



International
Labour
Office

MIGRATION, SCIENTIFIC DIASPORAS AND DEVELOPMENT: IMPACT OF SKILLED RETURN MIGRATION ON DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

Duration: From January 2011 to February 2013

Background

The link between skilled migration and home-country development has gained significance over the past number of years, with increasing number of studies addressing the flows of scientists, skilled professionals and students from the perspective of their potential contributions to the countries of origin either through their interventions from abroad or by their eventual return. India represents a good case in point as an important source of skilled personnel for many countries around the world. The ILO's particular interest in this project is in the contributions of institutional environments and relevant policies in shaping transnational activities of skilled migrants in their home country. The institutional settings of host countries matter in terms of their attractiveness for skilled migrants as well as in how they facilitate the exchange of knowledge with the home country. Continental European countries, which have turned into new destinations for Indian talent, are faced with questions about how to attract and retain foreign talent while at the same time stepping up their cooperation with developing countries. With the official discourse claiming that attracting foreign talent should not be at the cost of a brain drain for the countries of origin, these destination countries represent a good case for studying the contemporary links between skilled migration and development.

Four major channels were identified through which we can estimate and perceive the impact that skilled migration has on development:

- physical return
- remittances and investment
- knowledge transfer and
- social impact.

Knowledge transfer was found to be the most important of the four development engagement channels. Indian students and professionals in Europe link their development aspirations to their return plans and believe that Indian society can benefit from their expertise and networks acquired abroad. The survey among returnees, however, shows that they face a number of obstacles within the local system once they are back in India. Some of the obstacles identified in this study include the local work culture, a resistance to change, the lengthy bureaucratic process, and a lack of suitable infrastructure. Impediments to development potential of

skilled migration appear also in the lack of institutional involvement on the side of migrants. Diaspora knowledge networks, which bring together groups of scientists, engineers and skilled professionals, can work as instruments with a significant influence in terms of knowledge transfer. The outreach of these networks for Indians in Europe is often limited to selected groups, missing participatory and inclusive approaches. In addition, a majority of diaspora and returnees were found to have little knowledge of the various initiatives undertaken by the Indian government to engage with its diaspora. Even though Indians perceive the regional and national development of their home country as something very relevant, quite often they do not know how they could personally contribute, or they lack trust in the necessary structures. Accordingly, personal enthusiasm and efforts should be met with an enabling environment and with supportive policies from the country of origin and destination countries, making it easier and more inviting for individuals to participate in institutionalized collaboration.

Project overview

The project was coordinated by the Cooperation and Development Center (CODEV) of the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) and it was implemented in close collaboration with the Labour Migration Branch (MIGRANT) of the ILO, the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK) and the International Migration and Diasporas Studies (IMDS) Project of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). Funded by the Swiss Network for International Studies (SNIS), the project ran from January 2011 until February 2013.

The project aimed to expand the knowledge-base on skilled return migration and its impact, and to explore strategies to influence the potential of skilled diasporas. Taking the example of Indian skilled migration, the study offers an evidence-based analysis that shows the effects that both return and diaspora transnationalism have on home country development. The study draws on data collected simultaneously in the host and home countries between 2011 and 2012. One part of the study examined skilled Indians in four European destination countries (France, Germany, The Netherlands and Switzerland) and the other part of the study looked at skilled Indian returnees in six major cities in India (Delhi-National Capital Region (Delhi, Noida and Gurgaon), Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Mumbai and Pune).