

# Investment Migration Working Papers

## Talent Circulation Across Countries: A Review of Issues and Experiences

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**Abstract:** Talent often reflects the combination of inner abilities and personal motivation with formal education and training. In the knowledge economy talent has become a very important resource that contribute to create knowledge, mobilize entrepreneurial spirits, develop new technologies and bring fresh contacts and human resources to the host country. In addition, in the global age, people with special talents and high human capital tend to be particularly mobile across national boundaries generating “brain drain” effects that can be counteracted by “brain circulation” and the mobilization of Diasporas contributing to the development of the home country. This paper reviews main issues and country experiences with policies regarding talent mobilization for global and national development.

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## **1. Introduction**

The concept of “talent” refers to people with high skills, special knowledge, outstanding abilities that can contribute to create new factories and goods (the entrepreneurs), new technologies (innovators), new knowledge (scientists and academics) valuable cultural services, artwork (cultural workers) and so on. Talent often reflects the combination of inner abilities and personal motivation with formal education and training, although this last condition is not always required. In the knowledge economy talent has become a very important resource. In addition, people with special talents and human capital tend to be particularly mobile across national boundaries a feature of the “global age”.

The literature on the topic can be traced back to the 1960s. At the time there were two main strands of work on the subject: on one side there was the “internationalist view” favoring talent mobility across nations in which individuals should move to countries where they find the best professional possibilities in terms of pay, working conditions, and career development. This way global real income would increase, and the talented individuals and their families would be better off (see Harry Johnson, (1964). An alternative position reflecting early concerns with the

adverse development effects of the exodus of talented people for national development – the “brain drain” syndrome--on sending nations is the so-called “nationalist view” (see Don Patinkin, 1968).

Nowadays the prevalent position is a sort of mid-way between cosmopolitan and nationalists’ views. The new paradigm is that is more realistic to think in terms of “talent circulation” in which individuals while living in the host/receiving nation rotate between host and sending nations, through joint-projects, conferences, knowledge transfer and other modalities of interaction. In this case the outputs of human capital and talented people can be shared between host and home countries and third nations. Location, albeit important, is not the overriding consideration.

This literature is summarized in Solimano, (2008, 2010, 2019) with contributions from Boeri, Brucker, Docquier and Rapaport (2012) who study the productive impact of brain circulation; Kerr, Kerr, Ozden and Parsons (2016) examine the magnitude of global talent flows; Prato (2025) provide new mechanism linking talent in the sending and host nation and provide new data on patents, knowledge transfer, talent, and growth associated with the international mobility of talent. In turn, Akcigit, Pearce and Prato (2024) using data for Denmark and adopting models of endogenous growth model recreate a role for the IQ of the migrant, the attainment of PH. Ds, ability to innovate, knowledge generation and growth and underscore the multiple interactions among these variables. The paper is organized in five sections. Section 1 is the Introduction; section 2 explores main issues concerning the international mobility of

talent examining typologies of talent, key determinants of this mobility and measurement issues. Section 3 considers brain drain effects and brain circulation and highlights main circuits of mobility across nations and the role that Diasporas can play to promote economic development of the home country. Section 4 discusses initiatives and policies along with country experiences oriented to attract and mobilize talent from Diasporas and foreign talent pools. Section 5 concludes.

## **2. The International Mobility of Talent**

It is important to recognize that the pool of talented individuals is an heterogeneous group. It includes a wide range of people with special abilities such high-flying innovators and technology experts, top -level managers of multinational corporations and international banks, prestigious scholars and scientists and outstanding talent developed in sports, music, and literature.

### **Box 1. Classification of Talent and Main Determinants**

In the mid 2000s a multi-country research project devoted to study the international mobility of talent was undertaken by the United Nations University and the World Institute of Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER). In that context, a three-way typology of talent allocation within and across countries was developed (Solimano, 2008). This classification still seems to be useful to study this topic:

- (i) *talent engaged in directly productive activities* (entrepreneurs, managers, innovators that create patents, engineers, highly- skilled workers, and technical talent),
- (ii) *talent devoted to scientific, training, and academic endeavors* in the university system (scholars, academics, and international students), and
- (iii) *talent allocated to the health sector and the cultural sector* (medical doctors and nurses, writers, painters, singers).

Moreover, the project identified a set of *main determinants* of the international talent mobility:

- (a) International differences in remunerations for talent (wages, profits, other monetary benefits) between origin and destination countries favoring highly educated and talented individuals.
- (b) The desire to attain a higher living standard in the host nation.
- (c) The interest to meet networks of like-minded talent in other countries that can be beneficial for the career of talented individuals.
- (d) More resources available for doing research in the case of talent in science and academia.
- (e) Greater level of technological development in host countries compared with home countries, relevant for technical talent.
- (f) Countries with more favorable policy regimes and incentives to attract foreign talent receive larger inflows of foreign human capital.

(g) Concerns on the effects of “brain/talent drain” on sending nations, particularly poor economies, tend to be particularly relevant in the health sector.

In general, the allure of better pay, greater opportunity, and more challenging working conditions in the north; more secure property rights for entrepreneurs; more resources and possibilities for merit-based careers for scientists and scholars in universities; and larger markets for the arts – these are among the host of important factors driving the best and the brightest to leave developing countries and emerging and transition economies.

Talented individuals rarely will develop their full potential by working in isolation. A new idea, a new product, a new production process, or a new R&D theory requires human interaction and cooperation. An entrepreneur needs access to capital, markets, and technology to develop his or her new ideas and visions. A scientist wishes a certain number of peers to discuss his or her theories and present research papers. An artist needs the creativity found in the milieu of other artists with whom he or she interacts to gain a larger, more critical public.

Regarding the supply of talent and its international mobility at least four critical features can be highlighted:

- (a) The size of the global talent pool is comparatively small to the overall global labor force but its impact on knowledge generation, business creation, technical innovation, productivity, creativity in the cultural field, can be very large.



- (b) The main geographical concentration of people with tertiary education—a variable contributing to develop talent—is in high-income OECD nations (particularly the United States) --although around 35- 40 percent of the supply of individuals with tertiary education come from large emerging economies such as China, India, and Russia.
- (c) Measuring talent is not a simple task: approximations often include people with tertiary education, including people holding bachelor, master, and Ph.Ds. However, having completed tertiary education does not comprise the whole talent pool. For example, some very talented people did not complete advanced university studies (e.g the cases of Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg who launched highly successful ventures in the IT sector in the 1980s and 1990s after dropping out from their university studies).
- (d) There are multiple directions in the international circulation of talent besides the dominant North-North mobility (the Europe-USA corridor) that includes talent mobility from and to the Middle East, Far- East and the global South.<sup>2</sup>

Tentative estimates of high skill/ talent migration (measured by tertiary education) pose the numbers in around 35 million or close to 10 percent of total international migration flows.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> New destinations for talent mobility include the United Arab Emirates and other middle east destinations.

<sup>3</sup> For measurement purposes the duration of stay abroad is an issue. Circulation may not coincide with migration.

### **3. Brain Drain, Brain Circulation and Diasporas.**

A theme, as mentioned, that dominated discussions on talent mobility in past decades was the *outflow of human capital or brain drain*-- from developing countries to rich nations. In fact, low and middle-income countries often invest considerable resources in the education of their professionals and then they leave home in search for better opportunities in advanced nations. The concern is particularly acute in the case of medical doctors and nurses coming from sub-Saharan countries, the Caribbean countries, Philippines and other who emigrate to work in hospitals in the UK, the USA, and other advanced economies, depriving their home countries from this critical resource for their generally under-funded health sector. Some international initiatives have been put in place to redress these flows. Similar concerns can be extended to the outflows of scientists and engineers from developing countries to high-income economies.

As mentioned, the thrust of current work on talent mobility while recognizing this critical situation in sectors such as health also stresses that the outflows of human capital in sectors such as academia, high-tech industries, culture can be, at least, partially compensated by talent circulation (between host and home countries). This is relevant for a world of digital communications, with lower costs for international traveling and more international cooperation in the fields of science and technology in which professional contacts with peers in the home country allows for the transfer of knowledge, contacts and experience between home and host countries.

Box 2. <u>Global Circuits of Talent Mobility</u>
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The international mobility of talent can be conceptualized as composed by various *circuits or networks* that generate a dynamic of inter-country human mobility. In some cases, individuals may move independently and in other that circulation may take place within large organizations (public and private) located in more than one country. We can identify the following six “circuits” of global talent mobility:

- a) Mobility within the *international corporate sector* chiefly comprised by multinational companies and international banks (this applies to CEOs, other managers and administrators, and technical personnel).
- b) *Self-employed professionals* who do not belong to an established organization and move internationally motivated by the desire to obtain higher pay and have the opportunity of developing a successful career abroad (e.g., this is often the case of medical doctors, architects, lawyers, technical experts, innovators, cultural workers, artists, and sport celebrities).
- c) Mobility within the *global academic sector* composed by universities and research centers (e.g., scholars, scientists, university professors, international students).
- d) Mobility within *public international organizations* (United Nations, World Bank, OECD, IMF, and others).
- e) Mobility within the *global civil society* (Foundations and NGOs).
- f) *Digital Nomads*. Individuals who have an employer in a country different of their residence and the working relation is undertaken through digital means. The typical digital nomad

worker/professional does not seek to enter the job market of the host country.

Managers, financial experts, and human resource specialists that belong to multinational corporations move across countries within the corporations through the modality of *intra-company transfers* (ICT). A main destination for ICT within the OECD is the United States followed by the UK and Canada. In contrast, independent professionals such as architects, medical doctors, lawyers often move to other countries to pursue their careers without the umbrella of a multinational corporation or an international public organization. Service providers (e.g., in the IT and medical sectors, in construction, finance) can be hired by companies in the origin countries rather than in the country in which the service is rendered.

Universities and research centers in the countries of the global north are increasingly employing foreign scholars and academics and can appoint them as tenured professors in prestigious universities or hire them in the category of “post-doctoral fellows”. Until recent years, American universities in some fields more than 50 percent of Ph.D. students are foreigners but this may be changing due to geopolitical reasons in which admission for foreigners from certain countries could be curtailed. Also, the international public sector composed by organizations such as the United Nations, the IMF, World Bank, the regional development banks, the OECD and other—whose headquarters are in Washington DC, London, Paris, New York, Geneva—provide well-paid jobs along with other benefits for professionals and experts. Professionals from developing countries and emerging economies find these positions attractive and, therefore, pursue their careers in these

organizations. A side effect, perhaps un-intended, is that this mobility fosters a degree of brain drain of professionals from developing countries. In addition, there is a plethora of international NGOs and the foundations sector, sometimes called “global civil society.” To cite some: Ford Foundation, Soros Foundation, the Gates Foundation, the International Red Cross, Doctors without Frontiers, and several others. These organizations provide employment opportunities to professionals, volunteers, international students from the south although often offering less generous packages than those offered by international financial institutions. A modality of international temporary employment has been the *working holiday program* system, which is oriented to the youth. This program and concomitant visa system are valid for one to two years and have been implemented, mainly, in Australia, Argentina, Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, Italy and other countries.

Another important modality of mobility of qualified human resources is composed by foreign *medical doctors and nurses*. Currently, between a quarter and a third of total medical doctors in OECD countries are foreigners and close to 20 percent of the nurses came from non-OECD countries, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

The new modality of visas for “digital nomads” is being offered by near 50 countries included Spain, Portugal, Greece, Costa Rica, Germany, Czech Republic, and others. The visas are often granted for two years, and applicants must show they have a regular source of income and work with a company located outside the host country. An appealing feature for the host country is that digital nomads often do not compete for jobs with locals (they

have a foreign employer) while spending money (rents, meals, transportation) in the country of residence.

An index that measures the degree of human displacement of individuals with advanced educational degrees and abilities that can produce a disruption for national development in the sending country is presented in table 1. The index is prepared by the US-based Institute for Peace and is part of a broader project on “fragile states”. The index goes from 0 to 10 in which the higher values correspond to more brain drain and human flight with adverse effects on national development. Lower values correspond to a lower exodus of human capital and talent. Table 1 shows countries that experience the highest outflows of qualified human resources (with the index in the range of 8 to 10) such as small islands (Samoa), countries engaged in armed conflict countries (Palestine, Ukraine, Sudan), very poor nations (Haiti). In turn, middle to higher income countries such as Mexico, China and others are in the mid to lower range of the index (say between 5 and 3) and then higher income, well developed nations (Australia, USA, UK, Germany, New Zealand, Singapore, Sweden, Norway, others) experience the lowest degree of brain drain and retain more their talented individuals (values of the index in the 0-2 range).

Table 1 Human Flight and Brain Drain Index (2024),  
(0=very little , 1=the highest)

Selected Countries	Index Value
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Samoa.	10.0
Palestine	9.4
Ukraine	8.4
Haiti	8.0
Sudan.	8.0
Angola	5.3
Mexico	4.6
China	3.3
Chile	3.0
Germany	1.6
United Arab Emirates	1.8
United States	1.4
New Zealand	1.4
Spain	1.3
Singapore	1.0
Sweden	0.6
Australia	0.3

Source: from Fragile States Index, [www.the-globaleconomy.com](http://www.the-globaleconomy.com).

From a policy perspective, to attract and retain human capital and talented individuals to share with the home country the benefits of their entrepreneurial, academic, creative activities there are three broad options:

- (a) *Initiatives to attract foreign talent* through fellowships, attractive compensation, and benefit packages, help in relocation and job insertion and family education, support in housing.
- (b) *Reverse migration*. In the case the home country has a large diaspora abroad, governments and the private sector can mobilize incentives and resources to convince individuals of their diaspora abroad to leave their host country and return to the home nation. This may not be easy

if the individuals have already established a good professional position in the recipient country and have settled with their family in a high income, stable country.

(c) *The diaspora option*. This alternative focuses on enhancing cooperation and exchange between high human capital nationals abroad and the home nation through frequent visits, teaching, joint projects, knowledge transfer and so on.

**Box 3 Diasporas: Concept, Causes and Size.**

The term *Diaspora* comes from the Greek and means dispersion or scattering. In its common assertion it refers to a community of expatriates that are spread or dispersed around the world, outside their homeland. Expatriates communities may have different historical origins such as forced population movements because of external war and internal armed conflict (World War I and World War II and other conflicts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century), the exodus following wars in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Ukraine, Sudan, Gaza in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, expulsion for racial hostility and persecution (the case of the Jew community and other communities in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries ), famines (the Irish Diaspora of mid 19<sup>th</sup> century), slavery trade and post-colonial civil wars, (the Afro-community in the Americas, mainly in the United States and Brazil), emigration following revolutions and internal conflicts (the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the Chinese revolution of 1949, the Hungarian uprising of 1956, the Cuban revolution of 1959, the end of French-Algerian civil war in



the early 1960s, the Portuguese exit from Angola and Mozambique after 1975 and so on).

There are also economically motivated Diasporas following economic crisis and depressions such as the great depression of the 1930s, high inflation in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s in Latin America, debt crises and other instances of economic distress and/or financial collapse (Solimano, 2020). In fact, in normal and crisis times people leave their home countries because of a variety of factors that affect their living standards and expectations such low wages, lack of employment opportunities, poverty, obstacles to the development of entrepreneurship, financial crisis that affect their savings and related factors (see Solimano, 2010, 2019). The reduction of transport costs and the ease of telecommunication have increased the international mobility of people in recent decades increasing the size of Diasporas. Part of the Diaspora mobility is of permanent character (settling to work and live) and the other is transitory (tourism, visits to relatives and friends and short-term business and professional trips). A distinctive feature of Diaspora is the sense of national identity and emotional attachment with the homeland. This is what distinguishes Diaspora from pure economic migration although both concepts are obviously linked. Mobilizing Diasporas, at the end, implies tapping the resources and attitudes of the migrant community abroad.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> According to Ancien, Boyle and Kitchin (2009a) “not all expatriates belong to a Diaspora and not all members of a Diaspora are expatriates. A Diaspora consists of a non-resident population who share a national, civic or ethnic identity associated with a particular homeland through either being born in the homeland and migrating or being the descendants of emigrants”.

In terms of size, (c. 2010, see World Bank, 2011a) the largest Diasporas worldwide are the Chinese, around 40 -50 million people, the Indian Diaspora, 30 million: the African Diaspora of near 30 million people (with near 22 million coming from Sub-Saharan African countries), the Mexican Diaspora in the USA of near 20 million people and others.

Diasporas can contribute to the development of the home country through several mechanisms such as the transfer of savings, investment in the home country, remittances flows, skill, knowledge, and commercial and academic contacts to the home country.

Diasporas are often a heterogeneous group. The degree of cohesion, shared values and motivations may vary depending on the type of Diaspora and their histories. Some Diasporas have a political and national motivation and a corresponding willingness to contribute to the homeland. However, this may act both ways and some Diaspora groups that emerged as defeated from internal conflicts, exile or persecution may be reluctant to cooperate with the source nation if they perceive governments at home as hostile and unfriendly to them. In contrast, other new economic Diaspora groups, e.g., formed by transnational entrepreneurs and highly mobile professionals, can be willing and interested to cooperate with their homeland in the transfer of capital, contacts, knowledge, and other attributes if they see the home conditions propitious to that and an eventual commercial gain.

Box 4. The Development Potential of Diasporas.

We can distinguish the following resources, capabilities and assets associated with the Diasporas that can be mobilized to also benefit the home country:

a) *Diasporas as a source of income*. The very fact that migrants move from lower income countries to higher income countries, particularly in the case of migration to advanced economies, suggests an income gain associated with Diasporas. The potential income gain is proportional to pay differential between source and destination countries associated with emigrating to nations endowed with higher wages and labor productivity, better organizational capacities, and more advanced technologies are entitled to generate a much higher level of income had they stayed at home.

b) *Diasporas as savers*. The fact that migrants' income abroad tends to be higher than at home suggests that for a given marginal propensity to save migrants save more than nationals of the home country. Over time, this accumulated savings translates into higher wealth levels of the Diaspora members. In turn, an econometric study for Guatemala (Adams, 2005) detected statistically lower marginal propensities to spend --thus *higher* marginal propensities to *save*-- for families that do receive remittances from international migrants.

c) *Diasporas as investors*. The savings potential of Diasporas needs an outlet or vehicle to be invested. Here we can make a distinction between portfolio investment and Diaspora Direct Investment, DDI (Terrazas, 2010; Newland and Tanaka, 2010). Portfolio investment comprises a variety of financial instruments such as deposits, bonds, mutual funds, and others. The point is how to induce Diaspora members to choose financial instruments issued by financial institutions in the home country so that these savings are channeled

to the source country. Another possibility, not mutually exclusive, is for Diaspora members to engage in direct investment in the home economy.

d) *Diasporas as entrepreneurs*. In the last two decades or so *migrant entrepreneurs* have played an important role in building knowledge-based industries in India, China, Taiwan, Israel, and Ireland. The cycle of entrepreneurial transfer has been roughly the following: the home country sends graduate students to developed countries, chiefly the US and some European countries, to obtain degrees in fields such as engineering, information technology, mathematics, and others. Some of these students after graduation are hired as executives in corporations in the host country; those companies, in turn, buy software and parts from companies overseas generally in the country of origin of the foreign executives. The consequence of this was to help develop technological industries in India, Taiwan, China, Israel, and other countries. In addition, some of the executives eventually leave their companies and independently undertake start-ups and set-up new business in technology sectors. Once in operation and taking advantage of local contacts at home they outsource parts, hardware, and software in their countries of origin (See Saxenian, 2006 for details). A lesson from these experiences is that technological entrepreneurs overseas can play an important role in helping to develop technological firms at home and serve as a two-way link of market knowledge, connections, and technological transfer across countries.

e) *Diasporas as facilitators of trade*. Diasporas can also contribute to facilitate trade between source and host nations. A positive empirical correlation has been found between the degree of international trade in source and

destination countries and the size of the migrant community in both nations.<sup>5</sup> The dominance of language, culture and knowledge of costumer and supplier markets are all factors that help to develop trade relations among nations and the Diaspora communities can be specially positioned to perform that role.

f) *Diasporas as a source of talent, skills, human capital, and knowledge.* mobility of highly talented people and “knowledge workers”. This group includes technology entrepreneurs, IT experts, first-rate scientists, bright graduate students, skilled physicians, and gifted writers and artists. The proportion of foreign-born people with higher education is estimated at around 10 percent of the world’s total number of international migrants (around 30 million people). But this relatively small group of internationally educated people contributes disproportionately to new technological development, business creation, social service provision, and other forms of human creativity. They provide thus a significant economic payoff. However, from the viewpoint of developing countries, the location of this “high value migrants” is very concentrated in advanced economies. In fact, nearly 90 percent of “high-value” immigrants with a tertiary education concentrate in OECD countries.

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<sup>5</sup> See World Bank (2011b).

The challenge for inducing the return of talent or at least their reconnection with their home is how to create this critical mass. An example of the concentration of talent is the case of technological entrepreneurs from different countries who flowed to Silicon Valley because they found it to be a stimulating place in which other technological innovators gathered and developed their products, and in which venture capital was available to finance innovations.<sup>6</sup> Kuznetsov and Sabel (2008) have underlined the role of open migration chains and Diaspora networks (expatriate networks) in transmitting information over opportunities and types of skills required in the home and host countries and in advancing the collective interest of Diasporas. The authors highlight limitations of traditional industrial policies such as cognitive limitations for “picking winners”, capability problems of the state and capture and entrenched interests. According to the authors, new Industrial policies would overcome these difficulties through open migration chains and Diaspora networks and more horizontal decision-making processes. They also cite the creation of venture capital industry in Taiwan and other Diaspora-led initiatives to promote productive development in the home country as practical examples of Diaspora –induced productive development.

#### **4. Policies to Attract and Mobilize Talent from Diasporas and Foreign Talent Pools**

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<sup>6</sup> In the field of literature and film-making Latin American writers and actors, such as Isabel Allende, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Salma Hayek have written their best novels or developed their acting careers outside their country of origin.

Effective policies to attract talent must be multi-dimensional and include immigration, education, human resources, housing, and other policies. A first area is *immigration policies* oriented to attract and retain foreign talent. The classic instruments are working visas, investor's visa, skilled workers visa, student visa, professional's visas (H-B1 visas in the USA). In the last 15 years there have developed residence by investment visas and citizenship by investment programs (see Surak, 2023). A novel joint international humanitarian initiative in partnership with the private sector is *Talent Beyond Borders (TBB)* program seeking to attract talent from conflict countries and displaced populations (refugees) to several countries led by Australia, the UK and Canada with the potential of expanding to up to 25 countries. Recipient countries can benefit from receiving highly educated individuals, entrepreneurs, academics, artists, and writers and provide a solution for the talented people coming from conflict areas. Currently, the program provides job matches for around 5,000 people with a direct impact on 10,000 to 15,000 dependent people and family members.

Another important, but often neglected area in developing nations and LDCs is the need to put in place proper *human resources* policies in the public sector and universities. As mentioned before, research on the international mobility of talent underscores the fact that wage differentials and the prospects for fruitful and rewarding careers are critical motivations in the decision to emigrate of professionals and academics. In contrast, low budgets and uncompetitive wage scales in ministries, public agencies and public universities in the home country can trigger the exodus of talent from low-

income countries and /or prevent its attraction and retention in increasingly competitive global labor markets for talent.

A third area of intervention is the devising have “family *packages*” for talent attraction. Countries such as Scotland and New Zealand have been at the forefront on this. These packages often comprise salary, visa, housing, education for children that are offered to high value migrants. Investment migration programs adopt a similar approach. The rationale is clear: people often move to other countries with their families. Spouses need work permits for their insertion in the labor market, children need good schools and the whole family need good quality and affordable housing in their new country of residence. Focusing only on the salary and job of the head of household may not be enough for attracting talent.

A fourth area of policy is *housing, social services, and public transportation*. Urban economics connected with migration analysis has called attention to the importance of “*urban amenities and social services*” in attracting creative and talented people (Florida,2008). As most economic activity is concentrated in cities and immigrants go to urban centers, the availability of housing, safe neighborhoods, good public transportation systems, hospitals and cultural activities and tolerant environments is critical. This is even most important for educated migrants. Countries need to work hard in upgrading their urban facilities to attract human capital from Diasporas.

From the previous discussion it is apparent the potential of Diasporas for supporting the development process of source countries. However, spontaneous, and atomistic formation of effective Diaspora organizations may not always materialize. Thus, it is essential to develop a *strategic*



*approach* that can mobilize the promise of Diasporas for development. These strategies, in the source nation, must envision the emigrant community as an asset.

Box 5. Elements of a Diaspora Strategy

There are several goals, policies and concrete actions that can be part of a Diaspora strategy. We can highlight the following:

- (a) Putting Diaspora mobilization and engagement as a priority in the development agenda of the home countries.
- (b) Improve knowledge of the location, size, and characteristics of the Diaspora.
- (c) Contact and engage Diaspora organizations abroad.
- (d) Define the role of embassies and consulates in supporting and mobilizing the Diasporas living abroad; this should include legal and welfare assistance for migrants.
- (e) Encouraging return migration and providing return facilitation services.
- ( f) Define mechanisms of engagement (civil-society based, government-based, private sector- based, a combination of them).
- (g ) Establish mechanisms of Diaspora engagement such as financial assistance, cultural and national identity.
- (h) Extending and upholding citizenship rights (voting rights, dual citizenship);
- (i) Define financial vehicles and legal frameworks for attracting specific Diaspora resources (savings, investment, skills, knowledge and others).

( j) Create a favorable internal climate for Diaspora resource attraction.

Fostering information flows and portals; facilitating short-term and tourist home visits by the Diaspora.

( k) Establish links of Diasporas with productive development and Diaspora business networks.

(l) Seeking remittances to support extended families and providing the necessary financial infrastructure.

(m) Encouraging philanthropy to support the homeland. <sup>7</sup>

As mentioned below it seems important to link Diaspora strategies with national development goals, a sense of national identity and a vision of the place of the country in the world scene.

It is very key, for a Diaspora strategy to succeed, that it becomes a priority at the highest political level in the country (the President's Office or so) otherwise Diaspora attraction efforts may become managed in a bureaucratic way by medium to low level staff who does not attune with the needs and stringent demands of Diaspora members that may require senior level attention. Beyond the presidential office, there are several choices on where to locate Diaspora policy within the state or government. The ministries of foreign affairs have an important role to play through their network of embassies and consulates. Ministries of development and industrial promotion are important to help channeling the transfer of resources and skills of Diaspora takes place through investment,

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<sup>7</sup> Other activities include, supporting cultural activities and language learning; counseling advice from Diaspora leaders; seeking expert advice and training from Diaspora professionals and establishing business mentoring and student intern schemes.

technological transfer, and various productive endeavors of Diaspora. The ministry of education also plays a role in scientific exchange and student mobilization abroad and the recognition of academic degrees and professional titles with foreign universities. Finance ministries and central banks can regulate remittances flows and provide the legal and regulatory framework of capital markets. As we can see, Diaspora policies are multidimensional and embrace a range of institutional support needs within government. It is also relevant to define the appropriate degree and modalities of government intervention and the links with civil society and the private sector in the effective mobilization of Diaspora organization and individuals.

### China's Programs for Talent Mobilization

There is a variety of experiences with Diaspora engagement strategies, policies, and actions. The size of large developing countries outflows of talented people towards higher income countries are not minor. Between 1990 and 2010 it is estimated that around 1.5 million highly talented people emigrated from China to OECD countries, the outflow for the Philippines was 1.69 million talented people and India 3.4 million to the OECD (Zweig, 2024). To mobilize the Chinese diaspora abroad to contribute to China's internal development several programs were put in place: the most prominent were the "Thousand Talents Plan", the "Spring Light Program, the "Serve the Nation without Returning to the Nation", the part time "Thousand Talents Plan" and other programs thereafter. These programs are targeted to reach Chinese entrepreneurs, academics and scientists, businesspeople, graduate

students, and others living and working in OECD countries. The philosophy behind these programs are more in line with the “diaspora option” rather than the “reverse migration” strategy that was initially tried in the 1990s but switched to the diaspora option latter. Participating organization in China included the Minister of Education, Ministries of Science and Technology and the Organization Department of the Chinese Communist Party. In the USA until the Obama administration there was cooperation and understanding for these programs but during the first Trump administration a so called “China Initiative” was put in place in which national security consideration had a prominent role. The FBI and the Department of Justice targeted Chinese scholars who had academic positions in the US on allegations of unwarranted technology transfer and science sharing with the home country that could be used for military purposes. This created a climate of fear and uncertainty (resembling the Mac McCarthyism of the 1950s this time focused on technology sharing) among Chinese scholars that belonged as researchers and professors in America (Zweig, 2024). In 2022, the China Initiative was discontinued by President Biden.

### Irish and Scottish Diaspora Mobilization

Two interesting cases of diaspora mobilization are developed in Ireland and Scotland. These are high-income countries with significant Diasporas abroad and with Diaspora-oriented strategies supported at the highest political level. The size of the Irish Diaspora can be very large depending on the definition

used.<sup>8</sup> Currently Ireland has a National Skills Strategy (see Ireland, 2025). Scotland and Ireland acknowledged the potential of their Diasporas and aware of the attractiveness of home country conditions, started a process of developing national Diaspora strategies led by the First Minister (Scotland) and the presidency (Ireland). The two Diaspora strategies were broadly similar but not the same. Ireland has followed a sort of “light touch” Diaspora strategy, network-based --rather than heavy top-down (and bureaucratic). Scotland, in turn, followed a more state active strategy but without adopting a *dirigiste* approach of weighty state-led intervention. The Irish Diaspora Strategy is multi-dimensional in scope and built around economic, social, cultural and affinity networks. Business and economic considerations are certainly important but is not the only overriding concern.

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The Scottish strategy has stressed the mobilization of the Scottish business and high skilled professionals abroad along with the wider Diaspora of Scottish citizens abroad. In addition, attention has been paid to reaching

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<sup>8</sup> The population of the Irish Republic was 4.4 million in 2009 and over 70 million people worldwide claimed Irish descent; 3.2 million Irish are citizens (passport holders) and 800,000 Irish born citizens lived overseas (Ancien, Boyle and Kitchin, 2009a,b). In turn, millions in the world also claim Scottish descent and near 900 thousand people born in Scotland live abroad (including the UK).

<sup>9</sup> Main Irish networks and initiatives comprise the Irish Abroad Unit, established in 2004, depending on the Department of Foreign Affairs and with a mandate to coordinate the Emigrant Support Program oriented to centralize previous support programs to the Diaspora such as the Emigrant Advice Network, Enterprise Ireland, Culture Ireland, Emigrant’s news online and Ireland Funds. Most of these efforts were directed initially to the Irish communities residing in the United Kingdom and the United States but later were extended also to Irish communities in Australia, Canada, Argentina, South Africa, Zimbabwe, the Netherlands, and France.

citizens of other nationalities with an affinity and appreciation of the country (the so-called “affinity networks”).<sup>10</sup>

In both countries the Diaspora strategies include a broad range of activities from consular services (passports, visas, legal advice), welfare support for disadvantaged citizens living abroad, the nurturing of cultural identity with the homeland, the encouragement of philanthropy and the support of the business and professional communities abroad and the development of political contacts. These agencies and networks work closely with embassies and consular networks managed by their respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Efforts to engage the business community and professionals is often supported by government agencies of productive and international development (Scottish Development International and Scottish Enterprise and Irish Development Agency and Enterprise Ireland are the main agencies in both countries). Interestingly in neither Scotland nor Ireland, there is a single agency or Ministry that coordinates Diaspora policy, Programs, and strategies work through a plethora of organizations taking an active role with no evident central oversight or coordination.

It is important to underscore that a successful Diaspora Strategy promoted by home countries must not be an isolated initiative but an integral part of a broader model (vision) of internal development and a vision of the place of countries in both the regional community as well as in the world economy

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<sup>10</sup> An officially sponsored network called *Global Scot* catered the business and high skilled community both in the UK and overseas. This effort was complemented by a community network of overseas Scots, *Global Friends of Scotland* helped by other actions and initiatives such as the *Fresh Talent Initiative and Talent Scotland* and the creation of *The Scottish Centre for Diaspora Studies at Edinburg University* (see Ancien, Boyle and Kitchin, 2009b,c).

and society at large. An explicit articulation between Diaspora policy, national development and external integration is found in relatively few cases. China, Scotland, South Korea, and Ireland are the cases that have probably carried out further this articulation.

#### South Korea Visa Program to Attract Foreign Talent in High Tech Sectors and International Students

South Korea's demographics and the challenges to remain competitive in tech-intensive goods (cars, electric vehicles, electronics and other) has recently prompted the government to offer preferential visas and other support measures to attract foreign engineers and scientists specialized in the areas of Artificial Intelligence, Quantum Technology, and the Aerospace. In addition, a five-year plan to attract 300,000 students to Korea's educational system has been put in place in which fellowships and tuition support are offered to encourage the arrival of talented students that upon graduation can be integrated into the productive sector with an emphasis in the science and technology sector. This is an example

#### Other High Income Nations Initiatives

Countries such Norway, Finland, Sweden, France (Assemblée des Français de l'étranger) and Switzerland (Organisation des Suisses de l'étranger) have recently established expatriate parliaments. Italy also has a parliamentary representation system for nationals residing abroad.

New Zealand and Australia have built broad global networks of talented and professional people living overseas. They are more broadly conceived than simple business networks. KEA, in New Zealand, has many subscribers in over 174 countries and fourteen international chapters in eight countries. It works

to connect the estimated 750,000 New Zealand born people living overseas with home and specifically seeks to connect to talented New Zealanders to share knowledge, contacts, and opportunities. The Advance initiative of Australia, in turn, has headquarters in New York and members in over 100 countries with national chapters in several of them. Advance activates and engages overseas Australians to use their expertise, contacts, and positions of influence for Australia. It creates industry specific networks, partners with tourist agencies in promoting tourism to Australia, and facilitates return migration. In addition, Australia given its high living standards, high wages, solid economic development, and relatively small population given its vast territories is a magnet for migrants from many countries, particularly from the Asian region.

## **5. Concluding Remarks.**

The international mobility of talented individuals in different fields is a key vehicle for transferring knowledge, technologies, new products, foster innovation, entrepreneurship, academic and commercial contacts across nations. There are concerns on brain drain and the exodus of scientists, medical doctors, university graduates due to negative impacts on national development of the home country. At the same circular talent mobility through visits, joint-projects, academic and scientific cooperation can offset, at least partially the impact of brain. Countries such as China, Ireland, Scotland, South Korea, India and other have implemented a variety of policies to attract national diasporas to contribute and invite foreign talent to



contribute to their process of economic development. These experiences provide good references for other countries. Currently, however, geopolitical considerations can interfere the process of circular talent mobility hampering the international transfer of technology and knowledge affecting convergence in development levels among countries.

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