

Youth Migration and Brain Drain: Strategies for Retaining Talent and Creating Local Opportunities in Punjab

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ABSTRACT

The present study highlights the problem of youth migration and brain drain in Punjab. The objectives of the study are to find the major push and pull factors which motivates youth of Punjab to migrate resulting in Brain drain and to ascertain the major strategies which can create local opportunities in Punjab which will retain talent in Punjab. The research is based on secondary data collected from various sources like academic journals; Reports from Ministry of External Affairs; Press Release of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare; Report from Council of Energy, Environment and Water; Punjab Startup Policy 2025; Newspapers report by The Tribune; and Invest Punjab (Business First Web Portal). The study found Cultural trend of settling abroad, Weak education system, Under developed Industrial sector, Agricultural crisis, High rate of drug abuse as the major Push factors behind migration of Youth from Punjab. On the other hand, High pay scale or wage rate, Improved lifestyle, Freedom and independence, Safety, Family abroad are found to be the key Pull factors behind mass migration. The study reported that if some strategies like Establishment of Farmer Producer Companies (FPC's), Bypassing Mandis, Digitalisation of agriculture sector, Promoting establishment of kiosk at village level, Adoption of innovation in agri-business, Setting up of Lithium Ferro Phosphate (LFP) battery manufacturing units, Setting up AI and Robotics Centre of Excellence (CoEs), Promoting agri-tourism and experiential Homestays and Setting up Digital Freelancing Hubs get implemented with due care and seriousness by the government, it will surely address the problem of youth migration in Punjab by retaining talent in Punjab itself.

Keywords: Migration, Brain Drain, Farmer Producer Companies (FPC's), Lithium Ferro Phosphate (LFP), Center of Excellence (Coes), Agri-Tourism, Freelancing

Migration is a historical process which can be from rural to urban area, from one city to another, from one state to another or from one country to another. However migration distance was limited in the early phases of history because of certain reasons like language barrier, lack of quick transportation facility, lack of monitory resources, absence of world class social media etc. The past records show that very few people use to migrate and that too for very limited purpose like trade and cultural spread. In the colonial era i.e. from 18th century to 1947 (the partition year for India), British sent over I million contractual labourers to its various colonies like Mauritius, Fiji, south Africa, and the

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Caribbean to work on large scale commercial farming for a period of 3 to 5 years which scaled up the migration process followed by another migration wave due to India Pakistan partition in 1947. Since 1947, migration rate is rising year by year in India and in the modern era the primary reasons of migration are good quality education abroad, better employment opportunities, better pay scale or wage rate, high living standard, marriage etc. One of the state of India, which is going through intense migration phase in the last few decades is Punjab and youth of Punjab is the primary age group which is migrating and for them the primary reason for migration is craze or cultural trend for settling abroad apart from other reasons like education, better pay scale, high living standard, high rate of drug abuse in Punjab, agricultural discontent, freedom and safety etc. The primary and most popular countries for Punjab youth which they consider for migration are United States, Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, New Zealand, English speaking world and Gulf Countries. The major surge in migration came post 2016 where around 9.84 lakh people migrated from Punjab between 2016 and February 2021. As per the Times of India Report, roughly around 1,36,000 students migrated to Canada in the year 2022 which is approximately 60% of the Indian youth which migrated to Canada and this data seems to be more alarming because Punjab holds less than 2.5% of the total population of India. Because of visa regulations by Canada post 2023, the scenario have not changed at all. Punjab youth started migrating to countries like German, the United Kingdom and smaller European Nations looking for better education and high income. In fact, the youth is still very actively taking 'Donkey Route – an illegal immigration route to US to fulfil their dream of migrating to US. This continuous migration from Punjab is effecting Punjab both economically and socially. Punjab have lost a major portion of its working age group population with only aging population left behind in many of the households of Punjab. Punjab is actually facing an acute 'Brain drain' crisis as youth of Punjab which is educated, skilled and talented is leaving Punjab and migrating to other developed countries which is leading to a problem of 'human capital loss' for Punjab which in turn is hindering the development of Punjab. In order to face this brain, drain crisis, Punjab need to convert it into Brain gain by making youth return back to Punjab with improved skills, capital and experience. Punjab need to use certain strong strategies in order to achieve 'brain gain' and retain talent by creating local opportunities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of the literature review is to give insight as to the way the subject matter is being dealt with by others researchers. Some of the studies which are related to the topic under study are reviewed as under:

Renuka and Singh (2021) conducted a study to investigate the impact of Farmer producer organisations (FPO) on the employment and income of farmers in Punjab. The study was based on 10 FPO's, 100 farmer members and 50 non-farmer members. The study revealed that indeed FPO's are playing some role in enhancing income (15.71% increase because of shift in pattern of crops), and marginal increase in labour employment.

Batra et al. (2022) conducted a study keeping in view the extent of international migration from rural Punjab. The study was conducted on 172 people from 120 households selected using multistage random cum purposive sampling. The study reported Unemployment as the major push factor and desire to earn more along with better lifestyle as the major pull factors resulting in international migration.

Nayal & Jaswinder (2023) conducted a study on migration of youth from Punjab to developed countries. The study was based on data and information collected from secondary

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sources (academic journals) which reported high unemployment, increasing population, strong tradition of immigration, Lack of MNC's in Punjab, better education facilities, state government policies, less industrial development as the push factors and availability of jobs, family network, high standard of living, demographic factor as the pull factors.

Persaud *et al.* (2023) conducted a study on the prospects of agri-tourism and strategies for its promotion. The study was based on 210 teachers/principals, students, and urban consumers from Ludhiana. The study revealed that though more than half of the respondents are unaware about agri-tourism but more than 80% showed up their interest in visiting an agri-tourism farm in order to participate in agricultural activities.

Sharma *et al.* (2023) conducted a study on trends, causes and consequences of overseas migration from rural Punjab the study was based on 640 migrant households and 640 non-migrant households selected using simple random sampling. The study found that majority of migrants (95%) and migrants parents (91%) were satisfied with the decision of sending their child abroad and for this satisfaction they stated reasons like better employment opportunities, improved standard of living, self-reliance, good governance and social security on foreign land as the major factors.

Kaur *et al.* (2025) conducted a study on rethinking educational migration from Punjab as brain gain or brain drain. The study was based on data and information collected from secondary sources like All India Survey of Higher Education Report by MHRD, Ministry of External Affairs of India report etc. The study revealed that both socio-economic factors like agrarian crisis, poor quality of higher education within Punjab are major push factors resulting in Brain Drain in Punjab.

Singh *et al.* (2025) conducted a study to analyse the different aspects of international migration from rural Punjab. The study was based on data collected from 2597 households selected using multi-stage stratified random sampling technique spread over 12 districts of Punjab covering the period from 1951 to 2021. The study revealed that migration was male and youth centric with majority of the migrants from the general category and leaving for abroad just after completing senior secondary level education. The study highlighted unemployment, better living conditions, admiration at the destination, desire to earn more, acquiring a higher education, peer pressure and worsening socio-economic conditions of Punjab as the main reasons for migration from rural Punjab.

Significance of the Study

The primary need of the study arises from the necessity of addressing the problem of youth migration from Punjab in the past few decades. This study aims to identify the major push and pull factors behind such mass migration and also it provides valuable insights into the key strategies which can be adopted in Punjab to create local opportunities thereby retaining youth in Punjab.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are-

1. To find the major push and pull factors which motivates youth of Punjab to migrate resulting in Brain drain.
2. To ascertain the major strategies which can create local opportunities in Punjab which will retain talent in Punjab.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of the study, descriptive type of research design has been used as already existing information have been utilised in conducting the research. The research is based on secondary data collected from various sources like academic journals; Reports from Ministry of External Affairs; Press Release of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare; Report from Council of Energy, Environment and Water; Punjab Startup Policy 2025; Newspapers report by The Tribune; and Invest Punjab (Business First Web Portal).

Scope of the study

The scope of the study is limited to the problem of youth migration and brain drain in a particular state of India (Punjab).

Limitations of the study

As the study is entirely based on secondary data, the limitations of the secondary data are the limitations of the study as well and as some of the data on the topic under consideration was not available online, comprehensive study on the topic was difficult.

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

Prominent factors responsible for youth migration from Punjab-

There a number of factors which are responsible for youth migrating abroad from Punjab which can be categorised as push and pull factors. These are-

PUSH FACTORS

- Cultural trend of settling abroad- In Punjab, there is craze among youth of settling abroad. If any adult is asked about their future plans almost everyone will reply settling abroad as their future plan.
- Weak education system- Education system of not only Punjab but whole of India is weak as compared to developed nations where the focus is on imparting job-oriented skill to youth which to a great extent is absent in India. This lead Youth to migrate to developed nations.
- Under developed Industrial sector- The industrial sector of Punjab is weak as it do not have any major industry which left many well educated youth of Punjab unemployed forcing them to look for migration as an option.
- Agricultural crisis- Most of the youth of Punjab come from the rural sector with agriculture as the only source of earning. When the youth see the reality of low income from agriculture produce, high indebtedness, loss of crop they do not want to engage in agricultural activities in order to earn living, so they take the decision of migration.
- High rate of drug abuse- In the past few decades, Punjab is dealing with a very serious issue of drug of drug addiction. A study conducted by PGI showed that every 7th person in Punjab consume drugs. This situation made parents take the decision of sending their children abroad in order to keep them away from drug addiction.

PULL FACTORS

- High pay scale or wage rate- A student who is earning either nothing or very less in Punjab get an opportunity of earning high income abroad because of high pay scale in developed countries.

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- Improved lifestyle- In Punjab, when youth see their relatives or friends coming back to Punjab for a visit, they find their lifestyle much better which in turn motivate them to migrate.
- Freedom– Youth take up the option of migrating because they consider that they will get more freedom of doing different things abroad away from their parents.
- Safety- Youth find that in comparison to Punjab, foreign countries which they consider for migration are safe, so they take migration as a better option.
- Family abroad- As around 40% of the population of Punjab reside abroad, most of the youth find their family members abroad which make the youth take up the option of migration as survival become easy for them because of already residing family members abroad.

Strategies for creating local opportunities in Punjab-

- Establishment of Farmer Producer Companies (FPC's)- As per the report published by Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, 136 FPC's are registered in Punjab as of late 2024-2025 with approximately around 25% in running condition all over India (as reported by The Hindu in 2022) and this number is quite insufficient to retain youth in Punjab. So, the focus should be on establishing FPC's by making small and marginal farmers come together and register themselves as Farmer Producer Company which is the need of the hour. Punjab Government should adopt this strategy with due care as mere encouraging farmers to establish FPC should not be the goal, the government should provide support to farmers in various forms like financial support, registration, preparation of AOA and MOA etc. which though the government is already providing but it is not actually been received by FPC's which is proved by the current status of FPC'S running in Punjab. If Punjab will succeed in establishing a good number of active FPC's in future it will help the small and marginal farmers make purchase and sale of their crops in bulk as the primary objective of establishing FPC's is to change the farmer's mindset into that of a businessman. FPC's make it possible for farmers to negotiate for the price of their crops with the purchasing party which can be a company or individual which in turn improve the income of farmers. Also, in comparison to individual farmer, a farmer which is part of FPC's receive more financial, technical and other related support from government which in turn reduce the cost of operation for an FPC. FPC's can act as a game changer in the agriculture history of Punjab by converting farmers into agri business entrepreneurs.
- Bypassing Mandis- With the establishment of FPO'S the farmer's role change from labour to logistics. Once an FPC is registered under company's Act, it will create every position like CEO, Quality Controller, Marketing manager, Supply chain manager etc. just like a company which will bring professionalism. Youth with varied degrees will find agriculture as an attractive and reputed career choice with high scope of good pay scale. Also, by selling directly to customer and by bypassing tradition mandi, the FPC's save themselves from high rate of interest charged by arhtiya as all the personal and professional financial needs of FPC's and the members of FPC's can be fulfilled by their own as their earning is in a clubbed manner which is often sufficient to meet their financial requirements.
- Digitalisation of agriculture sector- The FPC's can earn more if they adopt to agri-tech environment by using agriStack data which is actually an aadhaar to the farm, blockchain which help ultimate consumer in knowing the exact date when the crop is actually harvested by just scanning a QR code, and e-commerce platforms which

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enable farmers sell directly to a consumer sitting miles apart just by listing their crop on an e-commerce platform. This digitalisation will attract youth with IT degrees to a company which is in their own village in the form of FPC where they can work as IT professionals.

- Promoting establishment of kiosk at village level - The government should encourage and help youth financially in establishing a kiosk at village level. The person running a kiosk use data analysis and help farmers take informed decisions like which crop to grow by analysing data related to current weather conditions, health of the soil and prevailing market trends. Kiosk help farmer in sending their crop to the right place in right condition at right time by managing logistics and also it perform the task of digital marketer for the farmers. The youth without becoming part of an FPC can run his/her own local technology driven startup allied with agricultural sector which will earn both name, fame and money for the youth.
- Adoption of innovation- The FPC's can adopt different innovative ideas like apart from mere selling raw crop directly to the consumer, FPC's can also go for establishing agro processing units which can process the raw crop into a processed product which can be sold under the brand name of FPC. This will attract youth to take up various non-farm roles like packaging, branding, and exporting.
- Setting up of Lithium Ferro Phosphate (LFP) battery manufacturing units- As World Bank rated Punjab as the number one state in India in solar energy progress, Punjab Government can adopt the strategy of setting up LFP battery manufacturing units in good numbers in Punjab as LFP batteries are used in Electronic Vehicles (EV's) and for storing solar energy which have high demand in future. This is going to convert the traditional industry sector of Punjab to high-tech industry sector which will attract youth with specialised technical knowledge to take up the role of material scientists, electrochemical engineers, Battery Management specialists etc.
- Setting up AI and Robotics Centres of Excellence (CoEs) – Though Punjab have one National center of Excellence in Agriculture established at IIT Ropar and 1 state level industrial CoE STPI (Software Technology Parks of India) in Mohali which are quite insufficient to address the problem of mass migration in Punjab. The government of Punjab should think of setting up more such CoE's across Punjab which will give opportunities to students to learn and understand the working of smartest machines which make use of AI and robotics. The biggest companies hire students from these centers once they finish up their training.
- Promoting agri tourism and experiential Homestays- In a research conducted in Ludhiana, around 70% of the urban population are found to be curious of visiting a village and experiencing the rural life. The Punjab government can take up steps to promote agri tourism on a large scale. Though many people across Punjab are currently running rural homestays and monetizing their rural life, but this number is insufficient to stop brain drain. The government should spread awareness towards agri tourism through Punjab Heritage and Tourism Promotion Board (PHTPB) and Punjab Farm Tourism Scheme. This should be done very actively by helping people with the process of registration and organising various workshops and training programs for the them on hospitality, hygiene, guest interaction etc. which will make it easy for them to run such business.
- Setting up Digital Freelancing Hubs- The government should take steps to establish IT skill centers on a large scale in Punjab which will allow youth to work for global companies from their own village. For making it possible the government should play an active role in establishing such workspaces by making possible the availability of

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24x7 electricity, high speed uninterrupted internet and computers. Though the government is already working in this area by arranging various free IT skill development programs, providing subsidised workspaces (25% reimbursement on lease rentals upto a maximum of 3 lakh per year), CM Punjab laptop scheme 2026, 20% relaxation in attendance and 45 grace marks under Punjab student Entrepreneurship Scheme for students involved in such businesses etc., but these steps till date are not proving to be much impactful to stop mass migration. The government should actively follow up such policies and schemes to succeed in eliminating the brain drain problem.

Retaining talent with the help of creating local opportunities-

- When a person specifically youth see the opportunity of transformation from being a mere farmer to an agri-business entrepreneur or being a CEO, Supply chain manager, marketing manager of an FPC, the youth instead of migrating will get attracted to these white-collar jobs in Punjab itself.
- It is status symbol which to a great extent is a major migration factor. When youth get role of an entrepreneur or a CEO, which are seen as a status symbol in our society, youth will take up these roles in Punjab itself.
- Being on good positions in FPC's will attract good income which will improve the standard of living of youth and their family in Punjab itself without migrating to a developed nation.
- As FPC's will generate more employment, most of the Youth will stop engaging in ill activities like drugs, theft, etc. which will stop parents think about sending their child abroad in order to save them from drugs.
- When youth will find employment which helps them make good income, youth will restrain them from committing crimes like theft, smuggling, gang involvement etc., which will make Punjab safe and better place for living because of which youth migrate.
- The establishment of LFP batteries manufacturing units in Punjab will generate more employment for youth with specialised technical knowledge which will give them opportunity of career growth in Punjab itself, reducing in them the urge to move abroad.
- Setting up AI and Robotics Centres of Excellence (CoEs) in Punjab will fulfil the dream of youth of working in high tech companies as companies themselves approach such centres and hire youth. The youth can also find themselves ready for starting their own company for which they will receive both monetary and technical support from the government via these centers or directly from the centers itself which will ultimately make youth stay in Punjab.
- Promotion of agri tourism will make youth think of making use of their existing rural lifestyle and monetizing it by converting it into an agri-tourism business will stop brain drain.
- Setting up Digital Freelancing Hubs will help youth earn income as per global standards which will fulfil their wish of earning high income along with less expense as they are earning in foreign currency (stronger than Indian currency) but spending in Indian currency which will help them will more savings along with the advantage of not leaving their home. So, this will solve mass migration problem of Punjab to a great extent.

CONCLUSION

The present study found Cultural trend of settling abroad, Weak education system, Under developed Industrial sector, Agricultural crisis, High rate of drug abuse as the major Push factors behind migration of Youth from Punjab. On the other hand, High pay scale or wage rate, improved lifestyle, freedom and independence, safety, family abroad are found to be the key Pull factors behind mass migration. As part of Punjab Vision Document 2047, the state is aimed at transforming into a \$1.1 trillion economy for which the government is aimed at directly addressing the brain drain problem in Punjab. The study reported that if some strategies like Establishment of Farmer Producer Companies (FPC's), Bypassing Mandis, Digitalisation of agriculture sector, Promoting establishment of kiosk at village level , Adoption of innovation in agri-business, Setting up of Lithium Ferro Phosphate (LFP) battery manufacturing units, Setting up AI and Robotics Centres of Excellence (CoEs), Promoting agri-tourism and experiential Homestays and Setting up Digital Freelancing Hubs which are also included as key strategies in Punjab Vision Document 2047 get implemented with due care and seriousness by the government, it will surely address the problem of youth migration in Punjab. To conclude it can be said that if Punjab want to achieve the objective of transforming into a \$1.1 trillion economy by 2047, the first and the foremost step should be towards retaining talent in Punjab itself.

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Conflict of Interest

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