

## **Psychosocial Drivers of Migration Intentions: Exploring Gender Dynamics and Workforce Implications for Generation Z in Sri Lanka**

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### **Abstract**

*This study explores the psychosocial drivers of migration intentions among Generation Z in Sri Lanka, emphasizing the roles of psychological factors, gender dynamics, and workforce implications. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews with 19 participants reveal that migration aspirations are shaped by self-improvement, emotional well-being, and exposure to global opportunities. Gender-specific insights indicate that women prioritize career growth and autonomy while managing societal constraints, whereas men focus on financial responsibilities. The findings also highlight dissatisfaction with local job opportunities and workplace inequities as significant push factors. These dynamics aggravate workforce challenges, including brain drain, further impacting the country's economic development. The study proposes actionable policy recommendations, such as fostering economic stability, enhancing gender-sensitive workplace policies, and aligning educational strategies with industry needs. By addressing these drivers, policymakers, educators, and businesses can collaboratively mitigate the adverse effects of migration and retain Sri Lanka's youth talent. Future research is encouraged to extend these findings, focusing on broader socio-economic and regional contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Generation Z, Gender dynamics, Migration intentions, Workforce implications, Sri Lanka, Brain drain.*

## **1. Introduction**

Migration, the movement of individuals from one country to another for temporary or permanent purposes, has become a prominent global phenomenon, particularly among younger generations. In the 21st century, migration has increasingly shaped global labor markets, cultural exchanges, and socio-economic dynamics. According to the International Organization for Migration (2022), over 281 million people live outside their country of origin, highlighting the growing importance of understanding migration trends. Among these, young people, particularly Generation Z—those born between 1995 and 2012 (Debczak, 2019)—play a pivotal role due to their distinct aspirations, digital literacy, and heightened awareness of global disparities.

The migration aspirations of Generation Z are significantly influenced by their exposure to digital connectivity and global narratives. As the first generation to grow up entirely in the digital age, their perceptions are shaped by instant access to information and peer-driven comparisons through social media platforms (Pepper, 2023). This exposure frequently increases the appeal of opportunities abroad, such as improved career prospects, higher living standards, and greater personal freedoms. For example, a study by The Economist (2021) highlighted that over 60% of young professionals in developing economies aspire to migrate for education and employment opportunities. Such trends underscore the global nature of migration and its critical relevance for youth. Moreover, Generation Z's ability to engage with diverse online communities has provided them with greater insights into disparities between their home countries and developed nations, further fueling their aspirations to migrate.

Sri Lanka, struggling with political instability and economic challenges, mirrors many of the migration drivers observed in other developing countries. For instance, nations like India and Bangladesh have also witnessed an increasing exodus of skilled youth due to limited job opportunities and socio-economic constraints (Ahmed et al., 2020). Similarly, in Nepal, youth migration has been driven by aspirations for financial stability and educational advancement, often resulting in significant brain drain (Shakya, 2022). These parallels provide a comparative lens through which Sri Lanka's migration patterns can be better understood. The shared experiences of young people across South Asia reflect a regional challenge that calls for coordinated policy interventions and targeted strategies to address youth migration.

Push and pull factors are fundamental to migration theories, shaping the decision-making process for migration. Push factors such as economic hardship, political instability, and inadequate local opportunities propel individuals to leave their home countries. In Sri Lanka, these challenges are further heightened by a prolonged economic crisis and political uncertainties, which disproportionately affect the youth (Weeraddana, 2023). Simultaneously, pull factors such as higher wages, improved career trajectories, and access to quality education in foreign countries act as significant attractors.

Similar trends are observable in neighboring countries like Pakistan, where youth cite employment and education as primary motivations for migration (Hussain et al., 2019). The interplay of these factors highlights the complexity of migration decisions, which are often shaped by both personal aspirations and structural constraints.

Generation Z's migration intentions are also influenced by gender dynamics and socio-cultural norms. Studies have shown that women, particularly in South Asia, often face unique barriers, including societal expectations and safety concerns, which shape their migration decisions differently from men (Kunnumbrath & Kodali, 2023). These gendered experiences are critical for understanding migration drivers in contexts like Sri Lanka, where traditional gender roles and societal pressures remain influential. For instance, women's migration decisions are often constrained by familial obligations and cultural expectations, while men may experience pressure to migrate as breadwinners. Addressing these gender-specific challenges requires a detailed understanding of how social norms intersect with economic and psychological factors to influence migration decisions.

Moreover, the interplay between individual aspirations and structural constraints highlights the complexity of migration decisions. Generation Z's desire for self-fulfillment and career growth is often at odds with the realities of limited local opportunities. For example, a survey conducted by the Asia Foundation (2022) found that 72% of young Sri Lankans perceived migration as a pathway to achieving their professional and personal goals. Such findings emphasize the urgency of addressing the underlying push factors while leveraging the potential of this demographic to contribute to local development. Additionally, the global competition for skilled youth emphasizes the need for policies that not only retain talent but also create opportunities for meaningful engagement within home countries.

Seeing in this manner, the research seeks to answer the questions, RQ 01: "What are the psychological and social factors influencing the migration intentions of Generation Z in Sri Lanka and RQ 02: "How do these factors vary by gender?" By addressing these research questions, the study renders several important contributions. Firstly, it advances the understanding of gender-specific migration drivers within the context of Sri Lanka, offering detailed insights into the interplay of societal pressures and individual aspirations. Secondly, it highlights the implications of these migration intentions for workforce sustainability, emphasizing the need for targeted retention strategies. Thirdly, it provides actionable recommendations for policymakers and businesses to address the root causes of migration, thereby reducing brain drain and fostering a more resilient workforce. Lastly, it enriches the global discourse on youth migration by presenting findings from a developing economy, contributing to the broader understanding of migration patterns in diverse socio-economic contexts.

## **2. Literature Review**

Migration as a global phenomenon has been studied extensively through various theoretical lenses. Push-pull models, such as those proposed by Lee (1966), highlight how socio-economic disparities between regions influence migration decisions. These models provide a foundational understanding of why individuals migrate, categorizing the factors that compel them to leave their home countries as push factors and the elements that attract them to host countries as pull factors. In the Sri Lankan context, these models remain relevant, as political instability and limited employment opportunities serve as prominent push factors, while better living standards and career prospects abroad function as key pull factors (Valiuniene, 2016). However, contemporary migration research increasingly emphasizes the importance of psychological and social drivers, which have received less attention in studies focusing on Sri Lankan youth. This gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive exploration of how these less tangible factors influence migration intentions, especially within distinct socio-cultural frameworks..

### **2.1 Psychological Factors Influencing Migration**

Personal aspirations, mental health, and emotional well-being have emerged as critical psychological motivators for migration. Castelli (2018) argues that migration decisions are often deeply intertwined with an individual's quest for self-fulfillment, stability, and personal growth. For Generation Z, whose values are shaped by exposure to digital media and global narratives, these factors are particularly salient (Pepper, 2023). This generation has grown up with unparalleled access to information, enabling them to compare their circumstances with those in developed countries instantly. Social media often amplifies the appeal of migration by portraying an idealized version of life abroad, fostering dissatisfaction with local living conditions. For instance, platforms like Instagram and LinkedIn allow individuals to showcase professional and personal successes, which can influence migration aspirations (Witte, 2024).

Moreover, mental health challenges, heightened by socio-economic instability, play a significant role in migration decisions. A study by Suciú and Florea (2017) emphasizes that youth in economically constrained regions often view migration as a pathway to escape stressors associated with local economic hardships. However, while studies highlight the psychological dimensions of migration, there is limited empirical evidence focusing specifically on Generation Z in developing economies like Sri Lanka. This gap underscores the importance of exploring how mental health, aspirations, and digital narratives intersect to shape migration intentions.

## **2.2 Gender Dynamics in Migration Intentions**

Gender plays a pivotal role in shaping migration decisions, with notable differences in motivations and barriers faced by men and women. Research by Kunnumbrath and Kodali (2023) highlights that women often prioritize safety, access to resources, and family well-being, while men are more likely to migrate for career advancement and economic responsibilities. In South Asia, cultural norms and societal expectations impose additional constraints on women, particularly in navigating restrictive laws and family obligations. In Sri Lanka, these dynamics are further compounded by traditional gender roles that often limit women's agency in making independent decisions about migration (Pingama, 2016).

The intersection of gender and migration is further influenced by global narratives. Women in developing countries increasingly perceive migration as a means to achieve empowerment and autonomy, often citing examples of female professionals thriving abroad (Ahmed et al., 2020). However, they face unique challenges, such as overcoming workplace discrimination and securing financial independence in foreign environments. Men, on the other hand, frequently experience societal pressure to migrate as breadwinners, reinforcing traditional patriarchal norms. Despite the global nature of these trends, there is a lacuna of research on how gendered migration dynamics specifically manifest within the socio-economic and cultural framework of Sri Lanka..

## **2.3 Workforce Implications of Youth Migration**

The migration of skilled youth has far-reaching implications for workforce dynamics. Docquier and Rapoport (2011) emphasize the phenomenon of brain drain, where the outflow of talent from developing economies hampers local development. In Sri Lanka, the migration of Generation Z exacerbates labor shortages in critical sectors while increasing dependency on remittances. For example, sectors such as healthcare and information technology have reported significant challenges in retaining skilled professionals, leading to gaps in service delivery and innovation (Weeraddana, 2023). This trend reflects a broader challenge faced by developing economies struggling to balance the benefits of remittances with the adverse effects of losing their most productive labor force.

Policy responses to address brain drain have included incentives to retain talent, such as offering competitive salaries and professional development opportunities. For instance, India has implemented returnee programs to encourage highly skilled migrants to reintegrate into the local workforce (Hussain et al., 2019). However, the effectiveness of such measures remains mixed, particularly in contexts like Sri Lanka, where economic and political instability deter long-term commitments from young professionals. Additionally, the intersection of gender and workforce implications remains underexplored, particularly in terms of designing policies that address the unique barriers faced by women in the labor market

## **2.4 Emerging Perspectives on Generation Z Migration**

Generation Z is distinguished by its technological proficiency and global awareness, traits that significantly influence migration intentions. This cohort's aspirations are shaped by their exposure to social media, which often portrays idealized versions of life abroad (Witte, 2024). Unlike previous generations, Generation Z is more likely to consider non-traditional pathways for migration, such as remote work opportunities and digital nomadism, reflecting their adaptability and entrepreneurial spirit. Studies such as those by Suci and Florea (2017) highlight how digital connectivity amplifies aspirations for better opportunities, particularly among youth in economically constrained regions.

Furthermore, Generation Z's migration intentions are often tied to their perceptions of quality of life and work-life balance. A study by Shakya (2022) found that young professionals in Nepal cited lifestyle aspirations and flexible working conditions as key motivators for migration. Similar trends are observable in Sri Lanka, where dissatisfaction with local workplace cultures and limited career growth opportunities drive migration aspirations. Despite these insights, there is limited empirical evidence on how these traits specifically drive migration intentions in developing economies like Sri Lanka. This highlights the need for research that captures the unique values and motivations of Generation Z, particularly in contexts characterized by economic volatility and cultural diversity.

Despite a growing body of literature on migration, several gaps persist in understanding the psychosocial drivers and workforce implications of migration among Generation Z in Sri Lanka. Firstly, there is a lack of gender-sensitive research that examines how societal pressures and personal aspirations intersect to shape migration intentions. Secondly, the implications of these migration patterns on workforce sustainability remain understudied, particularly in industries critical to Sri Lanka's development. Finally, existing studies often adopt quantitative approaches, leaving a gap in qualitative insights that capture the lived experiences and decision-making processes of young migrants. This study seeks to fill these gaps by exploring the psychosocial and gendered dimensions of migration intentions and their broader implications for Sri Lanka's labor market.

## **3. Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the psychosocial drivers of migration intentions among Generation Z in Sri Lanka, with a particular focus on gender dynamics and workforce implications. A qualitative design was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences and perspectives, allowing for a detailed exploration of the complex interplay between psychological, social, and economic factors driving migration intentions. The methodology encompasses detailed discussions on the population, sample, sampling technique, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations to ensure the rigor and relevance of the findings..

### **3.1 Population and Sample**

The target population comprised Generation Z individuals in Sri Lanka, specifically those aged 18 to 29 years in 2024. This age group represents individuals who are either entering the workforce or pursuing higher education, making them particularly relevant to the study's focus on migration intentions. This age group was selected due to their unique positioning as digital natives who are significantly influenced by global narratives, aspirations, and socio-economic challenges.

From this population, a sample of 19 participants was selected to ensure manageability and depth of analysis. The sample included individuals from diverse educational backgrounds (government university students, private university students, and working professionals) and different geographic regions, including urban and rural areas. This diversity was essential to capture the varied experiences and perspectives of Generation Z in Sri Lanka, particularly the differences in access to resources and exposure to global opportunities. A balanced representation of genders was ensured to capture gender-specific nuances in migration intentions, with 10 female and 9 male participants recruited for the study. The selection of participants also considered factors such as socio-economic status and family background to further enhance the richness of the data.

### **3.2 Sampling Technique**

Convenience sampling was employed due to its practicality and feasibility. This non-probability sampling technique allowed the researchers to recruit participants who were readily accessible and willing to share their experiences. While convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings, it enabled the researchers to gather valuable insights from a diverse group of participants within the constraints of time and resources.

To address potential biases associated with convenience sampling, efforts were made to recruit participants from varied socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Additionally, the researchers engaged in reflexivity throughout the study to minimize their influence on participant responses. By documenting and reflecting on their assumptions and interactions with participants, the researchers ensured that the findings authentically represented the participants' perspectives.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to allow flexibility and depth in exploring participants' migration intentions and the factors influencing their decisions. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their ability to provide a balance between structure and adaptability, enabling the researchers to explore predetermined themes while allowing participants to share additional insights.

An interview guide was developed to ensure consistency across interviews. The guide covered key themes such as psychological drivers (e.g., aspirations, emotional well-being), gender-specific influences (e.g., societal expectations, safety concerns), and workforce implications (e.g., career opportunities, job satisfaction). The development of the interview guide involved a review of existing literature to identify relevant themes and ensure alignment with the study's objectives. The guide was pilot tested with two participants to refine the questions and ensure clarity and relevance. Validity of the data was ensured through the design of an interview guide based on a comprehensive literature review, followed by validation by an expert panel comprising academics and professionals familiar with migration studies and qualitative methodologies. This process ensured that the questions were contextually relevant and captured the intended constructs. Pilot testing with two participants further enhanced content validity by refining the clarity and relevance of the questions. Reliability was maintained through thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke's framework, with peer debriefing sessions conducted to verify the consistency and credibility of the identified theme.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was conducted in Sinhala or English, based on the participant's preference. This multilingual approach ensured inclusivity and allowed participants to express themselves in their most comfortable language. Interviews were conducted in person or via video conferencing platforms, depending on participants' availability and preferences. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of the participants' narratives. The use of transcription software and manual verification ensured accuracy and completeness of the transcripts.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to analyze the data. This method was chosen for its systematic approach to identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. The analysis process involved several stages: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

Initially, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by repeatedly reading the transcripts and noting initial impressions. This was followed by the generation of initial codes to identify relevant features of the data. Codes were then collated into potential themes, which were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data. Key themes that emerged from the analysis included career aspirations, emotional well-being, societal pressures, and gendered motivations. Throughout the process, the researchers engaged in peer debriefing to enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings. This involved discussing the themes with other researchers to ensure that the analysis was rigorous and free from personal biases.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

Approval was obtained from participants prior to the commencement of the study, ensuring adherence to ethical research practices. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's objectives, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all participants through signed consent forms, which were available in Sinhala and English to accommodate language preferences.

Measures were taken to protect participants' confidentiality and anonymity. Pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and reports to ensure that participants could not be identified. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored in password-protected files, and only authorized researchers had access to the data. Additionally, the researchers were sensitive to the potential emotional impact of discussing migration intentions and ensured that participants were not subjected to distress. Participants were informed that they could pause or terminate the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable.

The researchers also adhered to ethical principles in data management and dissemination. All findings were presented in aggregate form to prevent identification of individual participants, and participants were offered the opportunity to review the findings to ensure their accuracy and fairness. By prioritizing ethical considerations throughout the study, the researchers upheld the integrity of the research process and ensured the well-being of the participants.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Psychological Drivers of Migration Intentions**

Participants highlighted aspirations for self-improvement, emotional well-being, and personal growth as critical motivators for migration. Male respondents often mentioned financial independence and achieving traditional milestones, such as owning a house or car. One participant expressed, *"I feel stuck here; achieving my dreams seems impossible unless I move abroad. The opportunities I need to progress just aren't available here. I've tried everything I can locally, but it's like hitting a wall every time."* This sentiment reflects the frustrations of young professionals who perceive migration as a pathway to financial and personal stability.

Women frequently emphasized career opportunities and escaping restrictive societal norms. For instance, one female respondent stated, *"Here, I can't explore my potential; abroad, I'll have freedom to grow, to pursue the career I've always dreamed of, without the constant judgment from society. Every decision I make here feels scrutinized; I want the chance to live for myself."* These findings align with Castelli (2018), who emphasizes that migration decisions are intertwined with personal aspirations and mental well-being. Moreover, psychological motivations among Generation Z are

amplified by their digital upbringing, which heightens awareness of global opportunities (Pepper, 2023).

Another participant, a university graduate, shared, *"Staying here feels like being in a loop with no progress. I see my friends who moved abroad—they're thriving, building careers, buying houses. It's hard not to compare and feel like I'm being left behind. It's not just envy; it's a realization that their environment offers possibilities that mine doesn't."* Such narratives emphasize the role of peer comparisons in shaping migration intentions. This aligns with broader findings that digital media fosters dissatisfaction with local conditions by portraying idealized lifestyles abroad..

#### 4.2 Gendered Motivations and Barriers

Distinct gender patterns emerged in the study. Male participants focused on economic stability and societal expectations, while women prioritized emotional well-being and safety. A female respondent noted, *"I feel trapped by societal expectations; moving abroad offers me freedom to be who I want to be without constantly having to prove myself to others. Here, I feel like I'm always fighting battles—whether at work or at home. Abroad, I imagine a fresh start."* This illustrates how migration is perceived as a means of escaping rigid societal norms and achieving personal autonomy.

Similarly, women reported facing family resistance, with one participant stating, *"My parents think migrating is unsafe for women. They worry about my safety, about what people will say, and whether I'll manage on my own. It's exhausting to constantly justify my decisions. I understand their concerns, but it feels like my dreams are being sidelined."* This highlights the added emotional burden faced by women in negotiating migration aspirations within traditional family structures. Conversely, men often felt familial pressure to succeed financially. One male respondent shared, *"I'm expected to provide for my family; migration seems necessary to meet those expectations. It's not just about me; it's about fulfilling what's expected of me as a son. My success reflects on my family, and that's a heavy weight to carry."*

This dichotomy emphasizes the influence of cultural norms on gendered migration dynamics, consistent with findings by Kunnumbrath and Kodali (2023). The intersection of gender and migration motivations reveals the complex ways in which societal expectations shape decisions, often reinforcing traditional roles and responsibilities. For women, migration offers liberation from societal constraints, while for men, it is often a means of fulfilling prescribed roles.

#### 4.3 Workforce Implications

Participants expressed dissatisfaction with local job opportunities, citing low wages and limited career progression. One respondent remarked, *"No matter how qualified you are, opportunities here are limited. I have a degree, but I'm stuck in a job that doesn't pay enough to cover basic expenses, let alone save for the future. Sometimes, it feels like my education was wasted because there's no platform*

*here to use it effectively."* This frustration highlights the structural challenges in Sri Lanka's labor market, which push young professionals to seek better prospects abroad.

Women reported concerns about workplace discrimination, with one participant stating, *"Even if you're qualified, you're not taken seriously. It's harder to climb the ladder as a woman here; it feels like the system is stacked against us. I've faced situations where my ideas were dismissed until a male colleague repeated them."* Men, on the other hand, emphasized financial instability, as reflected by a participant who noted, *"It's not just about earning more; it's about earning enough to feel secure. Staying here feels like being stuck in a cycle of uncertainty. Even when I earn, the rising costs make it impossible to plan for the future."*

These trends resonate with Docquier and Rapoport (2011), who highlight the workforce impact of skilled youth migration. The migration of Generation Z professionals exacerbates labor shortages in critical sectors, including healthcare and information technology, further straining Sri Lanka's economic development. Additionally, participants noted that migration often becomes a necessity rather than a choice due to the lack of support for professional growth within the country. One respondent summarized this sentiment: *"Migration isn't a luxury; it's survival. Staying here feels like stagnation."*

#### **4.4 Socio-Cultural Influences**

Social media emerged as a critical influence, with respondents describing it as a tool for showcasing idealized lifestyles abroad. *"Seeing my friends succeed abroad makes me want to try,"* shared one participant. *"They post pictures of their new jobs, their travels, their achievements. It's hard not to feel like I'm missing out by staying here. Their posts don't show the struggles, but they highlight the rewards, and that's what stays with you."* This reflects the role of social networks in amplifying migration aspirations by portraying success stories that highlight the perceived benefits of living abroad.

Family dynamics also shaped migration decisions, particularly for women facing resistance and men receiving encouragement to pursue financial success abroad. A male respondent noted, *"My parents see migration as an investment in the family's future. They encourage me to go, work hard, and send money back home. It's seen as a duty, not a choice."* Conversely, a female participant shared, *"Migration isn't just my decision; it's tied to what my family thinks is appropriate. Even if I want to go, their concerns hold me back. It's like my aspirations are secondary to their fears."*

These findings align with the work of Witte (2024), which emphasizes the role of social networks and family expectations in shaping migration aspirations. The interplay between socio-cultural influences and individual aspirations underscores the complexity of migration decisions, particularly in contexts where traditional values and global narratives coexist. Social media, combined with familial pressures,

creates a dual narrative of aspiration and obligation, shaping the migration landscape for Generation Z.

The findings illuminate the interplay between psychological, gendered, and socio-economic factors shaping migration intentions among Generation Z in Sri Lanka. Policymakers must address these drivers through targeted interventions, such as improving job opportunities, fostering inclusive work environments, and leveraging social media to highlight local success stories. By tackling these root causes, Sri Lanka can retain its youth talent and mitigate the adverse effects of brain drain. Furthermore, addressing the gendered dimensions of migration requires policies that empower women

## **4. Discussion**

### **5.1. Economic Stability and Employment Opportunities**

Policymakers should prioritize creating economic stability by introducing targeted programs to enhance employment opportunities for young professionals. A robust strategy would involve offering tax incentives for businesses that actively recruit local youth, particularly in sectors experiencing labor shortages. These incentives could include reduced corporate tax rates for companies that implement local hiring policies or establish skill development programs tailored to the needs of Generation Z. Additionally, the government can provide subsidies to industries that invest in training programs, apprenticeships, and internships, ensuring a seamless transition for young graduates entering the workforce.

Another critical aspect of economic stability is ensuring fair and competitive wages. Policymakers should establish mechanisms to monitor and enforce wage standards across industries, ensuring that employees are adequately compensated for their skills and efforts. Minimum wage laws should be regularly updated to reflect inflation and living costs, preventing financial dissatisfaction that often drives migration. Furthermore, the creation of employment insurance schemes can provide a safety net for young professionals, fostering confidence in the local labor market.

Policymakers should also focus on fostering entrepreneurship as a means to create new job opportunities. By offering financial support such as low-interest loans, grants, and start-up incubators, governments can empower young entrepreneurs to establish and grow businesses locally. These initiatives not only provide economic stability for individuals but also contribute to the overall economic development of the country. For instance, countries like India have successfully implemented youth-focused entrepreneurship schemes, such as the "Startup India" initiative, which could serve as a model for Sri Lanka. Moreover, the promotion of export-oriented industries can create additional opportunities for skilled professionals, aligning with global market demands and increasing economic resilience.

## **5.2. Educational Strategies**

Educational institutions have a vital role in shaping the aspirations and capabilities of Generation Z. Universities and vocational training centers should collaborate with industries to develop career-oriented programs that bridge the gap between education and employment. By aligning curricula with industry needs, institutions can equip students with practical, in-demand skills that enhance their employability within the local labor market. Internships, apprenticeships, and co-op programs should be integrated into academic frameworks to provide students with hands-on experience and professional networks.

A key focus should be on expanding STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and digital literacy. Policymakers and educators must work together to create specialized programs in areas such as data science, artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and advanced manufacturing. These fields not only have high global demand but also offer opportunities to retain talent within the country by establishing competitive local industries. Scholarships and funding programs should be introduced to encourage students from underrepresented backgrounds to pursue these fields, ensuring inclusivity and diversity.

Social media literacy programs should be introduced to educate students about the realities of migration and promote local success stories as viable alternatives to moving abroad. These programs can help young people critically assess the idealized portrayals of life abroad often seen on social media platforms. By highlighting the opportunities and potential for growth within Sri Lanka, these initiatives can counteract the allure of migration and foster a sense of pride and commitment to contributing to the country's development.

Additionally, policymakers should incentivize institutions to focus on research and innovation. Providing funding and resources for research projects that address local challenges can encourage students and academics to engage in meaningful work that contributes to the country's progress. Establishing partnerships between universities and local industries can further enhance the practical application of research outcomes, driving innovation and economic growth. Collaboration with international universities can also bring global expertise into the local education system, providing students with world-class learning experiences.

## **5.3. Business Innovations**

Businesses must foster a culture of innovation and inclusivity to attract and retain young talent. Providing competitive salaries, flexible working conditions, and clear career advancement pathways are critical strategies for addressing workforce dissatisfaction. Companies should implement policies that support work-life balance, such as remote work options and flexible hours, to align with the values

and preferences of Generation Z. These measures can significantly enhance job satisfaction and reduce the economic push factors that drive migration.

Investing in upskilling initiatives is another key strategy. Businesses should offer training programs, certifications, and mentorship opportunities that enable employees to enhance their skills and advance their careers. Special focus should be placed on empowering women and underrepresented groups by creating tailored programs that address the specific barriers they face in the workplace. By addressing skill gaps and creating pathways for professional growth, businesses can reduce the push factors that lead to migration.

Highlighting success stories of young professionals who thrive in local businesses can also counter the allure of migration. Companies should leverage their communication channels to showcase employees' achievements and contributions, demonstrating that meaningful and rewarding careers can be built within Sri Lanka. Additionally, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that focus on community development and youth empowerment can strengthen businesses' ties to local communities, fostering loyalty and reducing migration pressures.

To further attract talent, businesses should actively engage in public-private partnerships with educational institutions and government agencies. Such collaborations can lead to the development of industry-specific training programs, innovation hubs, and entrepreneurship support networks. These initiatives provide young professionals with the resources and opportunities they need to succeed locally, creating a robust ecosystem that supports talent retention.

Finally, businesses should explore opportunities to participate in global value chains, enabling employees to gain international exposure without leaving the country. By positioning themselves as globally competitive players, local companies can offer employees the chance to work on high-profile projects and collaborate with international teams, providing the professional growth and prestige often associated with migration..

## **5. Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This study highlights the need for further research to explore the intersectionality of migration drivers, considering variables such as regional disparities, educational levels, and socio-economic backgrounds. However, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The reliance on convenience sampling and a relatively small sample size may affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the self-reported nature of the data introduces potential biases that could influence the interpretation of migration intentions. Future studies should employ mixed-method approaches and larger, more representative samples to validate and extend the findings, offering deeper insights into migration trends among Generation Z in developing economies.

## 6. Conclusion

This study sought to explore the psychosocial drivers of migration intentions among Generation Z in Sri Lanka, with a specific focus on gender dynamics and workforce implications. The findings revealed that aspirations for self-improvement, emotional well-being, and personal growth were key psychological motivators, while societal expectations and restrictive cultural norms shaped gendered migration dynamics. Men were driven by financial responsibilities and societal pressures, whereas women emphasized career opportunities and autonomy. Additionally, dissatisfaction with local job opportunities and workplace inequities emerged as significant factors influencing migration intentions. These insights underscore the need for targeted interventions, as outlined in the recommendations, to create economic stability, promote inclusive educational strategies, and foster business innovations. By addressing the root causes of migration through collaborative efforts between policymakers, educators, and businesses, Sri Lanka can retain its youth talent and mitigate the adverse effects of brain drain. Future research should build on these findings to provide deeper insights into the evolving aspirations of Generation Z and inform sustainable development strategies tailored to the local context..

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