



REMINDER

ROLE OF EUROPEAN MOBILITY AND ITS IMPACTS
IN NARRATIVES, DEBATES AND EU REFORMS

Summary Report: Insights on the Determinants of Mobility in the EU

REPORT

Author: Carlos Vargas-Silva

Published October 2019





REMINDER

ROLE OF EUROPEAN MOBILITY AND ITS IMPACTS
IN NARRATIVES, DEBATES AND EU REFORMS

Summary Report: Insights on the Determinants of Mobility in the EU

Authors: Carlos Vargas-Silva¹

Submitted: August 2019

Paper prepared as part of the REMINDER project

www.reminder-project.eu

Correspondence address:

Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS)
University of Oxford
carlos.vargas-silva@compas.ox.ac.uk

¹ Note: This summary is based on work done by researchers in Work Package 3 of the REMINDER project including Esther Arenas-Arroyo, Talitha Dubow, Veronika Fajth, Zovanga Kone, Katrin Marchand, Cinzia Rienzo, Melissa Siegel, Anina Strey, and Carlos Vargas-Silva. Also, thanks to Katrin Marchand and Madeleine Sumption for helpful feedback on the summary.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 727072

Abstract

This document summarises seven key findings from Work Package 3 of the REMINDER project. Work Package 3 explored the drivers of EU mobility using a desk-based literature review, individual migrant interviews, focus groups, primary quantitative data analysis, and secondary quantitative data analysis. The analysis was based on work conducted in Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, and the UK, and included EU and non-EU migrants. Please refer to the different outputs of the Work Package for details about the methodologies employed and an extended discussion of the results (Arenas-Arroyo et al., 2019a,b; Dubow et al., 2019; Kone et al., 2019a,b; Marchand, 2019; Strey et al., 2018).

The analysis in the Work Package confirmed much of what we already know about the drivers of migration, e.g. individuals move to improve their well-being, in search of better economic conditions, etc. The insights discussed below refer to other less obvious and, in some cases, unexpected findings. The summary discussion is general, aimed at a non-academic audience.

In the discussion, we use the term “EU migrant” to refer to someone who was born in one EU country and now resides in another EU country. We use the term “non-EU migrant” to refer to someone who was born outside the EU and now lives in an EU country. The term “EU returnee” refers to someone born in a given EU country and living in her/his country of birth, who at some point resided in another EU country.

The insights discussed in the document, include:

1. Freedom of movement is not only a facilitator of migration, but also a reason for migration in itself. For many EU nationals, taking advantage of the opportunities provided by freedom of movement is way of expressing and conforming to their European identity. In this context, migration between EU countries could occur even without any major difference in economic or security terms.



2. EU mobility for work reasons dominates current policy and academic debate, but other reasons should play a major role. There has been a large amount of discussion regarding the optimal labour immigration policy in the EU. However, a closer look at this debate reveals a key limitation: the full heterogeneity of the EU migrant workforce is not taken into account. In particular, the heterogeneity of migrant workers regarding reason for immigration has been largely ignored.

3. Access to public services and the welfare system rarely matters for EU migrants, but it is more important for some non-EU migrants looking for asylum. The welfare system and access to public services play a minor role in the migration decisions of EU nationals. There is little evidence about the possibility of intra-EU movement undertaken with the intention of taking advantage of the welfare system, i.e. welfare or benefits “tourism”. However, upon arriving in the host country, EU migrants learn about their rights and many claim such benefits. Those moving for asylum reasons tend to put more emphasis on differences in access to public services and welfare across EU countries.

4. Differences in the minimum wage are not major drivers of EU mobility. There are important variations in the minimum wage across EU countries, including variations across eligible age groups in different countries. It is often argued that, by increasing the minimum wage, countries become more attractive to low-skill migrant workers, as many will receive a higher salary. The evidence shows that changes in the minimum wage have only a modest impact on the earnings of EU migrants and, in some cases, higher minimum wages could actually lead to worse labour market outcomes for migrants.

5. Political tensions are not driving EU mobility currently, but are affecting plans. The recent popularity of far-right parties in different European countries, as well as other related events such as Brexit, is playing a key role in determining the migration plans of many EU nationals. The most common response to these events now is a “wait and see” attitude. However, there is growing concern and it is common for EU migrants to say that they would move from their current country of residence if the electoral position of the far-right



intensifies or in response to a “hard” Brexit. Whether this intention to migrate will actually materialise into migration in the future under these scenarios remains uncertain.

6. The return plans of EU migrants are more open-ended compared to those of non-EU migrants. In a context of freedom of movement, where recurring migrations are easy, there is less weight put into strategic thinking on issues related to length of stay and likelihood of return. EU migrants often have open-ended intentions and do not plan their migration trajectories in much detail. These factors are major strategic decisions for non-EU migrants, particularly undocumented ones, given the legal and practical difficulties of subsequent migration.

7. The language of a destination matters, but also the language of institutions. The opportunity to work or study in a language that migrants already have learnt at an advanced level influences the selection of destination. In some cases, the language of the employing or academic institution is different to that spoken more widely in the country or city.



Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
1. Freedom of movement is not only a facilitator of migration, but also a reason for migration in itself.....	6
2. EU mobility for work reasons dominates current policy and academic debate, but other reasons should play a major role	8
3. Access to public services and the welfare system rarely matters for EU migrants, but it is important for some non-EU migrants looking for asylum	10
4. Differences in the minimum wage are not major drivers of EU mobility	12
5. Political tensions are not a major driver of EU mobility currently, but are affecting plans	14
6. The return plans of EU migrants are more open-ended compared to those of non-EU migrants...	16
7. The language of a destination matters, but also the language of institutions	18
References	20



1. Freedom of movement is not only a facilitator of migration, but also a reason for migration in itself

“I really want to use the options we have as European citizens to move around freely and to experience other countries. Yes, so, as long as I’m young and not fixed to a specific place, I really want to make use of it.” German student in the UK.

For many EU nationals, taking advantage of the opportunities provided by freedom of movement is a way of expressing and conforming to their European identity. This is seen as “a really important part of life”. This differs from many models of migration decisions, which start from the idea that there is some kind of gap between locations (e.g. economic, security) that affects individual and/or household well-being and eventually drives migration. In the EU context, migration would occur even without any key gaps. For instance, those moving from Germany to the UK are unlikely to gain much in economic or security terms.

There are several other contexts around the world in which migration is seen as part of a life trajectory or a “rite of passage”. However, in many of these contexts, migration involves substantial financial costs and there are major legal restrictions to movement across countries. This is not the case in the EU, where migration for its own sake interacts strongly with the legal and structural support that accompanies it (i.e., freedom of movement). For instance, in an unrestricted environment, admiration for the history and food of another country is often sufficient to drive migration.

Freedom of movement and the legal framework that supports it also play a key role in the selection of destination of EU nationals. That is, many EU nationals do not only desire to migrate, but to migrate within the EU. In fact, the EU legal system is perceived as lowering



the cost of information, as there should be a substantial degree of familiarity with the legal and political system of the destination country.

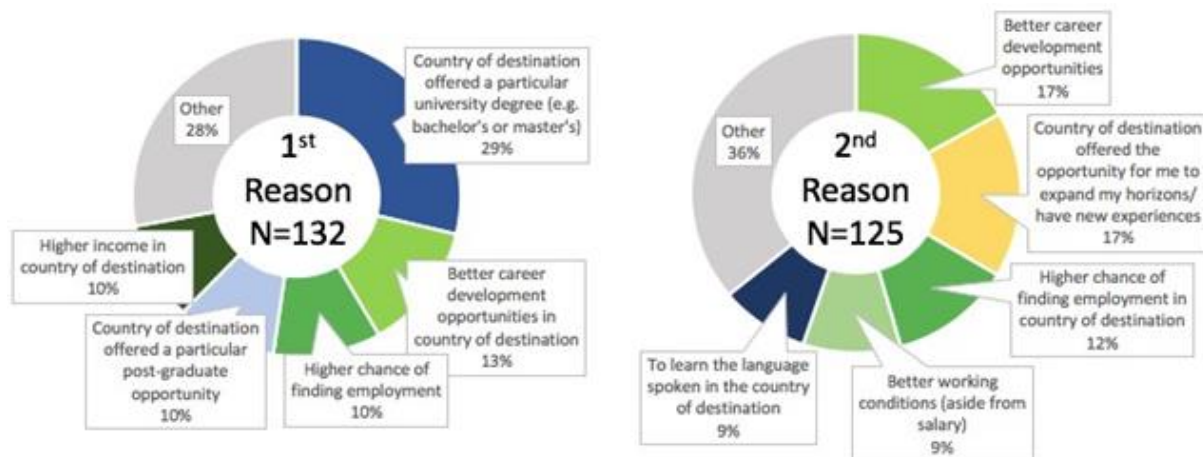
Unsurprisingly, those coming from non-EU countries do not make such a strong distinction between migrating within and outside the EU. However, there are some similarities regarding related factors. For instance, non-EU migrants tend to appreciate the flexibility of the Schengen Area, which allows them to travel around as tourists without any restrictions. Some non-EU migrants, particularly lower-skilled ones, often have “European countries” in mind as an initial migration destination without making much distinction between countries.

Concerns about losing the opportunity of freedom of movement are strong among young people in the UK. This also includes EU migrants inclined to return home or move on in the event of losing any rights, and others who consider that life will just be more difficult, including interactions with family members in other EU countries.



2. EU mobility for work reasons dominates current policy and academic debate, but other reasons should play a major role

Figure 1 - Survey respondents' first and second most important reasons for choosing the country of destination



A substantial number of EU migrants state that reasons such as study, family, love, and lifestyle play a key role in their decision to move to another EU country and their selection of destination (Figure 1). In fact, there is rarely one clear “determinant” of an individual’s intra-EU migration decision. A common example is that the prospect of work in another country is not necessarily the reason an individual migrates, but rather provides a convenient opportunity through which to pursue other, less tangible objectives or aspirations – for example, the desire to experience a different culture, or a sense of “wanderlust”. However, the large majority of the academic and policy discussion on EU mobility is about migration for work reasons.

This dynamic is also true in the context of Brexit. One key question in the Brexit debate is: what are the potential implications of modifying the access of UK (EU) nationals to the EU



(UK) and its labour market? There has been a large amount of discussion regarding the optimal post-Brexit labour immigration policy. However, a closer look at this debate reveals a key limitation: the full heterogeneity of the UK and EU workforce is not taken into account. In particular, the heterogeneity of migrants regarding reason for immigration has been largely ignored.

Among EU migrants in the UK, about half originally migrated to the country for work reasons, but about one third migrated for family reasons, and about 11% for study reasons. These differences in reason for immigration also have major implications on how the different migrant groups perform in the labour market. For instance, EU migrants who moved for study reasons are the group that has the largest share of workers in high-skill occupations. Therefore, any policies designed to prioritise high-skilled migration need to take into account migration for study and the transition from study to work.

In the context of the EU and the UK, this would mean to prioritise questions such as: would UK (EU) students be able to access education in the EU (UK) under the same terms that they do now (i.e. fees, funding, visas)? Would they be able to stay and work in the country after finishing their studies? Under what conditions?



3. Access to public services and the welfare system rarely matters for EU migrants, but it is more important for some non-EU migrants looking for asylum

“My main goal was to ensure that my children have good education and [a] good future, which I am sure Germany is a good place for” Syrian asylum seeker in Germany.

The welfare system and access to public services plays a minor role in the migration decisions of EU nationals. Rarely would this come up as an important aspect at all in the qualitative research. There is little evidence about the possibility of intra-EU movement with the intention of taking advantage of the welfare system, i.e. welfare or benefits “tourism”. In fact, most EU migrants were largely unaware of their welfare rights in the host country or the quality of many public services when they decided to migrate.

However, this does not mean that low-paid EU migrants do not claim benefits. Upon arriving in the host country, EU migrants learn about their rights. Given their socio-economic profile, many are actually entitled to welfare benefits and claim such benefits.

The welfare system and access to public services do play a role in the return decisions of EU migrants. That is, while the initial decision is made largely irrespective of these considerations, the possibility of return often considers these factors. This includes EU migrants returning to countries that provide a greater degree of old age support (e.g. Sweden).

Non-EU migrants who moved to an EU country for work reasons also paid little attention to differences in the welfare system across EU countries, when choosing a destination. However, similar to EU migrants, many do claim benefits once in the host country. In fact, the lack of transferability of benefits across countries, such as pensions, plays a role in limiting return migration to non-EU countries.



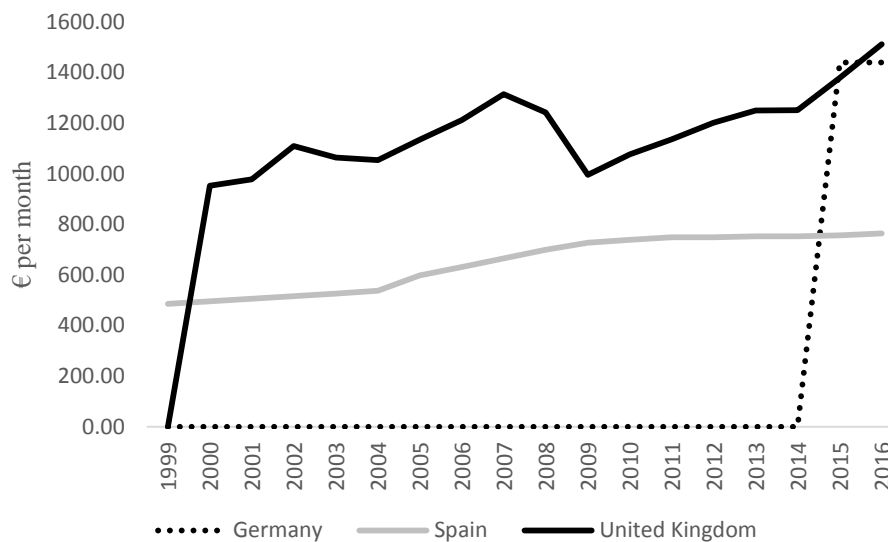
This is different for some non-EU migrants moving for asylum and related reasons. While the original decision to migrate was unrelated to these factors, the selection of destination, particularly as a result from onward migration (e.g. Greece to Germany), is often motivated by perceived quality of public services and access to benefits. This is particularly the case for services related to children such as schools and language learning.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 727072

4. Differences in the minimum wage are not major drivers of EU mobility

Figure 2 – Minimum wages in several EU countries.



There are important variations in the minimum wage across EU countries (Figure 2), including variations across eligible age groups in different countries. It is often argued that, by increasing the minimum wage, countries become more attractive to low-skill migrant workers, as many will receive a higher salary. The evidence shows that changes in the minimum only have a modest impact on the earnings of low-paid EU migrants and, in some cases, higher minimum wages could actually lead to lower wage growth.

The link between higher minimum wages and smaller wage growth for EU migrants in comparison with natives and other migrants could have several explanations. For instance, there is labour market segmentation between migrants and natives. Labour market segmentation refers to a situation in which the labour market is divided into separate submarkets, distinguished by different characteristics and rules. In each market, the wage of low-paid workers is likely to increase on an annual basis, even without, or in addition to, any changes in the minimum wage. If labour market segmentation is relatively strong, then it



can imply differences in the degree to which the minimum wage is a focal point in setting wages in each market; that is, differences in the degree to which employers respond to a minimum wage change by increasing wages just by the compulsory amount. This contrasts with the implicit assumption of much academic work that the wage of low-paid workers would not have changed in the absence of a minimum wage increase.

From the point of view of EU migrants, the minimum wage might indicate also a fair wage, representing the acceptable rate for work. This is more likely for those who are less familiar with pay rates in the host country. Hence, migrants could be less likely to bargain for wage increases beyond the minimum wage. Moreover, because of language and cultural differences, EU migrant workers might not be fully aware of their rights. Finally, EU migrant workers, particularly recently arrived ones, could be less attached to their jobs compared to native workers, and could be more willing to accept lower pay, including pay below the legal minimum while looking for a better job.



5. Political tensions are not a major driver of EU mobility currently, but are affecting plans

“When the referendum happened and the Brexit happened, and everything, that made me a bit more anxious, because I thought, well, if I go, what if I can’t come back or what if I don’t get the visa or whatever I needed to get, and then it would also break my stay [...] so just a lot of anxiety.” Romanian residing in the UK.

The recent popularity of far-right parties in different European countries, as well as other related events such as Brexit, could be playing a role in determining the migration plans of some EU nationals. The most common response to these events now is a “wait and see” attitude. However, there is growing concern and many EU migrants say that they would move from their current country of residence if the electoral position of the far-right intensifies or in response to a “hard” Brexit in the case of the UK. Whether this intention to migrate will actually materialise into migration in the future under these scenarios remains uncertain.

The mobility plans of EU migrants includes the decision to leave the EU altogether for some who considered the far right shift as a regional one. The reason for this position is a mix between pure ideological opposition and actual concern that their lives and rights will be affected.

This concern about ideological positions and other worries also extend to domestic disputes in some countries, such as Catalan nationalism, which is considered by some as unwelcoming to foreigners and negative for the local economy.

EU migrants living in the UK said that uncertainties related to Brexit mean that they are less willing to invest in building a life in the UK. This includes aspects such as home purchases



and integration into local communities. EU migrants also stated that the Brexit vote increased xenophobia and led to differentiation between 'Brits' and Europeans, which led them to reconsider their decision to live in the UK.

Migration for political reasons was more commonly indicated among those coming from non-EU countries. For many of these individuals, political reasons played a major role in determining their original migration to an EU country. However, members of this group also expressed concern about the ideological shift in Europe and expressed their intention to migrate among EU countries in response to perceived xenophobia and racism in their current country of residence.



6. The return plans of EU migrants are more open-ended compared to those of non-EU migrants.

“From the beginning I could never answer that question that people always ask you: ‘For how long are you planning to stay?’, ‘when are you moving back?’ I just don’t know.”

German who moved from the Netherlands to the UK.

A large number of studies have been written on the return decision of migrants. The results of these studies suggest that the likelihood of return has a major influence on the behaviour of migrants, including consumption, employment, and remittances behaviour. In most conceptual models of return migration, there are major barriers to movement between countries (i.e. high cost of migration), and migrants typically aim to accumulate certain levels of savings or investment back home before returning.

In a context of freedom of movement, there is less overall concern about issues related to length of stay or timing of return. In other words, EU migrants often say that their plans are open-ended. In this context, recurring migrations are easy and individuals are more likely to alternate periods of work/residence in the home and host country (or in many cases host countries).

The strategic planning related to the decision and timing of return is more consequential for non-EU migrants compared to EU migrants. Non-EU migrants are more likely to see the duration of their migration experience in the country of destination as coinciding with their working life.

Non-EU migrants are also more strategic in choosing their periods of return, which include often waiting until the receipt of the citizenship of the host country. Naturalisation implies



that there is greater flexibility to go back to the host country if necessary, which in essence places them in a similar position to that of EU migrants.

In fact, a lack of proper documentation can be a major impediment for returning to the home country for some non-EU migrants. For those without papers, the decision to return home has major long-term and potentially permanent implications. In fact, the evidence suggests that making subsequent migration more difficult, leads to higher levels of long-term settlement in the host country by migrants.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 727072

7. The language of a destination matters, but also the language of institutions

“The composers and the language. Because German is also an important language for opera.” Opera singer from Peru living in Germany.

The opportunity to learn a new language was one of the main drivers of EU mobility, often the main one. Fluency in several languages increases income prospects at home and abroad and leads to better cultural understanding.

Fluency in a particular language is also a major factor in the selection of destination. For instance, in the case of those migrating for study purposes (other than language learning), the selection of destination is largely influenced by the opportunity to study in a language that they already have learnt at an advanced level. In some cases, this could be the country’s official language. However, in many cases the language of instruction in the university environment is different to that spoken more widely in the country or city. A result of this dynamic is that universities in the UK, or in other countries offering courses in English, have an advantage in attracting mobile EU students.

The advantage of each language also responds to specific industries or professions. For instance, Italy and Germany are attractive destinations for opera singers, while bankers might prefer the UK.

The existing focus on the role of languages in determining the selection of destination is on the language of places. However, the language of institutions (e.g. universities, companies) is also very important in determining location. For instance, many of those in academic institutions in Barcelona, Rome, and Stockholm and many other cities are studying in degrees in a language different from the main one of the city.



Finally, once the person acquires skills in a particular language this could decrease the likelihood of return migration. This is more likely among those who either studied in the language of the host country or had their first employment opportunities in that country. They often perceive that they lack the technical vocabulary to work effectively in their professions back home. On the other hand, those who studied at academic institutions in a language that is different from the main one in the host country are more likely to move elsewhere after finishing their studies.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 727072

References

Arenas-Arroyo, Esther, Rienzo, Cinzia and Carlos Vargas-Silva. 2019a. "Minimum Wages, Expansion and Mobility in the EU". REMINDER Working Paper, forthcoming.

Arenas-Arroyo, Esther, Rienzo, Cinzia and Carlos Vargas-Silva. 2019b. "The Wage Effects of the Minimum Wage for Migrant and Native Workers". REMINDER Working Paper, forthcoming.

Dubow, Talitha, Marchand, Katrin and Melissa Siegel. 2019. "Evidence on the Determinants of Migration in the EU". REMINDER Working Paper. Available at: <https://www.reminder-project.eu/publications/working-papers/evidence-of-the-determinants-of-migration-in-the-eu/>

Kone, Zovanga and Carlos Vargas-Silva. 2019. "Reasons for Migration and the Labour Market Implications of Brexit". REMINDER Blog. Available at: <https://www.reminder-project.eu/blog/reasons-for-migration-and-the-labour-market-implications-of-brexit/>

Kone, Zovanga and Carlos Vargas-Silva. 2019. "Causes des Migrations et Conséquences du Brexit sur le Marché du Travail. *Hommes & Migrations*, No. 1326, July-September.

Marchand, Katrin. 2019. "Why are people moving within Europe? The complexity of migrant decision-making in the European Union", REMINDER Blog. Available at: <https://www.reminder-project.eu/blog/why-are-people-moving-within-europe-the-complexity-of-migrant-decision-making-in-the-european-union/>

Strey, Anina, Fajth, Veronika, Dubow, Talitha, and Melissa Siegel. 2018. "Determinants of Migration Flows Within the EU: Literature Review". REMINDER Working Paper. Available at: <https://www.reminder-project.eu/publications/literature-reviews/determinants-of-migration-flows-within-the-eu/>





REMINDER

ROLE OF EUROPEAN MOBILITY AND ITS IMPACTS
IN NARRATIVES, DEBATES AND EU REFORMS

The REMINDER project is exploring the economic, social, institutional and policy factors that have shaped the impacts of free movement in the EU and public debates about it.

The project is coordinated from COMPAS and includes participation from 14 consortium partners in 9 countries across Europe.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research & innovation programme under grant agreement no 727072

