

## **Mainstreaming Highly Skilled Migration into Development: the case of the Republic of Moldova**

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### **Abstract**

*Following the process of globalization, human capital has turned into a major driver of economic growth and countries around the world are up in a global race for “best and brightest”. The countries of origin of highly skilled migrants (HSMs), such as Moldova, represent a country where the impact of skilled migration on development are new issues on the public agenda. HSMs could become the spillovers of development if a state succeeds to implement effective political, social and economic reform, creating a favorable domestic enabling environment for returnees.*

*Key words:* globalization, highly skilled migration, mainstreaming, development, return and reintegration, Republic of Moldova, push and pull factors

### **1. Introduction**

Today, it is estimated that about 60 percent of the world's 214 million international migrants, as defined by the UN, are in the 30 developed or industrial countries that have a sixth of the world's residents and account for 70 percent of global economic output. (Philip, 2012, p. 16). Some 30 per cent of international labour migrants are skilled persons (CODEV-EPFL, 2013, p. 7). Human capital has turned into a major driver of economic growth and countries around the world are up in a global race for “best and brightest” (Czaika and Parsons, 2015, p. 5; Wiesbrock and Hercog, 2012, p.1).

Globalization and the advent of the knowledge economy have created a new context and offer new concepts and perspectives where highly skilled workers and entrepreneurs are in great demand. Their mobility and nexus with development, as well as challenges and opportunities of these processes are increasingly being scrutinized by both academics and policy makers (Tejada et al, 2013, p. 161; Li and Lo, 2012, p.1; CODEV-EPFL, 2013, p. 7; Habti, 2012, pp. 1-3; Wiesbrock and Hercog, 2012, p. 1; Jackson, 2012, pp. 20-21).

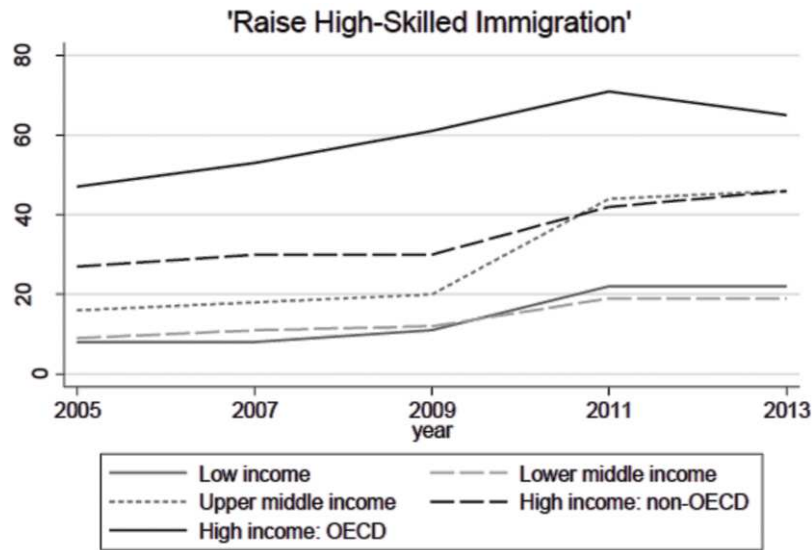
As a result, many industrialised countries are changing their policies in order to become more “attractive” for highly skilled migrants (HSMs) (Wiesbrock and Hercog, 2012, p. 1; Philip, 2012, p. 16). Host Governments increasingly express a preference for (top-earning) high-skilled immigrants, since they are widely perceived as net

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contributors to host societies, being economically advantageous, which in turn makes it easier for politicians to pacify anti-immigrant sentiment among voters, making immigration also politically acceptable (Rapoport et al, 2012, p. 1; Parsons et al, 2014, p. 14). Following Czaika and Parsons, as shown in Figure 1, even more countries are now engaging in the intense global competition to attract internationally mobile human capital, by redesigning their immigration regimes, thereby leading to a diffusion of high-skilled migration policies globally (Czaika and Parsons, 2015, p. 6).

**Figure 1. Government policy objectives on high-skilled migration, (% of countries) (Population Division)**



Source: Czaika and Parsons, 2015, p. 6.

Highly skilled migration encourages interconnections, including through diaspora networks, between home and host countries allowing the transfer of various resources such as skills, knowledge, technology, business and entrepreneurial investment, training, education and research collaborations that reinforce local capacities, inflow of social capital, financial remittances, venture capital, through networks established in the host countries, increased work ethic, stimulation of political debate, the strengthening of civil society through sustaining local organizations, promoting democratization, the enabling and encouraging of education for non-migrants, resolving some structural/infrastructural constraints by a collective action, small-scale contributions to local development, the emancipation of women and minority groups in countries of origin, “productive human relationships” (Ammassari, 2009, pp. 4-5) and, of course, eventual physical return to the home country (De Haas, 2006, p. 1; Tejada et al, 2013, p. 158; CODEV-EPFL, 2013, p. 6; Ammassari, 2009, pp. 4-5; Lowell and Gerova, 2004; Corrêa d'Almeida, 2008, p.1; Kōu et al, 2015, p. 1646).

Following the strong interlinkage between return migration and development,

the return phenomenon in all its spectrum of manifestations has gained momentum in recent years. However, there is still a shortage of conclusive studies of the specific conditions that facilitate a positive impact of return migration onto development (CODEV-EPFL, 2013, p. 6). For example, beyond possible family reasons there are social (age, level of education, professional expertise, lifestyle, occupational status and monetary resources, social mobility aspirations for offspring, social relationships and networks, etc.), cultural (religion, ethnicity, gender relations, etc.) and political factors determining migrants' decisions to return or not to return back home. Moreover, return migration does not always imply an easy reintegration into the original context; migrants who come back usually encounter difficulties in readapting and dealing with contradictory feelings concerning their place of origin and their chosen country(ies) of emigration (Ammassari, 2009, p. 5), their simultaneous knowledge of and involvement in two or more societies, which make them a potentially effective link between wealthy and poor countries (De Haas, 2006, p. 2). Anyway, these tendencies have coincided with a growing aspiration among government and development agencies to go “beyond remittances” and to support migrants' individual and collective transnational engagement in origin country development, or to 'mobilise' migrants for development cooperation (De Haas 2006, p. 3).

On another pole of discourse on migration and development, the countries of origin of HSMs, such as the Republic of Moldova (RM), represent countries where the impact of skilled migration on development and the role of transnational networks of its nationals are new issues on the public agenda. In Moldova, the mass emigration of skilled human capital, due to severe economic crises and long periods of political turbulence, is a tough challenge that has hindered the advancement of science, research and innovation since independence. Therefore, it appears crucial to address the brain drain challenge in both research and policy discussions about the relationship between migration, transnationalism and development (Tejada et al, 2013, p. 158).

Summarizing the above mentioned, the purpose of this research project was to conduct evidence and knowledge based analysis and to explore the nexus between return HSMs and home country development.

The major objectives of the study were:

- a) To identify the determinants of migration of Moldovan HSM;
- b) To analyze the development impact of highly skilled return migration in the RM;
- c) To formulate specific policy recommendations to maximize development impact of highly skilled migration on home country development.

The research tended to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the main determinants, challenges and opportunities of migration of highly skilled Moldovans abroad?
2. What could be the main determinants for return of Moldovan HSM and their overall potential impact on the development of homeland? How could the return Moldovan highly skilled migrants be better reintegrated in their community/society?
3. What practical recommendations, concrete actions and policies can be formulated to maximize the potential beneficial impact of return highly skilled to development in Moldova?

The extensive research activity occurred in the period September, 14th 2015 – January, 15th 2016, whereas the data collecting phase was carried in the period November, 23 – December, 10th 2015.

The research paper was focused on such research approaches, as analysis of secondary sources of data, such as review of the existing academic literature, policy documents, statistical data, empirical and analytical materials; qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews. The qualitative research approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the complexities of migration decision-making beyond economic thinking, opening up space for including human agency and socio-cultural context (Kõu et al, 2015, p. 1657), and contributing to a better understanding of the possible drivers and hindlers related to decision of a HSM to return to the country of origin and, therefore, having a significant impact on countries development; quantitative data was collected through a questionnaire, targeting Moldovan returned HSM. In all four sections of the questionnaire, there was a mix of both closed and open ended questions in order to offer respondents enough space to provide some qualitative responses whenever required.

#### Moldovan highly-skilled migration: main characteristics and tendencies

From the very beginning, it is worth mentioning that as many different dimensions of labor migration are frequently analyzed in Moldovan scientific research such as positive and negative consequences of migration; remittances; employment of migrants; demographic questions (age, gender, professional-educational, territorial and regional, ethnic) and socio-psychological, cultural and linguistic aspects of migration; youth questions; the legal and social protection of labor migrants; the state of poorly protected social groups (children, the elderly / seniors); Moldovan policies on labor migration (Mosneaga, 2015, p. 7). However, there are few available analytical studies that examine the determinants of migration of highly skilled Moldovans abroad and the development impact of return HSMs in the RM. This subject has not been sufficiently researched yet, though there are several studies, which cover different aspects of highly skilled migration and development nexus.

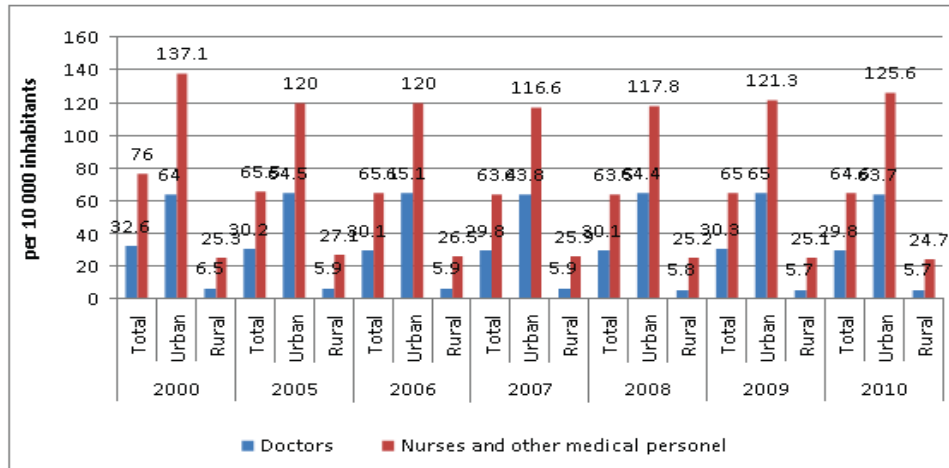
From the perspective of main characteristics of Moldovan highly skilled migration, it is necessary to mention that, since proclaiming its independence on 27 August 1991, RM has gone through several migratory periods distinguishable along factors such as push and pull factors, level of prevalence of migration, direction and composition of migratory flows, and duration and legal status of migrants' stay in host countries. Starting with the turn of the century, migration progressively increased to significant proportions compared to the population. (Burdelni et al, 2013, p. 26).

The main push factors for Moldovan skilled migrants, as for the rest of Moldovan labor migrants, are of economic nature: poverty, lack of adequate employment opportunities and low salaries, improved career prospects, further education and scientific advancement, the search for further training abroad, new research methodologies and to access modern infrastructure (Burdelni et al, 2013, p. 26), poor scientific and career options, a low quality of life, while higher living standards abroad (Tejada et al, 2013, pp. 168-169), act as a pull factor. However, in case of Moldovan skilled migrants, the determinants of social and political character play also an important role as push factors, namely political and economic instability in the

country (Tejada et al, 2013, p. 164); desire to secure a future that cannot be found in RM for either the migrants or their children (Burdelnii et al, 2013, p. 153). These determinants could be explained, in opinion of Olsen, by the fact this part of population is particularly sensitive to bad governance, when “they find the human rights/governance situation in their home country unacceptable. This can have many forms: honest civil servants refusing to be corrupted; lack of freedom to speak one's mind, especially for civil servants; and promotions based on unprofessional criteria”. Moreover, as Bozoki rightly put it, the most talent leaves a country because the present social elite in their domicile countries have emerged from the turbulence of transition often tainted with corruption and a wild, non-ethical capitalism, which created an “oligarchic” concept of state management that cannot be attractive. In this context, the brain drain phenomenon could be interpreted as avoidance of direct social conflict and some kind of silent revolution by those who want to be valued according to their merits and not 'managerial' capabilities that can be perceived as the base for implementing false-transition (Burdelnii, 2010, pp. 134-135).

It should be mentioned in this regard that push factors in Moldova are stronger than pull factors in destination countries, because the home-country context is the main catalyst behind skilled Moldovans deciding to emigrate. Skilled Moldovans mainly choose their destinations based on opportunities offered and less because of geographical and cultural proximity or a shared language (Tejada et al, 2013, p. 164). For instance, public investment in science and technology fell drastically between 1990, when it was 0.73% of GDP, and 2000, when it was only 0.18% of GDP. Science, research and innovation activities suffered major degradation due to a lack of proper funding, adequate wages and up-to-date infrastructure. At a management level, the methods of organizing science remained conservative and the legislative framework had a regressive rather than a stimulating character. As a result, the scientific potential of Moldova fell by 83% in 15 years, dropping from 30,000 scientific researchers in the early 1990s to less than 5000 in 2004. By 1 January 2011, the country had only 5216 employees registered in the research and development R&D area (Tejada et al, 2013, p. 160). Due to low salaries and poor working conditions, more than 12,000 health workers left the health system from 1996 to 2000. About 82 per cent consisted of mid-level medical workers. Consequently, the level of doctors' staffing dropped 14.3 per cent and that of secondary health personnel by 21 per cent. The staffing level for doctors is 29.8 per 10,000 inhabitants, and 64.5 secondary health workers with secondary education. This is a little bit under the EU average level, at 32.3 and 77.5 per 10,000 inhabitants, respectively. Another problem refers to the uneven distribution of health personnel by areas of residence, the number being eight times higher in urban areas (63.7 doctors per 10,000 inhabitants) as compared to rural areas (5.7 doctors per 10,000 inhabitants) (Burdelnii et al, 2013, p. 150).

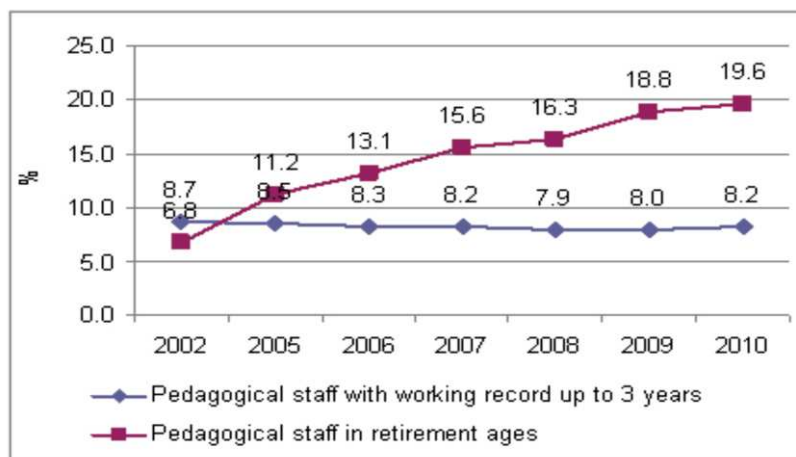
**Figure 2. Distribution of health personnel by areas of residence**



Source: Burdelnii et al, 2013, p. 150

Migration of personnel from the Moldovan education system led to a worsening in the teaching process. Due to unattractive salaries, which are among the lowest in the national economy, about 9,400 teachers left the educational system during 2005–2010. Statistical data shows that the share of young teaching personnel in the education sector has been decreasing, while the share of those reaching retirement age is continuously increasing. During 2002–2010, the share of teaching personnel of retirement age has tripled, increasing from 6.7 per cent to 19.6 per cent, and the share of young teaching personnel declined from 8.7 per cent to 8.2 per cent (Burdelnii et al, 2013, p. 150).

**Figure 3. Share of young and old teaching personnel in general education system**



Source: Burdelnii et al, 2013, p. 150

Additionally, the increasing number of higher education graduates competing for scarce positions is an important push factor forcing skilled Moldovans to search for options abroad. A relatively recent OECD (2012) study shows that 56% of people aged between 15 and 24, and 37% of those with a third level education would leave permanently if they had the opportunity (Tejada et al, 2013, p. 160).

Therefore, we agree with the experts Tejada et al that the skilled migration from Moldova may be understood as the result of individual strategies established to improve personal conditions at both a professional and private level. The families back in Moldova view their departure with a sense of pride for having accomplished their professional or educational project abroad. The emigration process is seen as an achievement, and parents prefer to see their children depart and succeed abroad rather than remain dissatisfied at home under precarious conditions (Tejada et al, 2013, p. 164).

However, it should be mentioned that the „brain waste” phenomenon is characteristic to Moldovan skilled migration. Moldovan migrants incur high rates of human and social capital depreciation. With the exception of those with technical or vocational training, they are rather unlikely to work in similar occupational categories as their skills tend to be specific to their home country and are not internationally portable. In addition, those higher up in the social pecking order in Moldova are unlikely to retain their social status when they migrate abroad. This deters some people and makes migration more selective (Porcescu et al, 2014, pp. 19-20). The data from the European Training Foundation survey on returning migrants show that in Moldova, more than 60 percent of the highly educated returning migrants had worked abroad as unskilled labor (Sabadie, 2010, p. 46). According to a World Bank's survey, about a third of professionals and managers reported that they expected to work at a lower skills level if they migrated to the EU (Sabadie, 2010, p. 50). Here it looks like, that much brain waste in Moldova is a product of post-communist transition with migration channelling abroad “brains” not much demanded at home (Porcescu et al, 2014, p. 18).

1. Problems of return and reintegration of the highly skilled migrants to the Republic of Moldova

From the very beginning, it is necessary to mention that there are no specific numbers of Moldovan labor migrants who returned to Moldova (not mentioning highly skilled ones). The most common answer is 1,000 persons (according to the Ministry of Labor Social Protection and Family of Moldova), while less frequently the number of 2,000 persons is mentioned (IOM data). According to expert Mosneaga, it is unlikely that any of these numbers is reliable, since both are too "rounded-up", and also due to the lack of adequate methodology (Mosneaga, 2013, p. 1). Aside from this, unfortunately, we have not found any definite data concerning the number of returned HSMs in Moldova that, in our opinion, could point to the fact that either the number of returned highly skilled migrants is minor, or this subject does not represent a focus for any comprehensive research yet. We were able to identify just few specific studies, covering the eventual motives of return of Moldovan highly skilled or skilled migrants back to the country. Therefore, this area of research requires any further scientific and analytical exploration.

According to the research team, led by Tejada, the students are the most likely to

return to Moldova (47%), followed by scientists and researchers (35%) and finally by professionals (28%). In overall terms, skilled Moldovans are willing to contribute to Moldova's progress, but are discouraged by the attitude of the Moldovan government, which they feel is not interested in engaging them in development efforts, and also by the hostility of Moldovan society towards scientists abroad. Migrants' deliberate hesitation is significant when they are uncertain about the chances that the future will offer them. Accordingly, the group of experts, conducted by Tejada concludes that the mobility behavior of international students changes according to the opportunities available and perceptions of the environments in the host and home countries, as well as in third countries. The intentions of students to return and those actually doing so may increase if they believe Moldova can offer them a safe and trustful environment with a specific career and future prospects (Tejada et al, 2013, p. 168-169). These peculiarities should be taken into account while designing future return policies, addressed Moldovan HSMs abroad.

Over the past ten years, the Government of Moldova drafted and implemented a series of migration-related reforms in order to maximize the position impact of migration on development in the country, as well as to minimize its negative impact. The focus of policy interventions has shifted from the migration control to exploring new global approaches towards diaspora and migration as key elements for development, according with the vision promoted by some international institutions, such as the World Bank, UN, IOM and European Commission (National Strategy “Diaspora-2025”).

The GoM recognized the need for a coordinated and integrated approach to manage migration through the National Development Strategy 2012–2020, which was adopted by Parliament on 11 July 2012 (Vremis, 2012). Broadly speaking, the National Strategy of the Republic of Moldova for Migration and Asylum (2011–2020) and the related Action Plan for 2011–2015 for its implementation aim at ensuring a comprehensive regulatory management of migration and asylum policies. These documents intend to integrate the existing strategic frameworks in this field and mainstream the policies into different strategic planning actions (in the field of education, health, social inclusion, etc.).

The Strategy reflects the efforts of national migration policies towards compliance with the EU's Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, by covering all of its four areas: promoting legal migration, fighting irregular migration, fostering migration for the development of the country and ensuring the right of asylum (Vremis, 2012).

Reintegration and return of Moldovan migrants represent one of the elements present in national legislation. A number of activities have been implemented, such as the PARE 1+1, Programme and National Economic Empowerment Programme for Youth (PNAET), which foresees training in entrepreneurial skills as well as financial assistance for business start-ups. In addition, activities aimed at improving the system for the recognition of skills and qualifications (i.e. National Concept of validation of the informal and non-formal learning, approved in November 2011), and strengthening the local labor market have been implemented, including in the context of the EU–RM Mobility Partnership. The return and retention of Moldovan migrants remains a major



policy objective that is clearly stipulated in the National Strategy of the Republic of Moldova for Migration and Asylum 2011–2020 and the related Action Plan for 2011–2015 (Vremis, 2012).

Action Plan for the years 2014-2016 on supporting reintegration of citizens returning from abroad, approved by Government Decision no. 339 dated 20 May 2014 (Action Plan for the years 2014-2016) is directed to accomplishment of such objectives, as: creating and improving institutional framework on supporting reintegration of citizens returning from abroad; supporting economic reintegration of returned Moldovan citizens through information and counseling; fostering migrants' entrepreneurial culture with the aim of attracting their remittances in the national economy, etc.

Collaboration with diaspora and associations of Moldovan citizens abroad is also important in the context of migrants' return and reintegration. Dialogue with diaspora is the foundation for the programs of attraction and investment of remittances in the economy and social-economic reintegration of migrants. Currently the emphasis is placed upon the protection of Moldovan citizens abroad, the preservation of cultural authenticity, and the stimulation of migrants' return home. In this regard, the Action Plan for support of nationals of the Republic of Moldova residing abroad (Moldovan diaspora) for 2006-2009, the National Action Plan for 2008 for the Protection of the Citizens of the Republic of Moldova abroad, and the Action Plan for National, Cultural, and Social Support of Moldovan Diaspora in 2012-2014, could be mentioned (Mosneaga, 2013, pp. 4-5).

Following the Government of Moldova's policy regarding the relations with the Diaspora and the cooperation with the international partners in the field of migration and development, the Prime Minister's Decree nr. 58-d (of June 7th 2013) creates the framework for the implementation of the “whole-of-Government” approach in the field of DMD (Diaspora, Migration and Development). The Decree stipulates the appointment of Diaspora Focal Points in the line Ministries and State Agencies on a decision-making (Vice minister or Deputy Director) and technical level (Head of Division) in coordination with the Diaspora Relations Bureau (State Chancellery). The main objectives of the framework are: to ensure the consolidation of the institutional capacities regarding the implementation of the State policies regarding the cooperation with the Diaspora; to ensure the efficient interaction between the governmental institutions via a horizontal integration (mainstreaming) of their responsibilities; to implement the transversal and integrated approach (“whole-of-government”) in the field of diaspora policy making, with each participating institution (with an appointed Diaspora Focal Point) responsible of Diaspora, Migration and Development topics within the limits of its mandate (Prime-Minister's Decree nr. 58-d).

With the aim of developing a sustainable and comprehensive framework for cooperation between the state and the Diaspora, based on trust and joint initiatives aimed at facilitating productive options for returning diaspora, the GoM approved National Strategy “Diaspora-2025” and Action Plan for the years 2016-2016 on its implementation (Government Decision no. 200) on 26 February 2016 (National Strategy “Diaspora-2025”). Some of its objectives, specifically 3 and 4, indirectly cover the issue of return of skilled migrants, namely facilitating the procedure of

recognition of remote academic and professional qualifications through the development of information system “Authentication, legalization and recognition of the educational documents”; capacity building of diaspora associations, communities and networks of excellences; recognizing and promoting outstanding and excellent merits of Diaspora members, etc.(National Strategy “Diaspora-2025”).

However, in Moldova, despite a solid institutional set-up and legal framework laying down a comprehensive basis for an efficient migration management system, migration policies are managed by a variety of government regulations and legislative instruments that give birth to the appearance of duplications and conflicts. Strategies and action plans are occasionally overlapping rather than complementary, lack fully developed mechanisms and capacities for monitoring and evaluation, do not tackle migration in a comprehensive way, or provide a clear answer to important questions such as how to maximize migration's benefits and reduce negative social effects. Migration processes are included in specific contexts without fully being mainstreamed in the field of employment and improvement of remuneration for labour, education, health and social protection (Vremis et al, 2012, p. 210). All these statements are relevant to the problems of return of Moldovan HSMs.

According to the results of the IASCI/ CIVIS survey, returning migrants often face problems of reintegration, because of the following reasons:

- Underdeveloped “enabling environment” in the country for launching proper business, due to the lack of access to information and violation of the "rules of game" by the state agencies;
- Adaptation of children who grew up and received education in a foreign country. They had difficulties adapting abroad, and it can be difficult for them to return to their home country. The key problem is knowledge of the language, for the purposes of both communication and study;
- Problems of adaptation to social conditions in Moldova due to the underdeveloped household infrastructure, the existing level of medical services, etc. It should be taken into consideration that while the economic reasons are the main reasons driving a person into labor migration, a person's decision to return could be determined by other factors of societal character. The latter include everyday life, transportation, streetlights, roads, prices, and wages, combating corruption and bureaucracy, taxation, administrative, official actions, an unfavorable environment for functioning of small business, freedom of movement in and out of country, and a visa-free regime. All of this can be generalized in one common notion - an efficiently functioning democratic political system, social state, and developed civil society. Therefore, it is necessary to create the conditions for the return of migrants, if there is a favorable investment climate and reasonable government policy, which takes the needs and the requirements of migrants into consideration (Mosneaga, 2013, pp. 6-7).
- Family issues. Years of migration weaken marriages and family relations. Hence, it is important to provide support in restoring interaction and emotional relationships with relatives, children and parents, etc. (Mosneaga, 2013, p. 5).
- Professional adaptation problems. Repatriates will have to work in Moldova for wages that are significantly lower than those abroad are. This affects the welfare

of the family. It should be taken into consideration that while abroad, Moldovan labor migrants mostly have not been employed according to their training (construction is the most common exception), and have engaged in unskilled labor, losing skills and the profession acquired back home. Thereafter, it is difficult for them to find a job corresponding to their qualifications and training. Taking up employment of an unskilled worker is unprofitable in Moldova (Mosneaga, 2013, p. 5).

Furthermore, the knowledge and skills acquired abroad cannot always be applied in the home country. Currently, Moldova is undertaking certain steps for the recognition of skills and qualifications acquired while working abroad and not certified by any relevant official documents. Another important aspect is that in order to find a well-paid job, one should have access to information, which is mainly available through social connections and informal contacts. The question remains to what extent a person who has just come back home after a long stay abroad have access to such contacts, and whether the Moldovan state can assist its citizens with this issue. Perhaps, according to Moldovan expert Mosneaga, a solution to the employment dilemma can be found via the development of business and small entrepreneurship by the returnees whose finances and energy could improve the situation on the domestic labor market. A wide range of measures and well-developed mechanisms for their implementation is necessary to make it happens (Mosneaga, 2013, p. 6).

Summarizing key issues related to return and reintegration of Moldovan migrants, including highly skilled ones, according to experts' opinions, Moldovans citizens are not sufficiently informed about the existence of institutional programmes that the GoM has recently implemented to engage skilled Moldovans abroad (Tejada et al, 2013, p. 169; Mosneaga, 2013, pp. 4-5). The main reasons for not participating include a lack of interest in supporting the government and a distrust of these initiatives, as well as poor communication and lack of transparency (Tejada et al, 2013, p. 169). Therefore, as part of possible reaction to this reality, adequate policies and communication and outreach campaigns should be perceived as imperative to overcome these shortcomings.

## **2. Conclusions**

Human capital has turned into a major driver of economic growth and countries around the world are up in a global race for “best and brightest” (Czaika and Parsons, 2015, p. 5; Wiesbrock and Hercog, p. 1). Globalization and the advent of the knowledge economy have created a new context and offer new concepts and perspectives where highly skilled workers and entrepreneurs are in great demand, their mobility and both academics and policy makers are increasingly scrutinizing nexus with development, as well as challenges and opportunities of these processes (Tejada et al, 2013, p. 161; Li and Low, p. 1; CODEV-EPFL, 2013, p. 7; Habti, 2012, pp. 1-3; Wiesbrock and Hercog, 2012, p. 1; Jackson, 2012, pp. 20-21).

The countries of origin of highly skilled migrants, such as the Republic of Moldova represents a country where the impact of skilled migration on development and the role of transnational networks of its nationals are new issues on the public

agenda. The mass emigration of skilled human capital due to severe economic crises and long periods of political turbulence is a tough challenge in Moldova that has hindered the advancement of science, research and innovation since independence. Therefore, it appears crucial to address the brain drain challenge in both research and policy discussions about the relationship between migration, transnationalism and development.

Our study showed that classical “push” (lack of possibilities for the realization of own ideas; high level of bureaucracy; distrust in public authorities; living standards (quality of life) in Moldova; uncertain future; high level of corruption; economic instability; political uncertainty and instability, etc.) and “pull” (better career opportunities; better education; a new professional and personal experience; positive impression of living / working / studying abroad from others; a good academic and professional reference; better living standards (quality of life) in general abroad (social welfare system, living environment and amenities, etc; high standards of research abroad; economic / political stability abroad, etc.) factors prevail in the case of Moldovan HSMs, that have a lot of similarities with the experience of other countries. As distinct of factors of merely economic nature, that represent the key trigger of economic migration, in case of HSMs the determinants of psychological, social and even political character play a much more pronounced role, comparing to material ones, namely distrust in current political elite of the country and state authorities, in corpora, deep frustration by high levels of corruption, political and economic instability and uncertainty, lack of clear perspectives for self-fulfillment in the country, low general level of living standards, absence of enabling environment for professional and personal growth, etc.

Findings related to the experience in the countries of residence prove the fact that Moldovans are not facing any significant integration problems during their migration experience (linguistic, social, economic integration and cultural integrations; legal and political rights). The process of their social adaptation and integration in host countries occurs rather efficient. In our opinion, successful integration of Moldovan HSMs in host societies will diminish automatically eventual rates of return of Moldovan HSMs back to the country. This fact, undoubtedly, should be taken into account during the process of migration policies design and implementation by the Moldovan public authorities concerning integration of returned Moldovan HSMs.

In case of our survey, only a minor number of respondents indicated that they were sending remittances to Moldova during their migration experience. We consider that this reality, that contradicts to average international experience, could be explained by one of the following three motives: either the respondents were reticent to disclosure “delicate” information of financial character, or most of the surveyed respondents were pursuing graduate studies abroad that was limiting their possibility of earning additional money, rather scholarship, or surveyed HSM were originating mostly from wealthy families and economic reason did not represent a push factor for migrating abroad. In one word, the main obstacles on the way to invest the remittances in Moldova are not of personal character, but are referring to enabling environment in Moldova that, in opinion of respondents, is not favoring remittances' investment.

The reasons of personal character, as own initiative and family stood behind the

decision of respondents to return to Moldova. Similar table appears when it comes to external factors that motivated respondents to come back to Moldova. Most of them are of personal/family related factors, followed by employment-related factors and immigration and integration-related factors. Thus, the objective factors of eventual attraction of HSMs to Moldova, comparing to the country of residence, are insignificant. The general neutral degree of satisfaction of the respondents with their life and work, after returning to Moldova, also confirms indirectly the low level of attractiveness of motives for return to Moldova under current circumstances in the country. Although the returnees could be potential messengers of newly acquired skills, innovative and entrepreneurial attitudes, bringing a new work culture, unfortunately, the absolute majority of respondents faced serious obstacles on the way of knowledge transfer. These obstacles are, in principle, correlated with the challenges faced by Moldovan returnees, particularly in the workplace. They are of discouraging nature for proper integration of acquired skills in Moldovan working culture and environment. Moldovan HSMs returnees do not perceive existing conditions in Moldova as “enabling environment” for the career advancement or professional growth. The main concern refers to the fact that the knowledge and skills obtained abroad are not capitalized and operationalized in current Moldovan context. The study shows a certain level of frustration of Moldovan returned HSMs when it comes to the interaction with the colleagues in working environment. The respondents believe that their visions and concepts on the way of working and business set-ups are not adequately perceived in Moldova.

Despite of the existing obstacles and challenges in the process of knowledge transfer, Moldovan returnees recognize international migration as important for the transfer of knowledge and skills. Respondents believe that their knowledge, skills and social capital acquired abroad could have a positive role in the societal development.

The HSMs could become the spillovers of development if a state succeeds to implement effective political and economic reform, creating a favorable domestic enabling environment for returnees. If development in origin country takes a positive turn, if the country stabilizes its political situation, if the country's structural situation improves tremendously, adequate policies are put in place and economic growth starts to take off, migrants are likely to be among the first to join in and recognize such new opportunities and, and reinforce these positive trends through investing, circulating and returning to their origin countries. However, we could hypothesize that if in Moldova continues to prevail and dominate disabling environment for personal and professional growth, unclear perspective, economic and political turmoil, social insecurity, high level of corruption and bureaucracy, underdeveloped physical and technological infrastructure, infringement of basic civil rights, etc., the chances of physical or virtual return of Moldovan HSMs through various channels are really minimal. The evidence shows that, although skilled Moldovans abroad do have the motivation and potential to benefit the home country through collaboration with the scientific and professional community in Moldova, this can only be accomplished if adequate conditions are put in place and maintained over time. The evidence gathered indicates that skilled Moldovans will continue to emigrate, but it also shows that return skilled migration could occur.

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