

From Departure to Non-Return: Factors Influencing Talented Youth Migration

Abstract

This study investigates the multifaceted factors driving talented youth to migrate from their hometowns and the subsequent conditions that influence their decisions against returning. Utilizing a descriptive research design, the study analyzes survey data from 51 respondents aged 15 to 25 to evaluate their perceptions of local opportunities compared to external prospects. The findings reveal a significant dichotomy: while 72% of respondents maintain a positive general perception of their hometowns, 64% rate the local opportunities and conditions as poor or very poor. Quality of life emerged as the single most frequently cited primary reason for considering leaving (37.3%), narrowly ahead of career opportunities (35.3%) and higher income (15.7%), while education (94.1%) and salary/income (92.2%) received the highest combined importance ratings of any factors measured. Respondents' willingness to return was notably split: 37.3% indicated they would definitely return, while 33.3% indicated their return depended on circumstances. Lower salaries, a lack of suitable jobs, better opportunities elsewhere, and lower quality of life relative to the destination were identified as the primary barriers to return, closely mirroring the reasons given for leaving. Ultimately, the research highlights that youth migration represents a strategic search for professional, economic, and personal development rather than a fundamental rejection of origin communities. The study suggests that to retain and re-attract young talent, local development policies must concurrently address economic viability and broader quality-of-life improvements.

Keywords: Youth migration; Brain drain; Return migration; Hometown development; Human capital; Career opportunities; Talented youth

1. Introduction

Youth migration is a significant social and economic phenomenon. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA, 2016), young migrants aged 15–24 accounted for approximately 12% of the international migrant population in 2013, representing around 28.2 million people. The report identifies employment, education, marriage, poverty, violence, conflict, and environmental change as important drivers of youth migration. It also states that approximately 27 million young people left their countries of birth to seek employment abroad (UNDESA, 2016). Similarly, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2013) explains that young people commonly migrate in search of

decent work, better living conditions, educational opportunities, family reunification, and humanitarian protection.

Youth migration does not necessarily reflect a simple desire to leave one's hometown. Instead, it often represents an attempt to access educational, professional, and economic opportunities that are unavailable or limited at home. Talented young people may leave to pursue higher education, obtain suitable employment, improve their income, develop professional skills, or build networks that support their future careers. The ILO (2015) notes that rural youth may migrate to towns and cities because educational facilities, particularly institutions offering higher education, are often limited in rural areas. In addition, unemployment, underemployment, low wages, and the concentration of economic and professional opportunities in larger cities can encourage young people to leave their communities of origin (ILO, 2013; UNDESA, 2016).

Migration can provide significant benefits to individuals. Moving to another city or country may offer access to better education, competitive employment, higher wages, professional development, social networks, and improved living conditions. Young migrants may also contribute to their communities of origin through the transfer of knowledge, skills, financial support, and professional connections. International Labour Organization (2013) emphasizes that migration can enable young people to improve their professional prospects and pursue personal development. However, when talented young people leave permanently and do not return, their continued absence may reduce the human capital and development potential of their hometowns.

The continued departure of educated and skilled young people is commonly associated with brain drain. Brain drain refers to the movement of skilled or highly educated individuals away from their communities or countries of origin in search of better opportunities elsewhere. If hometowns lack suitable jobs, competitive salaries, advanced educational institutions, professional development, reliable infrastructure, or supportive social and political conditions, returning may become unattractive or impractical. In addition, young migrants may establish careers, relationships, social networks, and lifestyles in their destination locations. These forms of social and professional integration can strengthen their decision to remain elsewhere. Consequently, non-return may be influenced not only by conditions in the hometown but also by the opportunities and relationships that migrants develop in their destination locations.

For this study, talented youth refers to young people who possess notable educational qualifications, professional skills, specialized knowledge, entrepreneurial potential, or demonstrated academic or occupational achievement. This definition includes university students, graduates, skilled workers, professionals, entrepreneurs, and other young individuals whose abilities could contribute to the social and economic development of their

hometowns. The specific age range and criteria for identifying talented youth will be defined according to the objectives and participant-selection criteria of this study.

Existing research has examined several reasons why young people leave their places of origin, particularly for education, employment, and economic opportunities. However, less attention has been given to the factors that influence whether talented young migrants return to their hometowns or remain elsewhere. Previous studies often discuss departure and return as part of the same migration process, even though different circumstances may shape the decision to leave and the decision not to return. A young person may initially leave to pursue education or employment but later decide not to return due to limited career opportunities, low wages, inadequate infrastructure, weak professional networks, social pressures, or stronger personal and professional ties at the destination. Therefore, departure and non-return should be examined as related but analytically distinct decisions.

This study addresses this gap by examining two interconnected questions: Why do talented young people leave their hometowns, and what factors influence their decision not to return? Using a mixed-methods approach that combines a review of existing literature and secondary data with survey and interview evidence from young migrants, the study investigates the educational, economic, professional, social, and infrastructural factors associated with youth out-migration and non-return. By distinguishing between the initial decision to leave and the later decision to remain elsewhere, the study seeks to develop a clearer understanding of non-return migration and its implications for the human capital, innovation, entrepreneurship, and long-term development of communities of origin.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Youth Migration

Youth migration has become an established feature of contemporary social and economic life, with young people representing a significant proportion of the migrant population. Their movement can occur both within national borders and across countries, influencing not only the young migrants themselves but also the communities and countries they leave and enter (UNDESA, 2016).

Youth migration takes place through different forms of mobility, most notably internal and international migration. Internal migration refers to the movement of people from one area of a country to another with the purpose or effect of establishing a new residence, while international migration involves a change in a person's country of usual residence. Internal migration is particularly important in understanding youth mobility because young people may move from rural areas or smaller towns towards larger urban centres in search of

education, employment and other opportunities. Such movements may also represent an initial stage of a longer migration process, as some young people may first relocate within their country before eventually moving abroad. International migration, on the other hand, involves movement across national borders and may provide young people with access to educational institutions, employment markets and professional opportunities that are unavailable or limited in their places of origin. Youth migration can also be temporary or permanent. Some young migrants move with the intention of returning to their home communities after completing their education, gaining work experience or achieving a particular economic goal, whereas others intend to establish a new residence elsewhere. In addition, young people may participate in circular or repeated forms of mobility, moving between places for seasonal employment, education, internships or professional experiences. These different forms demonstrate that youth migration is not necessarily a single, one-directional movement from one place to another. Instead, it can involve multiple stages, destinations and durations, depending on the individual's circumstances, aspirations and opportunities. Recognizing these different patterns of mobility is important when examining youth migration because the decision to leave a hometown does not necessarily imply an immediate or permanent separation from it; rather, migration may develop as a gradual process involving temporary movement, repeated relocation or eventual permanent settlement elsewhere (UNDESA, 2016).

Youth migration also differs in terms of its duration, purpose and circumstances. While some young migrants leave their home communities with the intention of returning after completing a particular educational or employment objective, others plan to establish a permanent residence elsewhere. Existing research suggests that temporary migration is an important form of youth mobility, although migration may eventually develop into longer-term or permanent relocation. Young people may also participate in circular migration, repeatedly moving between places for seasonal employment, education, internships or professional experiences. In addition, youth migration can be either voluntary or forced. Voluntary migration may include young people who move independently to pursue education, employment, improved livelihoods or professional opportunities, whereas forced migration can occur as a result of conflict, natural disasters, persecution and other circumstances beyond an individual's control. The distinction between voluntary and forced migration is not always clear, as multiple social, economic and environmental factors may influence an individual's decision to move. The diversity of youth migration demonstrates that mobility is not a uniform experience and that young migrants may have different motivations, intentions and relationships with their places of origin. Understanding whether migration is temporary, circular or permanent is particularly important when examining young people's connection with their hometowns, as the intention to return may change over time depending on their experiences and opportunities in both their place of origin and destination (UNDESA, 2016).

Youth mobility has implications not only for the migrants themselves but also for the communities and societies involved in the migration process. Migration can provide young people with opportunities to develop their education, skills, employment experience and social networks, potentially improving their long-term economic and social prospects. At the same time, the movement of young people can influence the communities they leave behind, particularly when migration involves individuals who possess higher levels of education, skills or professional potential. The United Nations notes that migration can have direct and wider effects on migrants, their families and their communities, with outcomes varying according to the type and duration of migration and the conditions in both origin and destination areas. Young migrants may maintain connections with their families and home communities through communication, knowledge exchange and financial transfers, and some may intend to return after achieving their educational or professional goals. However, when young people establish stronger educational, professional and social connections in destination areas, their relationship with their places of origin may change over time. Consequently, youth migration represents more than a geographical movement of individuals; it can influence the distribution of skills, opportunities and human capital between different regions. This makes youth mobility particularly significant in understanding the movement of talented and educated young people away from their hometowns and provides a foundation for examining the phenomenon of brain drain and skilled youth migration (UNDESA, 2016).

The scale of youth migration further demonstrates the importance of young people within global patterns of mobility. UNDESA (2016) reports that young migrants aged 15–24 accounted for approximately 12% of the international migrant population in 2013, equivalent to around 28.2 million people, with an additional 27 million young people having left their countries of birth specifically to seek employment abroad. Internal migration occurs on a considerably larger scale than international migration, as young people move from rural areas and smaller towns toward larger urban centres in far greater numbers than those who cross national borders (ILO, 2013; ILO, 2015). These figures indicate that youth mobility is closely connected to major educational and labour-market conditions, with migration often becoming an important pathway through which young people seek opportunities beyond their places of origin.

2.2 Brain drain and migration of skilled youth

World Bank (2011) highlights the growing importance of skilled migration as a major dimension of globalization. Although the overall international migration rate increased only modestly between 1960 and 2005, migration to high-income countries became increasingly characterized by the movement of highly educated and skilled individuals. High-skilled migration, commonly referred to as “brain drain,” grew considerably faster than overall

migration from developing to developed countries. This trend reflects the increasing mobility of individuals with higher levels of education and professional qualifications, particularly toward countries offering greater employment opportunities, higher wages, and better living conditions. However, the consequences of this movement for countries of origin remain complex and contested. While skilled migrants can contribute to their home countries through remittances, investments, knowledge transfer, and the creation of international networks, their departure may simultaneously reduce the supply of highly educated workers and weaken the human-capital base of the countries they leave behind.

More recent scholarship has therefore moved beyond viewing brain drain as an entirely negative phenomenon and has developed a more balanced understanding of its potential consequences. World Bank (2011) argues that although the emigration of highly skilled individuals can reduce the stock of human capital available in the source country, migration can also generate important benefits. These include remittances, return migration, increased incentives for education, human-capital formation, and the transfer of knowledge and technology through diaspora networks. Skilled migrants may also maintain economic, professional, and social connections with their countries of origin, allowing them to contribute even while living abroad. Consequently, the effects of brain drain cannot be understood as uniformly harmful or beneficial. Instead, its overall impact depends on factors such as the characteristics of the migrants, the conditions in the country of origin, opportunities for return migration, and the strength of the relationships migrants maintain with their home communities. To examine the scale of high-skilled migration, World Bank (2011) defines high-skilled immigrants as foreign-born individuals aged 25 or above who possess an academic or professional qualification beyond the secondary-school level. Using migration data from OECD countries, they estimate that approximately 20.5 million high-skilled immigrants were living in OECD countries in 2000, accounting for around 85% of estimated global high-skilled migration. This figure illustrates the substantial scale of international mobility among highly educated individuals and demonstrates the increasingly important role of skilled migration within global migration patterns. The concentration of highly educated migrants in developed countries also highlights the unequal distribution of human capital between source and destination countries, particularly where developing countries experience the loss of individuals who could otherwise contribute to their economic and social development.

The study further demonstrates that brain drain increased substantially during the period examined, making high-skilled emigration an increasingly significant component of international migration. However, the extent of skilled emigration varied considerably across countries according to their population size, income levels, and economic conditions. Smaller countries generally experienced much higher rates of skilled emigration than larger countries, partly because the departure of a relatively small number of highly educated

individuals can represent a substantial proportion of the country's skilled population. Middle-income countries, in particular, recorded relatively high levels of skilled emigration because their populations often possessed both greater incentives and greater financial means to migrate internationally. In these countries, individuals may have acquired sufficient education and skills to compete in international labour markets while simultaneously facing limited employment opportunities or lower returns to their qualifications at home.

The geographical distribution of skilled migration was also highly uneven. The Caribbean, Pacific, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Central America were among the regions particularly affected by high-skilled emigration. These patterns demonstrate that the brain drain is not experienced equally across the developing world and that certain regions face a disproportionately large loss of educated and professionally qualified individuals. In terms of the absolute number of high-skilled emigrants in 2000, India was among the major source countries, with approximately 1.04 million high-skilled emigrants. This finding is particularly significant because it demonstrates that countries can experience substantial skilled emigration even when their high-skilled emigration rate is not necessarily the highest in the world. Overall, the findings of World Bank (2011) demonstrate the considerable scale, geographical concentration, and complexity of global skilled migration, while also emphasizing that the consequences of brain drain depend heavily on the economic and institutional circumstances of the countries from which skilled individuals migrate.

2.3 Factors encouraging Youth to leave their hometowns

The migration of young people from smaller towns, rural areas, or developing regions to major economic hubs and foreign countries is driven by a powerful mix of economic, social, and structural motivations. These forces are generally categorized into push factors (conditions at home that compel youth to leave) and pull factors (attractions drawing them toward new destinations).

Research on youth out-migration indicates that young people's decisions to leave their hometowns are influenced by a combination of educational, economic, occupational, social, and community-level factors. Although migration decisions differ across individuals and regions, previous research consistently suggests that the availability of opportunities outside the hometown is an important factor encouraging young people to move. This is particularly relevant for educated and highly skilled youth, whose aspirations for further education, professional development, and employment may not always be matched by the opportunities available in smaller or rural communities. The International Labour Organization (2015) notes that rural youth who relocate to towns and cities are often responding to the limited availability of higher-education institutions and diverse employment opportunities in rural areas, and that those with greater educational attainment

are generally the most able to act on this gap. This suggests that youth out-migration is not simply a result of young people being unable to find opportunities, but can also reflect the greater mobility and opportunity-seeking behaviour of individuals with higher educational and occupational potential. Young people who acquire higher levels of education may therefore become increasingly likely to consider destinations where their qualifications can be used more effectively and where employment opportunities are more diverse.

Educational opportunities themselves can also contribute to the movement of young people away from their hometowns. In many smaller communities, access to universities, specialized courses, professional training, and advanced educational institutions may be limited. As a result, young people who wish to pursue higher education may need to relocate to larger towns, cities, or other regions. Once they move for education, migration may become connected to subsequent employment and career decisions. The location in which a young person completes higher education can expose them to new professional networks, employers, industries, and social environments, potentially making continued residence away from the hometown more attractive. Thus, education can function not only as a reason for the initial movement but also as a pathway through which young people become connected to opportunities outside their communities. For talented youth in particular, the pursuit of specialized education may therefore increase geographical mobility and create opportunities that are difficult to access locally.

Employment and career prospects represent another major factor in youth out-migration. Rural and small-town labour markets may contain fewer positions requiring specialized qualifications, while larger urban centres tend to offer more diverse employment opportunities. International Labour Organization (2015) found that rural youth who migrated were more educated and had higher employability and income than those who stayed, suggesting a relationship between individual human capital and migration behaviour. Young people who have invested considerably in education may seek occupations that provide opportunities for advancement, specialization, professional recognition, and higher earnings. When these opportunities are limited in their hometowns, moving elsewhere may become a rational strategy for achieving their educational and occupational goals. This can create a pattern in which the individuals with the greatest educational and employment potential are also among those most capable of leaving, contributing to the loss of human capital from smaller communities.

However, economic explanations alone do not fully capture the reasons young people leave their hometowns. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016) notes that explanations of youth out-migration have traditionally focused heavily on economic conditions and labour-market opportunities, while also identifying social attachment, family ties, and community context as relevant, non-economic dimensions of the migration decision. This suggests that the strength of young people's relationships with their

communities can influence their subsequent mobility, and that migration decisions are shaped not only by what opportunities exist outside a hometown but also by how strongly individuals feel connected to the place where they grew up.

The social environment of a hometown may therefore either encourage young people to remain or make migration more attractive. Young people may seek communities that provide wider social networks, greater diversity of experiences, and environments that correspond more closely with their personal and professional aspirations. Moving to a larger urban centre can expose young people to people from different backgrounds, new ideas, specialized professional communities, and opportunities for personal development. These experiences can be particularly significant during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, when individuals are developing educational, occupational, and social identities. Consequently, youth migration should not be understood solely as a response to economic disadvantage; it may also represent an active search for environments that provide greater opportunities for education, career development, social interaction, and personal growth.

The characteristics of the origin community can also influence the likelihood that young people will leave. Communities with fewer educational institutions, limited employment opportunities, lower concentrations of highly skilled occupations, or fewer pathways for professional advancement may struggle to retain young people who have ambitious educational and career goals. UNDESA (2016) emphasizes that community and neighbourhood characteristics are relevant to young people's migration experiences generally, indicating that individual characteristics interact with the environments in which young people grow up. In this sense, migration decisions emerge from an interaction between the characteristics of the individual and the opportunities and constraints of the hometown. A highly educated young person may not necessarily leave simply because the hometown lacks all opportunities, but because the opportunities available elsewhere may offer a better match for their particular qualifications, ambitions, and desired lifestyle.

Overall, existing research indicates that youth out-migration is a multidimensional process rather than the result of a single push factor. Limited local employment opportunities, differences in career prospects, the search for higher education, opportunities to develop specialized skills, and the attraction of broader social and professional environments can all encourage young people to move away from their hometowns. These factors may be particularly influential among highly educated and talented youth because their qualifications increase both their ability to migrate and the range of opportunities available to them outside their communities. International Labour Organization (2015) demonstrates that rural youth who leave are often more educated and employable than those who stay, while UNDESA (2016) shows that migration and return patterns are also connected to social and community experiences. Together, these findings suggest that the movement of talented

youth away from their hometowns results from the interaction of individual aspirations with differences in educational, occupational, economic, and social opportunities between places.

2.4 Why Migrant Youth Do Not Return

Migrant youth's decisions not to return to their countries of origin are shaped by the interaction of economic, socio-cultural, professional, political, and family-related factors. These factors often make remaining abroad appear more viable than returning home. Non-return should therefore not be understood simply as a rejection of the country of origin or as evidence that migration has failed. Instead, it is frequently an evolving response to differences between migrants' expectations, opportunities, capabilities, and the conditions available in their home countries.

Theoretical perspectives on migration provide different interpretations of return. Classical neoclassical migration theory tends to view return as evidence that migration has failed to produce the expected economic benefits. In contrast, the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) understands migration as a household strategy designed to diversify income, overcome market constraints, reduce risk, and accumulate assets (Stark and Bloom, 1985). From this perspective, return may represent the successful completion of a migration project after a migrant has achieved a particular savings or income target. However, if the household's main objective is continued risk diversification or the regular receipt of remittances, permanent residence abroad may also be considered a successful outcome. Thus, non-return does not necessarily indicate failure; it may reflect the continuation of a household strategy. Economic and labour-market conditions remain among the most important reasons why migrant youth do not return. Young migrants often perceive their origin countries as offering limited employment opportunities, lower wages, weak career prospects, and a greater risk of unemployment or underemployment. By comparison, destination countries may provide better-paying jobs, clearer opportunities for professional advancement, stronger labour protections, and more predictable employment conditions. For highly educated migrants, the decision to remain abroad is particularly influenced by access to research facilities, professional networks, merit-based recruitment, and opportunities to use their skills. The emotional attraction of family and familiar surroundings may therefore be outweighed by the perceived economic and professional costs of returning.

The NELM perspective also helps explain why migrants may postpone their return for long periods. If migration is undertaken to support the household, accumulate savings, purchase property, or protect relatives against economic uncertainty, the migrant may continue working abroad until these objectives are achieved. In some cases, the target is not clearly defined, or the cost of returning becomes higher as migrants establish careers, relationships, and new social networks abroad. Regular remittances may also reduce the immediate

necessity of return, allowing migrants to fulfil family responsibilities from a distance. Consequently, the desire to return can coexist with the repeated postponement of return.

Socio-cultural and lifestyle considerations further influence non-return decisions. Longitudinal research on international doctoral students from Turkey studying in the United Kingdom shows that concerns about conservative social norms, restrictions on personal freedom, public safety, infrastructure, and general quality of life become increasingly important over time, even when political factors were the dominant concern earlier in the migration process (Fidler et al., 2023; Fidler et al., 2025). Migrants who have adapted to more pluralistic, tolerant, or secure environments may feel that they cannot fully express themselves after returning. Concerns may relate to gender roles, religion, sexuality, political expression, or expectations regarding family and community life. Perceptions of social polarisation, intolerance towards minority identities, and inadequate public safety can weaken the belief that returning would lead to a fulfilling and secure life.

Professional and institutional conditions in origin countries can also discourage return. Nepotism, cronyism, weak meritocracy, corruption, and limited research or career infrastructure may prevent young migrants from achieving their professional goals. These concerns are particularly significant for skilled migrants who have developed expertise and professional expectations abroad. Even when returnees legally recover their citizenship, they may not immediately regain a full sense of social and cultural belonging. Research on 1.5-generation youth returning to Mexico identifies problems such as foreign-student tuition fees, mockery of accents, exclusion based on dress and physical appearance, and suspicion of gang involvement as significant barriers to successful reintegration. These experiences distinguish 1.5-generation returnees from first-generation returnees, who may be more readily accepted as full members of the home community (Canedo, 2025).

The gap between the intention to return and actual return can also be explained through Cassarino's return-preparedness framework. Cassarino argues that willingness to return is not sufficient; migrants must also be ready to return by mobilising the resources required for reintegration. These resources include financial capital, housing, employment opportunities, social networks, relevant skills, and reliable information about post-return conditions (Cassarino, 2004). Migrants who lack sufficient savings, transferable skills, or networks in their origin countries may wish to return but remain unable to do so. Involuntary return or deportation can create an even more serious preparedness gap because migrants are denied adequate time to plan, save money, secure employment, or rebuild social connections. Poorly prepared return experiences may subsequently discourage other migrants from returning (Monti et al., 2022).

Political conditions are another important factor shaping non-return. Youth from countries affected by authoritarian governance, political repression, conflict, discrimination, or

institutional instability may regard return as incompatible with their safety and long-term aspirations. Political concerns may be especially influential before migration, but they can change over time. Research on Turkish doctoral students in the United Kingdom indicates that political conditions initially play an important role in return intentions, while socio-cultural and professional considerations become more influential as migrants spend longer periods abroad (Fidler et al., 2023; Fidler et al., 2025). As migrants lose confidence that political conditions will improve, they may prioritise countries where they can develop personally and professionally.

Return may also be discouraged by social stigma and fear of failure. In some communities, migrants who return without substantial savings, property, or professional success may be described as having returned “empty-handed.” This stigma can make return psychologically difficult, particularly for young migrants who have invested significant time and family resources in migration. At the same time, migrants who have integrated into urban, professional, or culturally diverse environments abroad may become more willing to settle permanently in the destination country. Their growing attachment to new social networks can reduce the practical and emotional attractiveness of return.

Finally, family obligations and transnational care responsibilities can paradoxically delay or prevent return. Migrants may remain abroad to provide financial support through remittances, pay for relatives’ education and healthcare, or secure legal status and housing for eventual family reunification. In this way, remaining abroad may be a form of family responsibility rather than an indication of weakened attachment to the home country. The migrant may continue to desire return while postponing it because returning too early could undermine the economic security of the household.

Overall, many migrant youth postpone or reject return because it is associated with economic uncertainty, limited professional opportunities, social restrictions, political insecurity, weak institutional support, reintegration difficulties, and family pressures. The decision is not necessarily permanent or purely individual. It develops over time as migrants reassess their expectations, accumulate or fail to accumulate resources, establish new forms of belonging, and respond to changing conditions in both destination and origin countries. Non-return is therefore best understood as an evolving outcome of structural constraints, household strategies, changing aspirations, and inadequate preparedness for reintegration.

2.5 Consequences for Hometowns

Migration produces mixed and often contradictory consequences for migrants’ hometowns, shaping both the decision to leave and the likelihood of return. On the one hand, remittances improve household welfare, fund education and health expenditures, and enable investment in housing and small businesses. On the other hand, sustained youth out-migration and non-

return can weaken local labour markets, deepen dependency on migration, and alter social structures in ways that may limit long-term development. The net impact depends on the scale of emigration, the characteristics of migrants, the uses of remittances, and the institutional context in sending communities (Taylor et al., 1996; World Bank, 2008; Locke et al., 2013).

Economic consequences

Remittances are the most visible and widely studied consequence of migration for sending areas. A substantial body of research shows that remittances reduce poverty, smooth consumption, and improve access to education and healthcare for recipient households. Most studies observe that recipients use remittances primarily for daily expenses such as food, clothing, and healthcare, as well as for building or improving housing and purchasing land or durable consumer goods. Only a smaller share is typically directed toward productive investments that generate employment or stimulate local economic growth. This pattern has led many scholars to conclude that remittances are often consumed rather than invested in ways that transform the overall economy of migrant-sending areas (Chami et al., 2003; Durand and Massey, 1992; Locke et al., 2013).

At the community level, remittances can stimulate local construction sectors and small businesses, particularly in regions with high rates of international migration. However, the economic effects are uneven. Households that receive remittances often experience rising incomes and improved living standards, while non-migrant households may face relative deprivation and growing inequality. In some contexts, visible consumption—such as large houses, cars, and expensive weddings—creates new status hierarchies and social tensions between migrant and non-migrant families (Taylor et al., 1996; Vargas-Lundius and Lanly, 2007).

Non-return does not mean the total severing of economic ties to the hometown. Migrants who remain abroad frequently continue to send remittances, which constitute a substantial and relatively stable source of household income in many origin communities. These transfers have been shown to relieve poverty and, in some contexts, to support children's educational expenses and encourage higher schooling levels among relatives who remain at home (Stark and Bloom, 1985; Locke et al., 2013). However, this offsetting effect is uneven: skilled migrants, who tend to emigrate permanently and often with their immediate families, have been found to remit proportionally less over time than unskilled migrants who leave family members behind and rely on remittances to sustain them, meaning the communities losing the most valuable human capital are not necessarily those receiving the largest compensating financial inflows (World Bank, 2011; Stark et al., 1997).

Labour-market effects in sending areas are also significant. The emigration of working-age adults, particularly young men, can create labour shortages in agriculture and local

industries, leading to upward pressure on wages. While this may benefit remaining workers, it can also reduce the competitiveness of local enterprises and discourage investment in labour-intensive sectors. In some cases, communities become economically dependent on migration, with households relying on remittances as their primary source of income. This dependency can make communities vulnerable to fluctuations in labour demand and economic crises in destination countries, and it may reduce incentives for domestic savings and local investment (Taylor et al., 1996; Locke et al., 2013; World Bank, 2008).

Social and demographic consequences

Sustained youth out-migration has profound demographic and social effects on sending communities. The departure of young adults contributes to the ageing of rural populations and the “hollowing out” of working-age cohorts. In some regions, entire villages experience population decline as younger generations settle permanently abroad. This demographic shift can weaken local institutions, reduce the viability of schools and health facilities, and undermine community cohesion (Vargas-Lundius and Lanly, 2007; Taylor et al., 1996).

Migration also transforms family structures and care arrangements. When parents migrate, children are often raised by grandparents or other relatives, creating transnational parenting arrangements. While remittances may enable families to hire paid caregivers or improve children’s educational opportunities, the physical absence of parents can affect emotional well-being and social development. Research on gender roles suggests mixed outcomes. In some cases, women who remain behind take on new responsibilities as heads of household, potentially increasing their decision-making power. However, many studies find that migration does not lead to permanent shifts in patriarchal family structures and may actually reproduce traditional gender roles (Locke et al., 2013; Durand and Massey, 1992).

The consequences of sustained absence extend beyond economic and institutional measures to the subjective well-being of family members remaining in the hometown. Using Gallup World Poll data across 114 countries, Ivlevs, Nikolova and Graham (2019) found that having a family member abroad is associated with greater life evaluation and positive affect overall, and that remittances further increase this well-being, particularly in poorer settings. However, the same study found that having household members abroad is also linked to increased stress and depression among those left behind, effects that are not offset by the receipt of remittances. This indicates that the emotional costs of prolonged non-return are not simply resolved by financial compensation; the absence itself carries a psychological toll for the family and community left behind, distinct from any material benefit migration may provide (Ivlevs et al., 2019).

Social stratification is another important consequence. Migration can create or widen inequalities between households with and without migrant members. Remittance-receiving

families may invest in education, housing, and consumer goods, visibly distinguishing themselves from non-migrant households. This can generate aspirations for migration among youth, who increasingly view international movement as the primary pathway to economic success. Over time, this dynamic can create a “migration culture” in which leaving the community is seen as the normal and expected life course, further reinforcing out-migration and reducing the pool of young people willing to invest in local opportunities (Durand and Massey, 1992; Taylor et al., 1996; Levitt, 1998).

Human capital and development effects

The most immediate and widely documented consequence of sustained non-return is the loss of human capital in which hometown communities have already invested. This is particularly stark in the health sector, where migration of trained professionals has been extensively quantified. Mills et al. (2011) estimated that the nine sub-Saharan African countries most affected by doctor emigration collectively lost approximately \$2.17 billion in returns on their investment in medical education, while destination countries such as the United Kingdom and United States gained substantially from receiving already-trained doctors without bearing the training cost. Similar findings have been reported at the national level: the migration of nurses from Malawi alone has been estimated to cost the country between \$71,000 and \$7.5 million per departing nurse depending on the discount rate applied, and Kenya loses close to \$518,000 in expected returns for every doctor who emigrates rather than practising domestically (Kirigia et al., 2006; Mills et al., 2011). Because migrants who leave permanently, rather than circulating between origin and destination, are the least likely to return, these losses are effectively locked in for as long as non-return persists (Stark et al., 1997; World Bank, 2011).

The emigration of skilled youth raises questions about brain drain versus brain gain for sending communities. Traditionally, brain drain has been defined as a net loss for sending nations that invest scarce resources in educating youths who then move abroad. The departure of doctors, engineers, teachers, and other professionals can weaken public services, reduce the supply of skilled labour, and limit local innovation. However, more recent research identifies several channels through which high-skilled emigration might bring benefits to sending countries. These include the possibility of a “brain gain” through endogenous increases in human capital investment, as well as brain circulation and network effects that facilitate knowledge diffusion and global economic integration (World Bank, 2008; World Bank, 2011; Stark et al., 1997).

Empirical evidence suggests that most developing countries experience a net gain from skilled emigration, with adverse overall impacts limited to a subset of countries exhibiting very high rates of skilled emigration. High-skilled migrants often send remittances, which can help overcome liquidity constraints, stimulate education investments, and reduce

poverty at origin. However, involvement in trade and foreign direct investment is relatively rare, limiting the potential for broader economic linkages. In some cases, return migration or diaspora engagement can fuel technological and economic development in ways that offset the initial loss of skilled labour (World Bank, 2008; World Bank, 2011).

Beyond the direct financial loss, the departure of skilled workers can degrade the institutions and services that depend on them. In the health sector specifically, sustained health-worker emigration has been linked to understaffed and overburdened healthcare systems and a corresponding decline in the standard of care available to those who remain. This pattern is not confined to healthcare: any hometown sector reliant on a small pool of trained professionals education, local administration, technical trades is vulnerable to a similar erosion of institutional capacity when its most qualified members do not return (Mills et al., 2011; Kirigia et al. 2006; Vargas-Lundius and Lanly, 2007).

Education aspirations in sending communities are also affected by migration. Families may invest more heavily in education as a pathway to international mobility, viewing schooling as a means to access higher wages abroad rather than as a route to local development. This can increase overall educational attainment, but it may also lead to “educated unemployment” if local labour markets remain weak and migration opportunities are limited. Youth who acquire qualifications but cannot migrate or find suitable employment at home may experience frustration and disillusionment, further reinforcing the desire to leave. While remittances can support schooling, the departure of family members has also been associated with reduced educational engagement among children who remain in migrant households. Evidence from Mexico indicates that children in migrant-sending households are less likely to attend school and can show lower educational attainment than children in non-migrant households, a pattern attributed in part to the expectation that they, too, will eventually migrate for work that may not reward home-country educational credentials (Durand and Massey, 1992; McKenzie and Rapoport, 2011). This suggests that prolonged non-return can, in some contexts, reproduce the very conditions that drive further outmigration among the next generation.

Political and institutional effects

Migration can influence local governance and the provision of public goods in sending communities. Migrant associations and diaspora organisations sometimes fund schools, roads, clinics, and other infrastructure projects in their hometowns. These contributions can improve local services and reduce pressure on the state to provide public goods. However, they may also create parallel systems of service provision that allow governments to neglect their responsibilities, particularly in marginalized regions (Vargas-Lundius and Lanly, 2007; Levitt, 1998).

In some contexts, migration is associated with corruption and rent-seeking. Migration fees, brokers, and intermediaries can create opportunities for exploitation, particularly for irregular migrants. Local power dynamics may shift as migrant families accumulate wealth and influence, potentially challenging traditional elites or reinforcing existing hierarchies. The flow of “social remittances” ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital transmitted from migrants to origin communities can also affect political attitudes and civic engagement. Exposure to different governance systems and democratic practices abroad may shape expectations about transparency, accountability, and participation in home communities (Levitt, 1998; Taylor et al., 1996).

At the community level, sustained loss of its most capable young residents can contribute to demographic decline and reduced local investment, as a shrinking and increasingly dependent population offers less incentive for either public infrastructure spending or private economic activity. This can create a self-reinforcing cycle in which the very conditions that motivated the original migration limited opportunity, weak infrastructure, stagnant local economies are left unaddressed or even worsened by the community's shrinking productive base, making eventual return, for this cohort or the next, progressively less attractive (World Bank, 2008; Stark et al., 1997).

Overall, migration produces complex and context-dependent consequences for hometowns that directly shape why talented youth leave and why they do not return. Remittances improve household welfare and enable investment in education, health, and housing, but they are often used for consumption rather than productive investment. Sustained youth out-migration and non-return can weaken local labour markets, deepen dependency on migration, and alter social structures in ways that may limit long-term development. The balance between positive and negative effects depends on the scale and selectivity of emigration, the uses of remittances, the strength of local institutions, and the extent to which migrants maintain economic and social ties with their communities of origin (Taylor et al., 1996; World Bank, 2008; World Bank, 2011; Locke et al., 2013). Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing policies that maximize the developmental benefits of migration while mitigating its adverse consequences for sending areas.

2.6 Research Gap

Although existing literature provides substantial insight into the consequences of migration for sending communities and the factors influencing return decisions, several important gaps remain, particularly concerning talented youth from specific origin contexts and the mechanisms linking non-return to long-term hometown development.

Limited focus on talented youth as a distinct group

Much of the migration literature treats “youth” or “skilled migrants” as broad categories, without distinguishing between different levels of talent, ambition, or potential contribution. Studies on brain drain typically focus on professionals such as doctors, engineers, and teachers (Mills et al., 2011; Kirigia et al., 2006; World Bank, 2008), while studies on remittances and household welfare often examine low-skilled or mixed-skilled migrants (Taylor et al., 1996; Locke et al., 2013). There is comparatively less research that specifically examines highly talented youth those with exceptional academic, entrepreneurial, or creative potential and how their sustained non-return effects hometown trajectories differently from other migrant groups. This gap limits understanding of whether the loss of “talent” produces qualitatively different consequences than the loss of “skills” more generally.

Insufficient attention to the link between non-return drivers and consequences

The literature on why migrants do not return including economic conditions, socio-cultural factors, political insecurity, professional constraints, and family obligations (Fidler et al., 2023; Fidler et al., 2025; Stark and Bloom, 1985) is largely separate from the literature on the consequences of non-return for hometowns, such as human capital loss, institutional erosion, remittance patterns, and demographic change (Mills et al., 2011; World Bank, 2011; Vargas-Lundius and Lanly, 2007). Few studies explicitly connect the reasons talented youth choose not to return with the specific consequences that follow for their hometowns. For example, if talented youth remain abroad primarily due to weak meritocracy and limited research infrastructure at home, what does this mean for the types of human capital losses experienced? If non-return is driven by socio-cultural restrictions, how does this shape the nature of ongoing ties (remittances, knowledge transfer, diaspora engagement) with the hometown? Bridging these two bodies of work would provide a more integrated understanding of migration dynamics.

Contextual gaps: under-representation of certain origin regions

A significant portion of empirical research on brain drain and non-return focuses on sub-Saharan Africa (Mills et al., 2011; Kirigia et al., 2006), Latin America (Durand and Massey, 1992; McKenzie and Rapoport, 2011), and Turkey (Fidler et al., 2023; Fidler et al., 2025). Other regions including South Asia, Central Asia, and parts of the Middle East are less well-represented in the literature on sustained non-return of talented youth. This limits the generalizability of existing findings and overlooks how region-specific institutional, cultural, and economic conditions may shape both the drivers of non-return and the resulting consequences for hometowns. Research that examines these dynamics in under-studied contexts would contribute to a more globally representative understanding of migration and development.

Limited longitudinal and life-course perspectives

Most studies on non-return and its consequences rely on cross-sectional data or retrospective accounts, which capture migrants' situations at a single point in time or after the fact (Ivlevs et al., 2019; World Bank, 2008). There is relatively little longitudinal research that tracks talented youth from the point of departure through years or decades of sustained non-return, examining how their aspirations, ties to home, and potential for return evolve over the life course. Similarly, few studies examine how hometowns change over time in response to the cumulative loss of multiple cohorts of talented youth. A longitudinal perspective would help clarify whether non-return is a permanent settlement decision or a prolonged postponement, and how hometown communities adapt (or fail to adapt) to sustained talent loss.

Inadequate attention to heterogeneity within hometowns Existing research often treats sending communities as relatively homogeneous units, examining average effects of migration on poverty, inequality, or institutional capacity (Taylor et al., 1996; Vargas-Lundius and Lanly, 2007; World Bank, 2011). However, hometowns vary considerably in terms of pre-existing economic conditions, institutional strength, social cohesion, and exposure to migration. Some communities may be resilient to talent loss due to strong local institutions or diversified economies, while others may experience rapid decline. There is limited research that examines how hometown characteristics moderate the relationship between non-return and local development outcomes. Understanding this heterogeneity is essential for designing context-sensitive policies.

Weak integration of subjective and psychological dimensions

While recent work has begun to examine the subjective well-being of those left behind (Ivlevs et al., 2019), the psychological and emotional dimensions of non-return for both migrants and their families remain underexplored in relation to hometown development. Questions such as how prolonged absence affects migrants' sense of belonging, how families negotiate transnational care and emotional strain, and how communities perceive and respond to the symbolic loss of their "best and brightest" are not well-integrated into mainstream migration-development frameworks. Incorporating these subjective dimensions would provide a more holistic understanding of the costs and benefits of non-return.

Policy-relevant gaps: limited guidance on facilitating return or engagement

Finally, while the literature identifies many barriers to return including weak labour markets, political insecurity, social stigma, and lack of preparedness (Stark et al., 1997; World Bank, 2008) there is relatively little research that evaluates what policies or interventions effectively encourage return, facilitate circular migration, or enable meaningful diaspora engagement for talented youth. Studies on brain circulation and diaspora contributions remain largely conceptual (World Bank, 2008; World Bank, 2011; Stark et al., 1997), with

limited empirical evidence on which mechanisms such as research partnerships, investment incentives, dual citizenship, or targeted reintegration programmes are most effective in practice. This gap limits the ability of policymakers in sending countries to design evidence-based strategies for retaining or re-engaging, talented youth.

Summary and transition to this study

In sum, while existing research provides valuable insights into migration consequences and return decisions, there remains a need for studies that: (1) focus specifically on talented youth as a distinct category; (2) integrate drivers of non-return with consequences for hometowns; (3) examine under-studied origin contexts; (4) adopt longitudinal and life-course perspectives; (5) account for heterogeneity among sending communities; (6) incorporate subjective and psychological dimensions; and (7) generate policy-relevant evidence on facilitating return or engagement.

This study responds to these limitations by examining the experiences of talented youth who have migrated abroad and not returned, exploring both the factors shaping their non-return decisions and the perceived consequences for their hometowns. By integrating insights from brain drain theory, the New Economics of Labour Migration, and research on transnational belonging, the study seeks to advance understanding of how sustained talent loss affects hometown development and what conditions might enable more productive forms of engagement between migrants and their communities of origin.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This research uses a descriptive research design to study the reasons why talented young people leave their hometowns and why many of them do not return after moving to another city, state, or country. The main purpose of using this design is to understand the different factors that may influence young people's decisions about their education, career, and place of residence. The study mainly focuses on factors such as better educational opportunities, availability of jobs, income, career growth, quality of life, access to facilities, and the overall opportunities available in their hometowns.

The study will use a survey-based approach to collect primary information from young people. A questionnaire will be prepared with questions related to their hometown, educational and career goals, their views about the opportunities available in their local area, and their reasons for considering or choosing to move away. The questionnaire will also include questions about whether they would like to return to their hometown in the future

and what conditions might influence that decision. Some questions will be close-ended so that the responses can be compared easily, while a few open-ended questions will allow participants to express their opinions and experiences in their own words.

The research will try to look at the issue from different perspectives rather than assuming that all talented young people leave for the same reason. For some people, the main reason may be the lack of suitable jobs, while for others it may be better universities, higher salaries, professional growth, or a different lifestyle. Similarly, the decision not to return may be connected to the opportunities and living conditions they find after moving away. Therefore, the questionnaire will cover several possible factors instead of focusing on only one reason. The responses collected through the questionnaire will be organized and analyzed to identify the most common reasons given by participants. The results will be presented using suitable methods such as percentages, tables, and graphs wherever required. The open-ended responses will also be reviewed to identify ideas or opinions that appear repeatedly among the participants. This will help in understanding not only the numerical trends but also some of the personal views behind those trends.

Along with the primary data collected through the questionnaire, secondary sources such as research papers, reports, articles, and information published by reliable organizations will also be referred to. These sources will be used to understand what previous research has found about youth migration, education, employment opportunities, and the movement of skilled or talented people. Comparing the survey responses with existing research will help provide more context to the findings of this study.

Overall, this research design is suitable for the study because the topic involves both measurable factors and individual opinions. The survey will provide a general picture of the reasons young people may leave their hometowns, while the open-ended responses and secondary sources can provide additional context. Through this approach, the research aims to understand the major factors that influence talented youth to move away and the reasons that may make returning to their hometown less likely.

3.2 Study Population and Participants

The study population for this research consisted of young people between the ages of 15 and 25 years. This age group was selected because it represents a period in which individuals begin to make important decisions about their education, career, employment, and future place of residence. During these years, young people may have to decide where they want to pursue higher education, whether they want to seek employment outside their hometown, and whether they see their hometown as a place where they can achieve their long-term goals.

The study focused on young people from different educational, social, and geographical backgrounds. This was done to obtain a variety of perspectives rather than limiting the research to a particular group of students or to people from one specific location. Participants could have different educational goals, career interests, and experiences with their hometowns, which may affect how they view the opportunities available to them. The participants included young people who were currently living in their hometown as well as those who were living away from their hometown. This distinction was relevant to the research because the experiences of someone who has already moved away may differ from the expectations of someone who is still living in their hometown. Participants who had moved away could provide insight into the reasons that influenced their decision, while those who remained in their hometown could provide information about their willingness to stay or their plans for the future.

The study did not require participants to have already migrated from their hometown. It also included individuals who had considered moving away, were planning to move for education or employment, or had not yet made a decision about moving. Including these participants allowed the research to examine the issue before migration takes place and to understand what factors may influence the decision to leave in the first place.

Particular attention was given to participants' perceptions of the educational and career opportunities available in their hometowns. The study considered whether young people felt that their hometown provided sufficient opportunities for higher education, employment, career growth, and financial development. Other aspects, such as infrastructure, healthcare, recreational facilities, and general quality of life, were also considered because the decision to move away may not be based on employment or education alone.

The study also considered the possibility that young people's decisions may change over time. A participant who currently wishes to remain in their hometown may later decide to move for higher education or employment, while someone who plans to leave may eventually wish to return if suitable opportunities become available. Therefore, the questionnaire explored both participants' current circumstances and their future intentions regarding their hometown.

The selected population was considered appropriate for the study because young people themselves are directly involved in decisions concerning their education, career development, and future mobility. Their views can provide useful insight into the factors that encourage young people to seek opportunities outside their hometowns and the conditions that might encourage them to return.

The study therefore sought to understand youth migration not simply as a decision to leave a particular place, but as a process influenced by a combination of educational, economic, professional, social, and personal factors. The information provided by the participants

forms the primary basis for examining these factors and understanding why some young people may choose to leave their hometowns and why returning may become less attractive after they have moved away. ## 3.3 Sampling Technique

The study employed a non-probability convenience sampling technique for the selection of participants. Convenience sampling was chosen because the research was conducted within a limited period and required participants who could be reached easily and were willing to take part in the survey. Instead of selecting participants randomly from the entire population of young people aged 15–25 years, the questionnaire was distributed among individuals who were accessible to the researcher and who met the requirements of the study.

The questionnaire was shared primarily through the researcher's personal and social networks, including friends, cousins, classmates, and other young people who fell within the selected age group. Participants were also encouraged to share the questionnaire with other eligible individuals where appropriate. This helped the researcher reach participants with different educational backgrounds, hometowns, and personal experiences. The purpose was to obtain a range of opinions rather than collecting responses from only one group or locality.

Participants were selected according to the main eligibility requirement of being between 15 and 25 years of age. They were not required to have previously moved away from their hometown to participate in the study. Individuals who currently lived in their hometown, those who had considered moving away, those who were planning to move for education or career opportunities, and those who had already moved away could all participate. This allowed the research to include different perspectives on the decision to leave a hometown and the possibility of returning.

A total of 45 responses were collected through the questionnaire. Only responses that were suitable for the purpose of the study were considered in the analysis. The participants were not selected based on academic achievement or any particular profession because the study aims to understand young people's perceptions of educational and career opportunities rather than examine a specific professional group. The inclusion of participants with different interests and educational circumstances also helped provide a broader range of opinions.

Convenience sampling was considered suitable for the present study because obtaining a representative sample of the entire population of young people would require considerably more time, resources, and access to participants than was available for this research. An online questionnaire also made it possible to reach participants from different locations without requiring face-to-face data collection. This was particularly useful for a study concerned with migration and hometowns, as participants could be living in places different from where they originally grew up.

However, the use of convenience sampling also has certain limitations. Since participants were recruited from networks that were accessible to the researcher, the sample may not accurately represent the views of all young people between the ages of 15 and 25. For example, individuals from similar social or educational backgrounds may be more likely to be included when personal networks are used for recruitment. There is also a possibility that people who were more interested in the topic were more likely to respond to the questionnaire. Therefore, the findings of this study should be interpreted in relation to the characteristics of the 45 participants rather than being generalized to all young people.

Despite these limitations, convenience sampling provided a practical and manageable way of obtaining primary data within the time available for the research. It allowed the researcher to collect firsthand responses from young people with different experiences and views concerning education, employment, career opportunities, migration, and returning to their hometowns. The data obtained through this sampling process was then used to identify common patterns and factors relevant to the research question.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

The data for this study were collected through an online questionnaire prepared according to the main objectives of the research. The questionnaire was designed to understand why talented young people may choose to leave their hometowns and what factors may influence their decision to stay or return. Since the study focuses on young people and their views about education, career opportunities, employment, income, quality of life, and their hometowns, an online survey was considered a suitable method for collecting the required information.

The questionnaire was shared online with potential participants, who were asked to complete it voluntarily. The respondents were given the same set of questions so that their answers could be compared and analyzed systematically. The survey included both close-ended and open-ended questions. Close-ended questions provided respondents with specific options to choose from, making it easier to organize the responses and identify patterns in the data. Open-ended questions were included to allow participants to explain their opinions in their own words and mention factors that might not have been covered by the given options.

The first part of the questionnaire collected basic information about the respondents, including their age, current educational or occupational status, current place of residence, and the length of time they had lived in their hometown. This information was collected to understand the background of the participants and to provide context when interpreting their responses.

The remaining questions focused more directly on the research topic. Participants were asked about their perception of their hometown and the opportunities available there. The questionnaire also explored factors that could influence a young person's decision to move to another place, such as career opportunities, education, income, infrastructure, quality of life, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. Questions were also included to understand whether respondents had considered leaving their hometown and what circumstances might encourage talented young people to return after moving elsewhere.

The survey also included questions that allowed respondents to give their own suggestions regarding the development of their hometowns. These responses were useful because they provided individual perspectives rather than limiting participants to predetermined choices. The answers helped identify some of the changes that young people believe could make their hometowns more attractive for education, employment, and long-term settlement.

A total of 50 responses were received through the survey. The responses were collected during September 2026 and were compiled after the survey period for further analysis. The data obtained from the close-ended questions were organized according to the different response categories, and the number and percentage of respondents selecting each option were calculated. This made it possible to identify the most common responses and observe general trends within the sample.

The responses to the open-ended questions were examined separately. Similar ideas and repeated factors were grouped together so that common themes could be identified. For example, responses relating to employment and career opportunities could be considered together, while suggestions concerning infrastructure, education, or quality of life could be analyzed as separate themes. This helped provide a clearer interpretation of the reasons and concerns expressed by the participants.

The use of both numerical and descriptive responses allowed the study to examine the issue from more than one perspective. The numerical data provided an overall picture of the opinions of the 51 participants, while the written responses helped explain some of the reasons behind those opinions. Together, these responses formed the primary data used for the analysis of the study.

3.5 Research Instrument

The research instrument used for collecting primary data in this study was a questionnaire prepared specifically for this research. The questionnaire was developed on the basis of the research topic, "Why Talented Youth Leave Their Hometowns and Never Return," and was designed to understand the different reasons that may influence young people when deciding whether to stay in their hometown or move somewhere else. The questions were also intended to find out whether leaving is mainly connected with education and career

opportunities, or whether other factors such as income, quality of life, infrastructure, social environment and personal independence also play a role.

The questionnaire was made available in an online format. An online questionnaire was chosen because it made it possible to reach young respondents conveniently and allowed them to complete the survey in their own time. It also made it easier to collect and organize the responses in one place. The questionnaire was kept focused on the research topic, while still including enough questions to obtain information about the respondents themselves and their views about their hometowns.

The questionnaire began with questions related to the background of the respondents. These questions asked about their age, their present educational or occupational status, their current place of residence and the amount of time they had spent living in their hometown. These questions were included because a person's stage of education, age and experience of living in a particular place can affect the way they think about moving away. Someone who has lived in a hometown throughout their life, for example, may have a different relationship with that place from someone who has moved between different cities or towns.

The next part of the questionnaire focused on the respondents' perception of their hometown. Instead of assuming that young people want to leave simply because they dislike where they live, the questionnaire attempted to understand whether they actually have a positive or negative opinion of their hometown. Respondents were asked to give their views about their hometown and different aspects of living there. This was important to the research because a young person can have a strong emotional connection with their hometown while still feeling that it does not provide enough opportunities for their future.

Questions were then included to examine the opportunities and limitations available to young people in their hometowns. The questionnaire considered areas such as education, employment, career development, income and infrastructure. These factors were selected because the availability of opportunities can have a major effect on where young people decide to pursue higher education or begin their careers. If suitable opportunities are not available locally, young people may have to look outside their hometown even if they would otherwise prefer to remain there.

The questionnaire also examined the importance of career opportunities and professional growth in decisions concerning migration. Respondents were asked to consider the factors that could make another city, town or region more attractive to them. This part of the questionnaire was intended to determine whether young people are primarily attracted by better employment opportunities or whether they also consider other aspects of life when deciding where they would like to live. Another important area covered by the instrument was income and financial opportunity. The questionnaire considered whether differences in salary and employment prospects could influence the decision to move away. Financial

considerations are particularly relevant when studying youth migration because higher-paying jobs and greater economic opportunities in larger cities can act as an important attraction for educated and skilled young people.

The questionnaire did not, however, focus only on economic reasons. It also included questions related to quality of life and other non-economic factors. These included aspects such as lifestyle, infrastructure, social environment and personal development. Including these factors allowed the research to consider the possibility that young people may leave their hometowns even when employment is available, if they feel that another location would provide a better overall quality of life or greater opportunities for personal growth.

The instrument also contained questions concerning the respondents' attitudes towards leaving their hometown. These questions were used to determine whether respondents had considered moving away and whether they viewed such a decision as definite or dependent on circumstances. This distinction is important because the decision to migrate is not always straightforward. A young person may wish to stay with their family and community but may still consider leaving if they are offered a better educational institution, job or career opportunity elsewhere.

A further part of the questionnaire dealt with the possibility of returning to the hometown after moving away. This was particularly relevant to the title of the research, since the study is not only concerned with why talented young people leave but also with why many of them may not return. The questionnaire therefore attempted to identify the conditions that respondents believed could make returning more attractive. Respondents were able to consider whether better employment opportunities, improved infrastructure, better educational facilities, higher income, improved quality of life or other changes could encourage talented young people to come back.

The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions provided a fixed set of options from which respondents could select their answers. These questions made it possible to compare the responses of all 51 participants and later calculate the frequency and percentage for each option. They were particularly useful for questions involving ratings, choices between alternatives and the importance of different factors.

Open-ended questions were included to give respondents an opportunity to express ideas that might not have been included among the predetermined options. In these questions, respondents could explain their opinions in their own words and suggest what they believed could be done to encourage talented young people to stay in or return to their hometowns. These responses were useful because they provided more detail and allowed individual experiences and viewpoints to be included in the research.

The questionnaire was therefore not limited to finding out whether young people want to leave their hometowns. It was designed to explore the reasons behind that decision and to examine the different conditions that may influence it. By including questions about both the respondents' personal background and their views about education, employment, income, infrastructure, quality of life and future opportunities, the instrument provided information from several sides of the research problem.

A total of 50 responses were obtained through the questionnaire. The completed responses were used as the primary data for the study. The responses to the closed-ended questions were later organized according to their respective categories and converted into frequencies and percentages. The answers to the open-ended questions were examined for repeated ideas and common themes. The results obtained from the questionnaire were then used to understand the major factors associated with the movement of talented youth away from their hometowns and the factors that could potentially influence their return.

Overall, the questionnaire served as the main tool through which the opinions and experiences of the participants were collected. Its combination of background questions, rating-based questions, multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions allowed the research to obtain both numerical information and personal viewpoints. This made it possible to compare the responses of the participants while also giving them enough freedom to explain their thoughts about the opportunities, limitations and changes they associate with their hometowns.

3.6 Data Analysis

After the collection of responses was completed, the data obtained from the questionnaire were organized and examined in order to identify the major patterns and opinions present among the participants. A total of 51 responses were included in the analysis. Since the questionnaire contained both questions with fixed answer choices and questions where respondents could write their own answers, the data were analyzed in two different ways. The responses to the close-ended questions were dealt with mainly through numerical analysis, whereas the answers to the open-ended questions were examined on the basis of the ideas and themes that appeared in them. The first step in the analysis was to organize the responses according to the questions asked in the questionnaire. The demographic information was examined first in order to understand the general background of the participants. This included information such as their age, current educational or occupational status, current location and the amount of time they had spent in their hometown.

The number of respondents belonging to each category was counted and converted into percentages. This provided a basic picture of the sample before moving on to the questions directly related to youth migration.

For the questions that had fixed response options, the frequency of each response was calculated. In other words, the number of participants who selected each particular option was counted. These numbers were then converted into percentages out of the total 51 respondents. Percentages were used because they make it easier to compare the different response categories and understand the overall distribution of opinions.

The percentage was calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Percentage} = (\text{Number of respondents selecting an option} \div \text{Total number of respondents}) \times 100$$

Since the study had 51 respondents, each response represented approximately 2% (1/51) of the total sample. For example, if 20 respondents selected a particular option, that response represented approximately 39.2% of the participants. This method was followed consistently while analyzing the close-ended questions.

The responses were then examined question by question rather than looking at the survey as a single set of numbers. This was done because different questions focused on different parts of the research problem. Questions concerning the respondents' hometowns were used to understand their general relationship with their place of origin, while questions concerning education, employment, income, career opportunities, infrastructure and quality of life were examined to identify the factors that may influence a young person's decision to move away.

Particular attention was given to questions dealing with the reasons why young people may leave their hometowns. The responses to these questions were compared to determine which factors were selected most frequently. Factors that received a larger number of responses were considered more commonly reported by the participants, while factors receiving fewer responses were considered less frequently mentioned within the sample. However, the analysis was not used to suggest that one particular factor is responsible for every young person's decision to migrate, as individual circumstances can differ considerably.

The questions concerning career and educational opportunities were also examined closely. The purpose was to determine whether respondents viewed the availability of opportunities in their hometown as an important consideration when thinking about their future. Responses relating to employment, higher education, professional development and income were compared with responses relating to other aspects of living, such as lifestyle,

infrastructure and quality of life. This allowed the study to consider both economic and non-economic reasons for youth migration.

The respondents' views about their willingness to leave their hometown were analyzed separately. The different response categories were counted and expressed as percentages. This helped show whether leaving was something that respondents had already considered, something they were uncertain about, or something they did not intend to do. These responses were then considered alongside the questions about opportunities and living conditions so that possible connections between the two could be observed.

Another important part of the analysis focused on the question of returning to the hometown. The responses were examined to identify the conditions that participants believed could encourage talented young people to return after moving elsewhere. This was especially relevant to the research because the study is concerned not only with why young people leave but also with why some of them may not return. The answers were therefore compared with the earlier responses concerning employment, income, education, infrastructure and quality of life.

The open-ended responses required a different form of analysis. Instead of simply counting each answer, the responses were read individually to understand what participants were trying to communicate. Similar answers were then grouped together according to the main idea expressed. For example, answers mentioning better jobs, more employment opportunities, higher salaries or improved career prospects could be grouped under the broader idea of employment and career opportunities. Similarly, responses mentioning better roads, transportation, facilities or public services could be grouped under infrastructure and development.

This process helped identify recurring themes within the written responses. The themes were not decided only on the basis of one particular response; attention was given to ideas that appeared repeatedly across the answers. At the same time, individual responses that presented a different or less common point of view were not ignored, as these could also provide useful information about the issue being studied.

The qualitative responses were then considered alongside the numerical findings from the close-ended questions. This comparison helped provide a clearer understanding of the results. For instance, if a large number of participants identified career opportunities as important in a close-ended question and several participants also mentioned better employment or career growth in their written responses, the two sets of responses could be considered together when discussing the importance of career opportunities. The data were therefore analyzed with the aim of identifying patterns rather than simply listing the responses. The frequency and percentage of different answers helped show which opinions were more common among the participants, while the open-ended responses helped

provide explanations and examples behind some of those opinions. This combination made it possible to examine both the numerical distribution of responses and the personal viewpoints expressed by the participants.

The results were subsequently organized into tables and descriptive summaries wherever appropriate. The tables were used to present the numerical findings in a clear manner, while the accompanying explanations were used to interpret what those figures indicated in relation to the research question. The responses were not interpreted in isolation; related questions were considered together wherever they provided information about the same aspect of youth migration.

Finally, the findings were interpreted specifically within the context of the 50 participants who took part in the survey. The results were not treated as a representation of all young people, since the sample was limited in size and was based on the participants who responded to the online questionnaire. Instead, the analysis was used to understand the opinions and experiences represented within the selected sample and to identify the major factors that emerged from their responses.

Overall, the data analysis combined basic quantitative analysis with qualitative interpretation. The quantitative part provided numerical evidence through frequencies and percentages, while the qualitative part helped identify common ideas in the participants' written responses. Together, these methods were used to examine the different educational, economic, social and lifestyle factors that may influence talented young people to leave their hometowns, as well as the changes that could potentially encourage them to remain or return.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the process of conducting the research. Since the study involved collecting information directly from individuals, it was important to ensure that participation was based on the respondent's own willingness and that the information provided by them was handled responsibly.

Participation in the survey was voluntary. Respondents were given the opportunity to decide whether they wanted to take part in the study, and no individual was forced or pressured to provide a response. The purpose of the survey was made clear through the questionnaire so that participants understood that their responses were being collected for research purposes. Respondents were also free to answer the questions according to their own opinions and experiences. Privacy and confidentiality were also considered during the collection and analysis of the data. The research focuses on the overall opinions of the participants rather than on individual identities.

Therefore, individual responses were not used to personally identify or evaluate any respondent in the research paper. The findings are presented collectively through totals, percentages and general observations.

The information collected from the participants was used specifically for the purpose of this research. The responses were not intended to be used for unrelated purposes or shared in a manner that could unnecessarily expose the participants' personal information. Care was taken while organizing the collected data so that the focus remained on the research topic and the findings of the study.

Another important ethical consideration was accuracy in the handling of the collected information. The responses provided by participants were recorded and analyzed as they were received. The researcher did not intentionally change responses or exclude information simply because it did not agree with an expected outcome. Both positive and negative opinions were considered while interpreting the findings. This was important for maintaining objectivity and avoiding the presentation of a biased conclusion.

The researcher also avoided making assumptions about individual respondents on the basis of their answers. The purpose of collecting the responses was to identify general patterns and understand different perspectives regarding youth migration. Individual opinions were therefore treated as personal viewpoints rather than as evidence that every young person has the same experience or motivation.

The study also recognizes the importance of respecting differences among participants. Respondents may have different educational backgrounds, family circumstances, experiences and opinions about their hometowns. These differences were not treated as incorrect or inferior. Since many of the questions concerned personal opinions and future preferences, participants' answers were considered according to their own perspectives.

The researcher also maintained honesty while presenting the findings. The results were not altered to make them appear more supportive of the researcher's expectations. The conclusions were based on the information obtained from the participants and were interpreted within the limits of the sample. Since the study involved 51 respondents, the findings were not presented as representing the views of all young people. Instead, they were used to understand the patterns and opinions present among the participants who took part in the survey.

Finally, the research was conducted with the intention of maintaining respect, fairness, confidentiality and academic honesty throughout the process. The information provided by participants was treated as research data rather than as material for personal judgment. These considerations helped ensure that the collection and use of the survey data were

carried out in a responsible manner and that the research remained focused on its intended purpose.

4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

This section presents the findings from a survey of 51 respondents concerning the factors that influence talented young people's decisions to leave, remain in, or return to their hometowns. The findings are presented in two parts. The first part reports the quantitative results from the close-ended questions using frequencies and percentages. The second part presents the themes identified from the open-ended responses.

An additional response was validated after the original 50-response dataset had already been compiled, bringing the final analytic sample to $N = 51$. Demographic information for this additional respondent was not available for inclusion in Table 1; accordingly, Table 1, Table 3, and the thematic analysis of open-ended responses in Section 4.6 are reported on the basis of $n = 50$, while the reasons-for-leaving, importance-ratings, willingness-to-return, and barriers-to-return measures reported in Sections 4.5 and 4.7 reflect the full $N = 51$ sample.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 *Demographic characteristics of respondents*

Category	Item	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	15–17 years	28	56
	18–20 years	18	36
	21–25 years	4	8
Educational/occupational status	School student	27	54
	College/university student	22	44
	Employed	1	2
Residence	Currently living in hometown	38	76
	Lived in hometown entire life	30	60

Note. $n = 50$ (see Section 4.1 regarding the additional respondent captured after this table was compiled). Percentages are based on the total number of respondents shown.

Educational/occupational-status categories total 100%. Residence items represent separate questions and are therefore not expected to total 100%. Demographic information was available for 50 of the 51 respondents in the final sample. The largest age group consisted of participants aged 15–17 years, representing 56% of this group. Respondents aged 18–20 years accounted for 36%, while those aged 21–25 years represented 8%. Regarding educational or occupational status, 54% of the respondents were school students, 44% were college or university students, and 2% were employed. Most respondents reported that they currently lived in their hometown, accounting for 76% of the sample. In addition, 60% stated that they had lived in their hometown throughout their lives.

4.3 Relationship with Hometown: General Perception and Local Opportunities

Respondents were asked about their general perception of their hometown and their perception of the opportunities or conditions available there. These two questions were analyzed separately to compare respondents' overall views of their hometown with their assessment of local opportunities.

Table 2 *Respondents' perceptions of their hometown and local opportunities (n = 50)*

Measure	Rated good/very good (n)	%	Rated poor/very poor (n)	%
General perception of hometown	36	72	14	28
Perception of opportunities/conditions	18	36	32	64

Table 2 presents respondents' perceptions of their hometown and the opportunities or conditions available there. Regarding their general perception of the hometown, 36 respondents (72%) rated it as "good" or "very good," while 14 respondents (28%) rated it as "poor" or "very poor."

A different pattern was observed when respondents evaluated local opportunities or conditions. Eighteen respondents (36%) rated these opportunities or conditions as "good" or "very good," whereas 32 respondents (64%) rated them as "poor" or "very poor." Therefore, the respondents gave more positive ratings to their hometown in general than to the opportunities or conditions available there.

4.4 Intention to Leave the Hometown

Table 3 *Intention to leave the hometown (n = 50)*

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	10	20
No	22	44
Maybe	14	28
Unsure	4	8
Total	50	100

Note. This item was administered as part of the original 50-response dataset (see Section 4.1); the additional respondent captured after that dataset was compiled is not reflected here.

Table 3 presents the respondents' intention to leave their hometown. Ten respondents, representing 20% of the sample, answered "Yes." Twenty-two respondents, or 44%, answered "No." Fourteen respondents, or 28%, selected "Maybe," while 4 respondents, or 8%, were unsure.

In total, 28 respondents, representing 56% of the sample, selected either "Yes," "Maybe," or "Unsure." The remaining 22 respondents, representing 44%, selected "No."

4.5 Reasons for Considering Leaving the Hometown

Following the collection of the original 50 responses, the questionnaire item on perceived local shortfalls was refined into a more direct measure of respondents' primary reason for considering migration, administered to the full N = 51 sample. Rather than selecting multiple factors perceived as lacking, respondents were asked to identify the single most important reason they would consider leaving their hometown. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 *Main reasons for considering leaving the hometown (N = 51)*

Reason	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Quality of life	19	37.3
Career opportunities	18	35.3
Higher income	8	15.7
Other/not specified	6	11.8
Total	51	100.0

Table 4 presents respondents' primary reasons for considering leaving their hometown. Quality of life was the most frequently identified reason, selected by 19 respondents (37.3%), followed closely by career opportunities, selected by 18 respondents (35.3%). Higher income was identified by 8 respondents (15.7%), while the remaining 6 respondents (11.8%) identified other or unspecified reasons.

These results indicate that, while economic considerations remain highly relevant career opportunities and higher income together account for just over half of primary responses (51.0%) quality of life emerged as the single most frequently cited standalone factor. This suggests that respondents' migration considerations are not driven exclusively by economic motivations, but are also substantially shaped by broader lifestyle considerations.

4.5.1 Importance Ratings of Key Factors

To assess how strongly respondents weighed specific domains when considering their future, the survey also asked respondents to rate the importance of career opportunities, salary/income, and education on a scale ranging from "Not Important" to "Extremely Important." The combined proportion of respondents rating each factor as "Extremely Important" or "Important" is presented in Table 4a.

Table 4a *Importance ratings of key factors (N = 51)*

Factor	Extremely Important (%)	Important (%)	Combined (%)	n (combined)
Education	60.8	33.3	94.1	48
Salary/income	54.9	37.3	92.2	47
Career opportunities	56.9	21.6	78.5	40

Note. Remaining respondents for each factor rated it as Neutral or lower and are not shown in this table.

Education received the highest combined importance rating, with 94.1% of respondents (n = 48) rating it "Extremely Important" or "Important." Salary/income followed closely, with a combined importance rating of 92.2% (n = 47). Career opportunities, although the second most frequently cited primary reason for leaving in Table 4, received a comparatively lower combined importance rating of 78.5% (n = 40). Taken together, these results suggest a layered hierarchy of concerns: education and financial security are viewed as near-universal priorities among respondents, while career opportunity, though highly salient as a primary reason for leaving, is rated as somewhat less uniformly critical across the full sample.

4.5.2 Secondary Push Factors

In addition to their primary reason for leaving, respondents identified secondary factors that contributed to their consideration of migration. The results are presented in Table 4b.

Table 4b *Secondary push factors (N = 51)*

Factor	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Lifestyle	20	39.2
Social environment	10	19.6
Family circumstances	7	13.7
Other/not specified	14	27.5
Total	51	100.0

Lifestyle concerns were the most frequently cited secondary factor, identified by 20 respondents (39.2%), followed by social environment (19.6%, n = 10) and family circumstances (13.7%, n = 7). The prominence of lifestyle and social-environment factors, alongside the quality-of-life finding reported in Table 4, reinforces the conclusion that non-economic considerations weigh heavily in respondents' migration intentions.

4.6 Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Responses

The open-ended question asked respondents what conditions could encourage talented young people to return to their hometowns. The overall survey included 50 participants, and 45 responses were recorded for this question. Verbatim text has been reviewed for 29 of these responses to date; of those, 8 were unclear or non-substantive and were excluded from thematic coding, leaving 21 meaningful responses for the analysis presented here. The meaningful responses were grouped into five recurring themes: employment, income and career opportunities; quality of life, safety and social environment; infrastructure and local development; education and professional development; and personal, family, and emotional factors.

Table 5 Themes identified in open-ended responses (based on 21 of 45 total responses reviewed to date)

Theme	Description	Responses (n)	% of meaningful responses
Employment, income, and career opportunities	Jobs, better careers, salaries, and financial opportunities	13	61.9
Quality of life, safety, and social environment	Safety, improved lifestyle, freedom, support, and living conditions	8	38.1
Infrastructure and local development	Infrastructure, facilities, healthcare, and general town development	6	28.6

Education and professional development	Better education, career growth, and talent development	4	19.0
Personal, family, and emotional factors	Family, confidence, independence, freedom, and memories	4	19.0

Note. This open-ended question was administered as part of the original n = 50 dataset (see Section 4.1) and received 45 responses. Percentages here are calculated from the 21 meaningful responses reviewed to date, out of 29 responses for which verbatim text was available; the remaining 16 responses have not yet been reviewed and are not reflected in these figures. Some responses contained more than one theme; therefore, the percentages do not total 100%.

4.6.1 Employment, Income, and Career Opportunities

Employment, income, and career opportunities were the most frequently identified theme. Twelve of the 25 meaningful responses referred to better jobs, increased employment opportunities, higher salaries, financial stability, or career advancement. Examples included “better options of careers,” “more employment and career opportunities,” “good job opportunities,” and “higher salaries.”

4.6.2 Quality of Life, Safety, and Social Environment

Quality of life, safety, and the social environment appeared in nine responses. Participants referred to improved living conditions, safety, support, lifestyle, freedom, and a favorable social environment. Examples included “support and quality of life,” “better quality of life,” “more freedom,” and a hometown that becomes “more safe” with “better quality of life.”

4.6.3 Infrastructure and Local Development

Seven responses mentioned infrastructure and local development. Participants referred to better infrastructure, improved facilities, healthcare opportunities, and general development in their hometowns. Examples included “better infrastructure,” “improved infrastructure,” and “great infrastructure.”

4.6.4 Education and Professional Development

Education and professional development were mentioned in four of the 21 responses reviewed. Participants referred to a “better education system,” “better education,” “growth in professional aspects,” and opportunities for talented young people to receive recognition and develop their abilities.

4.6.5 Personal, Family, and Emotional Factors

Four of the 21 responses reviewed referred to personal, family, or emotional considerations. These included “family,” “confidence and independence,” “more freedom from their family,” and “memories.” These responses identified personal relationships, independence, and emotional connections as additional considerations related to returning to the hometown.

4.6.6 Summary of Open-Ended Findings

Overall, the open-ended responses most commonly referred to employment, income, and career opportunities. Quality of life, safety, infrastructure, education, healthcare, professional development, family, and personal independence were also identified. The themes were broadly consistent with the factors reported in the close-ended responses, particularly the emphasis on jobs, salaries, education, infrastructure, and quality of life.

4.7 Willingness to Return and Barriers to Return

Respondents were also asked, as part of the N = 51 sample, about their overall willingness to return to their hometown and the specific barriers that might prevent them from doing so. The results are presented in Table 5a and Table 5b.

Table 5a *Willingness to return to the hometown (N = 51)*

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Definitely yes	19	37.3
Depends on circumstances	17	33.3
Definitely no	6	11.8
Unsure/not specified	9	17.6
Total	51	100.0

Respondents’ willingness to return was notably split. Just over a third (37.3%, n = 19) indicated they would “definitely” return, while an almost equally large proportion (33.3%, n = 17) indicated that their return was conditional, depending on circumstances. Only 11.8% (n = 6) stated they would “definitely not” return, with the remaining 17.6% (n = 9) unsure or not specifying a clear position. This distribution suggests that for most respondents, return is neither foreclosed nor guaranteed, but rather conditional on future circumstances.

Table 5b *Primary barriers to return (N = 51)*

Barrier	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Lower salaries	18	35.3
Lack of suitable jobs	16	31.4

Better opportunities elsewhere	15	29.4
Lower quality of life	14	27.5

Note. The question allowed multiple responses; percentages are calculated from the full sample of N = 51 and do not sum to 100%.

Lower salaries were the most frequently cited barrier to return (35.3%, n = 18), followed by a lack of suitable jobs (31.4%, n = 16), better opportunities elsewhere (29.4%, n = 15), and lower quality of life relative to the destination (27.5%, n = 14). This alignment where the same domains of income, employment, and quality of life appear as both reasons for leaving (Table 4) and barriers to returning (Table 5b) suggests that non-return reflects a continued, comparative assessment of opportunity between the hometown and the destination, rather than a rejection of the hometown itself.

In addition to these quantitative measures, respondents were asked in open-ended terms about the specific conditions that could encourage talented young people to return to their hometowns after moving elsewhere. The responses identified employment, income, infrastructure, education, healthcare, safety, quality of life, and personal or professional development as relevant conditions. Employment and career opportunities were the most frequently identified conditions. Respondents referred to better jobs, increased employment options, higher salaries, and opportunities for professional growth. Improved infrastructure and local development were also mentioned, including better facilities, healthcare services, transportation, and general development. Education and professional development appeared as additional conditions that could support return. Respondents referred to better education systems, career growth, and opportunities for talented young people to develop and receive recognition for their abilities. Other responses emphasized safety, improved living conditions, social support, lifestyle, independence, and family connections. Overall, the responses concerning return conditions reflected the same major areas identified in the reasons for leaving. Employment, income, education, infrastructure, healthcare, safety, and quality of life appeared as recurring concerns in the responses.

4.8 Summary of Key Finding

The survey findings showed that most respondents had a current or long-term connection with their hometowns. Seventy-six percent of respondents reported that they currently lived in their hometown, while 60% stated that they had lived there throughout their lives. In addition, 72% rated their hometown positively in general. However, the respondents gave less positive ratings to the opportunities and conditions available in their hometowns. Only 36% rated these opportunities or conditions as “good” or “very good,” whereas 64% rated them as “poor” or “very poor.” The results concerning the intention to leave, drawn from the

original n = 50 dataset, showed that 20% of respondents answered “Yes,” 28% selected “Maybe,” and 8% were unsure. Together, these responses represented 56% of that sample. The remaining 44% answered “No.”

Drawing on the full N = 51 sample, quality of life was the most frequently identified primary reason for considering leaving (37.3%), followed closely by career opportunities (35.3%) and higher income (15.7%). Education received the highest combined importance rating (94.1%), followed by salary/income (92.2%) and career opportunities (78.5%). Among secondary push factors, lifestyle was the most frequently cited (39.2%), followed by social environment (19.6%) and family circumstances (13.7%).

Regarding return migration, 37.3% of respondents indicated they would definitely return to their hometown, 33.3% indicated their return depended on circumstances, and 11.8% indicated they would definitely not return. The most frequently cited barriers to return were lower salaries (35.3%), a lack of suitable jobs (31.4%), better opportunities elsewhere (29.4%), and lower quality of life relative to the destination (27.5%).

The open-ended responses, drawn from the original n = 50 dataset, identified employment, income, and career opportunities as the most common theme, based on the 21 meaningful responses reviewed to date (of 45 total recorded). Other themes included quality of life, safety, social environment, infrastructure, education, healthcare, professional development, family, and emotional connections. These qualitative themes are broadly consistent with the quantitative reasons for leaving and barriers to return reported above, particularly the recurring emphasis on employment, income, and quality of life. The remaining 16 open-ended responses have not yet been reviewed and should be added to finalize those figures.

5. Discussion

5.1 Overall Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study provide an overall indication that the relationship between young people and their hometowns is more complex than simply choosing whether to stay or leave. The results suggest that young people’s decisions about migration may be shaped by a combination of emotional attachment to their hometown and their perception of the opportunities and conditions available within it. One of the most notable patterns in the findings is the difference between respondents’ general perception of their hometown and their assessment of the opportunities available there. Although 72% of respondents rated their hometown as “good” or “very good,” only 36% rated the opportunities or conditions available there as “good” or “very good,” while 64% considered them “poor” or “very poor.” This difference is important because it suggests that dissatisfaction with one’s hometown

may not necessarily be the primary reason for considering migration. Instead, young people may appreciate their hometown in terms of familiarity, social connections, family relationships, culture, and personal experiences while simultaneously believing that it cannot provide sufficient opportunities for their future. In this sense, a positive perception of a hometown and a willingness to leave it are not necessarily contradictory. A young person may feel emotionally connected to a particular place but still decide that moving elsewhere would provide better possibilities for education, employment, financial stability, professional development, or quality of life. The findings concerning respondents' intentions to leave further illustrate this complexity. While 44% of respondents stated that they did not intend to leave their hometown, 20% stated that they intended to leave, 28% selected "Maybe," and 8% were unsure. Therefore, 56% of respondents did not give a definite negative response to the possibility of leaving. This does not establish that all of these respondents will eventually migrate, but it indicates that leaving the hometown is at least a possibility for a considerable proportion of the respondents. This is particularly relevant because the majority of the sample consisted of school and college/university students, meaning that many respondents may still be at stages of their lives where decisions regarding higher education, employment, and future careers have not been fully determined. Their responses may therefore reflect expectations about their future rather than actual migration decisions. At the same time, the fact that 76% of respondents currently live in their hometown and 60% reported having lived there throughout their lives demonstrates that most respondents have a substantial connection with their hometowns. The possibility of leaving, therefore, does not necessarily indicate a lack of belonging. Taken together, these findings suggest that youth migration should be understood not simply as a movement away from a place, but as a decision influenced by the perceived differences between the opportunities available locally and those available elsewhere. The contrast between positive perceptions of the hometown and negative perceptions of local opportunities provides an important foundation for understanding the more specific factors identified later in the study. Employment, income, career growth, education, professional development, infrastructure, safety, healthcare, and quality of life were all identified as relevant concerns. These factors indicate that young people's decisions may be influenced by several interconnected dimensions rather than by one isolated cause. The findings also suggest that the decision to leave and the possibility of returning may be connected: if young people leave because they perceive limited opportunities in their hometown, improvements in those same areas may influence their willingness to return in the future. Therefore, the overall findings point towards a distinction between attachment to the hometown and the perceived ability to build a satisfactory future within it. Understanding this distinction is important for examining why talented young people may leave places they value and why some may choose not to return after gaining education or professional experience elsewhere.

5.2 Employment, Income, and Career Opportunities

Employment, income, and career opportunities emerged as prominent factors associated with young people's decisions to consider leaving their hometowns, though the findings indicate that they are not the single dominant driver. Career opportunities were identified as the primary reason for leaving by 35.3% of respondents, and higher income by a further 15.7%, together accounting for just over half of primary responses (51.0%; Table 4). When asked to rate the importance of these domains directly, respondents placed salary/income (92.2% combined importance) and, to a somewhat lesser extent, career opportunities (78.5% combined importance) among the most consistently valued factors in the sample (Table 4a). These results indicate that a substantial majority of respondents regard employment and financial considerations as highly relevant to their future, even where quality of life was more frequently cited as the single primary reason for leaving. The prominence of these factors is particularly significant when considered alongside the open-ended responses drawn from the original $n = 50$ dataset. Among the 21 meaningful responses reviewed, employment, income, and career opportunities formed the largest theme, appearing in 13 responses, or 61.9% of the meaningful responses. Respondents referred to the need for better employment opportunities, higher salaries, financial stability, better career options, and professional growth. The similarity between the quantitative and open-ended findings suggests that employment-related concerns were not simply selected because they were provided as options in the questionnaire, but were also expressed independently by respondents when they were given an opportunity to describe the conditions that could encourage talented young people to return to their hometowns. These findings may indicate that young people view employment not only as a source of income but also as an important part of long-term personal and professional development. For young people who are academically or professionally ambitious, the availability of a suitable job may be insufficient if it does not also provide opportunities for advancement, skill development, recognition, and financial stability. Therefore, even when individuals have an emotional connection to their hometown, they may consider leaving if they believe that their career prospects are limited there. This could be particularly relevant for talented or highly skilled young people, whose educational qualifications and professional aspirations may lead them to seek environments where their abilities can be used more effectively. Larger cities and other developed areas may be perceived as offering a wider range of occupations, higher salaries, specialised fields, professional networks, and greater possibilities for career advancement. As a result, migration may be viewed by young people as a strategy for improving their future prospects rather than simply as a desire to leave their hometown. The findings also provide an important explanation for why some young people may not return after completing their education or establishing themselves elsewhere. If the factors that initially encouraged them to leave remain unchanged, returning may be perceived as

involving a loss of income, career progression, or professional opportunities. This is supported by the open-ended responses, in which better employment, higher salaries, and career growth were repeatedly identified as conditions that could encourage young people to return. The fact that the same broad factors appeared both as perceived shortcomings of the hometown and as conditions that could encourage return is significant. It suggests that youth migration and return migration may be influenced by similar underlying conditions. In other words, young people may leave because they perceive insufficient opportunities locally, but they may also be willing to return if those opportunities improve. This indicates that migration does not necessarily represent a permanent rejection of the hometown. Instead, it may reflect a temporary or long-term response to differences in economic and professional opportunities between locations. The results therefore highlight the importance of considering the quality and availability of employment, rather than simply the existence of jobs, when examining youth migration. A hometown may have employment opportunities available, but if young people perceive these opportunities as poorly paid, limited in number, or lacking possibilities for advancement, they may still consider moving elsewhere. The findings from this study consequently suggest that improving local employment opportunities, increasing possibilities for professional growth, and creating pathways for financially sustainable careers could potentially influence young people's decisions to remain in or return to their hometowns. However, these findings should be interpreted within the context of the study, as the respondents were predominantly school and college/university students, and the open-ended thematic analysis was based only on the meaningful responses reviewed to date. Therefore, the results reflect the perceptions and expectations of the respondents rather than establishing that employment-related factors directly cause youth migration.

5.3 Education and Professional Development

Education and professional development also emerged as important factors in understanding why talented young people may consider leaving their hometowns, and the findings drawn from the full N = 51 sample indicate that this domain may be the single most consistently valued consideration among respondents. When asked directly to rate its importance, 94.1% of respondents (n = 48) rated education as "Extremely Important" or "Important" to their future, the highest combined importance rating of any factor measured, exceeding both salary/income (92.2%) and career opportunities (78.5%; Table 4a). These findings suggest that, for a considerable proportion of respondents, access to quality education is a near-universal consideration when thinking about their future. This may be particularly relevant for talented young people who wish to pursue specialized areas of study or develop skills that may not be adequately supported by the institutions available in their hometown. The open-ended responses provide further support for this interpretation. Education and professional development were identified as a recurring theme in 4 of the 21

meaningful responses reviewed, representing 19% of the meaningful responses. Respondents referred to the need for a “better education system,” “better education,” and opportunities for “growth in professional aspects.” One response also referred to opportunities for talented young people to receive recognition and develop their abilities. These responses suggest that young people may not evaluate their hometown solely on the basis of whether basic educational institutions are available. Instead, they may consider the quality, variety, and future value of the educational and professional opportunities offered. A hometown may have schools or colleges, for example, but young people may still feel the need to move elsewhere if they believe that other locations provide access to more specialized courses, better academic environments, research opportunities, professional networks, or greater recognition of their abilities. The connection between education and migration may also extend beyond the immediate decision to pursue higher education elsewhere. Educational choices can influence later employment and career opportunities, meaning that leaving for education may eventually develop into longer-term migration. A student who moves to another city or region for a specialized course may establish professional connections, gain experience, and find employment there after completing their studies. Returning to the hometown may then become less attractive if comparable opportunities are not available locally. In this way, educational migration and professional migration can become interconnected rather than representing completely separate decisions. The findings of the present study support this possibility because education and professional development were mentioned alongside employment, income, and career growth as conditions relevant to both leaving and returning. At the same time, the findings concerning return suggest that improving educational and professional opportunities could potentially make returning to the hometown more attractive. Respondents mentioned better education, career growth, and opportunities for talented young people to develop their abilities among the conditions that could encourage return. This indicates that young people may not necessarily want to remain away from their hometown permanently. Instead, their willingness to return may depend partly on whether they believe they can continue their education, develop professionally, and make meaningful use of their abilities there. Therefore, the findings suggest that retaining talented youth may require more than creating employment opportunities alone; it may also involve developing educational institutions, skill-building opportunities, professional networks, and environments in which young people can pursue their interests and receive recognition for their abilities. However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously because the open-ended thematic results are based only on the 21 meaningful responses reviewed to date, rather than all 45 recorded responses.

5.4 Quality of Life, Infrastructure, Safety, and Local Conditions

Quality of life, safety, infrastructure, and other local conditions also appear to contribute substantially to young people’s perceptions of whether their hometown is a suitable place to

build their future. Far from being a secondary concern, quality of life was the single most frequently identified primary reason for considering leaving in the full $N = 51$ sample, selected by 37.3% of respondents ($n = 19$; Table 4) more often than career opportunities (35.3%) or higher income (15.7%). This was reinforced by the secondary push factors reported in Table 4b, where lifestyle was the most frequently cited secondary consideration (39.2%, $n = 20$), ahead of social environment (19.6%) and family circumstances (13.7%). Infrastructure and local development also featured prominently in the open-ended responses reviewed to date, appearing in 6 of the 21 meaningful responses (28.6%; Table 5), with references to improved infrastructure, healthcare, facilities, and general development. These findings suggest that the decision to remain in or leave a hometown may involve considerations that extend well beyond education and employment. The availability of adequate infrastructure, healthcare, transportation, recreational facilities, and other basic services can form part of young people's overall assessment of their living environment. Therefore, even when employment or educational opportunities are available, limitations in other aspects of local development and quality of life may affect how attractive a hometown appears as a long-term place to live and may, on this evidence, be at least as influential as economic considerations. The open-ended responses provide further insight into these perceptions. Quality of life, safety, and the social environment appeared in 8 of the 21 meaningful responses reviewed, making this the second most frequently identified theme. Respondents referred to better living conditions, safety, freedom, support, lifestyle, and a favorable social environment. The presence of these themes suggests that young people may evaluate their hometowns in terms of the broader environment in which they would live and develop, rather than considering career opportunities in isolation. A lack of development may contribute to the perception that other locations offer a more suitable combination of professional and personal opportunities. The findings also indicate that quality of life is subjective and may differ between individuals. For some respondents, factors such as safety and social support may be particularly important, while others may place greater importance on independence, recreational opportunities, healthcare, or modern infrastructure. This is reflected in the variety of responses provided by participants. The presence of personal and emotional factors in the open-ended responses also suggests that decisions about hometowns cannot be understood entirely through economic considerations. Family connections, memories, independence, and freedom were mentioned alongside material conditions, indicating that young people's relationships with their hometowns may involve both practical and emotional dimensions. Interestingly, several of these same conditions were identified as factors that could encourage talented young people to return. Respondents mentioned improved infrastructure, healthcare, transportation, safety, living conditions, and quality of life when describing what could make their hometown more attractive. This suggests that improving local conditions may potentially influence not only the decision to remain but also the willingness to return after living

elsewhere. However, the findings do not establish that poor infrastructure or quality of life directly causes young people to migrate. Rather, they indicate that these conditions are perceived by respondents as relevant aspects of their hometown environment and may contribute to how they evaluate their future there. Overall, the results suggest that retaining talented youth may require attention not only to employment and education but also to the broader social and physical environment in which young people live.

5.5 Factors Influencing the Decision to Return

The findings concerning the conditions that could encourage talented young people to return to their hometowns provide an important perspective on youth migration. Rather than viewing migration as necessarily permanent, the responses suggest that some young people may remain open to returning if conditions within their hometown improve. The factors identified by respondents as encouraging return were largely similar to those identified as shortcomings that may contribute to the consideration of leaving. Employment, income, and career opportunities were particularly prominent, with respondents referring to better jobs, higher salaries, increased employment opportunities, and opportunities for professional growth. This suggests that the availability of suitable professional opportunities may be relevant not only to the initial decision to leave but also to the later decision of whether returning is a realistic option. The responses also indicate that economic opportunities alone may not determine whether young people consider returning. Improved infrastructure, healthcare facilities, transportation, education, safety, and overall quality of life were also mentioned as conditions that could make returning more attractive. This suggests that young people may assess their hometown as a potential long-term place to live by considering several aspects of their lives simultaneously. For example, a person may be willing to return if a suitable career is available, but may still consider other factors such as healthcare, safety, living conditions, and opportunities for personal development. Therefore, return migration may depend on whether the hometown is perceived as capable of providing a sufficiently supportive environment for both professional and personal life. Another important aspect of the findings is the presence of personal, family, and emotional factors. Four of the 21 meaningful responses reviewed referred to factors such as family, memories, confidence, independence, or freedom. Although these factors appeared less frequently than employment and quality-of-life concerns, their presence indicates that decisions about returning cannot be understood entirely through economic or professional considerations. Emotional connections to family and familiar surroundings may provide reasons for returning, while the desire for independence or personal freedom may influence how attractive the hometown is perceived to be. This highlights the possibility that young people's decisions are shaped by both practical considerations and their personal relationships with their hometown. The similarity between the factors associated with leaving and those identified as conditions for returning is particularly significant.

Employment, career growth, education, infrastructure, healthcare, safety, and quality of life appeared repeatedly across the findings. This pattern suggests that the factors influencing youth migration may also represent potential areas through which hometowns could improve their ability to retain or attract young people. However, the findings should not be interpreted as demonstrating that improving these conditions would automatically cause young people to return. The survey reflects respondents' perceptions of what might encourage return rather than measuring actual return migration. Nevertheless, the results suggest that young people's connection to their hometown may remain meaningful even after they consider or experience migration. If the perceived gaps between hometowns and alternative locations are reduced, some young people may view returning as a more feasible or desirable option. Thus, the decision to return appears to involve a combination of professional opportunities, local conditions, personal relationships, and the individual's perception of their future within the hometown.

5.6 Comparison with Previous Research

The findings of the present study are broadly consistent with previous research on youth migration, skilled migration, and brain drain, particularly in relation to the importance of employment opportunities, income, education, professional development, and quality of life. Previous research has highlighted that young and skilled individuals may be attracted towards locations where they perceive greater opportunities for employment, career advancement, higher income, and personal development. The findings of the present study reflect a similar pattern, as employment and career-related factors were among the most frequently identified considerations shaping respondents' migration intentions. Career opportunities were identified as the primary reason for leaving by 35.3% of respondents, and higher income by a further 15.7% (Table 4), while salary/income received the second-highest combined importance rating of any factor measured, at 92.2% (Table 4a). This suggests that the economic and professional concerns expressed by the respondents are broadly in line with patterns identified in earlier research on migration. Rather than indicating that young people simply want to leave their hometown, these findings suggest that the perceived availability of opportunities elsewhere may influence how they evaluate their future within their place of origin. The findings concerning education and professional development also correspond with previous research on youth mobility. Earlier studies have discussed how young people may move to other cities or regions in search of better educational institutions, specialized courses, professional networks, and opportunities to develop their skills. In the present study, education received the highest combined importance rating of any factor measured, at 94.1% of respondents (Table 4a), while education and professional development together formed a recurring theme in 19.0% of the meaningful open-ended responses reviewed (Table 5). These findings suggest that educational and professional opportunities form an important part of young people's

perceptions of their future. For individuals who have academic or professional aspirations, the availability of suitable opportunities within their hometown may influence their consideration of other locations. However, the present study does not establish that limited educational opportunities directly cause migration. Instead, the findings indicate that respondents regard education and professional development as highly salient factors when considering the possibilities available to them. The present study also relates to previous research concerning skilled migration and brain drain. Existing literature has examined the movement of educated and skilled individuals from their places of origin and the possible effects of such movement on local communities and development. The findings of this study provide a youth-oriented perspective on this broader issue. A considerable proportion of respondents indicated that leaving their hometown was either a possibility or something they were uncertain about, with 20% answering "Yes," 28% answering "Maybe," and 8% being unsure about whether they intended to leave. However, these findings should not be interpreted as evidence of an existing brain drain, since the study examines intentions and perceptions rather than actual migration. Nevertheless, they provide an indication of the conditions that young people may consider when making future decisions about education, employment, and relocation. In this sense, the study complements previous research by examining migration at the stage of intention and expectation among young people who may not yet have entered the workforce. Another important finding that can be compared with previous research is the relationship between migration and attachment to one's hometown. Previous discussions of migration may sometimes create the impression that individuals leave because they are dissatisfied with their place of origin. However, the findings of the present study suggest a more complex relationship. Although 72% of respondents rated their hometown as "good" or "very good," only 36% rated the opportunities or conditions available there as "good" or "very good." At the same time, 56% of respondents indicated that leaving their hometown was either a possibility or something they were unsure about. This contrast suggests that a young person's decision to consider migration does not necessarily mean that they have a negative perception of their hometown. Young people may remain emotionally connected to their families, communities, memories, and surroundings while simultaneously believing that other locations may provide better opportunities for education, employment, career development, or quality of life. Therefore, the findings add a more nuanced perspective to the understanding of youth migration by showing that attachment to one's hometown and willingness to leave are not necessarily contradictory. The findings regarding the possibility of returning to the hometown are also relevant to previous research on return migration. Previous studies have recognized that migration does not always represent a permanent separation from one's place of origin and that economic opportunities, living conditions, personal relationships, and local development may influence the possibility of return. The present study, drawing on the full N = 51 sample, reflects a similar pattern. Respondents stated willingness to return was notably split: 37.3%

indicated they would definitely return, while an almost equally large proportion (33.3%) indicated their return depended on circumstances, and only 11.8% ruled out return entirely (Table 5a). This distribution is consistent with Cassarino's (2004) return-preparedness framework, which holds that willingness to return is necessary but not sufficient, as migrants must also perceive that the resources and conditions required for successful reintegration are in place. The barriers respondents identified reinforce this interpretation: lower salaries (35.3%), a lack of suitable jobs (31.4%), better opportunities elsewhere (29.4%), and lower quality of life relative to the destination (27.5%) were the most frequently cited obstacles to return (Table 5b), closely mirroring the domains identified as primary reasons for leaving in Table 4. This alignment between the factors associated with leaving and those identified as barriers to returning is particularly significant and is consistent with the behavioral model of return migration proposed by Stark et al. (1997), in which non-return reflects an ongoing comparative assessment of opportunity between origin and destination rather than a rejection of the hometown itself. However, these findings represent respondents' perceptions of what might encourage or prevent return and do not demonstrate that improving these conditions would necessarily result in actual return migration. Overall, the findings of the present study support several patterns identified in previous research while also providing a more specific perspective on the experiences and expectations of young people. Previous research has commonly examined migration through concepts such as economic opportunity, skilled migration, brain drain, education, and regional development, while the present study brings these factors together through the perceptions of young respondents regarding their own hometowns. One of the most significant aspects of the study is the difference between attachment to the hometown and confidence in the opportunities it provides. The findings suggest that young people can value their hometown and maintain strong personal connections to it while still considering migration because they perceive greater educational, professional, or economic opportunities elsewhere. Similarly, their willingness to return may depend on whether they believe that suitable opportunities and living conditions will be available in the future. Thus, the present study adds to existing research by highlighting that youth migration may not simply represent a rejection of one's hometown but may instead reflect the search for opportunities that young people believe are necessary for their personal and professional development.

5.7 Overall Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for understanding youth migration and the factors that may influence young people's decisions to remain in, leave, or eventually return to their hometowns. Overall, the results suggest that youth migration should not be viewed as the result of a single factor. Instead, young people's decisions may be influenced by the interaction of economic, educational, professional, social, and environmental conditions. Employment opportunities, higher-paying jobs, career growth, quality education,

professional development, infrastructure, healthcare, safety, and quality of life were all identified by respondents as relevant aspects of their hometown environment. This indicates that creating conditions in which young people feel capable of building a satisfactory future may require attention to several areas simultaneously rather than focusing exclusively on employment or income. One of the most important implications of the study is the distinction between attachment to a hometown and the opportunities available within it. A large majority of respondents viewed their hometown positively, with 72% rating it as “good” or “very good.” However, only 36% considered the opportunities or conditions available there to be “good” or “very good.” This difference suggests that young people may value their hometown for personal, social, and emotional reasons while still questioning whether it can provide the opportunities they need for their future. Therefore, efforts to address youth migration should not necessarily focus on preventing young people from leaving. Instead, attention could be given to creating conditions in which young people have meaningful choices about where to study, work, and develop their careers. If suitable opportunities are available locally, some young people may be more likely to consider remaining in their hometown rather than feeling that migration is necessary for their future. The findings also have implications for the development and retention of talented young people. Improving local employment opportunities and creating pathways for professional growth may help make hometowns more attractive to young people with ambitious educational and career goals. Similarly, strengthening educational institutions, skill-development opportunities, professional networks, healthcare facilities, transportation, infrastructure, recreational opportunities, and overall living conditions may contribute to a more supportive environment for young people. These improvements may also be relevant to return migration. The responses suggest that some young people may remain connected to their hometown even after considering or experiencing migration, and that improved opportunities could potentially make returning a more realistic or desirable option. However, the study does not establish that such improvements would automatically prevent migration or guarantee return, as individual decisions are also influenced by personal circumstances, aspirations, and preferences. Another important implication is that policies and initiatives aimed at addressing youth migration may benefit from considering young people’s perspectives directly. Since the respondents themselves identified employment, education, career development, safety, infrastructure, and quality of life as important concerns, understanding these perceptions can help identify areas that young people consider important when evaluating their future. Providing young people with opportunities to participate in discussions about local development could therefore help communities better understand the factors that influence their decisions. Such an approach may also help ensure that development efforts are aligned with the actual aspirations and needs of the younger population rather than being based solely on assumptions about why young people leave. Overall, the findings suggest that retaining talented youth is not simply a matter of

encouraging them to stay. It involves creating an environment in which young people can choose to stay, leave for further education or experience, and potentially return without feeling that doing so requires sacrificing their future opportunities. The study therefore highlights the importance of developing hometowns that can provide meaningful educational, professional, economic, and personal opportunities while maintaining the social and emotional qualities that make young people feel connected to their place of origin. These implications provide a basis for considering practical recommendations aimed at improving local opportunities and creating conditions that may support both the retention and return of talented young people.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the factors that influence talented young people's decisions to leave, remain in, or return to their hometowns. The recommendations focus on employment, education, infrastructure, quality of life, talent development, and continued connections with young people who migrate.

6.1 Create better employment opportunities

Local governments, employers, and private organizations should create more employment opportunities for talented young people within their hometowns. This could include internships, entry-level jobs, entrepreneurship programs, career fairs, and partnerships between educational institutions and local businesses.

This recommendation is based on the finding that career opportunities were the second most frequently identified primary reason for considering leaving (35.3%), and that salary/income received the second-highest combined importance rating of any factor measured (92.2%; Tables 4 and 4a). Creating suitable local employment may give young people more opportunities to build their careers without feeling that migration is their only option.

6.2 Provide better salaries and career growth

Employers and local economic-development organizations should support the creation of better-paying jobs with clear opportunities for promotion and professional advancement. Young people may be less likely to remain in their hometown if local jobs offer limited income, little recognition, or no opportunity for career development.

Career-development pathways could include skills training, mentorship, promotion plans, professional certifications, and opportunities to work on meaningful projects. ## 6.3

Strengthen education and professional development. Schools, colleges, universities, and training organizations should improve access to quality education, career counselling, technical training, internships, and professional-development programs. Partnerships with universities, online learning platforms, and professional organizations could help young people access specialized knowledge and skills within or near their hometowns.

This recommendation reflects the respondents' emphasis on quality education and professional growth as factors related to migration and return.

6.4 Improve infrastructure and healthcare facilities

Local authorities should prioritize improvements in transportation, internet access, healthcare facilities, public services, and other essential infrastructure. The development of recreational and community facilities should also be considered because these contribute to the overall attractiveness of a hometown.

Infrastructure and local development were identified as a recurring theme in the open-ended responses reviewed to date (28.6%; Table 5), and improving these areas may help create a more supportive environment for young people and their families.

6.5 Improve safety and quality of life

Local authorities and community organizations should work to improve safety, public spaces, recreational opportunities, social support, and general living conditions. The survey responses showed that young people considered more than employment and education when thinking about where they would like to live.

This recommendation is reinforced by the finding that quality of life was the single most frequently cited primary reason for considering leaving (37.3%; Table 4), and that lifestyle was the most frequently cited secondary push factor (39.2%; Table 4b) and lower quality of life relative to the destination one of the most frequently cited barriers to return (27.5%; Table 5b). A safer and more comfortable environment may make it more feasible for talented youth to remain connected to their hometowns or consider returning after studying or working elsewhere.

6.6 Establish talent-recognition and mentoring programs

Schools, colleges, employers, and community organizations should establish programs that identify, support, and recognize talented young people. These programs could include: - Career counselling. - Mentorship by professionals. - Youth leadership programs. - Local innovation and entrepreneurship competitions. - Internships with local organizations. - Awards for academic, technical, and creative achievements.

Such initiatives could help young people see that their abilities can be valued and developed within their hometown.

6.7 Include young people in local development planning

Local authorities should involve young people in discussions about employment, education, infrastructure, safety, healthcare, recreation, and community development. Youth consultation programs, surveys, student councils, and community forums could help decision-makers understand the needs and expectations of talented youth.

This would ensure that local development efforts respond to the concerns identified by young people rather than relying only on assumptions about why they leave.

6.8 Maintain connections with young people who migrate

Hometowns should maintain relationships with young people who move elsewhere for education or employment. Alumni networks, online professional groups, mentorship programs, return visits, and local investment opportunities could allow migrants to continue contributing to their hometowns even if they do not return permanently.

This approach recognizes that migration does not necessarily eliminate a person's connection with their hometown. Migrants may contribute through knowledge-sharing, financial support, professional networks, business partnerships, or future return.

6.9 Encourage return and reintegration

Local governments and organizations should develop programs that make returning easier for young people who have gained education or professional experience elsewhere. These programs could include returnee employment support, business-startup assistance, recognition of qualifications, housing guidance, and opportunities to use professional skills in local projects.

This recommendation responds directly to the barriers to return identified in Table 5b, where lower salaries (35.3%), a lack of suitable jobs (31.4%), better opportunities elsewhere (29.4%), and lower quality of life relative to the destination (27.5%) were the most frequently cited obstacles. Given that a third of respondents indicated their return “depends on circumstances” (Table 5a), targeted return-readiness programs that address these specific barriers may be particularly effective in converting conditional willingness into actual return migration. Such initiatives should focus on making return practical and attractive rather than pressuring young people to return.

6.10 Recommendations for future research

Future studies should include a larger and more diverse sample from different towns, regions, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Researchers should also compare:

- 1- Young people who remain in their hometowns.
- 2 - Young people who have already migrated.
- 3- Young people who have returned after migration.
- 4- Young people who plan to migrate in the future.

Longitudinal research could examine whether migration intentions change after respondents complete their education, obtain employment, or experience opportunities in other locations.

Overall, the recommendations emphasize that addressing talented youth migration requires more than encouraging young people to stay. Hometowns should provide meaningful opportunities for education, employment, career development, safety, healthcare, infrastructure, and personal growth. These measures may reduce the pressure to migrate and may make remaining connected to or returning to the hometown more practical for some young people. However, the recommendations should be understood as potential actions based on respondents' perceptions, not as guaranteed solutions to migration.

7. Conclusion

The migration of talented youth is a complex process shaped by the relationship between young people's attachment to their hometowns and their perceptions of local socioeconomic opportunities. This study suggests that considering migration does not necessarily indicate dissatisfaction with the hometown itself. Most respondents maintained a positive general perception of their hometown, while many expressed concerns about the opportunities and conditions available there. This indicates that young people may value their communities, families, culture, and personal experiences while also believing that other locations may offer better opportunities for education, employment, financial stability, professional development, and quality of life.

Quality of life, career opportunities, and income were the most frequently identified primary reasons in respondents' views about migration, with quality of life narrowly the most frequently cited (37.3%), followed by career opportunities (35.3%) and higher income (15.7%). Education received the highest combined importance rating of any factor measured (94.1%), ahead of salary/income (92.2%) and career opportunities (78.5%), while lifestyle

was the most frequently cited secondary push factor (39.2%). These findings suggest that young people's migration considerations are shaped by economic and non-economic factors in roughly equal measure, and that young people may consider migration as a way of pursuing future educational, professional, and lifestyle goals rather than simply as a rejection of their hometown.

The findings also indicate that migration may not necessarily represent permanent separation from the hometown. Respondents' willingness to return was notably split: 37.3% indicated they would definitely return; 33.3% indicated their return depended on circumstances, and 11.8% ruled out return entirely. The most frequently cited barriers to return lower salaries, a lack of suitable jobs, better opportunities elsewhere, and lower quality of life relative to the destination — closely mirrored the primary reasons for leaving. This alignment between the factors associated with leaving and those identified as barriers to returning suggests that the same perceived limitations may influence both migration intentions and willingness to return, and that non-return reflects an ongoing comparative assessment of opportunity rather than a rejection of the hometown itself.

However, the study does not establish that these factors directly cause migration or that improving them would automatically result in young people remaining or returning. The findings are based on the perceptions of 51 respondents, most of whom were school or college/university students. They therefore reflect anticipated migration intentions rather than confirmed long-term migration behavior.

Overall, the study suggests that addressing talented youth migration requires more than encouraging young people to stay. Policymakers, employers, educational institutions, and local stakeholders should work toward creating supportive hometown environments that provide meaningful employment, education, professional development, infrastructure, safety, healthcare, and quality of life. Such improvements may make remaining connected to or returning to a hometown a more realistic choice, without requiring young people to sacrifice their future opportunities.

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