

Edu, Professional

Cashing in on

By Rudina Xhaferri

ECONOMIC crisis hit some countries more than others for various reasons. One country's lost opportunity is the other's golden gate out of misery. Pakistan's strength rests in its young population.

While the industrialised countries of Europe and Japan are currently undergoing a negative population growth due to low birth rates, Pakistan has an estimated 36 million young people aged between 15 to 24 years. Alarming statistics regarding the aging population in Japan and its shrinking economy have increased the need for importing workers to run its industries.

Many European countries hope to utilise the "Blue Card" immigration visa programme to entice young skilled labour from developing countries. Such increasing demand for professional and skilled manpower is a unique opportunity for Pakistan's development. A faster adaptation to and better knowledge of the language and customs of the host country are crucial to the wellbeing and satisfaction of thousands of workers and their families that decide to work overseas.

Preparing the workforce for life abroad

It takes lots of courage to move to a foreign country seeking a better life and better opportunities. The pressure and challenges are even greater for those that decide to take their families along. While there are many private organisations that facilitate some legal and procedural processes for workers and their families moving overseas for a hefty fee, they do not prepare their clients for what the new life will be like. They undertake only the responsibility of getting the workers abroad and after that, they wish them good luck. However, leaving it to chance is not enough.

For many workers and their families that find work abroad, there are many difficulties with cultural differences, a language barrier, and legal issues in the foreign countries. Many workers get mistreated and taken advantage of with long hours and bad conditions in the work place. Without knowledge of the language or the legal system, an abused worker would not know where to go or whom to complain. It takes a long time to

adapt and gain familiarity with the new country even in the best case scenario.

As technology becomes more advanced each year and new technological tools are introduced in communication, planning and production, acquiring new skills becomes a necessity for job survival in today's knowledge-based economy. New opportunities are

ment chances as well as their success rate in maintaining jobs through short and long-term training. This goal may be achieved by two key institutional components, a manpower export institute and a national career management centre. A manpower export institute could provide complete training to the workers going overseas. A linguistic and



offered to those who seek them and are able to learn and adapt quickly.

For workers looking for better opportunities abroad, mastering new techniques and skills as quickly as possible is an essential part for their progress. To gain skills such as using a computer or new software, workers must first be equipped with basic language skills. They must be able to communicate properly at their workplace to understand and comply with the rules and regulations.

There is currently no institution in Pakistan that offers such vital information or facilitates for the cultural transition of workers moving to foreign countries. To fill this need, an institution along the lines of a manpower training university should be established. Such a university may tap into the great potential of graduates and workers in Pakistan and increase their existing employ-

cultural training course would be provided to qualified trainees to inform them about their future living and working environments. Such an institute would provide a comprehensive programme including language instruction taught by native speakers, a culture and custom guide, and courses on basic and relevant legal issues, a history of the host country, basic computer skills and other business communication methods as deemed necessary by the employers and the trainers. Qualified trainers could be provided by the foreign embassies of host countries, their respective governments, hosting employment companies, international organisations, and other relevant parties.

The goal of a manpower export institute would be to provide workers with the necessary language, cultural, business and legal background to facilitate their successful

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transition into life abroad. By conducting training and internship programmes, an institution of this nature may be able to better prepare employees who will lead successful lives in host countries. In addition, understanding other cultures greatly enhances international relations and creates more favourable working conditions for employees

an urgent need in Pakistan for guidance and career management services.

Selecting a successful professional career is not an easy task for many students. Career counselling programmes in schools that assist students to identify their strengths, interests, and opportunities, are scarce in Pakistan. Decisions on undergraduate or professional schools are usually influenced by the family without taking students' talents into consideration. Career counselors can offer expert advice that can lead to better-informed choices for students. They facilitate communication among students, parents and teachers, making it easier for a student to select the right course of study in preparing for a career. Effective career guidance and services can enhance job placement and satisfaction, reduce changing of jobs, the cost associated with it, and increase job stability. Career counseling centres in schools raise an individual's ambitions, by providing complete information and easy access to services.

Therefore, perhaps as a part of the aforementioned manpower training university, a national career management centre could provide a much-needed private-public partnership between educational institutions and employers. The purpose of such a centre would be to organise career guidance and management courses to help students successfully manage the job search process through individual advising sessions, workshops providing advice on finding a job and communication workshops that train them in interviewing and presentation skills.

In addition a centre could organise outreach opportunities with companies, government agencies and not-for-profit organisations. Equipped with a career management library and database, this centre would be able to offer informational resources for job searches, such as company profiles and other national and international employment resources, as well as helping students to put together a resume. Forums, workshops and meetings with career advisers could provide guidance and host guests and speakers from

the business and corporate world to facilitate networking opportunities. A career management centre would be able to provide career-related materials including general information, industry-specific information, and specialised resources. Under its auspices, workshops and coaching in all aspects of the career management process could take place: self-assessment, market assessment, job search skills and tools, and negotiation strategies. Career management specialists may assist trainees to shape their resume and cover letter as effective job search tools.

Federal and local governments must encourage and support public-private partnership initiatives that aim towards workforce empowerment. An example of a successful public-private partnership at work is the Institute for Advancing Careers and Talents, a non-profit vocational and technical education centre in Karachi. Established in 2008 in Malir by the Habib University Foundation in collaboration with City District Government of Karachi, this institute offers certificate courses that last from three to six months in emerging markets such as textiles, information technology, calling centres and the retail store industry (www.iact.org.pk).

It is not impossible to find innovative ways to improve the economy in critical times. One way is to tap and coordinate existing resources to maximize their potential. For Pakistan, there are many unique opportunities that can be used to benefit individuals, alleviate poverty in the country, and even to improve the nation's relations with the world. The establishment of forward looking educational institutions such as a manpower training university and its two components, a manpower export institute and a national career management centre are timely and much-needed projects to help improve Pakistan's economy. ■

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Providing opportunities in the home country

The recent graduates that decide to work within Pakistan have their own career-related challenges. The quality of education and training offered to students falls considerably short of the expectations and needs of future employers. It is therefore crucial for Pakistan to revise the quality of its education system and implement efficient training programmes to enable students to become better and more quickly employed, and also to remain employed (see "Tailor-made education", *Dawn*, February 24, 2008). The teaching and training of students must aim to create knowledge and skills that will enhance their chances of finding jobs on their own in a globalised society. In addition to improving the quality of education, there is

