

THE IMPACT OF HIGH SKILLED MIGRATION (BRAIN DRAIN) ON REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, AN ANALYSIS OF POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES AND APPROACHES TO MANAGE THIS PHENOMENON

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Abstract

High skilled migration is an actual and important research topic, especially for Republic of Moldova. Moldova is a small, developing country which needs high skilled workforce for its future economic development. High skilled migration brings up an important question – is it necessary to regulate, control and limit this type of migration? To answer this question the author analyzes the existing activities and initiatives in this field, and the initiatives of Moldovan authorities to regulate and monitor this type of migration. Also the research looks to identify good practices and effective measures to legally regulate high skilled migration. For this purpose are examined the conclusions and data from different economic, sociological and legal sources. The identified information permits to conclude the lack of interest from Moldovan authorities to research this form of migration. Also it identifies the absence of initiatives for its regulation and control. In this context the article offers recommendations on what could be done to improve the existing situation.

Key words: High skilled migration, Brain Drain, Brain Waste.

JEL Code: K37 Immigration Law

1. Introduction

The economic importance of high skilled workforce was emphasized by the British Economist Paul Collier, which mentions that it has the following impact:

- These workers increase the productivity of the less qualified workforce contributing to the rise of their revenues. Therefore lower number of skilled workers contributes to lower revenues for other lower skilled workers.
- They pay more taxes which are used to finance social goods, used by everyone.
- They create more jobs. (Collier, 2016)

The high skilled workforce is the foundation for development and economic growth in the actual economy of knowledge. Therefore it is important to study what would be the consequences of emigration of this category of workers, or the phenomenon otherwise named – brain drain.

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To understand the impact of brain drain and the options to regulate it we will try to answer the following questions:

1. What is the status quo of high skilled migration in Republic of Moldova?
2. What are the regulations and official legal initiatives in this field?
3. How does high skilled migration impact Republic of Moldova, is it necessary to regulate it legally?
4. If regulation is necessary what could be done to manage high skilled migration?

The article is structured in 5 compartments: 1. Introduction, 2. Literature review, 3. Data and methodology, 4. Findings and 5. Conclusions. The literature review analyses the existing legal regulations on high skilled migration as well as other official documents. Also this compartment mentions the existing literature and academic research on this topic. The data and methodology compartment, details the used research methods, and the source of some of materials and documents. The findings offer a detailed analysis of the research questions, each examined separately. The conclusions briefly emphasize the most important results of the research, establishing also other future research targets.

2. Literature review

There are no legal regulations regarding high skilled migration in Republic of Moldova. Yet we can find references to it in national strategies on migration and action plans for their implementation.

The Government decision No. 655 of 08.09.2011 on the approval of the National Strategy on Migration and Asylum (2011-2020), at its point 11 mentions the permanent increase in the number of migrants with higher and especially secondary education in the last decade, which emigrated to work abroad. And also the lack of criteria for monitoring data regarding high-skilled migration. Also the strategy mentions at the same point, the non-evaluation of the direct and indirect losses regarding migrants' public investment in health and education and also as of the citizens' private investment losses in higher education. Are also mentioned the absence of mechanisms for mutual recognition of study diplomas and for the employment of moldovan migrants according to their qualifications and level of training. At the objective VI. Point 6, the strategy proposes the elaboration of mechanisms for recognition of skills and qualifications obtained abroad and support in starting a business upon return to the country.

Another strategy, mentioning high skilled migration is the National Strategy Diaspora 2025. At the objective 4, it proposes to attract emigrants back to Moldova by supporting and organizing diaspora events to promote the image and investment potential of the Republic of Moldova(4.2). Organization in Republic of Moldova of the consecutive editions of the Diaspora Business Forum (pt 4.3.). Diversification of programs for supporting innovative and business initiatives of diaspora and returned migrants.(4.5)

Other important proposals included in the implementation plan of this Strategy for the period 2016 – 2018 are:

- Creation and development of networks of excellency in diaspora – pt. 3.1.2.
- Facilitation of remote recognition of academic and professional qualifications – pt. 3.5
- Involvement of diaspora members in performing scientific expertise, in research and development programs and projects - 3.5.1.

- Diversification of programs for supporting the innovative and business initiatives of diaspora and returned migrants – 4.5.

Another legal document is the action plan for 2014-2016 to support the reintegration of the citizens returned from abroad. It includes as targets for implementation the improvement of the mechanism for recognition of educational documents, pt. 7.1; Supporting and promoting, in partnership with international organizations, of return programs for youth, pt 9.1; Informing and counseling returned persons to use the savings obtained abroad in agricultural/non-agricultural business and financing them from foreign assistance programs funds, pt. 8.1.

The latest action plan for 2017-2020 on (re)integration of Moldovan citizens returning from abroad, does not focus so much on the issues of high skilled migration. It has mostly an economic approach. Its objective 3 - Economic reintegration of Moldovan citizens returning from abroad, focuses on economic and business initiatives and does not target the return of students, or academia diaspora in Moldova, as the earlier plan did.

Yet we must conclude that, although these strategies and implementation plans are good initiatives, they do not create in themselves a functional approach to the regulation of high skilled migration in Republic of Moldova.

Another important instrument in the monitoring and control of migration processes at national level is the Extended Migrational Profile, published by the Bureau of Migration and Asylum, under the Ministry of Interior Affairs. The profile offers general data on migration, in the recent 2016 edition the total content related to high skilled migration can be summarised to no more that 2 pages of text. This shows the lack of interest of national authorities for this type of migration.

Therefore we can summarise in respect to legal regulations and other official research that in Moldova:

1. There are no official instruments to register and monitor high skilled migration.
2. There are no regulations targeted directly for the management of high skilled migration.
3. The existing instruments have a fragmented and inefficient approach.

In international literature the phenomenon of high skilled migration is very well analysed by such authors as Paul Collier (Collier, 2016), Peter Stalker (Stalker, 2015), Russian researchers (Быстряков А. Я., Григорьева Е. М., Должикова А. В., Леденева В. Ю., Пономаренко Е. В., Савенкова Е. В, 2018).

In Republic of Moldova, two studies on this topic were realized with the support of IDIS Viitorul research hub (Viorica Antonov, Tatiana Gamanji and Olesea Cruc, 2010) and (Diana Cheianu-Andrei, 2012). There are few research articles on this topic, one of them focuses on the financial support for high skilled migration (Rodica Crudu, Veronica Mîrzîncu, 2018). Other general studies and research on migration from Moldova, partially analyze high skilled migration (Nicolaas de Zwager and Ruslan Sintov, 2014).

The conclusions of national studies point especially to the positive impact of high skilled migration, other conclusion is the brain waste of the Moldovan high skilled workforce.

The author agrees with the existence of the issue of brain waste but considers highly arguable the positive impact of high skilled migration for Moldova. Therefore we will present another point of view arguing on the negative impact of high skilled migration and why and how it should be regulated.

3. Data and Methodology

The present article uses mostly qualitative research methods, focusing on the analysis of already existing research regarding the impact and regulation of high skilled migration. The article combines the legal and economic approach, using the arguments provided by notable researchers to propose efficient legal regulation.

With regard to the analyzed legal norms, the source of information is the official legal database of the Ministry of Justice of Moldova. Official reports and the Extended Migration Profile are obtained from the official web resources of ministries and government bodies. The article also analyses monographs which researched high skilled migration published by British researchers (Collier, 2016), (Stalker, 2015) as well as Russian researchers (Быстряков А Я et al, 2018).

4. Findings

4.1. What is the status quo of high skilled migration in Republic of Moldova?

Existing international data shows that the number of high qualified workers in the general share of migrants tends to be very high. Peter Stalker offers us the following examples: In Africa for the year 2000, just 4% of population had higher education, while from the African migrant community 31% had it. For Asia the relevant numbers are 6 and 44%, for Latin America and West India 12 and 28%. (Stalker, 2016, p.139)

According to the IASCI study, published in 2015, in Moldova there is a similar share of high qualified workers: 28% of all migrants have completed university-level education; 45% completed high school or professional / vocational education. (Nicolaas de Zwager, Ruslan Sintov, 2014, p.39)

The official data of the Bureau of Statistics of Moldova, show for the year 2017 a number of 318 400 Moldovan migrants working or looking for work abroad.

Figure 1. Population aged 15 years and over, working and looking for work abroad by Age groups, Sex, Years, Quarters and Areas

Population aged 15 years and over, working or looking for work abroad by Age groups, Sex, Years, Quarters and Area							
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	Annual average						
	Whole country						
Age groups - total							
Both sexes	316.9	328.3	332.5	341.9	325.4	319.0	318.4

Footnotes

Information is presented without the data on districts from the left side of the river Nistru and municipality Bender.

Important! Values smaller than 1,5 have a large sampling error and must be used with care until 2015.
Values smaller than 3,0 have a large sampling error and must be used with care starting with 2016.

Source: Bureau of Statistics of Moldova - <http://www.statistica.md/> [visited on 10.10.2018]

The data presented by the Bureau of Statistics regarding the number of migrants or people looking for work abroad with higher education shows the number of – 46600 persons for 2017. Percentually this constitutes approximately 15% from the total number of labor migrants.

Figure 2. Population aged 15 and over, working or looking for work abroad by Country of destination, level of education, Age groups, years, Statistical regions and sex

Population aged 15 years and over, working or looking for work abroad by Country of destination, Level of education, Age groups, Years, Statistical regions and Sex

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	Whole the country							
	Both sexes							
All countries								
Higher								
Age groups - total	33.3	33.6	34.8	36.1	37.7	42.9	42.4	46.6

Footnotes

Information is presented without the data on districts from the left side of the river Nistru and municipality Bender.

Important! Values smaller than 1,5 have a large sampling error and must be used with care until 2015. Values smaller than 3,0 have a large sampling error and must be used with care starting with 2016.

Statistical regions

The difference between statistical regions and development regions is explained here

Source: Bureau of Statistics of Moldova - <http://www.statistica.md/> [visited on 10.10.2018]

a) Medical professionals

According to the data offered in a study of the Ministry of Health of Moldova (Ministry of Health of Republic of Moldova, 2013), there are no official data on the number of medical staff leaving for work abroad.

Yet this can be estimated by the applications for confirmation of higher and medium medical studies which are necessary for diploma recognition abroad. Citing the Ministry of Health: During the years 2007 - 2012, to the Ministry of Health applied for confirmation of higher and medium studies, as well as professional activity 2869 medical workers - 1269 doctors (44.2%) and 1600 medical workers with secondary education (55.8%). (Ministry of Health of Republic of Moldova, 2013, p.11)

The exodus of medical professionals becomes an increasing problem for Moldova in the context of simplified recognition of studies for moldovan medical graduates in Romania, the main destination country for medical professionals emigrating from Moldova.

It is highly possible that in the close future Moldova will enter the common trend of losing its medical workers, similarly to other small and developing countries: in Manchester, UK, there are more Malawi doctors than in Malawi. From 600 doctors trained in Zambia, only 50 work in their country. (Stalker, 2015, p.145)

b) Academia and teaching staff

Similarly to the medical professionals, there are no reliable data on the migration of education specialists. From a 2012 year study on this topic (Cheianu-Andrei, 2012), a clear conclusion results – the majority of education workers which emigrated from Moldova, work in lower qualified jobs. Therefore the migration of these specialists leads to a brain waste situation.

Studies related to the cartography of Moldovan Diaspora abroad show that from 9% of the education specialists which emigrated from Moldova to Russian Federation just 3% continue their work in this field. (Cheianu-Andrei, 2012, op cit p.22) In the EU region from 11% of education specialists emigrated from Moldova to Italy, Portugal, France and Great Britain, only 2% continued to activate in their field of study, although not always in the same

job (for example in Moldova the person worked as a Lyceum/University professor while in Italy she works as a nanny). (Cheianu-Andrei, 2012, op cit p.24)

b) Students

If in the past the term of brain drain included especially the already trained and educated specialists, a new approach includes also the talented students.

According to a OECD report, the number of foreign students increased from 2000 till 2010 with 99% from 2.1 to 4.1 million people. (Stalker, 2015)

As with other categories of highly qualified migrants, there are no precise data regarding the number of students from Moldova which are undertaking their studies abroad. A general number is offered by the Extended Migration Profile of Moldova. Yet these numbers include only the students which are studying under bilateral agreements or official programs. They do not include all other students which decided independently to apply for studies abroad. Therefore these numbers are far from being accurate.

Figure.3 Number of Moldovan citizens studying abroad

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of students	4009	4270	5356	5891	5469	5485

Source: Profilul Migrațional Extins al Republicii Moldova 2010-2015, [https://mai.gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/raport-analitic-pme_2010-2015 ed. 2016.pdf](https://mai.gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/raport-analitic-pme_2010-2015_ed.2016.pdf)

This is confirmed by a interview with Victoria Isac from the Direction for International Relations and European Integration of Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova: None of the 30 bilateral treaties of Republic of Moldova in the field of education stipulate the return of scholarship recipients in the country. In this context, we do not know how many of our students return after graduation in the country and how many of the foreign students to whom the Ministry of Education offered scholarships stay in Moldova and how many return to their home country. (Viorica Antonov, Tatiana Gamanji and Olesea Cruc, 2010, p.12)

Based on these treaties Rodica Crudu and Veronica Mîrzîncu established a general number of Moldovan students abroad: There is currently no official data on people moving to the European Union for study purposes. But based on of the Treaties of Republic of Moldova from 2013-2013, more than 24.000 thousand young people went abroad to continue their studies. International statistics disapprove this data, explaining that the number of Moldovan international students is four times bigger than the official data. (Rodica Crudu, Veronica Mîrzîncu, 2018, op cit p.20)

Major destination countries have changed significantly their policies related to foreign students. So for example if in the past they as a rule were not offered the right to obtain employment, now they generally can study and work. Many countries issue special residence permits for the recent graduates which permit them to look for a job, or offer them the right for family reunification during their studies. The general migration policies have changed to encourage potential migrants to enroll for studies and afterwards remain in the destination countries.

Other countries create special programs to attract talented youth: France in 1998, initiated a program with a 17 million \$ budget, to attract foreign students. Their number increased from 130.000 in 1998 to 147.000 in 2001. (Stalker, 2015, p.144)

4.2. How does high skilled migration impact Republic of Moldova is it necessary to regulate it legally?

In the few existing studies on this topic in Moldova, there is a predominant opinion that the general impact of high skilled migration in the case of Moldova is still positive. Often are mentioned the positive examples of such countries as China, India, etc.

The existing data on high skilled migration/brain drain, shows that this approach is biased, as there is a big difference regarding the impact of high skilled migration on the small and big countries.

An interesting analysis of this aspect is made by Paul Collier in his book - *Exodus: How Migration is Changing Our World*. Paul Collier mentions the existence of a so called pool of talents and stimuli to obtain education as an investment for accessing future emigration options (Collier, 2016). In the bigger countries the pool of talents is bigger, and not all of these talented people manage to emigrate. Some of them might not have a successful migration experience, finally returning to their countries. Therefore the pool of talents in the big countries does not deplete enough to create a crisis on the internal labor markets.

As mentioned by the Moldovan sociologist Diana Cheianu Andrei: Recent studies suggest that the negative effects, especially from a development perspective, which the migration of highly qualified workforce can bring, only occur if a certain volume of migration is exceeded - an optimal brain drain. Up to this threshold, migration seems to have the capacity to stimulate increased population engagement at higher educational levels due to the benefits that individuals expect to invest in education by going abroad. (Diana Cheianu-Andrei, 2012, p.10)

Paul Collier offers the example of high skilled emigration from Haiti to USA. Haiti having 10 millions population, lost approx 85% of its educated population due to emigration. To compensate this loss a seven fold increase in talented youth is necessary. (Collier, 2016, p.272). This is very unlikely to happen, leading to a perpetual stagnation in this country. Another British researcher, Peter Stalker, also shows that the smaller countries tend to have a bigger percentage of high skilled labor force in emigration: For Suriname – 89,9% of the nationals with higher degree now live in the OECD countries. This indicator constitutes more than 80% for Guyana, Jamaica and Haiti. (Stalker, 2016, p.139).

Therefore it would result that smaller countries tend to have issues in maintaining the optimal level of brain drain. Vice-versa in big developing countries – China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Egypt an increase in talents takes places together with high skilled migration(Collier, 2016). Because these countries can maintain an optimal balance of brain drain, and can create some perspectives which attract high skilled emigrants to return back to their home countries.

We can say that for small countries, emigration is an escape option. In the same time in the bigger countries, migration might be a stepping stone for a better professional carrier. As explained by Paul Collier on the example of China, an Chinese emigrant might see his experience in the silicon Valley as the stage he needs to pass, to get a top position in a Chinese corporation (Collier, 2016). This approach rarely works for smaller countries which do not have these possibilities.

Making a logical analogy with the presented examples, it is clear that Republic of Moldova being a small country is negatively affected by brain drain. Its talent pool will not replenish, similarly to the case of other small and developing countries. Also the lack of professional perspectives will not motivate well trained and experienced Moldovan migrants to return.

Another important problem is the brain waste, which occurs in the case of Moldovan high skilled emigrants. The IASCI/NEXUS study for 2015 shows that Moldovan workers are predominantly employed in low qualified occupations, especially construction and domestic work.

Figure.4 Predominant occupations of Moldovan migrants aboard

Migrants are predominantly employed in ...

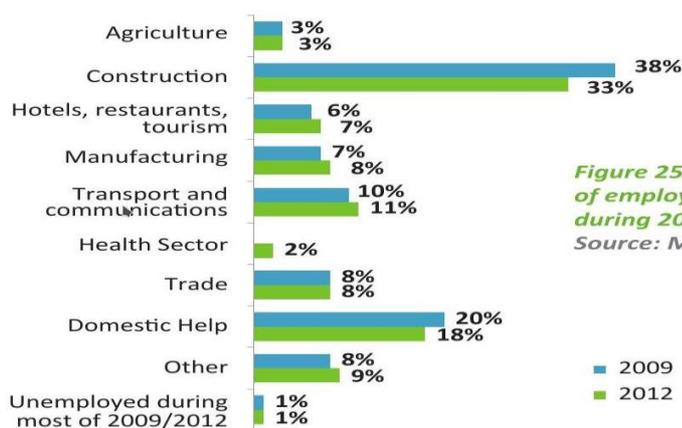


Figure 25: „What was your primary sector of employment in (country of migration) during 2009/2012?“

Source: Migrant Survey 2009, 2012

Source: (Nicolaas de Zwager, Ruslan Sintov, 2014)

According to IASCI/NEXUS study for 2015, there is also evidence of significant under-employment and hence “brain waste” occurring prior to migration. The finding is supported by NBS data, which found that 25% of all people employed in Moldova with a university degree were under-employed. A similar situation, but at a higher scale, holds true for employees with specialized (38%) and vocational education (30%). Moreover, this mismatch increased from 2008 to 2010. (Nicolaas de Zwager, Ruslan Sintov, 2014)

This issue is also confirmed by ILO: The share of youth (aged 15-29) who are neither employed nor studying or trained is higher in Moldova than in any other country in the region (29% in 2015). Government estimates suggest that less than 40% of graduates are employed in the first year after graduating from university. (ILO, 2017, Op cit p.13) Therefore even before migration, the absence of connection between the labor market and education institutions, contributes to the graduation of young specialists which are not demanded by the national economy, further increasing the number of Moldovan migrants.

Another argument which we can find in the national studies on migration is that the high skilled migration increases remittances (Diana Cheianu-Andrei, 2012). Paul Collier shows that high skilled migrants send less remittances, the use of point based migration systems shows a decrease of remittances in the case of these migrants. (Collier, 2016, p.292) In practice it seems that the lower skilled migrants tend to send more remittances to their countries of origin. Therefore Moldova will not benefit of a significant increase of remittances if it will loose its qualified workforce.

And lastly another argument made by Paul Collier and Peter Stalker is that brain drain, is a form of aid from the poor countries to the rich ones. An aid which also closes the perspectives of development of the poor countries and increases them for the rich ones, making the poor-rich gap even wider. Citing Peter Stalker - In OECD countries there are 3 million immigrants with higher education, if we invest 20.000 \$ for the education of each professional, it results that the developed countries pumped from the developing ones, approx 60 bln \$. (Stalker, 2015, p.145)

Therefore we must make the following conclusions:

- Migration of high skilled migrants will affect negatively Moldova, because it is a small and developing country. Like other countries in similar situation It will not manage to maintain an optimal value of high qualified labor force migration.
- Migration of high skilled migrants will not increase remittances to Moldova
- The lack of connection between education institutions and the labor market will contribute to the further increase of brain waste.

And of course the most important conclusion and the answer to the question which we posed is that - Republic of Moldova must elaborate effective regulations to manage high skilled migration.

4.3. Possible options to regulate and manage brain drain?

As general recommendation it is important that national authorities offer the necessary attention to high skilled migration and realize extensive research on this topic in the Extended Migration Profile of Republic of Moldova.

Also a national Strategy on high skilled migration is necessary, it has to identify the status quo and propose solutions to the existing problems.

Regarding the situation of teachers and researchers, different research data shows that the specialists working in the country for more than 10 years are not as attracted to emigration as the recent graduates. The Extended Migration Profile mentions the data from the study "Migration Impact on Teachers and Researchers in Moldova": Those who want to settle abroad are mainly married persons, who have work experience of up to 10 years, come from urban areas (less from Chisinau and Balti) and have average incomes. There are more pronounced intentions of migration among men than among women. According to age, more pronounced intentions are among young teachers and researchers, the highest tendencies being recorded for the 25-29 age group (67%). (Ministry of Interior, Bureau of Migration and Asylum, 2016, p.50)

Similar conclusions are made by Russian researchers: The share of researchers not interested in international movements rises from 10% for those who received a scientific degree in the last two years to 40% for those who got a PHD as minimum as 16 years ago. (Быстряков А Я et all, 2018, p.52). Therefore young specialists must be motivated to stay in the country with supplementary support measures at least for the first 10 years of their career. National authorities must identify especially needed positions for the national economy and establish support measures for young specialists employed in these fields, motivating them to pursue a career in their country.

Another important conclusion in the case of researchers is that the financial stimuli are frequently not the most important factor for pursuing a career. The biggest stimulus for researchers were:

- conditions of work and possibilities of carrier growth 87%
- financial revenues 71%

- moral encouragement 60%. (Быстряков А.Я et all, 2018)

Therefore creation of good work conditions, and moral encouragement of young researchers could serve as very strong factors to keep qualified researchers in the country, even in the conditions of lower financing.

Another proposal to maintain qualified workforce includes the use of possibilities of Internet and distance work and also encouraging international companies to open research hubs and centers in the countries of origin. (Быстряков А.Я et all, 2018) But this will have the side effect of not keeping the product of intellectual work in the country. Still this approach is more benefiting the country then in the case of the emigration of the skilled specialists.

At the same time, in order to prevent and reduce the labor force emigration, it is necessary to align the offer of the educational institutions with the requirements of the labor market. Existing research shows clearly that an important part of the problem of brain drain resides in the existing educational model in Moldova.

Regarding study programs abroad, national authorities must sign bilateral treaties which must stipulate, or include at least partially, the return of Moldovan students which graduated abroad.

A simpler procedure for remote and simplified recognition of academic and professional qualifications needs to be established for high skilled workers which graduated abroad and wish to return to Moldova.

Another important measures to manage brain drain are related to the entrepreneurial sphere. These could include, the implementation of easier procedures for entrepreneurial activity and offering fiscal and government support for business initiatives implemented by returning high skilled Moldovan migrants.

Another important proposal is to support and consolidate important services industries where Moldova could be competitive. Two of them could be Informational Technology and ITES - Information Technology Enabled Services, offering special tax preferences and simplified operation conditions for this sectors.

5. Conclusions

Having answered the questions at the start of this research it is possible to identify a brief number of most important conclusions:

1. The high skilled migration can negatively affect Republic of Moldova, as it did impact other small and developing countries.
2. While the economic potential of high skilled workers is very big while they work in their countries of origin, when they are in migration they do not contribute as much to their home countries.
3. The Moldovan authorities do not give the necessary attention to high skilled migration.
4. There are no national regulations, nor a systemic legal approach to manage and control high skilled migration.
5. National authorities must prioritize:
 - The management and control of the emigration of high skilled workers,
 - Connection of labor market demand with the offer provided by education institutions,
 - Support of young specialists for the first 10 years of their activity in Moldova

- Support of strategic services branches which could create high qualified jobs in Moldova, such as for example IT and ITeS.

Possible future research on this topic could be more effective if national authorities will collect more information on high skilled migration. Also it is highly important for national academic community to give an increased attention to high skilled migration, bringing this topic in front of national authorities and proposing effective measure for its monitoring, management and control.

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