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### The two sides of the same coin

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# Population & Policy

COMPACT

## THE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN: Challenges of Policy-Making for a Mobile Europe

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### Key messages:

- Europeans are increasingly mobile in terms of commuting and travelling, whereas rates of permanent change in residence across borders are scarce. Relocation rates within countries are stable or are even going down.
- Experiences of mobility are very heterogeneous and circumstances that lead people to be mobile change over the life course.
- Policies should support the development of “skills for mobility”, particularly at younger ages, but older people should also not be ignored.
- Policies should promote mobility that adjusts to personal situations and prevents negative consequences at the individual and social level.

## EUROPE'S PURSUIT OF MOBILITY

DURING THE PAST DECADES, large efforts have been dedicated to ensuring the freedom of movement in the EU, for example with the elimination of visa requirements and the liberalisation of labour market access for EU citizens. Mobility has been promoted as being a crucial learning experience, particularly for the younger generation: The Erasmus+ programme recently launched by the European Commission for the period 2014 to 2020 has a 40% higher budget than previous initiatives and is supposed to provide opportunities for over 4 million Europeans to study, receive training, gain work experience and volunteer abroad.

The general claim is that spatial mobility has a positive effect on economic growth, social welfare and cultural integration within the EU. During the economic crisis, it has also been discussed that labour market shortfalls in regions where people are exposed to higher unemployment risks may be compensated for by supporting mobility to regions with a higher labour force demand or further training opportunities.

On a general level, spatial mobility includes circular mobility (e.g. daily and weekend commuting, long distance relationships, frequent overnight business travels) as well as relocation mobility referring to international migration (across borders) and internal migration (long distance move within a country).

## EUROPEANS ARE HIGHLY MOBILE - BUT PERMANENT RELOCATION IS RARE

EUROPE IS A MOBILE ENTITY regarding fluxes of information, goods, ideas and people. Looking at job-related spatial mobility alone, data from a survey on specific types of mobility indicate that in 2007 in Belgium, France, Germany, Poland, Spain and Switzerland, almost every second person aged 25-54 and gainfully employed was or had been highly spatially mobile in the recent past (Schneider and Meil 2008). But even though mobility in terms of commuting and travelling is a common feature, the level of migration between countries is low: Only two per cent of the mobile population have moved to another country for work reasons in the last three years (Table 1).

In the period from 2006 to 2007, about 780,000 people in the EU were cross-border commuters, mainly to Switzerland (206,000), Luxembourg (127,000), Germany (86,000), the Netherlands (58,000), Austria (48,000) and Belgium (39,000). The main countries of origin were France (284,000), Germany (117,000) and Belgium (78,000), accounting for about 60% of all cross-border commuters in the EU (MKW/Empirica 2009).

These apparent large figures of circular mobility between and within EU countries contrast with average stagnating, or even

declining, levels of permanent residential change across regions (United Nations 2013).

		Percentage*
Circular Mobilities	Daily long distance commuters	41
	Vari-mobiles (Frequent overnight business travel)	20
	Weekend commuters ("Shuttler")	3
	Long-distance relationships	4
Relocation Mobilities	Long distance move within a country (Internal migration)	18
	Move across border (Migration)	2
Multi-Mobilities	Two or more types of mobility at the same time	13
Total (all types of mobility)		100

**Table 1** Specific types of job-related spatial mobility in 2007 among mobile people (BE, CH, DE, ES, FR, PL)  
\* Mean of the six countries, weighted by population size  
Source: Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe (2007)

## REASONS, INCENTIVES AND TIMES FOR MOBILITY

INDIVIDUALS MOVE IN HOPES of accomplishing goals in life, such as successful career development and a satisfying family life. The lack of opportunities available to achieve one's life goals in the current place of residence is the primary incentive to move (Kley 2011). Circular mobility is also often a prior step to relocation mobility: Individuals tend to test possibilities in other locations and contexts before planning a definitive move.

Younger, more educated individuals and those engaged in careers with high promotion potential tend to be more mobile because of the possible economic and status-related benefits deriving from it. Over the life course, changes of residence tend to occur at younger ages – moving during studies and at early career stages. Later on, the levels of residential relocation decline and levels of circular mobility tend to peak, particularly after family formation (Schneider and Meil 2008).

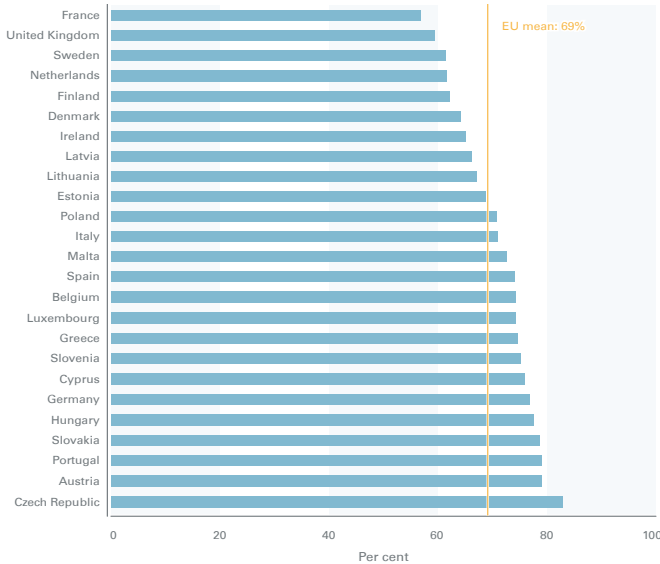
Higher employment or training opportunities, as well as social and professional contacts in the potential destinations are attractive reasons for relocation mobility. Other considerations, like environmental and lifestyle aspects, can lead individuals to move or, for instance, to change residence from inner cities to suburban or rural areas while increasing levels of commuting. This would often be the case when forming a family since smaller areas are typically considered to be more suitable to raise children (Kulu 2006).

The rise of circular mobility, and the substitution of traditional residential relocations, is also a response to changes inside families and in their surroundings: the emergence of dual-earner couples, increasing pressure for work-family balance and a sustained improvement in communication and transportation systems. There is an increasing number of couples who, for work reasons, do not live under the same roof, but far away from each other and travel to maintain their relationship – a phenomenon known as "Long-distance relationship" (see Table 1) or as "Commuter Partnership" (Van der Klis and Mulder 2008).

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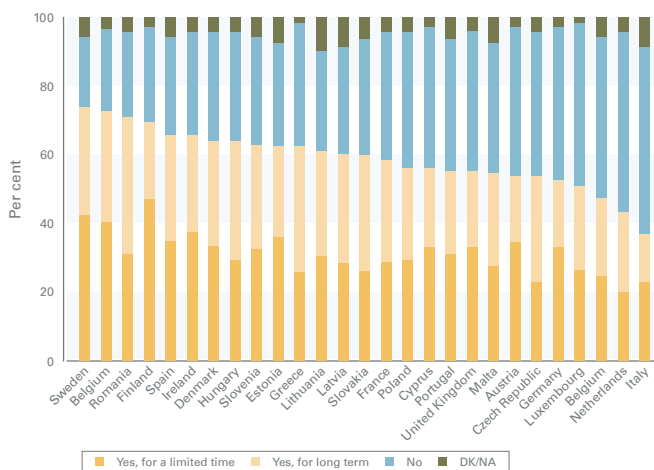
**BEING READY TO MOVE CONTRIBUTES TO SUCCESS**

EVIDENCE SHOWS that 69% of Europeans do not intend to move or relocate in the near future (Figure 1). Only around one-fifth of Europeans of working ages feel that they would not only be willing, but actually ready to move (Schneider and Collet 2010).



**Figure 1** Percentage of people who do not intend to move in the next five years, by country  
Source: Eurofound (2006)

The people who are ready to move – which is not necessarily translated into actual mobility – are also often the more successful ones, as this reflects the willingness to adapt in order to achieve one’s life goals and ambitions (Huinink et al. 2014). Those lacking such readiness may limit their life and job opportunities, thus missing possible opportunities to improve, not only elsewhere, but even at one’s current location.



**Figure 2** Young people's willingness to work in another EU country  
Source: 2011 Eurobarometer on Youth on the Move

In addition, in terms of motivations, there is an age-related pattern: In most European countries more than half of youth are keen on working in another country (Figure 2), while older Europeans perceive that they lack general skills to become mobile. This mostly refers to work-related skills, organisational capacities and language knowledge (Kaufmann et al. 2010).

**THE HARD SIDE OF MOBILITY**

EVEN IF MOBILITY HAS MANY POSITIVE EFFECTS, it can also have negative consequences that affect the mobile individual, as well as their partners and family. A distant workplace, frequent business travel or a long commute reduce available spare time and money, increase levels of stress or other health-related problems, and delay or prevent family formation (Huinink and Feldhaus 2012).

Mobility could also affect the quality of family relationships with consequences for all family members. The partnership might deteriorate and the educational outcomes of children may worsen (Boyle et al. 2008). Regarding gender aspects, on average, family migration does not automatically favour the female’s occupational career, but instead it tends to reproduce traditional gender roles at home and at work, particularly when there are children in the household (Perales and Vidal 2013).

Spatial mobility, especially migration, may affect the levels of emotional and material support that are exchanged with relatives, as well as the level of social engagement in the local community. An important issue is also the effects of a reduced amount of practical support that can be provided to children, as well as older and frail parents. This might further increase the demand for affordable public or private care (Mulder 2007). Research has, however, also shown that internal and international migrants are deemed to be healthier than non-migrants (Wallace and Kulu 2014), which reveals how different the consequences and circumstances of mobility can be depending on the type of mobility and the aspects analysed.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: PREPARE FOR MOBILITY, BUT ALSO PREVENT ITS NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES**

CHANGING LABOUR MARKETS and related social changes (e.g. dual-earner couples, fixed-term contracts, outsourcing, declining real wages) might continue to transform the attitudes and behaviours of Europeans towards mobility. Research suggests that these trends on the one hand might lead to more circular mobility (Schneider and Meil 2008), while on the other hand, they might further decrease the level of relocation mobility (Cooke 2012). Another important question is whether the ap-

parent benefits from spatial mobility in the form of regional economic convergence, knowledge sharing and cultural integration will level off with increasing costs for individuals.

Policies should avoid treating spatial mobility as an aim in and of itself. Instead, they should deal with the long-term consequences for individuals, families and the environment and offer more targeted support to potentially mobile populations. For example, access to flexible childcare services would contribute to the improvement of the compatibility between family and job-related mobility. People living in remote areas would benefit from accessible, frequent and reliable public transportation, or offers related to distance and frequency travelled. Financial incentives could increase workers' willingness to become mobile. In regard to cross-border commuting and migration, policies should, for example, facilitate the transferability of rights and entitlements (e.g. pensions, health care). Also employers should promote the spatial mobility of their employees more actively, especially regarding to the compatibility of work and family life, and skill development.

Particular attention should be paid to increase the skills for mobility, such as work-related skills, organisational capacities and language knowledge. This is especially important at younger ages, as evidence shows that early mobility experiences correlate with being mobile at older ages and a sustained willingness to move. However, older and currently employed individuals should not be left behind either. Here the social consequences of and obstacles to mobility play a more important role since they have more obligations, such as caring for their families or providing support to relatives.

In order to tackle the social and individual consequences of spatial mobility – as well as of spatial immobility – it will have to be high on the social policy agenda in the future.

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