

Think tank calls for urgent policy action to tackle brain drain

26 October 2023 08:12 am - 11 - 1145

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- **IPS calls for formulation of mix of policies to address labour and skill shortages**
- **Says authorities must identify labour market needs and efforts at talent attraction and retention**
- **Suggests three avenues to address ongoing brain drain, one of which is potential rollout of 'payback' concept**

By [Shabiya Ali Ahlam](#)

As Sri Lanka continues to deal with the outflux of its talent pool, largely owing to the prevailing economic conditions, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) stressed the need to look at designing an appropriate mix of policies to address labour and skill shortages at the earliest.

For this, the relevant authorities must identify labour market needs and efforts at talent attraction and retention, the Colombo-based think tank highlighted.

"This approach encourages the Sri Lankan diaspora abroad to engage in national recovery and development, exploring options to attract foreign workers, devise appropriate migration and regulatory policies, among others," the IPS said in its State of the Economy 2023 report.

The report suggests three avenues to address the ongoing brain drain, which is crippling sectors such as health.

The first is to roll out the concept of 'payback' for the cost of human capital and loss of opportunity for another student, which could involve paying back through labour/service or financial paybacks.

Many developing countries are adopting mandatory service periods, specially in the medical field. In Sri Lanka, the payback concept currently operates mainly in lieu of any foreign training received and largely overlooks the cost of human capital investment.

Since the financial component is considered cannot be comparable to the cost borne, the IPS noted these payback calculations need to be updated to account for human capital received in Sri Lanka or overseas as well as to make them commensurate with the market value of the cost borne. The mechanism for collection of payback also needs to be foolproof to ensure that all beneficiaries of state-funded human capital development pay back in a fair manner, it said. The second suggestion to address brain drain is to overcome the geographical boundaries through virtual connectivity, where the respective sending country engages high-skilled migrants to continue to benefit from their expertise.

"Modern technological advancements have enabled individuals worldwide to connect instantaneously at very low costs and the new normal under the pandemic has provided a good beta test," the IPS noted. The report highlighted that Sri Lanka's health sector can continue to benefit from professionals educated in Sri Lanka and now working in developed countries to be involved in remote surgeries, mentor students and perform virtual health clinics, among other.

The report went on to note that migrant workers in other sectors can also contribute remotely, such as in the IT and education sectors.

The third suggestion put forward is to harness the potential of brain circulation and focus on attracting high-skilled migrants, mainly at the time of retirement. Given the high skills and professional experience of these migrants, who are likely to be high-net-worth individuals upon their return, the IPS said Sri Lanka needs to offer well-crafted services and professional opportunities that would allow them to contribute to national recovery and growth efforts.

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[lankaputha](#) Thursday, 26 October 2023 08:24 AM

Apart from Suggestion 1, Payback.. which is a fair request, no other may work. You should address the reason, not the person.

Reply

[Punchi](#) Thursday, 26 October 2023 08:53 AM

Years ago I read on the number of Sri Lankan qualified accountants working as shelf fillers at Tesco's and Sainsbury's supermarkets

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[Jayantha](#) Thursday, 26 October 2023 09:03 AM

Just scrap the useless university grant commission. Then recognize any foreign degree same as local ones. Allow established private colleges to offer own degrees. Then the market will be open. So the burden on government will be reduced further. This way pvt sector and even gov sector can get good work force.

Reply

[Abu Umar](#) Thursday, 26 October 2023 09:11 AM

Reduce the PAYE tax. This is one of the most crucial reasons for skilled labor to look for greener pasture.

Reply

[Jude](#) Thursday, 26 October 2023 09:24 AM

It's been happening years and for decades!!

Reply

[KP](#) Thursday, 26 October 2023 09:39 AM

Remote surgeries? Can't even afford the basic anesthetic drugs. Do you have any idea how much a single remotely operable machine costs? There are only a handful in the world. Suggestion to recover the cost of education doesn't consider the legality of introducing retrospective laws. What are you going to do with that money? Pay compensation to the dead? Does the 'think' tank think a bond worth a couple of months salary in a foreign country will be an adequate deterrent to migration, enough to make a doctor work his entire life for a pittance in Sri Lanka with zero appreciation?

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