

## Concept Note 6

# “Brain Drain” and Its Consequences

### GOAL

This session will address the phenomenon of “brain drain” — the emigration of highly skilled individuals — and its far-reaching consequences for regions of origin. By examining the structural causes and multidimensional impacts of talent flight, the session aims to build a shared understanding of how regional and national public policies can mitigate brain drain and transform it into brain circulation. Special attention will be given to the role of territorial governance, youth empowerment, and investment in education and innovation ecosystems as tools to retain talent and create inclusive development models.

### CONCEPTUALISATION

Brain drain represents one of the most insidious forms of human capital loss for developing and emerging regions. It undermines local innovation, weakens institutional capacities, and drains the very resources necessary for long-term development. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than 30% of skilled professionals from some sub-Saharan countries have emigrated to OECD nations in recent decades. The phenomenon is exacerbated by global inequalities, lack of local opportunity, political instability, and systemic underinvestment in education and research.

This outflow disproportionately affects regions already struggling with structural deficits: in healthcare, as local hospitals lose trained doctors; in higher education, as professors and researchers seek better working conditions abroad; and in the private sector, where entrepreneurial energy is redirected toward foreign labor markets. Consequently, territories lose not only individuals but also decades of public investment, social capital, and future leadership.

Evidence from ORU Fogar’s IV World Summit of Regions, held in Temuco, Chile, underscores the territorial nature of this crisis. Marie Stella Kouassi, representative of the Association of Regions and Districts of Côte d’Ivoire (ARDCI), noted that brain drain is acutely affecting rural and border areas, where youth departure results in stagnation and aging populations. Similarly, Martín Guillermo of the Association of



European Border Regions emphasized that “distant areas, particularly border areas, keep talented young people away,” underlining that brain drain is as much a territorial justice issue as it is economic.

Despite the negative impacts, brain drain is not irreversible. When supported by effective territorial public policies, migration can evolve into brain gain or brain circulation. Diaspora engagement, returnee programs, transnational research networks, and remote entrepreneurial ecosystems are all tools that can turn migration into a mutually beneficial process.

Regional governments can play a critical role by fostering inclusive economic development and creating conditions that make staying — or returning — a viable and attractive option. This includes investing in quality education, creating career paths within public administration and local industries, supporting innovation hubs, and ensuring democratic governance and rule of law.

Crucially, territorial inequality must be tackled head-on. If opportunities remain concentrated in capital cities or abroad, regional territories will continue to see an outflow of their best-trained individuals. Empowering regions to design tailored development strategies — adapted to local strengths and aspirations — is essential to counterbalance these trends.

This session will serve as a platform to share best practices in reversing brain drain, highlight innovative partnerships between governments and diaspora, and reflect on how regional policies can anchor talent in place while engaging globally.

## **QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS**

- What are the main structural drivers of brain drain in regional and subnational territories?
- How can diaspora communities be engaged as development partners for their regions of origin?
- What institutional conditions are necessary to transform brain drain into brain circulation?
- How can regional education and innovation systems be strengthened to retain talent?
- What governance reforms are required to address territorial inequalities that fuel emigration?