**(Don’t) call me as you wish but treat me with respect.   
Migrant or expat label?**

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**Abstract**

This is a mixed methods study conducted in the city of Vienna among highly skilled foreign professionals with diverse ethnic backgrounds, migrants, and expats. The theoretical background for this research is Tajfel and Turner’s Social identity theory (1986) (SIT) which explains ingroup and outgroup dynamics. The sample in this study represents an outgroup (all the others), and the ingroup are national citizens.

We are aiming to define what is the difference between highly skilled migrants and expats, and how they perceive themselves. Is our skin color determining the label migrant or expat? Does that label have other consequences on our position in the organization and everyday life? How important is it for people with foreign backgrounds to be addressed according to their formal status, and not according to presumptions based on their appearance?

We are investigating the most common definitions: ‘expats’ for employees coming from Western countries, and ‘migrants’ coming from underdeveloped countries, using 40 interviews of highly skilled foreign professionals with diverse backgrounds, and 15 interviews with Austrian experts. Qualitative data will be triangulated with quantitative data collected from 500 surveys.

The first findings show us that highly skilled professionals do not want to be associated and connected with bad stereotypes of their ethnic belonging, they want to be valued for their professional achievements and contributions. This does not mean that they do not want to be associated with their origins, on the contrary. They do not want to be stigmatized and perceived as professionals of less value. They want to be equally respected, valued, paid and promoted. They want to build a different identity in the host country from the identity of marginalized members of the migrant community. It is presented that Eastern European, African, Muslim, and Arab cultures and professional qualifications are less worthy, and valued.

Economic situations and the ongoing need for global talent should change the definition from highly skilled migrants to internationally skilled professionals, keeping in mind that the term migrant has a stigma of unqualified people in need, which does not correspond to globally competitive and needed professionals. The goal is not todifferentiate highly skilled foreign professionals as more entitled than the unqualified workers, and blue-collar foreign labor force, The goal is to present them as equally valuable as other professionals coming from developed countries.

**Literate review**

There is a theoretical and real-life difference between immigrants and expatriates, (ex-pats); immigrants come from developing countries, to developed economies, and ex-pats are professionals coming from Western countries-developed economies to other Western countries or developing economies (Hajro, Stahl, Clegg & Lazarova, 2019).

The term ‘expatriate’ is often used (Cranston,2017) as a way to describe white Western nationals abroad, excluding other groups of migrants who fit within this technical description, as he explains in his paper:`` Expatriate as a ‘Good’ Migrant: Thinking Through Skilled International Migrant Categories

Koutonin ([2015](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/psp.2058)) talks about the hierarchy of terms within migration, pointing out that the term expatriates is reserved for white Europeans in the published article

‘Why are white people ex-pats when the rest of us are immigrants?’ in *The Guardian*

Kunz (2020) states that ‘the immigrant” is frequently visualized as a “non-white”, non-Western, and low-skilled’ employee. In Europe, (Guðjónsdóttir and Loftsdóttir Citation2017, 792) ‘Muslims’ and ‘Eastern Europeans’ seem now most regularly mobilized as migrants (Gullestad Citation2002; Hellwig and Sinno Citation2016).

However, Kunz notes that ‘expatriate’ and ‘migrant’ can be used as synonyms, interchangeably, confirming Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry's (2013) statement that no rational theoretical or methodological foundation is given to explain such terminological differentiation between migrant and expat. Instead, this terminological distinction comes to replicate and support a stereotyped image of migrants who are less advantaged in terms of their originating country and ethnic origins.

Kunz (2020) further states that migration categories work in processes of racialization, (the act of giving a racial character to someone or something: the process of categorizing, marginalizing, or regarding according to race) and vice versa, race intervenes in the production of categories. Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry (2013) state that literature positions “migrants” in stark contrast to self-initiated expats, (SIEs) from developed countries. Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs) are individuals who are highly mobile internationally and have the advantage of initiating their moves. Their ability to move across borders is influenced by both structural and individual factors.

Structurally, SIEs operate within agreements between countries, typically more developed ones, that support international mobility. Self-initiated expatriation focuses on the experiences of managers who possess various forms of capital, such as education, professional background, and networks. This group has abundant opportunities and choices in their international moves, leading to successful career outcomes. In contrast, the term "migrant" often highlights work and employment issues, which can involve challenging conditions like underemployment or unemployment.

Employees with the foreign backgrounds can be a very diverse group of people with different ethnic backgrounds, and different motives to come to the host country, and different aspirations to stay, and they can belong to one of the next groups that overlap in their characteristics: QI (qualified immigrants) (Cerdin,2012), IA/ AE (international assignees/assigned expatriates), SI (skilled immigrants), SIE (self-initiated expatriates), (Tharenou, 2015), ISM (international skilled migrants) (Binggeli, Dietz, Krings,2013), OE (organizational expatriates), (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014). In literature, they are categorized by certain criteria. Cerdin & Selmer, ([2014](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1748-8583.12233#hrmj12233-bib-0024)) recognize 4 criteria that distinct SIE(self-initiated expatriates) from other mentioned groups: 1) they initiate their relocation themselves without help from the organization/employer, in contrast to IA/AE (Tharenou, 2015) whose relocation is supported by the organization for which they are working; 2)they don’t have intentions for a permanent stay, unlike ISM, whose intention is to stay in host country permanently; 3) they have intentions for regular employment; 4) they have a high level of skills and professional qualifications which is the same as for highly skilled migrants.

International skilled migrants (ISMs; Binggeli, Dietz, & Krings, [2013](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1748-8583.12233#hrmj12233-bib-0013), Hajro, Stahl, Clegg & Lazarova, 2019) have been defined as migrants with at least a bachelor's degree or equivalent who have moved to work and live abroad on an indefinite basis (Cerdin, Diné, & Brewster, [2014](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1748-8583.12233#hrmj12233-bib-0023)). Unlike assigned expatriates (AEs), whose organizations transfer them temporarily to a new country (Tharenou, [2015](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1748-8583.12233#hrmj12233-bib-0096)), ISMs self-initiate international mobility that entails higher levels of risk and unpredictability and usually involves significant life transitions (Zikic, Bonache, & Cerdin, [2010](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1748-8583.12233#hrmj12233-bib-0103), Hajro, Stahl, Clegg & Lazarova, 2019). Their intention to settle for an indefinite period distinguishes them from SIEs who usually repatriate within a decade (Cerdin & Selmer, [2014](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1748-8583.12233#hrmj12233-bib-0024), Hajro, Stahl, Clegg & Lazarova, 2019). As ISMs frequently originate from emerging and developing economies (United Nations, [2017](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1748-8583.12233#hrmj12233-bib-0098)), they are often treated as “second-class” employees and are disadvantaged based on their national origin (Binggeli et al., [2013](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1748-8583.12233#hrmj12233-bib-0013); Dietz et al.,  [2015](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1748-8583.12233#hrmj12233-bib-0031), Hajro, Stahl, Clegg & Lazarova, 2019). Compared with AEs and SIEs, ISMs are also perceived as having lower levels of agency (Guo and Al Ariss, [2015](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1748-8583.12233#hrmj12233-bib-0047); Hajro, Stahl, Clegg & Lazarova, 2019 ).

**Case of Vienna and Austria**

In the case of Vienna, and Austria in general, we see that the economy is dictating a new reality for so-called highly skilled migrants. New demand for economy introduces a new definition and a new label for foreign employees:  
global talents, international skilled labor, and international professionals, and more importantly new self-awareness and self-determination of foreign employees regardless of their origin, and home country.

Having in mind that all participants are highly educated, IT engineers, and scientists from academia, they put a lot of emphasis on their professional achievements and professional identity. They want to be recognized according to their professional success and not according to negative stereotypes and prejudices connected to migrants in general, or particularly to low-qualified members of their community in the host country. That does not mean that they want more privileges than other foreigners, that means that they want the same opportunities, respect, salaries, and recognition as domestic professionals or so-called expats.

In the interviews answering the question why they chose Vienna, very often they respond :

*, I didn’t choose Vienna, Vienna chose me, I was approached by a talent scout from LinkedIn.´´*

or*, I got a job offer’’*

And they respond to that question with notable pride and self-consciousness.

Foreign labor forces, even those coming from disadvantaged countries, in theory labeled as internationally skilled migrants, or highly skilled migrants, are being recognized as

* 1)globally competitive, can find employment anywhere in the world
* 2) globally needed, they are not coming to Austria because they are in need, they are coming because they are needed
* 3) possess skills and formal education globally recognized,
* 4) they are chosen, and approached, by the employer, LinkedIn, talent scout
* institutions in Austria like ABA (Austria Business Agency) address them as international skilled labor, international professionals, and international talents, regardless of which country they come from.

This contrasts the already existing definition of Hajro et all,(2019) internationally skilled migrants, or highly skilled migrants,

* 1)Typically move from a developing/emerging to a developed country,
* 2) Intention to stay for an indefinite period (sometimes permanently),
* 3) Motivated by a variety of factors: political, economic, societal, family, or personal reasons,
* 4) Secure their employment, local job contact, Typically, underemployed, in precarious job situations, high likelihood of discrimination, the relative loss of status
* 5) Self‐funded, No organizational support, Career in the host country is “domestic”,
* 6) Acculturation

We want to point out that migrants are usually portrayed as people in need. They are often misrepresented as refugees.

One of our interviewees explained the burden of Muslim, Arab, and refugee stigma, even if she is not a refugee herself, being a Muslim or an Arab sometimes to some people means that you are immediately a refugee in need.

*’’My perception is that other people, if they see someone who is like Middle Eastern and Arabic immediately think they’re filthy and you know you need charity, needs our help, you know it's like that.*

*Someone who's coming here for his choice is actually adding for the country, but he's paying for living, and studying here. He's not taking anything from your country. So it changes like even you know when you are in this position, you will start more understanding refugees who didn't have a choice, that matters of choice to come here. And they need the country they're in. They need the support. They need support to stay and so on.*

*So people, you know, they look at you differently when you need them, even like in individual interactions. So imagine, like collective interactions and so on. And there's also, like, I've noticed different behavior between people who are refugees, who are Muslims and Christians, like Christians try to say we are Christians.*

*Because you have a stigma on Muslim refugees. So you know, they just try to state it in a very clear way. Yeah, I am, for example, Syrian, but I am Christian. So in this way, they have different kinds of support. So I don’t know, it’s a complicated world and it's becoming more and more complicated and I don't know now how things would be in Europe, also in the world, Ukraine. So I don't think it's the best place to stay in.’’*

* *(Areen, Palestinian from Israel, lawyer and doctoral student Pos. 47-50) interview conducted before the conflict in Gaza*

The terms “migrant” and “refugee” are often used interchangeably but it is important to distinguish between them as there is a legal difference.

Amnesty International introduces the next definitions for refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants: *a refugee is a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there. The risks to their safety and lives were so great that they felt they had no choice but to leave and seek safety outside their country because their government cannot or will not protect them from those dangers. Refugees have a right to international protection. An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who hasn’t yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim. Seeking asylum is a human right. This means everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum. There is no internationally accepted legal definition of a migrant. Like most agencies and organizations, we at Amnesty International understand migrants to be people staying outside their country of origin, who are not asylum seekers or refugees.*

On the other hand, we want to point out to the Buber-Ennser et al. (2016) study, predominantly conducted in the city of Vienna which already showed misconceptions about refugees from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan who came to Austria in 2015. That research shows that Syrian and Iraqi respondents who have arrived since the summer of 2015 display consistently high levels of education, which partly refutes commonly held public assumptions about asylum seekers and refugees’ low or non-existent education and alleged illiteracy. They also invested a significant amount of money to come to Austria, and belong to the higher class in their home country.

What we found out in our research, is that just putting the prefix highly skilled, or international skilled in front of MIGRANT, does not exclude those professionals from stigma, and most importantly, they do not feel comfortable with that label in the first place.

Another quote from our interview with an Austrian expert shows the discomfort of some foreign professionals with the term migrant:

*``On the other hand, take the case of Sub-saharan Africans in Austria generally, but in Vienna specifically, they are the group that is most discriminated against, right?*

*But talk to them and you find out they never use the word African migrant because they define themselves as diaspora.*

*If they're highly skilled like this, they want to differentiate themselves from those other Africans that are in drug dealing etcetera.`` (prof.B., Pos. 217-219)*

What is also very interesting, Austrian institutions are in the process of attracting them, and they refer to them as international or global talents. Most importantly the reality of the EU economy in general is that they are needed, not people in need, as they are always portrayed. They are invited, they do not come illegally, and their contribution to the Austrian economy is very significant, however, they are portrayed in the public discourse as exploiters of the public system.

Austrian Business Agency reports that International Skilled Workers are Key Cornerstones of Value Creation in Austria, generating 10 % of the country’s gross domestic product. The labor market in 2022 was characterized by a sharp increase in companies’ demand for staff. Some sectors still face acute labor shortages. There is an increasing and ongoing need for skilled labor in Austria and in Vienna, the deficit will be bigger in future years.

The labor shortage is a problem that is not unique to Austria, all EU countries are facing this problem, which will become bigger in future years. AMS director for Vienna (Public employment service) Winfried Goshl states that there is a lack of talent globally. Austria is a small market in competition with Germany and Switzerland, and professionals who already know the German language will go rather to those countries, which means that Vienna and Austria in general have less potential for highly skilled professionals. Highly skilled professionals are needed and welcomed no matter the country of origin.

There is a demographic deficit in the whole of Europe, not enough children are born to replace the aging population. The whole generation is going to pension, and there are not enough national professionals to replace it, especially skilled professionals. The labor market is facing a lot of problems: deficit of skilled professionals with domestic and immigration backgrounds, mismatch of demand and supply of labor force, German language barrier, and recognition of foreign diplomas and experiences.

The Austrian government established an institution to attract and bring highly skilled foreign professionals: ABA (Austria Business Agency –Work in Austria) aiming to attract international skilled labor professionals who are currently outside of Austria and bring them to Austria to fill the gap for highly skilled labor. Talent hub is a platform at the site of ABA with job positions in Austria. Vienna Business Agency and Expat Center are also institutions that provide assistance and help to foreign professionals in Vienna to navigate everyday life. These government institutions already use terms such as international skilled labor, international professionals, and international or global talents. They do not differentiate between professionals coming from Europe, or from India, Africa, or the Balkans.

Of course, the difference exists primarily in the legal framework, and it's mostly connected to the Red-white-red card system. Non-EU employees are restrained by many legal requirements, and one of them is the Red-white-red card (resident and working permit), which is still a very demanding and complicated system.

However official policy of institutions is that all talents are welcomed, regardless of county of origin. What we found as an obstacle is a welcoming culture of employers-companies who need a labor force, however, they are not ready to integrate foreigners into their working environment.

One of our interviewees who owns owning head-hunting agency states:

*‘’So actually that's maybe one, but let's say the first-hand problem for me is to find those companies who are willing to employ those people.’’(talent scout, Pos. 26)*

*’’So the HR department still treats applicants like applicants because they applied for the job and we have the job and we give the job and that’s that wrong because everybody now says, listen, maybe I applied, but you have to treat me like a king.*

*Now I'm the customer, I'm the king and how you treat me does not work.’’ (talent scout, Pos. 356-357)*

The next problem of highly skilled foreigners is how they are perceived in Austrian society. Will they have problems in restaurants, shops, and outside of the workplace? Austrian society is used to guest workers labor force from countries such as ex-Yugoslavia, and Turkey. However, our research indicates that a more diverse population of foreigners is confusing for the domestic population, and is sometimes perceived as a threat, which triggers an unwelcoming culture.

*’’ Most people won't have any problems regarding foreign nationals. Some might do as well. I had stories of highly skilled workers working in Carinthia who always took the label badge with them when they were going out at night so that they could be recognized as highly skilled workers.*

*Because otherwise, they fear they wouldn't be served in the pubs and restaurants. Or at least to face a smaller amount of disadvantages.*

*They were wearing badges which they normally used to get in the company, actually wearing visibly on the clothing.*

*So that everybody knows, oh you work for a respected company you might be a highly skilled worker and not to be misunderstood for a low skilled person actually.’’(Jonnas, expert in migration law Pos. 181-185)*

What was shocking and not expected, is that even in academia, at Universities, a distinction based on country of origin exists for ex-pats and others:

*‘‘For example, you have this big difference in science. I noticed that you have this big issue in the Scientific community. They call themselves expats because they are English people, they don't call themselves immigrants or migrants or whatever. They prefer to call themselves expats because they are always one step ahead of the rest. They have the kind of tiny ghetto here even in this Vienna Biocenter, there's a huge proportion of them.*

*They are, from the UK, Americans as well, some Irish basically from that gross action world and there's a preference for hiring those people. You might think that this is competence. I don’t think so because then you go to UK&US and you don't see the same situation, but they have a special preference here, in Germany I noticed that as well, if they want to work with someone from abroad, they would prefer to have someone first from that category and that could be normal people coming from UK and US but mostly from the UK. So this is how it is’’ (Paul, University researcher, PhD Pos. 238-241*

**Methodology**

This research will be conducted in two phases: Phase I as the qualitative exploration, and Phase II as the quantitative exploration*.*

**Phase I: Qualitative exploration**

Qualitative exploration is conducted by analyzing 40 interviews with highly skilled foreign professionals, encompassing diverse backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, citizenship, nationality, and gender. Participants are professionals with at least a university degree, working in IT, academia as predocs, and University professors, and in culture, and

15 Austrian experts in fields of migration and labor law from different government institutions and NGOs:

* Chamber of Labor (Arbeiterkammer)
* ABA (Austrian business agency),
* Expat Center of Vienna Business Agency,
* Business Immigration Office,
* AMS (Arbeitsmarktservice), Public labour service
* MA-17 (City of Vienna office for Integration und Diversitat),
* Ombud for Equal Treatment,
* AST (contact points for professionals educated abroad),

* and NGOs like ZARA (Civil courage and anti-racism work) and Helping Hands.

**Phase II: Quantitative exploration**

The objective of this phase is to validate the theoretical considerations, a process carried out in two distinct steps:

1. **Survey Data Collection:** A comprehensive survey will be conducted among a broad and representative group of highly skilled migrants and expatriates actively engaged in living, working, and seeking job opportunities in Vienna. This survey will be informed by the insights gained during the interviews in Phase 1 of the research. The intention is to delve deeper into the research topic, extending its scope and broadening the sample size.

The survey is made to find if does self-perception of participants corresponds with the current theoretical framework and definitions of expats and highly skilled migrants. The goal of the survey is to find out who the participants are, And how they perceive themselves. MIGRANT /EXPAT

The survey contains questions about country of origin, countries where their education was gained, how many countries participants lived and worked in before coming to Austria, language proficiency, type of resident permit, and a question to self-determine their belonging to a certain group:

* + highly skilled migrants,
  + international professional,
  + international skilled migrants,
  + skilled immigrant,
  + self-initiated expatriate,
  + international assignees,
  + assigned expatriates,
  + qualified immigrants,
  + diaspora

1. **Triangulation of Findings:** This step involves the triangulation of survey findings with the results obtained from the interviews conducted in Phase 1. Additionally, insights will be cross-referenced with quantitative empirical studies and official statistical data provided by recognized Austrian and Viennese institutions. This includes data on the total number of foreign workers in Vienna, the duration of their stay, the percentage who choose Vienna for residency and family life, their educational backgrounds, the countries where they received education and work experience, the professions in demand in Austria, and an assessment of how migration has influenced Vienna's economy over the past decade.

By combining survey data with insights from interviews and statistical evidence, this phase aims to reinforce the validity of the theoretical framework and provide a robust foundation for drawing meaningful conclusions.

**First findings**

This research is work in progress, and final conclusions need to be done, however,

The initial discovery indicates that highly skilled professionals from various ethnic backgrounds desire to be recognized and appreciated for their professional abilities and contributions, rather than being stereotyped based on their ethnic origins. They seek to be respected, valued, compensated, and promoted on equal terms with professionals from developed countries, without being stigmatized or considered of lesser worth. The label of "migrant" carries negative connotations of unskilled individuals in need, which does not apply to globally competitive and sought-after professionals. Therefore, it is suggested that the term "highly skilled migrants" be revised to "internationally skilled professionals" to better reflect the value and importance of these individuals in the global talent pool. The goal is not to elevate highly skilled professionals above other foreign workers, but to highlight their equal worth and contribution regardless of their background.

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