

## SKILLED MIGRATION AND THE CRISIS: AN UNEXPLORED RELATIONSHIP IN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores an often sidelined issue that is, nevertheless, of great importance to Latin America and the Caribbean. Current opinions on skilled migration have been shaped by analysts in developed nations and there has been little debate in the region. In addition, the issue has barely been addressed in the context of the global recessionary crisis. The current outlook has been influenced by exaggerated views on the effects of migrant employment and wages (usually involving semi- and low-skilled workers), as well as trends in remittance flows. There has been a resurgence of anti-immigrant sentiment along with concerns to address it, and migrant vulnerability has been widely acknowledged (particularly that of low-skilled Latin American workers). Available information indicates there has been a decline in migration accompanied by a small return rate on the part of some migrants, along with some measures to restrict immigration in general and skilled migration in particular.

**Keywords:** Skilled migration, employment, wages, vulnerability, return.

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*Programs that seek to link the scientific exodus to local communities have proved feasible and effective, but require the promotion and support of national policies so they do not perish once the initial interest associated to this type of venture decreases.*

Adela Pellegrino

## INTRODUCTION

The few extant analyses on skilled migration in the context of the crisis have focused on protectionism in receiving countries, discussing its scope and prospects of success rather than results (Cerna 2009). Little has been said about skilled migration and skilled diasporas, the problems faced by these migrants, and the effects and opportunities they could bring to countries of origin. In short, the perspective of the countries that form and provide these resources has not been taken into account.

What problems do highly-skilled migrants face in developed countries and how do they overcome them? What is the importance of skilled migration and skilled diasporas in Latin America and the Caribbean? The crisis has brought some of these issues to the surface and placed them on the debate table. Latin America and the Caribbean have been exporting skilled migrants for decades and this has usually been approached in a negative way, focusing on issues such as brain drain, or the loss of highly skilled population. It has been subsequently argued that these losses may be recouped via the return and, especially, the establishment of links with these emigrants, supporting the creation of diaspora-associated scientific networks in accordance with the global talents or skilled human resources market (Martínez 2005; ECLAC 2006). This led to the idea of “brain circulation” as an expression of the global economy and these are issues we should keep in mind in any discussion involving Latin America.

The above presents an apparently contradictory situation addressed by the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM): “the notion of ‘brain drain’ is somewhat outdated, since it implies that the migrant who leaves his country will never return. At present, there is a need to harness the growth of human mobility by promoting the notion of

'brain circulation,' according to which migrants return home regularly or occasionally and share the benefits of their skills and the resources they have acquired abroad" (GCIM 2005: 33). Does this mean an end to the notion of loss? The Commission adds that skilled worker migration is an increasingly important issue that is ambiguously perceived by many governments, arguing mobility barriers remain in spite of the acknowledged potential for competitiveness and development in the global economy.

There are many issues involving skilled migration that the crisis could help elucidate. The final goal is to identify a "selection of opportunities" that could benefit the countries in the region, its current emigrants and other potential skilled migrants.

### EMERGING ISSUES: THINGS TO CONSIDER

Available general analyses reveal that, in addition to the presence of discouraging protectionist measures, the demand for foreign skilled workers may have indeed decreased in developed countries. Unemployment could affect skilled migrants in certain areas, forcing them to search for less demanding occupations where they can take advantage of their training and human and social capital in order to avoid lack of income and unemployment. In the short term, they might go down in the skill hierarchy, preferring underutilization and underemployment to unemployment; this will bring about a shift in less skilled areas and the full impact will depend on the amount of people involved (Papademetriou and Terrazas 2009). At the same time, some migrants might return to the country of origin, either because they planned to do so anyway or because their status abroad was temporary (e.g., graduate students whose stays abroad included longer time spans). We do not seem to be dealing with a massive return of skilled migrants or migrants in general, but process is related to selective patterns that occur in the absence of deliberately beneficial policies. It is for this reason that the return of some skilled migrants should be considered.

The spread of the crisis, a decline in skilled emigration and probable, selective returns taking place in a context of shrinking employment can have positive outcomes for developing countries if we consider the following:

- a) In every recession, low skill jobs are strongly affected and governments tend to protect their domestic labor markets by focusing on this area—a response targeted at public opinion, which values decisions aimed at protecting the majority of local workers (Duncan and Waldorf 2010). Efforts to restrict skilled immigration, however, have applied more stringent admission criteria (Cerna 2009). Thus, in the medium term, most established professional immigrants will not see their jobs threatened, will remain abroad, and have no reason to disengage from their countries of origin.
- b) A decrease in skilled emigration, if it indeed took place, would provide an opportunity for developing countries: potential migrants would remain, at least temporarily, in their countries of origin, where they could contribute knowledge in exchange for employment, attractive salaries and exciting work environments—precisely the things that sending nations tend to lack and that prompt skilled emigration. Importantly, the wage decrease in receiving countries has been relatively small when compared with the structural wage differences between developed and developing countries. The crisis also affected most of the world, developed and developing, which means that employment prospects may also be limited in countries of origin.
- c) Return would provide new and unexpected opportunities to utilize migrant experiences and backgrounds in a framework of labor absorption, particularly in the case of young and newly trained workers.
- d) The circulation of skilled labor could slow down given the temporary return of some workers, but these are likely to migrate again once the recession is over, strengthening preexisting links with the diaspora.

The available evidence is scarce and cannot fully prove any of these assertions, but several countries have indeed taken steps to restrict skilled immigration.<sup>1</sup> It is more difficult to assess the situation of skilled migration in developing countries. We might need a longer window of time to do this, but we can nevertheless advance the discussion and identify opportunities.

1. For example, Cerna (2009) has developed a twelve-country comparative study on the effects of the crisis on skilled migration and policy responses across different regions (Asia, Australasia, Europe, Middle East and North America).

In the case of the European Union, Papademetriou, Sumption and Somerville state that,

Many highly skilled migrants are young and single, and hence unlikely to have strong family ties in the host country—making them potentially more likely to return home if they lose their job. Indeed, for those whose visa status ties them to a specific employer, return may be the only alternative to working illegally. At the same time, the fact that migrants are highly skilled suggests that the expense of going home may well be affordable relative to salary, even if the immigrant intends eventually to attempt to return to the host country. However, for immigrants whose visa conditions allow them to remain in the host country, a high skill level provides greater flexibility to find another job, since they are better able to transfer to new sectors or downgrade temporarily to an occupation below their education level. Further, many work in sectors such as health and social services that are not traditionally cyclical and that are expected to continue to grow at a robust pace as host societies age. For example, more than 15 percent of immigrants are employed in health and social services in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. (2009: 3)

Several authors have noted that the global economic crisis affected international migrants in unequal ways and the evidence, although partial and preliminary, suggests that the impact has had a qualification bias and skilled migrants have gained relative advantages (Cerna 2009; Papademetriou and Terrazas 2009; Duncan and Waldorf 2010). Potential and established migrants have been affected by changes in admission fees and changes in requirements for entering the labor market as foreigners, but their occupations, knowledge and financial resources have provided them with more tools with which to weather adversity.

*Dilemmas for receiving countries: protectionism is short-lived*

In an era ruled by an economy of knowledge and populated by an ageing society, the demand for human capital in developed countries is still high; states prefer skilled immigrants, even in times of economic contraction. Hence, protectionist measures that could affect the demand

for highly skilled migrant workers will not hold and could even delay economic recovery (Duncan and Waldorf 2010).

This leads us to the ways in which developed countries seek to address the aftershocks of the crisis. According Cerna (2009) and based on a report by the OECD, changes in admission criteria for skilled immigrants can be of different types. They range from changes in fees or requirements regarding experience and qualifications, to the more rigidly observed renovation of work permits and encouragement to return to home nations. The same author also notes that some skilled migrants may face an unprecedented degree of vulnerability due to increases in temporary work and unpaid overtime. It is, in any case, a kind of vulnerability very different from that of less skilled workers.

Some of these initiatives have been strongly questioned. Summarizing a fairly widespread opinion, Clemens (2009) stated that “restricting access to the United States for smart, highly educated, energetic workers is bad for development. International connections among skilled workers have been important to the engines of growth and poverty reduction that have arisen in several developing countries over the past few decades.”

### *Skilled migrants and their specific problems before the crisis*

The crisis did not only create dilemmas for countries receiving skilled migration (which, in any case, would likely end up dissipating early). Countries of origin have an opportunity to consolidate their diasporas as a way to address brain drain. In other words, the drain will remain as such if these nations do not take advantage of their foreign-based human and social capital, which will continue to grow in spite of the gravity of the crisis in developed countries.

Beyond the findings of some first world analysts, it is likely that the problems facing skilled migrants may come from various sources, particularly in the case of Latin Americans workers. Since 2008, job losses in countries like the United States have been uneven depending on the sector. Health care, education and social services are among the areas with an increased job offer during the past few months in The United States. They require a kind of expertise that cannot be easily provided

by local workers and this results in a less adverse scenario for professionals in these activities, especially when compared to low-skilled labor, the youth and new members of the workforce (Cerna 2009 ; Papademetriou and Terrazas 2009).

Spared a context of widespread vulnerability, skilled migrants who have not returned home and do not plan to do so could remain part of the diaspora. Experts agree that connections to these diasporas should be strengthened through networks and that they should be kept systematically integrated to development process in countries of origin because, in times of crisis, communities abroad can become a source of solidarity and aid. It would be very difficult for skilled migrants to suffer from more significant negative impacts than less qualified workers—at least in the United States, where the crisis has led to higher comparative rates of unemployment during the period of greatest economic contraction (see Figure 1). Developing countries must resume their efforts to establish links with skilled emigrants and support scientific networks.

**Figure 1**  
**UNITED STATES: QUARTERLY UNEMPLOYMENT RATE**  
**ACCORDING TO IMMIGRATION STATUS AND ETHNICITY,**  
**2007-2009**  
*(Percentages)*

Source: Prepared using data from the Current Population Survey (CPS).

Note: The “Latino immigrants” category includes people born in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela. The “Latino natives” category comprises two groups: a) those born in the United States to a parent born in one of the 20 Latin American countries mentioned (second generation), and b) those born in the United States to parents that are not Latin American but consider themselves of Mexican, Cuban, Central or South American origin (third, fourth and subsequent generations).

*Transit: from temporary to permanent*

Skilled migration must be considered in terms of duration as measured by visa conditions and inclusion in specific programs. Duration is not linked to networks and ties, since time-bound mobility would undermine the foundations of diaspora contacts and the organization of scientific networks. In any case, the basic idea of brain circulation focuses on temporary migration, which involves occasional returns and encourages the application of skills and investment in the country of origin.

Has this been the case for temporary skilled migration in Latin America? The evidence is almost nonexistent, at least when compared to that available in other developing regions. There are no studies that address this issue and temporary migration appears to have been approached as part of specific (not necessarily skilled) worker categories to which most of the programs in the region are targeted. These have usually involved relatively small groups of workers and a select number of recruitment countries (Conferencia Regional sobre Migración 2010).

Temporary migrant programs often highlight regular mobility as their defining premise (that is, they entail a return to the home country upon completion of the working contract). Many agree that both sending and receiving governments should devote more resources to the strengthening of their labor migration management institutional capacity, both in terms of policies as well as programs and projects (Lamb 2010). As far as developing countries are concerned, it is often said that some of the advantages of temporary migrant worker programs include flexibility and greater public acceptance in receiving countries, as well as an increase in remittance and skill transfers to countries of origin. This assertion would require further evaluation, especially since it is assumed that this temporary experience will strengthen trade and business networks between countries of origin and destination (Lamb 2010); it is not clear whether these programs involve highly qualified resources. Developed nations, on the other hand, deploy and effectively use these temporary skilled human resources in partnership with multinational firms, encouraging a circulation that fosters competitiveness and benefits the global economy.

The link between skilled migration and diasporas, then, comes down to the categories of permanent and temporary migration. While the first is necessarily linked to foreign scientific and skilled communities, the second involves a different process. Under what conditions do these two types become linked?

It is known that many skilled, temporary migrants tend to remain in developed countries once their working visas have expired. Although data are scarce, studies indicate that, in the United States, up to 80% of them eventually attain permanent status (Jachimowicz and Meyers 2002). Through a variety of mechanisms including secure and stable employment, marriage to a native or, ultimately, the move to an irregular status, settling seems to be most common among temporary workers from Asia (China, India and the Philippines). Workers with visas such as H-1B are typical candidates for permanent legal residence based on employment, because these visas do not require their holders to prove their intent to return their country of origin, so the laws end up implicitly favoring the transition to permanent residence. According to many analysts, if the system of permanent employment-based visas were able to respond promptly to market needs, employers would not need these temporary visas (H-1B temporary worker visa system) to recruit highly qualified migrant workers and this would thus reduce pressure on the system (Jachimowicz and Meyers 2002).

On the other hand, it should be noted that the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) addresses the issue of skilled migration through Mode 4 of supply, which entails the presence of natural persons in member countries (the other three are cross-border trade, consumption abroad, and commercial presence). The worker flows contemplated in the agreement are only temporary and classified into three broad categories: business visitors, intra-company transfers, and movement of professionals and skilled technicians. One of the major constraints involving Latin American and Caribbean countries for this mode of delivery is the non-recognition of degrees and licenses and residence or nationality requirements (Pellegrino and Martínez 2001; Martínez 2008; CEPAL, 2006).

Temporary skilled migration has an undoubtedly lesser range of action as far as countries of origin are concerned. The visa systems in host

countries are crucial, as are institutional arrangements in the form of specific programs. Brain circulation, therefore, is not currently an immediate option for Latin American countries.

### *Some skills and students open doors*

Many university students, particularly graduate ones, are obvious brain circulation candidates given their skills and education. Some studies show that certain groups are quite likely to become immigrants and salary offer tends to play a major role in their decisions (Chappell and Glennie 2010). While wages are important, they are neither the only nor the single, most valued factor. Workers in engineering and IT tend to place a strong emphasis on high wages because, in these areas, skills are more easily transferred. That is, they are more likely to become migrants because migration is most directly connected to the search for highly paid positions in another country (Chappell and Glennie 2010).

The recruitment of health professionals from developing countries has been a constant process. Countries like the United Kingdom actively recruit doctors and nurses to meet shortage of professionals and salaries have played a key role. Given the very negative impact this has had in small supply countries, ethical codes have been put in place to regulate recruitment in public services, although this does not affect the private sector (Adepoju, Van Noorloos and Zoomers 2010). Chappell and Glennie (2010) have shown that, in areas where the skills are less likely to be transferred to another country (typically in the field of law, which is nationally and culturally specific), migrant professionals fail to earn higher wages than their counterparts in the country of origin. Since their experience and credentials are often not recognized, wage differences usually play a less important role in their decision to migrate.

Occupations that can be easily transferred to a developed country will hardly be better paid in countries of origin and the drain is therefore not likely to be reversed. Consequently, the strengthening of networks and partnerships from a distance is an opportunity worth assessing in those fields where salary discrepancies play a critical role in the decision to migrate (including student cases) and, probably, not return.

## RECURRING AND CRITICAL REGIONAL ISSUES: BEYOND THE CRISIS

The crisis has provided opportunities that need to be evaluated from the standpoint of Latin American countries, but this is hampered by unsolved issues. Brain drain and its losses have been a recurring theme in the region but, for the reasons provided above, the possibilities of brain circulation have not been considered. Losses will remain as such if the potential role of the skilled diasporas continues to be ignored. This is particularly important in the case of small economies that are often affected by the emigration of nurses and teachers, which is the case in many Caribbean nations. However, the most populous countries in the region also suffer significant losses in highly specialized fields, a situation that threatens their critical knowledge mass. The emigration of highly skilled human capital will remain as long as there is no response to the high selectivity and low amount of circulation and networking between immigrants and their home countries. The ways in which Asian countries have implemented the above proposals have been a central point of discussion. The problem is not only the incomplete registry and definition of the area of study, but the absence of data that proves the benefits of these forms of mobility.<sup>2</sup>

Latin America is not starting these discussions from scratch. There is tradition involving skilled migration studies in the region, which have increasingly incorporated new forms of mobility as part of the current impacts of globalization (Martínez 2005; Pellegrino 2006). Anglo-Saxon conceptual proposals, from brain circulation and brain gain to brain exchange, have been discussed; these seek to turn migrants into individuals or groups that transfer knowledge and technology (Martinez 2005; Pellegrino 2001).

Identifying the factors that characterize skilled emigration is a priority. As previously noted, these are not just associated to specific skill

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2. Like many other fields in the study of migration, the analysis of skilled movements faces problems regarding data availability and construction. The heterogeneous way in which skilled migration is defined is part of the problem. Some definitions cover a broad spectrum, ranging from technical skills to more sophisticated specializations (Pellegrino 2002). Solimano (2005), for example, includes technical talent, scientists and academics, health professionals, entrepreneurs and managers, professionals in international organizations, and cultural talent.

demand in developed countries, but also to labor market conditions, research, science and technology (CEPAL, 2002 and 2006; Martínez 2005 and 2008; OIT 2005; Pellegrino 2006; Solimano, 2005). Differences in pay and working conditions favor developed countries, and this is a structural factor. A greater social appreciation for the profession is an additional motivation among academics and researchers (Pellegrino and Martínez 2001).

In addition to the wage gap, working conditions, available infrastructure, and ease of access to necessary equipment and materials, all of which are part of professional achievement, also favor developed countries. The gap in scientific and technological development between developing and developed countries does not help. Market demand does not stimulate innovation in the region; the prevalence and economic hegemony of multinational corporations that establish subsidiaries in these countries has not led to scientific development (Pellegrino and Martínez 2001; Pellegrino 2002).

The discussion extends to notions of professional and academic “oversupply” in relation to actual demand in domestic markets, which leads to a drop in wages and a rise in the propensity to migrate. The problem is also termed “underutilization”, although this entails a different assessment: those who speak of oversupply emphasize the excess of professionals and technicians in the higher education system; those who refer to underutilization emphasize the market’s inability to absorb skilled resources. Either way, the subject is linked to the expansion of regional education systems during the mid-20th century, which is in turn linked to strong economic growth and the transformation of production structures. Even though not all Latin American countries experienced it at the same time, there was a general increase in enrollment<sup>3</sup> as universities expanded and research centers got a boost (Martínez 2008).

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3. There were nearly 270,000 higher education students in the region in the mid 1950s; they had grown to almost 10 million by the end of the 20th century. In the 1950s, Latin America and the Caribbean had some 600,000 professionals. Now, some 700,000 graduate every year in spite of high dropout rates and low efficiency. The average regional coverage is still far from that of the United States (80%) or Europe (65%), and is around 23%. It should be noted, however, that rates differ by country (Martínez 2008; Rama 2002).

Those who focus on underutilization refer to the low rate of labor incorporation, which is not consistent with the rapid generation of professionals; the latter is higher than that of the unskilled labor force (especially among women) and generates involuntary inactivity, open unemployment, underemployment, reduction in salaries and outsourcing. And yet, the proportion of Latin American and Caribbean workers who have completed post-secondary and technical studies does not exceed 20% and is only 10% in some countries (Martínez 2005 and 2008; CEPAL 2002 and 2006).

All these factors affect types of skilled migrants in different ways and the nuances are possibly quite varied. As an example, consider different types of skills, gender inequalities, cultural barriers, and even class differences (even though, in this regard, skilled migrants tend to be more homogenous; Martínez 2008).

### *Students and opportunities to study abroad: an important issue*

Analysts of the current global crisis state that the pursuit of graduate studies abroad has long been a trigger for emigration. The region highly values this pursuit for reasons that include the local competitive advantage of having a degree from certain foreign institutions; multiculturalism; the central nature of the knowledge; prestige; potentially greater gender equality for women, and expectations of remaining in the host country after the completion of studies to earn higher salaries. In addition, developed countries deliberately seek to attract foreign students using scholarships, since the training process can be a good mechanism for selecting top students. Foreign education also offers more opportunities and reduced costs in some countries, particularly in the case of many Spanish universities (Martínez 2005; Pellegrino 2002).

Although the study of this situation requires more detail, we can say that it is not clear whether the region is attending to this wave of graduate emigrants. The internationalization of higher education systems is much more evident. The privatization of regional higher education is linked to this phenomenon, and there is growing interest in relaxing current rules in order to further this process. Some signatories of the GATS have

advocated open trade in all modes of educational services supply using strict academic control as regulation (Rodríguez Gómez 2005).

*Intervention areas: return and networking*

Going beyond the effects of the global recession, it is expected that developed countries will step up recruitment of skilled immigrants in the upcoming decades. Some successful experiences involving return and diaspora networks in Southeast Asian countries suggest this phenomenon can be approached through the design of appropriate measures (Pellegrino 2001). In the case of Latin America it is important come up with initiatives that do not undermine human rights, especially the right to freedom of movement (Martinez 2008).

A review of the literature leads to suggestions regarding return policies and networking. Such measures must not become the center of a two-sided argument; on the contrary, they should be approached as complementary aspects (Pellegrino and Martínez 2001; CEPAL, 2006). Networking policies should take into account the characteristics of skilled migrant groups in addition to the diversity of national settings. Professionals working in multinational firms, for example, must show loyalty to their companies and this does not allow them to engage in activities that involve skills or technological transfers. In contrast, scientists and academics play an essential role in the training of new generations and social innovation processes, but networks can only be established if strong local incentives add to the external dynamics. Programs that seek to link the scientific exodus to local communities can be effective but require the support of national policies in order to outlast the decrease in initial interest (Pellegrino 2001).

These types of skilled migrants often partake of a peculiar and complex situation: the hunt for a successful career can lead them to research that does not match the priorities of their country (the need or drive to publish in international journals, participate in international conferences or projects, or work with certain research centers can all lead to this). If, as Pellegrino states, science is universal and its goal is not to promote nationalistic and closed scientific models, it is also true that the degree of universality varies

greatly across the disciplines: “In the social sciences, local studies are not of general interest and have little national relevance” (Pellegrino 2001: 244).

Some of the guidelines and suggested approaches in the literature aim to strengthen the link between the entrepreneurial and industrial world and the universities. Thorn and Holm-Nielsen, for example, opt for early networking: “Linkages between academia and industry are essential for developing an entrepreneurial culture in education and research and for strengthening the private sector’s capacity to absorb knowledge” (2005: 12). Other proposals focus on the relationship between skilled migration and business initiatives. India and Taiwan were able to build a high-tech domestic industry that is internationally competitive using the critical contributions of expatriate entrepreneurs and technology experts who succeeded professionally in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other developed countries. In this regard, Solimano states that “to attract human and financial capital back home” some favorable tax treatment may be needed “in the initial stage” (2005: 30). Concerted regional demands for the easing of current restrictions to professional mobility as a way of mitigating global asymmetries, and practical citizenship offers to emigrants (offers that guarantee economic, political and social exercise in their countries of origin) are necessary measures as well as unavoidable responsibilities (CEPAL 2006; Martínez 2005).

Addressing consensus among experts and governments, the Global Commission on International Migration has also suggested policy: governments and employers must remove obstacles to the mobility of highly qualified personnel, which needlessly impede economic competitiveness; wealthy governments with workforce shortages should encourage the formation of human capital and the creation of a global group of professionals; assistance and foreign investment should target the countries and sectors most affected by the loss of professionals via the use of co-investment programs, for example, and host countries should promote circular migration by providing mechanisms and pathways that enable migrants to move relatively easily between the country of origin and the country of destination (GCIM 2005).

The Commission also questions “solutions” that intend to keep skilled professionals from leaving the country: “This kind of approach

would violate human rights principles, oppose trends towards the globalization of the labor market and, in any case, be quite difficult to apply (GCIM 2005: 26). The suggestion that states that hire foreign professionals should directly compensate source countries is seen as unworkable, and efforts to mobilize the knowledge networks of diasporas are considered more effective. Brain circulation, they suggest, can lead to the development of programs that facilitate skills and knowledge transfer from the diaspora back to the countries of origin, either through physical return, temporary visits, or a “virtual return” via videoconferencing or the Internet. Finally, the GCIM states that countries that employ foreign skilled personnel must optimize workforce planning and invest more resources in training their own citizens to cover the current and projected gaps in the domestic labor market: it is unwise that the world’s most prosperous states should ignore these responsibilities in their search for a quick solution to their human resources shortage (i.e., by hiring professionals from developing countries; GCIM 2005: 27).

## CONCLUSIONS

The good news for Latin American and Caribbean migration is that the crisis has provided a chance to take up certain agendas and discussions, and better assess the impact of an issue that has yet to be addressed properly. For decades, skilled migration has played a role in the international division of labor and unequal exchange relationships between developed and developing nations. The emigration of skilled personnel should not be seen as irreversible, even though it can certainly be constructed as a loss. The possibilities of scientific movement and exchange that try to recoup loss are still reduced for Latin America. They are hampered by labor flexibility practices applied by large corporations, the retention of outstanding students in universities of the developed world, and the huge disparity in working conditions and wages between the developed and developing world. Establishing networks with the diaspora is not only more realistic, but more promising.

Faced with the intensifying recruitment of skilled workforce in the upcoming decades, developing countries need to adopt active policies

that take into account the national and regional contexts while respecting human rights and freedom of movement. In addition to the diversity of national settings, they should take into account the different characteristics of skilled migrant groups when they design networking policies. Concerted regional demands for an ease in current restrictions to professional mobility as a way of mitigating global asymmetries, and practical citizenship offers to emigrants (offers that guarantee economic, political and social exercise in their countries of origin) are necessary measures as well as unavoidable responsibilities (CEPAL, 2006).

On the other hand, history, economic prospects, the crisis and the current situation suggest that protectionist measures aimed at stopping immigration will be short lived. Highly-skilled immigrants are more sought-after because they offer expertise, generate less integration problems, and pay taxes while contributing to innovation and competitiveness. But we should not ignore their need for protection and the crisis provides us with an opportunity to strengthen it. And, from an individual standpoint, we must not forget that the crisis has nevertheless had negative effects on established and potential skilled migrants who have suffered job losses, pay cuts and even postponed their decision to migrate.

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