

From Brain Drain to Brain Circulation

Linking Skills and Migration for Development : Insights from Lebanon

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Methodology

Research Question

Under what conditions does skilled migration generate development gains for countries of origin?

Evidence Base

- High-skilled migration: brain drain / brain gain / brain circulation
- Temporary migration and origin-country effects
- Student mobility and transnational knowledge transfer

Analytical Framework

Skills formation → mobility → circulation channels → conversion capacity → development outcomes

Case Application — Lebanon

- Structurally high outward skilled mobility
- High tertiary education output
- Limited labour-market absorption
- Large, globally connected diaspora

Key Findings

Migration Effects Are Conditional

- Human-capital loss (brain drain)
- Knowledge and network gains (circulation)
- Net outcome depends on institutional capacity

Transmission Channels

- Education incentives
- Remittances
- Return migration
- Diaspora networks
- Knowledge and technology transfer

Conversion Constraint — Lebanon

- High supply of tertiary-educated labour
- Weak domestic absorption
- Limited institutional integration of diaspora knowledge and capital

Empirical Anchor

- High intention to emigrate among educated youth (survey evidence)
- Significant reliance on remittances as external income source

Result

Mismatch between skills formation and utilisation constrains development conversion

Policy Implications

1

Develop a Skills–Migration Intelligence System

- Track skilled emigration profiles
- Identify sectoral skills gaps
- Align education with labour-market demand

2

Institutionalise Diaspora Knowledge Circulation

- Structured diaspora expert networks
- Sector-based knowledge transfer mechanisms
- Temporary return and remote collaboration schemes

3

Strengthen Conversion Mechanisms in Universities

- Career guidance linked to labour-market intelligence
- Incubators connected to diaspora investors and mentors
- Applied research with industry

4

Policy Shift

From passive migration management → to active skills circulation governance

Conclusion

→ High skilled mobility coexists with limited domestic absorption

→ Strong diaspora capital remains weakly integrated into productive systems

→ Conversion into productivity, innovation and employment remains constrained

Analytical Contribution

Lebanon illustrates a "**skills mobility without conversion**" configuration

Scientific Implication

Development effects arise only when three conditions are jointly met:

- Alignment of skills formation with labour-market demand
- Institutionalised diaspora knowledge and capital channels
- Effective conversion mechanisms linking mobility to productive sectors

Selected References

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