. Work and Employment Arrangements Europe and their Relationship with the aged 55 and over . Results from SHARE . METICES Discuss Pap Ser. 2021;(2):21.
3. Alon T, Doepke M, Olmstead-Rumsey J, Tertilt M. The Impact of Covid-19 on Gender Equality. NBER Work Pap Ser. 2020;26947:39.
4. Farré L, Fawaz Y, González L, Graves J. How the COVID-19 lockdown affected gender inequality in paid and unpaid work in Spain. IZA Discuss Pap. 2020;13434(13434).
5. Cook R, Grimshaw D. A gendered lens on COVID-19 employment and social policies in Europe. Eur Soc [Internet]. 2020;0(0):1–12. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1822538>
6. Ioannidis JPA. Global perspective of COVID-19 epidemiology for a full-cycle pandemic. Eur J Clin Invest. 2020;50(12):1–9.
7. Mitchell R, Nou G. Migrants: Left behind in health. Lancet Reg Heal - West Pacific. 2021;7:100119.
8. Holzmann R, Wels J. The cross-border portability of social security benefits: Status and progress? Int Soc Secur Rev. 2020;73(1):65–97.
9. Oh J, Lee HY, Long KQ, Markuns JF, Bullen C, Barrios OEA, et al. How well does societal mobility restriction help control the COVID-19 pandemic? Evidence from real-time evaluation. medRxiv. 2020;
10. Hossain MP, Junus A, Zhu X, Jia P, Wen TH, Pfeiffer D, et al. The effects of border control and quarantine measures on global spread of COVID-19. medRxiv. 2020;1–24.
11. Wells CR, Sah P, Moghadas SM, Pandey A, Shoukat A, Wang Y, et al. Impact of international travel and border control measures on the global spread of the novel 2019 coronavirus outbreak. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. 2020;117(13):7504–9.
12. Kikkawa Takenaka A, Villafuerte J, Raymond Gaspar, Badri Narayanan. COVID-19 Impact on International Migration, Remittances, and Recipient Households in Developing Asia [Internet]. Vol. 0. 2020. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22617/BRF200219-2><https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/622796/covid-19-impact-migration-remittances-asia.pdf><https://www.adb.org/publications/covid-19-impact-migration-remittances-asia>
13. Firang D. The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on international students in Canada. Int Soc Work. 2020;63(6):820–4.
14. Nguyen O (Olena) TK, Balakrishnan VD. International students in Australia—during and after COVID-19. High Educ Res Dev. 2020;39(7):1372–6.
15. Looi MK. Covid-19: Japan ends state of emergency but warns of “new normal.” BMJ [Internet]. 2020;369(May):m2100. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1136/bmj.m2100>
16. Looi MK. Covid-19: Japan declares second state of emergency as Asia struggles with virus surge. BMJ. 2021;372(January):n141.

**Tables and figures**

Figure 1 Number of positive PCR tests in Japan from January 2020 to March 2021, States of Emergency and Phased Measures for Resuming International Travel..... 10

Figure 2 On a scale from ‘very poor’ to ‘very wealthy’, how would you qualify your overall financial situation one year ago?.....12

Figure 3 On a scale from ‘very poor’ to ‘very wealthy’, how would you qualify your current overall financial situation?.....12

Figure 4 Has the travel ban had consequences on your financial situation? .....13

Figure 5 Since April 2020, have you had to cancel a stay in Japan?.....13

Figure 6 Nowadays, how is your health in general? ..... 14

Figure 7 One year ago, how was your health in general? ..... 14

Figure 12 How would you rate the official communication of the Japanese government about the current travel ban? (from 1. very poor to 5. Very good) .....15

Figure 13 How would you rate your communication with the different Japanese institutions and administrations in charge of your application? (from 1. very poor to 5. Very good) .....15

Figure 14 How would you rate your experience with the Japanese embassy you contacted? (from 1. very poor to 5. Very good) [only for those who declared they contacted their embassy].....15

Figure 15 How would you rate the support your employer gave you to deal with the process of applying for a Certificate of Eligibility (CoE) or Visa? (from 1. very poor to 5. Very good) [Only for those who planned to come to Japan to work in the private or public sector] ..... 16

Figure 16 For how long haven't you seen your partner, spouse or boyfriend / girlfriend since April 2020? ..... 16

Figure 17 What bothers you the most with the travel bans implemented by the Japanese government? .....17

Figure 18 Are you optimistic about the fact that international travel to Japan for workers and families will soon resume? .....17

Figure 19 Did you decide not to go in Japan anymore due to the current border situation? ..... 18

Table 1 Impact of travel ban on physical health, sleep quality, quality of life and level of stress .... 14