



## Africa's "brain drain" –

### What can companies do considering the reality?

The issue of skilled migration away from the continent is a topic that regularly pops up in the news cycle, usually with doom and gloom headlines. Although the reality of “brain drain” is an international occurrence, Africa is the continent hardest hit by this phenomenon.[1] Estimates on the amount of skilled and professional individuals leaving the continent vary but the African Union estimates that about 70 000 skilled and/or professional individuals migrate from the continent every year.[2] Figures show that this trend is set to be even more acute amongst the continent’s youth. A new survey found that 52% of Africans aged between 18–24 are likely to consider emigrating in the next few years.[3] The unprecedented increase of international migration since the 1990s has more specifically been migration predominantly characterised by flows from the global South to the global North.[4]

A vital characteristic of this migration trend has been the movement of skilled and professional individuals from developing countries to advanced economies.[5] Specifically, in the case of Africa, the migration trends over the last 30 years have witnessed skilled Africans constituting the highest number of immigrants that voluntarily migrated to the global North.[6] This movement of skilled and professional people has a dire impact on their countries of origin as it results in a depletion of human capital and loss of resources invested in education.[7] Studies have shown that nations better endowed with human capital have a higher propensity for sustainable positive economic growth.[8] Thus, this translates into a severely negative impact on countries that fall victim to “brain drain” as the loss of human capital influences a country's ability to compete in the global economy.[9]



The reasons for the migration of skilled and professional individuals out of Africa are various and complex. Ranging from economic reasons, political persecution, environmental concerns, a lack of opportunities to utilise skills and in many cases even a lack of job satisfaction.[10] The question then remains– what role can African-based companies play in stemming the flow of talent out of the continent? Recent literature on the “brain drain” has theorised how this unique form of migration can result in positive feedback to source countries.[11] Some theories make strong arguments that the “brain drain” should drive companies to increase their focus on upskilling and developing current employees which in turn should counter some of the push factors resulting in skilled individuals leaving the continent. In general, these theories reflect the urgency with which companies must invest in retentions strategies to mitigate the loss of talent to distant shores.

According to the *Harvard Business Review* individual companies must take action to stem the “brain drain” within their own ranks when considering that 42% of participants in their study cited retaining top talent as their biggest challenge to attaining their strategic objectives.[12] There are however numerous practices through which companies can retain talent including, assessing talent, developing talent, rewarding talent and leveraging diversity in

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## Practices through which companies can retain talent:

- developing talent
- rewarding talent
- leveraging diversity in the company's workforce [13]

the company's workforce.[13] This signals a new shift in the work place where retention has become just as important as recruitment.[14] Investing in skills development for talent within a company is one of the strongest drivers of employee retention. [15]

By working with employees on a structure and environment which allows for learning and development companies can contribute to professional growth which establishes an important correlation between employee retention and on-the-job-training.[16] Furthermore, in a paper published by *Case Business School*, it is revealed that training and development solidifies a social link between companies and employees.[17] This social



link creates a commitment factor which tends to encourage the employee to stay longer with a company.[18] This is also reflected in the numbers of a recent study with 90% of employees being more likely to stay long-term with employers who invest in their career through skills development. [19] It is thus clear that training and development

of staff results in tangible and intangible outcomes including enhanced employee commitment and satisfaction and attaining strategic company objectives.

The big issue in this regard is that many companies do not have the internal capacity or skills for such levels of talent management. That is why a business partner who can provide a variety of inter-related human resource services is essential to retaining top talent and countering Africa's "brain drain". Precision Recruitment International (PRI) provides a variety of services that directly speaks to the diverse elements which are crucial for the retention of highly skilled and professional employees who are much needed for the flourishing of African communities and their economies. It is thanks to PRI's in-depth understanding of this issue that everything from competence-based support, training needs analysis and the delivery thereof to team building and coaching form part of its talent management approach. Talent management must be an integral part of any strategy to plug the drain of human capital on the continent.



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