

Return Migration of Nurses*



International Centre
on Nurse Migration



Push and pull factors behind nurse migration

There are several reasons why nurses migrate. Some of the commonly identified push and pull factors are:

- ➔ **Income:** differences in salaries and living conditions between home and target country. This includes differences in housing and in education opportunities for family.
- ➔ **Job satisfaction:** perceptions of good working environment and whether or not it is possible to best use one's technical and professional skills.
- ➔ **Organizational environment and career opportunity:** differences in opportunities for professional education and for advancement.
- ➔ **Governance:** general political governance, as well as differences in administrative bureaucracy, and in the efficiency and fairness with which government and health services are managed.
- ➔ **Protection and risk:** differences in how safe it is to live and work in a particular place, including levels of crime and risk at the workplace.
- ➔ **Social security and benefits:** differences in possibilities for health insurance, unemployment protection, or fair retirement benefits.

A better understanding of these push and pull factors can be used to develop strategies to facilitate return of nurses to their countries of origin.

Return migration of nurses

Return migration is: 'The process of a person returning to his/her country of origin or habitual residence...'¹.

- ➔ Migration has long been seen as a one-way process but globalization is radically changing the way people move around the world, with particular attention being given to return migration.
- ➔ Approximately 50% of skilled workers return to their countries of origin², usually after about five years.
- ➔ The rate of return of nurses in general is higher than that of physicians³.
- ➔ Except for a return for retirement, the longer a person stays abroad the harder it is to return⁴.
- ➔ Return migration is more likely to take place if spouses, children or dependents have been left behind in the home country⁵.
- ➔ Return migration may be individual, or facilitated by an assisted voluntary return programme, or by a bilateral agreement. Return is greatly facilitated when frameworks are in place, and links through diaspora networks can also make the return process considerably easier⁶.
- ➔ A sense of change, particularly change for the better, is critical if return migration is to occur. If the economic and political conditions that encouraged migration in the first place have not changed then there is little impetus to return.



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- The propensity of migrants to become actors of change and development at home will depend on the extent to which they have been able to prepare. Successful preparation for return requires time, mobilization of tangible and intangible resources, and willingness on the part of the migrant. This preparedness can be shaped by public programmes promoted by the governments of countries of origin and aimed at repatriating skilled returnees⁷.
- "As any displaced and disposed person can testify, there is no such thing as a genuine, uncomplicated return to one's home"⁸ (Said, 1999, cited in Oxfield and Long, p 15). Various factors can, however, be put in place to facilitate the reintegration of the return migrant.
- Return may be the prelude to further episodes of spatial mobility, embedded in a cyclical process of repeat migrations increasingly referred to by such terms as 'circular migration', 'shuttle migration', or 'commuter migration'.
- The traditional migration framework, in which migrants who depart are seen as being 'lost' to the sending country — and arriving immigrants are therefore 'gained' by the receiving country — is being eroded in favour of a transnational framework, where migrants continually forge and sustain multiple attachments across nation-states and/or communities⁹. As transnational migrants return home, it is argued, they can facilitate the transfer of the critical financial and human capital that the developing world needs, reversing 'brain drain' into 'brain gain'^{10,11,12}.
- Returning nurses may be unable to put their new skills to work because the technology and other resources required to do so are simply not available.
- When nurses have been able to increase their skills, knowledge and experience by working abroad; when these bits of knowledge, skills and experience are relevant to the needs of the home country; when nurses are willing and able to return home and to use them, then they can be at the origin of the 'return of innovation'.

*This fact sheet is taken from *Return Migration of Nurses* by Mary Haour-Knipe and Anita Davies.

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- 2 Lowell L & Findlay A (2002). *Migration of Highly Skilled Persons from Developing Countries: Impact and Policy Responses*, International Labour Office, Geneva, 44.
- 3 Padarath A, Chamberlain C, McCoy D, Ntuli A, Rowson M and Loewenson R (2003). Health Personnel in Southern Africa: Confronting maldistribution and brain drain, EQUINET, Health Systems Trust (South Africa), MEDACT (UK), 4.
- 4 King R (2000). "Generalizations from the History of Return Migration," in *Return migration: Journey of hope or despair?*, International Organization for Migration, Geneva, pp. 7–55.
- 5 Kingma M (2006). *Nurses on the move: migration and the global health care economy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y.
- 6 Martin P (2003). *Highly Skilled Labor Migration: Sharing the Benefits*, ILO, International Institute for Labour Studies, Geneva.
- 7 Cassarino J-P (2004). "Theorising Return Migration: the Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited", *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, vol. 6, no. 2, p. 253–279.
- 8 NO FOOTNOTE IN REPORT FOR SAID
- 9 Agunias DR (2006). *From a zero-sum to a win-win scenario: literature review on circular migration*, Migration Policy Institute, Washington, D.C.
- 10 Hunger U (2004). "Brain Gain: Theoretical Considerations and Empirical Data on a New Research Perspective in Development and Migration Theory," in *Migration and the Regulation of Social Integration*, A. Böcker, B. M. de Hart, and I. Michalowski, eds., Universität Osnabrück, Osnabrück, pp. 213–221.
- 11 Kingma M (2006). *Nurses on the move: migration and the global health care economy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y.
- 12 Skeldon R (2005). *Globalization, Skilled Migration and Poverty Alleviation: Brain Drains in Context*, University of Sussex, Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalization and Poverty, Brighton.