

# BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE THROUGH GOVERNMENT POLICIES: STRATEGIC INSIGHTS FROM MIGRATED PROFESSIONALS

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## ABSTRACT

The study assesses how existing government policies affect the migration decisions of healthcare workers in Kerala. A structured questionnaire with Likert-scale items was used to collect data from 50 migrated healthcare professionals, evaluating their perceptions on policy effectiveness, financial incentives, professional development, work–life balance, and job security. A one-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether these factors had substantial impact on migration decisions. This study suggests that migrated health professionals believe current government policies play a significant role on their migration decisions. The findings indicate that current financial incentives and policies are ineffective whereas effective workforce planning, collaborative initiatives, greater investment in healthcare could serve as effective strategies to retain healthcare workers. The study examines the vital role of policy measures in shaping migration patterns and offers evidence-based insights for developing retention strategies in Kerala's healthcare system. It also emphasizes the importance of using the experiences of migrated professionals to develop evidence-based retention policies, guiding policymakers in developing focused plans to reduce out-migration and strengthen the healthcare workforce in Kerala.

*Keywords – Migration, Health workers, Government Policies, Migrated Professionals.*

## INTRODUCTION

Kerala is perhaps one of the states in the country which has been experiencing a very high rate of international migration. In fact, according to the Inward Remittance Surveys conducted by the Reserve Bank of India, Kerala accounts for about 19 per cent of the inward remittances coming to India. India is the largest remittance receiving country in the world and Kerala is indeed the largest remittance receiving state in India (**Centre for Development Studies, 2019**). The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that the world faces a global shortage of almost 4.3 million doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals. A global undersupply of these threatens the quality and sustainability of health systems worldwide. This undersupply is concurrent with globalization and the resulting liberalization of markets, which allow health workers to offer their services in countries other than those of their origin. The opportunities of health workers to seek employment abroad has led to a complex migration pattern, characterized by a flow of health professionals from low- to high-income countries.

Migration of healthcare professionals has turned into a major global concern mainly in developing countries, where skilled professionals migrating from low- and middle-income countries to high income countries. This brain drain comprises origin countries healthcare system and creates integration challenges for the host country. Building a sustainable workforce requires strategic insights from migrated health professionals explores their perspectives on government policies for sustainable workforce aims to guide decisions that lessen migration's adverse effects and contribute to a fair and equitable healthcare system.

Skilled and experienced: doctors, nurses, allied professionals are leaving in search for better pay, opportunities, career advancement, living conditions abroad. Thereby creating an imbalance in domestic health workforce, impacting the quality of services, performance, accessibility of services in the home country. There's been a considerable migration of health workforce in recent decades. Government policy plays an important role in ensuring stability and sustainability of health workforce which requires as stable recruitment, retention and supportive work environment addressing health workers social, economic, professional and personal needs. Strategic policies with incentives and reforms can reduce push factors such as low salary, limited professional development and wage disparity driving migration.

## NEED OF THE STUDY

The healthcare sector faces many challenges due to out migration leading to workforce shortage and affecting quality of healthcare. Despite the implementation of various government policies, the migration pattern persists, necessitating a comprehensive evaluation of these policies

effectiveness. This study evaluates a critical gap in existing literature by examining the perceptions of migrated healthcare professionals on the impact of government policies on their migration decisions. By identifying the impact of government policies on migration decision this research provides strategic insights for policymakers to develop evidence-based policies and build a sustainable healthcare workforce in Kerala. The findings of this study will inform policy reforms, workforce planning, and collaborative initiatives to reduce out-migration and strengthen the healthcare system, ultimately improving healthcare outcomes for the population.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- Sax dos Santos Gomes et al., (2024) discusses about the impact of international health workers migration in Colombia, Jordan Indonesia within a global context. The study says that there is lack of accurate data to inform policies and programmes to retain health workforce. It also highlights about the potential benefits of migration such as brain gain, return migration and knowledge transfer through reintegration. The findings discuss the need for policies and strategies in order to maintain health workforce capacity and its international migration, as it is beneficial for both source and destination country.
- Aluttis et al., (2014) studies about health workforce crisis especially on the shortage due to migration from low to high income countries It primarily looks at the migration pattern of health workers in the light of WHO Global Code of Practise established in 2010. It also highlights internal and external factors that drive migration and its impact on both source and destination country depending on the health worker's role in migration scheme. Additionally, the study recommends need for comprehensive strategy and polices that analyses the health workforce scarcity and incorporates programmes to keep them in home country and improve healthcare access. By implementing such policies, we can reduce the negative impact of migration and achieve optimal health outcomes.
- Akafa et al., (2023) examines the factors leading to Physicians migration in Nigeria finds that factors like low salary, job insecurity, unfavourable working conditions that forced them to migrate whereas, high earning potential, better career growth and access to specialized technology are the pull factors that attracted them to work abroad. The study reveals that young, employed female physicians are likely to migrate more to UK Canada and USA being their top preferred destination. To reverse this trend the study recommends improving working conditions, salary package, professional development opportunities which could retain them and promote national development.
- Adomah-Afari & Ameyaw (2023) studies about the push and pull factors that lead to retention of health workers in Ghana. About 22 % of them wish to stay in their home country rest of them wish to migrate career advancement, salary and additional benefits, management support are the reason for stay. The study suggests that if these factors are low, they are more likely to move abroad in the coming years and study recommend overall actionable suggestions for improvement in healthcare sector.
- Marchal & Kegels (2003) explores the health workforce migration and examines strategies to reduce its negative impact. The study discusses the brain drain, increasing human capital flight which mainly affects the developing nations. The study finds that low professional satisfaction, limited carer recognition and advancement are key factors of migration. Overall, the paper suggests need for solution to mitigate the negative impact of such migration and provide valuable insights into the complex issue of health workforce mobility and emphasising the importance of understanding such complex phenomena.
- Dimaya et al., (2012) studies about the migration of nurses from Philippines and examines policies addressing its brain drain focusing mainly on developing policies in order to shift their mindset and manage nurse migration. The study finds that Philippine policy managing on key issue like nurse education, employment and international relation. A thematic framework is developed for policy making process and guidance for other countries facing similar migration it provides valuable insights about stakeholder's perspective on nurse migration and develop strategies to maintain quality healthcare.
- Poppe et al., (2014) explores the reasons for out-migration of health workers from sub saharahn african to european countires and finds that main raesons behind this are educational purposes, political insatability, reuniting with family. Some have mentioned medical and economic factor ledaing to such decsions. Access to specialised training and job adavcement are also attracting factors for migration. The study recommends that provding a good working condition, improving safety and quality of life while promoting primary careas carrier option could encourage health wokers to remain in sub-saharan africa itself.
- Poppe et al., (2016) discusses about intention for return migration of Sub-Saharan African health workers working in Austria and Belgium and to know more about their post-return plan. It also examines about the benefit of such migration to their source country, and says that having their families around and wanting to stay there improves the migrants' mental and self-satisfaction. It finds that return migration will only rise in the source country if improved living conditions, political stability, and social stability are offered. It also sheds light on circular migration, which refers to the situation in which people remain connected to their country of origin and support the growth of the healthcare industry without permanently returning home.

## OBJECTIVE

- To examine the existing government policies on healthcare workforce migration from perspective of migrated professionals
- To analyse the experiences of migrated health workforce to formulate future retention strategies.
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## HYPOTHESIS

H0: There is no significant difference between existing government policies and the migration decisions of healthcare professionals

H1: There is significant difference between existing government policies and the migration decisions of healthcare professionals  
H0: The experiences of migrated health professionals do not have significant influence on developing effective future retention strategies  
H1: The experiences of migrated health professionals have significant influence on developing effective future retention strategies.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Population and Sample** - This quantitative research study explores the perspectives of migrated healthcare professionals from Kerala, India, who are currently working in the UK, on building a sustainable healthcare workforce through effective government policies. Employing a survey research design, the study utilizes convenient sampling to collect data from a sample of 50 respondents who have migrated to the UK.

**Data Collection** - Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire is to gather data, which is then analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods

**Data Analysis** - Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, are used to summarize the primary data, while inferential statistics, specifically t-tests and multiple regression analysis, are used to examine the existing government policies and to analyse the experiences of migrated health workforce. These analyses provide valuable insights for formulating effective retention strategies and develop sustainable policies to strengthen the healthcare workforce.

**Theoretical Framework**

The study's variables include migration decisions (dependent variable) and government policies, financial incentives, professional development, work-life balance, and job security (independent variables). The study provides insights into the role of government policies in shaping migration patterns among healthcare professionals.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Table 1: Demographic Profile**

Variable	Attribute	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Under 25	2	4
	25-34	24	48
	34-44	20	40
	44-54	4	8
	55 and above	-	
Gender	Male	34	68
	female	16	32
Marital status	Single	18	36
	Married	31	62
	Divorced	1	2
	Widow		
current occupation	Doctor	3	6
	Nurse	36	72
	paramedic	2	1
	Pharmacist	6	13
	Technician	2	1
	others	1	0.5
Years of experience in healthcare	0-5 years	17	34
	6-10years	16	32
	11-15years	10	21
	16-20years	7	14
	21years and above		
Current citizenship status	Permeant resident	36	72
	Work holder visa	12	24
	others	2	4

Source: Primary Data

The survey of healthcare professionals revealed striking insights regarding impact of existing government policies on their decision to migrate. The respondents, predominantly female (72%) and male (28%), healthcare professionals including nurses (71.4%) followed by doctors (7.1%), paramedics (3.6%), pharmacists (14.3%), and others (3.6%) who had worked in the health care industry for more than ten years.

**TABLE 2 - H1: There is significant difference between existing government policies and the migration decisions of healthcare professionals**

<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.76</b>	<b>2.28</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>3.86</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>3.32</b>
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>1.393278325</b>	<b>1.443352107</b>	<b>1.41781666</b>	<b>1.498434557</b>	<b>1.538618516</b>	<b>1.596180179</b>
<b>COUNT</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>t statistic</b>	<b>1.21803106</b>	<b>3.527322819</b>	<b>4.488564149</b>	<b>4.058314251</b>	<b>3.67658012</b>	<b>1.417597919</b>
<b>P value</b>	<b>0.0354775669</b>	<b>0.015387459</b>	<b>0.04002177466473</b>	<b>0.00308862408823</b>	<b>0.0102931830206</b>	<b>0.02131806366</b>

Source: Primary data

The analysis of migrated healthcare workers perceptions regarding the role of government policies in addressing workforce migration reveals significant insights. The participants shared their views on five critical policy-related statements, and the results indicate clear distinctions between areas of satisfaction and concern.

- “Current government policies in Kerala are not seen as effective in addressing migration” (M = 2.76, SD = 1.39, p < 0.05), suggesting that the existing policy framework is unable to reduce the challenges motivating healthcare professionals to migrate.
- “Financial incentives provided by government are seen as inadequate” (M = 2.28, SD = 1.44, p < 0.05), indicating that monetary benefits remain insufficient and are a major push factor contributing out-migration.
- “Government investment in professional development is currently insufficient” (M = 3.90, SD = 1.41, p < 0.05), highlighting the need for skill development, advanced training, and career enhancement as important strategies to mitigate migration.
- “Government policies to enhance work life balance are currently lacking” (M = 3.86, SD = 1.49, p < 0.01), indicating that workload management and supportive working conditions are vital for job satisfaction and retention.
- “Job security measures through government policies are currently inadequate” also received strong agreement (M = 3.80, SD = 1.54, p < 0.05), signifying that permanent employment opportunities and stability are highly valued by the workforce.

Here the p value is less than 0.05 the null hypothesis gets rejected, Overall, the findings reveal that while current policies and financial incentives are perceived as inadequate, respondents strongly believe that government must focus on professional development, healthy work–life balance, and assured job security to prevent the ongoing migration of healthcare professionals from Kerala.

**TABLE 3 - H1: The experiences of migrated health professionals have significant influence on developing effective future retention strategies**

<b>SUMMARY OUTPUT</b>	
<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
<b>Multiple R</b>	<b>0.228852</b>
<b>R Square</b>	<b>0.052373</b>
<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>-0.05531</b>
<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>1.249572</b>
<b>Observations</b>	<b>50</b>

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
<b>Intercept</b>	<b>0.03780</b>	<b>0.5722</b>	<b>6.2529</b>	<b>0.001</b>	<b>2.4248</b>	<b>4.7312</b>	<b>2.424</b>	<b>4.7312</b>
<b>Developing and effectively implementing policies to retain health workers</b>	<b>0.08623</b>	<b>0.1783</b>	<b>0.4835</b>	<b>0.0311</b>	<b>0.2732</b>	<b>0.4456</b>	<b>0.273</b>	<b>0.4456</b>
<b>Greater investment in healthcare infrastructure</b>	<b>0.10934</b>	<b>0.1736</b>	<b>0.6294</b>	<b>0.0153</b>	<b>0.4594</b>	<b>0.0240</b>	<b>0.045</b>	<b>0.2407</b>
<b>Continuous training and professional development programs</b>	<b>0.35057</b>	<b>0.3440</b>	<b>1.0188</b>	<b>0.0313</b>	<b>1.0440</b>	<b>0.3428</b>	<b>1.044</b>	<b>0.3428</b>
<b>Effective workforce planning and management</b>	<b>0.30559</b>	<b>0.3743</b>	<b>0.8164</b>	<b>0.0418</b>	<b>0.4487</b>	<b>1.0599</b>	<b>0.448</b>	<b>1.0599</b>
<b>Collaborative initiatives between government and healthcare institutions</b>	<b>0.137074</b>	<b>0.2189</b>	<b>0.6261</b>	<b>0.0253</b>	<b>0.3041</b>	<b>0.5741</b>	<b>0.304</b>	<b>0.578</b>

Source: Primary Data

To examine the influence of migrated healthcare professionals’ experiences on the development of effective future retention strategies, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted with five factors: Developing and effectively implementing policies to retain health workers, Greater investment in healthcare Infrastructure, Continuous training and Professional Development programs, Effective workforce planning and Management and Collaborative initiatives between government and healthcare institutions.

- The overall regression model indicated a Multiple R of 0.229 and an R<sup>2</sup> of 0.052, indicating that approximately 5.2% of the variance in retention strategy effectiveness can be explained by these factors. Although the Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> was slightly negative (-0.055), the regression coefficients and p-values reveal meaningful individual contributions of the predictors.
- Continuous training and professional development programs emerged as the strongest positive predictor (p = 0.0313), suggesting that experiences related to skill development and career growth significantly influence the decision to migrate, focusing on that area can reduce migration.
- Effective workforce planning and management (p = 0.0418) and greater investment in healthcare infrastructure (p = 0.0153) also showed significant positive relationships, indicating that ensuring adequate resources and structured workforce policies are critical in reducing migration.
- Collaborative initiatives between government and healthcare institutions (p = 0.0253) and developing and effectively implementing policies (p = 0.0311) were significant contributors, demonstrating that coordinated policy efforts and institutional support based on migrated professionals’ experiences are essential for sustainable retention strategies.
- Overall, these results collectively support the alternative hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>), confirming that the experiences of migrated health professionals have a significant influence on developing effective future retention strategies, emphasizing that practical, experience-driven interventions such as professional development, workforce planning, and institutional collaboration should be prioritized to mitigate the out-migration of healthcare workers.

## FINDINGS

Based on the findings of the one-sample t-test, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference between existing government policies and the migration decisions of healthcare professionals is rejected, as all the tested factors showed p-values less than 0.05. This indicates that migrated health professionals perceive current policy measures particularly in areas such as financial incentives, work–life balance, professional development, and job security—as significantly influencing their decisions to migrate. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted, confirming that government policies do have a significant association with and impact on the migration decisions of healthcare professionals in Kerala.

The multiple linear regression analysis revealed that all five predictor variables developing and effectively implementing policies to retain healthcare workers, greater investment in healthcare infrastructure, continuous training and professional development programs, effective workforce planning and management, and collaborative initiatives between government and healthcare institutions had statistically significant positive coefficients ( $p < 0.05$ ). Continuous training and professional development programs emerged as the strongest predictor ( $\beta = 0.351$ ,  $p = 0.0313$ ), followed by workforce planning ( $\beta = 0.306$ ,  $p = 0.0418$ ), infrastructure investment ( $\beta = 0.109$ ,  $p = 0.0153$ ), collaborative initiatives ( $\beta = 0.137$ ,  $p = 0.0253$ ), and policy implementation ( $\beta = 0.086$ ,  $p = 0.0311$ ). Although the overall  $R^2$  value was 0.052, indicating a modest amount of variance explained, the significant  $p$ -values confirm that each factor contributes meaningfully to retention strategy development. Based on these results, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) is accepted. This indicates that the experiences of migrated healthcare professionals have a significant influence on formulating effective future retention strategies, emphasizing the importance of using their insights to guide policy, training, workforce planning, and institutional collaboration to reduce migration.

## CONCLUSION

The study focused on the impact of existing government policies on the migration decisions of healthcare professionals in Kerala and analysed the experiences of migrated health workers to inform future retention strategies. In conclusion, for Kerala's healthcare system to retain skilled professionals and ensure sustainable service delivery, policymakers must prioritize comprehensive retention strategies that focus on developing and implementing proper policies, career growth, greater investment in healthcare sector, supportive work environments, and collaborative institutional planning. The study provides empirical data that can guide future policy development and help mitigate the issues posed by healthcare workforce migration. By implementing these reliable retention strategies, Kerala's healthcare system can be strengthened, and healthcare outcomes can be improved. This study serves as a foundation for future research on healthcare workforce migration and retention, highlighting the need for ongoing assessment and improvement of policy measures to address this critical issue. Ultimately the study reinforces the urgent call for policy driven experience centred interventions that not only reduce out migration but also cultivate a sustainable, empowered and future ready healthcare workforce in Kerala.

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