

**ON-THE-MOVE – "The reality of free movement for young European citizens  
migrating in times of crisis"**

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**PERSPECTIVES ON FREE MOVEMENT:**

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Authorities and other stakeholders in sending and  
receiving countries

Cross country report



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## Executive summary

This report presents the results of field research conducted in 2016 in 15 EU Member States with 71 representatives of institutions dealing with matters related to free movement, such as government agencies, local authorities, non-governmental organisations, public employment services and trade unions. The aim of this research was to examine the prevailing trends related to freedom of movement of young Europeans, and to describe both the positive and negative factors that influence the phenomenon of intra-EU mobility at the individual, national and EU levels. The present report consists of nine chapters. The first describes the methodology used and situates the study in the broader context of the research project "On the move – the reality of free movement for young European citizens migrating in times of crisis". The second chapter describes current trends in mobility, including directions of movement, as seen by the experts. Chapters three and four deal with drivers and barriers to free movement respectively. Chapter five is dedicated to the question of knowledge among young Europeans about free movement and the rights and obligations that are attached to it, as well as their access to information. Chapters six and seven describe practices that hinder and promote mobility, including those related to legislation, systemic arrangements, and support and awareness-raising programmes. Chapter eight presents ideas and suggestions proposed by experts as solutions to existing problems, and Chapter nine contains the conclusions to the report.

## 1. Sample and methods

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The findings of this report are based on qualitative research conducted in 2016 by national research teams in **15 EU countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and the UK**. This research was part of a larger project, implemented over a period of 3 years between 2015- and 2017 by 15 research institutions and NGOs in the above-mentioned countries. Its aim was to describe the main drivers and barriers to intra-EU mobility and consisted of field research (interviews with young Europeans and representatives of authorities and other stakeholders), supported by an analysis of national legislations, statistics and academic literature.

The selection of countries was pre-determined by the framework of the project and included countries with different trends with regard to demographics and mobility. Based on the analysis of the intra-EU free movement trends, member states were later organized into three groups: (1) receiving countries, with a clear inward movement trend (Belgium, Germany, France, Netherlands, and the UK), (2) sending countries, with a clear outward movement trend (Bulgaria, Estonia Greece, Poland, Portugal, and Romania) and (3) mixed countries, where outward and inward movement is relatively balanced (Austria, Cyprus, Italy, and Spain). Researchers conducted 575 interviews with young EU citizens aged 25-35 years who had decided to exercise their right to free movement (i.e. had moved to another EU Member State [MS] from their home country and remained abroad, wished to move or are preparing to move to another EU MS, or had moved and had returned to their country of origin), as well as with **71 experts representing a variety of institutions dealing with matters related to free movement**. The findings of desktop research, legislation analysis and field research were compiled into 15 national reports.

The present report is based on the material gathered through expert interviews. It is an **attempt to look jointly at the perspectives of authorities and other institutions based on information collected in 15 different national contexts**. The authorities and institutions approached across the 15 countries included:

- national ministries (e.g. of the interior, foreign affairs, labour, social policy, youth, sports and culture);
- government-affiliated agencies providing services for outgoing, incoming and returning movers (including legal advice, orientation and integration courses, language courses, career advice, etc.);
- non-governmental organizations (e.g. organizations implementing European programmes, providing legal advice, protecting the rights of free movers, etc.);
- trade unions;
- local authorities/municipalities;
- public employment services;

- public welfare services;
- European Job Mobility Portal (EURES) counsellors – a cooperation network formed by public employment services in the EU member states with the objective to facilitate the free movement of workers within the European Economic Area (28 members of the European Union, plus Norway, Liechtenstein, Iceland and Switzerland);
- Europe Direct information centres (information network on the functioning of the European Union);
- Erasmus Plus national agencies;
- diaspora associations;
- private companies (consultancies for business investors and law firms);
- chambers of commerce;
- research institutions.

Each national team was first asked to identify relevant institutions responsible for dealing with matters related to mobility in their respective country, and to later select a group of approximately 5 experts representing diverse institutions who would be approached for interviews. The choice remained at the discretion of the teams and often depended on a particular national context and availability of experts at the time of the research. Therefore, teams did not interview representatives from all types of institutions in every country.

Difficulties were encountered in particular by the German team, who had a problem with recruiting interviewees as most institutions working on migration had their staff and resources allocated to addressing the refugee crisis. In the Netherlands, in turn, due to a post-election change of personnel, the researchers could not reach representatives of national authorities competent for matters related to mobility.

As a result, each research team interviewed between 4 and 7 experts. The interviewees were at different career stages and the length of their professional experience varied from 1 to 22 years. Most interviews were conducted in person, though some were conducted over the phone or on Skype.

The interviews were semi-structured and conducted in national languages. Each lasted from 30 to 90 minutes. They were based on a set of questions and topics to discuss which were prepared by the coordinating institution and translated into national languages. The questions concerned interviewees' experiences with the topic of free movement, services provided to movers, and an assessment of movers' knowledge about their rights and sources of information. In addition, experts were asked about drivers and barriers, as well as practices that hinder or promote mobility. They were also encouraged to express ideas and suggestions for improvements that would enable young people to fully enjoy their opportunities and rights related to freedom of movement. It must be noted that, due to the particular construction of the sample described above, no explicit comparisons between the countries are possible. The problems mentioned by experts in some countries were not

necessarily discussed in the others, which could be explained not only by the absence/insignificance of a given issue in a particular national context, but also by the fact that it was not in the scope of competences of the experts selected for interview. For example, representatives from central government were not interviewed in every country. Some national teams talked only to the representatives of organisations and charities providing assistance to free movers on the ground, but who did not focus on trends and socio-economic contexts of mobility (such as, for example, the impact of the economic crisis on the scale of movement) but rather discussed systemic flaws that led to difficulties experienced by their clients.

Expert perceptions of phenomena related to mobility are also influenced by their professional involvement with selected groups of movers. For example, experts working at organisations providing legal advice deal mostly with persons who have experienced some sort of difficulty. Experts interviewed in the Netherlands deal primarily with Eastern European labour movers who assisted by employment agencies due to the large scale of this phenomenon and a particular focus of Dutch policies on this group of movers. Therefore, these mostly referred to this group of movers.

Furthermore, some national experts dealt with issues relating to the freedom of movement of EU citizens of all ages and education groups (e.g. both high-skilled and low-skilled), not exclusively young movers who left after the crisis, and referred to their broader experience when identifying existing problems and shortcomings.

It should also be noted, as pointed out by some national teams, that representatives of local authorities occasionally expressed evaluative views on the freedom of movement that were in line with their particular political affiliations.

## 2. Main trends and challenges

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### 2.1. Young EU citizens on the move

Experts underlined that **Europeans on the move have diverse backgrounds**: they are both very young as well as older, some with little formal education, and others who are highly educated. On a general level, experts confirm the predominance of the 'East to West' and 'South to North/West' movement patterns in the EU, however they also observed that the numbers of movers from particular countries that they come into contact with vary across different time periods. Experts in France, UK, Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Austria and Cyprus dealt mostly with **movers from the largest 2004 and 2007 EU enlargement countries**, i.e. Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, as well as **from countries of Southern Europe that have been heavily affected by the economic recession**, including Spain, Portugal and Greece. Experts in France and the UK singled out persons belonging to the **Roma minority**, mostly from Central and Eastern Europe, as constituting a particular group of movers. Their particular situation is primarily related to an initial disadvantaged socio-economic position which seems to be a matter of concern and a subject of specific policies in host countries.

Experts in Poland and Romania stated that the **characteristics of movement have changed over the years**, acquiring new dimensions, given the fact that most of those who leave now have a bachelor's degree or higher, and most likely gave up the job they had in the country of origin. In the early waves of movement, the people who left were mainly unemployed, or had been unemployed for a long time due to deindustrialization.

Similar changes in the demographic characteristics of movers are observed in Portugal and Greece. Portuguese experts note that **many young, qualified people decide to leave the country** because they either cannot find a job, are not satisfied with their wages, or want to look for employment corresponding to their field of education. Experts in Greece observe that there are **two types of movers**: labour immigrants who might not have tertiary level education and people with very high qualifications and skills who look for opportunities to maintain the level of income they previously had in Greece. They are also a group characterised by self-confidence and high expectations who seek to move abroad, as they have more confidence in themselves and their capacities:

*"In recent years, the quality and identity of those who move, especially young people, has been changing constantly.... while we were moving away from the identity of the labour immigrant we moved towards immigrant through choice... the educational level was higher, and the qualifications... After the financial crisis, movement has had two distinct poles, people who seek employment and might not have tertiary level education, and people with very high qualifications and skills who look for opportunities to maintain the level of income they previously had in Greece, which is continuously shrinking, through other alternatives..."*



*Highly paid professionals are the ones that are under pressure in Greece and they seek to move abroad, as they have more confidence in themselves and their capacities...”*

Another Greek official notes the changes before and after 2010:

*“Before 2010 and the financial crisis, the intention to move was limited and was usually matched with studies... After 2010 the picture changed... many people are searching for something...”*

Experts in Poland and Bulgaria pointed to some observations and data (e.g. surveys and statistics on remittances) suggesting that the **mobility of Polish and Bulgarian movers has gradually been becoming long-term** as many settle definitively in their host countries. Most of these migrants, when they move to a place where their quality of life is relatively better, put down roots and find it difficult to return to their home countries, even if at some point they wish to. The moment where children are born or when they reach the school age is often critical for people to decide whether to return, or to settle. Some movers have sold all their property before leaving and may have nothing to go back to. Other experts note, however, that in parallel with the above-described tendencies, there is also a group of people who, even when they have already started families, do not see their decisions on moving to another country as entirely permanent – they allow for the possibility of relocating again in a few years and are more used to and willing to accept changes.

## 2.2. Return movement

As regards the factors that make young people return to their home countries, personal and emotional reasons such as family issues (starting a family, parents getting sick), loneliness (missing friends) and nostalgia were mentioned by experts as the main drivers. The second group of reasons was related to a feeling that movers’ expectations of mobility have not been met or they have underestimated the difficulties. This can concern their professional situation: end of contract, lack of opportunities, or difficulties in finding a job that matches their interests and/or qualifications. Many young people face barriers that are related to a lack of local language competence; this can become a barrier in both professional and personal contact where they feel they cannot fully integrate. Such movers may be attracted to the idea of returning, especially if their home country provides an incentive (for example, by introducing policies or benefits that were not in place when they left). Experts also mentioned that there is a group of people for whom mobility remains a strictly temporary project and this perception remains stable over time.

## 2.3. EU citizens moving to traditionally ‘sending’ countries

The expertise of the majority of interviewees related to movers originating from countries such as Bulgaria, Romania and Poland, however they occasionally referred to the citizens moving to these traditionally ‘sending’ countries. While talking about EU movers, experts in Poland and in Romania noted that the scale of this movement is smaller and it is exercised

by very particular groups of movers, mainly highly qualified individuals, most of whom enjoy the support of their companies or, as in the case of students, of their respective universities. One Romanian expert pointed out that in recent years sustainable jobs for Romanians are fewer in number and lower in quality, whereas foreigners come to Romania in top positions in multinational companies for an exchange of experiences or rotational assignments. An expert in Poland mentioned that EU movers rarely report problems, in her opinion they are greatly supported and provided for by their companies.

### 3. Drivers

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Experts agree that the main driver for the intra-EU mobility of young Europeans is **employment-related** and that this is linked to the economic crisis, however the picture is much more complex.

Large groups of mobile citizens from countries affected by the **economic crisis** in southern Europe (such as Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy) have moved to wealthier countries with more stable economies and lower unemployment rates (UK, Germany, France, Austria). The second large group of migrants comes from Eastern Europe, from countries that have not been affected by recession, but which have less well developed economies and lower wages (Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland). However, the 'receiving countries' also experience changes in the economic situation which may, in turn, discourage incoming movement, or lead to secondary movement where EU citizens do not return to their countries of origin but decide to move to a different country.

The economic situation and a **lack of opportunities** are the strongest push factors for movement. Experts in Bulgaria pointed to generalized **feelings of insecurity and uncertainty among the young generations** and a perceived lack of a good future if they decide to stay in Bulgaria. The demographic situation, political and social climate and, finally, the 'illusion' that everything abroad is perfect and that people there have no problems complement the picture

Polish experts note that the number of people moving out of Poland was the highest in 2004, when Poland joined the EU. They believe that, despite still high numbers of people moving out of Poland, the scale of movement from Poland decreased following the financial crisis of 2008. The crisis has also affected Polish movers who were already abroad, as some of them decided to return or to move to a different EU country. However, on the other hand, it is difficult to attribute those secondary movements only to the financial crisis, as another important factor influencing movement decisions was the **gradual opening of the labour markets** in several EU countries.

EU movement is identified by several experts as an excellent opportunity for young people to gain their **first work experiences abroad**. Stays abroad (be they short-term or long-term, organized or independent) are perceived as valuable resources and advantages on the CVs of

young persons, which offer them better career opportunities in destination countries but also back in countries of origin. According to experts, many young people believe that **gaining international work experience** could improve their job prospects in their home and other countries.

**Previous participation in an EU- funded mobility programme** is perceived as a work-related driver for EU movement too. The experience of the interviewed experts in charge of such programmes shows that those who have participated in the European Voluntary-Service-Programme or in ERASMUS are much more likely to move again later on.

**High-quality education** offered by foreign educational institutions in the destination is another important factor influencing decisions on mobility. According to Bulgarian experts, the UK, Germany, Netherlands and Austria are preferred destinations among young Bulgarians who want to study abroad for both first and subsequent degrees.

**Personal reasons** are also very important as drivers as many people move to join their partners in another EU country.

**Language** can be both a driver for movement – in the case of young people who want to learn a particular language - and an additional factor taken into account while deciding about moving for employment purposes. Experts note, for example, that Spaniards, French and Italians tend to move to other countries where a Romance language is spoken because it is easier for them to learn. Experts note also that the young generation has in general more options to choose from because their knowledge of foreign languages is better than in the previous generation.

Similarly, having a **social network** in the destination country can be a sole driver, or one of multiple factors taken into account while moving. Having friends (in particular: of the same nationality) who have been successful in a given country has a strong impact on the decisions of young movers.

**The possibility of pursuing new opportunities** such as discovering a new culture and gaining new experiences are also important for young movers.

One of the Polish experts also mentioned a desire **to pursue a particular lifestyle** as significant reason for young people to move. In her opinion, in the case of people from lower social classes, economic factors and the existence of social networks in the country of destination are a much more important when thinking about moving to another country. However, there is also a group of young people coming predominantly from well-off families who are driven by post-materialist values (such as independence and self-expression), connected to cultural factors, rather than economic factors (such as security or financial status). These young people (labelled by sociologists as **'third culture kids'**) have often been exposed to living abroad since early childhood due to their parents' employment, and have grown up in an international environment and later chosen international educational and

professional paths. They often move between countries to experiment with different personal lifestyles and career paths.

Experts indicate also that accessibility and quality of healthcare and social welfare systems plays an important role when deciding on the destination country. Experts in Austria, Belgium and the UK pointed to an ambiguous phenomenon referred to as **'benefit tourism'**. For example, a representative of the Austrian settlement authority perceives the country's social welfare system as an important driver for movers from Eastern EU countries. According to him, this is a comparably well organised movement. The interviewee refers to the high Austrian family allowances for single children that the EU movers are also entitled to, and for which the demand is very high.

*"I have the impression that it is not only a certain lack of opportunities in the country of origin, but rather many [EU citizens] come [to Austria] because of the social welfare system. I do not mean this to be devaluating, but the services are simply better here and I notice this because they are sent by the social welfare office to us or end up there [at the Welfare office] later on. So, I do not mean this in a negative way, I do not want you to understand me wrongly. It is legitimate. But I do believe that many do not come because Austria is so beautiful, but rather because they want to improve the situation for themselves and their families".*

A British expert, in turn, identified the case of Roma people who tend to move to the UK because of a cut back in welfare policies (such as wage subsidies) in their countries, mostly in Romania or Bulgaria. An expert in Estonia talked about a related issue of abuse of the tax system: some people go to work in a country with a higher average salary (and higher tax rates) to earn money, but they are not willing to 'give back' to the country. A study of the content of social media groups dedicated to intra-EU movement conducted in Estonia showed that people often seek information on how to circumvent tax regulations in their destination countries (mostly Finland). This, in the experts' opinion, may be related to a poor understanding of the meaning of taxation (e.g. movers who have planned to stay in the other country only for a period of time believe that they are not benefiting from the social welfare system so much, so they should not contribute to it).

## 4. Barriers

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The main barriers identified by national experts to make the right to free movement effective are finding work, discrimination, language and cooperation between national authorities.

### 4.1. Economic barriers

Before moving, a first barrier that was identified by Austrian experts is that, in order to be able to move, one needs to have a sound economic status. The more one is dependent on the social services of one's country, the harder it is for him or her to move to another country and lose this protection. Economic background thus has a key impact on the right to move.

### 4.2. Finding work

While a main driver for moving between EU countries is finding work, for several reasons this becomes a major challenge for movers when they arrive in their destination country.

Firstly, getting foreign qualifications recognized can be very difficult. As a consequence, movers may be underemployed or employed in jobs for which they are overqualified. Polish experts gave the example of British employers who do not equally value foreign qualifications. Regarding the recognition of professional credentials in the so-called 'regulated professions', some countries are particularly meticulous in checking these qualifications, requiring very detailed documents and paperwork. Another problem, as noted by the Greek experts, is that some technical professions, like craftsmen and handymen, are taught through practice in some countries. These workers do not need to attend a relevant school which means that they do not have any certification papers when they move. It may also be that language, knowledge and skills do not match the requirements of the destination country.

In addition, insufficient language skills may also lead movers to work in lower skilled jobs than their qualifications allow, or jobs which are not in line with their educational backgrounds. A Polish expert stated that obtaining very prestigious jobs is limited more to 'third culture kids' who have been 'Europeanized' at a very early stage.

In Belgium, finding employment may be a particularly serious barrier as movers need to find a job within three months if they want to stay in the country.

For movers, this difficulty can be a source of major frustration. To begin with, because as they have moved to find work they did not anticipate that it would be difficult to find a job. Thus, movers very frequently take work at a level below their qualifications. Also, it was mentioned by Polish experts that with the economic crisis, movers who look for a job can be perceived by nationals as rivals in the labour market.

### 4.3. Discrimination

Authorities in several countries mentioned a problem of discrimination against movers, especially those who come from Eastern Europe. Discrimination takes place mainly in finding work or a place to live: these strong prejudices against people from Eastern countries are well illustrated in this quote from an Austrian counsellor for incoming migrants: *“Obviously, Austrians believe that everyone who comes from the East is automatically lower qualified, more stupid and less polite, or whatever the prejudice might be. But there are definitely prejudices”*.

In France, the law on free movement, stating that after three months in France people need to have enough resources not to be a burden on the French social welfare system is interpreted in a discriminatory way, as it only targets movers from Romania or Bulgaria, movers who are designated as the Roma population.

### 4.4. Language

Language is mentioned by many experts as a main barrier to becoming integrated in a destination country, mainly for finding work, a place to live or when dealing with the administration. Insufficient language skills can also be a barrier to exercising one’s rights, as many documents and forms are only available in the national language. Experts from Belgium noted that for movers, it is an unexpected barrier that they have to deal with when they arrive.

In some countries dealing with the administration can be particularly complicated when the staff only speak the national language. This is the case of Austrian civil servants and personnel in the Public Employment Service (AMS). A counsellor of an NGO who was interviewed wonders if the staff are not able to speak English, or if they are told not to speak English in order to foster language learning by movers. The interviewee’s assessment is based on her experiences, as while she accompanies movers with the public authorities to translate, she is often told by clerks not to do so because the incoming movers should learn German.

To tackle this issue, some EU countries propose integration courses with language classes. However, there are different policies between the countries. In some countries, like Belgium, European citizens can take integration courses voluntarily for free. Indeed, more and more movers do so. On the contrary, in Germany, these are not available for citizens of the European Union who have to pay significant sums of money if they want to follow German classes because there, advice centres are targeted for refugees.

### 4.5. Access to housing

Different experts mentioned access to housing as a barrier, mostly when one does not speak the language of the destination country. This is particularly striking in France where, besides

discrimination against foreigners, one needs to have French guarantors to rent a place to live, and present a number of documents and pay slips, which is particularly difficult for movers who have just arrived. As a consequence, many movers live in places with no official contracts which means that they cannot access social help given by the state to help pay the rent.

#### 4.6. Right to healthcare

Obtaining the right to health in the destination country can take a long time for movers who may be in a situation where they no longer have access to health in their home country because they have moved, and they have to wait a long time before receiving the health card in the destination country. In France, this issue was particularly highlighted, as in general, people have to wait eight months to receive the French health card.

#### 4.7. Interaction with authorities

Interaction with authorities can be a major challenge for movers, as it can be difficult for them to understand the procedures and requirements they need to go through, because the information may be scattered, they do not speak the language of the country of destination well, or they do not understand how the system works. For instance, in France, associations said that French administration is very bureaucratic and the staff always ask for different papers, though at the same time there are very strict rules.

#### 4.8. Impact of the refugee crisis on institutional capacity

Experts interviewed in Germany noted that due to the high numbers of refugees in the country, public institutions that deal with migrants and foreign populations in general are overburdened, as priority is given to address the needs of the most vulnerable groups. Similar situations in the future may constitute a barrier to free movement in the sense that some state agencies dealing with matters related to foreign populations (both third-country nationals and EU citizens) may have limited institutional capacities which may, in turn, result in delays or limited access to consultations.

#### 4.9. Lack of cooperation between EU countries

##### Official documents

In many EU countries, the administration asks movers to translate their official documents into the national language, which cost movers time and money. For instance, in Austria, though the authorities are requested to accept English translation, in practice they require an official German translation, which costs EU movers time and money.

For Estonian movers, providing official documents can be very difficult as birth and marriage certificates have been digitized in Estonia, but are not accepted in this format in other EU countries.

## Taxes and social welfare

Moving for EU citizens can also be complicated because transferring social welfare entitlements and tax duties to destination countries is a major challenge. This reveals a lack of cooperation and coordination between the authorities of EU countries.

## Elections

The difficulty to exercise one's right to vote in national elections was mentioned by some experts. For instance, one interviewee noted that after 2011, when the outgoing movement of Spanish people became more significant, the rules were changed in Spain to make it more difficult for expatriates to vote, resulting in a decrease in turnout in national elections among this group.

### 4.10. Characteristics of the destination country

When people move, the characteristics of the destination country, such as weather, can be a barrier for European citizens on the move. This is emphasized in a quote from a Greek expert: *"They cannot bear the cold, or continuous rain, or humidity...Especially for the Greeks, because we are a bit spoilt with the weather in our country... From my experience I have realized that they exclude countries a priori because of the weather conditions..."*<sup>1</sup>

The legislation of each state, the tax system, and the social security system may also constitute a barrier for movement. Another barrier mentioned was the structure of the country, of an area, or even how the transport system works, and what compromises one has to make in everyday life, especially for people with families. For example, how much time and money is needed to travel to and from work, school, kindergarten, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with the head of the national coordination office of EURES in Greece.



## 5. Information

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### 5.1. General knowledge about free movement

The experts of all EU countries interviewed consider that in general young people are well informed about the fact that they have the right to move. In Cyprus, it was noted that this right is so well publicised on the internet that it is hard to miss.

Age can make a difference, with younger people more aware of their rights than older people, according to Austrian authorities. Sociological background can also have an impact: experts from Bulgaria noted that people from big cities are more aware of their rights than those from small cities. There may also be a gap between those who are well-educated or who had already moved with a European programme (Greek and Portuguese experts). According to an Austrian counsellor, movers from the Eastern EU are better informed about their right to move than those from the EU-15.

### 5.2. Awareness of detailed information

Though it appears that young people realize they can move between EU countries, they often do not know what this right entails in practice. Several experts mentioned that young Europeans are not aware that they need to go to the settlement authorities within three months after they have arrived in a country, which has particularly dramatic consequences in Belgium.

Although information on movers' rights is widely available on the internet, which young people are competent in using, it appears that many young people are not aware of specific rights linked to their right to move, such as labour rights or social rights. This can have very dramatic consequences, such as labour trafficking. In Cyprus, trade unions denounce the labour trafficking of people coming from Romania, Bulgaria or Poland. They try to raise the awareness of these workers whose rights are not respected. Among the main violations, they do not receive the same salaries as Cyprus citizens, they do more working hours and their social security rights are not respected.

Usually, it is only when movers face difficulties after arriving in the destination country that they realize they are not aware of their rights and look for information. For instance, movers can have difficulties finding a job because they did not anticipate issues in recognizing qualifications between EU countries.

According to Polish experts, the reason why movers do not have information about these rights is because they are mostly looking at moving for economic reasons and for the short-term.

Regarding the lack of access to information, it is interesting to note that Austrian authorities consider that young Austrians are well informed of their right to move, even though they say they are not enough informed. The authorities claim that this is more likely because they lack a serious enough approach in their desire to move.

### 5.3. Sources of information

The internet seems to be the main source of information, as well as friends and families. On social networks, an important source of information are nationality groups where expatriates from the same country exchange information, like the Facebook group: “Estonians in Finland”. However, the information gathered through these networks may not always be accurate and can be contradictory. It was also pointed out by Polish experts that information shared by a person who has moved may be biased, as some may not want to share their bad experiences out of shame.

Official information is available on the internet, however it was noted by different experts that these websites are not necessarily well known and are usually written in very technical language which makes it difficult for movers to be aware of their rights.

Besides the internet, there are official representations, such as embassies or consulates, who can provide information. Nonetheless, these are not usually used by movers as a source of information.

Companies appear to be a key source of information for movers who have arrived in a country to work, particularly in big companies which are used to welcoming movers.

What is interesting to note is that though experts think that the information exists and is widely available, and that young people are aware of their right to move, they nonetheless advocate better sharing of information and an increase of awareness.

## 6. Practices that hinder mobility

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Experts mentioned two practices that can hinder the mobility of Europeans. The first relates to the legislation of national countries and its application, which may be strict, and the second concerns the lack of awareness of movers of the existence of support services available to them.

### 6.1. Legislation

According to Austrian experts, a practice that hinders the right to move freely concerns unmarried couples. Unmarried partners who live and move together face difficulties. Their relationship is not acknowledged if they have not been living together in the destination country for 10 or more months. This problem particularly affects couples where one partner moves because of a job offer and the other partner moves without yet having a job offer. If the accompanying partner does not find a job within three months, s/he will not be entitled to settlement or social insurance benefits. This is the case even if the employed partner could easily provide financial support – just as if they were married. The employed partner has the possibility to sign a declaration of liability (*Haftungserklärung*) for the other partner. The experience of the interviewed expert shows that this is even more complicated.

In Belgium, legislation on free movement is applied in a stricter way than in other EU countries. Here, movers need to find work within three months, otherwise, s/he faces expulsion from the country.

### 6.2. Lack of awareness of support programmes

Though information and support services may be available, it appears from the interviews that many movers do not know that such services exist at the EU and national levels. For instance, according to Greek experts, only a few people know that there is a EURES office in Greece or what its role is.

## 7. Practices that promote mobility

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Several practices carried out by authorities, NGOs or associations at the local, national and European levels foster the mobility of young movers. These are helpful in the country of origin to support young people to move, as well as in the destination country to help movers to integrate.

### 7.1. Favourable legislation

There are provisions in EU legislation that promote the right to move, such as *Directive 2014/54/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 on measures facilitating the exercise of rights conferred on workers in the context of freedom of movement for workers*, which imposes upon the member states an obligation to provide legal advice for EU citizens and to carry out research on barriers to free movement. The experts interviewed think that this is a valuable instrument to provide a better identification of systemic barriers, and improve the provision of services related to free movement.

We should also note that the European legislation is applied differently between countries. While Belgium is described as being very strict by Belgian experts, Austria is described as more liberal by Austrian settlement authorities. In their view, this liberal application of the law promotes free movement. Firstly, residence registration certificates are issued by settlement authorities to EU movers as soon as they start working in the country, regardless of the number of working hours in the contract. As a result, EU movers can benefit from the Austrian needs-based minimum benefit system (*Bedarfsorientierte Mindestsicherung*).<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, Austrian experts describe the legislation on marriage and family reunification as favourable for EU movers who are married to third country national. According to an interviewee who is a counsellor for migrants: *“As soon as the marriage is concluded, the TCN[third country national] partner has the right to settlement, which is valid for five years. The right is documented on his/her settlement card. All the requirements, which other TCN and their Austrian partners have to meet, like evidence for German skills at A1 level, evidence of income higher than €1,300 a month, are not needed in these cases.”*

### 7.2. Exchange programmes

European student exchanges (such as Erasmus) were also listed as practices facilitating free movement through early exposure of students to diversity and living abroad.

Such programmes are also implemented on the national level. For instance, in Bulgaria, the Administration of the President created in 2012 an internship programme which offers a number of long- and short-term internships to university students studying both abroad and in Bulgaria.

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<sup>2</sup> Work of 8 hours a week is sufficient for Austrians and EU movers to receive the compensatory allowances from the needs-based minimum benefit system. See: [https://www.sozialministerium.at/cms/site/attachments/1/1/1/CH3434/CMS1452101500344/soziales-konsumentinnen\\_bms\\_infobroschuere.pdf](https://www.sozialministerium.at/cms/site/attachments/1/1/1/CH3434/CMS1452101500344/soziales-konsumentinnen_bms_infobroschuere.pdf), p. 14.

### 7.3. Support programmes

At the EU level as well as nationally, official organizations and NGOs give support to EU movers. At the EU level, the Internal Market Problem Solving System (SOLVIT system) helps people who encounter difficulties in another country when public authorities do not apply the EU legislation correctly. Through national contact points this mechanism allows for informal settling of disputes and solving problems relating to any aspect of the internal market (recognition of professional qualifications, pension rights, family and unemployment benefits, taxation, health insurance, driving license, residence, etc.) before starting a formal appeal procedure.

Experts also mentioned other European networks, including EURES and EuroDesk as examples of helpful solutions that facilitate free movement.

At the national level, an example in Germany is the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) (*Europäischer Hilfsfond für die am stärksten benachteiligten Personen in Deutschland*, EHAP) which aims to support the social cohesion and social integration of persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion. In particular, deprived newly arrived EU citizens and their children as well as homeless people can receive support from the fund. The main purpose is to ensure better access to early education and social care for newly arrived children.<sup>3</sup>

The State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad (SABA), the government body whose main duty is to communicate with Bulgarians and their communities abroad, has been developing and working on a Programme for the Professional Realisation of Young Bulgarians Abroad.

### 7.4. Fostering integration

In Germany, there are migration advice centres (*Migrationsberatungsstellen*)<sup>4</sup> available in almost every large city. Although these are not dedicated specifically to EU movers, they are a first contact point offering a broad range of services giving support and advice on questions regarding, for example, where to learn the German language, how to recognize foreign qualifications, where to find work, health insurance, marriage, family, raising children, or where to find accommodation.

Another programme that fosters integration mentioned by German experts is “Give something back to Berlin.”<sup>5</sup> This is not addressed to Europeans in particular, but it shows how integration can be achieved by making social engagement and neighbourhood work

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<sup>3</sup> Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (2017): Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) in Germany. URL: <http://www.bmas.de/EN/Our-Topics/Social-Europe-and-international-Affairs/Europe/Programs-and-Fonds/fead.html>

<sup>4</sup> For more information see: Bundesministerium für Migration und Flüchtlinge, Advice for adults. URL: <http://www.bamf.de/EN/Willkommen/InformationBeratung/ErwachseneBeratung/erwachseneberatung-node.html>

<sup>5</sup> “Give something back to Berlin. Making worlds meet working together for a better city”. URL: <http://givesomethingbacktoberlin.com/about>

accessible to the migrant population. People from different countries are helping and assisting each other as well as volunteering in different projects.

Among good practices of non-state actors, experts in Poland indicated the role of British trade unions (General Municipal Boilermakers - GMB) in providing English language classes and thematic meetings to movers where a person can, among others, receive information about registering with a trade union.

In Estonia, in recent years, different institutions have developed websites for specific target groups, e.g. “Work in Estonia”<sup>6</sup> for people who move to Estonia for work, or “Study in Estonia”<sup>7</sup> for people who move to Estonia to study. In 2016, the Ministry of the Interior also launched a website “Settle in Estonia”<sup>8</sup> where people can find all the necessary information regarding settling in Estonia. When information is available on one single website, it makes finding all the relevant information for the move and settling easier for the foreigner.

### 7.5. Raising awareness of opportunities for European mobility

To raise the awareness of young Europeans who have not moved yet, campaigns are run by NGOs or institutions that provide information on European programmes and opportunities. For example, in Spain, the Eslabón association organizes Working abroad workshops, mainly with young people up to 30 years old, including socially excluded young people, where they speak about the EURES network, Europass CV, and job or volunteer offers.

Another example is the Institute of youth in Spain, attached to the Ministry of health, social services and equality that gives talks in universities and high schools on the different mobility programmes that exist in Europe. In Estonia, The Integration and Migration Foundation of Our People (MISA), which promotes integration processes in Estonia and coordinates activities related to immigration and emigration, has run campaigns to raise awareness about these services.

### 7.6. Raising awareness about labour trafficking

Labour trafficking was denounced by several experts as a major challenge in some European countries. In Estonia, to tackle the issue of labour trafficking, awareness-raising campaigns were organised specifically for people who move to Finland. In addition to campaigns in the media, posters are displayed in the harbours of Tallinn and Helsinki and campaigns have been run to raise awareness on the characteristics of human trafficking, with an aim to prevent people engaging themselves in unofficial working agreements.

Another example are the actions undertaken by the Dutch government in relation to the problem of exploitation by employment agencies of Eastern European workers in the

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<sup>6</sup> See here: <http://www.studyinestonia.ee>

<sup>7</sup> See here: <http://www.workinestonia.com>

<sup>8</sup> See here: <https://www.settleinestonia.ee>

Netherlands, which has been a matter of concern since around 2010. According to Polish experts, many movers work in the agriculture and building sectors in the Netherlands on the basis of so-called 'package offers' where transportation, accommodation and work are provided by the same agency; as very often they do not speak either Dutch or English, they are vulnerable to abuses due to their dependency on agencies. A network of policy officers was created at Dutch embassies in the new EU member states – Poland, Bulgaria and Romania - with the task of raising awareness about the Dutch labour market, regulations and working conditions, and social and political rights.

## 8. Suggestions

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### 8.1. Improving the access to information for free movers

Experts believe that although there is a lot of information on free movement available, there are still things that could be done to better promote this knowledge. In particular, new forms of tools should be developed that would be more accessible and attractive to young people, for example an EU-wide internet website or interactive toolkit/mobile application, with updated information and a user-friendly interface, providing information on various aspects of living in all member states (labour rights, healthcare, welfare, and pension system related to users' country of origin and destination).

There should also be more information campaigns dedicated to various group of movers in both sending and receiving countries. For example, institutions dealing with labour (ministries of labour, labour inspectorates) in the destination countries should be responsible for promoting knowledge of labour rights among foreign workers. Experts in receiving countries such as Austria, Belgium or the Netherlands underlined the necessity to provide extensive information to those wishing to move before departure, in the countries of origin (e.g. what type of documents are needed for registration, recognition of qualifications, what are the particular conditions of stay in each country – for example, in Belgium there is an obligation to find employment within 3 months). In their opinion, realistic information is very much needed to make people aware, before they depart, that some expectations may not be met.

Experts acknowledge, however, that information campaigns by public institutions may be a sensitive issue in particular countries as they may be regarded as promoting outgoing movement which is not always in the best interest of the states. In Poland, for example, a representative of the ministry of labour stated that they are working on finding a 'happy medium' between being over-enthusiastic in promoting the idea of free movement and encouraging people to go, on the one hand, and discouraging them by presenting examples of unsuccessful stories, often connected with labour exploitation or other abuses on the other.

## 8.2. Better coordination between institutions and their counterparts across the EU

Experts pointed to the fact that most problems and barriers in accessing public services are related to diverging regulations concerning health and social insurance, recognition of degrees and professional qualifications or tax systems in the member states. In their opinion, cooperation between the institutions that deal with these issues in national contexts should be enhanced at the EU level, through information and sharing of best practices.

## 8.3. Improving the quality of public services provided to free movers

The quality of services could benefit from more training (including English language training) provided to frontline officers in public institutions at national and local levels in areas that experience high numbers of incoming movers. Local authorities and municipalities with a high number of foreign residents from a particular EU country should also consider employing bilingual officers who speak both the local language and the language of incoming movers. Some experts also mentioned one-stop-shops (single points of contact where EU citizens could receive information about housing, schooling and education, employment, registration, health insurance as well as arrange services with officers representing relevant authorities) as a solution aimed at increasing the efficiency of public services provided to EU movers.

## 8.4. Change of particular policies

Experts indicated a need to change certain policies in order to address country-specific problems:

- Some experts believe that no member state should expel EU movers, even if they do not find work within 90 days - as some national laws require - because given the current difficult economic situation it is very hard for some people to find employment;
- Change of the legal framework governing the activities of employment agencies in the Netherlands: there should be stronger supervision by the State to prevent labour exploitation of foreign workers.
- One expert believes that all member states should provide free and unconditional access to healthcare (it should not be dependent on employment status, as it is in Belgium, for example).

## 8.5. Engaging new actors

Experts indicated several actors who in their opinion should be more engaged in promoting knowledge about the rights and conditions related to free movement. For example, experts in the 'sending' countries (Bulgaria, Poland and Portugal) see the role of national



governments in destination countries as important, e.g. more engagement of consulates is needed, in particular in education activities, and more funding should be dedicated to programmes for citizens of those countries who are residing abroad.

Greater responsibility should be placed upon local authorities to provide information to EU citizens on the move. For example, municipalities could prepare welcome packages for EU movers, and organise free language and integration courses at convenient hours, available also to those working full-time. They could also promote or run initiatives aimed at enhancing movers' interaction with the local community through community projects and foster contacts between municipalities and employers.

Trade unions (both in origin and destination countries) have an important role to play in educating movers and encouraging them to participate, as high participation of movers in trade unions is beneficial for all employees who would be better positioned to combat social dumping.

Experts in the 'sending' countries also agree that education institutions should be more active in promoting knowledge about rights related to free movement, labour rights, etc.; including participation in the local community and in trade unions; these topics could be included in school curricula where the concept of the EU is discussed, or during civic education classes.

## 8.6. Prevention of brain drain

Experts in Bulgaria spoke about the need to prevent negative aspects of the freedom of movement, such as the outflow of highly skilled or well-educated individuals from countries with a relatively poorer economic situation. Referring to the Bulgarian context, they indicated that an excessive flight of human capital should be counteracted first and foremost by a reform of the higher education system and bridging the gap between what is taught at universities and what is needed in the job market. Bulgarian universities should attract young people and give them the necessary qualifications so that they would prefer to stay in the country; priority should be given to areas in which Bulgaria is lacking qualified professionals.

## 8.7. Other suggestions

The representative of authorities suggested also the following solutions:

- There should be stronger recommendations/encouragement for free movers to register their stay within 3 months as a failure to register may lead to practical problems; registration could also be an occasion to provide information to movers (e.g. through welcome packages); some experts emphasised the need to make a linkage between registration and information;
- More state funding should be dedicated to civil society organisations who provide assistance to free movers (although experts acknowledge at the same time that the

current particular situation where NGOs working with refugees and third-country nationals may be in a greater need of public funding);

- A need for the continuity of EU funding for initiatives aimed at cultural and social integration;
- There should be more programmes or initiatives dedicated to disabled persons to improve their chances of benefiting from freedom of movement;
- Some statistics on free movement should be collected to counteract abuses of rules by both national authorities and free movers, and to share good practices.

## 9. Conclusions

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The gradual opening of the labour market in Europe has led to an increase in the movement of young Europeans. As a matter of fact, the main driver for moving is related to economic reasons: the lack of opportunities in their home country, high rates of unemployment, low wages, or poor social care are clearly pull factors for young Europeans, as well as looking for a better education or a better quality of life. Though the economic crisis has played a role in the movement of young Europeans, mainly from southern countries, it was not mentioned as much as one might have expected. Movement thus appears to be a practical decision in most cases. Mobility becomes a choice when one is not satisfied with one's life conditions.

However, movers' expectations are not always met and this can be a great source of frustration for them: many move to find work but have great difficulties in finding a job when they arrive in the destination country, or they find a job that does not match their qualifications or aspirations. Some are even victims of labour trafficking. Lack of information of movers' rights, particularly labour and social rights, impacts greatly on the experience of moving.

Though young movers appear to be well informed about their right to move, the fact that they do not seem very aware of their rights and the conditions of stay can be surprising as much information is available, particularly on the internet. On the one hand, information is scattered, usually written in technical terms and is hard to understand, or it is hosted on websites unknown to young movers. On the other hand, it seems that young movers sometimes lack a serious approach in looking for their rights and duties before moving, and deal with difficulties when they face them after they arrive in their destination country.

Integration can also be a major setback for movers who may suffer discrimination when they arrive in the destination country, even more so for Europeans from Eastern countries. Settling can thus become very complicated as movers have difficulties dealing with administration, finding work, finding a place to live or making friends.

The opening of borders in Europe, the development of exchange programmes, and the increased learning of foreign languages has increased the movement of young Europeans, who are mainly qualified. However, it seems that this has not been accompanied by enough

cooperation between national authorities, mainly concerning the recognition of skills and qualifications, health care, and taxes which would have smoothed the movement between European countries.

From this perspective, a major challenge for national authorities is to find the correct balance between promoting free movement, informing of possible difficulties when settling abroad, and preventing brain drain. To reach this balance and tackle the issues mentioned above, improving access to information on free movement and movers' rights, enhancing cooperation between authorities, and involving local authorities more closely to foster integration are key factors to be considered.