SKILL DRAIN FROM ASEAN COUNTRIES
CAN SENDING COUNTRIES AFFORD?

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ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK
Contents

Tables iv
Abstract v
1. Introduction 1
2. Objectives and Methods 4
3. Conceptual Considerations and Findings 5
4. Skill Drain or Skill Waste in ASEAN 8
5. Conclusions 11
References 13
Tables

Table 1: Intra-ASEAN Migration Data .................................................. 3
Table 2: Distribution of Respondents (Country and Profession Wise) .......... 4
Table 3: Profile of Respondents .......................................................... 6
Table 4: Top 25 Intra-ASEAN Migration Corridor, 2013 .......................... 7
Migration of skilled workers to other countries remains a highly contentious issue. Skill drain does not take place based on skill surplus and deficient equation. Skilled migrants can make their choice to migrate on their own with minimal control of the Government. This paper argues that sending countries lose skill which cannot be offset or justified by the remittances inflow. This paper is based on a research conducted on skill migration from the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. In this study, skilled migrants are engineers, medical doctors, nurses, and academics. I interviewed 12 engineers (4 from the Philippines; 2 from Malaysia; 4 from Singapore and 2 from Thailand); 9 medical doctors (4 from the Philippines; 3 from Singapore, 1 from Malaysia and 1 from Thailand); 8 nurses (6 from the Philippines and 2 from Thailand) and 14 academics (6 from the Philippines; 5 from Singapore and 3 from Malaysia) who were working abroad. Skill migration continues to grow because of the growing demand, wage differentials, glorifications of the contribution of remittances to development and failure of the origin countries to retain them. The question remains whether the respective sending country is producing more of them so that they can send after their own demand is met. This paper investigates whether the sending end can afford exporting such skills.
1. Introduction

"The loss of skilled labour is of vital importance for development and development potential of a country. The loss of teachers undermines the ability of schools and education systems to function, the loss of nurses impairs efforts to deliver even basic healthcare and public health programmes and the loss of other skilled professionals acts as a barrier to institutional capacity building, the efficient utilisation of external assistance and private sector growth (Nunn, 2005:7)."

There has been a longstanding debate that whether skill migration is beneficial or not for countries of origin. Skilled citizens i.e. human capital is one of the most important assets for a country. In order to transform a citizen into human capital, nations invest an immense amount of resources. A one-year increase in the average education of a nation’s workforce results in increase of the output per worker by between five and 15 percent. Therefore, loss of skilled workers has the potential to retard overall growth of a nation. The empirical literature is underpinned by a robust theoretical framework suggesting that skill migration eventually leave the country skill-empty which has long term impact on development. Most skilled migrants tend to settle elsewhere at some point of their life as opposed to the unskilled migrants. Thus, it is highly likely that the country would lose them forever. Skill loss cannot in anyway be justified and compensated by glorification of migration.

Even in the historical era of near-open borders, migration has never been free of cost. The costs involved were the costs of transporting the belongings, and the effort to find work, lodging, and sustenance at one’s new home (Ullah, 2010; Rahman and Ullah, 2012; Rahman, 2011). Legal restrictions on migration imposed new financial costs. Skilled workers tend to move out of their origin to a richer country with the hope to be able to fully utilize their skills (Ullah, 2015; 2015a; 2013a; Dodani and LaPorte, 2005). The trend is also apparent in the ASEAN region i.e. migration within the region or between the member countries. Rationally, the free movement of goods between any two countries tends to expand the free movement of workers at the same time. Over and above that, the integration of ASEAN through the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) aims not only to administer the South-North migration but also to elevate the South-South migration (Susantono, 2015). The AEC aims to have a free flow
migration region, with Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, and Malaysia as the major destinations for workers from Indonesia and the Philippines. Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, account for about 90 percent of the region's total migrants and 97 percent of intra-ASEAN migrants (ILO and ADB, 2014). Disparities between the six other Member States, namely Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand (ASEAN-6) and the CLMV countries (Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam) are evident (ILO and ADB, 2014). These differences partly explain patterns of regional labor migration. Disparities are marked when it comes to wages i.e. a worker in Malaysia earns, on average, more than three times the monthly salary of an Indonesian worker (ILO and ADB, 2014).

Not all educated and skilled migrants casually leave their home country merely for seeking better pay or for a better living. Under certain circumstances such as war, political unrest, ethnic or religious persecution, migrants are forced to leave (Torres and Wittchen, 2010; Ullah, 2014). Simultaneously, Siar (2014) claimed, the frequent movement of people crossing the borders is commonly large due to the high rates of unemployment and poverty. These movements are seen as solutions to certain individuals who need to start a living. However, Castles and Miller (2009) argue that the emigration of skilled people does not damage the economy as they leave, rather educated or skilled individuals who are unemployed would opt to seek jobs outside their home country, so as to become productive by utilizing the skills and knowledge they possess.

ASEAN is home to 604 million people (Jones, 2013) (as of 2011) of which about a little less than half (263 million) are in their working age (ASEAN Statistics). Using estimates based on bilateral migrant stock in 2011, it contributes 12.8 million or 6 percent of the total global migrants or 30 percent of which are migrants within ASEAN (Orbeta and Gonzales, 2013). The AEC focuses on breaking down trade barriers, so that the region can foster economic output up to 7 percent by 2025 and generate approximately 14 million employments (Susantono, 2015).
Table 1: Intra-ASEAN Migration Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intra-ASEAN</th>
<th>Outward Migration</th>
<th>Inward Migration</th>
<th>Ratio of Outbound/Inbound</th>
<th>Outward Migration</th>
<th>Inward Migration</th>
<th>Ratio of Outbound/Inbound</th>
<th>Share of Intra-ASEAN to Total Migration (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>9,313</td>
<td>120,578</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>24,343</td>
<td>148,123</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>38.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>53,722</td>
<td>320,573</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>350,485</td>
<td>335,829</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>15.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1,518,687</td>
<td>158,485</td>
<td>9.58</td>
<td>2,504,297</td>
<td>397,124</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>60.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>82,788</td>
<td>10,134</td>
<td>8.17</td>
<td>366,663</td>
<td>18,916</td>
<td>19.38</td>
<td>22.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>1,195,566</td>
<td>1,882,987</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>1,481,202</td>
<td>2,357,603</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>80.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar*</td>
<td>321,100</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>394.47</td>
<td>514,667</td>
<td>98,008</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>62.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>335,407</td>
<td>9,096</td>
<td>36.87</td>
<td>4,275,612</td>
<td>435,423</td>
<td>9.82</td>
<td>7.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>122,254</td>
<td>1,162,960</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>297,234</td>
<td>1,966,865</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>41.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>262,721</td>
<td>448,218</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>811,123</td>
<td>1,157,263</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>32.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>221,956</td>
<td>21,511</td>
<td>10.32</td>
<td>2,226,401</td>
<td>69,307</td>
<td>32.12</td>
<td>9.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>4,123,515</td>
<td>4,135,357</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>12,852,027</td>
<td>6,984,461</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>32.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * means that the data was based on earlier estimates by the World Bank, i.e. 2007, while the rest are from the 2010 released data.
Lao PDR = Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

Skilled/educated individuals move out of their countries of origins where they believe they can bring their knowledge into effective actions, while building new life. The unevenness of the migration pattern due to rigid national immigration policies, inequalities of professional education and licensing regimes as well as the vast income gap between countries represents that with the ever increasingly interconnectedness, the risk of brain drain has become a serious matter of concern (Susantano, 2015; Bernard, 2015). Economic integration may be seen as favorable as a whole but free movement of skilled laborers may stimulate a brain drain from poor countries to richer ones (Chaltrong, 2012). Moreover, today’s world economy is perpetually in transition, some countries are in favor of skilled laborers and the demand can be achieved through an open labor market at certain corridors.

The notion of brain drain is a common nuanced phenomenon that usually is seen from two lenses: detrimental and beneficial (Ullah, Rahman and Murshed, 1999). What is a brain drain theory? According to Torres and Wittchen (2010), brain drain does not simply express the situation when the educated individuals in their home country emigrate to look for higher wages or better opportunities in another country – but also when the individuals who earned knowledge and completed their education abroad do not return to their home country. Dodani and LaPorte (2005) claimed that the countries (mostly the countries of origin) that have invested in education and training to the individuals would be at loss of significant resources when they migrate, while the recipient countries accrue benefit as they did not spend out the cost of educating those migrants in the first place.

I will conceptualize the term affordability in this context and lay out the variables why these countries are losing skills and why they are in fact not in a position to lose them. This paper is based on a research conducted on skill migration from the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Skill migration continues to grow because of the growing demand, wage differentials, glorifications of the contribution of remittances to development and failure of the origin countries to retain them. The question remains whether the respective sending country is producing more of them so that they can send after their domestic demand is met.
2. Objectives and Methods

This paper is a part of a larger project being conducted from 2014 to 2017. This paper delves into the question why ASEAN nations cannot afford to lose their skilled migrants. This paper argues that the trend of losing skill from sending countries could be detrimental to the countries of origin and this loss could not be justified by the remittances inflow.

In this study, skilled migrants are engineers, medical doctors, nurses, and academics. I interviewed 12 engineers (4 from the Philippines; 2 from Malaysia; 4 from Singapore and 2 from Thailand); 9 medical doctors (4 from the Philippines; 3 from Singapore, 1 from Malaysia and 1 from Thailand); 8 nurses (6 from the Philippines and 2 from Thailand) and 14 academics (6 from the Philippines; 5 from Singapore and 3 from Malaysia) who were working abroad.

In selecting the respondents, snow-ball technique was applied. A checklist was used to collect data. The primary intention to ask question has been to know whether they consider their migration as a brain drain, if yes, what way it is, and if no, what is their reflection on this current ongoing debate about brain drain and brain gain, and why they particularly left their own soil.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries of origin</th>
<th>Physicians</th>
<th>Nurses</th>
<th>Engineers</th>
<th>Academics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source:
3. Conceptual Considerations and Findings

Because of the fact that this paper deals with a concept ‘affordability’, I conceptualize this term so as to make the direction of the paper clear. In what way ASEAN country’s affordability is questioned in the paper? Before the time migration studies came under academic investigations, migration used to be considered as natural human phenomenon. Since the last decade, security, political, social and economic factors have been predominantly occupying the space in public debate about migration. Migration has been viewed by most scholars as one of the best options for making positive impact on development (Ullah, 2010; 2013; Rahman and Ullah, 2012; Skeldon, 2006). One of the reasons for this is the volume of remittances being channeled into origin countries. There are many countries whose 20-40 percent of the GDP is constituted by remittances. While this is a great indication of contribution to development, it is important too to look into the potential negative impact migration may have in both origin and destination countries in the long run (Ullah, 2015; Ullah and Hossain, 2014; 2016). While in this paper affordability is viewed from two perspectives: origin and destination, primary attention has been paid to countries of origin.

The need for international skills has grown in developing nations. The supply and demand mismatch for labor is one of the main drivers for international migration and this is particularly evident in some countries in Asia. This happens due to the fact that they experienced remarkable economic growth in the past two decades (ADB Institute, 2014). For example, Thailand has been in shortage of skilled labor in a number of sectors because Thai market is insufficient both in terms of quantity and quality to meet the growing skill need (NESDB, 2013). Increased dependency on foreign technologies also led many countries like Thailand to import increasing number of foreign skilled labor.

Some countries in ASEAN are facing fertility decline and the population size is shrinking and they are becoming dependent on migrant population as a result. At the same time some human resource-surplus countries are ready to send labor to other countries. Apparently, the tradeoff looks great in the way that some countries are deficient of people and some are surplus. This might imply that a demand and supply theory works in making a balance of need of both ends. The question has always been left unanswered which is: can the countries with surplus human resources really afford losing their human resources and the human resources-deficient countries can afford importing migrant workers?

Scholars defended the early 1980s theory of brain drain and came up with brain gain theory. Lately, the theory of brain waste is replacing the earlier ones. This theory is getting prominence in scholarly debate due to the fact that the brain that goes out is unlikely to come back and those who really return cannot use the skill they gained overseas because they engaged in such jobs where their skills were redundant thus eventually get de-skilled. One of the most pressing issues is that skill that a country produces is drained but the gap remains as it is or gets bigger as the country is not producing more than they export [in order to reduce the gap]. For example, the Philippines is losing medical doctors and nurses but the supply is less than they need.
The dire need of medical doctors in clinics in rural Philippines could not be met, as a result. This kind of loss is not taken seriously into account by policy makers because remittances inflow is seen to be counterbalancing this loss.

**Table 3: Profile of Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professionals</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engineers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physicians</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Primary reasons for leaving the country: Majority (65 percent) of the engineers (irrespective of countries of origin) confirmed that they left their own country for a better salary base, this means that wage differentials are primary reasons for their decision to leave. Most Filipinos (85 percent) pointed to the fact for the decision to leave the country that the country was becoming inhabitable in terms environment, political culture, corruption and price hike which may not match the majority's income. Most Singaporeans (irrespective of their professions) pointed that that was their choice to move out of the country. Most of them however mentioned one thing that life in Singapore is very stressful. Their skill is marketable, sellable and got high demand elsewhere. Most Malaysian and Thais pointed to the wage differentials as their primary reasons for taking over jobs abroad.

Migrants in many countries including the Philippines are often called heroes. This title is given to recognize their contribution to the economy, and this eventually works as encouragement to leave the country. In addition, migration is seen as the tool for easing unemployment problem. It should however be noted that skilled people may not be the reasons for growing unemployment problem. In addition, migrants are often seen as alien in destination countries. In many countries, recently in Europe, though due to the mass influx from the Middle East, a strong opposition to the migration was heard from people at large under the belief that migrants steal their jobs. This allegation may lead people to potential xenophobic practices of which there are myriad of evidences (see Ullah, 2010).

It is acknowledged that brain drain adversely affects the countries of origins. Firstly, the evident impact of brain drain is the phenomenon known as a 'labor gap' that reflects the growing gap between the rich and poor nations. As elaborated by Ilagan, et. al. (2013), the poorer a country is, the more the (educated) people tend to leave for a richer country, and this process usually generates profit to the respective inbound countries. This trend exhibits that the country is in demand of highly educated workers and the requirement of work experience, which the youth in low income countries may not possess (Battistella and Liao, 2013). One of the respondents (who is a nurse from the Philippines working in Singapore) said that she is better respected there than in the Philippine hospitals. Respect...‘(F), she mumbles in reply... ‘I mean in terms of salary, benefits and status.”

This leads to the second impact, in such a way that the resource poor nations are usually made up of unskilled labors while rich nations are usually blessed by skilled and educated labors (Bernard, 2015). With this ongoing trend, Susantonoto (2015) claims that by 2025, there could be more that half of all the high skilled job positions in the low-income countries like Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam will be taken up by low skilled workers. In other words, the low-income countries might always lag behind the high-income countries as they are lacking of the human capital or human resources needed to further advance the economy and other development. Many respondents irrespective of origin said, as long as they can contribute to their countries in whatever way they can should be fine. ‘...we don't have to be in our own country. We can contribute wherever we are....’. One of the respondents (who is a academic from Singapore) thinks his decision to move out of the country is not tantamount to brain drain. Why and how? She replied ‘...though I live here, look at my profile, most of my research and publications deal with Singapore. This means I am contributing more to the country than I could have been if I were in my own country.'
When a country consistently loses its skilled citizens, its identity might get weakened at some point of time. In Singapore, every year, 4 to 5 percent of the country’s top 30 percent of its population give up their citizenships to take up overseas jobs (Loh, 2015). The Prime Minister of Singapore during his interview with TIME magazine expressed his concern by saying “If the successful ones mostly leave, we’re going to be depleted. And if it goes beyond the successful ones, we’ll be shrunken.” As Singapore continues to lose its citizens, the government opens its labor market to accept migrants from elsewhere. However, the true identity may be at stake due to the loss of its natives while being inhabited by large proportion of new residents (Lee, 2015).

Competitiveness and growth of a country depend largely on its ability to acquire and fully utilize new knowledge and the skills of its workforce. However, draining out direly needed skills and knowledge may bring havoc to domestic economy. The problem with this is that many countries are not capable of producing the workforce they need, and many more see their highly skilled workers emigrate (Sugiyarto and Agunias, 2014).

The level of impact of brain drain may closely be linked to the economic and political conditions of the countries of origin. Poorer nations are prone to the detrimental consequences as a result of migration that involved the major outflow of their most talented human resources (i.e. educated and skilled individuals). Then again, the economic integration such as the AEC implemented by the members of ASEAN may be regarded as a step to support the financial system of the region aiming at easing the economic conditions of the less developed countries. As positively seen, the integration and interlinks between the members might elevate the migration process but as negatively seen, uncontrollable migration might end up giving more pressure to the disadvantaged grounds.

### Table 4: Top 25 Intra-ASEAN Migration Corridor, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country Corridor</th>
<th>Intra ASEAN Migrant Stock</th>
<th>Proportion of Intra-ASEAN Migrant Stock (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Myanmar to Thailand</td>
<td>1,892,480</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Indonesia to Malaysia</td>
<td>1,051,227</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Malaysia to Singapore</td>
<td>1,044,994</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lao PDR to Thailand</td>
<td>926,427</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cambodia to Thailand</td>
<td>750,109</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Myanmar to Malaysia</td>
<td>247,768</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Indonesia to Singapore</td>
<td>152,681</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Singapore to Malaysia</td>
<td>78,092</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Viet Nam to Cambodia</td>
<td>37,225</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Thailand to Cambodia</td>
<td>31,472</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Thailand to Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>25,451</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Philippines to Malaysia</td>
<td>21,345</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Thailand to Indonesia</td>
<td>19,681</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Singapore to Indonesia</td>
<td>19,681</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Thailand to Singapore</td>
<td>17,644</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Philippines to Singapore</td>
<td>14,176</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Cambodia to Malaysia</td>
<td>13,876</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Viet Nam to Lao PDR</td>
<td>11,447</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Myanmar to Viet Nam</td>
<td>9,783</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Thailand to Malaysia</td>
<td>8,137</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Indonesia to Viet Nam</td>
<td>7,671</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Brunei to Malaysia</td>
<td>5,975</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Viet Nam to Thailand</td>
<td>5,966</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Lao PDR to Viet Nam</td>
<td>4,284</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Philippines to Indonesia</td>
<td>3,517</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lao PDR = Lao People’s Democratic Republic.
Source: Sugiyarto and Agunias, 2014 (Calculated from the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Origin and Destination, 2013 Revision (With permission from author).
4. Skill Drain or Skill Waste in ASEAN

Over the last two decades, migration landscape has changed (in terms of volume, direction and skill composition etc.) across ASEAN region. Most receiving countries got new policies aiming at being self-reliant in labor market and thus slimming the inflow of migrant workers. These efforts are not working very well due to two factors: fertility decline and skill mismatch. Hence the unemployment as well as the number of migrant workers are growing. This picture is seen from two opposite lenses: migrants steal the local’s jobs hence is the unemployment and that locals are reluctant to take over some certain job categories. Almost all categories (skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled) of workers originate from the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore however sends mostly skilled ones. Filipino nurses represent the largest category of health workers migrating, followed by midwives and doctors. They prefer moving to Brunei, Ireland, Kuwait, Libya, Qatar, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates as their destinations. Saudi Arabia has consistently been the top destination for nurses in the last decade. Engineers from both Singapore and the Philippines prefer to move to North America and Europe. Academics from Singapore moved to the Pacific and North America.

Singapore is one of the most prosperous nations in Asia. As of 2012, the unemployment rate is maintained at a low rate with the average of 2 percent in Singapore (Walter, 2014). The mismatch between the need for skills for the fast expanding development undertakings and the domestically available skill has made the country dependent on the migrant workers (Ullah, 2012; 2013; Rahman, 2012; Walter, 2014). However, this dependency has not stopped the native Singaporeans to go out for better opportunities overseas. At the same time, the large inflow of foreigners into the country has slowly becoming a point of issue as the local Singaporeans are on the other hand, looking for jobs abroad. Some policy makers attempted to justify this by the fact that diversity and globalization have made the border open for all and the mobility of people around the world has become largely inevitable (Lee, 2015). Diversity is necessary to create knowledge and migration is necessary for creating diversity.
Job announcements in Canada, for example, clearly spell out that Canadians and Canada permanent residents will be given priority. This in fact signifies that while diversity is not closed, national talent should be retained first. Some countries in ASEAN hire ‘western’ people. This is seen as an exclusionary policy by the citizens. Many citizens find it difficult to land into jobs of respective areas of skill, and decide to move on elsewhere as a result. For example, in March 2014, Seah Kian Peng, a Member of Parliament in Singapore, “expressed shock” at the overwhelming number of foreign faculty members in universities in Singapore. Singaporean faculty members made up the minority (28 percent of the 25 faculty members) in the National University of Singapore’s (NUS) political science department. However, this came as no surprise to many Singaporean academics and graduate students. In 2013, a Member of Parliament (NMP) and associate professor of Law at Singapore Management University, raised the same issue in parliament. A Senior Minister of State for Education pointed out that Singaporeans made up one in four (25 percent) faculty members on the tenure-track in both NUS and Nanyang Technological University (NTU); Singapore Management University’s (SMU) figure is one in six (16.6 percent); and Singapore University of Technology and Design’s (SUTD) figure is one in three (33.3 percent). In other words, Singaporean faculty members are a minority in Singapore’s universities. Some 44 percent of Singapore PhD students revealed in a survey that they believe Singaporean universities have a preference for hiring foreign faculty members (Lay, 2014).

Among ASEAN worker in Malaysia, Indonesians are the largest group, accounting for about 51 percent of all foreign workers, followed by Myanmar 7 percent, Viet Nam 4 percent, and the Philippines, Thailand, and Cambodia, accounting for a combined 5 percent (Pasadilla, 2011). Cambodian migrants move mainly within ASEAN, in particular to Thailand and Malaysia. In terms of outward migration, workers from Malaysia, Myanmar, and Indonesia are mostly destined to work within the region, while in the rest of ASEAN countries, out-migration to the rest of the world takes the larger share.

The contradicting factor is that while Malaysia’s one-third of labor force is constituted by migrants, a considerable number of Malaysians are living and working abroad. Most of them are educated with tertiary qualifications. In 2013, 308,834 high-skilled Malaysians were living in the OECD countries and Singapore (Rahman, 2012; The World Bank, 2014; Mustafa, 2015). Most of them were working in the financial, technical and engineering sectors (Pillay, 2015). With the opportunity to migrate, Malaysians who decided to leave their homeland were mostly due to wage differentials, the origin’s ‘unfavorable political issues and public security’. Hence, Malaysia is facing an exodus of talent due to the poor prospects and lack of high-skilled jobs offering (NEAC, 2010:60). This issue matters very much, as Malaysia is moving towards becoming a high-economic nation by 2020, with the aim of sustainable development and that all they need is a sufficient pool of talent and skillful human resources to achieve it (Ishak and Abdul-Aziz, 2014). Whatever are the reasons for them to leave the country, the truth is that the country lost the skills which placed the country into a position to import skills from other countries. The cost of importing human resources, especially social costs, could be very high. For example, to tackle the issues of security; illegality/irregularity Malaysia had to form RELA (Ullah, 2013) which costed Malaysia’s image as Malaysia has been known to human rights regime for its infamous and brutal treatment towards migrant and refugee population.

In order to get most talented people home back the 10th Malaysia Plan revealed in June 2010 announced a ‘Talent Corporation’ to headhunt Malaysians abroad. Recognizing the fact that the skills Malaysia lost are instrumental in driving economic growth. This implies that Malaysia realized that they cannot afford losing the skills from the country. Though this program turned unsuccessful. In the last 15 years only about 1,000 were attracted to come back (MalaysiaKini, 2010). Of the 23 percent of the resident Singaporeans and permanent residents (PRs) about half (45 percent) were from Malaysia (MalaysiaKini, 2010). According to Malaysia’s Human Resource Ministry, there are about 350,000 Malaysians working
in Singapore, and that 386,000 PRs (excluding Malaysian-born Singapore citizens and non-resident Malaysians) were Malaysians.

In the Philippines brain drain has been a concern since the 1970s, which involved the departure of college-educated and professional workers, mostly the physicians, teachers, engineers, scientists and mechanical officer (Alburo and Abella, 2002). Then in the 1980s, the growing outflow of medical professionals (especially doctors and nurses) had started to become apparent. Of the 2 million domestic helpers from the Philippines, it is believed, about 3 percent are nurses and university graduates. They compromised their skills to take up foreign jobs (Ullah, 2016; 2015b). Worldwide, 25 percent of all overseas medical professionals come from the Philippines (Morella, 2008). The continuous outflow of medical professionals, which is labeled as “Medical Apocalypse” (Morella, 2008) is a serious problem that is currently faced by the nation. The country is steadily losing its medical professionals that it has to suffer the lack of doctors and nurses to take care of the local patients – forcing 2,500 hospitals to shut down, since 2002 (Purgill, 2010). The biggest shortage in many Philippines’ hospitals is not the equipment but the medical experts who run the equipment and perform the medical procedures (Voice of America, 2009). As a result, the social development has become extremely poor especially in the sector of health services of the Philippines. This shows that the mass migration of high-skilled individuals has adversely affected the nation.
5. Conclusions

There is no easy way to calculate advantages and disadvantages of skill migration. Of course skilled migrants do better, in general, economically, although unskilled and low skilled migrants contribute more to the origin country because they got less chance to attain root in destinations (7 Policy Implications for High-Skilled Immigration, 2015). Highly skilled labour is an essential input to an innovative economy (Industry Canada and Policy Research Directorate, 2008). High demand for skills in industrialized countries has led to intense international competition for skills. Skilled workers help provide destination countries with needed skills, but if overall attractiveness to these workers is insufficient, they will go elsewhere. Policymakers have to structure policy responses to benefit from skilled workers, taking into consideration the variety of ways they affect the domestic labour market and the economy. A policy on skilled migration should safeguard the integrity of international protection mechanisms. A balanced return policy is one that will include enforced returns when voluntary returns are not possible.

Throughout history, migration has always been one of the most important drivers of human progress. Evidences suggest that both in the developed and developing world migration has contributed tremendously to the economic development (Goldin, 2013). However, most researches demonstrated migration phenomenon from positive biasness. As a result, its negativity remained under-researched. Skill migration has always been seen as a great way of getting remittances. Only recently, skill migration is seen as a talent loss. The question hence has been posed in the paper whether sending ends can afford this loss. The ASEAN region is home to a workforce of about 260 million. Among the anticipated outcomes of ASEAN Integration is intra-regional mobility among professionals. ASEAN professionals may soon be able to practice anywhere within the region. What does the current discourse say on who would stand to gain or lose from this eventuality? Loss of skilled workers would retard national growth. This study suggests that skill migration has adverse impact on services provision in the origin country, eventually leaving the country skill-empty. Most skilled migrants tend to settle elsewhere at some point of their life. Thus the country loses them permanently. Skill loss cannot in anyway be justified and compensated by glorification of migration and remittances.

Migrants are flooding across the borders, and that they are stealing jobs and eroding country’s social fabric in the process; and in spite of minor short-term dislocations, international migration is a boon: it generates innovation and dynamism while fueling long-term economic growth (Goldin, 2013). As with debates on trade, where protectionist instincts tend to overwhelm the longer-term need for more open societies, the core role that migrants play in economic development is often overwhelmed by defensive measures to keep migrants out.

Many Singaporeans expressed their deep resentment to protest against the White Paper’s prediction that Singapore’s population could rise to 6.9 million in the coming 15 years, with
immigrants making up nearly half that figure. Many locals blame immigration for rising property prices and living costs. Within Asia, the most important initiative in the area of skills mobility has been undertaken by the ASEAN, which decided in 2007 to achieve a regional ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by 2015. In the AEC blueprint, the fifth of five pillars is the “free flow of skilled labor.” This is a bold step toward creating the institutions and mechanisms for governing mobility in the region (ADB Institute, 2014). The Philippines and Thailand send almost all categories (skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled) of workers, and Singapore sends mostly skilled ones (Yong, Rahman and Ullah, 2014). Engineers from both Singapore and the Philippines prefer to move to North America and Europe. Academics from Singapore moved to the Pacific and North America. This study suggests that skill migration has adverse impact in myriad ways on services provision in the origin country. Keeping this fact into account, many countries have now formulated policies for encouraging return migration. Long term stay out of the country leads to losing roots and often de-skilling. A certain percentage of migrants leave their family back home for the sake of the continuity of their educations. The consequences of growing up of children without parents often could be longstanding. The bottom line is we must not be complacent with that. The ‘Brain Drain’, as the flow of skilled professionals out of developing countries has become known, thus marks a potentially serious barrier to economic growth, development and poverty reduction.’ The continuous movement of skilled laborers seriously causes the depletion of human resources in the countries of origins. The sad truth about migration is that, it may be seen as a strategy to ease unemployment in the countries of origin as well as to open up better employment chances for the people, yet it should not be done in a way that it leaves the home countries brain-empty.
References


* ADB recognizes "Vietnam" as Viet Nam and "Russia" as the Russian Federation.


