



European  
Research Area

# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



## Chasing Work: The Mobility Dilemma

Policy implications of JobMob and FamLives  
(Job Mobilities and Family Lives),  
an EU-funded research project

December 2008

### INTRODUCTION

#### What are the main effects of job-related mobility in the EU?

Facilitating **work-related mobility** is a worthwhile endeavour for the European Union. Relocation, commuting and business trips can contribute to broad-based social integration. These movements can also help correct regional imbalances within the labour market. More fundamentally, work-related mobility helps match people with jobs they are qualified and motivated to do, thus boosting productivity and contributing to economic output.

**The consequences of job-related mobility, however, are not exclusively beneficial. Indeed, in the absence of effective measures to mitigate its negative effects, mobility can undermine efforts to achieve other key goals in European society. The risks are especially significant with respect to gender equality and demographic growth.**

Though necessary and desirable on the whole, job-related spatial mobility presents European policymakers with **four formidable dilemmas**:

- 1. It is very difficult to combine with being an active parent.** Increasing mobility discourages family development (especially for women) and can decrease fertility rates.
- 2. It reinforces the traditional division of labour between paid and unpaid work among couples,** especially those with children. This presents a goal conflict between increasing mobility and promoting gender equality.

- 3. **It complicates social engagement and volunteer work, thereby aggravating the development of civic society.**
- 4. **It may pose health risks.** Unwanted mobility in particular often causes stress and can have harmful affects on psychological and physical health.

From a European policy point of view, the challenge is to develop strategies for dealing with all relevant forms of job-related mobility (not just migration) while ameliorating the harmful effects.

**NEW KNOWLEDGE**  
**Observable Trends**

**How widespread is job-related mobility in Europe?**

- Job-related spatial mobility is widespread in Europe, whether it be ‘residential’ (changing one’s residence mainly for job-related reasons) or ‘recurring’ (moving repeatedly between two or more places such as home and the workplace).
- Among the gainfully employed, 16 percent are currently mobile. Another 32 percent have experienced mobility in the past. An additional four percent are affected by the mobility of their spouse or partner.
- **All in all, about every second European has experience with mobility.**

**How mobile is the European workforce?**  
Current and former mobility experiences of gainfully employed individuals by country (in %)

	F	D	E	PL	CH	B	EU6
Currently mobile	15	19	14	15	13	17	16
Formerly mobile	36	30	38	21	38	25	32
Without mobility experience	49	51	48	63	49	58	52
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: JobMob and FamLives 2009 – Prof. Dr. Norbert F. Schneider

**What are the most common forms of mobility?**

- Among those currently mobile for job-related reasons, one in four is residentially mobile.
- **Migration (relocating across a national border) is rare, involving only about two percent of all mobiles.**
- Three percent of mobile people have relocated temporarily, while 14 percent have moved across regions within one country.
- **Recurring forms of mobility are more frequent. The most frequent form of mobility is daily long-distance commuting (two hours or more), representing 41 percent of all mobiles.**
- Another 29 percent of mobile Europeans spend at least 60 nights a year away from home – for example on business trips, as weekend commuters or as seasonal workers.

**In which ways are people mobile?**  
 General patterns of current mobility of gainfully employed individuals by country (in %)

	F	D	E	PL	CH	B	EU6
Recurringly mobile	65	69	83	76	73	87	72
Residentially mobile	27	22	12	12	18	11	20
Mobile in both ways	8	9	6	12	9	2	8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: JobMob and FamLives 2009 – Prof. Dr. Norbert F. Schneider

- Recurring forms of mobility allow people to maintain social ties at their primary home region.
- 12 percent of mobile people are mobile in more than one way.
- There has been an increase in job-related spatial mobility over the last two decades.

### What social groups are most mobile?

- The younger generation (about 30 years of age) has already collected more mobility experience than the older generation (about 50 years of age). This increase is stronger in some countries (Spain, Poland, and Belgium) than it is in others.
- Young people reveal more mobility than older ones.
- University graduates are mobile more often than others.
- Young people and those with a university degree tend to relocate when mobility is required; older ones and people without a university degree prefer to commute.
- **Spatial mobility is required to some extent in all vocations and in very different positions. It appears more frequently in knowledge-based jobs than in the industrial sector.**
- Transportation and construction branches also require more mobility than others. Mobility is more frequent among people in time-limited contracts as well as in international companies. It is almost equally high in the public and private sectors.
- Mobility can be found more often among men, with or without children, and childless women, whereas mothers are only rarely mobile.

### How do Europeans view work-related mobility?

- For some, mobility provides new opportunities and fosters social advancement. For others, it is the only way of avoiding unemployment and social decline.
- **Europeans who are not currently mobile for job-related reasons express more reluctance than willingness to become mobile in the future. From this perspective, a significant increase in mobility during the coming decades is improbable.**
- While the willingness to become mobile is relatively high in Germany, it is especially low in France.

### How does job-related mobility affect individually and families?

- People who are mobile for job-related reasons may have difficulties maintaining social ties, finding or maintaining a partnership, becoming parents, maintaining good family relations or organising family work fairly. They may experience stress and dissatisfaction, and they may suffer financial disadvantages because mobility is expensive.
- Women who are mobile for job-related reasons are very rarely mothers, and mothers are very rarely mobile. Only for men (with a female partner), parenthood and mobility seem to be combinable.
- Among couples (especially those with children) the traditional division of responsibilities regarding paid and unpaid work is intensified by job-related mobility.
- In the case of mobile women, it is uncommon that their male partners take over an equal share of childcare and housework. On the other hand, mobile men are very often fully released from these responsibilities by their female partners.
- **An increase in mobility may discourage women especially from proceeding with family planning and may, in consequence, decrease fertility rates throughout Europe.**
- Because it tends to complicate social engagement and volunteer work, increasing mobility can aggravate the development of civic society.
- Recurring forms of mobility (such as daily or weekly commuting) are more likely to produce negative effects. Especially weekend commuting and daily long-distance commuting are stressful, whereas the strains of relocation are, in the long run, rather small.
- The consequences of mobility tend to be positive when mobility is perceived as freely chosen. They tend to be negative when it is experienced as a constraint, as unforeseen or unwanted.
- Favourable working conditions (e.g. flexibility in working hours) can reduce the strain of mobility.

**KEY MESSAGES****Recommendations for policymakers**

- Adapt mobility policies to recognize different forms of mobility (not just migration). Apply this expanded concept to data-collection and consulting practices.
- Recognize that recurring forms of mobility (such as long-distance commuting) are more frequent than residential forms. Devote more policy attention to job-related recurring forms of mobility.
- Develop policy strategies acknowledging that cross-border migration is particularly rare in Europe. Devote more attention to job-related residential mobility within countries.
- Design measures to minimize the negative effects of mobility. For example:
  - provide financial compensation to offset the costs of mobility;
  - expand fast and affordable transportation systems;
  - improve childcare infrastructure that makes it easier to combine parenthood and mobility.
- Offer companies specific incentives to foster and support their employees' mobility.
- Encourage employers to:
  - avoid unnecessary mobility requirements;
  - compensate employees for the additional costs of mobility;
  - offer employees more flexibility in terms of working hours and allow them to work occasionally from home.

**Objectives of  
the research**

**“Job Mobilities and Family Lives. Modern Mobile Living and its Relation to Quality of Life” (JobMob and FamLives) was an EU-funded research project that examined job-related spatial mobility in Europe. It dealt with relevance, diversity, causes and consequences of this kind of mobility.**

The project focused on three general research areas:

- **Relevance and diversity** of mobility are described based on representative data. The description includes the number of people who are currently, have been and would be willing to become mobile in the future, differentiated according to the various forms of being mobile.
- **Causes and circumstances** were studied to determine the basis for people becoming or refusing to become mobile. They include, among others: the family situation, the partner’s job situation, social ties, home ownership and emotional ties.
- The project analysed **consequences** of mobility in terms of job career, partnership, fertility, division of responsibilities within couples, family relations, social integration, stress and subjective well-being.

**Scientific approach / methodology**

A **representative survey** was carried out in six European countries (France, Germany, Spain, Poland, Switzerland and Belgium) by interviewing a total of 7,220 people, aged 25 to 54, in the summer of 2007.

Aside from collecting statistical evidence, the study also measured subjectively perceived consequences and evaluations such as the perception of mobility as either an opportunity or a necessity.

The project distinguished between **two main forms of mobility**:

1. **Residential mobility** means changing one's main residence once (or a few times) mainly for job-related reasons.

Residentially mobile subgroups include:

- migrants (relocation across a national border);
- movers (relocation within a country over a distance of at least 50 km);
- expatriates (relocation with the intention to return).

2. **Recurring mobility** occurs repeatedly between two or more places, such as home, the (main) workplace, and various customers.

Recurringly mobile subgroups include:

- Long Distance Commuters (daily commute with an overall duration of at least two hours both ways, at least three times per week),
- Overnights (at least 60 overnights per year away from home, for job reasons).

The **theoretical framework** combined a micro-level approach, taking the perspective of individuals who intend to optimise their subjectively expected utility, with a macro-level approach that considered societal circumstances as influences on decision making. It is enriched by the concept of motility which analyses the ability to become mobile.

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**Funding Scheme**

Specific Targeted Research Project (STReP)  
Funded by the European Commission in the Sixth Framework Programme for research and technological development Priority 7: Citizens and governance in a knowledge-based society

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**Duration**

33 months: February, 2006 to October, 2008

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**Budget**

1 277 350 €

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**Website**

[www.jobmob-and-famlives.eu](http://www.jobmob-and-famlives.eu)

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**Further Reading**

Norbert F. Schneider and Gerardo Meil (eds.) 2008: Mobile Living Across Europe, Volume I, Relevance and Diversity of Job-Related Spatial Mobility in Six European Countries, Opladen: Barbara Budrich

Norbert F. Schneider and Beate Collet (eds.) 2009: Mobile Living Across Europe, Volume II, Causes and Consequences of Job-Related Spatial Mobility in Cross- National Perspective, Opladen: Barbara Budrich, forthcoming

Eric Widmer and Norbert F. Schneider (eds.) 2006: State-of-the-art of mobility research. A Literature Analysis for Eight Countries. JobMob and FamLives Working Paper (JFW), No. 2006-01 available on [www.jobmob-and-famlives.eu](http://www.jobmob-and-famlives.eu)

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**Links**

<http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ssh/>  
<http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/>

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