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ARTICLE



Impact of migration of Sri Lankan professionals to Qatar on skill acquisition and brain drain

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ABSTRACT

Since the boom in the economies of Gulf countries in the mid-1970s, the region has gradually become an appealing destination for professional migrants. In the Gulf, professionals gain skills and knowledge which could be beneficial for their home countries. However, the majority of studies on professional migrants have only focused on those who migrate to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. This study on Sri Lankan professional migrants to Qatar attempts to address this dearth in literature by assessing the skills and long-term plans of Sri Lankan professionals in Qatar. The study is based on primary data gathered via in-depth interviews and an online survey of 125 Sri Lankan professionals based in Qatar. Drawing on the concepts of brain drain and brain gain and using a mixed-method analysis, the study identifies that the enhancement of communication, technical, managerial and other skills and the exposure to cutting-edge technologies by Sri Lankan professionals in Qatar are valuable for Sri Lanka. The study also identifies that the majority of Sri Lankan professionals in Qatar have prolonged their stay in the country. Moreover, a significant number of these professionals intend to migrate to OECD countries permanently without returning to Sri Lanka, which prevents the country from benefiting from their skills.

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KEYWORDS

Migration; brain-drain; brain-gain; Sri Lanka; Gulf region

Introduction

Migration of professionals has become a key field in migration research due to the continuous flow of highly-skilled persons from developing countries to developed nations (Ekanayake & Amirthalingam, 2019). The early studies on the migration of professionals viewed the migration of the most skilled and educated members of poor developing nations as a drain on the human capital of these countries. However, recent studies on the subject argue that developing countries have the potential to gain from the migration of their highly-skilled members to developed countries through technology and knowledge transfers that take place via return and circular migration. (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012; Kone & Özden, 2017).

The majority of studies on high-skilled migration from developing countries have focused on professional migrants to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and