

# O PAPEL DOS ESCRITÓRIOS DE RELAÇÕES INTERNACIONAIS NO FENÔMENO DA FUGA DE CÉREBROS NO BRASIL

## THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OFFICES IN THE BRAIN DRAIN PHENOMENON IN BRAZIL

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**Resumo.** A globalização desempenha um papel crucial no processo de internacionalização da pesquisa, levando a um fenômeno de migração de profissionais altamente qualificados de um país para outro — a fuga de cérebros. O Brasil é um dos países que vivenciam os efeitos desse fenômeno, pois assiste à partida de trabalhadores altamente qualificados para o Norte Global. Este artigo busca iniciar uma discussão sobre o papel dos Escritórios de Relações Internacionais (ERIs) nas universidades federais do Brasil. O dilema central é que, embora os Escritórios de Relações Internacionais desempenhem um papel importante na formulação de estratégias para promover a internacionalização da pesquisa e da educação, suas ações podem contribuir involuntariamente para o fenômeno da fuga de cérebros. Atualmente, pesquisadores em início de carreira no Brasil enfrentam desafios como políticas governamentais inconsistentes, oportunidades limitadas de emprego e investimento insuficiente em educação e desenvolvimento de competências ao ingressarem no mercado de trabalho.

**Palavras-chave:** Fuga de cérebros. Escritório de Relações Internacionais. Diáspora acadêmica brasileira. Internacionalização.

**Abstract.** Globalization plays a crucial role in the process of internationalization of research, leading to a phenomenon of migration of highly qualified professionals from one country to another - the brain drain. Brazil is one of the countries that experience the effects of this phenomenon, as it witnesses the departure of highly qualified workers to the global North. This article aims to initiate a discussion on the role of International Relations Offices (IROs) in federal universities in Brazil. The central dilemma is that while International Relations

Offices play an important role in formulating strategies to promote the internationalization of research and education, their actions may unintentionally contribute to the brain drain phenomenon. Currently, aspiring researchers in Brazil face challenges such as inconsistent government policies, limited employment opportunities, and insufficient investment in education and skills development as they enter the job market.

**Keywords:** Brain Drain. International Relations Office. Brazilian academic diaspora. Internationalization.

## Introduction

The phenomenon of brain drain<sup>1</sup>, particularly from the Global South to the Global North, can be attributed in part to the globalization of research and the inadequate investment and infrastructure for scientific endeavors in low-income countries (Dodani & Laporte, 2005). Brain drain refers to the intentional or unintentional movement of skilled professionals from one country to another, increasing the recipient country's human capital (Mcgrath & Lempinen, 2021). These individuals seek to enhance research prospects and a better quality of life (Dodani & Laporte, 2005). Brain drain can have negative consequences for the country of origin as it represents a loss of human capital and expertise. It can lead to a shortage of skilled professionals in key sectors, hinder technological and economic development, and exacerbate social inequalities. Brain drain is typically seen as a challenge for developing countries that have difficulty retaining their best talent.

Brazil has gradually emerged as a source of highly skilled labor for research in developed nations (Martinez & Stallivieri, 2017). Given that a significant portion of research in Brazil is conducted in public Higher Education Institutions (HEI), it is imperative to retain the highly skilled professionals trained with public investment. We examine the role of International Relations Offices (IROs) at public HEI in Brazil. Recognizing that internationalization initiatives may inadvertently contribute to the brain drain phenomenon, we ask whether it is possible to internationalize Brazilian public HEI while retaining talent. Our professional and academic experience for over a decade, primarily in the Global South, suggest that brain drain is an undesirable externality of internationalization processes. We believe that IROs play a central role in facilitating brain drain by promoting internationalization within universities through the development of policies and programs that facilitate academic mobility and collaboration.

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<sup>1</sup> We acknowledge the term academic diaspora, although as this paper aims to discuss the negative consequences for the country of origin of academic mobility, we intentionally chose to use the word brain drain. Although we recognize the benefits that scientific diaspora also brings such as international collaboration and knowledge exchange and production.

## Discussion – IROs at HEI as catalysts for the Brain Drain

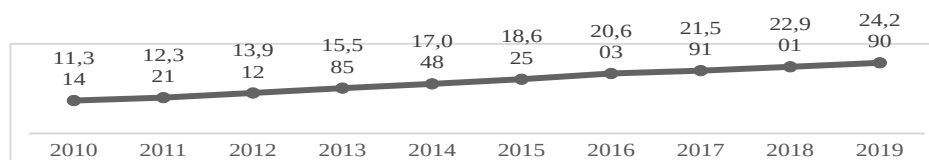
Over the past two decades, internationalization policies have gained prominence through initiatives such as the National Plan for Graduate Studies (PNPG) and institutional plans in universities (PDI), among others. Additionally, the emphasis on internationalization has influenced evaluations and rankings, impacting the allocation of funds in Brazil (Saes, 2020). The discussion on internationalization gained momentum with the Science without Borders program, leading to the establishment of the Capes-Print institutional internationalization program. This period witnessed a significant increase in academic mobility, particularly among undergraduate students (Martinez & Stallivieri, 2017). The outcomes of these internationalization policies are manifold, including an increase in international publications, co-authorships, and exchange programs.

IROs play a critical role in policy implementation by establishing networks, managing academic mobility, and creating opportunities for international collaboration, thus promoting the internationalization of HEI. Double degree programs, cotutelle, and international mobility, for example, serve as gateways to further study or employment abroad. However, they can also be a barrier to the return of highly qualified professionals to Brazil, as they offer students prospects for future employment and research abroad, providing a further incentive for them to leave Brazil.

The academic networks that have emerged as a result of the internationalization process have been used to showcase the skills of professionals and attract the most exceptional students to developed countries. In other words, HEI create networks of researchers that inadvertently encourage the brain drain. Once young scientists from the Global South are exposed to international communities where there are more resources, they may be enticed to stay abroad rather than return to their home countries. The highly qualified students who previously had short-term study abroad experiences are now choosing countries that are able to secure research investment and provide scholarship, even during economic crises and recessions. As Vessuri (2013) points out, international science exerts a centripetal force that draws researchers to centers with concentrated resources, effectively turning them into nomads. This trend is often fueled by the flexibility of graduate programs in recognizing and accepting degrees from other countries.

The question arises: How can internationalization be pursued without unintentionally encouraging the brain drain? The issue of brain drain from Brazil goes beyond research infrastructure or budgetary provision and is closely linked to the dynamics between professional training and the labor market. More than twenty thousand students obtain doctoral degrees each year in Brazil, as shown in Figure 01.

Figure 1: Number of PhD degrees awarded annually in Brazil from 2010 to 2019.



Source: MEC/Inep/DEED - Microdados do Censo da Educação Superior. By Todos Pela Educação.

The labor market for PhD holders is highly specific and requires a sufficient number of employment opportunities that allow these professionals to apply their knowledge and skills. In addition, a robust industry in Brazil that is actively engaged in research and development is critical. However, the national industry is still at an early stage in terms of research and development activities. To retain professionals who are about to leave the country, as well as those who have already left, cross-sector coordination and political will to invest are essential.

While Brazil is losing qualified people, there is no opening for foreigners, which could lead to a high skilled labor shortage in the future. Conversely, a survey conducted by Ferreira (2019) among foreign students registered on the Lattes platform revealed that the majority of respondents held a negative perception of Brazil, largely influenced by their experiences in the country. Brazil often serves as a steppingstone for skilled workers from less developed countries.

A profound debate is needed regarding the role of HEI in the Brazilian context. Should HEI focus on training professionals specifically for the domestic market or aim to produce the best professionals for the global stage? One possible solution is to prioritize "internationalization at home," especially in terms of personnel, including professors, technicians, and administrators. This approach ensures that HEI maintain global connections while remaining engaged in their local communities. At a recent internationalization meeting held at the Federal University of Paraná in Curitiba, the head of CAPES mentioned the committee's intention to develop measures to attract the scientific diaspora. The details of these measures are not yet known, but the challenge ahead is undoubtedly great.

## Conclusions

It is not our intention to condemn internationalization, but rather to encourage interdisciplinary reflection on the role of public HEI, funding agencies, the future of the scientific system, and the reassessment of the nature of internationalization. Reducing brain drain extends beyond research infrastructure and requires a focus on industrialization, job creation inside and outside academia, and ensuring adequate compensation for professionals. Coordinated internationalization strategies across different HEI functions and services are essential in our semi-peripheral context, as this path is irreversible.

In conclusion, the internationalization efforts promoted by IROs in Brazil have yielded both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, it has facilitated academic mobility, collaboration, and the growth of postgraduate programs and students within Brazil. However, it has also contributed to the phenomenon of brain drain of highly qualified professionals seeking better opportunities abroad. To address this issue, the government should prioritize policies that promote employment opportunities and investment in education and skills development. In addition, IROs should create incentives for highly skilled professionals to return to Brazil after their international studies.

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