

## **Brain Drain among Indian health workers**

### **What is the issue?**

The government's policies to check brain drain in health sector is restrictive in nature which cannot address the current health sector challenge.

### **How is India's brain drain?**

- For several decades, India has been a major exporter of healthcare workers to developed nations particularly to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Europe and other English-speaking countries.
- As per OECD data, around 69,000 Indian trained doctors and 56,000 Indian-trained nurses work in the UK, US, Canada and Australia in 2017.
- There is also large-scale migration of health workers to the GCC countries.

### **How has the pandemic accelerated brain drain?**

- With the onset of the pandemic, there has been a greater demand for healthcare workers across the world, especially in developed nations.
- Countries in dire need of retaining their healthcare workers have adopted migrant-friendly policies.
- At the beginning of the pandemic, OECD countries exempted health professionals with a job offer from the travel bans.
- Some countries processed visa applications of healthcare workers even during the lockdown period.
- The UK has granted free one-year visa extensions to eligible overseas healthcare workers and their dependents.
- Similarly, France has offered citizenship to frontline immigrant healthcare workers during the pandemic.
- Strong pull factors such as higher pay and better opportunities in the destination countries drive these workers to migrate abroad.
- Also the lack of government investment in healthcare and delayed appointments to public health institutions acts as a catalyst for such migration.

### **What are the steps taken to control brain drain?**

- In 2014, government stopped issuing No Objection to Return to India (NORI) certificates to doctors migrating to the US.
- The NORI certificate is a US government requirement for doctors who migrate to America on a J1 visa and seek to extend their stay beyond three years.
- The non-issuance of the NORI would ensure that the doctors will have to return to India at the end of the three-year period.
- The government has included nurses in the Emigration Check Required (ECR) category.
- This move was taken to bring about transparency in nursing recruitment and reduce exploitation of nurses in the destination countries.
- This policy requires nurse recruitment to be done through six state-related employment agencies and makes it mandatory for the nurses to accept international contracts that are approved by the government.

### **What is the problem with these measures?**

- Indian nurses are mostly from lower middle-class families and take loans to complete their nursing education with an aim of getting a job abroad.
- Meanwhile, they also prepare for the IELTS tests which is one of the indication of their desire to migrate.
- Therefore government's policies to check brain drain are restrictive in nature and do not give us a real long-term solution to the problem.

### **What can be done now?**

- Hence a systematic change is required which could range from increased investment in health infrastructure, ensuring decent pay to workers.
- The government should focus on framing policies that promote circular migration and return migration.
- These policies will incentivise healthcare workers to return home after the completion of their training or studies.
- It could also work towards framing bilateral agreements that could help shape a policy of brain-share between the sending and receiving countries.
- This ensures that destination countries of the migrants would be obliged to supply healthcare workers to their country of origin in times of need, especially in the current times.

**Source: The Hindu**



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