Skilled Return Migration: Policy Implications

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Abstract:
Return migration of the highly skilled can benefit all, the sending country, the receiving country and the individual if it is supported by adequate policies and environment. Therefore, this article revolves entirely over this issue especially in context of Indian Diaspora and suggests management approaches and policy initiatives on how governments, suffering from brain drain, might initiate and accelerate this process.

Keywords: Indian diaspora, skilled return migration, policy initiatives, motivations, trends

1. Introduction

Return migration is a relatively new area of migration that does not have a standard meaning in national or international policy or law. Different typologies of return have been proposed to describe the level of development of the countries linked by migration and return, or the length of time spent back in the home country, or the intention of the migrants vis-à-vis the effective outcome, or the sociological setting of the individual return.

It is often pointed out that return migration of the highly skilled is generally considered to create a 'triple-win' situation, coming to the benefit of sending country, receiving country as well as individual migrants. The receiving states draw on the temporary supply of labour from abroad to fill shortages in their labour markets. Individual migrants have the possibility to receive a high salary and upgrade their skills abroad, whilst maintaining links and eventually returning (on a temporary or permanent basis) to their country of origin. For the sending countries, return migration can have the advantages of a temporary outflow of workers, investments by former migrants, and transfer of knowledge and skills by returnees.
The example of India demonstrates that the positive effects of brain gain can be supported—at least to a certain extent—by government policies. The Indian government has not only invested a great amount of money in education, but has also been able to encourage lost elites to invest in the economy through reforms which have liberalized the economy. This research focuses on investigating the effects of "brain gain" and how governments, suffering from brain drain, might initiate and accelerate this process.

2. Motivations of Return Migration

From a migration management point of view, returns broadly occur in three different ways regardless of the individual's status in the country of destination. Return may be:

- voluntary without compulsion, when migrants decide at any time during their sojourn to return home at their own volition and cost
- voluntary under compulsion, when persons are at the end of their temporary protected status, rejected for asylum, or are unable to stay, and choose to return at their own volition involuntary, as a result of the authorities of the host State ordering deportation.
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The extent to which returning migrants can contribute to economic development in their countries of origin also depends very much on the characteristics of each individual migrant, the diaspora community in general and the patterns of return. Return after a very short period of time abroad is generally considered to have no significant effect on economic development in the sending country. It has been argued that migrants should have stayed ten years or longer abroad in order to make an optimal contribution towards economic development.

In that case the observed tendency towards shorter periods of migration would be disadvantageous rather than beneficial to economic development. Temporary return could even lead to what has been called 'negative circularity', i.e. a form of temporary migration that has a negative rather than a positive impact on developing economies. This will be the case if there are large numbers of migrants who return to their home country only shortly in order to migrate again.

To sum up, the impact of policies that foster return migration depends to a large extent on the political, economic and social conditions in the sending and receiving countries as well as the migrants' individual characteristics.

3. Impact of Return Migration

Return migration has significant impact on countries of origin, transit, and destination. For destination and transit countries, the impact is felt on national immigration systems and on the integrity of asylum systems. For countries of return, whether of origin, transit, or third countries, large influxes of returning migrants may pose specific challenges to the "absorption" capacity in terms of reintegration and socio-economic stabilization. Countries of return may also experience changes to remittance patterns. It is clear that the reintegraton of returnees needs careful planning and greater cooperation between sending countries and receiving ones.
Example:

Many developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have traditionally offered temporary refuge to a number of persons compelled to leave their homes within their region. The largest numbers of asylum-seekers, refugees, and irregular migrants are still hosted in countries, mostly developing ones, within the regions of origin. Many of these countries find themselves in the dual role of both host and origin countries. In this context, the question of return of nationals is just as sensitive a political and social issue as it is in destination countries in the West.

4. Recent Trends in Skilled Migration

For decades, migration research has concentrated on the negative impact the immigration of skilled elites has on the countries of origin. The brain drain long experienced by many developing countries has been seen by many migration and development theories as a final outcome of migration. Yet, recent developments have suggested that a return migration of previously "lost" elites from developing countries – the quasi-reversal of brain drain – is possible.

Empirical research has shown evidence to suggest a positive relationship between economic development and the return migration of Third World elites (brain gain), including the establishment of social networks through migrant diasporas (Brown 2000).

There have been several studies and reports (UNDP 2001a) on highly skilled migrants, mainly scientists, from developing countries and their links to their home country (Gaillard / Gaillard 1997; Johnson/ Regets 1998; Meyer 2001), that indicate the positive effects or benefits of brain gain.

A prominent example is India, which has been one of the biggest recipients of international development aid and has been regarded as a country suffering the most from brain drain. Today this country is beginning to profit from the re-migration of its experts previously “lost” to the USA.

As global attention turns the spotlight on recession and unemployment ratios, a growing number of Indians are packing their international experience and degrees into their suitcases and heading home to a new, greener pasture. In what is a turnaround of the sapping brain drain phenomenon of the 1970s and 1980s, India stands to gain with the ambitious and educated seeking a better tomorrow through their “r2i” or return-to-India decision.

According to Kelly Services India, a global workforce solutions provider, around 300,000 Indian professionals are expected to migrate home over the next four years. Interestingly, it is not just the private sector that is attracting Indian returnees. The Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) has hundreds of Non Resident Indian (NRI) scientists keen to be part of India’s defence projects, with the Government also eager to attract Indian scientists currently abroad, as stated in recent media reports.

Return Migrant Entrepreneurs in India is a 2010 ILO report (ILO-EU Asia Migration Project and ILO Sub-regional Office in New Delhi) that focuses on blue-collar workers returning from the Middle East. The report states that while “a significant proportion of skilled workers
tend to migrate to countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, it is the less skilled migrant workers that comprise a higher proportion of the total number of out-migrants from India”.

4.1 A win-win situation - Average annual growth rate of India - 9 per cent

The average annual growth rate of India is 9 per cent which is very healthy compared to the developed economies after the recent recession. Most MNCs are looking at the Indian markets to support their growth/sustainability.

Dharmakirti Joshi, Chief Economist, CRISIL Ltd, elaborates: “Over the last few years India’s growth rate has gone up significantly. Between 2004 and 2011, average annual GDP growth has been 8.5 per cent. Additionally, India’s growth potential was not dented by the global financial crisis of 2008 and it quickly returned to the 8 per cent growth path within a year.”

According to Joshi, this is in contrast to the economic developments in the West. GDP growth not only came down sharply following the crisis, in both Europe and the United States, where recovery and growth prospects have been weak, and employment has taken a big hit.

Since India suffers from skill shortages, particularly at the high end of the job market, those returning can easily get absorbed. “The push factor has been shrinking job opportunities in the West and the pull factor has been opportunities for these professions in the fast-growing Indian economy. India has seen finance, information technology and medical professionals returning. This is a win-win situation for both. India stands to gain from the return of these professionals due to fast-emerging skill shortages in India,” explains Joshi. Hence, in order to reap the benefits of a foreign stint and do well back home, informed choices and sensible investments are also essential, more so for those in the less-skilled job sectors.

4.2 Return also comes with challenges

By the nineteenth century, it was recognized that migration flows often tend to produce "counterflows" of migrants—mostly returning migrants. While this is intrinsic to the concept of circular migration, much still remains to be understood about the complex and multilayered issue of return migration processes. Return migration remains the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration. This may be due in part to the fact that, in the past, many returns occurred spontaneously and were, therefore, unrecorded, and not perceived as requiring the same level of monitoring as cases involving resettlement and integration. However, a large number of labour migrants from developing countries have often been recruited with no intention to provide them with permanent resettlement, nor support for their return, when facing political or economic downturns in the host country.

Yet homecoming to India does come with its challenges. Admittedly, the transition does require resolve and could lead to disappointment and helplessness in the face of alleged corruption and inefficiency within the system.

The decision to return is strongly linked to family and lifestyle reasons, rather than to the income opportunities in different countries. Overall the data show a relatively limited role for income maximization in distinguishing migration propensities among the very highly skilled, and a need to pay more attention to other components of the utility maximization decision.
Therefore, the Indian government should encourage the reverse brain drain by forming a body to facilitate the homecoming as a one-stop shop; and should give a tax holiday for a period of at least 3 to 5 years.

5. Policy Framework

The consequence of return migration for the economic development of areas of origin has been the object of some debate. It is contended that when managed properly, return migration can be a real stimulus to home country development. On the other hand, large numbers of returnees, disappointed in their migration experience, often with little return on their initial outlay required for travel, and with no immediate employment prospects, may provide a further destabilizing socio-economic factor.

Although return is often seen simply as a matter of removing the migrant concerned from a given territory, problems may arise if the return is not sustainable and if little is done to facilitate the reintegration of the returning migrant. Return may also ultimately not be viable in cases where the migrant is removed to a transit state that lacks the means to return the migrant concerned to his or her country of origin. The end result may be that the migrant simply tries to re-enter the destination country illegally.

A comprehensive return policy will include several key factors to promote success:

- Promotion of voluntary return as the first option
- Measures for enforced return in safety and dignity
- Promoting sustainability of return, which means alleviating pressures leading to renewed attempts of undocumented migration
- Facilitating economic, social, and cultural reintegration of the returnee
- Partnerships and cooperation in implementing return

6. Rationale/Justification: Policy framework

These factors are examined in the "Important Points" that follow.

Important Points

1. The sheer scale of return migration, particularly related to irregular migration and the mass displacements stemming from emergency situations in countries of origin, has created new challenges and opened up possibilities for return that were not available before the end of the Cold War.

Example

- Bosnia and Herzegovina and subsequently Kosovo, Ivory Coast, Sierra. Afghanistan, and East Timor
- Population movements prompted by the collapse of the Soviet Union
- Returns of an "ancestral" nature involving people who did not then emigrate in the first place from a putative country of origin
2. At the international level, there has been an endorsement of the need to have a comprehensive approach to migration management that addresses political and developmental issues. For instance, migration cooperation clauses have been incorporated into the EU's association and cooperation agreements with third countries. Such a multi-disciplinary approach is also reflected in many other countries’ domestic efforts in co-ordinating policy across departments.

3. In 1994, the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development called on all states to manage returns through dialogue and constructive interaction.

4. An increasing variety of partnerships are being developed to manage migration because increasing interaction between humanitarian, economic, social, smuggling, and trafficking factors is making migration more complex and multi-directional. Partnerships can be key elements of a comprehensive approach to return migration by combining interests that cover the political, economic, and social dimensions of the phenomenon. Such partnerships can also ensure that migration policy takes account of human rights and development issues in countries of origin and transit.

5. A convergence of interests and cooperation in processing and assisting migrants stranded in transit can also eventually lead to complementary technical assistance initiatives to reinforce the migration management capacities of the transit country, as well as joint actions in countering smuggling activities affecting the region.

Example

One such approach to partnership is the "Cluster" initiative, which brings countries of origin, transit, and destination to the negotiating table to find common and practical solutions to irregular and return migration. In this instance, "Cluster" simply refers to a grouping of countries along a particular migration route with a mutual interest in resolving migration challenges. By offering a supportive and agreed return/reintegration framework, the cluster approach can directly contribute to fostering an increase in voluntary return migration.

6. Irregular migrants may require assistance to return from countries of transit en route to their intended destination where they may be destitute and without the means to find their own way home. This may be the result of interdiction actions by States of vessels on the high seas carrying irregular migrants; or because of illegal entry or overstay in a transit country; or because they are stranded at an airport as a result of deportation from a country of destination with missing or incomplete travel documentation.

7. Models of cooperation between countries of origin, transit, and destination are evolving to cope with this phenomenon that often involves mixed migrant flows. In many instances, this cooperation takes place in conjunction with international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and—where local asylum assessment capacity is lacking—the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
8. At a national level, it is useful to have arrangements for inter-departmental exchanges of information, and when working with other governments, it helps to provide a point of contact on specific policy issues. Such arrangements can assist in improving removals strategy.

9. Sustainable returns are a key element to any removal policy. This involves working with other departments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and agencies, particularly those with expertise in development, and those who can facilitate post-return and reintegration programmes as well as working with other governments to build good relations with countries of transit or of origin.

10. The sustainable return of people, both voluntarily and enforced, should be facilitated through policy initiatives that encourage third-country cooperation on post-return incentives. Policies should be encouraged that involve co-operation with agencies that can provide economic and social regeneration to areas with large numbers of illegal immigrants. Such initiatives will have a positive long-term impact on the prevention of illegal migration to the destination country and improved social well-being for communities in countries of origin.

**In short, government needs to focus mainly on the following areas:**

- To create effective mechanisms for management and monitoring of migration flows
- To improve the reliability of migration and remittance data and the capacity of the government to collect, share and apply such data
- To improve the knowledge and capacity of migrant workers and their families to channel and use their remittances for productive investments
- To improve the linkages of the Government with its Diaspora
- To improve remuneration of labour and a continued increase of state guaranties in this area
- To promote return migration and reintegration programs
- To create an enabling environment for SME growth
- To promote mobility of labour force/circular migration
7. Conclusion

As migration policy has developed, it has become very apparent that an effective returns policy requires a multi-disciplinary approach to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of a wider migration policy. This requires coherent cross-government, department, and agency co-operation. This should not be seen as an "optional extra", but an essential part of a returns programme. The convergence of inter-related policy areas in the policy-making process is a challenging, but important part of a comprehensive and fully effective migration policy.

Migration management requires a number of approaches, including the provision of assistance for the voluntary return of irregular migrants. This management tool is particularly effective when combined with competent border management and asylum management systems, including timely asylum adjudication and, as a last resort, expedited deportations of asylum-seekers who have been rejected for consideration.

Voluntary return is the preferred option for both policy makers and those being returned, but there is an inevitable need for enforced returns to take place in some cases. A policy of involuntary, or enforced, returns should be included as part of any comprehensive and balanced approach to migration. This policy will also safeguard the integrity of international protection mechanisms.

A balanced returns policy is one that will include enforced returns when voluntary returns are not possible. An effective approach to the return of those persons who do not have a legitimate basis to stay in a host State underpins the wider effort to tackle irregular and illegal migration. Rapid returns of irregular migrants and those persons determined not to be in need of protection provide the clearest possible message to traffickers and potential irregular migrants that their activities will not succeed.

**Key Message**

An effective returns policy requires a multi-disciplinary approach to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of a wider migration policy. Optimal results are achieved when return is combined with effective border and asylum management systems as well as with appropriate arrangements for legal and orderly entry, reception, and integration. A balanced returns policy will include enforced returns where the preferred option of voluntary return is not possible. Procedures for enforced removal need to be efficient and consistent with international human rights laws and conventions to ensure the safeguarding of basic human rights and protection needs of the person concerned.
References


