



Brain Drain

A Gain or a Loss for the Global South

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Temple of Understanding

Overview

While international Brain Drain is traditionally described as when skilled workers leave from one country to another (in search of better working conditions and pay), this paper will cover the importance of all brains (skilled and unskilled) that leave the global south. There are around 266 million international migrants in the world, with the largest migration corridor (Mexico to the United States) moving 11.6 million migrants in 2017. These migrants sent 529 billion USD home to low- and middle-income countries through official remittances in 2018 (World Bank).

Effects: Losses

Brain Drain is linked to lower economic growth and productivity in the sending nation, and skilled Brain Drain exacerbates inequality. This is because it reduces wages for the unskilled population and increases wages for the remaining skilled population. Skilled Brain Drain is worse for developing nations with small skilled workforces because the skilled workers that leave the country are extremely hard to replace. Interestingly, women were overrepresented in skilled Brain Drain, which leaves countries with fewer female professionals (UNICEF Philippines).

One example of Brain Drain's effect is in Sub-Saharan Africa, which has 24% of the world's diseases, but only 3% of its healthcare force, and in Uganda, there is a 25% vacancy in public midwife positions. One organization Seed Global Health is trying to combat this by educating nurses and midwives in East Africa (*PBS*).

Another concern is that of Brain Waste. This is when a migrant has completed a higher educational level than their job's skill level. This could be due to factors such as lower quality of education in universities in developing countries, lack of recognition for universities, or language learning difficulties. This results in a "double brain loss" with both receiving and sending countries losing productivity; the receiving country loses the productivity of a skilled worker, and the sending country experiences Brain Drain (UNICEF Philippines).

Migrants also experience discrimination as a foreigner, not receiving the same work rights as citizens (Guardian & Al-Jazeera). One example of this is the case of Joanna Demafelis, a Filipino domestic worker, who was only allowed access to her phone every few months and could not keep her passport. To make matters worse, her employers murdered her and hid her body in a refrigerator for two years. When Demafelis' body returned to the Philippines, her sister said, "She's a big loss to [our family] because of her dreams for us. She always told our mother that the reason she left was because she wanted to help our parents and our youngest sibling" (*Rappler*). The outcry about Demafelis' murder caused a diplomatic crisis between Kuwait and the Philippines, where the Philippines did not grant any OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) the ability to work in Kuwait and voluntarily rescued any OFWs in Kuwait. Eventually, the countries brokered a deal, resulting in better protections for domestic workers in Kuwait (*Rappler, Gulf News*).

Effects: Benefits

The flipside of Brain Drain is (unsurprisingly) called Brain Gain. This occurs when a migrant uses the skills and capital to help their home country. They can transfer technology and knowledge. They engage in Diaspora Philanthropy, donating money to their home country. If they move back to their home country, they can take the money they earned to start a business (UNICEF Philippines).

Migrants remit money back home as well. By going straight to family and friends, remittances promote inclusive growth to be used for education, healthcare, etc. Remittances are also resilient to economic shocks, making them vital to some developing nations, contributing to 35% of Kyrgyzstan's GDP (UNICEF Philippines and Statista). They are also now the largest source of external financing for developing nations (except China), larger than foreign direct investment (World Bank).

Looking Forward

To promote Brain Gain and other benefits, society can address several issues. First, they should remember SDG Target 10.C by working to lower remittance transaction costs to 3% (Infornea.org). Programs like TOKTEN under UNDP and IOM's talent program, which encourage expatriates to come back to their home countries, could be expanded. More countries

could create their own programs to encourage migration back home. University degrees from developing nations could be recognized by more countries to prevent Brain Waste. Universities in developing nations should focus on sectors that are not overly crowded so that graduates will not need to migrate to find work. And, countries should create incentives for workers to stay in their home country (UNICEF Philippines).

To protect migrants, developing nations should make migrant workers' rights a top priority by signing bilateral agreements, such as in the case of Demafelis' death. Developing nations could also make sure that contracts are verified, as the Philippines does. Receiving nations ought to treat migrant workers and citizen workers equally as well.

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