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## POLICY BRIEF

**MIGRATION EXERTS DIFFERENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE  
EASTERN CAPE HEALTH AND EDUCATION LABOUR  
MARKET**

**By Dr Akpan**

## **Executive Summary**

A new study has found that the labour market within two key sectors in the Eastern Cape – health and education - feels the impact of migration somewhat differently. The study investigated current migration patterns in the Eastern Cape and how migration affects labour market dynamics in specific economic sectors in the Province. It also examined how existing government policies address the impact of migration on the labour market.

South Africa is home to hundreds of thousands of international immigrants, the majority of whom originate from within the SADC sub-region. Although the rate of migration has slowed in recent years, concerns are often expressed that immigration negatively affects labour market participation; that is, the rate at which South African citizens of working age access employment opportunities. In some quarters, there are also concerns about whether migration ultimately has benefits for South Africa, especially given the unrelenting challenge of high unemployment.

## **The Problem**

In the Eastern Cape – which has consistently recorded the highest unemployment rate in the country - the study reveals that the effect of migration on the labour market is complicated. This is as a result of at least four factors. One, the province is characterised by a serious rural-urban migration problem. Rural-urban migrants are concentrated in the Province's two major cities (Port Elizabeth and East London). Two, the Eastern Cape is a net loser of people (especially educated and skilled workforce) to other provinces, notably the Western Cape and Gauteng. Three, the loss of large numbers of people to other provinces has not led to a reduction in unemployment locally. Finally, policy interventions have not succeeded in curbing envisaged negative effects of migration on the local labour market.

## **Key Findings**

One of the key findings of the study is that in the Eastern Cape, the effect of migration on the labour market is not uniform across economic sectors. Using data from the health, basic education and higher education sectors, the study highlights important findings in this regard.

While there has been a noticeable increase in the number of health professionals that have registered to practice in the Eastern Cape – a trend that has been observed in other provinces – the study cautions that such increases should not be taken at face value. This is because, as the World Bank has pointed out, many health workers who have migrated abroad to seek greener pastures have been known to retain their home country addresses in relevant documents for personal reasons.

Besides, where personnel increases appear to have occurred, they are often negatively offset by resignations. In the Eastern Cape, while the number of registered health personnel has remained relatively constant at between 686 and 648 (including intern doctors) in 2011 and 2015 respectively, resignations during the two periods stood at 244 and 342. This shows that the Eastern Cape is a net loser of health practitioners. These latter numbers include intern doctors who have “resigned” to look for opportunities in the private health sector, in other provinces, or abroad. Needless to say, many fully registered doctors, especially those in the prime age bracket of 31-40, have been known to move to other countries. The bottom line is that while the Eastern Cape health labour market is constrained by out-migration, it has not significantly gained from in-migration. This is partly due to poor salaries (especially among those working in the public health institutions), poor working conditions, inadequate medical infrastructure (especially in the public health sector), overwork resulting from high doctor-patient ratio, limited advancement opportunities, and lack of personal security (that have seen medical officers and patients raped, stabbed or killed at hospitals).

With regard to basic education, the study found that the Eastern Cape has a perennial problem of teacher shortage, especially in rural schools. This has often resulted in some schools being merged with better resourced ones. What has compounded this situation is the issue of out-migration. The emigration of qualified teachers especially in science and mathematics is now a major challenge in the basic education sector. The province has sought to fill the void left by emigrating qualified teachers by recruiting from abroad. However, this has been done in a such a way as not to distort the local labour market, which, in effect, means that the void is far from being closed.

Among the four Eastern Cape-based universities, the proportion of full-time international instructional and research staff is quite low, with Nelson Mandela University (NMU) having the lowest (2.5% of a total instructional and research staff complement of 607). University of Fort Hare (UFH), with a total full-time instructional/research staff complement of 364, has the highest proportion of international instructional/research staff (23.4%). At Walter Sisulu University (WSU), with an instructional/research staff complement of 580, the proportion of international instructional/research staff is 5.2%. Rhodes University (RU) has 322 full-time instructional/research staff, of whom 39 (12.1%) are internationals (Figure 8).

It is not clear what the relationship is between the presence of international academics in the South African university system and specific higher education outcomes, such as the number of doctoral graduates produced by universities. What the study does

indicate regarding the ratio of foreign nationals in South African universities vis-à-vis their South African counterparts is that with a percentage of 11.2% of foreign nationals in the universities, there is probably no real displacement of locals. Instead, the universities continue to face a stiff competition with the private sector to retain its qualified professionals.

### **Does policy matter?**

The study draws attention to two policy instruments – *the White Paper on a New Employment Policy* and *Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa*.

*The White Paper on a New Employment Policy* was drafted to outline the policy framework for human resource management practices within the public service in line with the country's transformation agenda, It lays out employment processes within the civil service, with strict prescriptions on who should or should not be employed, and giving overriding preference to the permanent employment of those who are South African citizens by birth or naturalisation. Non-citizens can only be employed on a fixed-term contract basis for up to a maximum of five years with extensions through mutual agreements between the employer and employee. Given the acute teacher shortage in many deep rural schools, the study raises questions as to whether this policy instrument can be tweaked to make it possible to engage qualified international teachers on terms that would entice them to stay longer and help to revive the rural school sector.

The national *Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa* is the basis of the internationalisation policies adopted and implemented by universities across the country. South Africa recognises the importance of exposing its higher education sector to intercultural, international and global dimensions through physical movement of students and staff, changes in education curriculum and assessment, and through encouraging foreign students to study in the country. It encourages research collaborations among universities in the country and abroad, students and staff exchange programmes and establishment of campuses by foreign universities. Individual universities determine the number of international students and staff they would accommodate so as to balance labour market concerns with institutional research and internationalisation imperatives. While the government is often vocal about the policy possibly having the unintended consequence of displacing locals, the general experience is that very few international academics are employed in the universities, and their presence primarily helps to promote the transfer of high level expertise among locals.

### **Policy recommendations**

The study suggests three steps that can be taken to manage or mitigate the unintended consequences of specific migration patterns on the labour market. One, government must make concerted efforts to develop the rural areas and the rural economy. What is needed in this regard is exponential, not simply incremental, investments in the rural areas. Two, government must mobilise resources to industrialise the Eastern Cape and diversify the economy. Every effort must be made to bring on board development partners to play a more visible and sustainable role in changing the face of the Eastern Cape economy. Three, new investments must be made in education – both at primary and tertiary levels – to increase the stock of educated citizens, who then would have better and wider options with regard to labour market participation.



**ecsecc**

eastern cape socio economic  
consultative council

12 Gloucester Road, Vincent, East London, 5217

Postnet Vincent, Private Bag X9063, Suite No. 302, Vincent, 5247

T: +27 (0)43 701 3400

F: +27 (0)43 701 3415

E: [info@ecsecc.org](mailto:info@ecsecc.org)

W: [www.ecsecc.org](http://www.ecsecc.org)