



India's Brain Drain in Health Sector

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Why in News

India has been a **major exporter of healthcare workers** to developed nations particularly to the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** countries, Europe and other English-speaking countries.

This **Brain Drain** in the health sector is part of the reason for the **current shortage in nurses and doctors**.

Key Points

- **Brain Drain:**

- Brain drain is a term **indicating substantial emigration or migration of individuals**.

A brain drain can **result from turmoil within a nation**, the existence of **favorable professional opportunities** in other countries, or from a desire to seek a **higher standard of living**.

- The **majority of migration is from developing to developed countries**. This is of **growing concern worldwide** because of its impact on the health systems in developing countries.
- As per the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** data, around **69,000 Indian trained doctors worked in the UK, US, Canada and Australia in 2017**. In these four countries, 56,000 Indian-trained nurses were working in the same year.
- There is also large-scale **migration of health workers to the GCC countries** but there is a **lack of credible data** on the stock of such workers in these nations.

There is no real-time data on high-skilled migration from India as in the case of low-skilled and semi-skilled migration.

- **Reasons:**
 - **Need in the Pandemic:**
 - 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**.
 - The **UK has granted free one-year visa extensions to eligible overseas healthcare workers** and their dependents whose visas were due to expire before October 2021.
 - **France has offered citizenship** to frontline immigrant healthcare workers during the pandemic.
 - **Higher Pay and Better Opportunities:**

There are **strong pull factors** associated with the migration of healthcare workers, in terms of **higher pay and better opportunities in the destination countries**.
 - **Low Wages and Lack of Investment in India:**
 - There are **strong push factors** that often drive these workers to migrate abroad.
 - In case of nurses in India the **low wages in private sector outfits along with reduced opportunities in the public sector** plays a big role in them seeking employment opportunities outside the country.
 - The **lack of government investment in healthcare and delayed appointments** to public health institutions act as a catalyst for such migration.
 - **Policies of the Indian Government :**
 - The government's policies to check brain drain are restrictive in nature and do not give a real long-term solution to the problem.
 - In 2014, it 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 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.

- **Concerns in India's Health Sector:**

- **Lack of Human Resource:**

India has **1.7 nurses per 1,000 population** and a **doctor to patient ratio of 1:1,404** — this is well **below the World Health Organization (WHO) norm** of three nurses per 1,000 population and a doctor to patient ratio of 1:1,100.

- **Skewed Distribution:**

The distribution of **doctors and nurses is heavily skewed against some regions**. Moreover, there is **high concentration in some urban pockets**.

- **Poor Infrastructure:**

The **2020 Human Development Report** shows that India has **five hospital beds per 10,000 people** — **one of the lowest in the world**.

Way Forward

- **Increased investment in healthcare**, especially in the public sector, is thus the **need of the hour**. This would, in turn, increase employment opportunities for health workers.
- India **needs systematic changes to building an overall environment** that could **prove to be beneficial for them and motivate them to stay in the country**.
- The **government should focus on framing policies that promote circular migration and return migration**—policies that **incentivise healthcare workers to return home** after the completion of their training or studies.
- India could also work towards framing bilateral agreements that could help shape a policy of “**brain-share**” between the **sending and receiving countries**.

Source:IE