

UNIVERSITY OF PUBLIC SERVICE
Doctoral School of Public Administration Sciences

Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

**The Engagement of Highly Skilled Migrants in Knowledge Transfer to
their Home Country: Case of Palestine**

Thesis booklet

Supervisor:

Prof. Dr. Pasztor Scabolcs
University of Public Service

Prepared by:

Saqer Sulaiman

Budapest, 2020

1. Topicality of the issue

Promoting positive contributions of highly skilled migrants to development and knowledge transfer have a positive impact on the human capital and economic development in the origin countries. From a development point of view, migration of highly skilled migrants or as it is described in popular discourse brain drain may not necessarily lead to knowledge and skills losses. However, converting brain drain into brain gain is possible by engagement of skilled diaspora in knowledge transfer, and capacity building. Furthermore, “the diasporas knowledge network has led to the emergence of the brain gain skills circulation by converting the loss of human resources into remote although accessible asset of expanded networks”¹. The engagement of highly skilled migrants in knowledge transfer and development in their home country is a vital and important subject. In general, there are two models of skilled diaspora engagement to channel back skills and knowledge to their home country and to convert brain drain to brain gain. “The first one through the expatriates returns to the country of origin (return option). Nonetheless, the second option can be achieved through their remote mobilization and association to its development (diaspora option)”².

Historically speaking, the Palestinian diaspora is distributed all over the world. Decades of violence and wars as a result of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have led to the displacement and migration of millions of Palestinians. The long-term dispersion and restrictions imposed by the occupation have undermined the opportunities of the Palestinians abroad to return to their home country and to take part in developing it. Actually, the link between skilled migration and development is still weak in the case of Palestine. However, after the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), the Palestinian Diaspora and the highly skilled migrants have had some contributions to the transfer of knowledge and capacity building in their home country. The peculiarity of the Palestinian case, as a country that is still under occupation hampers the possibility of a permanent return to the Palestinians

¹ Kuschminder, K. (2011). The Role of the Diaspora in Knowledge Transfer and Capacity Building in Post-Conflict Settings: The Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals to Afghanistan IS Academy Migration Policy Report No. 1, December 2011, p. 12.

² Meyer, J. B., & Brown, M. (1999). *Scientific diasporas: A new approach to the brain drain*. Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme, p. 11.

abroad; the temporary return of the highly skilled migrants seems to be the possible and realistic approach that can be used to benefit from the skilled Palestinian Diaspora's experience and knowledge.

Given the increased topicality of temporary and circular migration all over the world, especially in those countries that suffer more of brain drain, and need to increase the contribution of highly skilled migrants to knowledge transfer, the necessity to study and measure this kind of contribution and its impact is substantial. This topic will be addressed through focusing on the case of Palestine, which is unique in terms of socio-economic factors. This research will explore the ways of engagement and the factors affecting the contribution of the Palestinian highly skilled migrants to knowledge transfer in their home country, additionally, it is going to shed more light on the impacts of this kind of contribution on the host institutions, the Palestinian human capital as well as the immigrants themselves.

2. Problem formulation and objectives

The West Bank and the Gaza Strip suffer from a low level of engagement of skilled diasporas in development and knowledge transfer. No doubt the “difficulty of returning to Palestine because of occupation; restricts the possibilities of skilled diasporas to contribute to knowledge transfer. This raises questions about their ability to contribute to state-building and development in their home country”³. As a matter of fact, there were some initiatives to engage Diasporas and the highly skilled migrants in knowledge transfer and development through temporary return migration. Unfortunately, with some exemptions, most of the contribution of the diaspora to knowledge transfer to their home countries came out as a result of Diasporas and international organizations initiatives, rather than by the Arab governments, moreover, these endeavors have not continued or progressed.

Despite the fact that literature and studies on the engagement of skilled diaspora in development and knowledge transfer to their home countries have increased in the last decades, at an academic level, this topic did not receive adequate attention neither in the Palestinian theoretical studies nor experimental ones. Previous research on migration has focused on three primary topics; the demographic and social characteristics of the returnees,

³ League of Arab state, (2008). Regional report about the migration of the Arab Labour, Arab brain drain bleeding or opportunities. Cairo. Policy Management of Population, Expatriates and migration / social sector. P. 95

Migration and its impact on the economic and social class formation. Thus, this research aims to fill this gap by offering an empirical investigation of these components. Hence, the former research studies did not address the topic of knowledge transfer except for one which did not discuss it in depth nor did it address all of its dimensions. It also did not consider the different factors affecting the contributions of highly skilled migrants in knowledge transfer, and measuring the usefulness of these contributions on the level of institutions, or human capital. This triggered the need for more studies to examine the unexplored dimensions of this topic. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by offering an empirical investigation of these components.

Furthermore, this dissertation aims to achieve the following objectives:

- The research aims to collect information on the factors that influence the decisions of highly skilled migrants to engage in knowledge transfer back home.
- To explore the ways through which highly skilled migrants transferred knowledge to Palestine.
- To examine and assess if there are policies and incentive packages to encourage highly skilled Palestinian migrants to engage in knowledge transfer back home.
- To develop a current understanding of the feasibility of knowledge transferred by highly skilled migrants to their home country.
- To provide context to the rise of interest in diaspora engagement. Furthermore, this thesis aims to establish and develop a model that will allow sustainability and institutionalization of the engagement of highly skilled migrants in transferring knowledge to their homeland.
- Palestine is not only a country that has not benefitted much from circular migration and the setback flows of social remittances and expertise acquired abroad, but it also lacks a comprehensive understanding of the various impediments and drivers that affect the transfer of skilled Diasporas accumulated knowledge to the home country. So this thesis sought to expand the knowledge-base on skilled Diasporas and their role in the development and institutional building. Moreover, it aims to explore policies to leverage the potential of skilled Diasporas.

3. Main hypothesis

Basically, the dissertation strives to address the above research questions by applying **three** main hypotheses as follows:

1st hypothesis (H1): Engagement of highly skilled migrants in knowledge transfer is not an on-going and regular process; it occurs often individually or through international organizations without any shared national policy or vision.

2nd hypothesis (H2): There are significant differences in the effect of the push and pull factors in the case of Palestine, and the motivation of the Palestinian highly skilled migrants to engage in the development and knowledge transfer processes of their home country are driven by specific factors.

3rd hypothesis (H3): The engagement of highly skilled Palestinian migrants through circular and return migration significantly improves the capacities of Palestinian institutions, mainly as regards their human capital.

Research design and strategy

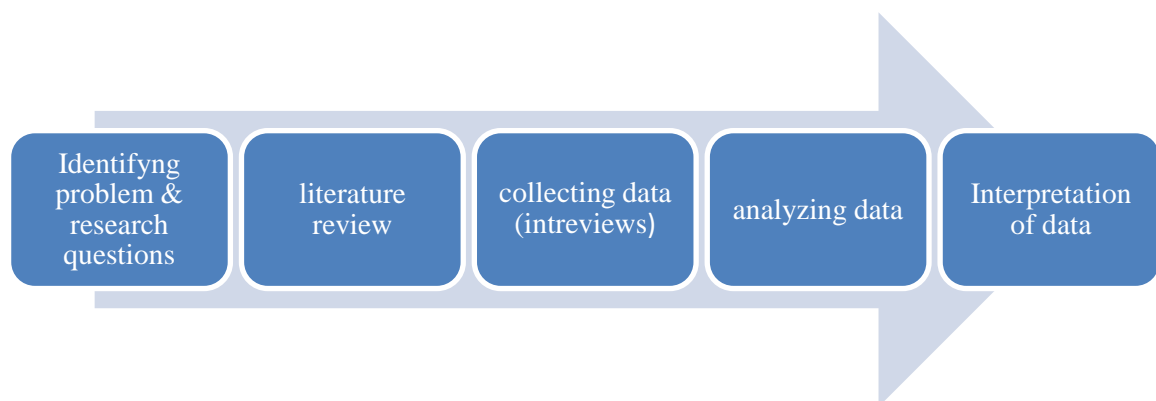
A research design is the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in a procedure (Kothari & Garg, 2014: 29)⁴. Indeed, “the research design describes the procedures you plan to follow in conducting the research”⁵. The researcher applied the descriptive-analytical approach, as it is the most suitable approach for the diagnosis of this topic. In the first phase, the researcher studied relevant studies related to the topic, directly or indirectly, collect data and information for the research, whether published or unpublished from various sources, such as books, previous studies, newsletters, government and non- government organizations reports and plans as well as the Internet and websites.

⁴ Kothari, C, R., & Garg, G, (2014). *Research Methodology: Method and Techniques*. Delhi: New Age International (P) Ltd., Publishers. 494, P. 29.

⁵ McNabb, D, E. (2018). *Research Method for Public Administration and Non-profit Management*. New York and London: Routledge. 543, P. 105

The researcher applied both quantitative and qualitative approaches and mainly relied on the primary sources using questionnaires and interview tools (soft indicators). The sources of indicators are international organizations such as IOM, the global competitiveness index (GCI) released by the World Economic Forum, and previous researches (Siar, 2012, Williams and Balaz 2005, Williams and Balaz 2004 & Kuschminder et al., 2014). This research was carried out taking into consideration Creswell (2012)⁶ steps in scientific research which consists of defining the problem, reviewing the literature, determining the purpose of research, collecting data, and the last step is to analyse and interpret data. (p. 7) According to this approach, the research questions were designed and distributed to the target group, then collected and analyzed by using SPSS statistical program, and finally answers and conclusions were drawn (See figure 3.2).

Figure: 3.2. Research design and steps.



Source: author's own compilation

4. Conclusion and findings

The results of the questionnaire and interviews revealed crucial facts and points that are related to the engagement of Palestinian skilled diasporas in development and knowledge transfer to their home country. However, I would like to draw special attention to the weakness and strength in the engagement process obtained from the data analysis in order to provide the required remedies to weakness and to enhance the strong points. Along the same lines, opportunities and threats have been stated. Based on the structure of the

⁶ Creswell, John. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative*. Fourth ed. Boston: Pearson, 204-35, p. 7.

SWOT analysis the main conclusions are categorized under the following headings: Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

8.3.1. Strengths

- *A high level of awareness of the importance of knowledge transfer.*
Findings revealed profound and significant agreement and awareness among highly skilled migrants and policy-makers on the importance of the engagement of skilled Palestinian diasporas in development and knowledge transfer to their home country. Skilled diaspora believes that it is their duty to come back and transfer whatever knowledge and experience they learned abroad to their home country.
- *High level of willingness to engage in knowledge transfer and development back home.*
The results showed that the highly skilled Palestinian migrants have the willingness and readiness to come and volunteer their services towards the building of the Palestinian institutions and share their knowledge with their community in Palestine. Furthermore, this strong willingness is mainly guided by emotional attachment and feeling of responsibility to help their communities.
- The results showed that the two main common means of engagement in knowledge transfer among highly skilled Palestinian migrants are *personal initiatives and international organizations*. After several years of living abroad, some Palestinians started thinking about their home country, and how they could pay part of their debt. So they began to look for ways to contribute to the development of their country. On the other hand, others get opportunities to do that through international organizations or sometimes through diasporas associations.
- *Widespread, deep impacts.* Also, one of the noticeable outcomes was that highly skilled Palestinian migrants impacted their community in Palestine not only scientifically or academically, but also socially and behaviourally.
- *Privilege and benefits of the international working environment.* Living in the host country provides highly skilled Palestinian migrants with opportunities and privileges which include foreign citizenship, gaining new knowledge and experience, and working in international organizations. All these benefits have helped them become more confident, engage in circular migration, and transfer knowledge to their home country.

- *The role of solidarity.* Availability of solidarity among the Palestinian diaspora in terms of assisting new immigrants in finding jobs and in integrating them into the Palestinian communities abroad.

8.3.2. Points for improvement

- *Non-systematic way of engagement.* The Palestinian endeavours to engage the diaspora in knowledge transfer still humble. The key point in this regard is that the engagement is done away from the Palestinian official institutions and in the absence of any government initiatives or any systematic way of engagement.
- *Limited national capacities and resources.* Despite the fact that the Palestinian institutions have the willingness to tap into skilled diasporas expertise, Palestinian institutions suffer from limited resources and weak infrastructure. Besides, their absorptive capacity is not entirely ready to take advantage of the experience of highly skilled migrants. Obviously, governmental institutions are less prepared to utilize such expertise.
- *Weak home country institutional background.* The feasibility and benefits at the level individual were better than that at the collective level, which indicates that Palestinian institutions are still lagging behind and facing real challenges in utilizing and disseminating knowledge especially those related to tacit knowledge.
- *The weak performance of embassies in this field.* Apparently, the role of the Palestinian diaspora's association remains modest in mobilizing their highly skilled migrants to engage in development back home. Additionally, the Palestinian embassies are not doing well regarding this issue. As a point of fact, the results indicated that these embassies do not have any database about their people in their host countries, which raises a big question about the performance of these embassies.
- *Inefficient diaspora associated institutions.* The Palestinian diaspora-associated institutions are scattered and they suffer from the overlapping of functions, and a low level of coordination. Indeed, expatriation management functions are spread across several agencies and stakeholders, which often lead to a lack of information sharing.
- *Lack of official incentives.* The efforts that have done by the Palestinian institutions to encourage skilled diasporas to come back to Palestine are still modest and dispersed. The findings indicated that there are no incentive policies for the mobilization and recruitment of the skilled Palestinian diaspora. For instance, the Palestinian Government

did not provide any incentives to the highly skilled returnees who came back and chose to stay and live in Palestine. Nonetheless, if there are any incentives, they are often a personal incentive or an internal incentive provided by the host institution rather than the government.

- *Weak monitoring and evaluation system.* Notably, the weakness of monitoring and evaluation of the performance of those skilled people who come from abroad is another shortcoming in their engagement in the development and knowledge transfer. The results showed the absence of such monitoring and follow-up systems especially at the national level, and ministry level with some exceptions such as the Ministry of Health.
- *Limited benefits.* Overall, it can be concluded that Palestinians have not fully benefited from the presence of skilled diasporas and that more can be improved in this regard.

8.3.3. Opportunities

- Presence of *international programs* to engage the skilled diaspora in transferring knowledge and best practices in various fields to their home country.
- *The role of facilitating factors.* The results indicated that the contribution of European countries, the USA, and Canada were the highest among others. This is due to the presence of facilitation factors such as knowledge transfer programs organized by international organizations or diasporas in these countries. Also, obtaining passports from such countries facilitates circular migration. However, most contributors are those who have dual citizenship due to the fact that they can move freely and easily within and outside the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- Some *diaspora associations* are very active in organizing knowledge transfer programs. Furthermore, there were some examples of the cooperation between international organizations and some diaspora associations.
 - *Nostalgia for the culture of home.* Many Palestinians abroad prefer seeing their children grow up in Palestine in order to keep them in touch with the norms and culture of their home country.

8.3.4. Threats

- *Occupation restrictions* remain the main obstacle affecting Palestinian life, including the transfer of knowledge and movement within and out of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

- *An unstable political environment and poor opportunities* limit the efforts of the Palestinian Government to mobilize and recruit more highly skilled Palestinian migrants to come back or to engage in circular migration between the home country and the host country.
- *Perception about some bad practices* in Palestinian institutions and exaggeration of corruption there negatively affects the decision of highly skilled Palestinian migrants to engage in transferring knowledge back home.
- *Unorganized and fractionalized diaspora.* Additionally, the relationship between embassies and communities is often not in harmony, Thereby undermining access to these communities.
- *Disparities in the standard of living* and salaries between the home country and the host country. Palestinian institutions cannot afford to pay salaries to these experts similar to those available in the host countries. Moreover, there are remarkable differences between working environments. Also, there are disparities in the level of education and healthcare between the home country and the host countries. In many host countries, there are a lot of social and healthcare facilities and sophisticated learning system which is not available in Palestine.

8.3.5. New Scientific Finding

- *Two-way processes.* Another observation in this research is that knowledge transfer is a two-way process. Highly skilled migrants are not only knowledge senders, but they can also achieve benefits such as gaining new experience, learn from difficulties and challenges they face in Palestine, building new relationships with people in Palestine, and learning new things about their home country.
- *Universities, NGOs, and the private sector are the best in engaging and utilizing highly skilled Palestinian migrants.* Indeed, they had the upper hand compared to public institutions in this regard. However, healthcare institutions were the best among other governmental agencies.
- The transfer of knowledge by highly skilled migrants had a *significant impact on the capacity building* in Palestine; however, the impacts on human capital were greater than on Palestinian institutions.
- *Skilled diaspora engagement is driven by particular factors more than others.* findings revealed that the most significant and influential factors in the diaspora engagement are

sentiment and national feeling as well as the host country factors such as obtaining foreign passport and gaining new skills.

- *Lack of specific diaspora policy.* The Palestinian government does not have a clear vision or strategy to build a two-way effective relationship with its communities abroad. Further, the engagement of skilled Diasporas in development back home is still not a priority for decision-makers.
- *Absence of a database on the skilled diaspora.* The results revealed that the lack of databases on expatriates and skilled diaspora remains the main weakness in diaspora engagement. Collecting and building this database is crucial to approaching the diaspora and engaging them in development at home.
- *Absence of a demand-driven approach that matches* the needs of the home country with the skills and qualifications of highly skilled Palestinian migrants. Previous initiatives to launch knowledge transfer programs quite often originated from donors with less government involvement.

5. Policy implications and recommendations

To fully reap the potential development impact of the skilled diaspora the following policy implications and recommendations must be considered by Palestinian government and institutions in order to enhance the relationship with diasporas and activate the engagement of highly skilled Palestinian migrants abroad in development and knowledge transfer to their home country:

- Developing a distinct strategy for effective and sustainable engagement of Palestinian skilled diasporas.
- Creating a database on expatriates and Palestinian communities abroad.
- Involvement of all actors and creating a good system that incorporates various stakeholders in Palestine is crucial to reach these skilled people and engage them in development and knowledge transfer back home.
- Supporting the sustainability of diaspora institutions and enhancing the level of coordination among them appears to be very decisive.
- Qualitative and quantitative analyses in order to provide a balance between the demand and the supply of skills.

- Improved information flow. Indeed, one of the interventions, the Palestinian Government should take, is educating the Palestinians abroad on the local conditions inside.
- Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of programs to encourage diaspora engagement.

6. Publication of the author

- 2018: Knowledge Management in the Palestinian National Authority Institutions. *International Humanities Studies* 5.1 (2018).
- 2018: Brain Drain in the Arab Countries. Chapter in a book, *Ajövő Közigazgztás Tudmoány*, 2018.
- 2018: Network Governance of Migration Profile in Palestine. *International Humanities Studies* 5.3 (2018).
- 2019: Public Administration in Palestine. *AARMS Journal/ 2019/ vol 18, Issue 1*.
- 2019: Risk Management in Palestinian Institutions. *Aeronautical Science Bullettins (RTK)*, 2019/2.

7. Curriculum vitae

Saqer Sulaiman graduated from Al-Quds University has a master degree in human development and institutional building. After serving as the director of the Development & Projects Department in the Ministry of Interior in the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), he is currently associated as the director of Expatriates and Migration Department in the PNA. Also, he worked as a National focal point for the Euromed migration project in Palestine. He has several types of research such as the role of peace and conflict resolution organization in developing a culture of nonviolence in Palestine. The role of non-governmental organizations in empowering women. Network governance of migration profile in Palestine. Knowledge management of the Palestinian National Authority Institutions. Guide to measuring the performance of non-governmental organization. He participated in several conferences like the international conference in public administration in 2017 in Rumania, and nation-building and minority rights in the world in Hungary.