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INTRODUCTION



## Highly skilled migration between the Global North and South: gender, life courses and institutions

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Highly skilled migration is emerging as the new wave in the migration flows between countries both in the Global North and in the Global South. Skilled migration<sup>1</sup> is seen as one of the key elements for economic growth and innovation. According to a joint paper released by the OECD, World Bank and ILO (2015), the share of skilled migrants compared to all other migrant groups has been continuously increasing and by 2010/2011, nearly one-third of all highly skilled migrants in the OECD came from Asia and one-fifth of all tertiary educated migrants in the OECD area are from countries such as India, China and the Philippines. Many of the skilled migration programmes are geared towards attracting the skilled workforce from the Global South (Boucher and Cerna 2014). For example, in the EU many skilled migration programmes are geared towards third country nationals, as citizens of the EU countries have no mobility or residency restrictions within the EU.

The global competition for highly skilled migrants has increased considerably along with the increasing part highly skilled migrants play in maintaining the growth of developed economies. As Beaverstock (2012) observes, the strong growth in various economic sectors in the last three decades has necessitated the mobility of highly skilled transnational migrants, especially in sectors where there are global talent shortages. In EU countries, population ageing and decline in some regions has meant that many countries are dependent on foreign skilled labour both to innovate and to sustain their economies. Often many of the skilled migrants come from low- and middle-income countries, for example, in the fields of medicine and information technology. The growth of knowledge economies depends on the companies getting the right skills at the right time and to the right price (Hopkins and Levy 2012). George et al. (2012) warn that restrictions on immigration of the highly skilled would lead to loss of productivity and innovation.

The migration of skilled personnel has led to brain drain in some developing countries. Critics of skilled migration highlight the loss of investment in human capital development and the loss of a young workforce leading to a 'brain gain' for the developed countries (Docquier, Lohest, and Marfouk 2007; Varma and Kapur 2013). Lowell and Findlay (2001) argue that a certain percentage of movement of skilled personnel is needed for low- and middle-income countries to enter the global market. Optimists concerning

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skilled migration from low- and middle-income countries propose brain gain or even brain circulation (Harvey 2008; Saxenian 2002) as a way to keep the global economic machinery functioning. A good example of brain circulation is described in the work of Saxenian (2007) who examined how skilled migrants were responsible for the technology transfer to their home countries. However, not all countries benefit from this type of migration. Low- and middle-income countries often face shortages in their own labour market as many of the skilled leave for the Global North. Connell (2007) found that in South Africa the migration of healthcare workers resulted in depletion of workforce, diminished effectiveness of health delivery and reduced morale of the remaining workforce. To avoid further degradation of the health systems due to emigration of skilled workers, the World Health Organization in 2010 brought out the Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel (Taylor et al. 2011). This agreement adopted by 193 countries provides the framework for ethical norms, legal and institutional arrangements for countries to ethically recruit health workers without destabilising the health systems in low- and middle-income countries.

Proponents of the 'Migration and Development' paradigm, including the World Bank, stress the importance of remittances as spurring development in low- and middle-income countries (De Haas 2007; Faist 2008; Hickey 2016; King and Skeldon 2010). Kapur (2004) terms remittances as the new 'development mantra' as the flow of remittances to many countries in the Global South has overtaken the share of development aid these countries receive. Those countries where remittances form a larger share of the GDP are more vulnerable to changes in the Global North. For example, the global economic crisis and the drop in oil prices. The remittance decay hypothesis builds on the idea that with time the bonds between migrants and their families weaken and this leads to a decline of remittances. De Haas (2007), comparing different countries, observed that the rate of decline varies per migrant group. However, one has to also acknowledge that not all remittances are from skilled workers. Ghosh (2006) comments that the highly skilled are more likely to invest in the host country than send a large share of their earnings to their countries of origin.

Another topic of research has been the economic value of skilled migrants to the host society. This value or impact is measured in terms of the improved productivity, higher innovation potential and a wider range of skill sets. Boucher and Cerna (2014) highlight that skilled migrants are more attractive for countries compared to other immigrant groups as they are often viewed as less welfare dependent and have a skill set that is ready for the labour market. From a human capital perspective, the countries in the Global North benefit from the skills that they did not invest in developing. Recognising this value many national governments started targeted highly skilled migrant programmes to attract and retain talent. The pioneer for such programmes was the United States of America, which was then followed by Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (Cerna 2011; Shachar 2006). The European Union introduced the 'Blue card' to further improve mobility and transferability of skills across its member states. The 'Blue card', though an interesting initiative, faces resistance as member countries are competing for the same talent from non-EU countries. Each member country has its own requirements for entry and stay for skilled migrants and their families. Compared to other immigrant groups, highly skilled migrants have easier entry both for themselves and their linked movers. The ability of spouses to work, long-term visa, tax reductions and a lack of imposition of integration rules have led to specific corridors for swift mobility of professionals.

The demand for highly skilled migrants fluctuates depending heavily on the economic scenario. In their work on the effect of the global economic crisis on the flow of skilled migrants into 10 OECD countries, Czaika and Parsons (2016) observe that there was a steady increase of highly skilled migration between 2003 and 2007, but then between 2007 and 2009 there was a decline of about 20%. They further document an increase in migration from 2010 which resulted in flows of skilled migrants returning to pre-crisis levels even in the face of high unemployment rates in the OECD countries. This then highlights that in some high-skilled sectors there are shortages that cannot be filled with the local workforce, as they are not skilled enough.

Most previous studies on highly skilled migrants have been carried out in the fields of economics, regional studies and international relations (Cerna 2011; Docquier, Lohest, and Marfouk 2007; Ho 2011). Most of these studies focus on return on skills, impact on the economy, moving into and out of regions and the effect of changes in migration policies. Consequently, research on highly skilled migrants has been limited in focus by mainly examining highly skilled migrants as economic agents moving only to maximise the return on their human capital (Beverstock 2012; Ho 2011). Three themes can be identified that are important to highly skilled migration but have remained underemphasised. First, highly skilled migrants are not just economic agents but also social, cultural and political agents marked by race/ethnicity, class and gender. Second, there is a need to broaden our lens to understand the life-course choices the migrants make (entry into partnership, having a child, becoming home owners and retirement plans) which then shape their future migration decisions. It should also be acknowledged that the lives of migrants are intrinsically linked to those of their significant others, either accompanying them or left behind. Third, the employer and institutional focus have been relatively neglected in studies of highly skilled migrants.

This special issue addresses these three themes, not only separately but also in relation to each other. It explores the relationships between (1) the migrants' gender, identity and position in society, (2) their life-course choices in relation to others in the host country and 'back home' and (3) the way employers deal with the destination countries' immigration policies and the ever growing need to attract the best talent. It brings together seven papers that deal with skilled migration. The papers by Leung (2017), Föbker and Imani (2017), Grigoleit-Richter (2017) and Roohi (2017) are most closely related to the theme of *gender, identity and social inequality*. The papers by Kirk, Bal, and Janssen (2017) and Kōu, Mulder, and Bailey (2017) fit best under the theme of *life courses and linked lives*. The main theme of the paper by Green and Hogarth (2017) is *institutions and policy*. Yet, in all papers associations between the themes are also evident – either explicitly or more implicitly.

### Gender, identities and social inequality

Being a highly skilled migrant is not a single identity but one of many identities, and is related to privileges on the one hand and discrimination on the other. Gender is one such identity that is often masked in the skilled migration literature. The dominant image of a skilled migrant is of a male, even in policy discourses where women are seen as co-movers. Kofman (2014), Raghuram (2008) and Roos (2013) caution policymakers from viewing skilled women merely as co-movers and encourage them to give due

attention to their skills. Gender norms in countries of origin may act as push factors for skilled women to migrate, but these women may then end up facing other sets of discriminatory norms in host countries due to their migrant background and gender norms (Bagguley and Hussain 2007; Riaño and Baghdadi 2007). Purkayastha (2005) terms this cumulative disadvantage women face in the host society labour market. Negotiating employment and family life is still a bigger challenge for female than male highly skilled immigrants to the Global North (Lee Cooke 2007; Liversage 2009).

Gender relations between co-ethnics and with the host society often reflect the gender schemes that are part of the socialisation process of skilled migrants. Migrants coming from rigid patriarchal societies tend to reproduce the same gendered behaviors, which could lead to cultural misunderstandings in the host society. In addition to gender schemas, the field of sexuality is still unexplored with regard to skilled migrants. In a study among Chinese skilled migrants in Australia, Hibbins (2005) found that gay men used different socialisation strategies compared to gay men in the host society.

Skilled migrants come from varied economically and socially advantaged or disadvantaged sections of the society in their home countries. The class and ethnic differences are much wider in countries with strong social and religious hierarchies (Johnson et al. 2014; Rutten and Verstappen 2014). Being in the upper echelons of the social hierarchy would mean that they have had the privilege of better education and a more luxurious lifestyle. In contrast, migrants who have had to fight discrimination have faced many more challenges to reach their current situation.

Remittances play a bigger role in improving family well-being among the poorer and more disadvantaged groups (Mahapatro et al. 2015). The privileged middle-class does not depend on remittances but regards international migration as a way to move up higher in the social hierarchy. In this group, skilled migration becomes a norm to the extent that it influences the choice of higher education and occupation. This 'Culture of Migration' (Ali 2007) is more visible for countries that have historical or stronger economic ties. Large diasporas have a greater ability to maintain transnational ties and influence development efforts (Levitt 2001). The conflation of diaspora and skilled migrants groups is problematic due to class and ethnic differences. The formation of diasporic organisations has historically occurred in groups of low or semi-skilled migrants (Faist 2008; Portes, Escobar, and Radford 2007). Due to their class position, skilled migrants may not necessarily identify with this ideology or group. The attachment to the homeland and imagined sense of community is very different for these two groups. The manner in which skilled migrants create networks and organise themselves along common ethnicity or ideology is relatively less studied. There is emerging work that deconstructs this notion of a single diaspora and urges migration scholars to examine regional diasporas (see Rutten and Verstappen 2014; also Roohi 2017).

Highly skilled migrants are also often pitted against the native skilled categories. Yeoh and Lam (2016) comment that such staging of the skilled versus native leads to many identity politics and 'othering' both within workspaces and in the media. Some examples of such othering include the racist attacks faced by Indian students in Australia (Baas 2009); the protests in Germany with slogans 'Kinder Statt Inder' (Children instead of Indians) to protest the introduction of special visas (green cards) for skilled Indians (Carle 2007) and more recently the post-Brexit discrimination faced by skilled migrants (Allan 2016).

In addition to inequalities with regard to gender, ethnicity and class, highly skilled migrants also face inequalities in the labour market with regard to barriers to labour market entry and the recognition of their skills. Inequalities between highly skilled migrants and native skilled are best described using cultural capital theory. This theory, established by Bourdieu (1984), describes the social position of social groups within a space structured by economic, cultural and social structures of inequality. He distinguishes two types of cultural capital. The first is institutionalised cultural capital (degrees, work experience and professional qualifications) and the second is incorporated cultural capital (mental schemes, language, values and competences). In a globalised workplace, one would assume that skill sets acquired in one setting would be easily transferable in another setting, but this is hardly the case with certain professions. More often professional qualifications are not recognised by the host country's labour market leading to skilled migrants working in low-skill occupations (Nohl et al. 2006). Bauder (2003) calls this 'Brain abuse', which leads to further marginalisation of skilled workers. In situations where institutionalised capital is recognised, the incorporated capital may remain unrecognised. These processes affect the upward mobility of skilled migrants and can push them towards return or onward migration. In times of economic crisis or labour market crisis, this problem may be exacerbated. Koikkalainen (2012) suggests that, in such difficult times, highly skilled migrants may use various strategies to minimise the loss of cultural capital. She observes three main strategies: adaptation to the local labour market, distinction by gaining additional skills to have a competitive advantage and re-orientation to find a different or a related occupation. According to the report released by the OECD and EU (2015), employed highly skilled immigrants are almost twice as likely to be overqualified for their job as their native peers. Unemployment rates are also higher among highly educated immigrants; in OECD countries nearly 10 million highly educated immigrants were unemployed and as many as 8 million were evaluated to be overqualified for their jobs (OECD and EU 2015).

In this special issue, four papers bring out the intersectional identities of highly skilled migrants in relation to gender, ethnicity and class, in specific institutional and regulatory contexts. The reported experienced inequalities vary in these papers but the manner in which gender norms and power structures impact the experiences is common. The first paper by Leung (2017) addresses the impact of academic mobility in reconfiguring class and gender identities among highly skilled migrants from China, Indonesia and Hong Kong. Highly skilled migrants experience multiple social positioning in countries of origin and in host countries, which translates into different gender- and class-based privileges and discriminations.

The second paper by Föbker and Imani (2017) takes up the issue of female tied movers and their strategies to settle in after migration. Their empirical work is situated in the concept of cultural capital and its conversion in the host country setting. They also discuss extensively the different forms of cultural capital and focus on language as a form of capital for partners of skilled migrants.

The third paper by Grigoleit-Richter (2017) addresses the issue of how female highly skilled migrants in Germany, though privileged compared with other immigrant women, face barriers in the highly gender-segregated German technology industry. She further goes on to discuss how female highly skilled migrants develop strong ties with the locality and are more likely to settle than return.

Migration in large numbers from one ethnic or caste group can lead to the formation of exclusionary groups. The fourth paper by Roohi (2017) critically examines the role of kinship and caste networks in the migration of Indian highly skilled migrants to the USA. Through rich ethnographic material, we see the role of caste and kinship in forming regional caste-based diasporas in the USA. Roohi discusses the role of 'caste capital' that skilled migrants from dominant caste groups utilise to improve chances of spatial mobility among younger members of their caste group and in the due course also setting their own agenda for development in the country of origin.

### Life-course choices and linked lives

In the lives of highly skilled migrants, their migration decisions are inextricably bound up with events and experiences in other life-course trajectories. The life-course approach focuses on life events and transitions of individuals and the ways in which these events define their life trajectories (Elder 1985), also known as careers (Willekens 1991). An important goal of life-course research on migration and residential mobility is to interpret the strong age differentiation in moving behaviour (Clark 2013). Within each individual, the various life trajectories are related to each other. These relations take the form of event dependence (the occurrence of an event in one trajectory increases or decreases the likelihood of event occurrence in another) or state dependence (the status occupied in one trajectory influences the likelihood of event occurrence in another). Relevant events in other trajectories could be leaving the parental home, marriage, childbirth, enrolling in education, entering the labour market, leaving the labour market for further education and/or marriage. The life-course approach also emphasises that migration events are often part of longer trajectories that also include return migration. For example, Sabharwal and Varma (2016) have examined return decisions of migrant engineers and scientists. Furthermore, in addition to current statuses and events in the life courses of the highly skilled migrants, we need to take into account the previous life-course events and their impact on the individuals' current trajectory (Feijten 2005).

Only very few studies (Ackers 2004; Kofman et al. 2000; Kōu and Bailey 2014) have concentrated on the choices of highly skilled migrants with regard to family life and housing, or have investigated their aspirations and behaviour with regard to further migration in the sense of return migration or migration to third countries. Ramos and Martín-Palomino (2015) observe that life-course decisions of skilled women migrants are intrinsically linked to the agency they possess and the social circumstances they find themselves in. The scarcity of life-course research on skilled migration is unfortunate, because knowledge of the migrants' choices in family life, housing and further migration is crucial to evaluate their role in the host society and how policies can facilitate their contribution to destination countries and their own labour market and family trajectories.

Furthermore, among individuals, and particularly between those sharing households or kin relationships with significant others, life courses and the trajectories comprising them are also interdependent, in so-called linked lives. Clark and Withers (2007) stress the need to bring family dynamics into the discussion surrounding highly skilled migrants. In her research among recent post-graduates, Geddie (2013) stresses that relationship considerations play a major role in professional and migration decisions.

In the family migration literature, the concepts of tied movers and tied stayers are central (Cooke 2008). It is argued that, within families and couples, it is mainly the partner with the most human capital, or the male partner regardless of human capital, who influences the decision to migrate (Smits, Mulder, and Hooimeijer 2003). Gilmartin and Migge (2016) report that migrant mothers due to the burden of care, lack of child care and family networks have difficulties integrating in the host society and developing a sense of belonging.

Most of this literature presupposes the partners in couples and families share one common household (Mulder and Malmberg 2014, for an exception). But it is important to acknowledge the possibility that partners live at a distance in migrant families. Skilled migrants with strong local ties in countries of origin may leave behind families for motives of children's education, care for older parents or to retain jobs. In highly skilled migrant couples the negotiation on the move and who follows is both culturally embedded as well as the context for opportunities for the partner (Kōu and Bailey 2014). Traditionally it has been women who followed their migrating husbands, but recently studies are emerging on men who are the followers in the migration project (Gallo 2006; Shaw and Charsley 2006). It is also important to acknowledge that, particularly in a transnational context, the family should not be regarded as being restricted to the nuclear family. Grandparents often migrate internationally to provide care for the offspring of their children (Glick and Van Hook 2002). Mazzucato (2011) terms this care giving, both internationally and locally, as reverse remittances to migrants from their extended family.

In the literature on the interplay between family migration and other life-course trajectories, not much attention has been paid to international migration (Kulu and Milewski 2007). This is probably because the life-course approach is a typical micro approach, focusing on the behaviour of individuals and households. In the context of international migration, Hagestad and Dannefer (2001) have criticised the life-course approach for its 'microfication' and recommend that it broaden its view to include the asymmetry of power relations both within and beyond national borders. Clearly, in studying international migration, it is important not to restrict oneself to micro approaches but to acknowledge factors on the macro level of sending and receiving countries. Care giving and receiving by family often act as countermeasures to the lack of access to welfare. As family members move across borders to provide care, these mobilities for care giving then become new motives for onward/return migration (Kōu and Bailey 2014; Mazzucato 2011). Linked lives have also been emphasised as important to return migration (Konzett-Smoliner 2016; Wong 2014).

In this special issue, two papers are grouped under the theme of life course and linked lives by highlighting the role of different life-course stages and significant others in the migration process. The paper by Kirk, Bal, and Janssen (2017) examines the bachelorhood stage of skilled Indian migrants in Amsterdam. The authors discuss how being young, single and not co-residing with family/friends in Amsterdam acts as a coming-of-age process. The highly skilled migrants experience this stage as being 'betwixt and between' the Indian culture and the western culture they experience in Amsterdam. The authors also show how skilled Indian men saw staying away from family in Amsterdam as liberating and at the same time unsettling as they knew the time of bachelorhood would end and was defined in relation to future marriage.



The paper by Kōu, Mulder, and Bailey (2017) on Indian highly skilled migrants in the UK and the Netherlands discusses how significant others such as parents, extended family members, spouses and children shape life-course events and migration trajectories of these highly skilled migrants. The linked lives concept in this paper underscores the need to expand the family lens in skilled migration research to also include parents and understand that caregiving could be one of the motives for return migration.

## Institutions and policies

Institutions and their changing policies provide the context in which we can situate highly skilled migrants' migration decisions. Policies and guidelines on labour migration set the framework at the macro level for both highly skilled migrants and their employers. Labour market policies keep adapting to the economic fluctuations in the host countries. There has been considerable attention to the role of policies in shaping skilled migration from a macro perspective (Boucher and Cerna 2014; Cerna 2011, 2014). Migration policies change depending largely on the political climate and to some extent on the economic regulations that govern the market (Cerna 2014). Similarly, who is included in the skilled migrant category differs by country. These policies create corridors to those who fit the requirements while erecting barriers to others. Setting a minimum on wages is a good example of how distinctions are made between categories of highly skilled migrants. The recent changes to the UK Points-Based Tier system (increase in minimum wages) resulted in a reclassification as to who would be eligible for highly skilled migrant visas. Conversely, in the Netherlands the minimum wage to qualify for a highly skilled migrant visa had to be reduced so that nurses and doctoral researchers could enter with skilled migrant visas. Although the EU advocates through the 'Blue card' for borderless flows of skilled labour, many member countries have not yet streamlined their policies. According to Czaika and Parsons (2015), nearly 40% of the 172 UN member countries aim to increase the number of highly skilled migrants but very few of them have implemented a specific skilled migrant programme. Many of these countries still use the general immigration rules and regulations to accept highly skilled migrants. This results in some highly skilled migrants and their families not having the same privileges as other highly skilled migrants in the EU. Cerna and Czaika (2016) observe that the heterogeneity of European HSM policies is largely due to the differences in national labour market situations and openness in integrating foreign workers in the labour force (24).

The role of employers in the mobility of highly skilled migrants has been relatively neglected, but it seems to be gaining more research attention (Chen, Ward, and Coulon 2013; Menz 2013). In the Netherlands, it is the duty of the employers to apply for the visa and report to the Immigration department on any changes in the length of the stay or termination of contracts of the highly skilled migrants. The responsibility of the return of highly skilled migrants is now being increasingly put on the shoulders of the employers. Employers are also under pressure to give preference to EU nationals over third country nationals, even though most highly skilled migrants come from non-EU countries (Menz 2013).

Compared to other immigrant groups, highly skilled migrants have more agencies in planning return or onward migration. Transferable skill sets and working for multinational companies give them many opportunities to move. These moves could also be linked to the life-course stage they find themselves in and their aspirations for the

future of their families (Kōu and Bailey 2014). Many non-EU companies set up a base in the EU or other developed economies, or acquire firms there (Duysters et al. 2015). This leads to mobility of skilled professionals across many locations without a change of employer (Ryan and Mulholland 2014). This process is also referred to as Intra-Company Transfers. Findlay and Cranston (2015) use the term ‘brain exchange’ for such transfers in transnational corporations. The recent shift of Research and Development (R&D) facilities outside the EU to countries such as India signals the movement of jobs to people rather than people to jobs (Patra and Krishna 2015). What remains to be seen is if this move will lead to intra-company transfers of highly skilled migrants from the Global North to the Global South.

In the last paper of this special issue, Green and Hogarth (2017) bring institutional factors to the forefront of discussion by connecting migration policy changes and employer perspectives in the UK. Employers often face difficulties in adapting their businesses to changing rules. Green and Hogarth highlight the difficulty of finding an appropriate balance between ‘attracting the best talent’ and ‘growing local talent’ without compromising the competitiveness in the global market.

### Inter-linkages between the themes

Above we have introduced the papers of this special issue as addressing either of the three themes *gender, identity and social inequality*; *life courses and linked lives*; and *institutions and policy*. However, this hardly does justice to the papers: all papers have clear links to one or both other themes. Leung (2017)’s main theme is gender and identity, but she also brings in how the migrants’ life courses are linked to those of others, particularly mothers. Furthermore, she begins her paper with an autobiographical example of how work placement with a particular employer shapes a skilled migrant’s experiences. In Föbker and Imani (2017)’s paper gendered experiences of mobility are an important topic, but they show that the linked lives of the male partners they accompany are crucial, and so is the labour market because it does not require that the working partner speaks the language of the host country. Grigoleit-Richter (2017) mainly addresses gender, but also the ‘gendered and ethnicised conditions of Germany’s technology sector’. Furthermore, she points to discrimination by employers and colleagues and points to deskilling processes. Next to the perspective of the migrants, she also examines the perspectives of recruitment personnel and recruitment agencies. Roohi’s (2017) mainly discusses caste and ethnicity, but linked lives in kinship networks and endogamous marriage. Kirk, Bal, and Janssen (2017) look into the life-course stage of bachelorhood, but this stage is strongly related to masculinity. Furthermore, the bachelors work in a labour-market sector that requires mobile flexible workers and therefore mainly attracts young single men. Kōu, Mulder, and Bailey (2017) focus on life courses and linked lives, but clearly show how these lives differ between men and women. Furthermore, they describe how demand for labour implicitly determines how a father’s advice leads a young migrant to study engineering rather than art. Green and Hogarth (2017)’s paper fits under the theme of institutions and policy, but the authors also acknowledge that policies are crucial to whether migrants are eligible for a destination and, if so, which destination they choose – while destination choice is also influenced by labour market shortages. In short, distinguishing between three themes and ordering the papers under these themes

was useful to structure this introduction to the special issue, but the themes clearly intersect and the dividing lines between the themes and groups of papers are permeable.

### **An agenda for future research on highly skilled migrants**

With changing global scenarios in terms of demography, politics and economy, one has to re-examine the skilled migration processes, motives and outcomes. This special issue highlights the need to connect highly skilled migration with issues surrounding gender, identity, social inequality, family lives, policy and institutions. Such a contextual approach gives us the possibility to examine the diversity that exists within the concept of highly skilled migration. The agenda that we propose includes (a) an intersectional approach to skilled migration to examine multiple social positionings and identities such as gender, class, caste and ethnicity, (b) recognition of the role of life-course events, family and linked lives in the migration and settlement processes of skilled migrants and (c) combining migrant and employer perspectives to obtain a more holistic view of skilled migration and its contribution to the host countries.

Skilled migrants experience in various ways the concepts of gender, identities (such as ethnicity, class, sexuality) and inequalities in the host society. Based on this special issue, we recommend an intersectional approach to studying skilled migrants. The intersectional approach was developed by Kimberley Crenshaw (1991) to show the multiple disadvantages coloured women face with regard to gender, ethnicity and class. The approach provides the prism of advantages/privileges and disadvantages individuals face in the society. In the case of skilled migrants, we see that they are privileged as they can relatively easily enter countries in the Global North when compared to other migrant groups. But depending on their gender, social positioning and reception in the host society they may face varying degrees of inequalities in their migration project. What we need to consider is that skilled migrants (men and women) from the Global South are leaving behind hegemonic and hetero-normative family and societal contexts. Such movements could provide skilled migrants with newer living arrangements and lifestyle choices. These provisions, however, are still mediated through class, ethnicity and the level of integration into the host society. Future research on skilled migrants should be aware of these differences. The intersectional approach provides us with the frame to situate the experiences skilled men and women and understand the finer details of these experiences. More importantly, it allows us to avoid broad generalisations about one group and look deeper for other intersectional groupings that emerge from the empirical analyses.

The life-course approach and more specifically the linked lives concept provide a new set of lenses to examine skilled migrants and their families. These lenses help broaden our view from the primary migrants to include the role of significant others in the migration process. The life-course approach with its emphasis on the life events and transition between events adds another dimension to understanding migration motives and decisions. This approach will help expand future skilled migration research from the sole focus on maximising the returns to human capital. Life-course decisions such as marriage, divorce, having a child and changing jobs have major implications to the migrant's sense of belonging. Future research could explore the role of divorce, separation and long-distance relationships in migration decision-making. Successful and positive experiences of life-course transitions can motivate the skilled migrants and their families to build

stronger ties with the host country in terms of home ownership, citizenship and political participation. How such ties are built and under which circumstances, and conversely what drives return or onward migration, should also be a topic of future research

Combining migrant and employer perspectives provides a more holistic understanding of the interaction between the macro (governments) and the micro (individual migrants and employers) through the mechanisms of policies. Future research on highly skilled migration could investigate how employers adapt to changes as well as how they find innovative solutions to counteract impositions of policy changes. By employing the employer perspective, we also understand the demand side of skilled migration and the employers' evaluation of importing skilled workforce and their contribution to the local workforce. With transnational companies the emphasis is not so much with the local contributions but more towards the global talent pool that the employers poses and the advantage this brings to their organisations. Such knowledge will help us in examining the role of employers in attracting, retaining and nurturing talent from abroad.

To conclude, the intersectional approach to gender and identities, importance of linked lives and focus on policies and employers provide a framework for a more holistic view on skilled migration beyond the mere economic perspective.

## Note

1. We use 'highly skilled migrants/migration' and 'skilled migrants/migration' as synonyms. The concept refers to those international migrants who are viewed as belonging to the upper part of the skills distribution (in terms of education and work experience) in both the country of origin and the country of destination.

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