

Brain Drain in India, Key Causes, Economic Impact, Government Steps

May 23, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



Brain Drain in India refers to the migration of educated and skilled people from the country to other nations. Many professionals such as doctors, engineers, scientists, and students move abroad in search of better job opportunities, higher salaries, and improved living conditions. This outflow of talent can affect India's development, as the country loses valuable human resources that could have contributed to its growth.

About Brain Drain in India

- Brain Drain refers to the **migration of skilled and educated people from India to other countries** in search of better opportunities, education, and living standards.
- In India, it is mainly seen in **students going abroad for higher education and often settling there, leading to loss of human capital.**
- **Current Scenario of Student Mobility**
 - India is facing a **major imbalance in student mobility**, where outbound students (Indians going abroad) are much higher than inbound students (foreign students in India).
 - For every **1 international student, nearly 25 Indian students go abroad**, showing a serious gap.

- In 2021-22, India had about **46,878 foreign students, while 11.59 lakh Indian students went abroad**, increasing to **13.36 lakh by 2024**, indicating a rising trend.

- **Key Findings of the Report**

- The **NITI Aayog** report highlights that India's internationalisation is **"skewed"**, focusing more on **outbound mobility rather than inbound mobility**.
- This trend is a **major cause of brain drain**, as India is unable to retain domestic talent or attract global students and researchers.

- **Reasons Behind Brain Drain**

- Students move abroad due to **better quality education, advanced research facilities, and global exposure**.
- Other factors include **higher salaries, better job opportunities, and improved lifestyle** in developed countries.
- Domestic challenges like limited **research funding, rigid curriculum, and intense competition** also act as push factors.

- **Challenges in Attracting Foreign Students**

- India faces issues like poor infrastructure, visa barriers, and lack of student support services.
- Other challenges include rigid curriculum, limited scholarships, and low global visibility of institutions.
- These factors reduce India's ability to attract international students and faculty.

- **Recommendations by the Report**

- The report suggests **"Internationalisation at Home"**, focusing on **bringing global standards and practices into Indian institutions**.
- It recommends schemes like **Vishwa Bandhu Scholarship** to attract foreign students with financial and academic support.
- Strengthening initiatives like **"Study in India"** and promoting **international summer schools** can improve inbound mobility.
- It also suggests improving **research funding, career opportunities, and academic collaborations within India**.
- Learning from **global models like China's talent programmes** can help in reversing brain drain.

Reasons for Brain Drain in India

- **Push Factors (Factors forcing people to leave India)**

- One major reason is the **limited access to quality higher education in India**. With very high cut-offs, intense competition, and limited seats in top institutions, many deserving students are unable to get admission, **pushing them to look for opportunities abroad where entry systems are relatively flexible**.
- India also suffers from **low investment in research and development (R&D)**, with spending stuck around **0.7% of GDP**, which is quite low compared to other developing nations. Due to this, students and researchers often lack proper funding, infrastructure, and guidance, forcing them to move abroad to continue their work.
- Another important push factor is the **issue of lower income and limited career growth in certain sectors** like healthcare, research, and academia. Many professionals feel that their efforts are not

rewarded adequately in India, which encourages them to migrate.

- There is also a problem of **lack of recognition and appreciation of talent**. In a highly populated country like India, it becomes difficult for individuals to stand out, and often **merit is overshadowed by competition or lack of opportunities**, leading talented people to seek recognition abroad.
- Additionally, **rigid education systems and outdated curriculum** in some institutions limit creativity and innovation. Students who want **practical exposure and interdisciplinary learning** often prefer foreign universities.
- Social factors also play a role, such as **pressure to follow conventional career paths and lifestyles**. Many young people feel restricted by societal expectations and prefer moving to countries where they have **more freedom of choice and independence**.

- **Pull Factors (Factors attracting people towards foreign countries)**

- One of the strongest attractions is the **better standard of living offered by developed countries**, including high-quality infrastructure, healthcare, education, and social security systems. This creates a **strong motivation to settle abroad**.
- Foreign countries provide **higher salaries and better remuneration**, especially in fields like IT, medicine, engineering, and research, which significantly improves the financial condition of migrants.
- There is also a **clear difference in the quality of life**, including better work-life balance, cleaner environment, efficient public services, and safety, which makes these countries more appealing.
- **Developed nations actively follow talent-attracting policies**, such as easy visa rules, work permits, and permanent residency options, specifically designed to attract skilled professionals from countries like India.
- Another key factor is the **availability of world-class universities and research institutions**, which offer advanced facilities, global exposure, and international collaborations, helping students build better careers.
- Many students and professionals are also attracted by the **culture of innovation and merit-based systems abroad**, where talent is more likely to be recognized and rewarded fairly.
- In addition, **exposure to a more liberal and open society** gives individuals greater personal freedom and lifestyle choices, which is appealing to many young Indians.

Effects of Brain Drain in India

- **Loss of Skilled Human Capital**

- One of the biggest impacts of brain drain is the **loss of highly educated and skilled people** such as doctors, engineers, scientists, and teachers.
- This creates a shortage of talent in important sectors like healthcare, education, and technology, slowing down overall national development.

- **Financial Impact**

- There is a **massive outflow of money due to students studying abroad** under the **Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS)**.
- Spending increased from ₹975 crore (2013-14) to about ₹29,000 crore (2023-24), showing a sharp rise.

- This amount is nearly **53% of India's higher education budget**, highlighting a significant economic loss.
- **Shortage of Healthcare Professionals**
 - One of the most visible impacts of brain drain is the **shortage of doctors and nurses in India**. For many years, trained healthcare workers have been moving to countries like the Gulf nations (GCC), UK, USA, and others, leaving gaps in India's healthcare system.
 - As a result, **India has a low doctor-to-patient ratio (around 1:811)** and only about **2.23 nurses per 1000 people**. This puts extra pressure on the existing workforce.
- **Pressure on Public Healthcare System**
 - Due to migration, **government hospitals and rural health centres face severe staff shortages**.
 - This leads to **overworked doctors, long waiting times, and reduced quality of care**, especially for poor and rural populations who depend heavily on public healthcare.
- **Weakening of Research and Innovation**
 - When talented researchers and innovators leave, **India's ability to develop new ideas, technologies, and solutions gets affected**.
 - **Low investment in research and development (R&D)** combined with migration leads to less innovation and fewer scientific breakthroughs.
- **Slower Economic Growth**
 - **Skilled professionals contribute significantly** to the economy through their work, productivity, and spending.
 - **When they migrate, the country loses productive workers**, which results in slower economic growth and reduced efficiency.
- **Loss of Government Revenue**
 - **Highly paid professionals usually contribute more in taxes**, which help the government fund infrastructure, healthcare, and welfare schemes.
 - When they leave, **there is a decline in tax collection, affecting public development projects**.
- **Increased Economic Inequality**
 - Brain drain can **widen the gap between rich and poor regions**.
 - **Wealthier and more educated individuals are more likely to migrate**, leaving behind weaker communities with fewer skilled professionals to support development.
- **Pressure on Domestic Systems**
 - The shortage of professionals increases the burden on those who remain.
 - For example, fewer doctors mean overcrowded hospitals, long waiting times, and reduced quality of services.
- **Financial Outflow (Foreign Exchange Loss)**
 - A large number of Indian students go abroad for higher education, **leading to a huge outflow of money from the country**.
 - This spending on foreign education **reduces India's foreign exchange reserves** and could have been invested in domestic institutions.
- **Underutilisation of Demographic Dividend**
 - India has a **large young population, which is considered a strength**.

- However, when skilled youth migrate, the country fails to fully utilise its **human resource potential**, weakening long-term growth prospects.
- **Dependence on Foreign Countries**
 - With fewer skilled professionals at home, **India may become more dependent on foreign technology, expertise, and services.**
 - This can affect self-reliance and national development goals.
- **Regional Imbalance in Development**
 - Brain drain **often affects smaller cities and rural areas more**, as talent moves first to big cities and then abroad.
 - This creates a **development gap between regions**, slowing balanced growth.
- **Decline in Productivity and Efficiency**
 - When experienced professionals leave, **industries face a shortage of expertise**, leading to lower productivity and inefficiency.
 - Training new workers also takes time and resources, adding to the challenge.
- **Social and Psychological Impact**
 - Continuous migration can **create a feeling among youth that success lies only abroad**, reducing confidence in domestic opportunities.
 - It may also lead to family separation and **social changes within communities.**

Government's Stance on Brain Drain in India

- **Flexible Approach towards Citizenship and Migration**
 - India does not allow dual citizenship, so people who take foreign citizenship must give up their Indian passport.
 - However, the government provides an alternative in the form of the **Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card**, which allows them to live, work, and even run businesses in India.
 - This shows that the government is not completely against migration, but instead tries to maintain a connection with Indians living abroad.
- **Brain Drain Seen as Both Challenge and Opportunity**
 - While brain drain leads to loss of talent, the government also recognizes that **Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) contribute significantly through remittances, investments, and global networks.**
 - India receives a large amount of foreign exchange through remittances, which supports the economy.
 - Because of this, the government's approach is somewhat balanced rather than strictly restrictive.
- **Easy Exit but Limited Control Measures**
 - The process to renounce **Indian citizenship is simple and online**, indicating that the government does not heavily restrict people from leaving.
 - Some steps have been taken to **regulate migration** (like certain certification requirements), but overall, India has not imposed strict barriers to stop brain drain.
- **Efforts to Bring Back Talent (Reverse Brain Drain)**
 - The government has launched several schemes to **attract Indian-origin scientists and professionals back to India**, such as:

- **Ramanujan Fellowship** and **INSPIRE Programme** to support young researchers and scientists returning from abroad
 - **Ramalingaswamy Fellowship** to provide research opportunities in India
- These programs aim to create career opportunities and research support so that talented individuals can contribute within the country.
- **Strengthening Research and Innovation Ecosystem**
 - Multiple initiatives have been introduced to improve research quality and academic environment in India, including:
 - **SPARC (Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration)**
 - **STARS (Scheme for Transformational and Advanced Research in Sciences)**
 - **IMPRESS (Impactful Policy Research in Social Sciences)**
 - These schemes focus on boosting India-specific research and global collaboration, making India a more attractive place for scholars.
- **Collaboration with Global Talent**
 - Programs like:
 - **GIAN (Global Initiative of Academic Networks)**
 - **VAJRA (Visiting Advanced Joint Research Faculty Scheme)**
 - These allow foreign experts and Indian-origin scientists abroad to work with Indian institutions for short periods.
 - This helps in knowledge sharing without requiring permanent migration back to India.
- **Development of Research Infrastructure**
 - The government is investing in **Research Parks at IITs and IISc**, where students and researchers **can work on innovation, startups, and advanced research**.
 - This is aimed at creating a strong research ecosystem within the country, reducing the need to go abroad.
- **Education Reforms (NEP 2020)**
 - The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** aims to promote **internationalisation of higher education in India**.
 - It allows foreign universities to set up campuses, encourages global collaborations, and focuses on improving education quality.
 - This can provide international-level education within the country, reducing the need for students to go abroad.
- **Three-Pronged Strategy to Tackle Brain Drain**
 - The government broadly follows a **three-part strategy**:
 - Improving research infrastructure and academic environment
 - Creating opportunities for Indian-origin professionals abroad
 - Expanding postdoctoral and advanced research opportunities in India

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/brain-drain-in-india/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.