Chapter 2
Highly Skilled Migration: Concept and Definitions

2.1 Introduction

While there may be broad agreement on their desirability, there is not one agreed-upon definition of the highly-skilled migrant; the boundaries of the concept fluctuate depending on who is talking: economists favour a different approach than sociologists, while policymakers might have yet another view. In this chapter we will consider the various definitions of the highly skilled. Above all, we will look at two key factors drawn on in establishing these definitions: first, who sets the boundaries of the definition? Second, what is the purpose of any given definition? We will also address a number of inconsistencies in the definitions and conceptual frameworks which are used, and will present critical views of these conceptualisations.

But, first, we must acknowledge an important caveat: in the phrase "highly-skilled international migrant", it is the "international migrant" which remains the key term, with "international" an implicit part of the phrase. It means that these individuals are subject to national immigration policy and law. They often enjoy easier access to an entry visa and/or residence permit than their lower-skilled brethren, but none of them is exempt from these requirements. As all highly-skilled migrants are first and foremost individuals crossing international borders and therefore seeking to enter another nation-state, we thus need to look first at states' emigration and immigration policy. Indeed, our first, almost intuitive, answer to the question of who defines a highly skilled migrant is quite simple: the state does. The sovereign state exercises control over its borders; as such, it is up to the state to define who can enter, and under which rules – in short, to establish the definition of a migrant (Brettell and Hollifield 2014; Zolberg 1999; Weiner 1995).

The state sets the rules of entry through establishing visa categories and eligibility criteria for those categories, which, in turn, means that the state also ultimately defines the way data are collected. The means of data gathering thus additionally influences the ways in which the concepts of skills, education and migration are

reflected in the datasets used by researchers. We may of course argue that the international legal framework has influenced many states' decisions in this field (Joppke 1999; Lavenex 1999; Soysal 1994), but ultimately a state is bound by the international order (only) as long as it chooses to be so bound (Krasner 2009; Checkel 1997; McSweeney 1999). The state is the real power-wielder as regards conceptualisation of highly skilled migrants when granting them entry to its territory either through specific highly-skilled immigration streams or programs for economic migration. Phrases such as "the best and the brightest," "international talent" and "chosen immigration" fill policy discourses and shape real-world migration streams.

Of course, not all highly skilled migrants come through the streams dedicated to this category – they may enter as spouses or as refugees, for instance – and this is where the state-driven conceptualisation can be contested. However, scholars studying migration largely follow the state-centred view of highly-skilled migrants, working within state-defined policy and visa categories, which continues to influence the shaping of the definition. When defining highly skilled migrants, the academic literature overwhelmingly perpetuates the educational, skill and income criteria within a labour-market oriented view of this migration flow. Only recently have some researchers begun to question this dominant approach (Raghuram 2013; van Bochove and Engbersen 2015) by broadening the categories of entrants who may be considered as highly skilled.

In the next sections of this chapter we examine the academic and policy debates on the meaning of "highly skilled migrant" from the state perspective. We cover the three criteria most often used in literature to specify who may be categorized as a highly skilled migrant, namely education, skills and income. In the second part of the chapter, we will discuss scholarship contesting these criteria and offering a more nuanced view of the highly skilled migrant.

2.2 Highly-Skilled Migrants as Workers

Who is the highly skilled migrant? In migration studies scholarship, highly skilled migration refers generally to the stream of migrant, i.e. foreign workers sharing specific characteristics and who therefore qualify for a particular visa category. More detailed definitions depend largely on the function of the research. A review of academic literature indicates that there is no consistent definition or measurement of highly skilled, for a variety of reasons, the principle being that the variety of conceptualisations that are used are not necessarily to be found in available data.

Scholars studying the highly-skilled as a group and interested in their outcomes on the labour market generally use a data-driven definition. Those interested in policies on highly skilled migration, on the other hand, tend to employ policy-driven definitions, while, finally, those scholars who are interested in the lived experience of educated migrants tend to contest the dominant conceptualisations. In what follows, we will present these approaches in more detail.

2.2.1   Data-Driven Research on Highly-Skilled

The most obvious starting place to define highly skilled is either by the level of education (Borjas 2005; Docquier and Marfouk 2006; Peri and Sparber 2011) or by classification of occupation (Bouvier and Simcox 1995; Espenshade et al. 2001; Libaers 2014). The basic definition, often used by economists as a proxy to narrow down the data for analysis, is that a highly skilled migrant is a person with tertiary (university-level) education. However, even this is not a simple measure: in his report to the United Nations on highly skilled migration, Lindsay Lowell noted that capturing educational level in the data is in itself tricky. He gives the example of the data collection that uses age proxy: tertiary education should be normally captured in the adult group over 25, while most of the measures using age proxy focus on general cohort of 15+ (Lowell 2005). Building on this observation, Ron Skeldon noted in 2018 that the OECD, when discussing highly skilled in its latest publication, was basing its analyses on the population who are 15 years of age and over, thus including the population currently in secondary and in higher education (Skeldon 2018; Dumont and Lemaître 2005). This inclusion underestimates the highly skilled population and potentially leads to skewed data. However, this approach is a particular one, and the most common definition of highly skilled tends to be limited to persons with "tertiary" education, typically meaning a formal two-year college degree or more. Lowell notes that, as tertiary education is "the most readily available international statistic", it becomes the default measure for the highly skilled (2005, p. 2). This approach focusing on educational attainment is often used by economists, with the highly skilled can thus more easily identified within a larger sample of migrants. This variable has been widely used among those studying the effects of emigration on the countries of origin, and in particular "brain drain" (see Chap. 3).

Development economists interested in questions of brain drain have used data sets on international skilled migration, which defined skilled immigrants as foreign-born workers with university or post-secondary training (Carrington and Detragiache 1998; Adams 2003; Docquier and Marfouk 2006). In the same area of development studies, Beine and his colleagues concluded that existing databases did not differentiate enough between student migrants, i.e. those who came to gain education, and migrant workers, i.e. those who came with a certain level of education already obtained in the country of origin. They thus constructed a database which uses immigrants' age of entry to the country of destination as a proxy for where education was acquired. This distinction was important for the analysis of the effects of highly skilled migration on the country of origin (Beine et al. 2007). With time, the database has been used for a variety of studies, almost always focusing on the country of origin (Docquier and Rapoport 2012; Docquier et al. 2009; Rapoport et al. 2011; Beine et al. 2008).

Yet, the perspective of the country of destination requires a different set of definitions and, consequently, data. Many scholars employ the definitions proposed by the OECD, which tend to mix educational attainment with occupation. In the 1990s, OECD identified highly-skilled as meaning that an individual has a university

degree or extensive/ equivalent experience in a given field (OECD 1998). At that time, this included "highly skilled specialists, independent executives and senior managers, specialized technicians or tradespersons, investors, business persons, "keyworkers", and sub-contract workers" (OECD 1998, p. 21). This mixed approach brings to light the occupational dimension of highly skilled, acknowledging that not all skilled migrants actually work as such in their host countries. Some scholars have developed the occupation-based definition further. Czaika and Parson propose that any migrant with occupational qualifications in the top three categories of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) should be considered a skilled migrant (Czaika and Parsons 2017). This approach is then tested on ten national administrative datasets. This comparative approach has been adopted by scholars studying particular occupations (Clemens and Pettersson 2008; Bhargava et al. 2011; Franzoni et al. 2012; Czaika and Toma 2017). Yet, as Boucher noted., "Such benchmarking exercises may be driven primarily by pragmatism and a concern to draw large-scale cross-national comparative inferences even if they are not situated within the real effects of immigration selection policies" (2019, p. 14).

Most governments define, and thus measure, highly skilled immigrants in terms of both education and occupation. For example, the United States' well known H-1B visa is based on a list of occupations and a minimum degree requirement of a baccalaureate (4-year US bachelor's degree) or equivalent (Lowell 2001; McLaughlan and Salt 2002). Scholars of public policy, on the other hand, conceptualise the highly skilled through the notion of "skills." This preference responds to the clear utilitarian view of highly-skilled migrants, notably as vessels of specific knowledge and competences; much scholarship refers to them as "skills" or "human capital" (Dzvimbo 2003; Ganguli 2014; Mahroum 1999; Cunha and Heckman 2007; Becker 1975 Box 2.1).

Box 2.1: Highly Skilled Migrants in the US

Known as a classic immigration country, the United States is better known for a focus on family in permanent migration – including parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins as well as children and spouses – rather than labor migration. However, when it comes to temporary migration, labor migration comes to the fore.

The H-1B visa, established in 1990, is the best-known highly-skilled worker visa in the US, issued for 3 years and renewable once; H-1B visa holders can transition to permanent (Green Card) status. The cap on the H-1B, set annually by Congress, has remained at 65,000 since 2005, with an additional 20,000 for those with a minimum of an MA from a US university. In response to employer demand, it was raised to 115,000 in 1999 and 2000 and 195,000 for 2001–2003, but returned to 65,000 in 2004. Many employers are exempt from the H-1B, with the result that 570,000 migrants entered the US in 2018 on H-1B visas. The H-1B is just one of over 20 visa categories, however, many of which would also be seen as highly skilled, such as O-1 "Individuals with Extraordinary Ability or Achievement". Organisational expatriates are here in a separate category, L-1A "Intracompany Transferee Executive or Manager" and related visas – accounting together for nearly one million non-immigrant admissions in 2018.

Another way in which data on the highly skilled are collected is to use wage level as a proxy for skills and education. George Borjas introduced this concept, asserting that migrants and natives with the same skills are perfect substitutes in a receiving country's labour market (Borjas 2005). He also suggested that skills can be measured by income level. Recognizing that migration flows represent a continuum of skills and income levels rather than distinct categories, he proposed to set a cut-off line at a certain income level, proposing that the highly skilled migrants were those above this cut-off line. In his view, the value of the same skill would be reflected similarly across countries, because employers would, he argued, always recognize the net worth of such skilled workers, also rendering datasets comparable (Borjas 1987). Some scholars took on this idea and in some publications, wages are indeed seen as a proxy for "skill." Indeed, Ruggles and colleagues have gone so far as to develop a dataset that considers both occupation and salary (Ruggles et al. 2010). However, this approach has not been widely used in publications on the highly skilled in migration studies, in contrast to public policies themselves. Salary, bound together with educational attainment, has been at the core of the definition of highly skilled for several migration policies, e.g. European Union Blue Card, which adopts educational criteria as well as wage criteria (Cerna 2013; Triandafyllidou and Isaakyan 2014).

The difficulty of determining a clearly defined category of the highly skilled, from the point of view of a receiving country and its system of data collection, has been pointed out recently by Parsons et al. (2014). They presented three perspectives on the conceptualisation of highly skilled migration: definitions in national immigration statistics; definitions that govern national occupational nomenclatures, and definitions used in unilateral immigration policies. They identified three major discordances. First, a definitional discordance, when the same individual may be defined as highly skilled or not depending upon the variables used to capture them in data collection (e.g. tertiary education defined as 2-year college education or Master's degree). Second, an occupational discordance, when the same individual may be classified as highly skilled or not depending upon the occupational classification applied to them (e.g. national occupational grids (NOC)). And third, a policy discordance when migrants defined as such and working in the same occupations may be considered as highly skilled or not depending on the immigration policy stream through which they have entered (e.g. highly skilled, refugees or spouses) (Parsons et al. 2014). This inconsistency throughout data, methodologies and policy choices affects many individuals who are not identified – or counted – as highly skilled migrant workers (de Haas et al. 2018; Pethe 2007).

2.2.2 The Notion of "Skill"

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, immigrant categories are defined by the interest of the state: the current needs of the labour market as well as other economic and social concerns. Many authors have noted that "highly skilled" has, over the

years, become a synonym of desired, unproblematic migration (Triadafilopoulos 2013; Bielewska 2018; Beaverstock 2005; Iredale and Appleyard 2001; Boucher 2019; McLaughlan and Salt 2002; Raghuram 2004). Those who enter through skilled visa streams defined by educational attainment are often viewed as facing fewer challenges to integration and thus being less of a burden to the welfare state. As noted, however, there does remain a distinction for migrants from the Global South, for whom tertiary education is assumed to facilitate integration, and for those from the Global North, for whom integration is often not expected. Most importantly, members of the public seem to believe that the skilled migrants fill in a gap on the labour market and are less likely to replace domestic workers, thus not representing direct competition (Naumann et al. 2018; Kerr et al. 2016). One consistent element of these discourses is that the "skill" is clearly definable and easily differentiated from "unskilled" or "low-skilled" labour migration.

As noted in the previous subsection, there is considerable variation on how the highly skilled are identified in a policy context. Yet even the variation presented above only represents one broad category of the highly skilled. "Skill" is context-related and socially-constructed (e.g. Skeldon 2018). The term "skilled" can be broader or narrower than a college or university degree. For example, athletes and artists are, depending on the receiving country, often considered to be highly skilled but they do not necessarily hold a tertiary degree. Most importantly, the term "highly skilled" defined by educational attainment excludes many people with vocational education: this can relate to welders as well as some categories of health care practitioners. At the same time, both welding and health care professions top the lists of the migrants who are recruited in many labour immigration programs (Green and Green 1995; Beach et al. 2007; Walsh 2008).

To align the academic data-driven definitions with the real-world policy-making outcomes (which, in turn, create the administrative data upon which scholars base their analyses), public policy and migration studies literature focuses on the "marketable skill"-centered definition of the highly skilled. While not lending itself toward easy conceptualization in terms of data, it has been the most widely used in the research geared toward policy analysis. First prominent attempts to conceptualise highly-skilled migration around skills and the interest of the receiving labour market appeared in the 1990s. In that time the question of defining the highly skilled began to emerge, and it revolved around one question: what is the utility of the migrant worker? If they were needed because of their high skills, they were, indeed, highly skilled, leading to a somewhat circular definition. In this context the occupation and actual employment of the migrant seemed to be the more important dimension of the definition. For example, Salt (1997) noted that expansion of industries and services drove a growing recognition of the importance of international recruitment and mobility of the highly skilled in the 1990s. This expansion could only be supported by the increased employment of human talent with very specific skills. If these skills were not available locally, the companies would push for a greater opening in immigration policies, or would move overseas. The result was an increased net number of human capital flows thanks to the exclusive channels of migration and mobility put in place by governments willing to harness talent:

This takes place in the context of two fundamental and interrelated processes: the development of internal labour markets by employers, on the one hand, and of the institutional framework by governments to facilitate the global interchange of skills, on the other. The principal flows of highly skilled workers today reflect the global expansion of world trade, the international expansion of trans-national corporations, and the activities of institutions such as governments and recruitment agencies. (Salt 1997, p. 3)

Salt put the institutional framework at the center of his analysis, foregoing the traditional databases of tertiary educated migrants. The questions about why and how these skills flow across border thus became a central point of scholarly interest for over a decade. However, the very concept of skills has, since then, become quite contentious. As tertiary education ceased being the primary marker of the highly skilled in immigration policies, the question arose of what type of skills make somebody a highly skilled person. Even today, the working definition changes from country to country, and depends, as we already noted, on the needs of the labour market, whether annually adjusted or not. Who can access the labour market depends to a great extent on the system of recognition of qualifications. This system differs from country to country (even within the European Union) and formal skills are defined through that system. Robyn Iredale clearly addressed the issue of the variety of definitions of "skill" in his work on five Western democracies (2001). He reviewed concepts of skills embedded in skilled immigration policies as regards health professionals. He showed that there are a plurality of concepts and approaches to the definition of "skills" within political and policy debates in these countries. His most important contribution is, however, the critical reading of theoretical approaches to the question of highly skilled immigration. He argues in particular that existing policies and approaches to definitions are prone to gender and racial bias. This bias is linked to the public preference for a certain type of migrant, who is viewed as unproblematic. According to Iredale, the biased conceptualisation of the highly skilled worker as a wanted and unproblematic migrant permeates policy discourses and blurs the definitions: there are indeed certain racial and gendered hierarchies in the migrant continuum (Iredale 2001). Similar concerns were voiced more recently by Boucher. In her 2019 article, she reviews concepts of "skill," which drives skilled immigration policies in five Western liberal democracies. The author brings to the fore the plurality of approaches and definitions of skill in political discourses. While indicating the danger of simplification and essentialisation, she argues that "greater attention by policy-makers and scholars of skilled immigration to the theoretical assumptions underpinning their preferred models of skilled immigration would better reveal the gendered and racialised biases of existing approaches to skills definition" (2019, p. 1). A critique of the notion of "skills" in the context of international migration has also been delivered by Williams (2007), who argued that skills are actually defined differently by various actors involved in highly skilled migration; the state, the city and the company (A. M. Williams 2007). This multilevel approach to skill definition further problematises the assumed straightforwardness of the concept.

For some authors, skills seem to be defined better in the context of global labour markets. Where "internationally marketable" skills are concerned, national optics and politics give way to a broader view of human capital as a limited resource on the global scale. Therefore the needs and attractiveness of international labour markets set the boundaries for the conceptualisation of the highly skilled migrants. Solimano (2008) proposed a classification of skills according to the demand that exists for them on the international professional labor markets. The individuals in possession of these skills are the target of the global talent hunt, meaning that they have a high propensity to move and look for greener pastures. Thus, the policymakers and businesses who try to lure them globally do not necessarily see them as permanent immigrants, but rather as temporary residents (cf. Iredale 2002). These migrants fall into one of the following categories (adapted from Solimano 2008):

(a) People defined as directly productive talent, such as entrepreneurs, engineers, and technicians. They are engaged directly in activities that lead to the actual production of goods and services.
(b) People defined as academic (indirect) talent, i.e. scientists, researchers, research managers, and scholars. They work at universities, research centres, and think tanks and are devoted to the production and/or acquisition of scientific and scholarly knowledge that may be eventually translated into commercially valuable products and inputs.
(c) People defined as talent in social sectors. They include medical doctors, nurses and teachers. This talent is engaged directly in the provision of critical social services such as health or education.

Solimano's proposal largely reflects the current set up of national immigration programs geared towards highly skilled and skilled migrants. The sectoral-based definitions that consider the actual shortages and needs are dominant in Europe, but also in temporary migration programs all over the globe. Most importantly, they change with labour market needs and go through the economic cycles (Enríquez and Triandafyllidou 2016).

2.2.3 Migrant, Expatriate or Mobile Professional?

The idea of international labour markets resonates with the vision of the global labour market within which the highly skilled can move more freely than other (i.e. less skilled) migrants (Callister et al. 2006; Favell 2009; Geddes 2003). In principle, their flows are uninterrupted and facilitated, and this enhanced mobility is a key differentiating feature from all other migrants, including those who enter via the more traditional highly skilled migrant route. That particular feature of the "highly skilled" group was not lost on Salt (1997). In his attempt to provide a working

definition of the highly skilled migrant for the sake of public policy design, he noted that "migrant" is indeed the most problematic part of "highly-skilled migrant." Salt argued that highly skilled migrants are not seen as migrants, but mobile people. He suggested that those with high levels of educational attainment or occupations – which make them more likely to turn to international labour markets – often are not captured in migration statistics. These statistics tend to focus either on visa categories or on counting permanent residents, and rarely look at short-term, circular movements. However, highly skilled migrants enter under other visa streams (e.g. business visitors or visitors *tout court*) and, because of their high degree of mobility, may often remain mobile, rather than settling.[1] Hence, there is a sizable group of mobile people who are not enumerated as migrants, and thus are not captured on the radar of either scholars or policy-makers. While migration is the term most often used to describe the international movement of South-North or South-South migrants, when it comes to the international movement of individuals from the Global North, the term "mobility" is often used as an alternative by authors. This distinction underscores the difference in perception of movement from the Global North and from the Global South. Indeed, it has been argued that highly-skilled migrants from countries which bestow more mobility opportunities on its citizens (e.g. some 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). Such mobility patterns – back-and-forth movement, rather than one-way – 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 always give them the same access to mobility. 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. This clear distinction in patterns between what is called migration and what is called mobility has an important impact on conceptualisation of highly skilled migrants and the measurement of the same (Box 2.2).

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[1] A migrant is normally defined as a person residing in a state other than their state of nationality or habitual residence for between 3 and 12 months, or more than 12 months, distinguishing between temporary and long-term migration. https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions [accessed 25 October 2019] The UN Migration Agency (IOM) defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is. https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/migration/index.html [accessed 25 October 2019].

Box 2.2: Highly Skilled Migrants as Mobile People

To support early policy development, Salt (1997) proposed a categorisation[2] of temporary highly skilled migrants based on occupation and mobility patterns. He aimed at a conceptualisation that would accommodate the diversity of the highly skilled, with the varied composition of the flows, and differing patterns of mobility. Most importantly, he excluded from his discussion permanent immigrants, business travellers, and those migrants who experience deskilling in their new occupations in the country of destination, working in "unskilled" or "lesser-skilled" professions, despite having tertiary education. In other words, he was interested in foreigners who are employed in occupations normally assigned to highly skilled (educated) people, but who do not migrate through the special immigration streams for highly skilled, but rather through various short-term mobility schemes. In this sense, he introduced a clear distinction between migrants using immigration channels and mobile professionals in the field of highly skilled migration studies.

In a similar vein, Mahroum (1999) proposed five distinct categories of people whom he classified as highly skilled migrants, but in his definition they were just mobile. He used NOC classification to define their level of skills and occupations, and gave them nicknames that reinforced the notion of temporariness, key to the definition of highly skilled migrant in his view. These were: (i) Managers & Executives, whom Mahroum nicknamed "accidental tourists", (ii) Engineers & Technicians – "economy class passengers", (iii) Academics & Scientists – "pilgrims", (iv) Entrepreneurs – "explorers", and (v) Students – "passengers".

The focus on temporariness and mobility as opposed to settlement and migration in early work on highly skilled migration reflected the then reality of Global North migrants pursuing career development in an international context. Indeed, most of the categories identified by these scholars were related to what has been called the global mobility of talent (Crowley-Henry and Al Ariss 2018; McNulty and Hutchings 2016). This term is widely used in business studies concerned with the mobility of these so-called organisational "expatriates," who are on specific packages and have usually been posted abroad by their companies. Debate around the mobility of this specific group of people seems to be present neither in policy nor in public debate. It even might be said to be an invisible migration stream. The main characteristic of this type of highly skilled migration is that it tends to be short-to-medium term, but there are some other features defining this group. Beaverstock (2016) undertakes conceptualisation of skilled international migration through the lens of international producer service firms. He narrows down his definition to those "highly skilled, professional and managerial, and knowledge-intensive human resources" (p. 1) who

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[2] Salt called it a typology, but, arguably, he does not present "types" but "categories."

are deployed globally as a part of a company's organizational strategy. From the view of business studies, this global mobility of talent is a normalised practice in the training or managing strategies of multinational or international companies. Such mobility has become ubiquitous as companies organize their internal labor markets and client relationships more globally, introducing flexibility in the mobility of highly skilled staff. These changes prompt businesses to seek support from state policymakers for their new human resources management models. They lobby for more flexible talent mobility policies and tools (e.g. fast tracking, exemptions or special programs). Some use the existing legal frameworks to their advantage, as e.g. non-EU businesses employing workers with EU passports specifically to go for assignments in the European Union.[3]

Salt's categorisation included professionals who move for temporary stays abroad somewhat independently from the company (e.g. consultants). Business literature coined the term "self-initiated expatriate" to refer to this particular group of people (Cerdin and Selmer 2014; Doherty 2013; Fu et al. 2017; Froese and Peltokorpi 2013; Jokinen et al. 2008; Elo and Habti 2019), distinguishing them from the "organizational expatriates" mentioned above. The definition has not been clearly specified, however. Cerdin and Selmer offer a review of a variety of concepts and definitions present in this literature, and then propose a definition based on four conceptual, rather than quantitatively measurable, criteria to differentiate self-initiated expatriates from other migrants: (1) a self-initiated international relocation, (2) at least intentions of regular employment, (3) intentions of a temporary stay, and (4) skilled/professional qualifications (Cerdin and Selmer 2014). These criteria effectively remove any overlaps with traditional "organisational expatriate" or highly skilled immigrant who comes through permanent immigration channels.

Indeed, the criteria above are so broad that they capture the majority of highly skilled movers – many migrants move initially on temporary visas, including those on H1B visas to the US, which are renewable, and they include all highly skilled immigrants to EU member states, where all migrants have temporary status before obtaining permanent resident status. While many migrants do shift from temporary to long-term or permanent status, data are not available to indicate how widespread that shift is. Indeed, the lack of data more broadly for many of these sub-categories means that further study is often carried out as smaller qualitative studies, which contributes depth to the knowledge of particular groups, but does not necessarily contribute to the breadth of knowledge of the wide variation among highly skilled migrants. Also, the intention of a temporary stay and thus lack of integration is elusive, as we will discuss in more detail in Chap. 3. This is so not only because most temporary highly skilled migrants, even if they are considered to be exempt from integration requirements, do adjust to their local culture (van Bochove and Engbersen 2015), but because a common phenomenon among permanent migrants is the "myth of return", or "accidental migrant", i.e. they originally intended to emigrate

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[3] Agnieszka Weinar interviews with Ubisoft and ABB employees, March 2017 and June 2017.

temporarily, but happen to stay (Safran 1991; Carling and Pettersen 2014; Dustmann 1999; Klekowski von Koppenfels 2014). Mobile professionals have similar challenges as other international migrants – learning a new language, finding suitable employment – but do not have the support of their company, as do organisational expatriates. It is thus, in our opinion, impossible to distinguish them from "migrants" (Al Ariss 2010), because they meet all definitions of international highly skilled migrants. We want to note that the term "expatriate" has become broadly – and erroneously – applied to all migrants from the Global North (Klekowski von Koppenfels 2014, see also Chap. 4). Understood through the discussion above, however, the "expatriate", whether organizational or self-initiated, may come from either the Global North or the Global South. Key is that the individual have the skills and/or training which qualify him/ her as a highly skilled migrant and immigration policies recognise them as such. Very often, however, highly skilled migrants do not get such recognition.

2.3   Contested Categories

In recent years, scholarship has started contesting the conventional definitions of highly skilled migrants. Many researchers have rightly noted that immigration policies targeting workers are missing out on many highly skilled migrants, who are not identified as such. In 2016, Canadian Immigration Minister John McCallum made headlines when he argued that "all immigrants are economic immigrants" regardless of whether they entered Canada as refugees, family unification migrants or labor migrants.[4] He underlined that all of them, regardless of their visa status upon entry, will contribute to the Canadian economy, and are, further, needed to develop that economy, so treating them differently according to immigration policy categorisation is essentially nonsensical. His comments are particularly illuminating when we reflect on the fact that 65% of permanent immigrants to Canada in any given year are assigned to the so-called economic stream – yet this figure includes both workers and members of their families, obscuring administrative data for this group (IRCC 2016).

The same can be said about the prevailing definitions and data sources on highly skilled migrants: more often than not, administrative data on migrants capture those who come explicitly as highly skilled migrants, through specific streams, but it does not capture any other immigrants: international students, who come as students, but who may be already highly skilled in some domains; highly skilled who may accept migrating as low-skilled workers; skilled refugees and spouses who enter as refugees or asylum-seekers, spouses or intended spouses. We briefly discuss these groups, with reference to inclusion in the highly skilled.

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[4] https://globalnews.ca/video/2579468/immigration-minister-calls-all-newcomers-economic-immigrants [accessed 29 March 2019].

2.3.1 International Students

OECD in its publication on highly skilled migration included a chapter on international students (Tremblay 2002). In 2002, this approach – including international students as highly skilled migrants - was a fairly common, intuitive approach. International students, defined as individuals who were in education beyond 15 years of age and who crossed international borders to enrol, became one of the targets of policies attracting skilled workers. However, they are not, as a group, strictly speaking, highly skilled migrants, whether measured by the criterion of educational attainment (tertiary degree achieved), the criterion of professional experience, or even of salary. Rather, their inclusion in the category of highly skilled migrant reflected the possibility of their retention in the country of destination after graduation, as a highly skilled immigrant, promoted *inter alia* by the International Labour Organisation (Kuptsch 2006).

The prevailing idea was thus that international students are per definition skilled because they have the potential to become highly skilled down the road. If they pay for their education and then stay to work in highly skilled occupations in the country of destination, this certainly does seem to be a win-win situation for both migrants and for the country of destination. Hence, policy makers have been eager to portray students as potentially highly skilled migrants, or at least: wanted migrants, those who will be easily adaptable to the domestic labour market and society (Hawthorne 2008, 2010). Indeed, many authors have demonstrated that the experience of being an international student increases the likelihood of becoming a skilled migrant after graduation (F. L. N. Li et al. 1996; Salt 1997; Koser and Salt 1997; Cairns 2017). Moreover, some scholars have claimed that the networks developed by international students also serve to increase highly skilled immigration, because they support their colleagues and friends from the country of origin in their emigration project. The circulation of skilled labour is thus partly due to the presence of international students (Khadria 2001; Koser and Salt 1997; Gribble 2008; Vertovec 2002) (Khadria 2001; Vertovec 2002; Gribble 2008).

However, in the light of the knowledge accumulated over the last 15 years, it has become clear that the status of permanent highly skilled worker is not an obvious outcome for international students. Already in 1999 Mahroum classified students as passengers rather than stayers, people who stay but also return, or move forward (Mahroum 1999). As to skills, several researchers have raised some doubts as to how to address the educational attainment in students. For example, Skeldon (2018) questions that all students should be considered as highly skilled. He brings to light the variability of skill levels attainable through formal tertiary education (e.g. a range from BA to PhD), type of skills (e.g. technical or not), and fields of studies (e.g. humanities or medicine). These differences are important, and they showcase the point made by Williams (2007) about the invisible yet real, unspoken yet solid skill hierarchy, which changes from actor to actor and is socially constructed.

The character of skills is not the only headache. Some authors noted that it is very difficult to actually collect data on international students as highly skilled

immigrants: to establish the boundaries of the group, there should be a clear distinction between those in the process of training and those already trained, those who work during their studies, and those who wait until graduation (Skeldon 2018; She and Wotherspoon 2013). So when does the international student stop being a student and becomes a highly skilled migrant? Or otherwise: when does the student cease to be a student? From the administrative perspective, we are talking about the change in status (from student visa to permanent residency, or to a work permit for example). But it is not sure that a student will get a shot at the highly skilled position, so it may be that they undergo deskilling to stay.

This conceptual conundrum has been addressed in recent work of Raghuram, who argued that student migration is a key component of knowledge migration (Raghuram 2013). The term "knowledge migrant" has been used the most in the field of human resource management studies and education studies to denote highly skilled migrants (A. Williams and Baláž 2014). In this sense, the "knowledge" is not really defined in standardised terms, it is defined by the participants in the field it is applied in. In business studies, these are people who have the knowledge that is needed in the given sector. Scientists, researchers and students make part of this category, although they are not necessarily workers (Ackers 2005). In the 2013 article, Raghuram shows that the term "knowledge migrant" becomes more and more blurred as knowledge becomes central to any migration project. This is migrant selectivity at play: migrants without knowledge run higher risks and costs of migration. In this context refugees, economic and family migrants tend to engage in knowledge acquisition, at all stages of migration. This generalised run towards knowledge blurs the distinction between international students and other categories of migrants, and in our opinion also blurs the categories within the highly skilled field. Raghuram postulates that international students are still the "quintessential knowledge-seeking migrants" (p. 149) and that their distinctiveness can be deduced from their primary motive to move: studying.

The concept of "knowledge migrant" contests immigration policy-centered definition, driven by a variety of visas and permits, where the main motive to migrate defines the migrant. It can be neat for policy makers, but leaves us with a conceptual Gordian knot. The ambiguity of classification of international students has meant that they have become a subject to a separate research field, which offers more contextual definitions, depending on the actual case study that is presented (King and Raghuram 2013; Cairns 2014; De Wit et al. 2008).

2.3.2 Spouses – Trailing or Not

"Trailing spouse" has been a dominant label attached to a skilled spouse of an international professional for three decades now. It was first used by scholars in business studies, who examined the obstacles to international mobility among managers. The biggest obstacle that they identified was so-called "dual career couple," in which the spouse was reluctant to give up her career (L. L. Jean-Yves 1987; Eby 2001; Harvey

1998). Michael Harvey, who established the category of "trailing spouse" defined them as skilled individuals, mostly women, who followed their husbands and had to renounce their careers for the time of the move (Harvey 1998; van Bochove and Engbersen 2015). In these works, the "classic" travelling or trailing spouses have been firmly categorised as high-income expatriates who move in the bubble of intra-corporate transfers. Migration of this group has not been thus of major interest to any of the migration scholars for a long time. It wasn't until gender dimension of highly skilled migration entered under the radar of migration scholars very recently (Triandafyllidou and Isaakyan 2016; Kofman 2000) that researchers have started turning our attention to the plethora of nuances of spousal migration, especially among the highly skilled.

First, it has been acknowledged that most of the highly skilled spouses in dual career couples are not "classic" trailing spouses, but spouses accompanying a regular highly skilled migrant (i.e. not an intra-corporate transferee) to the new county of destination (Raghuram 2004; Purkayastha 2005; Vergés Bosch and González Ramos 2013, Cooke 2001; Pixley 2008; Eby 2001; Mäkelä, Känsälä, and Suutari 2011; van der Klis and Mulder 2008). This might be as well a new phenomenon, which was not so widespread – or perhaps not so well-known – a couple of decades ago. The global shift to immigration policies that favour skilled immigrants have had a rather unintended consequence: an influx of spouses. Whereas the classic "organisational expatriate" was the purely temporary migrant and the spouse was indeed a "trailing spouse," often without the right to work, highly skilled immigrants nowadays can settle in countries that pursue skilled settlement migration programs that can cater also to the spouse. So there is less "trailing" and more "family reunification" all around the globe.

Second, the travelling spouse is not necessarily a woman. There is a breadth of literature on gendered migration that focuses on women' experience, but men are more and more represented among migrants' spouses (Amcoff and Niedomysl 2015), whether in heterosexual or homosexual partnerships (McPhail et al. 2016). This is rather uncharted waters, as the work on highly skilled professional women has only just started and we do not know enough about their family dynamics (Kõu and Bailey 2017; Gropas and Bartolini 2016). This gender aspect further complicates the definition of highly skilled migrant.

Third, spouses of highly skilled migrants tend to be highly skilled themselves (Cangià 2018; Raghuram 2004); it is a general truth in social studies that individuals often choose partners with similar educational levels and social backgrounds. The policy focus on highly skilled migrant workers in countries like Canada or Australia brought a wave of skilled spouses, who are, however not defined as highly skilled migrants themselves. Although entering under the economic migrant umbrella, they are registered statistically as dependents of highly skilled migrants (IRCC 2016). This methodology skews the data and requires additional data processing e.g. to see educational levels of spouses, which is gathered in some countries (e.g. Canada and Australia), but by no means all.

Fourth, because they are generally overlooked in immigration policies, and may not have the right to work in formal employment, they often suffer acute deskilling

or job-loss in the migration process (Purkayastha 2005; Kranz 2019; Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou 2018).[5] They might be the top example of why skills and occupation do not help to define who a highly skilled migrant is, as they end up either unemployed for long periods, or chronically underemployed.

All in all, scholars generally have not yet considered spouses of highly skilled migrants as highly skilled migrants in their own right (e.g. Reslow 2018). This might be again dictated by the policy reality, where the motive for migration (in this case: following a spouse) is dominant for any definition. However, since the policy makers like Minister McCallum have started to appreciate the characteristics of this stream of spouses, there has been increased interest. The work taking this perspective is scarce and developing, with the possible inclusion of this category in the definition of highly skilled to come.

2.3.3   Refugees – Reluctant Non-workers

Are refugees highly skilled migrants? Overall, the answer used to be a "no." Educational attainment or professional experience of refugees have not been of much consequence. In countries with permanent immigration programs (most prominently the US, Canada and Australia), refugees have been conceptualised as part of a strategy fulfilling humanitarian goals, rather than seeing refugees as potential net positive economic contributors to the economy. Nonetheless, they are granted the right to work upon arrival, with refugee status recognised (Knowles 2016; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2006).

In the European Union, which does not have the same refugee resettlement programs as Canada, the United States and Australia, the discussion is focused instead on asylum seekers, i.e. migrants who apply for refugee status on EU territory. As they are seen, on the one hand, as humanitarian cases and, on the other, as having a pending status and, above all, not seen as economic migrants in the sense of having an expected overall contribution to the economy, they are often not entitled to work (there is some variation across the EU; Hatton 2016) until their status as refugees has been recognized, a process which may take months, sometimes years (Berthoud 2000; Bloch and Schuster 2002, Hatton 2016). In addition, they are often disparaged as so-called "bogus asylum seekers", said to have no credible claim to refugee status, and to be trying to benefit from the European welfare state (Hatton 2016; Huysmans 2006).

Once they have had refugee status recognized and they are entitled to work, refugees nonetheless face a range of barriers to employment, although there has been progress in recent years. Even so, for refugees who arrive in the country of destination without formal proof of their academic and professional qualifications or work

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[5] See e.g. the survey of Internations, a global group for expats, mobile professionals and other skilled migrants. https://www.internations.org/expat-insider/2015/expat-spouses [accessed 29 March 2019].

experience, as many do (Phillimore and Goodson 2016), it is difficult to demonstrate education or skill level. Hence, refugees are more often than not automatically treated as low-skilled workers (Dustmann et al. 2016; Lergetporer et al. 2018) or may be confined to the secondary labour market, based on racial or ethnic bias (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2006). Those who prepared their move more meticulously and were able to bring evidence of qualifications or experience, could hope for local recognition and in the long run: the label of a highly skilled migrant. Many UN-led and EU-wide policy initiatives try to rectify the situation, especially since 2014.[6] Even so, Eggenhofer and colleagues, using a Bourdieusian notion of capital,[7] showed that the human and social capital of Afghani and Syrian refugees was strongly devalued, that attempts to employ their cultural capital encountered unfamiliar labor market rules, occupational identity threats, and status loss, and that acquisition and conversion of new capital is a complex and lengthy process (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al. 2018).

A more nuanced perspective on refugees and skills has been emerging in the aftermath of the so-called refugee crisis in Europe. There has been a clear change of the dominant discourse, with information on the declared skills of refugees now collected. Indeed, many Syrian refugees to Europe to 2018 had achieved tertiary education (Desiderio 2016; Eggenhofer-Rehart et al. 2018; Juran and Broer 2017). There has also been a big push to create opportunities for those refugees who fled the war during their studies, such as the gradual establishment of permanent and large-scale programs for university-aged youth (Streitwieser and Idriss 2017). Such approaches put refugees in the category of international students, and thus potentially highly skilled immigrants.

In refugee resettlement countries like Canada, where the understanding that "all migrants are economic migrants" has, as noted above, only just started to shine through, there is as yet only a nascent interest in the skills refugees can bring. Refugees may well be highly skilled migrants, as demonstrated by the experience of the Green card (highly skilled worker program) in Germany, which had a high number of refugees and displaced persons among its applicants (Pethe 2007). How these discoveries and assertions from the research community will change the definition of the highly skilled migrant (and thus affect the administrative data collections) is still the question of the future.

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[6] http://www.aca-secretariat.be/index.php?id=1104 [accessed 21 January 2019].

https://www.mariecuriealumni.eu/news/science4refugees-initiative [accessed 21 January 2019].

http://www.akademikmiras.org/en/yok-ve-multeciler [accessed 21 January 2019].

https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2019/01/report-examines-progress-in-recognizing-refugees-credentials/ [accessed 21 January 2019].

https://www.unhcr.org/5bc07ca94.pdf [accessed 21 January 2019].

https://www.unhcr.org/ [accessed 21 January 2019].

[7] See Box 3.2.

2.4   Geography and Skills

In the last section of this chapter, we want to touch upon a notion of geography in definitions of the highly skilled migrants. This is the distinction between the highly skilled from the Global South – universally referred to as "migrants" – and the highly skilled from the Global North – nearly universally referred to as "expatriates" (Klekowski von Koppenfels 2014, 2015). This geographical distinction – accompanied by implicit, if not explicit, racial and ethnic bias, has an impact upon how the highly skilled are portrayed and defined; we will develop these ideas further in the subsequent chapters. In 1988, Gould developed a typology of the movements of highly skilled international migrants in Africa associated with levels of economic development of the countries of origin and destination. At that time, skilled migrants from Western developed countries – the Global North – were associated predominantly with a migrant that reflected the "organisational expatriate", or, in a sub-Saharan African context, often the humanitarian worker, while skilled migrants from developing countries – the Global South – were seen as permanent emigrants to the more developed world (Gould 1988). That typology was focused not on migration, but rather on development policy, examining concepts such as "brain drain," or the negative impact of emigration on development.

Within migration studies, more emphasis has been placed upon South-North migration, rather than on South-South or North-North. This emphasis emerges from the work done in the 1960s and 1970s by development economists who were interested in the effects of the movement of human capital from developing to developed countries (A. B. Zahlan ed. 1982; Adams Jr. 2003; Zhao et al. 2000; Koser and Salt 1997).

Moreover, migration from the Global South to Global North has been a dynamic force with a significant impact on the societies of the strongly developed OECD states. The research on the impact of highly skilled migration from the South on the country of origin – largely through a study of brain drain – has been thus complemented, and in many cases, substituted, by research on the impacts on the country of destination, including impact on native workers (Borjas 2005; Friedberg and Hunt 1995; Biavaschi et al. 2018) (Box 2.3).

Box 2.3: What Is the Impact of the Temporary Foreign Workers?
The Canadian TWF program, in place since 1973, was opened to all occupations in 2002. Instantly, the number of foreign workers has risen by 234.5% in the first decade (2002–2012). The largest increase has been in Western Canada (371.3%) and the lowest in Ontario (137.6%). As noted by Dominique Gross (2017), that increase took place regardless of the rising unemployment, especially during the financial crisis years, pointing to the adverse effects the programme had on domestic workers. Over her many publications, Gross has shown however, that the highly skilled temporary workers have less impact on the domestic workforce than low skilled ones. Gross has noted also the important policy considerations that must be taken under account regardless of the skill level of the TFW namely the need to incentivize the employers to invest in training of youth for occupations and in technological innovations.

   Within studies on South-North migration, disproportionate interest has been paid to highly skilled migration from India and China. By far, these two countries of origin are the most represented among the recent articles in the leading population and geography journals.[8] This is not surprising, as India and China are now leading countries of origin for skilled migration and student migration to the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, while ranking near the top also in the UK. They have the biggest populations and the growing culture of internationalisation of human capital (Lakha 1992; Kumar 2013; Gao et al. 2013; Sanfilippo and Weinar 2017). These two groups dominate research that asks questions from the perspective of the countries of destination, but also from the perspective of individual migrants: integration in host society, labour market success, skill development and career prospects, return and transnational business networks (Czaika and Toma 2017; Fernando and Cohen 2016; Kirk et al. 2017; Siddiqui and Tejada 2014; W. Li and Lo 2012; Yao 2012).

   In contrast, the studies on highly skilled migration from Sub-Saharan Africa still focus predominantly on the impacts on the country of origin, hence they develop further the development perspective (Clemens and Pettersson 2008; Capps et al. 2012; Creese and Wiebe 2012). There is rarely a question on how highly skilled African migrants develop their country of destination or how they contribute with their knowledge to the global economy. The various treatment reserved for various geographies reflects a certain hierarchy of issues that can be tackled in relation to their highly skilled migrants. In this view, the political and racial bias is perpetuated and the highly skilled label has different connotations.

   North-North migration of the highly skilled is another widely researched topic. Yet, as noted earlier, it is usually not called migration, but mobility. There are four geography-related aspects to this field of research. First, intra-EU mobility, a prime example of North-North migration, is a type of mobility confined to a geo-political space. In this space, 40% of movers have tertiary education, so they can be regarded as North-North highly skilled migrants (Gropas and Bartolini 2016). The EU case is a specific case, where the data on intra-EU mobility is not easy to get, because these highly skilled workers are not captured through any dedicated immigration programme. Second, contemporary North-North migration is often portrayed as quantitatively inconsequential (Weinar 2018), as well as having no integration or political ramifications, and thus not interesting to study. Third, contemporary North-North migration is erroneously not seen as permanent migration, so the mobility of highly skilled (including students) in this geographical space is perceived as temporary and circular at best (Klekowski von Koppenfels 2014). Fourth, there is little conceptual clarity about who the "North-North migrant" is. The perception that all North-North migrants are highly skilled seems to permeate the field (even, to some extent, as regards intra-EU mobility). In addition, concepts such as "life-style migration" (King et al. 2000; Benson and O'reilly 2009) and "love migration" (D'Aoust 2013; Sinke 1999) are conflated with highly skilled migration and in result, the

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[8] Agnieszka Weinar e-journal database content review, 10–15 January 2019.

predominant idea is that North-North migration is not only unproblematic, it is also a personal happiness pursuit by highly skilled migrants who enjoy the benefit of choice. There has been enough research on North-North migration to suggest that these assumptions are incorrect, but not enough to give a complete picture of these migration flows. We will address those in more detail in Chap. 4.

To complicate the issues, within business management literature, North-North and North-South migration is often conflated. The studies of "organisational expatriate" mobility are nearly exclusively about mobility from Western developed countries. Their destination can be to other developed countries or to the countries in the Global South (Beaverstock 2017, 1996). The added complexity of today's global mobility of professionals and their international career development changes the old patterns (Meyskens et al. 2009). Many Western international highly skilled movers can be classified as "self-initiated expatriate" (Cerdin and Selmer 2014). Some of these emerging populations of expatriates have been termed "international itinerants" (Banai and Harry 2004) or "independent internationally mobile professionals" (McKenna and Richardson 2007). Interestingly enough, the term "migrant" is still avoided, as it is in all other cases of North-North migration. This labelling approach, coupled with the highly skilled migrations streams open for South migrants contributes to racialisation of the concept of the highly skilled migrant.

Finally, the understudied geographical mobility, South-South migration of highly skilled is in its nascent state (Ratha and Shaw 2007; Botha and Rasool 2011; Facchini et al. 2011). With the emergence of Africa as a business hub, this mobility will become a more important focus of research. For the moment, however, it is largely ignored, leaving the overall impression that South-North is the defining line of the geographies of highly skilled migration.

2.5   Conclusions

As we have shown in this Chapter, the definitions of the highly skilled vary. They have been mainly driven by the administrative data used to meet policy needs. The research in this area has been very much policy oriented and until recently has developed in two main fields of study: public policy and management studies. However, with the evolution of the research field, the definitions have been nuanced by the contributions from other scholars: sociologists, anthropologists, and those in the field of education. Current debates on how to define a highly skilled migrant evolve nowadays around the concept of skill measurement, employability and educational attainment. What seems to emerge from these debates is a consensus that the definition of the highly skilled is very context-dependent and can be adapted to particular needs. It is thus still more utilitarian than academic. Policy needs seem to be crucial in this case, more than in any other migration category.

In the next Chapter we will delve deeper into the lived experience of the highly skilled to determine the impact of the policies that define them. We will particularly look at their integration, keeping in mind all the different moving parts of their definition.

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