

Long distance mobility and migration intentions in Europe

With the accession of ten New Member States to the European Union, the issue of geographic and labour market mobility has taken a prominent position on the EU policy agenda. The year 2006 has been officially chosen as the "European Year of Workers' Mobility", which also reflects the policy saliency of the mobility issue. In this paper we analyse differences and similarities in residential mobility across European countries, with particular interest for long distance mobility. We discuss in turn the extent of past long distance mobility in Europe and the motives thereof. Then we discuss the extent of future intended mobility and what people expect from it. The data used are from the 2005 Eurobarometer Mobility Survey (EB64.1), the most recent Europe-wide survey on mobility and mobility intentions. Data were collected in the 25 EU countries in September 2005. The survey includes a representative sample of 24,500 individuals aged 15 years or more (more or less 1,000 by country). The analyses presented here pertain to respondents of 18 years old and above. An extensive descriptive analysis of the data is provided in Coppin et al. (2006), on which this paper is based.

Distance of past geographic mobility

According to OECD numbers, the stock of the foreign population in the total population in the European Economic Area has increased from 4.8% in 1991 to 5.7% in 2001 (OECD, 2004, p. 19). The bulk of foreign citizens living in EU Member States is from outside the EU. Intra-EU migration, however, is a rather limited phenomenon. An important part

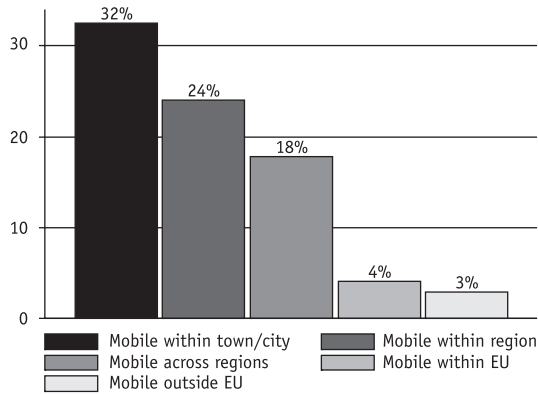
of the Eurobarometer Mobility Survey is devoted to the distance of past moves (whether it is within the town/city, outside the town but within the region, outside the region but within the country, to another EU country or to a country outside the EU) and to the motives and consequences of such moves. Figure 1 shows the level of past mobility for the various distances. Only 18% of the Europeans moved outside the region in the past, and the percentage for cross-border migration is especially low: only 4% ever moved to another country within the EU and less than 3% ever moved to another country outside the EU. This contrasts with the larger mobility rates found for short distance moves: 32% of Europeans ever moved within the town or city in which they live and almost a quarter moved outside the city border, but remained within the region in which they reside.

How do these numbers compare to the USA? Almost a third (32%) of the US population does not live in the state in which they were born (source: US Census Bureau, data from 2000). This is twice as much as regional mobility in the EU. Obviously distances in the USA are much larger than within countries of the EU. Hence we suggest that a better number to compare to would be to count the people in Europe that either lived in another region or country. Using the Eurobarometer data, we find that around 22% of

the EU population has ever lived in another region or country (Figure 2). On the basis of this number, the EU-US difference in mobility is lower, but still

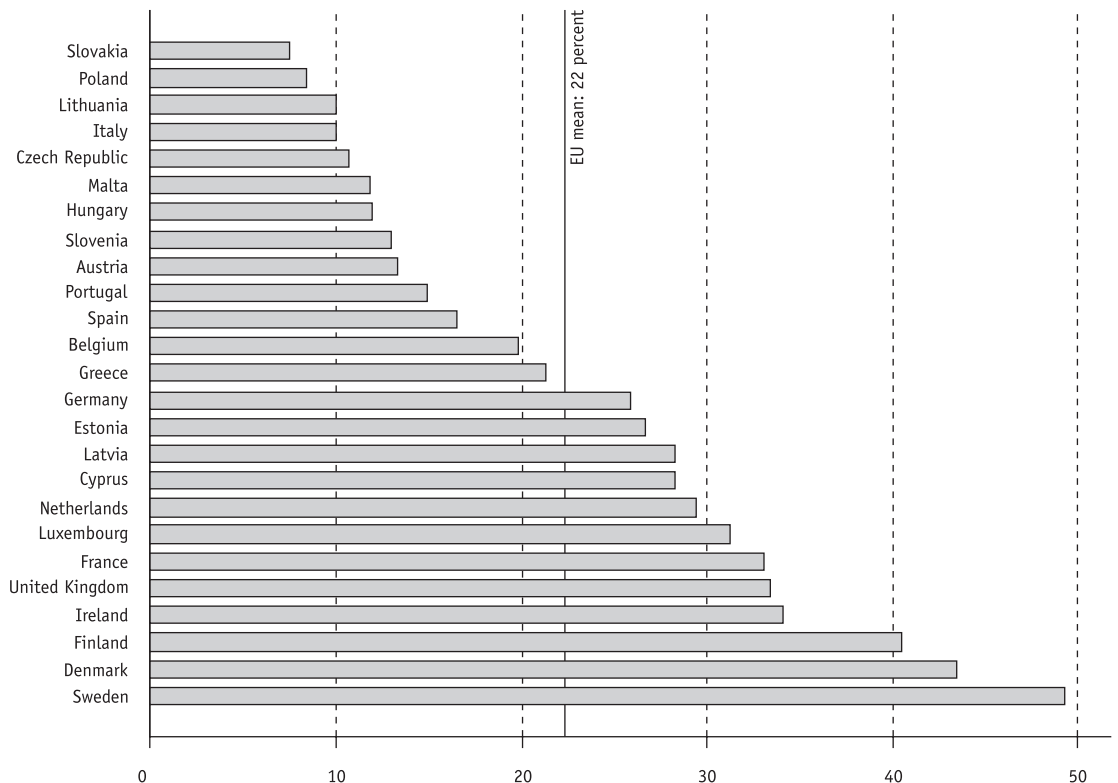
substantial. However, one should note that movements within the USA take place within the same country, language and culture, which is not the case in the EU. Indeed, EU respondents report that what worries them most when they think about moving to another EU country is their “lack of language skills” or “having to adapt to another culture”. Labour market issues “finding a job for oneself”, however, is also something that worries people when they think about moving to another EU country.

Figure 1.
Past mobility by distance of the move (percentages)



Intra- and extra-EU mobility or migration, so the conclusion must be, still is a rather limited phenomenon. The differences in long distance mobility (mobility across regions or border) among EU countries, however, are striking (Figure 2). Long distance mobility is relatively high in Nordic countries but low in most of the new Member States and Italy. Although the gender differences in past long distance mobility are small, the differences by edu-

Figure 2.
Past long distance (across regions or border) mobility (percentages)

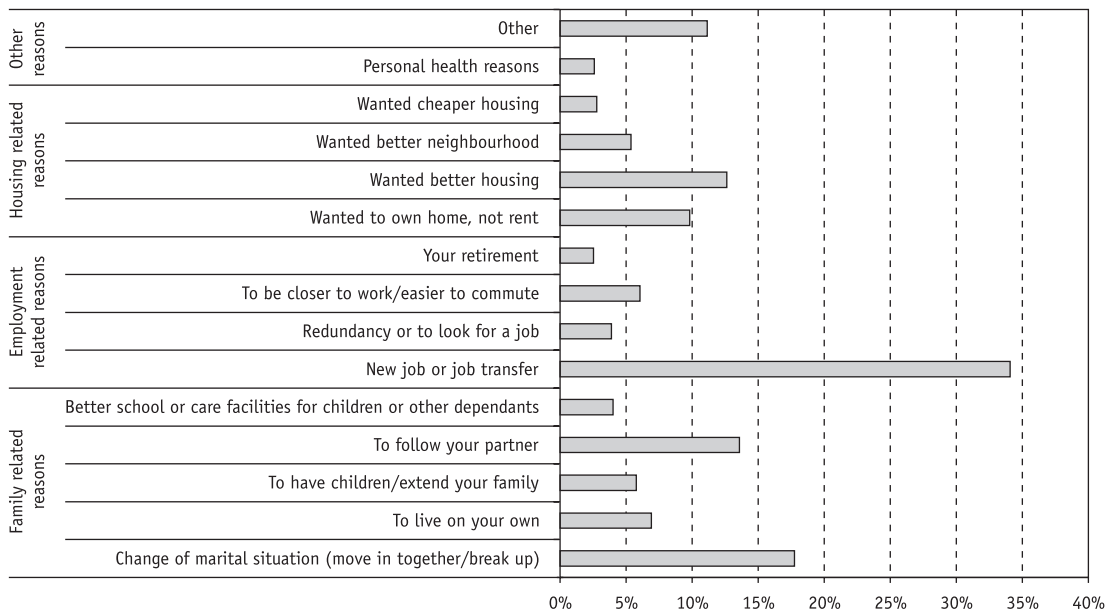


cational level are substantial: as the educational level increases, the percentage of people who report long distance moves in the past also increases. Results show that about 7% of the higher educated report having made a move within the EU since they left their parental home, against 4% among the lower educated. This confirms previous studies according to which it is especially higher educated workers who are more likely to be mobile on the international labour market (Salt, 1992).¹ During the 1990s the demand for highly qualified professionals willing to move across borders grew substantially, particularly by multinationals but also in sectors such as research and development, IT, tourism, and marketing. The globalisation of skills and competences implies a wider geographical job and career scope – and consequently employment options – for highly qualified individuals (OECD, 2001). Willingness to move, even over longer distances and between countries, for career reasons is much more part of the professional culture of highly educated persons compared to lower educated workers.

Motives for past long distance mobility

The literature suggests a variety of reasons why people would move from one country to another. Migration can be a response to differences in actual wages, but the decision to migrate can also be based on the basis of future employment and wage prospects. Non-wage income (e.g. social security benefits) and the supply of public facilities is also expected to play a role in the migration decision. Furthermore, research has pointed out the importance of demographic events and social networks in the decision whether to migrate or not. The Eurobarometer Mobility Survey records the reason for the last long distance move as reported by the respondents. These motives for mobility are presented in Figure 3. Long distance moves are often labour market related (new job or job transfer: 34%), but a change of partnership/marital situation is also a chief motive for moving (18%). Males do report “new job or job transfer” as the main reason for long distance mobility far more often than females (44% compared 27%), females more often indicate to have made a long distance move to follow their partner. The latter finding is in line with the existing

Figure 3.
Reasons for long distance mobility (percentages)



literature that suggests that this decision is gender-biased (for a review, see e.g. Jürges, 2005). Roughly speaking, the most important motives for mobility are more or less the same across birth cohorts. Looking at the self-reported effects of migration, the general conclusion is that when people have moved across the border, it is for the better: the main positive effects of long distance mobility are an improvement of the housing conditions, of the employment situation of one of the household members and, related to that, of the household income.

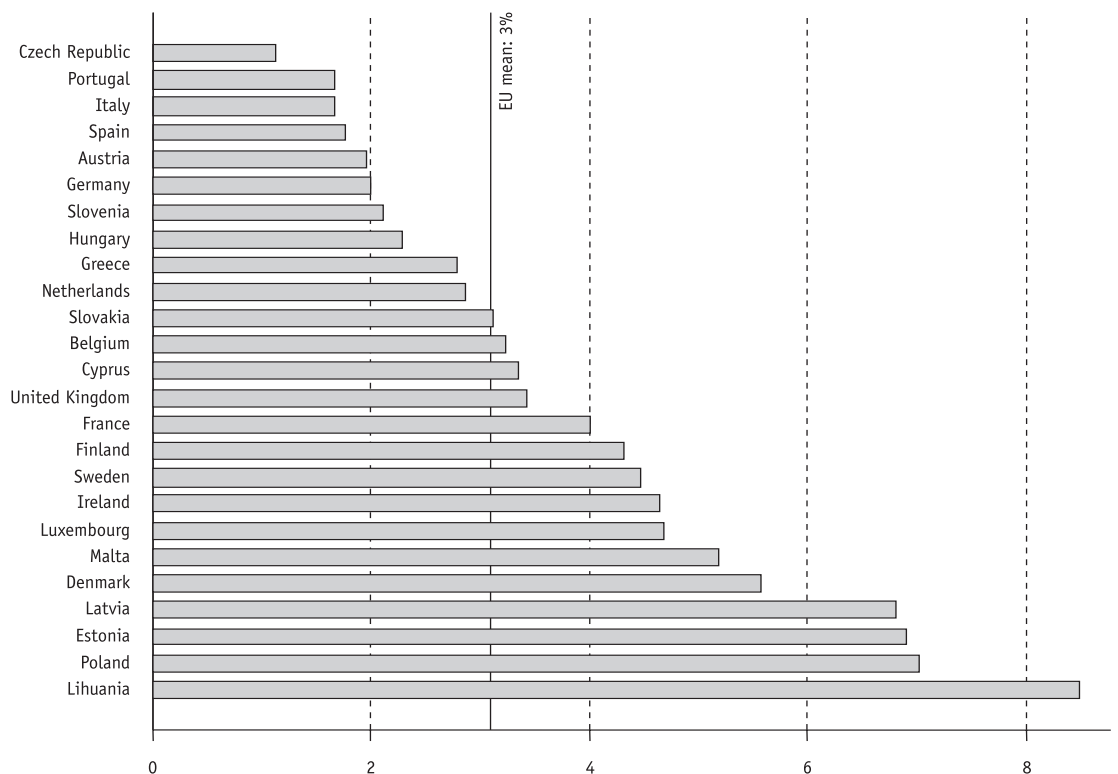
Europeans' expectations for future mobility

It is interesting to determine Europeans' geographic mobility history and its determinants, but it is equally – and from a policy point of view even

more – interesting to explore their future expectations about mobility. In the Eurobarometer Mobility Survey, such intentions are captured by one key question: “Do you think that in the next five years you are likely to move: (1) in the same city/town/village; (2) to another city/town/village but in the same region; (3) to another region but in the same country; (4) to another country in the European Union; (5) to another country outside the European Union; (6) you don't think you will move”. Although we know that a pro-move intention cannot be taken as a perfect predictor for future mobility it is widely acknowledged that such intentions do, under certain circumstances, have a predictive value for future behaviour (Gordon and Molho, 1995).

Despite an overall positive view on mobility,² a large majority of the respondents (almost 70%) has no personal moving expectations for the near fu-

Figure 4. Proportion of people intending to move to another EU country in the next five years (percentages)



ture. Regarding the EU view on the need for a higher mobility of the EU workforce it is important to note the stronger expectations to move among younger and higher educated people. But it is equally important to note that having no intentions to move is not necessarily reflecting immobility or a lack of willingness to move: people are rooted in communities, have invested in their local social capital, may have children in a crucial life-course stage, may have a working partner, which may affect the psycho-social cost of moving. This will be especially true for long distance and cross-border mobility.

On average 3% of the EU population expects to move to another EU country within the next five years. Overall, the expected intra EU mobility in the new Member States is larger than in the EU-15. Moreover, our analyses have shown that mobility intentions in the New Member States have increased substantially over the past few years, probably a consequence of the EU membership (Coppin et al., 2006). This, however, hides large variations within the New Member States. Four of the new Member States display high levels of mobility expectations: Latvia, Poland, Lithuania, and Estonia (Figure 4). Especially the case of Poland is important in this respect: with a population of almost 40 million people, a percentage of about 7% that expects to move to another EU country is quite substantial in absolute numbers. The other new Member States have moderate or low levels of expected mobility. That the potential of migration is indeed large is also confirmed by a recent Dutch study (Ecorys, 2006).

With respect to the intrinsic motivations for future mobility it is found that persons who expect to move more frequently mention pull factors such as “discovering a new environment”, “better working conditions”, and “higher household income”. Males and younger people more often point at work- or income-related motives. As far as factors that would discourage people from moving abroad, the potential loss of social networks (especially for females) or having to learn a new language (especially for older people and the low educated) are important barrier to future mobility. Migration intentions crucially depend on past experience with residential mobility and the reason thereof (Fouarge and Ester, 2006).

Conclusion

The conclusion is that at present cross-border mobility in Europe is not very high. But can we expect it to increase in the near future? Not dramatically and not for all EU-25 countries so the data tell us. This is likely explained by the fact that moving across borders involves the loss of social networks in the country of origin, it also involves the quest for new employment opportunities, and the learning of new language skills. The European diversity in past mobility and migration intentions is large. Also within the New Member States the mobility variations across countries are substantial. In this sense, an ‘old-new divide’ in the mobility statistics is a too simplistic representation of the great diversity in mobility patterns in Europe.

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Notes

1. Whether the resulting effect for Member States is a ‘brain drain’ or a ‘brain gain’ cannot be estimated from the Eurobarometer Mobility Survey data. For this purpose one needs reliable information of origin and destination of migration flows.
2. A large proportion of Europeans think that moving across regions of countries in the EU is generally speaking a good thing for individuals (49%; only 12% think it is a bad thing), the labour market (50%; only 21% think it is a bad thing) or the European integration (62%; only 11% think it is a bad thing).

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