

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY IN CRISIS? Understanding post-diploma mobility decision-making in an economic crisis context

David Cairns

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), CIES-IUL, Lisbon, Portugal

Abstract This article examines student mobility in Portugal, with the aim of understanding what prompts the decision to leave, with particular emphasis upon the weight of factors associated with the on-going economic crisis. Findings from a survey of 400 Lisbon students conducted during 2014 are used to demonstrate the popularity of the idea of moving abroad after the completion of present course of study, with 35% indicating an intention to leave Portugal. Regression analysis confirms that factors associated with the economic crisis have a bearing upon mobility decisions, the most significant predictor being negative impact on personal well-being.

Keywords Portugal, international student mobility, migration, economic crisis.

Resumo Este artigo analisa a mobilidade dos estudantes portugueses com o objetivo de compreender o que motiva a decisão de sair, com particular ênfase num conjunto de fatores associados à atual crise económica. Os resultados de um estudo com 400 estudantes de Lisboa, realizado durante 2014, são usados para demonstrar a popularidade da ideia de ir para o exterior após a conclusão do curso, com 35% que manifestam a intenção de deixar Portugal. A análise de regressão confirma que os fatores associados à crise económica têm influência nas decisões de mobilidade, sendo o mais significativo o impacto negativo no bem-estar pessoal.

Palavras-chave Portugal, mobilidade internacional de estudantes, migração, crise económica.

Résumé Cet article analyse la mobilité des étudiants portugais afin de comprendre ce qui motive leur décision de partir, en mettant l'accent sur un ensemble de facteurs associés à l'actuelle crise économique. Les résultats d'une étude menée en 2014 concernant 400 étudiants de Lisbonne sont utilisés pour démontrer la popularité de l'idée de partir à l'étranger après la fin des études, puisque 35% ont l'intention de quitter le Portugal. L'analyse de régression confirme que les facteurs associés à la crise économique ont une influence sur les décisions de mobilité, le plus important étant l'impact négatif sur le bien-être personnel.

Mots-clés Portugal, mobilité internationale des étudiants, migration, crise économique.

Resumen Este artículo analiza la movilidad de los estudiantes portugueses con el objetivo de comprender lo que motiva la decisión de salir, con particular énfasis en un conjunto de factores asociados a la actual crisis económica. Los resultados de un estudio con 400 estudiantes de Lisboa, realizado durante 2014, son usados para demostrar la popularidad de la idea de ir para el exterior tras la conclusión del curso, siendo que el 35% tiene la intención de dejar Portugal. El análisis de regresión confirma que los factores asociados a la crisis económica tienen

influencia en las decisiones de movilidad, siendo el más significativo el impacto negativo en el bienestar personal.

Palabras-clave Portugal, movilidad internacional de estudiantes, migración, crisis económica.

Introduction

Numerous studies have highlighted the fact that young people across Europe are disproportionately affected by the current economic crisis (see, for example, Scarpetta, Sonnet and Manfredi, 2010; Bell and Blanchflower, 2011; Claessens et al., 2010; Aassve, Cottini and Vitali, 2013; Cho and Newhouse, 2013; Dietrich, 2013; Papadopoulos, 2014). The most visible signs include rising unemployment rates and declining life chances for youth, factors closely associated with the integration of neoliberal principles into labour market regulation (Centeno and Cohen, 2012; Heyes, Lewis and Clark, 2012). In the Portuguese context, these developments are accompanied by widening income inequality (Carmo and Cantante, 2014), growing “proletarianization” (Abrantes, 2013) and precariousness of tenure for those in work (Alves et al., 2011).¹ All these factors have serious implications for large numbers of Portuguese young people who happen to be making the transition to adulthood at this time, including those seeking to progress from undergraduate to postgraduate educational or move from full-time education into the highly-skilled job market (Cairns, Growiec and Alves, 2014).

In regard to the extent of this “problem”, at the time of writing, November 2014, the unemployment rate for the active population in Portugal aged between 15 and 74 years old stood at 13.5%; with a figure of 33.7% for the 15-24 age group (INE, 2014). While these rates are lower than equivalent figures for Spain (26.1%) and Greece (27.3%), they are still much higher than the EU-28 average of 10.8% as measured in 2013 (Eurostat, 2014). That this should be the case confirms our suspicion that young people are marginalised within the Portuguese labour market. Less apparent from these breakdowns is the changing character of youth unemployment. While it is true to say that unemployment among those with relatively modest levels of skills and qualifications has persisted during the crisis period, tertiary educated young people are now almost equally well represented among the jobless: for example, the current unemployment rate among the 15-24 year old age group in Portugal in the third quarter of 2014 stands at 33.1% for those having completed tertiary education and 27.3% for those with secondary and post-secondary education (INE, 2014).²

1 A further indicator is the widening of the Portuguese Gini coefficient, demonstrating growing income inequality: 34.2 in 2012 compared to the EU-28 mean of 30.5 (Carmo and Cantante, 2014: 39).

2 It should also be noted that these statistics also confirm that youth unemployment among those with low levels of educational achievement remains extremely low: 48.5% at basic education (second cycle) and 35.6% for basic education (third cycle) at the third quarter of 2014.

That this should be the case provides us with a justification for choice of research subjects: tertiary educated young people, specifically those currently studying at various universities in the city of Lisbon. In regard to a main research question, the issue which concerns us is future plans for geographic mobility. What we wish to ascertain is the extent to which these students are contemplating a move abroad after the completion of their present course of study, taking into account the bearing of factors associated with the economic crisis: or put in simple terms, is the crisis driving qualified young people away from Portugal? In respect to the impact of the crisis, this includes not only economic impacts, such as fears regarding future employment prospects or dwindling hopes of attaining financial independence, but also more personal considerations such as the likelihood of having a family of one's own. These are all key issues in mobility decision-making which will be considered in the discussion of results which follows.

At the same time, and putting this discussion into a broader theoretical context, the opportunity will also be taken in this article to inform current debates on what has come to be known as "international student mobility" (King, Findlay and Ahrens, 2010), with particular emphasis upon understanding the relationship between the crisis and prospective mobility after the completion of an initial degree course. With existing perspectives within this research field concentrating on modalities strongly associated with mobility as practiced in Anglophone and core European nations, we wish to learn of the desired forms of outward movement among student respondents, including considerations such as reasons for wanting to leave, preferred destinations and anticipated durations of stays abroad.

Theoretical context: international student mobility (in crisis)

Widespread unemployment among the highly qualified has a double significance for a national economy. There is obviously a price to be paid by the state, and families, in regard to providing welfare to jobless graduates, on top of the long-term unemployed, added to which is lost revenue due to an inability to utilise their accrued "academic capital" (Bourdieu, 1984). Moving away from political economy and towards a more personal and subjective level of analysis, we also need to take into account the disruption to the life courses of many graduates, whose skills risk being laid to waste alongside their future prospects for becoming independent adults (Nico, 2014). But another form of "disruption" relates to the threat posed to the geographical integrity of transitions to adult due what migration scholars term a heightened "mobility requirement" (Morano-Foadi, 2005: 146), meaning voluntary or involuntary movement abroad for work or study purposes for many of those who wish to fulfil their professional ambitions.

This idea of utilising spatial movement to circumnavigate regional disadvantage is not a new theme within Sociology. It has previously been discussed by the author in a range of studies (Cairns, 2008, 2010, 2014a), and many other researchers in the fields of human migration and youth studies. In regard to the Portuguese

context of this discussion, a considerable debt is also owed to pre-existing work on youth traditions within Portugal (see, for example, Pais, 2001; Guerreiro and Abrantes, 2004; Pappámikail, 2004; Guerreiro, Torres and Lobo, 2009; Dellgran et al., 2012; Torres, Coelho and Cabrita, 2013). This work provides insight into the personal and professional dilemmas facing highly qualified youth, before and after the crisis, including the reflection that many Portuguese young people engage in prolonged periods of inter-dependent living with their families, meaning a greater propensity towards completing undergraduate studies close to home (Biggart and Cairns, 2004; Biggart et al., 2010; Cairns, 2011). What remains to be considered is the impact of the economic crisis on the education and work transitions of tertiary educated youth; those who may be at risk of unemployment and social disadvantage, taking into account mobility choices.

This choice of topic also creates an opportunity to inform current debates in what has become a highly prominent research field across the social sciences, namely student mobility. To recap, since the turn of the century, we have witnessed a rapid growth in the number of studies on this topic. The emphasis has been upon appreciating the different motivations students have for moving abroad and evaluating their varied experiences of living in other societies (see, for example, Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Gürüz, 2008; King et al., 2011). But at the same time, and perhaps not coincidentally, there has been recognition at European policy level through the European Commission's recent Youth on the Move initiative and the Erasmus+ programme. The basic message conveyed by mobility studies and mobility policy is that being mobile during one's tertiary education period has a positive impact on various aspects of personal and professional development, in direct contrast to the more negative common perception of student migration as an example of a "brain drain" process (Guth and Gill, 2008), which tends to pervade media discourse on this issue.³ Through a strategic discursive shift, the message from the Europe has been that rather than representing a means of losing talent, student mobility is an opportunity for European nations to strengthening their capacities via the participation of tertiary educated youth in non-migratory international mobility. This helps explain why exchange platforms include a guarantee of return to the sending society, not only in the case of Erasmus for undergraduates but also the EC funded Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowships for post-doctoral candidates.

This is the theory, but the reality is that we lack empirically informed perspectives on student mobility outside a concentration upon a small number of exceptional circumstances. The research field that has come to be defined as "international student mobility" (King, Findlay and Ahrens, 2010) is dominated by perspectives which emphasise the importance of such movement to institutions rather than individuals and the study of relatively ephemeral, in terms of durations of stays, forms of circulation. A further omission is consideration of the economic crisis as a driver of

3 This personal and professional development includes the strengthening of inter-cultural skills, such as foreign language proficiency, and the fostering of employability (Boden and Nedeva, 2010; Crossman and Clarke, 2010; Wiers-Jenssen, 2011).

student mobility, a position which can be explained by the fact that most studies in this field focus upon the United Kingdom and the European heartlands as opposed to more peripheral contexts (see, for example, Feyen and Krzaklewska, 2013). Given the heightened mobility imperative placed upon those with tertiary level qualifications, and the fact that Portugal has returned to its former position of net exporter of talent (Malheiros, 2011; Peixoto, 2011),⁴ this article takes advantage of the opportunity to explore this issue among a group of student respondents, thus introducing a potent sociological question into an emerging research field.

Methodological approach

The empirical evidence upon which this discussion is based is taken from a survey conducted with students in the Lisbon metropolitan area in the first half of 2014. All respondents were aged between 18 and 25 years old and currently studying at public universities in the city. The research design involved the gathering of a quota sample, proportionately stratified according to field of study and gender, with sample parameters sourced from most recently available government data on the Portuguese student population (INE, 2013). These figures show that Portugal had 371,000 students enrolled at various public tertiary education institutes in 2012/13, with 97,977 of these students based at universities in the Lisbon metropolitan area (INE, 2013: 145).⁵

All respondents were undergraduates, with ten different academic fields of study included in the final sample: Business and Administration; Health; Engineering; Social and Behavioural Sciences; Architecture; Arts; Education; Law; Humanities; and Life Sciences. In respect to the choice of these fields, government statistics divide the Portuguese student population into 22 academic subject groups. Ten of the largest groups were included in the final sample, with the remainder not covered due to the very small sizes of these groups. That the eliminated subject categories still comprised 17.65% of the overall student population, or 65,502 students, should be considered, but we can say that the actual sample was representative of slightly more than 82% of the Portuguese student population (INE, 2013: 145-146). Data collection was undertaken by the author, with the assistance of teaching and support staff at the various university faculties, with questionnaires personally administered to respondents, none of whom refused to participate in the study. While labour intensive, this approach ensured that sample parameters were accurately adhered to, in addition

4 The rise in emigration during the crisis has also been linked to the decline in the size of the Portuguese youth population (age 15-29), with an estimated 26,000 leaving permanently and 27,000 on a temporary basis, meaning between three months and one year, in 2012 (INE, 2014: 7).

5 In interpreting results, that baseline parameters pertained to the 2012/13 academic year as opposed to the 2013/14 academic year in which the actual fieldwork was conducted should thus be taken into account. Likewise, that the large number of tertiary educational institutions clustered in the Portuguese capital might mean less potential need for mobility compared to outlying regions of the country for those seeking to continue their tertiary educated trajectories.

to providing an opportunity to confirm that respondents were appropriately informed as to the aims and objectives of the study. A total of 400 cases were included in the final sample, gender-balanced (50% male and 50% female) and proportionately structured in relation to the ten fields of study.

In respect to the demographic make-up of this sample, it was important to ensure that students from different socio-economic backgrounds were included. As none of the respondents were in full-time employment, "social class" was estimated from the proxy indicator of parental occupational background. This revealed that 18% of the sample had parents in managerial and professional occupations, with 59% in skilled manual and non-manual occupations and an additional 23% in semi-skilled and unskilled occupations; this last group also included students with economically inactive parents, such as those who were presently unemployed or deceased. Regarding other sample characteristics, two of the respondents were married and eight cohabiting with a partner (4% of the sample), and only one had children. 12% had experience of living in different countries, mostly Portuguese-speaking African countries (Cape Verde, Angola and Mozambique) or other European countries; 80% lived in the parental home, with 12% residing with friends and 6% living alone.

Exploring mobility decision-making

In order to answer the basic question of how popular the idea of moving abroad is among respondents, discussion of results begins with an overview of their mobility intentions. The "should I stay or should I go" decision is a mainstay of migration and mobility research, and not only in studies conducted with students (see, for example, Fischer, Martin and Straubhaar, 1997; Hammar and Tamas, 1997), although the nature of the question differs from study to study. But in the present research context, the focus was upon intentions to leave Portugal after completion of present course of study irrespective of duration, although anticipated length of stays was included in a supplementary question, along with inquiry into motivations and probable destinations.

Figure 1 presents a graphic illustration of the popularity of the idea of leaving, with breakdowns included for gender and three different socio-economic background groups using the proxy indicator of parental occupation. Overall, 35% of respondents registered a desire to leave Portugal. In regard to the issue of gender, it is clear from figure 1 that there is a marked disparity between young men and women in regard to the question of wanting to leave, with more females (40% with intentions to leave) than males (30%) indicating that they had such a desire; a difference that statistical tests confirm is significant (Pearson chi square level of significance less than 0.50). But while figure 1 shows that there is some observable variation between respondents from the "professional/managerial" (28%), "skilled" (35%) and "semi/unskilled" (36%) occupational groups, these differences are not statistically significant, implying that this is not a demarcating factor in the distribution of mobility decisions. However, given the relatively

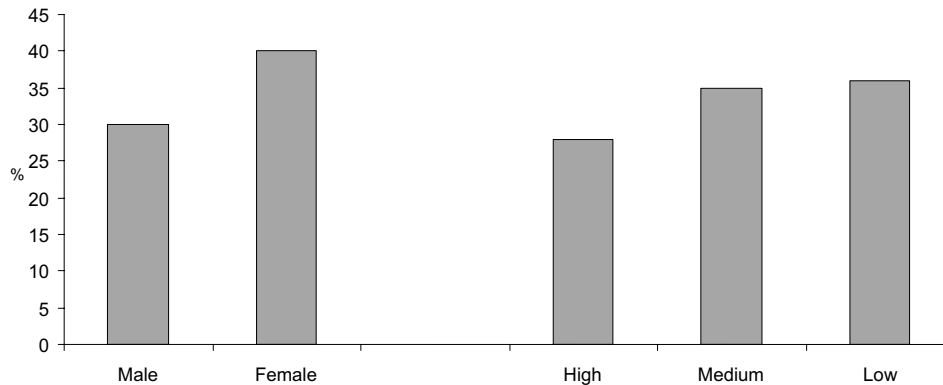


Figure 1 Percentages of students with intentions to leave by gender and socio-economic background

small sample size, it would be unwise to declare that socio-economic has no bearing upon the mobility decision. This is obviously an issue in need of further exploration via more in-depth qualitative methods given the complex nature of class advantage and disadvantage. This is illustrated in the author's prior work on this issue with students from across Ireland and in Portugal, which emphasizes the role of family habitus in shaping mobility and immobility trajectories (see, for example, Cairns, 2014a).⁶

In regard to the gender disparity, it has been argued elsewhere that young women are facing more privation than young men during the crisis period (McDowell, 2012). It may therefore be the case that a greater degree of labour market marginalisation at this time is prompting a greater number of prospective exits, although youth unemployment rates in Portugal do not currently show a significant gender disparity. We should however acknowledge that this disadvantage may also reflect a more long-standing problem in regard to transitions to the labour market among tertiary educated young women. For example, it is known that even prior to the crisis, female graduates took longer to find a job than their male counterparts in Portugal (Gonçalves, 2010).

What the outcomes presented in figure 1 confirm with less ambiguity is that a desire to move abroad for the next educational or occupational step has been registered in a substantial number of cases, if still a minority, although we obviously do not know at this point in time precisely how many of these students will actually depart as this question is outside the scope of this analysis. But while acknowledging the fact that these are intentions rather than concrete plans, if these plans were to be enacted in the form of actual exits, and generalised to the tertiary educated population of Portugal, this would represent an

⁶ In respect to the relationship between field of study and the mobility decision, while there were differences according to academic discipline in relation to the popularity of the idea of leaving, these disparities were not statistically significant.

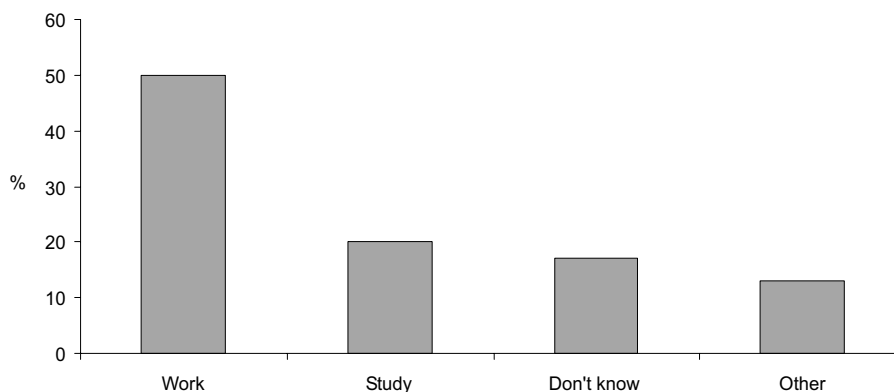


Figure 2 Reason for leaving for students with intentions to leave

exodus that could contribute to a cycle of underdevelopment, such as has been observed in other southern European contexts such as Greece (Labrianidis and Vogiatzis, 2013).

It is also worth bearing in mind the different reasons these respondents have for wanting to leave Portugal: for example, are they intending to continue their tertiary education level trajectories or do they wish to enter the labour market in their anticipated destination?

Figure 2 confirms that what these young people are seeking is work, with 50% of all those indicating a desire to leave Portugal stating that their intention was to enter a foreign labour market. Also notable is the fact that 20% are seeking postgraduate study opportunities, and that 17% “don’t know” what their reason for seeking an exit is. The remaining 13% stated that they had “other” reasons for wanting to leave, the most popular being mobility for leisure purposes. But these outcomes are an interesting contrast with the idea implicit in European policy discourse of student mobility as a practice orientated towards enhancing the skills base of the “home” country, with half of these young people seeking work and a significant number of others wanting to continue their education elsewhere.

A related issue is that of probable destinations for those with mobility intentions. In the past, the parents and grandparents of at least some of these respondents have gravitated towards migrating to other European countries, including France, Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland, or other Lusophone societies such as Brazil (Baganha and Góis, 1999); and recent data shows that France, Brazil and the USA are still the most popular places for adult Portuguese migrants (Pires et al., 2011). Considering the specificities of student mobility in contrast to other forms of population circulation, including the need to invest academic capital, we might expect to encounter a different range of destinations among our prospective student “migrants,” for example, a preference for countries which offer the best opportunities for post-graduate study.

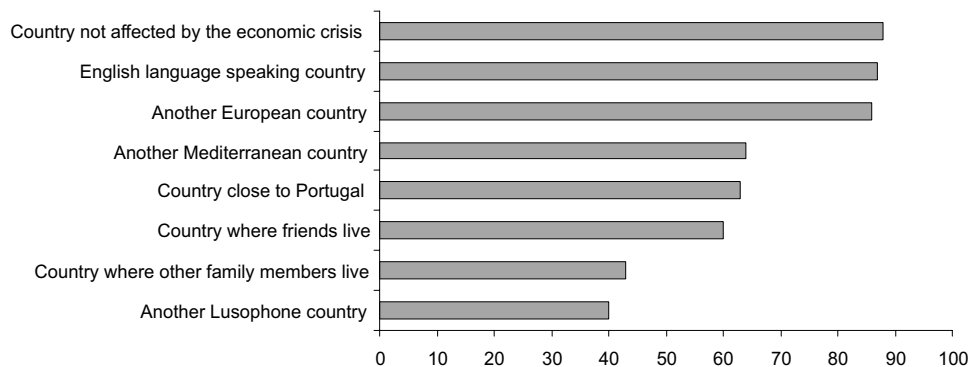


Figure 3 Potential destinations for students with intentions to leave

To explore this issue, a block of questions was included in the survey enquiring as to the popularity of various types of destination for those registering an intention to leave. This included other Lusophone countries and alternative options such as moving to neighbouring or English language speaking countries, with the freedom to select more than one scenario.

Figure 3 provides an overview of responses: most popular are the ideas of moving to a “country not affected by the economic crisis” (88%), an “English-language speaking country” (87%) and “Another European country” (86%). The idea of moving to “another Lusophone country” is least attractive, with only 40% of potential leavers selecting this option, while 60% would move to a country in which friends live, and 43%, other family members. Broadly speaking, these results indicate a break with the traditional pattern of Portuguese migration among this group of students, although we should bear in mind that we are considering a diverse range of mobility modalities as opposed to having a singular focus on a more or less permanent exits. Alternatively, it may be that this is a more student specific mobility pattern, leaning towards Anglophone and core European destinations; a position generally supported by prior work on graduate mobility in Portugal (Araújo 2007; Fontes 2007; Delicado 2011).

Moving on to consider the related issue of anticipated durations of stays abroad among the 35% of respondents who registered an intention to leave, survey results provide an indication of how long these young people wish to spend abroad.

The results presented in figure 4 confirm that there is no interest whatsoever (0%) in moving abroad for short periods: short-term sojourns abroad including “credit mobility” schemes of less than a year in duration such as Erasmus have no appeal for these students. This may be a reflection of the traditionally weak levels of participating in the programme, with Portugal being more of an Erasmus destination than a sending country (European Commission, 2014), as well as limited access to the programme among those not studying STEM (Science, Technology,

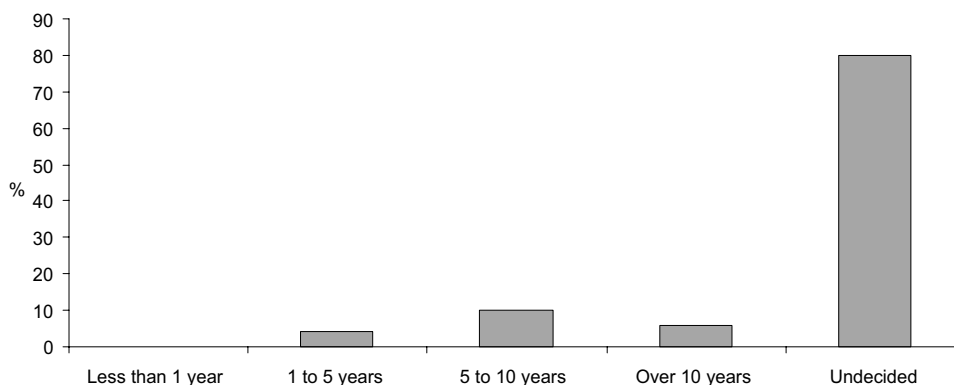


Figure 4 Anticipated durations of stays among students with intentions to leave

Engineering and Mathematics) subjects (Heger, 2013).⁷ It may also be the case that this form of institutionally-mediated movement is designed to meet the specifications of students in relatively prosperous countries such as Germany and France, who along with Poland, Italy and Spain represent the biggest consumers of Erasmus (Cairns, 2015), rather than those seeking work or new educational opportunities, as suggested by the results of figure 2. Therefore, while the Erasmus programme may be the mobility mode du jour of some European students it is not the de facto mobility modality of the tertiary educated respondents in this study.

If short-term movement is not what these students desire, the question remains regarding the popularity of longer duration alternatives, including modalities corresponding to migratory norms. Returning to figure 4, we can see that 4% of potentially mobile respondents indicated that they intend to stay abroad for a period of up to 5 years, 10% for between 5 and 10 years, and 6% for longer. While this does imply that a combined 20% could be making relatively substantial stays outside of Portugal, the outstanding result is that 80% were undecided about how long to stay away. In interpreting this outcome, what immediately springs to mind are contemporaneous studies in Portugal that have examined the general state of the youth generation: characterised by an inability to plan for the future due to a loss of hope during the crisis (Alves et al., 2011). It may therefore be the case that this loss of planning capability extends to the question of international mobility.

⁷ In regard to its prevalence, it is estimated by the EC that up to 5% of all European Union students have participated in Erasmus, with around 270,000 young people from 33 countries during the 2012-13 academic year participating (European Commission, 2014, pp. 5-8), and there are many other examples of short-term exchange programmes, such as summer language learning camps or internships across Europe which operate in a similar manner. In the 2012/13 academic year, only 7,041 Portuguese students, or around 1.5% of the student population, went abroad via the Erasmus platform (European Commission, 2014).

Mobility and crisis?

The second part of this analysis considers a range of subjective impacts of the economic crisis upon the lives of the student respondents, assessing the bearing of these impacts upon the decision to leave Portugal using a straightforward binary logistic regression model. Five crisis impacts were included in the model presented in table 1: a perceived diminution of the value of one's educational credentials; decreased possibility of finding a job in the local labour market; reduced capacity to be financially independent of one's family (i.e. parents); decreased likelihood of having a family of one's own; and sense of personal well-being eroded. These issues are mainstays of youth sociology (see, for example, Shanahan, 2000), including the study of transitions to adulthood in Portugal (see, for example, Nico, 2014), where there is a need to appreciate the interaction between macro-structural level factors such as a change in labour market conditions alongside micro level issues such as young people's own needs and desires. However, to date there has been relatively little exploration of the impact of the crisis at a subjective level through the use of primary data in Portugal. For the purposes of the model presented in table 1, the decision to leave Portugal was coded "1", with the intention to stay "0". The robustness of the model was: chi square 22.748, sig 0.000 and Nagelkerke R square 0.119, with 59.6% of cases classified correctly. Overall, it can be said that the model is highly significant in terms of predicting a decision to leave Portugal: 1 to a 0.00 level of significance according to the Pearson chi square statistic. This implies that there is a strong association between the impact the crisis is making, as measured by the combination of the five items included in the model, and wanting to leave Portugal on completion of present course of study.

From table 1 we can also obtain an idea as to what matters most in terms of the bearing the crisis upon the mobility decision in respect to these five indicators. The results show that it is "sense of well-being negatively affected" that matters most; in fact, out of the five dimensions, it is the only response that proved to be statistically significant in its own right in predicting a decision to leave.

That a personal as opposed to a strictly professional factor should be found to be of paramount importance is an interesting finding. This outcome is consistent with emerging evidence from non-traditional sites of research on student mobility, namely an experimental study conducted by Baláz et al. (2014) in Slovakia, which demonstrated that student mobility decision-making involves more than simple cost-benefit calculations. However while this Slovakian study emphasised the importance of non-monetary resources such as access to information, in the present context it was very different factor which acted as the greatest push towards leaving: the more psychological issue of well-being. In this sense, it is possible to argue that there needs to be greater consideration of factors such as personal happiness in our understanding of student mobility decision-making alongside the more obvious issue of career development.

Table 1 Decision to leave Portugal and impacts of the economic crisis

	B	SE	Wald	Sig.	Exp (B)
Value of qualifications diminishing (yes 1; no 0)	-0.108	0.545	0.039	0.844	0.898
Possibility of finding job decreasing (yes 1; no 0)	0.422	0.742	0.323	0.570	1.525
Financial independence diminishing (yes 1; no 0)	0.643	0.951	0.457	0.499	1.902
Possibility of having a family diminishing (yes 1; no 0)	0.734	0.553	1.758	0.185	2.083
Sense of well-being negatively affected (yes 1; no 0)	0.769	0.384	4.023	0.045	2.159
Constant	-2.489	0.767	10.524	0.001	0.083

Conclusion: post-diploma mobility in and out of crisis

In reaching a conclusion, the results presented in the preceding discussion strongly suggest that mobility, in this case movement abroad after the completion of an undergraduate degree, matters to a substantial number of the student respondents included in this study. The fact that this was, for the most part, a representative study means that we have some grounds for believing that this orientation may have some applicability to greater numbers of students within this educational cohort. We can also observe that half of those with plans to leave are seeking work and the destinations sought by this tertiary educated youth cohort diverge somewhat from the countries that have attracted most “adult” Portuguese migrants in the past, veering more closely towards popular choices for students across Europe. However, these remarks are tempered by the high degree of uncertainty in regard to anticipated lengths of stays abroad, indicating that the sojourns to be undertaken may be open-ended or that plans have yet to be finalised. What we learn about the impact of the economic crisis is that, as we might have expected, there is a link between the weight of a combination of factors associated with the transition to adulthood, and among these dimensions, it is a personal consideration which matters most, namely the negative impact of the crisis upon well-being.

This evidence also supports the case for including mobility upon completion of an undergraduate degree into European student mobility paradigms: this modality obviously matters to a large number of students in the present context, and the same may be the case of other economic crisis contexts or societies with few opportunities for the highly qualified. For these reasons, I would argue that what I have termed “post-diploma mobility” (Cairns, 2014a, 2014b) should be integrated into existing schemata of “international student mobility”, alongside the already recognised categories of “credit mobility” and “diploma/degree mobility”. In regard to substance, we have gained some insight into what “post-diploma mobility” entails. Like “degree” or “diploma mobility” (see, for example, Altbach and Knight, 2007; Marginson, 2008; Dale and Robertson, 2009), this is a practice which refers to *laissez faire* movement abroad for work or study. But the suggestion from the present context is that it may be a longer duration or more open-ended form of movement, adhering more to the norms of classical migration than “international student mobility” as conceptualised in other European nations (see, for

example, King and Raghuram, 2013). It was also noted that there was significantly more interest in moving at this level from female as opposed to male respondents, opening up possibilities for future analysis of the gender dimension of this modality.

While the popularity of the idea of moving at this stage in a career trajectory is clear, the actual prevalence of movement may be more modest: although existing statistical databases on student mobility are not calibrated to demarcate between different stages within tertiary education, the overall level of student “migration” from Portugal is quite limited in scope.⁸ What this suggests is that there may be difficulties in operationalising mobility at this point in time for “diploma/degree” and “post-diploma” level movers. Ironically, it may be the economic crisis itself which is curtailing movement due to erosion of family incomes via austerity measures, while the results presented in figure 4 demonstrated that there is no interest in short-term travel during a degree programme, the form of student mobility which receives most financial support from the EC. This reveals an uncomfortable, and not exactly hidden, truth about international student mobility as practiced in the EU: that publically-supported student mobility modalities aimed at supporting travel during undergraduate degree programmes, most prominently Erasmus, may be giving benefits to students in the relatively economically stable societies of the European core while lacking relevance to those in the more precarious periphery who, arguable, would benefit more from mobility opportunities attuned to their educational and occupational needs. In this sense, there is a major challenge for mobility policymakers to retain their, politically understandable, reticence to endorse practices which may lead to the migration of highly-skilled youth while providing appropriate support to tertiary educated young people so as to enable them to continue their educational and occupational trajectories.

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⁸ In regard to the popularity of all non-credit forms of student mobility, estimates collated by UNESCO suggest that in the region of 13,000 Portuguese students, or just over 3% of the student population, are presently studying abroad (UNESCO, 2014). This form of student mobility is traditionally associated with a socio-economically narrow range of young people, specifically those from affluent families, being practiced by what Murphy-Lejeune (2002), borrowing a term from Musgrove (1963) calls a “migratory elite”.

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David Cairns. Postdoctoral researcher at CIES-IUL, Avenida das Forças Armadas, 1649-026, Lisboa. *E-mail*: david.cairns@iscte.pt

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