EUROPEAN
POLICYBRIEF

MAPPING THE POPULATION, CAREERS, MOBILITIES AND IMPACTS OF ADVANCED DEGREE GRADUATES IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES (POCARIM)

5. INTERNATIONALISATION AND INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY IN SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES CAREERS

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INTRODUCTION

The Innovation Union Communication asserts the need for researchers to be able 'to work and cooperate across the EU as easily as within national borders' and for the development of 'frameworks for a truly free movement of knowledge' (2010b). In this way policymakers aim to establish Europe as the most advanced knowledge-based economy in the world.

Against this background the POCARIM project explored the movement and engagements of social science and humanities (SSH) PhDs across national borders. Specifically, we aimed to understand the motivations behind and the obstacles to international mobility, as well as its consequences and impacts not just for the individual but for social and economic communities on multiple scales.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

The POCARIM team found that, in all countries of the study, international mobility and engagement were common policy themes from the doctoral training phase onwards. Motivations for this included enhancing international networking and knowledge exchange, as well as more market-focused responses to funding crises. However, compared to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, subjects in SSH were more likely to have experienced funding cuts and to be less valued in policy and public discourses. This situation had implications for patterns of international mobility and engagement.

POCARIM also revealed a high level of international mobility amongst SSH researchers in the sample, with short-term mobility in particular being commonly undertaken. With the exception of Spain, France and Poland, for example, around 80% or more of respondents from all countries had engaged in short-term mobility (a POCARIM average of 82%), with 62% doing so regularly or frequently. This high degree of international mobility and other types of cross-border engagement suggests that there is a transnational space of SSH research which encompasses the POCARIM countries and others. This space is primarily

European, with the UK and Germany playing central roles. However, the United States is also a significant destination for all types of mobility and international engagement.

For countries which are relatively peripheral or in which funding for international activity is limited, welcoming foreign researchers to conferences and workshops or to longer-term fellowships was reported to enable relatively immobile researchers to build networks and play a role in international communities.

The place of each country in patterns of international activity are shaped by a number of factors: cultural, linguistic and historical legacies; research and academic career paths, practices and expectations; and the availability of financial, infrastructural and other resources (including people and reputations). To varying degrees disciplinary traditions can also be associated with particular countries. Country-specific factors influence the international activity of SSH researchers in two key ways. Firstly, mobility of shorter duration is enabled or inhibited by funding and other institutional or national structures (such as time off for travel), the overall internationalisation of an academic or research system, and the geographical proximity from key centres (and therefore costs of travel).

Secondly, mobility of longer duration, and in particular cross-border career moves, can also be problematic in country-specific ways. For example, a professional profile established over time in one country may not translate to another country. This may be because a narrower set of interests or different activities is valued, or because an incoming researcher lacks the necessary networks to be able to identify or be considered for opportunities. Therefore, whilst there is evidence of a transnational labour *pool* in SSH research, labour *markets* remain in many ways nationally specific. The UK's very open labour market, for example, contrasts dramatically with the closed labour market in Italy, in spite of the fact that both countries could potentially draw on the same population of mobile researchers.

National characteristics and traditions are not determining, however. We also find evidence of changes in patterns of international activity occurring in both 'bottom up' and 'top down' ways. For example we found evidence of a reorientation of researchers in former Soviet Bloc countries which reflects wider national and European trends; and we found numerous examples of the influence of European funding on the geographies of interactions in large-scale research projects.

The most commonly reported forms of mobility amongst the POCARIM respondents were of short to medium duration. These included travel for conferences and workshops, fieldwork, and in order to conduct cross-border collaborative search. There were fewer instances of mobility of longer duration or which were open-ended or permanent.

It is clear that experiences of international mobility at early career, PhD or pre-PhD phases contributed to a positive view of the value of mobility later on, and a predisposition towards international activity. The POCARIM survey revealed that respondents with experiences of international mobility were more likely than their immobile peers to have reported a range of impacts from their work. They were, for example, more than twice as likely to have had experience with the media than those without international mobility experience, and almost twice as likely to have advised policymakers at some level (table 1).

Table 1. Relationship between international mobility and impact

	Mobility experience		
Impact activity	Yes	No	Yes/No ratio
Given interviews in media (radio, TV, newspapers)	58	27	2.2
Have advised to policy-actors on the local, regional, national or international level	40	22	1.8
Have supervised graduate or PhD students	71	44	1.6
Developed innovative products	25	15	1.6
Been a board member/volunteer/advisor in an NGO	30	19	1.5
Have managed/coordinated projects	71	48	1.5
Have participated in policy-relevant conferences or events	66	45	1.5
Have participated in societal or political committees	37	28	1.3
Have taken part in in knowledge transfer activities	71	54	1.3
Been a board member in a company	12	10	1.2
Have published textbooks, monographs, articles, books	93	77	1.2
Have taught students	91	82	1.1

Source: from POCARIM prepared by D. Kupiszewska

In the interviews, too, numerous positive outcomes of international mobility were reported. These included straightforward knowledge transfer and acquisition, an understanding of different perspectives and academic cultures, and the establishment and maintenance of networks.

Moreover, we found that researchers who were internationally mobile were more likely to be engaged in international collaborations. Therefore, countries with a high proportion of internationally mobile researchers are also more likely to have a high level of international collaborations. This was found to be the case for all countries except Turkey, which had a lower than expected level of collaboration.

Different durations of mobility are related to different outcomes. For example, frequent, short trips enable networks to be established and to grow. Longer-term trips are associated with greater embedding in, and understanding of, host academic cultures, although there is a limit to the degree to which additional time adds additional value. However, in order to maximise the knowledge and network returns from longer international stays, mobile researchers must develop positive social and professional relationships with peers (see Policy Brief 3, which focuses on the role of networks and networking).

One caveat in this discussion is that it is difficult to say what direction the influence travels – it is important to note that the development of networks, professional reputations and impacts, and international activity are parts of a circular process through which careers are established. In other words, as careers progress, publications lead to reputation and networking which, in turn, leads to opportunities for international activity and higher profile forms of impact.

The role of mobility in the lives and careers of SSH academics is not uncomplicated, however. For some interviewees mobility was more forced than desired. In terms of long-term mobility this could be the case if there is a strong expectation or a formal requirement for foreign experience in order to secure a job at home; or where the national labour market is effectively closed and researchers are forced to go abroad for work.

Shorter trips were also reported as being disruptive to personal and professional lives. A common problem was the inadequate support at institutional level or at home to enable mobility when it was desired. This was particularly problematic for researchers in geographically peripheral places. It is also likely to be a factor in the relatively lower levels of mobility amongst women.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1) National and European policymakers should recognise the influence of national traditions, resources, disciplines, career paths and labour markets on the complex and diverse patterns of international activity practiced by researchers. In practice this would mean supporting a wider and more complex range of international and mobility practices.
2) There is no single mode of international activity – mobility or otherwise – which is universally appropriate for all researchers or all research aims. Organisations should therefor incentivise the widest range of mobilities from longer through to short stays tailored to the needs of the research and the researcher and appropriate to the desired outcomes.
3) Institutional leaders, as well as national and European policymakers, should support the inward mobility of researchers through shorter (i.e. conferences) or longer (i.e. fellowships) visits. In this way relationships and networks can be established that provide essential connections to international fields, knowledge and skills, as well as career information and opportunities. Equally important, supporting inward mobility helps to counter 'brain drain' from peripheral institutions and regions.
4) Institutional leaders, as well as national and European policymakers, should support organised programs involving institutional collaborations, joint degrees or joint supervisions. These can play an important role in supporting doctoral researchers, leaving them less reliant on supervisory relationships.
5) The value of international experience is clear. However, SSH researchers should be fully informed of the opportunities and risks associated with international mobility, and provided with strategies to facilitate positive experiences. Such information would have greatest value at doctoral phase and early career stages, and should be incorporated into researcher training.

The findings contained in this brief are based on original work carried out in each of the POCARIM countries[1] and which includes: a review of the literature, policy and existing data, as well as original empirical survey and interview research. We draw out the implications of our findings for policymakers. The project consisted of two core phases. Each phase was coordinated by a key partner and carried out across the 13 countries by all partners.

Phase one of the research consisted of:

- A review of over 350 studies on the themes of: employment trends, career paths and graduate destinations; and impact, engagement and the contribution of SSH research (Gustafsson and Hansen, 2013).
- A review of policy approaches to interdisciplinarity, doctoral education as the first phase of an academic career, and responses to the economic crisis in terms of funding of doctoral education (Bitusikova, 2013).
- A review of existing statistical data sources on the population of social science and humanities researchers in the POCARIM countries and beyond (Canibano *et al*., 2013).

Phase two consisted of:

- An online survey of 2,723 SSH doctoral graduates which asked a number of questions on the key themes of the project. These included the perceived impacts of respondents' work, and their international, intersectoral and interdisciplinary mobilities. Survey data was cleaned and analysed in SPSS and EXCEL (Kupiszewska *et al*., 2013).
- In-depth, qualitative interviews with 25 respondents in each of the thirteen POCARIM countries. Each interview was transcribed, translated into English if necessary, and entered into a single NVIVO project file for analysis (Ackers *et al*., 2013).

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[1] The countries in which the study was carried out were: France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK.