

**Forum:** SPC1 - Education

**Issue:** Addressing the effects of human capital flight on origin countries

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## Introduction

Human capital flight, often referred to as "brain drain", is the emigration of highly educated and skilled people from their country of origin to another in search of better work or study opportunities abroad. This issue is particularly affecting the nations who are continuing to develop, these countries face a loss of critical workers such as surgeons, engineers, and educators. In fact, this emigration causes to deepen the existing inequalities between high and low classes and weakening national capacities. Notable reasons for brain drain are: disparities in working conditions, levels of pay, the potential of career, lack of freedom or military/civil conflicts. In addition, poverty and lack of economic growth are believed to be one of the main reasons of human capital flight. These brain drain activities cause negative effects on source countries such as the loss of skilled and innovative individuals, the loss of tax revenues, and shortages of man power. In consequence, the source countries may face with the loss of socio-economic potential, minimization of the potential for public spending and insufficient numbers of workers in key sectors such as education or health.

Every year, the U.S. think tank, *Fund for Peace*, publishes a report dubbed the *Fragile States Index*. The report takes into account 12 conflict risk indicators, one of which is the "Human Flight and Brain Drain" which takes into account the effects of human displacement on the economy due to political or economic reasons and how it affects the growth of a nation. From this report, the country at the top with the possibility of 100% is Samoa. The other countries are: Jamaica, Palestine, Ukraine, El Salvador, Eritrea, Somalia, Afghanistan, Albania, Micronesia. These countries are mainly in civil or military conflict and situated in low income areas.



## Definition of Key Terms

### Brain Waste

Brain waste refers to the underemployment of highly skilled or educated individuals in low-skilled or unrelated jobs because of barriers like language, non-recognition of credentials, or lack of opportunity in their host country.

### Capacity Drain

Capacity drain refers to the loss of a country's institutional and systemic capacity—like health, education, or innovation—because of the long-term out-migration of skilled workers, which leaves national systems drained or understaffed.

### Credential Recognition Gap

The credentials recognition gap is the difference or failure to acknowledge educational qualifications, licenses, or diplomas among countries, which does not permit skilled migrants to pursue their trained profession overseas or on return.

### Policy-Induced Migration

Policy-induced migration occurs when individuals migrate not due to conflict or economic hardship, but in response to specific government policies—e.g., repressive labor laws, lack of academic freedom, or immigration incentives abroad—that push or pull skilled labor across borders.

### Reverse Brain Drain

Reverse brain drain describes the return movement of skilled immigrants to their home country, typically prompted by selective incentives, work prospects, or national development strategy, where these immigrants can re-invest their skills and foreign experience in their homeland.



## Background Information

Emigration of human capital, which is also termed brain drain, involves the large-scale movement of educated individuals, experts, or talented individuals to advanced areas from their native land. Individuals such as physicians, engineers, instructors, and IT experts primarily move in search of more beneficial economic conditions, better living standards, political stability, or enhanced research and professional environments. Although international mobility is beneficial to migrants and host countries, it most often entails substantial loss of talent for developing nations, eroding their ability for long-term growth and innovation.

Human capital flight has been around before. During the Cold War, scientists and intellectuals from Eastern Europe escaped to the West, away from political persecution. In the 1980s and 1990s, economic instability and civil wars in some parts of Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia led to a large-scale exodus of skilled staff. In recent decades, globalization, computerization, and the growing differences in research infrastructure and income levels have enhanced the process. Currently, even highly investing emerging economies such as India, Nigeria, and the Philippines experience significant losses of skilled experts to destinations like the United States, Canada, Germany, and Australia.

Human capital flight is driven by push and pull factors. Political uncertainty, governance, corruption, inferior pay, dilapidated infrastructure, and non-progression career opportunities are among the push forces. Pull factors include higher living standards, job opportunities, access to research grants, and social security in more affluent countries. Occasionally, government policies—such as visa programs for skilled migrants—also attract brain drain. For example, the American H-1B visa program and the European Union Blue Card program specifically entice foreign experts, primarily in the STEM and healthcare industries.



The consequence of human capital flight on the part of developing nations can be catastrophic. Developing nations put a tremendous amount of public funds into the training and education of professionals who are then lost to the more affluent economies. This leads to capacity drain in key areas like medicine and education, lowering access and quality of essential services. For instance, some sub-Saharan African countries face acute shortages of doctors and nurses due to the fact that most of them migrate to work in Western healthcare systems. Brain drain also hinders scientific research, economic competitiveness, and innovation in the country of origin, hence widening global inequalities.

The issue has attracted growing attention from international agencies. The World Health Organization (WHO) introduced a Global Code of Practice in 2010 to promote ethical recruitment of health workers and protect health systems in vulnerable countries. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) promotes "brain circulation" and return migration in programs like the Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) program. Similarly, UNESCO promotes international cooperation in education and science to reverse the loss of intellectual brainpower. But most of these efforts are impaired by limited budgets, political sophistication, and the voluntary nature of global agreements.

It is difficult to stop human capital flight, but some new solutions are on the drawing board. They include diaspora engagement policy, return-migration incentives, transnational research collaboration, and public-private partnerships that create opportunities at home. A few nations have initiated reverse brain drain programs, offering research grants, tax benefits, and academic positions to attract their diaspora back home. Yet, there is still no international consensus on how to balance the rights of people to mobility with the goals of national development. The international community must come together to design equitable migration policies that make brain drain a two-way movement of knowledge, skills, and opportunity.



## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### Palestine

Prior to the recent military conflict, young people in Palestine are immigrating to developed countries for educational and training opportunities abroad with the intention of returning to their home country to contribute to the economy. However, after the Israeli-Palestinian War, the situation of the country worsened as indicated by the Fund for Peace's report and other reports.

This exacerbation has profoundly affected the youth development and the overall situation within the country. Consequently, many young Palestinians now aspire to establish lives abroad, despite maintaining strong familial ties and a deep sense of connection to their native land.

### Jamaica

With a population of 2.8 million people, Jamaican-educated youths and highly qualified professionals opt to leave for North America and the United Kingdom which ultimately causes significant social and economic challenges within the country. Nearly a million Jamaican citizens have left their home country and emigrated to the US, the UK, and Canada over the last thirty years.

According to recent estimates, more than 80% of Jamaicans who completed tertiary education and now reside outside the country received their training in their home country. It has been observed that this loss of skills and knowledge impacts the nation's education system and other crucial sectors.

### Samoa

The Polynesian island of Samoa is a nation grappling with the problem of brain drain. The acute shortage of teachers in schools has led to consequences that older students being tasked with teaching responsibilities to address the deficit.



The country's Ministry of Education has tackled these issues by providing training and capacity-building for young teachers and increasing the number of disciplines taught by each year. While the authorities deny the claims that senior students are acting as teachers, they do admit that there is a serious lack of teaching staff in schools. This very important because schools are the most remarkable institution of a country that directly displays the social and cultural values and skills.

### International Organization for Migration (IOM)

This institution is the leading organization within the United Nations system promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. The connection of this organization with brain drains is because IOM plays a vital role in addressing the challenges and opportunities of human capital flight. As the UN's leading agency on migration activities, the IOM works with governments and communities to manage the movement of skilled migrants in ways that benefit both source and recipient countries.

It promotes "brain circulation" which is not a permanent change in places rather a opportunity to encourage return migration, diaspora engagement and knowledge exchanges with other countries and cultures. The organization's main point is to ensure that migration is not simply a drain on national capacity but a strategic tool for development and global cooperation.

### Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1940-1950: Post-WWII Recovery	European scientists and intellectuals emigrate to the U.S. and Canada after WWII.
1960-1970: Decolonization and Early Brain Drain	Newly independent nations in Africa and Asia experience emigration of skilled professionals.



1980s: Cold War Migration & Academic Exodus	Soviet bloc scientists and academics defect or emigrate to the West.
1990s: Globalization & Liberation	Fall of the Soviet Union and liberal economic reforms in India and China.
2000s: Rise of IT and Health Sector Migration	Massive outflow of IT professionals from India, and healthcare workers from Philippines and Sub-Saharan Africa.
2010s: Talent War & Reverse Brain Drain	Countries like China and India begin policies to attract their diaspora back.
2020s: Pandemic & Political Shift	COVID- 19 disrupts migration; many skilled workers return home.

### Relevant UN Resolutions and Other Documents

- Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (A/RES/73/195,2018)  
[https://www.un.int/philippines/activities/un-lauds-ph-leadership-historic-adoption-consensus-resolution-international-migration-and?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.un.int/philippines/activities/un-lauds-ph-leadership-historic-adoption-consensus-resolution-international-migration-and?utm_source=chatgpt.com)
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990)  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-protection-rights-all-migrant-workers>
- UNESCO Executive Board Report on Brain Drain (1974)  
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000075299>
- UN Report: Migration and Human Capital  
[https://www.un.org/esa/documents/HRD%20Rep%20Final30AUG.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.un.org/esa/documents/HRD%20Rep%20Final30AUG.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)
- UNESCO Report: The Brain Drain Problem  
[https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark%3A/48223/pf0000075299?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark%3A/48223/pf0000075299?utm_source=chatgpt.com)



## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

IOM uses the "brain circulation" strategy, wherein it regards brain drain not as loss but also as circulation of skills and knowledge. For example, through the Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) program sponsored by IOM, African professionals who live in Europe were able to return to their native land for a short period to share knowledge in the fields of education, health and technology. Through this, specialists were encouraged to contribute back to the country they originally belonged to, rather than being completely dependent on the host country.

WHO supported the "Global Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Healthcare Workers" in 2010 to balance the high migration of healthcare workers, especially from regions such as Africa and Southeast Asia. This report highlights that it is not ethically right for wealthy countries to recruit healthcare professionals from poor countries, but should work with the latter in the field of healthcare. For example, Britain's National Health Service (NHS) has put active health care worker recruitment from some poor countries on hold in accordance with this code.

UNESCO has placed its attention on the brain-drain impacts, especially on the fields of research and tertiary education. With its research since the 1970s, it has already shown that the exodus of scholars and researchers destabilizes developing countries' universities. The recent era has seen UNESCO taking on "diaspora professors" terminology and suggesting schemes that encourage remote teaching from expatriate professors to local institutions or virtual assistantship. This approach attempts to ensure knowledge flows, even if the return is not permanent.

The majority of international NGOs other than those in the United Nations are attempting to stem the negative effects of brain drain by collaborating with the diaspora. For example, the African Diaspora Network runs initiatives that encourage African entrepreneurs in Europe and the US to invest in start-ups on the continent, mentor, and come back home. Similarly, the India Development Foundation of





Overseas Indians was established to facilitate overseas Indians to contribute towards education and health activities in India. These setups ensure that individual achievement is translated into contributions towards collective development.

Several countries have begun reverse brain drain policies to lure back the human talent lost because of brain drain. China's "Thousand Talents Program," for example, offers competitive pay, research grants and honorific designations to incentivize Chinese intellectuals and foreign researchers to return to the country. Similarly, India has begun schemes offering research grants and laboratory facilities to scientists to return. These efforts not only intend to bring the people back but their knowledge and contacts with the world too.

### Possible Solutions

Develop international, UN-facilitated platforms whereby skilled diaspora from developing countries can provide remote expertise to their countries of origin while living abroad. These platforms could have a "virtual return migration" effect on connecting diaspora scientists, doctors, engineers, and teachers with public institutions and projects in their countries of origin.

Governments and NGOs can partner to offer reintegration scholarships that go beyond just funding but offer well-planned career paths, mentorship, home assistance, and seed capital for returnees. Instead of a single incentive, the program would tie in a multi-year proposal with career stability as an incentive for long-term resettlement and contribution.

Create diaspora co-funded and internationally donor-funded transnational innovation hubs in source countries. These hubs will provide high-tech infrastructure for returning talent and facilitate partnerships between local entrepreneurs and diaspora investors. This will transform the "brain drain" into a "brain investment."



One of the issues for working abroad or returning migrants is non-recognition of their skills. An international skills registry on a blockchain platform supported by UNESCO or IOM can enable easier return or regional mobility through transparent and speedy recognition of academic and professional skills.

Introduce "knowledge transfer" incentives: In the same way that nations benefit from fiscal transfers, returnees or diaspora members can also receive tax credits or deductions if they invest their time or resources in institutions in the home country, for example, by teaching short courses, mentoring start-ups, or supporting research.

Negotiate bilateral or regional circular migration agreements where skilled workers work temporarily overseas and then return home with secure employment, finance or new skills. The EU's pilot circular migration schemes with countries like Tunisia and Moldova are examples that can be followed globally.

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