



Global Governance Programme  
European University Institute

## SURVEY REPORT

Emigrating in times of crisis.

Highlights and new data from an e-survey on high-skilled emigrants from Southern Europe and Ireland

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## **About the survey**

In 2013, the EUI's Global Governance Programme launched an e-survey to gather new qualitative data on high-skill emigration from five EU Member States hard hit by the crisis: Greece, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Spain. The e-survey was launched in collaboration with Real Elcano Institute, Trinity College Dublin and the Technical University of Lisbon. It was launched simultaneously in five languages (English, Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish) and ran between 21<sup>st</sup> May and 18<sup>th</sup> August 2013.

The team consists of:

*Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou, Global Governance Programme, European University Institute (EUI)*

*Dr. Ruby Gropas, Global Governance Programme, European University Institute (EUI)*

*Prof. Carmen Gonzalez Enriquez, Real Elcano Institute, Madrid*

*Dr. Camilla Devitt, Trinity College Dublin*

*Dr. João Peixoto, Technical University of Lisbon*

*Dr. Joana Azevedo, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL)*

## **About the report**

This report examines emigration of high-skilled citizens from five EU Member States hard hit by the crisis: Greece, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Spain. It presents a general overview of the data generated from the web-based survey on 'Emigration from Southern Europe and Ireland' coordinated by the Global Governance Programme of the EUI.

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## SURVEY REPORT

### Emigrating in times of crisis. Highlights and new data from an e-survey on high-skilled emigrants from Southern Europe and Ireland

#### The issues at stake

Crises impact on migration trends and development in numerous ways. In general, remittances tend to fall and ‘brain drain’ tends to increase as high skilled individuals are prone to ‘exit’ in search of opportunities elsewhere. The outflow of high-skilled individuals may have significant long-term implications for a country’s economic growth potential and its competitiveness, while the inflow of talented, skilled workers may stimulate economic growth and enhance competitiveness.

Given the premium that is accorded to human capital in today’s ‘knowledge economies’ and the global competition over this scarce resource, it is urgent to **better understand in what ways the current economic crisis and its consequences have impacted the decisions of high-skilled EU citizens from the most hard-hit countries to ‘vote with their feet’.**

Over the past five years, residents of Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Ireland have been hit by economic crisis, recession and harsh austerity measures. **Unemployment reached record levels in countries that already faced high levels of youth unemployment.** In fact, **Greece, Italy and Portugal** counted the **highest unemployment rates among young people aged 25-29 with tertiary education in 2007.**<sup>1</sup>

Unemployment and underemployment have not been the only consequences. People in Southern Europe and Ireland have faced a dramatic fall in their salaries and welfare benefits, and a substantial deterioration of their professional expectations.

The crisis had a number of far-reaching implications for the European Union, and one of these has been the way it has impacted intra-EU mobility. Intra-EU mobility had been steadily rising in the decade preceding the 2008 global financial crisis, and while mobility flows declined in the period 2008-2010, they quickly picked up again mainly triggered by flows from Greece, Spain and Ireland. Moreover, one particularly important dimension to note is that since 2010 there has been **a significant increase in mobility of people with tertiary education.** In effect, the percentage of those with a tertiary education among recent intra-EU mobile workers, grew from 27% in 2007-08 to 44% in 2011-12.<sup>2</sup>

Data presented by the OECD’s International Migration Outlook (2013)<sup>3</sup> suggests that emigration from Ireland accelerated since 2009 and increased significantly particularly for Greece and Spain after 2010. Although precise numbers cannot be registered there are clear indications that crisis hit European countries have been experiencing significant emigration flows. Among those leaving, there are third country nationals who are returning to their country of origin or moving on to other destinations, and there are citizens – both native and naturalised – who are emigrating.

If we consider the extent, the duration and harshness of the crisis it seems that a surprisingly lower number of Greeks, Italians, Irish, Spaniards and Portuguese have emigrated than would have been expected. Yet those who have emigrated to other countries or continents, have captured much media attention and the prospect of continued emigration of the ‘**youngest, best and brightest**’ of these countries, has triggered notable public debate and concern.

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_OFFPUB/KS-78-09-920/EN/KS-78-09-920-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-78-09-920/EN/KS-78-09-920-EN.PDF)

<sup>2</sup> See [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-14-115\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-14-115_en.htm)

<sup>3</sup> See also [http://www.oecd.org/about/membersandpartners/publicaffairs/Jean-ChristopheDumont\\_Migration.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/about/membersandpartners/publicaffairs/Jean-ChristopheDumont_Migration.pdf)

However, little is known about:

- ✓ Who is actually emigrating, where to, and under what circumstances;
- ✓ The range of (push and pull) factors and motivations that is driving this new emigration wave from countries that in the last three decades had been transformed from countries of emigration to countries of immigration;
- ✓ How intra-EU mobility is being experienced by recent European emigrants who move to other EU countries and by those who move to other continents.

## **Our e-survey**

Confronted with this scarce knowledge about the new wave of southern European emigration, in the beginning of 2013, Professor Anna Triandafyllidou from the Global Governance Programme of the European University Institute, in Florence, Italy, took the initiative to conduct a survey among these recent emigrants.

The survey and related analysis was coordinated by Professor Anna Triandafyllidou in cooperation with Dr. Ruby Gropas and included four more research teams: Professor Carmen Gonzalez-Enriquez, at the Real Instituto Elcano in Madrid; Dr. Camilla Devitt, at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland; Professor Joao Peixoto at the University of Lisbon and Dr. Joana Azevedo at the ISCTE-IUL also in Lisbon, Portugal.

The **e-survey was launched in 5 languages** (English, Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish) aiming to investigate the main features of the migrants' experiences, their profile and their expectations. The e-survey was open for three months, from 21<sup>st</sup> May to 18<sup>th</sup> August 2013 and gathered 6,750 valid answers.

Our aim was to collect **qualitative** information on who is migrating, where to, and under what conditions. We aimed to **gather new insights into the drivers and push factors** of their decision to migrate, as well as **the extent to which these migrants are integrated in the labour market in their societies of destination**.

This is the first European level survey devoted to the new South and West European emigrants and provides information about the features and experiences of Highly Skilled Migrants who migrated from any of those five countries since the beginning of the crisis. The survey includes information about key issues such as type of studies, occupation, earnings, family status, registration in consulates, labour situation previous to emigration, family dynamics (spouses and children migrating or staying behind), the main problems encountered at the destination country, the obstacles that they may have faced in their intra-EU mobility, and plans for return. The survey consisted of approximately 70 questions with multiple choice answers and options for additional comments and clarifications to be inserted and four open ended questions on the reasons for leaving the country of origin, the aspects that the migrants likes and dislikes in the origin and destination countries and a global evaluation of their migratory experience.

## **A note of caution: Caveats and shortcomings of e-surveys**

We would like to include here a special note on the constraints and shortcomings associated with the **reliability, sampling and generalizability of data collected through e-surveys**. Internet based surveys face the same challenges that 'pencil and paper' surveys may face, but these can be intensified

by the special conditions of the Internet context that include perceived anonymity, less control over respondents selection and transmission errors.<sup>4</sup>

We wish to highlight three main disadvantages of data collected by open e-surveys such as ours as these are also applicable to our dataset. **Survey fraud** is a common challenge associated with e-surveys so in order to control it as much as possible we included open ended questions and we included a number of interconnected questions that also tested for consistency (to ensure that respondents did not just randomly provide answers to the questions). Moreover, before analysing the responses collected **we thoroughly ‘cleaned’ the datasets** and kept just ‘valid’ responses, i.e. individuals who had indeed migrated to another country (not individuals who were considering migration) and who completed the entire set of questions. Finally, as this was an open survey there is a **bias** in the sample that was collected, not least in that **it targeted only internet users** as there was no other way to participate in the survey (i.e. by phone or completing a paper questionnaire).

Nonetheless, in spite of the drawbacks we consider that the material collected through this survey is **rich and insightful**. It was a **cost efficient** way to provide some data on a tranche of migrants that is not easy to collect information, particularly in the case of high skilled individuals who move to another EU member state who may not necessarily register with the local authorities (at least for the first period).

Moreover, we were able to **capture the development of the migration wave as close to its actual time-frame as possible**, and in as wide a **geographical** range as possible. In effect, data provided by statistical services have an unavoidable time lag whereas our data registers individuals who migrated up to June 2013. We received responses from Italians, Irish, Spaniards, Portuguese and Greeks who had moved to completely different parts of the world, from Switzerland to the UK, and from Canada to Australia. This geographic range gave a variety to our dataset that is only possible through the use of an internet based survey. The advantages of internet based surveys, which include the low cost of this option, the higher response rates and faster response times, led us to prefer this methodology.

### **Our data: young, highly educated and highly employable**

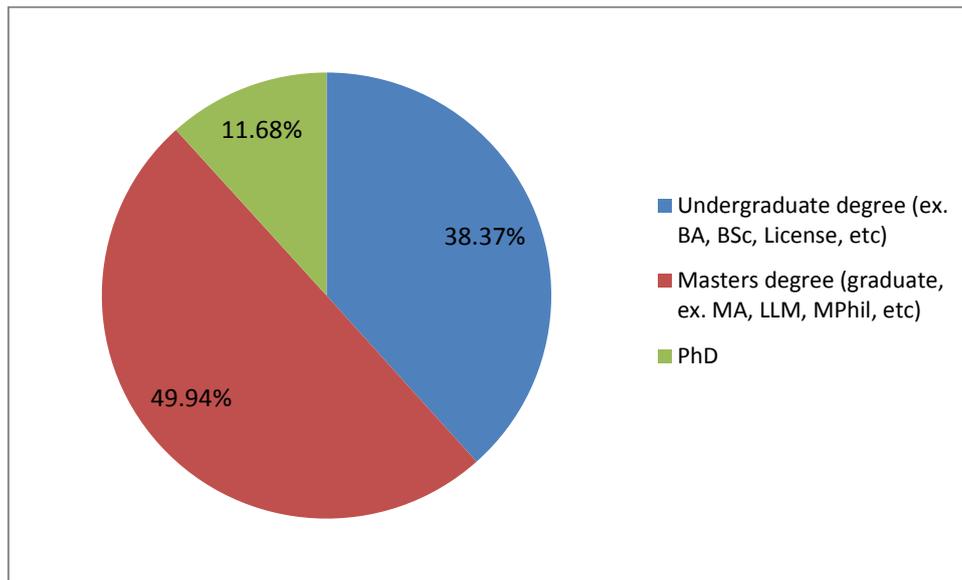
Overall we had 6,750 valid responses from Irish, Italian, Greek, Spanish and Portuguese who have emigrated from their country of origin. Of these:

- ✓ 64% are male
- ✓ 92% are under 45 years of age (44% under 30 years old; 48% 31-45 years old)
- ✓ 88% hold a university degree, and of these, over 60% have pursued graduate studies
- ✓ The majority have studied economics and business, engineering, maths and natural sciences, IT and computer sciences, while there are quite a few who have studied the humanities and social science, or medicine

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<sup>4</sup> See inter alia: Roztocki, N. (2001) “Using Internet Based Surveys for Academic Research: Opportunities and Problems,” Submitted to the 2001 American Society of Engineering Management (ASEM) National Conference, available at <http://www2.newpaltz.edu/~roztockn/alabam01.pdf>; Jansen, K.J., Corley K.G., and B.J.Jansen (2007), *E-Survey Methodology*, available at [http://faculty.ist.psu.edu/jjansen/academic/pubs/esurvey\\_chapter\\_jansen.pdf](http://faculty.ist.psu.edu/jjansen/academic/pubs/esurvey_chapter_jansen.pdf)

**Figure 1. Level of Education. Highest degree obtained**



Source: GGP E-Survey 2013

## Highlights from our findings

### *What is the profile of our high-skill migrants in our dataset?*

Our respondents were mainly:

- ✓ Professionals in specific sectors (such as healthcare, banking sector, education)
- ✓ Corporate transferees
- ✓ Students seeking to improve their qualifications and skills
- ✓ Researchers and academics

We also collected data on their partners.

- ✓ Approximately half have a spouse or partner and of these, 82% also holds a university degree. Thus a secondary wave of high-skilled migration is also captured in this dataset.

### *What is pushing and what is pulling EU high-skill migrants from Southern Europe and Ireland?*

- ✓ In spite of high unemployment rates in all countries, **the majority were employed** during the six months prior to their emigration
  - 51% of Spaniards, 52% of Greeks, 67% of Irish, 63% of Italians and 67% of Portuguese
  - Of these, 50% of the Irish respondents, 41% of Greeks, 46% of Portuguese and 51% of the Italian respondents held long term contracts
- ✓ Regardless of their employment status, they felt that there were limited or no opportunities **for professional advancement** and they were **overall dissatisfied with the career opportunities** and prospects that were being offered in their country of origin
  - Main reasons identified by the respondents for deciding to emigrate:
    - “I saw now future for me in my country”
    - “I could find better opportunities for me elsewhere”

- “To try a new experience, a new adventure”
- “To improve my academic/ professional training”
  
- ✓ When asked to identify what **‘pushed’ them from their country of origin:**
  - **Corruption** in the country’s political and economic life
  - **Lack of meritocracy,**
  - **Nepotism,**
  - **Lack of opportunities** offered to **young** professionals,
  - **Lack of work and low wages**

***Where to and why?***

- ✓ **Top destinations:** Germany, United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Switzerland, USA, Canada, Belgium
- ✓ When asked to identify the **factors that ‘pulled’ them to their new country of settlement** the recurring themes were:
  - **Meritocracy,**
  - **Employment opportunities in positions of responsibility offered to younger** professionals based on skills and drive,
  - Openness to **diversity**
  - **Better quality of life**
- ✓ Indeed it seems that their decision ‘paid off’ as the overwhelming majority are employed in professional or managerial positions, in their field of expertise and with significantly higher income and job satisfaction.
  - Among our respondents, 70% of Spaniards, 73% of Greeks, 85% of Irish, 77% of Italians and 87% of Portuguese are currently employed in their country of settlement

***And what about their future plans?***

- ✓ Their migration project has a **long term perspective** as well over 60% are planning to stay for at least five years in their new country of settlement.
- ✓ A quarter of our respondents who have migrated in the past five years, are **considering further migration to yet another destination** suggesting a positive disposition towards **‘globe-trotting.’** **Top destinations for future migration plans are the USA, Canada and Australia.**

## Some food for thought

### 1. *Loosing ‘the best and brightest’ in the short and longer term...*

- ✓ It is well documented that high skilled individuals tend to be more **flexible and more prone to migration**. They do so not only because of the human capital they might have at their disposal, but mainly because they expect a ‘return’ on the investment they have made regarding their education, skills and qualifications.
- ✓ Over the past decade, there has been increasing policy concern at enterprise, governmental and inter-governmental level within the EU of a ‘**brain-drain**’ from certain economic sectors toward highly attractive labour markets, mainly the USA though increasingly also Asia. The highest levels of concern have been with regards the technology sector and academia.
- ✓ Our data offers qualitative insight into this phenomenon from the perspective of the high-skilled individual. Indeed, their responses confirm that there is a **clear perception that the best opportunities for their professional advancement, and often overall quality of life that they can offer themselves and their offspring is indeed either outside the EU or in very specific countries on the European continent**, (mainly the UK, Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland).
- ✓ **The USA, Canada and Australia continue to top the list of preferences while there is a growing attraction for Asia.**
- ✓ This is an area that requires attention, given the EU and its Member States declared goal to create a **competitive knowledge economy and to also attract global talent**. It requires particular attention on behalf of the crisis countries if indeed their resources of talent are being depleted. In effect, according to the Global Talent Index (2012), the USA tops the ranks of countries attracting global talent with Australia in sixth position and Canada in fourteenth. Ireland ranks 16<sup>th</sup>, Spain 21<sup>st</sup>, Greece and Italy 23<sup>rd</sup>, Portugal is 26<sup>th</sup> in the global ranking.
- ✓ **Knowledge of the language serves as a significant facilitator (this serves as an advantage for English speaking countries).**
- ✓ **Perceptions of destination countries as open labour markets to non-nationals and of diversity-friendly societies act as pull factors**

### 2...and loosing even more...

- ✓ **High skilled individuals are particularly likely to migrate from corrupt countries and move to less corrupt countries where employment is meritocratic;**
- ✓ This impacts a country with high levels of corruption in at least two ways: it may lead to a ‘brain drain’ of its own high skilled citizens, and it will probably not be able to attract foreign talent (brain circulation) to balance the outflow since access to high-paying and prestigious positions in its labour market are determined by political affiliations and nepotism. Thus the country may experience **a double loss of human capital at a time where skills, knowledge and education are important resources for an economy’s innovative and competitive potential.**

For more information about the survey see:

<http://globalgovernanceprogramme.eui.eu/research-areas/cultural-pluralism/mobility-at-times-of-globalisation-and-crisis/>

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