

## Press release

### **Europeans are sedentary, but highly mobile as commuters and on business trips**

**First representative study on job-related spatial mobility in Europe shows: One in two people in gainful employment has experience with mobility.**

(Brussels, October 17th 2008, lei) Even in times of rising demands to become mobile people in Europe prove to be surprisingly settled: They rarely relocate over large distances and they hardly migrate. But Europeans nonetheless do develop manifold strategies to meet mobility requirements: They commute daily or weekly over long distances, they maintain long-distance relationships, they go on foreign assignments or frequently on long business trips. Almost one in two people in gainful employment has experience with job-related spatial mobility. The most frequent way of being mobile is, by far, long-distance commuting: Among those who are mobile, 41 percent are long-distance commuters and spend at least two hours each day on their way to and from work. Another 29 percent of mobile people spend at least 60 nights a year away from home – for example on business trips, as weekend commuters, or as seasonal workers. 14 percent of job-related mobility is relocations within one country. Migration and foreign assignments only play a marginal role, with 4 percent altogether. 12 percent of mobile people are even mobile in more than one way.

These results are based on the first representative study on the spread, causes, and consequences of job-related spatial mobility in Europe. The study, entitled “Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe”, is funded by the Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development of the European Commission. It is carried out in France, Germany, Spain, Poland, Switzerland and

Belgium, and is coordinated by the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. For this research project, all in all 7,220 people aged 25 to 54 were interviewed. 16 percent of those in gainful employment are currently mobile; another 32 percent have had experience with mobility in the past. All in all, the differences in the extent of current mobility between the countries are small. At 18 percent, Germany has the highest proportion of mobile people in gainful employment; Switzerland has the lowest, with 13 percent.

The study also shows an increase in the need to become mobile professionally over the last 20 years. "People aged 30 today already have considerably more experience with mobility than those aged 50" the project coordinator, Professor Norbert Schneider from Mainz University sums up the findings on change in mobility.

Despite the widespread experience of job-related spatial mobility, the potential for further mobility must be considered as relatively low, the authors of the study believe. Among the currently non-mobile people in gainful employment 53 percent are reluctant to become mobile or are only willing to do so within very strict limits. In particular, the idea of relocating and leaving their accustomed main place of residence is rejected by a large majority. Europeans can more easily imagine commuting to a distant workplace. This preference, which corresponds to the actual distribution of the ways in which people are mobile, indicates that people are searching for compromises between distinct emotional ties to their home region and the labour market's requirement to become mobile.

Europeans' experience of mobility strongly varies according to sex, age, and education. Men are more often mobile than women, young people more so than older ones, people with a university degree more than those without. The size of the company also matters. Employees of international enterprises are more mobile than those in small and medium-sized firms. Further differences are related to the way

people are mobile. Whereas young people and those with a university degree tend to relocate, the elder ones and those without university education prefer to commute.

The causes of the increase in the need to be mobile have not only to do with the changing labour market; the rising labour market participation of women is also leading to greater mobility. For many couples, for example, weekend commuting is the only way of reconciling their partnership with both of their occupations.

Today mobility is taking on an increasingly ambivalent character: For some, it provides new opportunities and fosters social advancement. For others, mobility is the only way of avoiding unemployment and social decline. Prof. Dr. Anna Giza-Poleszczuk from Warsaw University points out the relevance of mobility as a survival strategy: "For one in four mobile people, mobility is the last chance to secure their livelihood."

Mobility can affect a wide range of aspects, from subjective well-being or health and social ties to family life. For example, mobility fosters a traditional division of responsibilities between women and men regarding childcare: While mobile men are further released from their responsibilities by their female partners this is much more rarely true for mobile women. This aggravates the problem of reconciling family, job, and mobility, especially for women. Furthermore, mobility inhibits family development, in particular for mobile women: Unlike mobile men, they tend to remain childless and even without a partner. In return, being a parent clearly reduces the readiness to become mobile, for men and especially for women.

Mobility does not necessarily have negative consequences on people's well-being and satisfaction. It depends on how people are mobile. Weekend commuting and daily long-distance commuting in particular are often accompanied by considerable strains, whereas the strains of relocation tend to be less severe. Other than that the level of stress mainly depends on the working conditions and on the circumstances

in which the people concerned have become mobile. “In particular when mobility is experienced as a constraint, as unforeseen, or unwanted, people feel especially burdened by it,” emphasizes Prof. Dr. Gerardo Meil from Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

“In times of rising demands to become professionally mobile, politics and business are called upon to develop new strategies to encourage Europeans’ mobility and at the same time minimise the negative consequences of enhanced mobility,” concludes Prof. Dr. Norbert Schneider from the research results. Employers’ contribution could be to offer more flexibility regarding work hours, to allow employees to work at home more often, to take over a share of the financial costs of mobility, and to reduce individuals’ need to be mobile.

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