

The Brain Drain

Human capital flight, sometimes called “brain drain”, refers to the emigration of intelligent, well-educated individuals to another country for better pay or conditions, causing the home country to lose those skilled people, or “brains”.

The term "brain drain" was coined by the Royal Society in the 1950s to describe the emigration of scientists and technologists to North America from post-war Europe. Albert Einstein was an earlier, and perhaps the most famous, example of this form of emigration. Einstein was visiting the United States when Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933 and, being Jewish, did not go back to Germany, where he had been a professor at the Berlin Academy of Sciences. He settled in the U.S., becoming an American citizen in 1940. Although the term originally referred to science and technology workers leaving a nation, the meaning has broadened to describe "the departure of educated or professional people from one country, economic sector, or field for another, usually for better pay or living conditions".

As with other human migration, the social environment is considered to be a key reason for this population shift. In source countries, lack of opportunities, political instability or oppression, economic depression, and health risks contribute to brain drain. Host countries, on the other hand, may offer employment opportunities, political stability and freedom, a developed economy, and better living conditions. At the individual level, family influences (relatives living overseas, for example), as well as personal preferences, career ambitions and other motivating factors can be considered.

In spite of its negative connotation, “brain drain” migration can be seen in a positive light. There is obviously a benefit to the migrating individuals, in terms of career progression, quality of life and earning power. These professionals often send remittances home to family members, and they may at some point return to their home countries with enhanced knowledge and skills. The home country may also experience an increase in demand for higher level education as people see the opportunities for educated workers overseas.

On the other hand, it is almost certainly more beneficial for a country to gain educated professionals than to lose them. It can be argued that the brain drain leads to an uneven distribution of knowledge, promoting innovation and development in destination countries, while stripping ‘source’ countries of their best workers, and therefore hindering their progress.

Some governments have policies to retain skilled workers. In Germany, Switzerland, Austria and France, for example, government-funded initiatives have been established to assist professionals working abroad to return to their home countries. By contrast, the Indian government has not adopted such policies, believing that the lost talent will eventually contribute to the nation in the future.

Questions 1 to 4

Choose the best answer for each of the questions. Write A, B, C, or D as your answer.

1. People first used the term “brain drain”

- A) during the Second World War
- B) when Albert Einstein decided to settle in the USA
- C) to refer to the emigration of skilled Europeans after the Second World War
- D) to describe immigration in North America

2. “Brain drain” migration is thought to be the result of

- A) social and environmental factors in developing countries
- B) the problems people face in source countries, and the allure of a better life
- C) families living in different parts of the world
- D) workers becoming more ambitious

3. When people emigrate to work abroad

- A) they may help their families by sending money home
- B) they usually return home to visit family members
- C) they benefit from better education systems in the destination countries
- D) their home countries receive money for higher education

4. To curb the negative effects of a “brain drain”

- A) most countries promote innovation
- B) all governments have policies to stop skilled workers leaving
- C) Indian migrants are expected to send financial contributions home
- D) schemes have been implemented in some countries to bring migrants home

Correct answers:

1. C
2. B
3. A
4. D

For more multiple choice practice, click on the links below.

[Academic reading, multiple choice exercise](#)

[General reading, multiple choice exercise](#)

Note:

I recommend that you try both of the exercises above. The techniques for multiple choice questions are the same for both the academic and general tests.