

The analysis of immigration trends of skilled migrants: case of Georgia

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Indexing

Abstracting

THE ANALYSIS OF IMMIGRATION TRENDS OF SKILLED MIGRANTS: CASE OF GEORGIA

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Abstract

In this paper we investigate several aspects of the contemporary immigration in post-Soviet Georgia by analyzing some recent trends related to the migration phenomena in the country. Our results are based on an extensive field work with two main groups – one, with skilled foreign immigrants in Georgia, and the other, with return Georgian emigrants, both covering all of the country's territory. Finally, we discuss the return migration and the existing programs of voluntary return between Georgia and other countries, as well as the opportunities for professional realization in the country of the Georgian returnees and the foreign immigrants.

Keywords: Migration trends, immigration, Georgia, return migration, skilled migration

INTRODUCTION

Georgian emigration has been the subject of intensive investigation during the last several years (Jasnova 2012, Collyer 2013, Zurabishvili 2013, Badurashvili 2015, Iashvili and Gvenetadze 2014, Iashvili, et.al. 2016). According to some recent results from research on Georgian migration, the Georgian potential migrants are divided into two subgroups: prospective migrants (with an intention to migrate), represented by one third of people aged 18-50 years including 11.4% being ready to migrate at any moment and non-migrants (with no intention to migrate). The tendency to (re)migrate is particularly high (close to 50%) among returnees, thus indicating a circular pattern (Bardak 2011).

The intention to go abroad is most likely expressed by young single people, being the migration stock gender bias from country to country. Despite of the fact that most of the migrants from Georgia have a higher education, in general they have a more successful professional realization in post-Soviet space than in EU or in other Western countries, where their professional background is usually underestimated. Statistics, offered by the European Training Foundation (ETF) shows that around 48% of the Georgian emigrants have a working experience abroad below their education level, which is even more pronounced in the case of female migrants (70%), who are usually characterized by a higher education level (Jasnova et al. 2012).

According to the ETF research the preferred destinations for Georgian migrants with low and intermediate education level are Turkey (32%), Russia (29%) and Greece (13%). Turkey is a top destination due to the lack of visa requirements for Georgian citizens, while people with higher/better education, tend to prefer the USA, Italy or Germany as an emigration destination (Jasnova 2012, Collyer 2013).

Although several economic reforms were implemented in Georgia including enhancement of foreign investments, stimulation of entrepreneurial activities that have posed the country among the first worldwide countries in international ranking of business activities (Doing Business 2016), it seems that these measures are not enough to regularize the emigration and the brain-drain from the country.

Phenomena, related to return migration are also important along the migration panorama. Return migration is a phenomenon, when migrants return to their country of origin by their own choice, often after a significant period abroad. In general, people who have worked abroad and have returned, are important for the home country's development as they have gained experience and skills, such as language, vocational, entrepreneurship, higher professional skills and so on. The source country can actually gain from the opportunity that its citizens have to acquire experience abroad.

One might enumerate several motives for a temporary migration such as differences in relative prices between host and home country, complementarities

between consumption and the location where consumption takes place, or the possibility of accumulating human capital abroad, which enhances the immigrant's earnings potential back home (Dustmann 2007). The economic and social bilateral programs between several countries are attracting as well national professionals living abroad. Similar phenomena are also observed within the Georgia context (Jasnova 2012).

From the other side, the immigration trends during the last several years show their importance for the country development. The main factors that contribute to its dynamics are mainly related to a relative bureaucratic easiness of doing business in Georgia and the existence of opportunities in the economic, social and educational activities such as low tuition fees and living expenses, quality of education or security, accompanied by political stability in the country, which are attracting a large number of educational immigrants as well as foreign professionals.

In this paper we will focus on the immigration of foreign professionals, who have immigrated to Georgia, attracted by the above mentioned opportunities as well as analyze the skilled return migration of natives discussing as well some existing bilateral agreements.

Our main working hypothesis is based on the fact that the country possesses a rich potential for future development, due to its rich cultural traditions and flexible administrative system, and it could be transformed into an attracting destination for skilled professionals from abroad.

The methodology we have used for is based on qualitative fieldwork with immigrants and returnees to Georgia as well as on statistical analysis and literature data. A total of 60 in-depth interviews have been performed in the following cities and regions, practically covering all of the country's territory: Stephantsminda (Kazbegi) (2), Juta, Etseri (1) (Mestia Municipality), Kutaisi (4), Tsqaltubo (1), Senaki (1), Ozurgeti (1), Poti (3), Batumi (5), Qvareli (1), Borjomi (2), Ninotsminda (2), Oni (1), Lentekhi (2), Zugdidi (1), Signaghi (2), Dedoplistskaro (1), Gurjaani (1), Lagodekhi (3), Tsnori (1), Gori (3) and Tbilisi (22).

The different groups have been selected to have the largest pattern representation in order to have more complete results. The interviewed 33 men and 27 women who had immigrated to Georgia over the last 5 years, were originally from (written in alphabetic order): Bulgaria (3), Canada (3), China (4), Czech Rep.(1), Estonia (1), Germany (5), Holland (1), Iran (4), Israel (6), Italia (1), India (2), Lithuania (1), Nigeria (1), Russian Federation (3), Spain (5), Turkey (6), UK (5) and USA (8).

Five additional interviews with return Georgian migrants from Germany have been also performed. The interviewed had their field of expertise in teaching (high school and university), research, finance, medicine, engineering, trade, management or hospitality.

Many of them were entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurship and social volunteers. A large group of the interviewed formed part of teams involved in international organizations and in international projects.

As for the second group of the interviewed skilled foreign migrants, 19 were associated with the educational sector (high school and university), 7 with some European projects, both being presented with temporal contracts in Georgia. From the rest of the interviewed, 17 cases expressed their success in creating an own business, while other 7 reported about some difficulties in starting an own labor activity.

Additionally, other officials who specialize in the management of immigration in Georgia have been also interviewed. Between them are the coordinator of ICMPD (International Centre for Migration Policy Development) and the corresponding representatives from different projects such as ENIGMMA (Enhancing Georgia's Migration Management), GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer internationale Zusammenarbeit) and ARISC (American Research Institute of the South Caucasus); representatives of the Austrian-Georgian commerce chamber, representatives from the German Economic Association (Deutsche Wirtschaftsvereinigung), representatives from the Public Service Hall as well as researchers and professors at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Akaki Tsereteli State University in Kutaisi and from private universities in Tbilisi.

Our research is based on Grounded Theory approach (Glaser 1967), according to which a systematic methodology through the analysis of qualitative data is performed taking into consideration different data such as interview, surveys, statistical analyses, as well as literature data.

The paper is organized as follows: in Section 2 we analyze the migration trends in Georgia paying attention to immigration and return migration phenomena. Section 3 is devoted to the skilled migration in Georgia, analyzed from the field work and numerous interviews. The last section presents the final conclusion of the present analysis.

IMMIGRATION AND RETURN MIGRATION TO GEORGIA

Immigration to Georgia

Georgia has a relatively liberal visa regime for a vast majority of countries, for whom no residence permits are necessary to live and work in the country. The recently started Georgian migration policy on September 1st, 2014, based on the new Law entitled "The Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons", was a step toward a new migration strategy. With the amendments from 2015, based on continues monitoring and recommendations from different institutions, the visa and residence requirements

concepts were specifically developed (State Commission on Migration Issues Georgia 2014). According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, the residence permits issued in 2014, are shown in the following Table 1. The predominance is given to the temporary permits, followed by permanent and labor permits, respectively.

Table 1. Residence permits according to the permit type (2014).

Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia.

Permit Type	Total number
Temporary permits	34425
Permanent permits	10827
Labor permits	2804
Residence permit of former citizen of Georgia	1929
Training permits	1217
Family reunification permits	502
Special permits	196
Permanent investment permits	57
Total	52974

The top five countries of origin of working residence permit holders are represented in Fig. 1, where the recent dynamic patterns of Chinese and Turkish applicants are clearly seen.

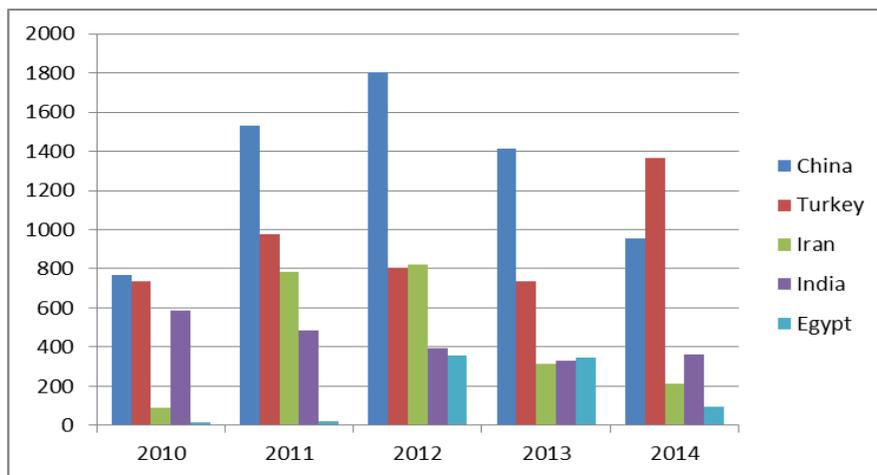


Fig. 1. Top five countries of origin of working residence permit holders (2010-2014)

Source: Public Service Development Agency.

Regarding the origin of the naturalized citizens¹, the statistics is dominated by Russian citizens with a high rate of approval, followed by Turkish, and in a less extend by Israeli, Greek, USA and Armenian citizens (Table 2).

Table 2. Approved applications for naturalized citizens by country of origin.

Source: State Commission of Migration Issues (2015).

Country	Approved Application (absolute numbers)
Russia	25992
Turkey	3033
Israel	1151
Greece	1143
USA	1097
Armenia	670
Others	4855
Total	35769

The above statistics confirms some trends in the recent Georgian migration panorama. A tendency for decreasing after 2012 for the most countries is observed except of Turkey.

Educational immigrants

The higher education in Georgia is considered as attractive due to its good level and low matriculation taxes. This is clearly reflected by the number of foreign students studying in Georgia, which is continuously growing in both state and private high educational institutions. From the other side, one has to mention that the number of Georgian students, studying abroad is also continuously increasing due to the different programs and opportunities for young people (Study in Georgia 2017).

The educational immigrants are mainly dominated by male students from Azerbaijan, India, Turkey, Nigeria, the Russian Federation, and Iraq although there is a tendency for increase of the female ones, both showing an increasing trend after 2010 (Fig. 2). This is accompanied by a continuous offer of different educational programs such as bachelor, master, PhD programs and an increasing number of universities offering foreign language educational programs (International Admission Department

¹ Naturalized citizen is a non-citizen in a country that has acquired citizenship or nationality of that country.

2017). According to the opinion of students from state and private Universities with whom interviews have been performed by the authors, attractive educational offers in terms of lower tuition fees and the recognition of the degrees awarded by Georgian educational institutions are crucial especially for students with interests in medicine, social sciences and humanities or business.

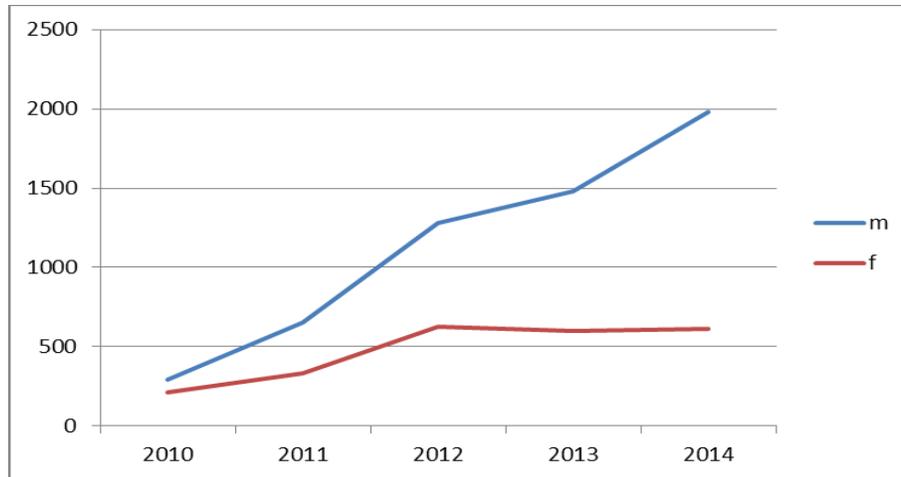


Fig. 2. Evolution of the male (m) and female (f) immigrant students in tertiary institutions (2010-2014). Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia.

Labor Skilled immigrants

The access to the labor market for foreign immigrants is regulated by the Law of Labor Migration (Georgian Department of Labor 2016). The analysis of the statistics of the total number of work permit during the period 2010-2014, show that the major part of them corresponds to the five top countries of origin: China (6,467), Turkey (4,618), Iran (2,222), India (2,156) and Egypt (842) (SCMI 2015). An example is given by the foreign entrepreneurs and investors, whose arrival is related to a pronounced increase of the immovable property. The statistics, offered by the State Commission on Migration Issues (SCMI 2015), shows an increase of investment in non-agricultural land when the moratorium on land ownership for foreigners was introduced, thus registrations of non-agricultural land slightly increased from 1,273 in 2013 to 1,651 in 2014 (SCMI 2015). Although more statistics is still needed, there is evidence that foreign investments in Georgian agriculture create significant spillovers of knowledge and innovation that local farmers can benefit from (AgricisTrade 2015, ISET 2016).

In terms of country of origin, the majority of the foreign investors come from Russian Federation, followed by investors from Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Armenia, Greece, Israel and USA (Fig. 3). The positive effect on the industry and construction sectors of the Georgian economy is reflected in the declarations presented by the foreign companies (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2017).

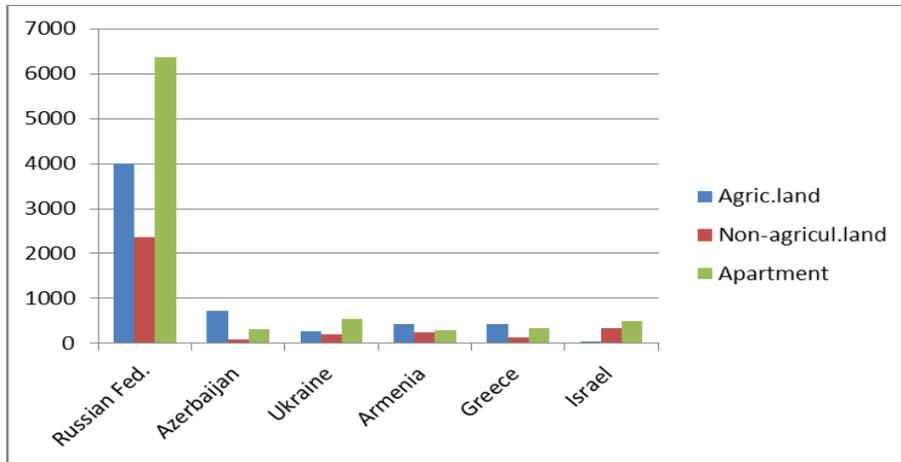


Fig. 3. Owned immovable property in Georgia by foreign nationals by citizenship (2010-2014, top 6 countries). Source: National Agency of Public Registry.

An interesting segment is represented by the foreign-profit and non-profit enterprises and branches of foreign companies, registered in more extend in Tbilisi and Adjara region, followed by Kvemo Kartli and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti regions. The number of the registered enterprises during the period 2010-2014, coming from the top 6 countries of origin i.e. Iran, Turkey, Egypt, India, Russian Federation and Azerbaijan is represented in Fig. 4. The main areas of investment are the food production and agriculture, hotels and restaurants, construction and real estate, transportation, financial and insurance services, etc. (National Agency of Public Registry 2015).

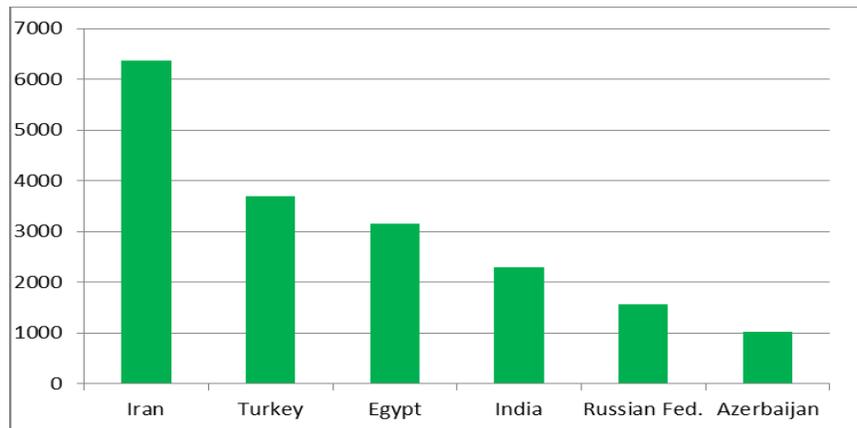


Fig. 4. Top 6 foreign-profit and non-profit enterprises registered (2010-2014).
Source: National Agency of Public Registry.

Return migration to Georgia

There are several attempts in the literature (see Dustmann 2007 and the references therein), trying to quantify in a more rigorous way the return migration by modeling it using the fact that the immigrants decide to return home when the benefits of staying abroad are lower than the cost. According to these models, when the marginal utility of wealth decreases, the benefit of migration slowly decreases. This alone does not trigger a return migration, because, whatever the immigrant's wealth, it is always advantageous to remain a further unit in a country that pays a higher wage. Thus, one has to assume that migrants have a preference for consumption in their home country. As a consequence, benefits of migration decrease over the migration cycle, while costs are positive and may increase, which may lead eventually to a return migration (Dustmann 2007).

Concerning the case under study, the main reasons for Georgian emigrants to return to Georgia are related to emotional and economic problems, being mainly dominated by family obligations (the biggest proportion) and homesick followed by residence permit expiration, unemployment, and deportation (ETF 2013). The latter reasons especially concern illegal migrants as well as those, who were involved in low-paid jobs in abroad, in EU or other Western countries. However, some other reasons are not excluded, like it happened between Russia and Georgia in 2006 due to spoiled political relationships. Many Georgian migrants were deported by the Russian government with rude violation of human rights and many others left the country voluntarily ("Georgia against Russia" 2012). The statistics differs slightly on the gender (Fig. 5).

The main difference between both genders is observed regarding the unemployment, which is around three times lower for woman (European Training Foundation 2013).

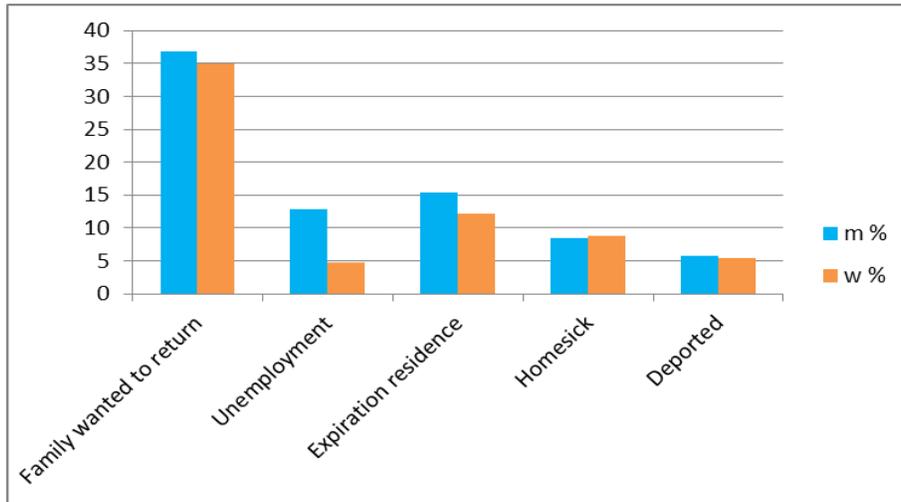


Fig. 5. Main reasons to return to Georgia depending on gender (m – male, f – female)
Source: European Training Foundation. ETF (2013).

According to the ETF survey (Bardak 2011), once back, only around 30% of the returnees manage to find a job and due to the poor conditions of domestic labor market around half of them have the same job they had before.

As a general rule, the educated people tend to enjoy a more successful return than less educated people, the later facing a series of difficulties to fit into the Georgian labor market (Jasnova 2012). In this sense, more support for the creation of employment and job opportunities in terms of job-matching, placement services and labor market management, increasing legal labor circular mobility with a gradual liberalization of entry visas for beneficial migration and sustainable return are necessary.

The countries from which the majority of returnees came back are dominated by Greece, Poland, Belgium, and France due to the existence of voluntary return program offered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The reintegration package includes various types of medical treatment for returnees, temporary accommodation, vocational training courses, setting up small businesses and public education. The programs for the Georgian nationals to assist in return from Switzerland, Austria and Netherlands also exist. These programs are supported by IOM and operating in Georgia since 2009, when Georgia entered into a mobility partnership with the European Union (IOM-GEORGIA 2016).

In the following Fig. 6, the numbers of beneficiaries of return programs, corresponding to 2014, by country of origin are represented respectively upon their gender.

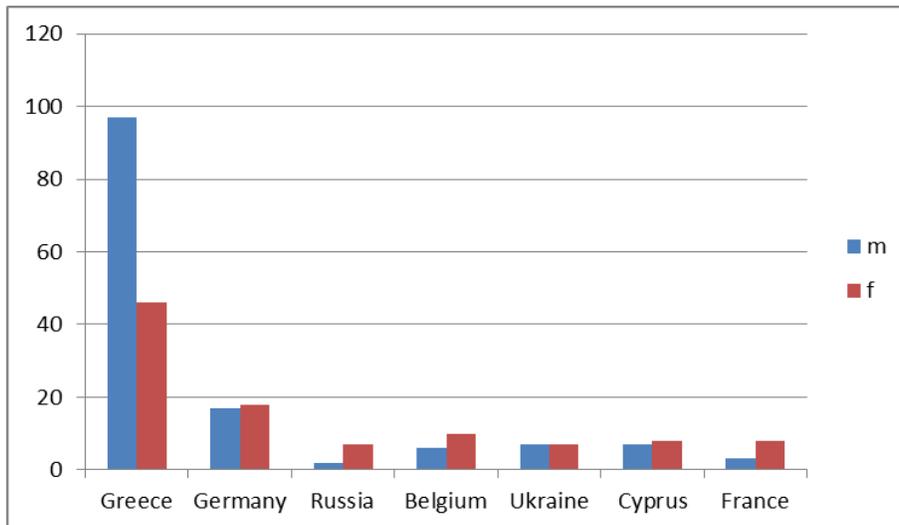


Fig. 6. Origin countries of returning citizens registered in 2014 (m – male, f – female).

Source: State Commission of Migration Issues (SCMI 2015).

The Center for International Migration and Development (CIM), which is promoting the cooperation between the German and other Governments in the area of global migration for sustainable development, plays an important role in the sphere of return migration. The Center is supporting Georgia with a pilot migration project in return and circular migration between Germany and Georgia (CIM 2013). The CIM project which started in 2007, has been supported by the German Government and the EU and helps Georgian professionals to go back from Germany to Georgia providing them an information and support on starting up an own business or/and to find a job in Georgia.

In total, there were 28 persons who have participated into the program, 10 of them belonged to the nursing sector and the other 18 to the hospitality sector. From the second group of the participants, 13 professions have returned, but only 4 of them have a work in the sector. On the other side, only one nurse has returned from Germany to Georgia.

Although for the moment there are only few examples of successful return, it is believed that this project will contribute to improvement of professional skills and the country's development toward effectiveness and innovation.

SKILLED MIGRATION IN GEORGIA – ANALYSIS OF THE FIELD WORK

Skilled migration refers to any migrant (immigrant or return and circular migrant) who has special skills, training, knowledge, and ability. This is usually referred to as brain gain, raising thus the average level of education of the remaining population in a way that may stimulate economic growth (Wadhwa 2008). Skilled migrants, who have returned after acquiring work experience abroad (i.e. original returnees), generally increase their employability and entrepreneurial skills often relying to their savings to invest in business activities after their return. The skilled return migrants give also an important influx of entrepreneurial and technological skills and financial resources. Their own network abroad helps to enhance effectively the host country's economic development and productivity. In this way, brain circulation reflects the positive aspects of movements, such as the development of expertise, business contacts, scientific exchange and cooperation and technology transfer (Docquier 2011, Jasnova 2012).

In the following we discuss our main results related to the Georgia country's characteristics, possessing all the ingredients to be transformed into an attracting destination for skilled professionals from abroad.

Analysis of the foreign educated and skilled labor migrants

Almost all foreign skilled migrants consider Georgia as a very rich country culturally and traditionally, with important geographic resources and impressive landscapes. Between the most attractive aspects that the respondents cited are the potential for development in almost all economic branches, the country's tourist potential, the low taxes, the effective and transparent administration, the simple way to formalize starting a business and the profit margin when performing it. Note that in 2016 Georgia was rated at 16th place of Ease of Doing Business by the World Bank (Doing Business 2016).

Generally, the interviewed were satisfied and integrated in the Georgian society (mainly in Tbilisi and other cities), although some of them reported about arbitrary procedures, differences in culture, education, gender issues and up to some extend irresponsibility. These perceptions were mainly expressed by people from Western countries, although all of them reported that they were impressed by the nature and the country's cultural heritage.

The critical statements about gender issues were generalized and not only expressed by female participants that clearly show the necessity of long-term programs in this aspect. Some of them have started with the help of some international programs within different international organizations such as, for example, the UNDP.

In the following we present some of the more important affirmations taken from interviews with foreign professionals during a 6 months' field analysis performed in 2014-2015.

The analysis of the representative groups of *foreign skilled migrants* in Georgia shows that the majority of the foreign investors coming from some neighboring countries like Turkey, Iran, Russian Federation or Israel, are investing in the Real Estate, retail and service sectors. They have a critical opinion about the business opportunities and conditions in Georgia but they are willing to continue with their investments in the country. Some of them are in favor of doing business mainly in the capital and the biggest cities, although some investors are also interested up to some extent to do it in the countryside, especially regarding the tourism development. This segment of the foreign skilled migrants is within the most willing to settle for a longer period of time in Georgia.

M., 50 years, Male: "I like very much the security system in Georgia. It is easy of doing business, the taxes are low. There is a good profit margin while doing business."

The foreign skilled migrants coming from USA and UK are mainly working in the educational sector (secondary school and universities) within some temporary programs. They have introduced new educational and social projects and practices to the Georgian students and have enriched themselves by the Georgian cultural heritage and customs.

T., 40 years old, Male: "I like traditions, landscape, foods, ancient history, dance, hospitality (makes the West a shame), people care about people."

L., 27 years old, Female: "I like very much the nature, the way of eating and drinking, the food, that everything has a solution, the international connections that I have access."

The professional experts are mainly working within some European projects or European institutions and programs, as well as NGO's. Their labor is considered important as they contribute for the process of integration in European structures. The opinion of these professionals about Georgia is positive and stimulating, although of some criticism related to gender issues.

A., 40 years old, Female: "I like the country (the nature) and the climate very much. I like as well the food, the wine, the hospitality, the style of doing things (they don't plan), but I dislike crazy traffic and the lack of tolerance."

As has been stated previously, the number of the foreign and exchange students from all around the world has sharply increased during the last 5 years, thus contributing to the cultural exchange and traditional interchange between the young people. The exchange programs, including European educational projects enrich the country's educational level and gives opportunities of exchange of national and international students.

K., 22 years old, Male: "I would say I am satisfied. I did not have many expectations but so far I am sure that I made a right decision to come here. I like that Georgia is so different, with many different faces. When it comes to nature then Georgia has flat lands, sea, half deserts, and mountains. I love Georgian food. I like people here. I like that there are a lot of places to visit in Georgia."

An aspect that should be changed is the approach towards students from developing countries, studying in Georgia, which have big difficulties getting residence permits and finding accommodation. By promoting the enrollment of these students, which mostly belong to the high classes of society, and who will leave Georgia after completing their studies, will contribute financially to the Georgian economy (with the remittances their families are sending them) and also helps to promote the Georgian culture worldwide.

Analysis of the native returned skilled migrants

To analyze the representative groups of *returned skilled migrants* in Georgia, we have focused on the project entitled "Strengthening the Development Potential of the EU Mobility Partnership in Georgia through targeted Circular Migration and Diaspora Mobilization" that has started recently between Germany and Georgia in terms of labor migration.

Within this project, a potential realization of the majority of the returnees is the hospitality sector in Georgia, offering a big potential for development. The South Caucasus region has a long history of tourism, which is currently revitalizing after the post-Soviet collapse. Tourism is one of the most important areas of the country's economy and it is expected that it will be properly developed.

The interviews performed during the field work with returnees revealed that there are big obstacles for the experts coming from a social science discipline. They have limited opportunities for a work in state administration NGO sector.

T., 30 years old, Female: " After promoting and defending my PhD in Social Sciences in Germany, I decided to come back to Georgia to live close to my family and to

contribute with my knowledge to the country. However, I see that this decision was not very correct as I cannot find a suitable professional realization. Thus I am forced to look for an administrative job and it is not what I am interested in."

On the other side, the finance sector offers better opportunities for professional development. This is also observed with the experts from some engineering professions who were able to find realization in big private projects related to energy and water resources distribution.

It seems that an important part of the returnees is also willing to develop some own tourist projects related to hospitality, green and eco tourism, eco agriculture or cultural and wine tourism. This segment is still at the beginning stages, however a lot of opportunities exist for foreigner and returned entrepreneurs.

M., 45 years old, Male: "After more than 7 years living in Germany, I have returned to Georgia with the intention to make some entrepreneur project in the domain of tourism. The country possesses a huge potential that has to be developed."

The country's administration is interested in to make similar project a reality, making them easy by providing a transparent, user-friendly, fast and almost fully computerized support for carrying out business activities and the related administrative tasks. This conclusion, sustained by numerous interviews, statistical data and literature, actually confirms our initial working hypothesis and shows in a consistent way the potential that the country possesses and the opportunities that it can offer for its future sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have analyzed the recent phenomena of skilled migration to Georgia by performing an exhaustive field research and interviews with different groups of skilled migrants (foreign migrants and native return migrants) coming from different areas of competence.

As a general conclusion of the analysis, one can state that Georgia is perceived as a country of opportunities due to its effective administration, transparency and safety. It is appreciated by its landscape, ancient history, traditions and hospitality as well.

The interviews with the return migrants have revealed that those people who came back mainly within the framework of some European return program, have the opportunity to work in different branches of the industry and service sectors at relatively good positions. These conclusions are also supported by the interviews with the group of foreign skilled migrants, who have the opportunity to work under some European or

international projects, as well as to invest in the country by profiting of the business challenges in Georgia. Both groups are interested in to work in projects from real estate, retail or tourism sectors, where there is a lot of demand of professional employees. With its natural resources Georgia is an attractive destination for entrepreneurs who are interested in to develop their own projects in the environment of easy, transparent, fast and efficient administration with little regulations, which will contribute to the economic development and social enrichment of the society. 

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