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IDEAL JOBS AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY IN THE ENLARGED EUROPEAN UNION

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WORKING IN THE ENLARGED EUROPEAN UNION

IDEAL JOBS AND INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN SIXTEEN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

ABSTRACT

After the enlargement of the European Union (EU) with ten new countries on the 1st of May 2004, international labour mobility within the EU has become a rather contentious issue. This article looks at international mobility for a highly skilled group of people: university students in Business & Commerce. In this context, we first investigate what students across Europe are looking for in their ideal job and show that students from both Eastern Europe and Turkey differ substantially from other European countries in this respect. In the second part of this article, we assess whether students are likely to move internationally by looking at the extent to which they are attached to their own country/language. This analysis shows that, overall, students from Eastern Europe and Turkey are less keen to work internationally than students from many other European countries. On the other hand, the final part of the article shows that students from Eastern Europe and Turkey generally seem well prepared for international work in terms of their language skills. They prefer to work in Anglophone and Southern European countries and previous international experience and language skills are shown to be a major influence on the extent and direction of international mobility.

INTRODUCTION

After the enlargement of the European Union (EU) with ten new countries on the 1st of May 2004, international labour mobility within the EU has become a contentious issue. Employment and immigration¹ were seen as the two most important topics for the European elections (Eurobarometer 61, 2004) by the fifteen original EU members. In the EU-15, only 2% of the population

have decided to live and work in another country (<http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/-enlargement/faq>), but the increased economic diversity within the EU-25 might well mean that international labour mobility might become more prevalent. In this context, attention seems to have largely been focused on the mobility of unskilled or low-skilled migrants. In contrast, this article looks at international mobility for a highly skilled group of people: university students in Business & Commerce. As indicated by Piracha & Vickerman (nd) emigration of highly qualified workers from economically less to economically more developed has both positive and negative effects for the home countries. Although emigration can provide an outlet for those people who are frustrated with the pace of transition in less developed countries, possibly alleviating serious political problems, it also means that these countries are losing their best human resources. Investment in education is transferred from poor to rich countries and this might slow down the development of the poorer countries (Piracha & Vickerman, nd). On the other hand, if the migration is short-term, further skill acquisition abroad might have a long-term positive impact on the development of the home country. In addition, financial remittances to non-migrating family members back home and accumulation of savings might result in better health care and education for children (Piracha & Vickerman, nd). International mobility of highly-qualified workers could therefore be a mixed blessing for the new EU countries.

In this context, the first part of this article investigates what students across Europe look for in their ideal job. The study includes eleven of the original fifteen EU countries (the only countries missing are Belgium, Luxembourg, Ireland and Italy), two countries that have recently joined the EU (Poland & Lithuania), two countries that are prospective EU candidates (Bulgaria & Turkey) and the largest Eastern European country: Russia. To what extent can we distinguish clusters of countries across Europe and what can we conclude from this in terms of labour mobility? The second part of this article assesses whether students are likely to move internationally by investigating the extent to which they are attached to their own country/language. Finally, we look

at their level of preparation for international work in terms of language skills and international experience and assess which countries are the most popular migration destinations.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. First, the next section will briefly review the literature with regard to cross-country differences in work goals and ideal jobs. A discussion of the methods used in our study is then followed by a presentation and discussion of the results. Finally, we draw some conclusions with regard to international mobility.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there are many studies that have investigated cultural differences between countries (see e.g. Hofstede, 1980/2001; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987; Trompenaars, 1993), relatively few studies have compared cross-country differences in work goals and ideal jobs. Sirota & Greenwood (1971) compared work goals for three occupational groups (salesmen, technical personnel and service personnel) across 25 countries and found relatively few differences between countries. However, the countries could be classified into five cultural groupings (+ six countries that could not be classified): Anglo, French, Northern Europe, Southern Latin America and Northern Latin America that did show some differences in work goals. Harpaz (1990) studied work goals in 7 countries (Belgium, Germany, Israel, Japan, the Netherlands, the UK and the U.S.A.). He also found relatively few systematic differences between countries in the ranking of work goals. Interesting work, good pay and good interpersonal relationships were the three most important work goals in most of the countries. However, all countries in this survey were similar in the sense that they are economically highly developed countries.

Gooderham & Nordhaug's (2001/02) study forms the closest comparison to our study as their sample included business school students from eleven different (Western) European countries. They used ideal job characteristics to approximate three of Hofstede's four cultural dimensions (Masculinity-Femininity, Individualism-Collectivism and Uncertainty Avoidance), while the importance of power related management competences was used to measure the fourth dimension

(Power Distance). Their questions for the first two dimensions closely resemble the questions loading on our Intrinsic & Influence (Individualism) and Money, Prestige & Advancement (Masculinity) factors (see Methods). Their results, which show very minimal differences between the eleven countries, lead them to conclude cultural differences in Europe are on the decline. However, the authors did not control for response bias (see below) and hence their comparison of mean scores might be problematic.

None of the above studies on work values included Eastern European countries into their sample. Eastern European countries were included in Smith, Dugan & Trompenaars's (1996) study on national cultural values and were found to cluster together and differ considerably from the other countries in the survey. The Globe leadership studies identified ten societal clusters with the Eastern European countries forming one cluster (Gupta, Hanges & Dorfman, 2002), although in this case Greece was also included in the Eastern European cluster. However, neither of these two studies focused on ideal job characteristics or work goals. Our study therefore is the first to compare differences in ideal job characteristics between both Western and Eastern European countries.

METHODS

Sample and questionnaire administration

Data were collected in eleven of the fifteen original EU countries; the only countries missing were Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy and Ireland. Two of the new entrants, Lithuania and Poland, were included as well as one country that is planned to join in 2007 (Bulgaria). In addition, Turkey, that will be allowed to start accession negotiations once it meet political criteria, and Russia, the largest Eastern European country, were included. Respondents were final year university students following a course in Business Administration, Business & Management, Commerce or a similar subject. International students were excluded from our sample, so that our comparisons only included students that could be assumed to be representative of the country in which they studied.² The project was part of a study investigating the impact of the language of the questionnaire on

students' responses. Responses were shown to be significantly different between the English-language questionnaire and the native-language questionnaire, showing a pattern of cultural accommodation (see Harzing & Maznevski, 2002; Harzing, 2003). Hence, in this study we only used the sample of students that responded to a questionnaire in their native language. Language versions were randomly distributed and respondents were not allowed to choose which language version they completed. The resulting sample sizes ranged from 44 for Russia and Denmark to 125 for the British sample, but for most were in the range of 50-80 respondents. The total sample included 1153 students. Data were collected at two Dutch universities, one in Groningen, the smallish capital of the rural province Groningen in the north of the Netherlands, and one in Rotterdam, capital of South Holland, and one of the largest cities in the Netherlands. The data for most countries were collected between February and October 2001, while data for Finland, Spain, Turkey and Lithuania were collected between March and October 2002. Although it would have been preferable to collect data closer to the actual accession date, we do not expect student opinions and characteristics have to have changed drastically in just a couple of years. In addition, EU enlargement to include Eastern European countries has already been on the agenda for a long time.

All country collaborators receive a 15-page document containing very detailed instructions about the aim of the study, items and constructs, results of the pilot study, translation, data collection and data entry procedures, as well as agreements about co-authorship. All collaborators received access to the final data set. A document with personal introductions of all collaborators was prepared to promote group cohesion and facilitate networking among collaborators.

Measures

The original questionnaire was designed in English. It was pilot tested in the UK in October 2000. The pilot study coincided with a discussion among the first eight country collaborators about translatability of items. Several items that proved to be difficult to translate were replaced. Subsequently, bilingual country collaborators were responsible for the translation of the original English questionnaire. Translations were conducted using translation-back-translation procedures. The

translator and back-translator where separate individuals who did not enter into a discussion until after they had finished their translations. Discussions between translator and back-translator usually resulted in the change of some of the translations. Where difficulties remained, a third bilingual person was consulted. The back-translated versions were verified by the project coordinator for consistency across languages, which usually resulted in further changes and discussions between translator and back-translator. For several of the European languages, the project coordinator provided independent verification of the translated versions.

Questions to assess the importance of various characteristics of the students' ideal job after graduation were adapted from Sirota & Greenwood (1971) and Hofstede (1980). A total of eighteen ideal job characteristics were included in the questionnaire and students were asked to assess the relative importance of each on a 5-point Likert scale (of very little or no importance – of utmost importance). These questions were subsequently subjected to factor analysis (principal components, with oblique rotation). Bartlett's test of sphericity was highly significant (4471.117, $p < 0.000$) and KMO's measure of sampling adequacy was 0.79, which indicates that factor analysis is appropriate. The 18 questions were reduced to four relatively clear factors.

Table 1: Factor analysis of ideal job characteristics

	Cronbach's alphas			
	.69	.73	.64	.60
Job: Have a good working relationship with your direct supervisor	.697			
Job: Have friendly colleagues who help each other	.662			
Job: Have an opportunity to balance your work and private life	.646			
Job: Have security of employment	.604		.339	
Job: Have the opportunity to share responsibility for a task with others	.547			-.391
Job: Have little tension and stress on the job	.542	-.327		
Job: Have the opportunity to take full responsibility for a task	.680			
Job: Make a real contribution to the success of your organisation	.652			
Job: Have considerable freedom to adapt your own approach to the job	.633			
Job: Be consulted by your direct superior in his/her decisions	.620			
Job: Have challenging work to do	.609			
Job: Have an element of variety and adventure in the job	.602			
Job: Have an opportunity for high earnings			.773	
Job: Work in a prestigious, successful company or organisation			.737	-.343
Job: Have an opportunity for advancement to higher level jobs		.413	.683	
Job: Serve your country				-.759
Job: Have an opportunity for helping other people	.342			-.716
Job: Work according to clear and stable rules and regulations			.350	-.670

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

As can be seen in Table 1, the first factor included characteristics that referred to a balance between work and private life and having a job that was not very demanding, but allowed good relationships with others. It was labelled *balance & relationships*. The second factor represented mainly job intrinsic elements as well as the ability to influence the organisation's policies and was labelled *intrinsic & influence*. Factor 3 clearly referred to monetary rewards, prestige and advancement and was therefore labelled *money, prestige & advancement*. The final factor would seem to refer to an orientation to serve and follow rules and was labelled *following & serving*. Scale reliabilities were subsequently calculated for each of the factors and were deemed acceptable, given the wide range of countries represented in our sample (see Table 1).

Two statements were used to probe attachment to the students' home country and native language: "I consider myself a citizen of the world and would like to work in other countries than my home country after finishing my studies," and, "If I could speak English like a native speaker, I would not mind using English as often as my native language". Students were asked to indicate their agreement to each of the two

statements on a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree). In addition, students were asked to list any countries in which they had lived for more than 3 months and any foreign languages in which they were able to communicate on at least an intermediate level. They were also asked to indicate how typical they considered their views to be of people who live in the country in which they were born (scale 1-10) and the country in which they would prefer to live if they didn't live in their home country. Finally, their English language competence was probed with two questions: *How often do you read English?* (daily, several times a week, weekly, once a month or less) and *How would you assess your capability to understand written English?* (8-point scale, very weak – fully bilingual).³

Previous research has demonstrated a significant country effect on respondents' tendency to use different parts of the scale (Leung & Bond, 1989; Mullen, 1995; Singh, 1995). Since this would impact on our between-country comparisons, it is important to assess whether these response effects are present in our sample. In order to assess differences in response styles across the sixteen countries included in our survey, we averaged each respondent's answers on the total of eighteen ideal job questions. Even though all countries showed an acquiescence bias (i.e. average response above the mid-point of the scale), an ANOVA analysis showed very significant differences between countries ($F = 14.633, p < 0.000$). Finland, Denmark, The Netherlands (both samples⁴), and Austria showed a relatively low acquiescence bias (average response 3.40-3.58). A medium level of acquiescence (average response 3.67-3.77) was found for Lithuania, Germany, Sweden, France, Russia, Spain, Poland and the UK, while Portugal, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece showed high levels of acquiescence (3.85-4.00). Similar differences have been found by Van Herk, Poortinga & Verhallen (2004) and have been shown to reflect response styles rather than true preferences. Clearly this has important implications for the interpretation of attitude surveys in the European Union.

The established procedure for removing bias associated with scale response is within-person standardisation (Leung and Bond, 1989). The four ideal job scales were subsequently recal-

culated using the standardised data. With the exception of the questions about attachment to home country and native language, other questions were factual and hence would not be expected to be subject to substantial response bias. The questions about attachment to home country and native language were part of a section that showed far weaker response style effects than other sections of the questionnaire. Moreover, the response styles that were present were completely contrary to the response styles for ideal jobs and known differences in response styles (e.g. high acquiescence bias for Austria, Finland and Sweden and low acquiescence bias for Turkey, Portugal and Greece). We therefore concluded that for these questions the unstandardised score probably provided a more truthful picture of the students' true preferences. However, these differences do illustrate the tremendous difficulty in conducting valid comparisons between European countries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ideal Job characteristics

The four Ideal Job scales and the sixteen countries were subjected to a TwoStep Cluster Analysis. The TwoStep Cluster Analysis procedure is a new SPSS cluster analysis tool designed to reveal natural groupings (or clusters) within a data set. The advantage over traditional clustering techniques is that it can deal with both categorical and continuous data. It is hence ideally suited to determine clusters of ideal job characteristics and cluster membership by country at the same time. The technique allows the researcher to either let the optimal number of clusters be determined automatically or fix the number of clusters in the solution.

Overall, students in our sample consider job intrinsic & influence characteristics to be most important in their ideal job, closely followed by the money, prestige & advancement items. Characteristics related to balance & relationships come third, while following & serving is clearly least important for students in our sample. However, as Table 2 shows there are substantial differences between the three clusters determined automatically by the TwoStep Cluster Analysis. The first cluster has a clear focus on money, prestige & advancement and also has a higher following &

serving orientation than the other clusters. All Eastern European countries and Turkey are found in this cluster. The second cluster is dominated by a clear focus on the job-intrinsic & influence factor, while the other factors are all relatively unimportant. This cluster includes three of the six original European Community members plus Austria and Denmark. The third cluster shows a nearly equal preference for the intrinsic & influence factor and the money, prestige & advancement factor, with a secondary importance for balance & relationships. A rather mixed group of countries is included in this sample, including the UK and the more recent Scandinavian entrants (both countries joined in 1995) as well as the three Southern European countries that joined the EU between 1981 and 1986.

Table 2: Ideal job characteristics, 3-cluster solution

Job characteristics	Intrinsic & influence	Balance & re-relationships	Money, prestige & advancement	Following & serving
Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Turkey	.02	-.03	.48	-.34
Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands (1+2)	.46	-.04	.07	-.69
Finland, Greece, Portugal, Sweden, UK, Spain	.25	.11	.20	-.63
Total	.26	.02	.20	-.57

The mix of countries in cluster 3 is interesting, as the Southern European countries are usually classified as a different cultural cluster than the Western/Northern European countries (see e.g. Hofstede, 1980/2001, Ronen & Shenkar, 1985). We therefore ran the TwoStep Cluster Analysis again, fixing the number of clusters to four. As Table 3 showed, this did not change the first two clusters, but it did split the third cluster into two distinct clusters. The first of these includes the three Southern European countries and shows an equal preference for the intrinsic & influence ideal job characteristics and the balance & relationship job characteristics. The cluster also resembles the Eastern European countries and Turkey in attaching a higher importance to the following & serving characteristics than the Northern and Western European countries. The fourth cluster now only includes Finland, Sweden and the UK and shows a high importance for the intrinsic &

influence ideal job characteristics and a high secondary importance for money, prestige and advancement. Overall though, it is clear that the main distinction is between Eastern European countries and Turkey on the one hand and the remaining European countries on the other.

Table 3: Ideal job characteristics, 4-cluster solution

Job characteristics	Intrinsic & influence	Balance & re-relationships	Money, prestige & advancement	Following & serving
Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Turkey	.02	-.03	.48	-.34
Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands (1+2)	.46	-.04	.07	-.69
Greece, Portugal, Spain	.13	.12	-.03	-.35
Finland, Sweden, UK	.32	.10	.23	-.80
Total	.26	.02	.20	-.57

Attachment to home country and native language

Since students from Eastern European countries and Turkey attach a high importance to money, prestige and advancement they might be interested to find a job in more economically advanced countries. In the EU-15, only 2% of the population have emigrated to another country, but the increased economic diversity within the EU-25 might well mean that emigration becomes more important. And given that Bulgaria and Turkey (and Romania) have an even lower GDP per capita than any of the 10 new entrants, entrance of these countries into the EU might lead to even higher emigration levels. However, most people are still reluctant to leave their own countries and working in another country would normally also mean working in another language (often English). To what extent are the students in our sample attached to their home country and native language?

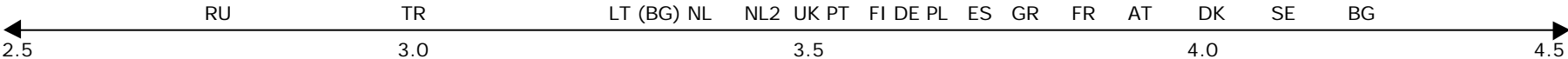
As Figure 1 shows students in Russia, Turkey and Lithuania show the lowest inclination to work outside their home countries. Polish students are more likely to consider this option, but even they do not show a very strong acceptance of international work. Students from many Western, Northern and Southern European countries score higher than the Polish students. Bulgarian students show a surprisingly strong preference for international work, the strongest among all countries. However, this is likely to be due to the slightly idiosyncratic nature of the Bulgarian

sample. Unlike the other countries where our respondents were students completing a degree in Business Administration, Business & Management or Commerce, the Bulgarian students that responded to the native-language questionnaire were completing a degree in International Relations that would be likely to lead to an international career path. Bulgarian students that responded to the English-language questionnaire (and were hence excluded from this article), studied Business Administration. Their scores (shown in brackets) are very similar to the scores of Lithuanian students and show a low preference for international work.

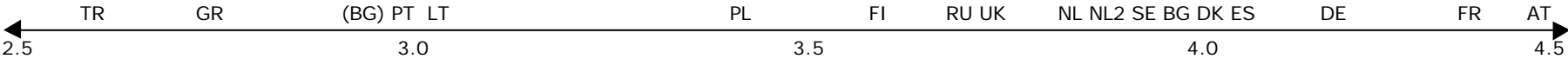
With respect to the willingness to use English as often as their native language, the Eastern European and Turkish students again score rather low. Turkish, Lithuanian and Bulgarian (business) students all score at or below the middle of the scale. Polish and Russian students score a bit higher, but most of the Western, Northern and Southern European countries show a higher willingness to speak English as often as their native tongue. The ranking of countries of this statement begs the question of whether English language capability could have influenced the students' willingness to speak English, in spite of the fact that the statement clearly included the proviso "if I could speak English like a native speaker". However, an ANOVA analysis with the two different measures of English language capability does not show any significant differences, neither for the overall sample, nor for the individual countries. This seems to imply that students have replied to this question truthfully and that it can be interpreted as an attachment to native language, irrespective of their English language skills.

Figure 1: Attachment to home country/native language

I consider myself a citizen of the world and would like to work in other countries than my home country after finishing my studies



If I could speak English like a native speaker, I would not mind using English as often as my native language



Legend of country abbreviations: AT = Austria, BG = Bulgaria, International Relations students, (BG) = Business students, DE = Germany, DK = Denmark, ES = Spain, FI = Finland, FR = France, GR = Greece, LT = Lithuania, PL = Poland, PT = Portugal, NL = Netherlands, RU = Russia, SE = Sweden, TR = Turkey, UK = United Kingdom.

Overall then, students in the new and prospective member states do not seem to have a strong disposition to work in other countries. They are certainly less inclined to want to do so than students in most Northern, Western and Southern European countries. In the next two sections we will explore to what extent students in the different countries already have international experience, what their preferences are in terms of the countries they would like to live in and what their actual foreign language skills are.

International experience and emigration preferences

We asked students to list the countries (other than their home country) in which they had lived in for more than 3 months. As Table 4 shows, overall nearly three quarters of the students did not have any international experience.

Table 4: Extent of international experience and country preferences (ordered by average number of countries lived in)

Country/no countries lived in	0	1	2 or more	If you would not live in your home country, where would you prefer to live? Top 5 countries listed*
Turkey	92%	8%	0%	USA, UK, any country, Canada/Italy, Australia
Portugal	92%	7%	1%	USA, UK, Brazil, France, Canada/Netherlands
UK	89%	10%	1%	USA, Australia, Spain, Canada/France
Bulgaria	87%	9%	4%	USA/Spain, Germany/UK, Italy, Australia/Switzerland
Greece	81%	17%	2%	USA, Italy, Spain, France
Netherlands (G)	84%	10%	6%	USA, UK, Spain, Italy, Canada/France
Germany	80%	16%	4%	USA/any country, Italy, Spain, Australia/France
Spain	76%	21%	4%	USA, Italy, France, UK, Australia
Netherlands (R)	76%	15%	9%	USA, France/Italy, any country, UK
Austria	62%	26%	11%	Italy, USA, France/any country, Australia/Canada/UK
Poland	50%	46%	4%	USA, UK, any country, Australia, Germany
Lithuania	56%	37%	7%	USA, France/Sweden, Australia/Germany/Spain/UK
Russia	60%	27%	14%	Any country/Spain, Germany, Europe/UK/USA, Italy
Finland	55%	31%	14%	UK, Sweden, USA, Germany, Australia/France
Sweden	52%	23%	26%	UK, USA, Canada/France, Spain, Italy
France	38%	43%	16%	Australia, Spain/USA, Canada, Italy
Denmark	23%	46%	31%	UK, USA, any country/Australia, France, Italy
Total	72%	20%	8%	USA (21%), UK (10%), Australia/France/Italy/Spain (≈ 8% each)

* Only 4 countries mentioned if 5th country has <5% of votes

However, there are large differences between countries in this respect, with the Scandinavian countries and France showing a very high level of international experience and Turkey and Portugal showing a very low level of international experience. However, the level of international experience in the Scandinavian countries and France is probably biased upwards since students in these countries were generally older than the other respondents. With regard to the new and prospective EU countries the pattern is varied. While Turkish and Bulgarian students generally have a very low level of international experience, nearly 1 in 2 Polish, Lithuanian and Russian students have lived in at least one other country than their own. With regard to the countries that students have lived in for more than 3 months, the USA, the UK and Germany are the only countries that are mentioned more than incidentally. And while experience in the Anglophone countries is fairly evenly spread over all European countries, half of the number of students spending more than 3 months in Germany was from either Finland or Poland. The large number of international student exchange programmes with universities in the UK and the US might explain the dominance of these two countries in the students' international experience, while geographical closeness might explain the Polish preference for Germany.

Interestingly, students who have lived abroad for more than 3 months at least once are very significantly ($t = 8.494$, $p < 0.000$) more likely to agree with the statement "*I consider myself a citizen of the world and would like to work in other countries than my home country after finishing my studies*". This effect is present in every country in the survey, but because the number of students with international experience is small in many countries, the difference is not always significant on a country-level. Significant differences are found in Austria, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, The Netherlands (both samples) and Russia. In all these cases effect sizes are very considerable: on average students with international experience score a full point higher on the five-point scale than students without experience. The direction of causality is unclear though: are students with international experience more likely to want to work internationally or are students who have a preference for

working internationally more likely to seek out international experience? Only a longitudinal study would be able to answer this question.

Students with international experience also consider themselves to be significantly ($t = 2.176$, $p = 0.03$) less typical of their home country than students without international experience. These results are also reproduced at a country-level, but with smaller sample sizes are generally not significant. Results for Turkey are particularly strong: students with international experience see themselves as rather atypical (4 on a 10-point scale) of their country. However, given the small number of students in Turkey with international experience, this result should be considered with caution. Again, however, causality is difficult to establish: are students with international experience less typical, or do students who are less typical seek international experience?

Students were also asked which countries they would prefer to live in if they didn't live in their home country. Overall, the USA was a clear favourite, getting one in five votes, with the UK a rather distant second. One other Anglophone country (Australia) and three Southern European countries (Spain, Italy, and France) were the only other countries to get a substantial number of votes. Together these six countries drew nearly two thirds of the students' votes. The order of preference for individual countries shows the USA at the top for most countries, although students in the Scandinavian countries prefer the UK to the USA, while for Austrian and French students Italy and Australia are higher on their list of preferences than the USA. Russian students seem least specific in their preferences with "any country" and "Europe" getting a rather high number of votes. Interestingly, the UK is absent in the top-5 preferred countries for Greece, France and Germany with only 1 student in each country listing the UK as their preferred choice. Overall, country preferences appear to be motivated by language (Anglophone countries) and life style/climate (France, Italy, Spain).

Comparing the countries that students have lived in for more than 3 months with the countries they would prefer to live in shows a rather high level of concordance. Half of the stu-

dents who have experience in Australia list it as their preferred country, versus only 7% of those who haven't. Students who have already lived in France or Spain are five times as likely to list this country as their preferred choice. Students are also twice as likely to list the UK and the USA as their first preference if they have lived there before. These results either indicate that students have been able to realise their first country preference in their international experience so far, or that familiarity with a country positively influences a student's perception of this country. Interestingly, no such effect is present for Italy. Even though only 3 students have ever lived in Italy, it is the 3rd most highly preferred destination country, narrowly topped by the UK.

Foreign language skills

We asked students to list the foreign languages they were able to communicate in on at least an intermediate level. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Foreign language skills (ordered by average number of foreign languages spoken)

Languages Country	0	1	2	3	4 or more	Mean	% English	% German	% French	% Spanish	% Russian
UK	36%	41%	18%	4%	1%	0.9	--	26%	39%	8%	1%
Turkey	0%	62%	37%	1%	0%	1.4	100%	32%	3%	1%	0%
Spain	4%	57%	35%	5%	0%	1.4	95%	6%	36%	--	1%
Poland	0%	44%	50%	6%	0%	1.6	100%	50%	2%	2%	4%
Portugal	3%	42%	43%	9%	3%	1.7	93%	3%	45%	26%	0%
Bulgaria	0%	36%	50%	12%	3%	1.8	100%	30%	9%	8%	30%
Greece	2%	29%	52%	16%	2%	1.9	97%	16%	40%	17%	0%
France	2%	14%	67%	14%	2%	2.0	95%	33%	--	48%	0%
Netherl (R)	4%	32%	36%	17%	11%	2.0	96%	51%	36%	8%	2%
Germany	0%	34%	30%	32%	4%	2.1	98%	--	48%	22%	2%
Netherl (G)	0%	26%	43%	26%	6%	2.1	99%	64%	36%	3%	0%
Denmark	0%	18%	50%	21%	11%	2.3	100%	73%	11%	18%	0%
Russia	0%	11%	57%	27%	5%	2.3	98%	37%	34%	34%	--
Austria	2%	13%	40%	34%	11%	2.4	96%	--	74%	34%	6%
Sweden	0%	10%	47%	31%	13%	2.5	95%	55%	52%	11%	5%
Lithuania	0%	2%	40%	46%	13%	2.7	95%	42%	4%	4%	97%
Finland	0%	0%	16%	49%	35%	3.3	99%	70%	36%	8%	1%
Total	5%	30%	39%	19%	7%	1.9	97%	39%	32%	16%	9%

The importance of English as the language of business in Europe is clearly illustrated by the fact that 97% of the students in our sample spoke English and by the fact that the British students showed the lowest level of foreign language skills. Overall, foreign language skills seem to be rather low in Turkey, Poland and Bulgaria as well as the Southern European countries and high in the Scandinavian countries as well as Russia and Lithuania. Lithuania's high score is caused by the fact that nearly all students speak Russian as well as English, while language skills of the Russian students are varied. Our results also show that the accession of Eastern European countries and Turkey is likely to increase the importance of the German language in the European Union. While knowledge of French is negligible except in Russia, one third to one half of the students in these five countries speak German.

Language capabilities do seem to influence the countries that students list as their preferred country to live in. Two thirds of the students who list France as their preferred country speak French (compared to one third in general) and students are four times more likely to prefer France to other countries if they speak French. The effect for Spanish is even slightly stronger. Over 40% of the students who list Spain as their favourite country speak Spanish (compared to 16% in general) and students are four and a half times more likely to prefer Spain to other countries if they speak Spanish. For German the effect is weaker, but still present: 57% of the students preferring Germany speak German (as opposed to 39% overall) and students are more than twice as likely to prefer Germany to other countries if they speak German. However, since the number of students that preferred Germany was rather small, these results might not be representative. Only very few students spoke Italian, so the preference for Italy seems to be independent of language skills.

Although nearly all students claimed to speak English, the countries did vary in their *level* of English language competence. Table 6 shows the results for our two measures of English language competence. For the first measure, the categories "very weak", "weak", "moderate" and "average" were collapsed into one, as there were very few observations in these categories. It is clear that the

vast majority of students in our sample have at least a good English language competence. There is, however, a substantial minority of students in France, Germany, Spain and Portugal that claim their English language capability is rather weak. This is also reflected in the lower frequency with which students in these countries read English. English language skills are clearly highest in the Scandinavian countries with half of the students claiming an excellent or bilingual level of English. English is obviously important as a language of instruction in these countries as well: around 90% of the students in these countries read English daily or several times a week.

The Eastern European countries and Turkey vary in their English language skills, with Poland and Lithuania scoring lower than Turkey, Russia and Bulgaria. However, 84% (Lithuania) to 91-2% (Russia, Turkey & Bulgaria) of the students have at least a good level of English language skills. The dominance of Russian in Lithuania and the importance of German as a 2nd foreign language in Poland might explain the relatively lower English language competence in these countries. With good English language skills and German as a 2nd foreign language for a third to half of the students in these countries, language skills seem to be no barrier for international mobility as these two languages would give students access to all Northern and most Western European countries.

The position of the Netherlands in this table is puzzling, as the Dutch are usually classified with the Scandinavians as having very good English language skills. The frequency with which the Dutch students read English would suggest a higher level of English language skills than their own assessment. The Dutch reluctance to stand out and classify oneself as “excellent” (Hofstede, 1980/2001) might be a partial explanation for this puzzling result. Again this shows the limitations of using perceptual measures in cross-country comparisons.

Table 6: English language skills (ordered by average assessment of skills and frequency of reading English)

Country	How would you assess your ability to speak English?				Country	How often do you read English?			
	Very weak – Average	Good	Very good	Excellent – bilingual		Once a month or less	Once a week	Several times a week	Daily
Spain	27%	39%	30%	4%	Germany	53%	16%	18%	12%
Germany	31%	29%	33%	8%	Spain	28%	40%	29%	4%
Portugal	29%	20%	40%	11%	France	29%	39%	22%	10%
France	22%	36%	26%	16%	Portugal	33%	29%	25%	12%
Poland	13%	42%	38%	8%	Poland	13%	52%	35%	--
Lithuania	16%	33%	33%	18%	Lithuania	24%	33%	28%	15%
Netherlands (G)	15%	37%	37%	11%	Greece	21%	27%	36%	16%
Greece	17%	19%	36%	27%	Bulgaria	15%	31%	41%	13%
Netherlands (R)	9%	25%	40%	26%	Austria	21%	2%	52%	25%
Turkey	8%	30%	42%	20%	Netherlands (G)	7%	14%	48%	32%
Bulgaria	8%	23%	49%	20%	Turkey	14%	10%	31%	45%
Russia	9%	21%	34%	36%	Russia	7%	9%	50%	34%
Austria	13%	12%	39%	36%	Finland	4%	9%	51%	36%
Denmark	9%	12%	27%	52%	Netherlands (R)	8%	--	43%	49%
Finland	4%	13%	37%	46%	Sweden	--	11%	39%	50%
Sweden	2%	11%	32%	55%	Denmark	2%	5%	36%	57%
Total	14%	25%	37%	24%	Total	17%	20%	37%	26%

CONCLUSIONS

This article investigated issues surrounding international mobility of highly skilled labour in Europe, using a matched sample of final year university students in Business & Commerce in sixteen countries. It showed that students in Eastern European countries and Turkey generally show different preferences with regard to their ideal type of job than students in other European countries. Money, prestige and advancement are important motivators for students from these countries. Given the level of economic development in their home countries, this might lead them to consider migration to other EU countries. However, in general Eastern European and Turkish students seem less interested to work internationally than students from most other European countries and also show a lower willingness to speak English instead of their native language. Students who do already have international experience (most likely through student exchange programmes) are far more likely to want to work abroad though. It is also important to note that Eastern European and Turkish students generally seem rather well prepared to work internationally. With good English language skills and German as a 2nd foreign language for a third to half of the students in these countries, language skills seem to be no barrier for international mobility as these two languages would give them access to all Northern and most Western European countries.

Asked about their preferred countries, Anglophone countries, such as the USA, the UK and Australia stand out, with the Southern European countries (Italy, Spain, France) being popular as well. In addition, it should be noted that students in the four Eastern European countries are the only ones, except for Finland, listing Germany among their top-5 countries. This is likely to be influenced by their German language skills, as our results clearly show that host country language skills substantially increase the likelihood that students want to live in these countries. Overall though, it appears that migration patterns for highly skilled labour might be substantially different from those for unskilled or low-skilled labour.

Finally, although the causality of this relationship is unclear, the fact that international experience is associated with a stronger preference for working abroad means that increased student exchange could be an important impetus for international labour mobility. And since language skills seem to be a very important determinant for the country that students would prefer to work in, language education beyond English remains an important means for promoting mobility within the European Union.

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¹ Ex equo with security

² Local students were defined as those who were both born in the country of data collection and spoke the local language.

³ For the UK these questions referred to the student's first foreign language.

⁴ Data were collected at two Dutch universities, one in Groningen, the smallish capital of the rural province Groningen in the north of the Netherlands, and one in Rotterdam, capital of South Holland, and one of the largest cities in the Netherlands.