

Call for Papers for *Current Sociology Monographs Series*

“Highly-skilled” migration in uncertain times: Temporary migratory trajectories in Asian restrictive migration regimes

This Special Issue invites contributions examining the changing – and increasingly contested – notion of “highly skilled migration” through the analytical lens of temporariness. Reexamining so-called highly skilled migrants by acknowledging their increasingly often only temporary legal status, constrained employment conditions and provisional acts of establishing lives abroad, contributions in this Issue seek to understand how seemingly mobile and desired foreign professionals navigate (timely-limited) projections of their spatial mobility, at times leading to continuously extended stays or transitory ways of life. In so doing, the Issue develops recent scholarship at the intersection of the sociology of migration, social mobility, and the sociology of work by incorporating temporariness as a guiding principle for both migration governance and migratory agency (Baas and Yeoh 2018; Robertson 2018; Triandafyllidou 2022).

“Temporariness” within this Issue spans several dimensions: Migrants’ timely constrained presence in destination countries (or projection thereof) amid current global and geopolitical uncertainties (e.g. shifts in immigration policies in the “traditional” settlement countries like the US, outbreak of COVID-19), the institutional-political notion of initially only temporary acceptance yet simultaneous expansion of so-called highly-skilled migration policies in non-traditional immigration countries (Paul and Rabel 2024), and the way temporariness affects migrants’ biographical times and everyday lived experiences (Merla and Smit 2023). Intensively debated in recent sociological work, we problematize the term “(highly-)skilled migration” as socially and politically constructed (Liu-Farrer et al. 2021; Liu-Farrer 2025). Interested in the group of migrants who have for long been regarded as being transnationally mobile, unproblematic and desired alike (Favell 2008; Gomes 2018), we focus on “highly-skilled” or “highly educated” migrants (hereafter used interchangeably) as tertiary degree holders or those with equivalent professional experiences (Chaloff and Lemaître 2009). However, processes of (de)skilling and their link to a temporary, or conditional, status of acceptance or to the idea of provisional dwelling in the host society are an empirical question at the core of this Special Issue.

Traditionally a sending region, Asia has become a major receiver of highly educated migrants (IOM 2024). Asian migration regimes are at the forefront of demographic aging and labor shortages and react with deregulations for selected groups of the most urgently needed labor migrants (Hof et al. 2024). While labeled “constrained” and temporary because of restrictive policies regarding admission, settlement and access to citizenship (Boucher and Gest 2018), (East) Asia has significantly opened to the migration of highly educated individuals. Amid Western traditional immigration countries’ gradually more restrictive policies (Vosko 2022) this Special Issue shifts the focus on temporary labor migration to Asia’s emerging migration regimes (Toma and Villares-Varela 2019) and contributes to understanding the new dynamics of the migration of sought-after labor migrants through a multi-level approach.

The Special Issue seeks to demonstrate how both structure (macro- and micro-level) and migrants' (time) planning and projection shape their migratory careers (micro-level) and sometimes result in a reshuffling of the (politically and academically) contested notion of "highly-skilled" migration. This includes ideas of permanence vs. temporariness or migration to the West vs. migration to the East, foregrounding the usefulness of a processual lens and an acknowledgement of the provisional character inherent to temporary migrants' lives. As such, "[i]maginaries [of professional migratory trajectories] are social because they are shared, socially constructed, and have social ... impacts" (O'Reilly 2014: 212). They are an "attempt to grapple with the ... ever-changing nature of the imagination, with the socially shaped ways ...and with the social outcomes of people acting on their imagination ..." (ibid: 211). These insights recognize in practice-theory fashion that both macro-level structures and people's agencies jointly shape and "act on" outcomes and produce new structures alike, and that both institutionally produced and lived experiences of temporariness matter (O'Reilly 2012). "Social imaginary" considers migrants' (time) planning and projection of their migratory trajectories (micro-level), and communities' and stakeholders' imaginaries of how to accept and retain highly educated migrants at times of labor shortages and increased socio-cultural diversity (meso- and macro-levels).

We especially welcome papers that address one or several of the multi-level dimensions affecting temporariness and which contribute both empirically and theoretically to the theme of the Special Issue:

- The institutionalization of restrictive migration regimes through shifting labor market demands
- Imaginaries of social mobility in restrictive migration regimes from different perspectives (e.g. (aspiring) migrants, employers, states, migration intermediaries, and other stakeholders' imaginaries)
- Contingencies and conditionalities of migratory trajectories, such as the proliferation of restrictive immigration regimes vis-à-vis highly educated migrants' career projections)

Abstracts should clearly outline the theoretical contributions in line with the theme of the Special Issue, research design, methods, and data, and present the main results and their significance for the case of migration to and within Asia. Authors should define all key concepts used and should clarify how their case / group in focus relates to problematizing the concept of 'highly skilled migration' as outlined in the CfP.

Time frame

- Submission of abstracts: May 10th, 2026 (minimum 700 words)
- Upon provisional acceptance, submission of draft paper (6000-8000 words): June 30th, 2026
- Following an internal review, submission to the journal: August 30th, 2026

Special Issue editors

Helena Hof (helena.hof@uzh.ch)

Aimi Muranaka (a.muranaka@aoni.waseda.jp)

List of references

- Baas, Michel, and Brenda S. Yeoh. (2018), "Introduction: Migration studies and critical temporalities". *Current Sociology* 67(2), 161-168.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392118792924> (Original work published 2019)
- Boucher, Anna K. and Justin Gest. (2018), *Crossroads: Comparative Immigration Regimes in a World of Demographic Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chaloff, Jonathan, and Georges Lemaître. (2009), *Managing Highly-Skilled Labour Migration: A Comparative Analysis of Migration Policies and Challenges in OECD Countries*. OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 79. Vol. 79. OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers.
<https://doi.org/10.1787/225505346577>.
- Gomes, Catherine. (2018), "Identity as a strategy for negotiating everyday life in transience: A case study of Asian foreign talent in Singapore". *Current Sociology* 67(2): 225-249. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392118792929>
- Hof, Helena, Aimi Muranaka, and Joohyun Justine Park. (2024), "Employment as an Anchor: The Prospects of Emerging East Asian Skilled Migration Regimes through the Lens of Migrants' Access to the Labor Market". *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 33(3): 554–576. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01171968241292376>.
- IOM. (2024), *World Migration Report 2024*. IOM
- Liu-Farrer, Gracia. (2025), "The Social Construction of Skill in International Migration: Perspectives from Asia". *Annual Review of Sociology* 51: 423-440.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-090324-033254>
- Liu-Farrer, Gracia, Brenda S. Yeoh, and Michiel Baas. (2021), "Social construction of skill: an analytical approach toward the question of skill in cross-border labour mobilities". *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47(10): 2237-2251.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1731983>
- Merla, Laura and Sarah Smit. (2023), "Enforced temporariness and skilled migrants' family plans: examining the friction between institutional, biographical and daily timescales" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 49(1): 371-388.
- O'Reilly, Karen (2012), *International Migration and Social Theory*. Macmillan Education.
- O'Reilly, Karen. (2014), "The Role of the Social Imaginary in Lifestyle Migration: Employing the Ontology of Practice Theory". In: *Understanding Lifestyle Migration: Theoretical Approaches to Migration and the Quest for a Better Way of Life*, edited by Michaela Benson and Nick Osbaldiston. Palgrave Macmillan UK.
https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137328670_10.

Paul, Anju Mary and Githmi Rabel. (2024), "When citizenship is off the table: the comfortable transience of high-skilled Indian women migrants in the UAE." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 48(14), 2900–2917. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2024.2441907>

Robertson, Shanti. (2018), "Migrant, interrupted: The temporalities of 'staggered' migration from Asia to Australia". *Current Sociology* 67(2), 169-185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392118792920> (Original work published 2019)

Toma, Sorana and Maria Villares-Varela. (2018), "The Role of Migration Policies in the Attraction and Retention of International Talent: The Case of Indian Researchers". *Sociology* 53(1): 52-68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038517750540>

Triandafyllidou, Anna. (2022), "Temporary Migration: Category of Analysis or Category of Practice?" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48(16): 3847–3859. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2022.2028350>.

Vosko, Leah F. (2022), "Temporary labour migration by any other name: differential inclusion under Canada's 'new' international mobility regime." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48(1): 129-152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1834839>

You, Shunan. (2025), "Friction and Fragility in Encountering Cultural Difference: Why Global South Fulbright Students Withdraw From Cosmopolitanism in the United States". *Global Networks* 25(1): 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12520>