

Chapter 1

Introduction



1.1 Statement of Objectives

Simply put, migration is a politicized topic. This applies both to migration itself as well as post-migration integration, and is the case both in the Global North and the Global South. There are, of course, variations in the degree of politicization, but it remains broadly present. However, on the other hand, highly-skilled migrants are one group of migrants who are only rarely politicized or seen in a negative light, both in political and in public discourse (e.g. Heath and Richards 2018). Conventional wisdom has it that highly-skilled migrants are high-earners with needed skills and that they integrate easily and quickly. This perception makes them a “wanted” migration flow (Triadafilopoulos 2013). However, as with most migration flows, there is quite some distance between popular perceptions of this migration flow and the more nuanced picture uncovered by social research. The objective of this Reader is to provide a basic understanding of the migration of the highly-skilled, but also to raise questions and to contribute to closing the divide between popular perception and research-based findings. We should note that the publications we have worked with have been overwhelmingly written in English. We are aware of the wealth of literature in other languages, and hope that others will expand this review beyond the Anglophone works reviewed here. The Reader will thus provide an up-to-date review and critical analysis of literature on highly-skilled migration, within linguistic limits. The review will follow three broad axes of analysis: definition and conceptualization of highly skilled migration; integration of highly-skilled migrants; and emerging patterns of migration and mobility.

An attempt to define the term already raises questions. Also referred to as “highly-educated” or “highly-qualified” migrants, there is not one universally agreed-upon definition of the highly skilled migrant. The definitions vary depending on the source, country and context. In the political realm, some lawmakers define the highly-skilled by using a salary scale, while others use level of education

(Chaloff and Lemaitre 2009). In the academic realm, the definition differs from author to author, with many authors not even defining the term at all. Where definitions are offered, there is, however, a broad consensus that the level of education, rather than the salary scale is the appropriate measure (Smith and Favell 2006; Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2014). The multi-causality of migration is, however, rarely recognized, with the indicator of education level rarely applied to such migrant categories as refugees or spouses, despite the fact that many of them meet the same criteria. We can then ask whether the definition of the “highly-skilled” migrant is limited to visa category, and not necessarily linked to an individual’s skills? Very often in popular discussion, this is the case, resulting in a mischaracterization of migrants’ profile, and further distorting the rhetoric surrounding migration and integration.

Students are a special category, considered highly-skilled in some cases, yet not in others (She and Wotherspoon 2013; Raghuram 2013). This then leaves us asking: what is it exactly that differentiates the highly-skilled migrant from simply a migrant?

In the Reader, we will delve deeper into the variety of experiences, discourses and realities of highly skilled migrants, focusing especially on geographical differences (Koser and Salt 1997). We divide our analysis into three groups of highly-skilled migrants, differentiated by region: North-North migrants, South-North migrants, and North-South migrants. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the first two groups will be more prominent in the analysis, not only because of their larger numbers (according to available figures) but also because of the rich literature on these groups; the third group, a more specific flow, will be discussed in less detail (Odok 2013). The North, here, is broadly conceptualized as being those countries which are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). North-North migration might, then, be migration within the European Union, or from Canada or the United States to Europe, as well as the inverse.

These highly-skilled North-North migrants are, more often than not, however, characterized not as migrants *per se*, but as “expatriates,” “lifestyle migrants” (Benson and O’Reilly 2009), “cosmopolitans” (Brimm 2010), “Eurostars” (Favell 2011), “elite migrants” (Beaverstock 2005) or as “knowledge migrants” (e.g. Ackers 2005). Although the term “corporate expatriate” is often used, we find that it is limiting; these specific postings and pay packages are also used outside of the corporate world, including by international NGOs and international organisations. For this reason, we prefer the term “organisational expatriate” and will use that throughout this Reader. At the same time, we note that the term “expatriate” is a very specific term, referring to those on time-limited deployment and specific pay and often tax packages. It has nonetheless become widely – erroneously – used to refer to all migrants from the Global North, and we will, in this Reader, demonstrate that the variety of migrants from the Global North includes the organisational expatriate, but is not limited to the organisational expatriate.

We find it of particular interest that North-North migrants are, for the most part, presented as non-migrants; as such, their integration is also often perceived as a separate phenomenon from that of “migrants”. Here, too, we notice a distinction

between highly-skilled migrants from the Global North and from the Global South. Those from the Global North seem to be exempt from the expectation of integration, with, indeed, self-segregation rather seen as being the norm (see, e.g. Ahmed 2011; Beaverstock 2002; Cohen 1977; Croucher 2009; Fechter 2007; Glasze 2006; Pow 2011; Smith and Favell 2006). Highly-skilled migrants from the Global South, on the other hand, face a different set of challenges and expectations (Lowell and Findlay 2001; Purkayastha 2005). Even though integration of those from the Global South is often implicitly assumed to be smoother than that of their lesser-skilled compatriots, their experiences are nonetheless often closer to the experience of the low-skilled migrant than the idealized highly-skilled path to integration.

This bifurcated view of highly-skilled migrants can be understood by a view through the lens of “country labels”. The “country labels” can be operationalized as the effects of the country of origin (Klekowski von Koppenfels and Weinar 2019). These effects are discussed as endogenous or exogenous features. The characteristics that are endogenous to the country are not mere perceptions, they are rather components of a migrant’s human capital. These components can underpin a “country label” but are measurable, such as level and quality of education, social and cultural development, or measurement of migrants’ health. The characteristics exogenous to the country, or what might be called the “country label”, is a set of beliefs existing in any given host country vis-à-vis a country of origin and its citizens. These beliefs can result in negative stereotypes and racism in the host country towards one group, but also in ungrounded overtly positive attitudes towards another group, **regardless of the migrant’s skill level**. These labels are important factors that support or challenge integration.

In our second axis of analysis, integration, there has been substantial literature on specific patterns of integration among highly-skilled migrants (Nohl et al. 2014; Duchêne-Lacroix and Koukoutsaki-Monnier 2016; Ryan and Mulholland 2014; Raghuram 2013; Piekut 2013; Fechter and Walsh 2010; Fechter 2007), but an examination of the integration of these migrants *as migrants* is still lacking. The migration of highly-skilled migrants is often portrayed as a movement other than migration, and their integration is similarly often portrayed as a phenomenon separate from that of the low-skilled migrants. When discussing highly skilled migration, Smith and Favell (2006) argued that integration policy seems to be thought unnecessary for this category of migrants. Yet, we point out here, integration is a challenge for all migrants, regardless of skill level. Indeed, highly-skilled migrants are still newcomers to a society and - aside from those recruited externally for positions - they also face barriers to the labour market, including recognition of qualifications, and obstacles in cultural integration. Also, the highly-skilled are the very group that most often experiences employment below their skill level, loss of status and painful adjustment trajectories, which also seem to be exacerbated for female migrants (Gauthier 2016; Adamuti-Trache 2011; Purkayastha 2005).

The migration trajectories and possible success of highly skilled migrants are shaped by several factors that can be applied to any migration flow and have been discussed in literature: the way they enter a country (with a job offer or not); marketability of skills that they have (in the IT sector or other sectors) and existence of

strong networks (Zikic et al. 2010; Mahroum 2000). In addition, the highly-skilled compete for jobs with highly-skilled natives, a competition which is said to be fiercer than the one on lower skill levels (Cantwell 2011; Schuster et al. 2013). The policy context is also crucial: intra-EU movers face fewer hurdles to their integration than transatlantic movers. The lower-skilled face higher integration challenges than the highly-skilled. However, the highly skilled face considerable integration challenges as well; in assuming that only the lower-skilled face challenges, the highly-skilled are hurt: integration support in the host countries focuses on low-skilled immigration and the highly-skilled are often left to their own devices to create a life on their own (Buzdugan and Halli 2009; She and Wotherspoon 2013). This can include painful transitions for trailing spouses - who often do not have the right to work - and children. Arguably, however, integration seems to be more difficult in the case of South-North migration, often because of the racial or cultural contexts in which migrants find themselves. As some researchers attest, the same challenges are part and parcel of North-South migration (Camenisch and Suter 2019). These migrants are usually inserted in a labour market but live in an international bubble that makes any meaningful integration impossible (Lauring and Selmer 2010), with negative consequences for themselves and their families.

The last axis of analysis is the evolving pattern of brain flows. Over the last two decades, the migration of the highly-skilled has become more fluid. It is no longer necessarily a migration for settlement, but often mobility to facilitate a job-hunt. Again, it seems that the North-North experience is distinct from that of South-North migration. For example, we are now experiencing a fundamental change in the transatlantic migration system, which is arguably a truly complete system of mobility, with circular and temporary mobility as the predominant model for transatlantic flows of people (Harpaz 2019, 2015; Weinar 2017; Cairns 2014; Chalk 2014). This change has to be critically examined: the factors facilitating circularity and temporariness depend on policies at both origin and destination, on the mobility opportunities offered at both ends of the migration system (e.g. bilateral temporary mobility schemes, academic and research cooperation, business cooperation) as well as the possibilities offered by one's passport (Pellerin 2011). Mobility also reflects the circulation of skills across the Atlantic, as well as circulation of labour, both encouraged by specific trade arrangements and a variety of bilateral or multilateral cooperation tools (Hübner 2011; Pellerin 2017). Indeed, it has been argued that highly-skilled migrants from countries which bestow more mobility opportunities on its citizens (e.g. North-Western European countries) are not tied to their immigration decision and if they do not reach their goals overseas, they have the choice of returning or moving elsewhere (Weinar 2019; Camenisch and Suter 2019). Such mobility patterns are also more acceptable now than they were in the past, e.g. thanks to the increased acceptance of dual nationality and internationalization of skills (Harvey 2012). This experience is not, however, shared by South-North highly-skilled migrants, whose passports do not give them the same access to mobility (Harpaz 2019). Indeed, the patterns of South-North highly-skilled migrants remain more settlement-bound, which brings us back again to the distinction in

integration between the highly-skilled migrants from the Global North and from the Global South.

Overall, this Reader seeks to draft the state-of-play in research on highly-skilled migration in the twenty-first century through a critical lens. Understanding the challenges of highly-skilled migration is increasingly important, as countries engage more strongly with specific immigration programs targeting this group. The rise of the highly-skilled middle class as well as lower barriers to mobility for educated professionals will likely boost the flows of this category of migrants. Indeed, the more human capital the world produces in a more mobile framework, the more highly-skilled migrants will be on the move, increasingly challenging our current understanding of drivers of migration, integration and belonging.

1.2 Organisation of the Book

The book is organised as follows. In the next chapter (Chap. 2) we discuss the definition of highly skilled migrants. We go through the main definitions of highly skilled migrants, both policy-applied definitions as well as the more academic. The chapter further discusses the variety of definitions and conceptualizations of highly skilled migrants, taking into account country of origin, gender and career path. We reflect upon the challenges policy makers and researchers face when trying to set boundaries of this particular category of migrants and present some of the critiques of the existing attempts of conceptualisation. We conclude that predominant academic discourses on highly skilled migration have been influenced by the public policy needs, and thus it is still the state and state administration – which approves visas – that has the final say in defining who counts as a highly skilled migrant or not.

Following from there, in Chap. 3, we discuss the relationship between the state and the highly skilled migrant. It starts with the critical discussion of policies and politics of highly skilled migration by examining the differences in hard and soft barriers to the full access to several measures of integration: labour market, citizenship, language and education. Using the conceptual framework of analysis built around macro- and meso-levels of integration, we look at the ways highly skilled migrants navigate labour market integration challenges. We put emphasis on the differences between experiences of migrants from the Global North and the South, and we discuss not only immigration experiences, but also return migration. The chapter continues with an overview of issues surrounding social and cultural integration. It also critically discusses the role of gender in highly skilled migration.

In Chap. 4, we propose to look deeper into the specific case of these Global Northerners who migrate within the Global North. As explained above, their experience is generally considered to be “non-migration”. In the light of the recent research, we disagree with this consideration, and propose instead to use the case of North-North migration as an illustration of the complexities of highly skilled migration. We are interested in exposing factors common to all migrants, which impact the lives of even those who are privileged to be highly-skilled and mobile in the

extremely open trans-Atlantic mobility space. At the heart of our discussion is an examination of the tension between settlement and mobility. We expand on the case of contemporary twenty-first century transatlantic migration system as model from which other migration systems might learn. We look into how policies in non-immigration domains (such as trade or education) can open up the space of circulation and how large-scale migrations can become associated with enhanced mobility, rather than with a domain of immigration policies. This mobility is however not a one-way or simple migration, as more freedom of movement lowers risks and brings more choices. While we might think, on the one hand, Global North transatlantic migrants might have an easier time migrating than do Global Southerners, on the other hand, they might also find integration difficult and, like Southerners as well, subsequently return. Integration challenges, often related to patterns of settlement and mobility, define North-North migration as much as any other migration. In our view, the Global North transatlantic case can thus enable broader generalisation about the experience of the highly skilled migrants.

We conclude with a review of the main concepts and themes of the book, and offer a research agenda for the future.

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