

# Mobility and Internationality of Academics in the Humanities and Social Sciences

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The discourse on ‘knowledge society’ and ‘knowledge economy’ often implicitly or explicitly suggests that the natural sciences are at the forefront of the development towards worldwide mobility, communication and cooperation in the world of knowledge, while the humanities and social sciences look more frequently at the specifics of certain cultures and countries or lag behind in their intention to internationalize. *On dits* can be persistent in the domain, among other things, because systematic information on mobility and migration of scholars, as well as on their international activities is scarce. This contribution tries to extract what can be found on mobility and migration of scholars in Europe. The available information suggests that differences by disciplinary groups are unexpectedly small.

## Introduction

Scholars tend to collect information the world over about the state of knowledge in their area of expertise. Many of them collaborate with colleagues from other countries. Many scholarly publications are written in a language and published in a way that makes them accessible worldwide. International reputation is viewed as a key indicator of quality. A substantial proportion of scholars are internationally mobile in the course of their career, and some scholars are migrants, i.e. have changed their country of residence permanently, either already in an early stage of their lives or in the process of learning and working in their sphere of knowledge.

The public discourse on the role of mobility and internationality suggests that there are substantial differences by disciplines. Scholars in the fields of science and engineering are in the limelight of efforts to strengthen the role of research in contributing to a future conceived of as a ‘knowledge society’ and ‘knowledge economy’. Moreover, international cooperation and communications seem to be easier in the fields of science and engineering due to the often universal character of many disciplines in these fields, in contrast to the humanities and social sciences,

which are seen as having to pay more attention to national and regional specifics of language, culture and human behaviour and values.

The aim of this contribution is to provide some basic information on the physical mobility of scholars, with special attention paid to the extent in which physical mobility between disciplinary groups actually differs. It is not the intention here to comment on the public discourse about the benefits, drawbacks, problems or dangers of such mobility. These have been well documented in the past. Suffice it to say that, in general, the benefits of mobility and migration are altogether more highly appreciated than their drawbacks (see the overviews in Ref. 1).

### **The Information Base**

It is not easy to construct a good information base on the mobility and migration of scholars. The available information refers to different definitions of the target group: is it academics teaching and doing research in institutions of higher education that are meant, researchers professionally active in a broad range of institutions, or all persons qualified to do scholarly work, for instance doctoral degree holders? How broad is the definition of scholars? In some countries the category includes so-called 'support staff' while in other countries this category is excluded. Does the category include all those scholarly employed full-time, or also part-timers, and even those scholarly active as little as one hour per week? Do the analyses focus on well-established and experienced scholars or do they also consider doctoral candidates? In some countries the latter are understood to be students while in others they count as junior scholars. Moreover, the very notion of mobility varies: in many instances, having a nationality that is different from that of the country where scholarly work is undertaken counts as an indicator for mobility. In other instances it is the crossing of national borders that is taken as a measure. Moreover, do we pay attention to mobility and migration only in terms of inflows to certain countries, or are – more complicated – efforts made as well to collect information on outflows? Finally, views vary substantially with regard to what kind and magnitude of activity should be included in the analysis: certainly, being awarded a degree in another country and regular employment in another country are included, but how about those spending a substantial period abroad during study or work on their doctoral dissertation, and how about sabbaticals and visits for research collaboration?

Different notions are endemic in this area. This is true among other things because in many individual countries and in international organisations there exist separate administrations in charge of education on the one hand and science on the other, and these administrations each collect statistical data, which are not compatible with each other. In addition, the organisations in the various countries involved differ in the attention they pay to various phenomena and accordingly in their collection of information. Last but not least, most surveys aiming at providing more in-depth information than mere statistics are undertaken with different thematic and methodological thrusts and mostly focus only on individual countries (see the overview on the information base in Refs 2 and 3).

As most available official statistics pay attention only to a limited set of dimensions of mobility and migration, the information provided in this publication will draw primarily on a few comparative surveys: (a) ‘The Changing Academic Profession’ (CAP): a questionnaire survey undertaken in 2007–2008 of more than 25,000 academic staff (regularly employed at least half time) from 18 countries (among them seven European countries and China) and the SAR Hong Kong<sup>4,5</sup>; (b) ‘The Academic Profession in Europe’ (EUROAC): an additional questionnaire survey undertaken in 2010 of almost 8000 academic staff from five European countries. Actually, the scholars involved in the latter study generated a combined CAP/EUROAC data set of more than 16,000 academic staff from 12 European countries surveyed between 2007 and 2010<sup>6</sup>; (c) ‘MORE2 Survey’: a statistical analysis and a questionnaire survey undertaken in 2012 of more than 10,000 researchers at higher education institutions in 33 European countries.<sup>7</sup>

### **Overall Mobility and Migration**

In the public debate about migration and mobility in higher education, most attention goes to student mobility. According to international statistics published by UNESCO, OECD and EUROSTAT, less than 3% of all students worldwide study in a country different from that of their citizenship. Detailed studies have shown that a substantial proportion of foreign students had not gone to their respective country of study for the purpose of study, but rather because they lived there already prior to embarking on their study. There is a non-negligible number of students as well who are mobile but not foreign – either because they returned from abroad to their country of citizenship in order to study there or because they became citizens of the host country while studying there. Moreover, the international data-collecting agencies, surprisingly enough, suggest not including short-term mobile students into their statistics, which effectively excludes the major thrust of European student mobility policy. Even taking into account these distortions we may still conclude that between 3 and 4% of students are internationally mobile at any given moment. In 2009, the ministers in charge of higher education in the European countries suggested, in the framework of the Bologna Process, not to take information at a given moment in time as the key criterion for student mobility, but rather the event of mobility over a lifespan, i.e. actually the quota of all students having been mobile – whether for a short time or all of their study – during their studies; in this context, they set a target of 20% mobility on average across European countries by the year 2020. Graduate surveys undertaken in the first decade of the 21st century show that this target had already been reached in Austria, the Netherlands and Norway, was certainly within reach in countries such as Germany and Italy, but was equally certainly out of reach in countries such as Poland and the United Kingdom, where the surveys reported quotas of less than 5%.<sup>8</sup>

Mobility is enormously high among doctoral candidates.<sup>9,10</sup> Among OECD member states, annually about 20% of doctoral degrees on average are awarded to foreigners. The respective proportion is more than 40% in Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the US,

more than 20% in Sweden, and below 20% in Germany. A doctoral degree abroad is often pursued by persons from middle-income and low-income countries, but also, of European researchers with a doctor degree surveyed in 2012, 14% had obtained their doctoral degree abroad. According to the surveys of academics employed in higher education in 12 European countries in 2007–2010, 21% of doctoral degree holders on average across countries had been awarded this title in a country different from that of their employment at the time of the survey. Actually, in the 2012 survey, on average 15% of the academics of the European countries surveyed were citizens of another country than that of their birth. This figure was highest in Switzerland (46%), quite high in the United Kingdom (22% as compared with 10% of the so-called ‘migrant stock’ in 2005 according to World Bank statistics) and in Norway (22% as compared with 8%), but clearly below average in the Netherlands (9% as compared with 11%) and Germany (7% as compared with 13%) and finally extremely low in Italy (1% as compared with 5%). It should be noted that the respective figures were marginal (between 0% and 1%) as well in major East Asian countries – China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. In the same survey, the figures with regard to current citizenship were similar: on average 13% were foreigners of the European countries surveyed at the time the survey was conducted – ranging from 40% in Switzerland and about one fifth each in Ireland and the United Kingdom to about 1–2% each in Italy, Poland and Portugal. Again, the respective figures for the East Asian countries mentioned above were at most 1%.

### **The Share of the Humanities and Social Sciences**

The share of the humanities and social sciences among all scholars in Europe is by no means small. EUROSTAT, the statistical agency of the European Union, reported for 2009 that on average across the 27 countries surveyed, 36.4% of scholars at institutions of higher education were from the humanities and social sciences. The proportion, for example, was 32.4% in Germany, 36.3% in France and 36.5% in the United Kingdom. For the natural sciences and engineering, and for the medical and agricultural fields, the respective figures for the European Union altogether were 39.6% and 24.0%. The 2012 survey statistical overview of researchers (both academics at institutions of higher education and researchers at other institutions) in 33 European countries classified 36.2% as humanities and social sciences, 38.5% as natural sciences and engineering, and 25.3% as medical and agricultural.

The humanities and social sciences are less often represented among doctoral awards. According to an OECD Study on doctoral graduates in selected OECD countries 1990–2006, 10–15% of doctoral degrees were awarded in the humanities and between 15% and somewhat more than 20% in the social sciences.<sup>9</sup>

According to the surveys undertaken in European countries between 2007 and 2010, on average the scholars employed at universities, i.e. institutions active in both teaching and research, were distributed across disciplinary groups as follows:

- 21% in the humanities.
- 20% in the social sciences,
- 28% in natural sciences,

- 14% in engineering, and
- 17% in medical and health fields.

The respective data for academics at higher education institutions in China in the same comparative study were by and large similar. However, the proportion of academics in medical and health fields was substantially lower (4%).

The relative size of the disciplinary groups, however, varies substantially by country. According to the 2007–2010 surveys, 35% of the academics employed at universities in Austria were active in the humanities, but only 17% in the Netherlands, 16% in Switzerland, 15% in Germany and 12% in Italy. The percentage of academics employed in the social sciences ranged from 33% in the Netherlands and 28% in Ireland to 16% in Germany and 11% in Poland. The percentage of academics in the humanities and social sciences combined ranged from a high of 54% in Austria, and 50% in Ireland and in the Netherlands, to a low of 31% in Germany and Italy.

### **Differences of Mobility and Migration by Disciplinary Group**

As stated above, data on the location of the award of the doctoral degree tend to be viewed as both interesting and reliable. According to the 2012 survey undertaken in 33 European countries, the proportion of researchers having obtained a doctoral degree in a country other than the country of their citizenship was 14.2% on average across countries. It varied only to a small extent by disciplinary group:

- Surprisingly, a doctoral award abroad was most frequent in the humanities and social sciences, i.e. 15.0%.
- The respective proportion was slightly lower in the natural sciences and engineering (14.3%) and somewhat lower still in the medical and agricultural fields (12.8%).

The international surveys on the academic profession undertaken between 2007 and 2010 suggest some variety between countries. Moreover, they show a significant difference between economics and business studies and other parts of the humanities and social sciences:

- Among academics with a doctoral degree in economics and business studies employed at German institutions of higher education, only 3% had been awarded the doctoral degree in another country. The respective proportion for the humanities and other social sciences was 15% and for all natural sciences (including engineering and the medical fields) 10%.
- Also in the UK, the proportion of academics with a doctoral degree from another country was lowest in economics and business studies (10%), but here the difference with the other disciplinary groups was smaller (14% and 16% respectively) than in Germany.
- According to the same survey, in China the proportion of academics with a doctoral degree awarded abroad hardly differed between the various fields (7%, 7% and 6% respectively).

The current proportion of mobile researchers differs somewhat by disciplinary groups, but again to a lesser extent than one could have expected. In the 2012 study of 33 European countries, about 15% of the researchers in the humanities and social sciences were classified as currently mobile. The respective figures were 19% for the natural sciences and engineering and 12% for the medical and agricultural fields.

Again, differences by country are more striking. In the 2012 study, the proportions of foreigners (current citizenship) among researchers in the humanities and social sciences ranged from more than 30% to less than 5%:

- More than 30% in Luxemburg, Switzerland, Ireland and the United Kingdom,
- 20–30% in the Netherlands, Denmark, Cyprus and Norway,
- 15–20% in Austria, Belgium, Sweden and Finland,
- somewhat more than 10% in France,
- 5–10% in Germany, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Spain, Macedonia, Latvia, Estonia, Portugal, Turkey and Malta, and finally,
- less than 5% in Croatia, Greece, Iceland, Lithuania, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Bulgaria.

The 2012 study also analysed mobility at different career stages. Table 1 provides information on selected modes of mobility of academics with a doctoral degree employed at institutions of higher education in the 27 countries of the European Union. It should be noted that short periods of mobility were defined in this study as periods of up to three months.

This survey suggests, first, that more European scholars in the humanities and social sciences had been short-term internationally mobile during the period of work on their dissertation than scholars from other disciplines. Second, European scholars in the humanities and social sciences had been internationally mobile in the first ten years after the award of the doctoral degree as often as their peers from other disciplines. Third, however, a smaller proportion of European scholars in the

**Table 1.** Mobility of academics at higher education institutions with a PhD in the European Union 2012 by disciplinary group (percentage).

Discipline	Short-term during PhD	First 10 years after PhD		More than 10 years after PhD	
		Short	Long	Short	Long
Medical/agricultural fields	16.6	36.5	26.3	15.6	22.7
Nat. sciences/engineering fields	16.2	42.3	34.4	13.9	19.4
Social sciences/humanities fields	21.9	42.6	30.5	11.3	12.1
Total	18.3	41.0	31.0	13.4	19.6

Source: MORE 2 Survey

humanities and social sciences had been internationally mobile at later stages of their academic career (i.e. more than 10 years after the award of the doctoral degree).

The questionnaire surveys undertaken between 2007 and 2010 in various European countries provided the opportunity of creating a typology of major activities of mobility and migration in the life course of academics. This yields the following distinction between the humanities and the social sciences in the data presented in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that, on average, the proportion of mobile and migrant academics in the humanities is above average across the European countries surveyed. Academics in the humanities had been immigrants more than average across all disciplines and had been more mobile in one way or other according to the five categories analysed (33.5%) than the average of academics surveyed (30.8%), whereas migration and mobility was below average among academics in the social sciences (27.3%). Notably, the proportion of early immigrants, the proportion of study mobile academics and the proportion of PhD mobile academics was higher in the humanities than the average across disciplines. In reverse, the proportion of persons immigrating to the host country after having been awarded a doctoral degree there, also the proportion of PhD mobile academics and the proportion of those professionally mobile (i.e. those moving to the host country at later stages of the academic career) was relatively low among academics in the social sciences.

Such differences are illustrated for two European countries in Table 3: Switzerland as an example of a country with a very high overall rate of mobility and migration and Poland as an example of a country with a very low overall rate of mobility and migration. We observe that the proportion of mobile and migrant academics in the humanities in Poland is – as altogether in Europe – above average. In contrast, the proportion of scholars both in the humanities and social sciences at Swiss institutions of higher education, who had been mobile or had been migrants in one way or other, is lower than the respective proportion in all fields of the natural sciences, but, again, this difference is smaller than one might have expected.

**Table 2.** Types of mobility of academics at higher education institutions in 11 European countries by disciplinary group 2007–2010 – country mean (percentage).

Discipline	Types of mobility and migration					
	Early immigrants	PhD immigrants	Study mobile academics	PhD mobile academics	Professional migrants	Non-mobile
Humanities	6.2	2.3	10.5	5.6	8.9	66.5
Social sciences	5.2	1.5	9.7	4.0	6.9	72.7
All disciplines	5.4	2.4	9.5	4.8	8.7	69.2

Source: CAP and EOROAC surveys

**Table 3.** Types of mobility of academics at higher education institutions in Switzerland and Poland by disciplinary group 2010 (percentage).

Discipline	Types of mobility and migration					
	Early immigrants	PhD immigrants	Study mobile academics	PhD mobile academics	Professional migrants	Non-mobile
<i>Switzerland</i>						
Humanities	11.8	2.8	6.9	2.8	31.3	44.4
Social sciences	11.4	6.0	8.2	0.5	32.6	41.3
All disciplines	8.7	8.1	4.6	1.4	36.5	40.7
<i>Poland</i>						
Humanities	0.1	0.7	1.8	1.8	0.9	94.6
Social sciences	0.6	0.0	1.9	0.3	0.3	96.9
All disciplines	0.4	0.3	1.4	1.9	0.5	95.5

Source: EUROAC Survey

It might be added here that the proportion of academics at Chinese universities being migrants or having been mobile according to the five dimensions addressed in Table 3 was altogether only 2%. As the overall figure is so low, no further analysis is undertaken here with respect to differences by disciplinary group.

### Differences of International Activities by Disciplinary Group

The surveys mentioned were aimed at examining the extent to which academics are internationally active in research and teaching. Information was collected on international research collaboration, publishing internationally, teaching abroad, teaching in a foreign language, and teaching foreign students. Moreover, the academics surveyed were asked to state how much their teaching and their research was international in scope. Some of the responses are documented in Table 4.

It should be noted that the survey shows that mobile and migrating academics are more likely to undertake international activities in teaching and research. However, international activities are by no means rare among the non-mobile academics.

According to Table 4, international research cooperation was clearly above the average in the natural sciences and about average in medical fields. It was slightly below the average in the humanities and clearly below the average in the social sciences and engineering.

The pattern turned out to be different among academics of countries outside of Europe that were included in the survey: research cooperation was relatively high in these countries in the natural science and medical fields, about average in the social sciences and relatively low in the humanities and engineering.<sup>11</sup> More than 60% of the academics in the humanities and social sciences responded affirmatively as compared with slightly less than 60% in the natural sciences and medical fields and less than 50% in engineering. One has to



**Table 4.** International activities of academics in 11 European countries by discipline and rank 2007–2010 (percentage).

Discipline	Int. research collaboration			Int. scope of research			Teaching abroad*		
	Junior**	Senior***	Total	Junior	Senior	Total	Junior	Senior	Total
Humanities	54.1	66.2	58.8	60.7	71.7	64.9	17.3	26.9	21.1
Social sciences	49.0	64.4	55.0	57.7	69.5	62.3	12.4	24.9	17.5
Natural sciences	64.7	76.2	69.1	55.4	64.8	58.9	8.2	15.3	11.3
Engineering	51.8	59.4	54.5	47.4	50.9	48.6	8.8	16.2	11.8
Medicine	55.3	70.3	60.6	55.5	67.2	59.5	8.3	21.4	13.2
Total	56.2	68.5	60.8	55.6	65.5	59.2	11.1	20.6	14.9

\*In the previous academic year.

\*\*Up to assistant professors and corresponding ranks.

\*\*\*Associate and full professors.

Source: CAP and EUROAC surveys

bear in mind, though, that the meaning of ‘international scope’ might be viewed ambivalently in disciplines with a universalist thrust.

Finally, Table 4 shows that academics in the humanities and in the social sciences were clearly more active in teaching abroad for some periods than academics in the natural sciences. International mobility for teaching purposes is clearly less widespread in many fields of the natural sciences than in the humanities and social sciences, where teaching abroad is notably quite common among academics specialized in foreign languages and philology as well as in economics and business studies.

### Concluding Observations

Mobility and migration does not hold true for the majority of academics and researchers in Europe, but might be viewed as quite frequent. Some surveys suggest that about one eighth of academics in European countries are foreigners. Depending on types of activity taken into consideration, we note that between one quarter and one third of all European scholars experience major periods of mobility in their lives or move permanently between countries. The figures are higher in notable knowledge hubs such as Hong Kong and Singapore, and they are also higher in countries very active in ‘importing’ learners and scholars, e.g. some Anglo-Saxon countries, while we also notice that some low- and middle-income countries are faced with temporary or permanent outflows of higher education graduates. Still, migration and mobility in Europe look to be quite high when compared with China or Japan.

It is widely assumed that the humanities and social sciences are the step-children of the worldwide trend towards an increasing exchange of knowledge and towards scholarly cooperation and mobility. This is assumed to be true partly as a

consequence of preferential support for worldwide interaction of knowledge in the natural sciences and engineering, and partly as a consequence of the stronger attention paid by the humanities and social sciences to phenomena specific to individual countries and cultures. The available information, however, suggests that the differences in mobility and migration as well as in the international activities of academics and researchers are smaller by disciplinary group than generally expected. Even in the domain of international research collaboration, scholars from Europe report differences of only 55% to 70% according to disciplinary groups, and in various respects mobility and migration of scholars in the humanities and social sciences are not lower, and in some respects even higher than with scholars in the natural sciences.

All such generalisations have to be viewed with caution, however. We note individual disciplines in the humanities and social sciences where mobility, migration and engagement in international activities are very high, whereas such activities are rare in other individual disciplines. Moreover, the situation varies substantially between European countries.

Altogether, this report on mobility and migration of European scholars and researchers looks sketchy. Given the popularity of the theme, one would expect there to be a much better information base than we actually find. It certainly would be worth supporting a more in-depth collection of information – information that does not only provide detailed information on mobility and migration as such, but also about the conditions, the mobilizing factors and barriers as well as about the impact of mobility, migration and cooperation on the quality of systematic knowledge and its relevance for society.

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