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Van Mol, C.

Published in:
Journal of Youth Studies

DOI:
[10.1080/13676261.2016.1166192](https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2016.1166192)

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Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2016

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Van Mol, C. (2016). Migration aspirations of European youth in times of crisis. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 19(10), 1303-1320. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2016.1166192>

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To cite this article: Christof Van Mol (2016) Migration aspirations of European youth in times of crisis, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 19:10, 1303-1320, DOI: [10.1080/13676261.2016.1166192](https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2016.1166192)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2016.1166192>



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Migration aspirations of European youth in times of crisis

Christof Van Mol 

Migration & Migrants, Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute/KNAW/UG, The Hague,
The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the European Union (EU) passed through a significant economic crisis. All across Europe, European young people are among the groups which are hit hardest, with youth unemployment rates rising to over 50% in member states such as Greece and Spain. In the classical migration literature, it is suggested that such unfavourable economic climate would make people more likely to move abroad. Whereas in press releases we are regularly confronted with stories about South European young adults with tertiary education working in bars in Northern European cities, limited empirical evidence exists as such on the relationship between the recent Euro-crisis and migration aspirations. This paper addresses this gap in the academic literature. Using data from Flash Eurobarometer 395, I investigate which micro- and macro-level characteristics influence migration aspirations of young people across the member states of the EU. The results reveal the importance of individual characteristics and feelings of discontent with the current climate in explaining migration aspirations. Furthermore, I detect a negative relationship of relative welfare levels with migration aspirations, and a positive relationship of the youth unemployment ratio. Together, the results suggest that potential young intra-EU movers are positively selected from the population.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 25 September 2015
Accepted 11 March 2016

KEYWORDS

Economic crisis; migration;
youth; aspirations; Europe

Introduction

In recent years, the global economic recession led to increasing unemployment levels in the European Union (EU). Young people are hit particularly hard, as about a third of them is unemployed today (Eurostat 2015). In the popular press, rising youth unemployment rates are regularly connected to migration to other European countries, particularly from Southern towards North-Western Europe. A large share of these new intra-EU migration flows would consist of tertiary educated young adults, who in search of a better life accept jobs below their educational qualifications abroad. There are abundant examples of press reports on specific cases of young Europeans' skill downgrading after moving, working, for example, in clothing shops in Amsterdam (e.g. Alderman 2013), coffee bars in London (e.g. The Economist 2013b) or local rental firms in Berlin (The Economist 2013a). Although some researchers also suggested recent trends of youth migration

CONTACT Christof Van Mol  mol@nidi.nl

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within the EU are linked to rising levels of youth unemployment, apart from some single-country studies (e.g. Cairns, Growiec, and Smyth 2013; Cairns, Growiec, and de Almeida Alves 2014; Cairns 2014a), the influence of the detrimental labour prospects on youth migration dynamics has not been well empirically investigated today (Kahanec and Fabo 2013, 3). Therefore, relying on representative data for youth aged 16–30 in all member states of the EU, I empirically study which individual background characteristics, personal perceptions and macro-economic factors are correlated with migration aspirations of European young people.

This paper also adds to current policy debates. The European Commission considers the intra-EU mobility of persons beneficial for the competitiveness of the EU, and it is hence no surprise barriers to mobility are increasingly being removed (Recchi and Favell 2009; Eichhorst, Hinte, and Rinne 2013). Geographical mobility between EU-member states would target labour market disparities and have a positive on the European economy, as people would move where the jobs are. This way, a mobile labour force is considered to be vital both for economic integration to succeed and for the EU to retain its economic competitiveness among global economies (Kahanec and Fabo 2013).

Finally, this paper adds thematically to the academic literature. Although the establishment of the right to freedom of movement in the 1990s facilitated movements to other European countries for family reasons, study, work or retirement, European migration research has long focused on lowly skilled labour migration (King 2002), particularly from non-European countries towards the EU. Apart from East-West movements following subsequent EU enlargements (e.g. Cook, Dwyer, and Waite 2011; Gill and Bialski 2011), it is only in recent years scholars started to study intra-EU migration, both more generally (e.g. Recchi 2015), as well as by focusing on different sub-populations of European migrants, such as middle-class professionals (e.g. Verwiebe 2008), marriage migration (e.g. de Valk and Diez Medrano 2014), students (e.g. Van Mol 2014), retirement migrants (e.g. King, Warnes, and Williams 2000) and cross-border commuters (Ralph 2015). Nevertheless, while explorations of adults' motivations for migration are relatively commonplace, we know less about young people's motivations for transnational movements or the lack of them. In this paper, I thereby add thematically to this growing body of literature by focusing on European youth migration.

Background

Migration aspirations

This paper is grafted on the notion of migration aspirations instead of actual migration behaviour. This choice is informed by data availability: to my knowledge, as yet no representative international comparative data exists on migration behaviour of young people across all EU-member states. However, an investigation of young people's migratory aspirations are a valuable starting point for grasping migration-related dynamics. Aspirations point to mental processes that affect ideas, wishes and preoccupations of individuals, and 'can be expressed in behavioural and conscious psychological ways' (Azmat et al. 2013, 99). Migration aspirations as a function of spatial aspirations (encompassing the aspiration to move or to stay) can then be defined as 'the conviction that migration is desirable' given the specific context an individual is situated in, in combination with his/her personal

characteristics (Carling 2014, 2). Therefore, it can be expected that young people's migration aspirations (or the lack of them) are related to wider life goals in terms of improving their personal situation in the long run. It is hence imperative that research into migration dynamics takes the goals, motivations and aspirations of individuals into account (Boneva and Frieze 2001). Of course, it should be remarked that migration aspirations do not necessarily feed into actual migration behaviour (Epstein and Gang 2006; Santacreu, Baldoni, and Albert 2009; Cairns and Smyth 2011; Cairns et al. 2013). Young people might express aspirations to move, but they are often heavily attached to the places they live in through close family relationships, their 'structural dispositions' and socio-economic background, preventing them from moving abroad (Cairns et al. 2013). Nevertheless, 'behavioural intentions account for an appreciable proportion of variance in actual behaviour' (Ajzen 2005, 100), and migration intentions are considered to be a good predictor of migration behaviour (e.g. De Jong 2000; van Dalen and Henkens 2012). Furthermore, in the Dutch context it has been suggested that the forces triggering migration intentions are the same triggering actual migratory behaviour (van Dalen and Henkens 2012). In addition, migration aspirations of young adults can be considered to be a property of communities that can affect other age groups as well (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006). Therefore, migration aspirations of youth should 'be treated as a measure of *migration potential* rather than a proxy measure of actual future migration' (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006, 291).

Contextual characteristics affecting migration aspirations

The link between economic conditions and migratory intentions is classical in the international migration literature, focusing on economic differences between countries in terms of wages, unemployment and economic prosperity as drivers of international migration (e.g. Sjaastad 1962; Todaro and Maruszko 1987; Hadler 2006). Individuals would thereby move from places with low employment opportunities and wages to countries where wages are higher and more jobs available. The inequality dimension of youth migration linked to specific places is particularly relevant here, as in some places a more limited structure of opportunities might exist, 'pushing' young adults abroad (e.g. Van Mol 2014). On the individual level, rational cost-benefit analyses would be made to improve a person's situation when deciding to move (Hadler 2006). Some recent studies into youth mobility provide partial evidence on these dynamics. A mixed-method study of Cairns, Growiec, and de Almeida Alves (2014) among Portuguese graduate students, for example, suggested that international mobility often figures as a possible option when domestic labour market prospects are not very positive. Cairns uses the term 'spatial reflexivity' to grasp such decision-making processes, pointing to a recognition and validation of mobility when an individual reaches the limits of a particular opportunity in a particular place (Cairns 2014b). In a similar vein, a mixed-method study of Van Mol (2014) revealed that Italian students often move abroad for study because of economic circumstances, with the aim to secure employment in the domestic labour market upon their return. Finally, a recent multi-methods study into work placements of UK students based on 40 in-depth interviews and an analysis of the reports of returning students, showed that the economic recession heightened the propensity of British students to enrol in such international schemes (Deakin 2014). Also here, international mobility fulfils the function of heightening chances on the domestic labour market upon return.

Finally, although my analysis focuses on the economic context, it should be noted non-economic contextual factors such as the organisation and quality of educational systems and welfare states probably also exert an important influence on migration aspirations of European youth (see e.g. Kureková 2013; Van Mol 2014).

The relationship between individual characteristics and migration aspirations

Apart from adverse macro-economic conditions 'pushing' people abroad, however, it is likely micro-level characteristics and personal opinions also play a role. After all, significant heterogeneity between individuals exist: different individuals in the same country exhibit different propensities to move or stay. First, gender shows to play a specific role in migration movements. Whereas in some migration flows, women are overrepresented, other flows appear to be male-dominated. In the European context, it has been suggested men are more likely to have high migration aspirations for work (Vandenbrande et al. 2006), whereas women would be more inclined than men to participate in study exchanges (European Commission 2014). Second, age also plays a significant role. Several studies showed that older individuals are less likely to migrate (Sjaastad 1962) or study abroad (Netz 2015). Third, the educational level of an individual can also be expected to influence his or her migration aspirations. It is often reported that migrants are a positively selected group in terms of education (e.g. Feliciano 2005). Migrants are often young, highly educated and described as being ambitious, adventurous and risk-takers (e.g. Borjas and Bratsberg 1996; Braun and Arsene 2009; De Haas 2010). Fourth, employment status can be expected to play a role as well. It can be expected that unemployed people are more likely to seek work abroad when opportunities in the home country are limited. Furthermore, students might be more inclined to move abroad as well, as they are freer from constraints and might have the opportunity to benefit from financial support of parents and/or mobility schemes such as the Erasmus programme to move abroad (e.g. Van Mol 2014). Fifth, it has been well established in the literature on international migration that once moved, migrants are likely to move again (e.g. Massey and Zenteno 1999; Deléchat 2001). Therefore, it can be expected that previous experiences abroad are correlated with a higher propensity to migrate (again). Finally, the urbanisation level of the locality an individual lives in potentially influences his/her migration aspirations. It has been reported, for example, that in rural areas youth are very likely to migrate elsewhere (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006). It should be noted, however, that this often points to internal instead of international mobility, namely from rural to urban areas.

Finally, besides 'fixed' background characteristics, individuals' personal opinions at a specific time can also be expected to influence their migration aspirations. Thaut (2009) documented in Lithuania, for example, that a mismatch between the educational system and the domestic labour market induces emigration. Furthermore, research in the Netherlands showed that people who are discontent with the quality of the public domain are more likely to move (van Dalen and Henkens 2012). Therefore, it can be expected that individuals who perceive more mismatches and express more feelings of discontent are more likely to move.

As studies of diverse migration streams find considerable variation in the nature and degree of migrant selectivity and relate this to country effects (Jokisch and Pribilsky

2002), it can be expected the variation in geographic mobility rates across EU Member states is not easily explained by individual characteristics alone. A multi-level analysis covering different countries of origin is hence a suitable approach for taking into account this variation across and within EU member states.

Methodology

Data

In order to investigate which individual and contextual factors are related to migration aspirations among European youth, the Flash Eurobarometer 395 (European Youth 2014) is used (European Parliament/European Commission 2014). Flash Eurobarometer surveys are conducted at request of the European Commission, and often provide information on pressing policy issues. The sample of the Flash Eurobarometer 395 contains 13,437 young individuals (aged 16–30) from all 28 EU-member states. A multi-stage random (probabilistic) sample was drawn in each member state. For each member state, about 500 individuals were surveyed through Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) between 13 March and 2 April 2014.

Variables

Dependent variable

Migration aspirations were measured by the statement 'You want to study, undergo training or work in another EU country than [country]' (0 = no, 1 = yes). Although it would have been desirable to differentiate between aspirations to study and work abroad, the Flash Eurobarometer data do not allow this. Nevertheless, it has recently been argued that mobile students can also be intrinsically considered as a migrant category (Van Mol 2014), which can be framed within the broader category of youth mobilities (King 2002). Furthermore, study abroad often appears to function as a way to cope with limited labour market prospects in the home country as well (Van Mol 2014).

Independent variables: individual level

In order to investigate which individual characteristics make an individual more likely to aspire migration, several variables were used. First, gender is included as a dichotomous variable (0 = female, 1 = male). Second, age is measured as a continuous variable in years. The same models were run with age centred at its mean, and the results are largely the same. Third, respondents' educational level was measured by a continuous variable indicating the age when respondents finished their education. This variable was recoded into four categories (1 = until the age of 15/no formal education; 2 = until age 16–19; 3 = until age 20 or older; 4 = still studying). Given the small number of cases with education until the age of 15/no formal education (see Table 2), the age range 16–19 is used as the reference category. I expect young people falling into this category to have completed secondary education. Fourth, individuals' employment level was included as a categorical variable (1 = unemployed; 2 = employed; 3 = studying). As I expect unemployed young people and students to be more inclined to move compared to employed people, the latter are chosen as the reference category. Fifth, previous international

experience abroad is measured by the statement 'You have already studied, undergone training or worked in another EU country than [country], or you are currently doing it' (0 = no, 1 = yes).¹ Sixth, I included information on the urbanisation level of the locality respondents live in. The localities were coded as an ordinal variable (1 = rural area, 2 = small or medium sized town, 3 = large town). Individuals living in a rural area are taken as the reference category, as it is expected they will be more inclined to move. Finally, two indicators of individuals' satisfaction with the situation in their home country are included. A first indicator asked about respondents' perception of the compatibility of the national education and training system with the domestic labour market, based on the question 'Do you think that in country, training, school and university education are well adapted or not to the current world of work?' Respondents could answer this question on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (very well adapted) to 4 (not at all adapted). Feelings of exclusion are measured by the question 'Do you have the feeling that in [country], young people have been marginalised by the economic crisis, that is to say excluded from economic and social life?', which respondents could rate from 1 (yes, definitely) to 4 (No, definitely not). Both scales have been inversed to facilitate interpretation.

Independent variables: macro-level

In the multi-level model, six contextual variables are included. The choice for these variables is based on the arguments put forward in the first section of this paper. First, it is expected that the employment situation in a country influences the likelihood of moving abroad. Therefore, I include numbers on the general unemployment rate in 2014 for each country as well as specifically for the young population, aged 15–24, based on numbers provided by Eurostat. Furthermore, I include the youth unemployment ratio in the models as well. The youth unemployment ratio is generally lower compared to the youth unemployment rate, as it is an unemployment-to-population measure (Eurostat 2015). Second, two economic indicators, namely the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita and the Actual Individual Consumption (AIC) per capita are included. The GDP per capita is a primary indicator for a country's level of economic performance, as it divides the total economic output of a country in a year by the country's population. The AIC per capita allows to compare the relative welfare of consumers across countries, as this measure 'encompasses consumer goods and services purchased directly by households, as well as services provided by non-profit institutions and the government for individual consumption (e.g. health and education services)' (Eurostat 2014). The AIC per capita hence takes welfare provisions into account, which vary substantially across European countries (de Beer et al. 2001). Third, I include the membership duration of a country in the EU, as migration from new member states such as Poland and Romania significantly increased after their accession in the EU (Van Mol and de Valk 2016).

Analytical strategy

The presented analysis is based on random intercept models for binary dependent variables (Snijders and Bosker 1999; Guo and Zhao 2000). These are suitable to describe phenomena whereby respondents are nested within countries (Hox 2010). Furthermore, a multi-stage sampling design, which is the one applied in the Eurobarometer, potentially introduces bias in the estimates of the standard errors when applying standard regression

models. This problem, however, can be efficiently handled with a multi-level analysis (Goldstein 1995). The key independent variables are individuals' migration aspirations. The chosen approach allows to control for cross-sectional variation across countries. The equations are estimated in Stata14.

Results

Descriptive statistics

A significant variety exists among European member states considering unemployment levels as well as macro-economic conditions. Therefore, before turning to the multi-level analysis, I provide an overview of the macro-economic situation wherein young people live in the different member states of the EU (Table 1). When considering the GDP per capita as well as the AIC per capita, a clear difference emerges between peripheral countries with lower levels, particularly CEE (Central and Eastern European) and Southern European countries. Furthermore, youth unemployment rates also vary significantly. Particularly Cyprus, Spain, Greece, Croatia, Italy, Portugal and Slovakia stand out, as about one in three young adults are unemployed. On the other end of the scale, North-Western European countries such as Austria, Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands as

Table 1. Country-level characteristics, 2014.

Country	GDP per capita	AIC per capita	Unemployment rate (%)	Youth unemployment rate (%)	Youth unemployment ratio	Migration aspirations
Austria	128	121	5.6	10.3	6.0	41.5
Belgium	119	114	8.5	23.2	7.0	27.9
Bulgaria	54	49	11.4	23.8	6.5	60.6
Cyprus	85	91	16.1	36.0	14.5	57.5
Czech Republic	84	75	6.1	15.9	5.1	43.5
Germany	124	123	5.0	7.7	3.9	37.2
Denmark	124	115	6.6	12.6	7.8	49.1
Estonia	73	65	7.4	15.0	5.9	64.3
Spain	93	90	24.5	53.2	19.0	59.8
Finland	110	113	8.7	20.5	10.7	56.7
France	107	112	10.3	24.2	8.5	32.6
UK	108	114	6.1	16.9	9.8	29.6
Greece	72	83	26.5	52.4	14.7	44.6
Croatia	59	59	17.3	45.5	15.3	66.2
Hungary	68	62	7.7	20.4	6.0	53.7
Ireland	132	93	11.3	23.9	8.9	50.7
Italy	97	98	12.7	42.7	11.6	58.9
Lithuania	74	80	10.7	19.3	6.6	54.7
Luxembourg	263	140	6.0	22.0	6.0	50.0
Latvia	64	65	10.8	19.6	7.9	46.8
Malta	85	78	5.9	11.8	6.2	57.7
Netherlands	130	112	7.4	12.7	7.1	26.9
Poland	68	74	9	23.9	8.1	43.1
Portugal	78	83	14.1	34.7	11.9	54.6
Romania	54	55	6.8	24.0	7.1	61.9
Sweden	124	114	7.9	22.9	12.7	52.7
Slovenia	83	74	9.7	20.2	6.8	65.5
Slovakia	76	74	13.2	29.7	9.2	50.0

Source: GDP, AIC and (youth) unemployment rates and ratios are based on numbers of Eurostat. Youth unemployment rates and ratios cover youth aged 16 until 24. Migration aspirations per country are based on the Flash Eurobarometer 395 'European Youth 2014'. Migration aspirations cover the population of youth people from 16 until 30.

well as Malta have comparatively low levels of youth unemployment, about 1 in 10 young adults. When comparing the youth unemployment rate with the youth unemployment ratio, it can be noticed a similar pattern emerges, however, with slight variations. Whereas Slovakia does not appear anymore among the countries with the highest youth unemployment ratios, Finland and Sweden are characterised by a relatively high youth unemployment ratio as well.

When considering the migration aspirations of young people across the member states of the EU based on the Flash Eurobarometer, it can be observed migration aspirations are most commonly expressed in Estonia, Croatia, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria. In these countries, more than 60% stated to aim to move to another EU-country in the future. When considering the contextual characteristics of each member state in light of migration aspirations, it can be observed these five countries are also characterised by a low GDP and AIC per capita. Considering youth unemployment rates, among these five countries, all except Croatia have middle-range shares of unemployed people, ranging between 15% and 25%. According to this reasoning, however, young people from Hungary, Poland and Latvia should also show higher levels of migration aspirations, which is not the case. It is hence likely other factors are at play as well.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the sample.

Variable	Mean	SE	N	Min	Max
Age	23.42	4.21	13,437	16	30
Variable	%	N	Min	Max	
Migration aspirations		13,078	0	1	
No	50.3	6577			
Yes	49.7	6501			
Gender	13,437	0	1		
Female	47.9	6439			
Male	52.1	6998			
Educational level			1	4	
No formal education or until age 15	2.65	352			
Until age 16–19	26.72	3555			
Until age 20 or older	34.28	4561			
Still studying	36.35	4836			
Employment status		13,401	1	3	
Unemployed	14.9	1996			
Employed	50.1	6708			
Student	35.0	4697			
Studied/lived abroad		13,430	0	1	
No	82.3	11,057			
Yes	17.7	2373			
Urban settlement		13,403	1	3	
Rural area	30.0	4024			
Small to medium sized town	37.8	5071			
Large town	32.1	4308			
Opinion education-work well adapted		13,049	1	4	
Not at all adapted	10.0	1310			
Not very well adapted	33.4	4362			
Fairly well adapted	48.0	6267			
Very well adapted	8.5	1110			
Feeling youth is marginalised		13,209	1	4	
No, definitely not	3.5	457			
No, not really	13.1	1732			
Yes, to some extent	53.3	7043			
Yes, definitely	30.1	3977			

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 395, author's own calculations.

When considering the descriptive statistics of the sample included in the Flash Eurobarometer 395 (Table 2), it can be observed that overall, aspirations to go abroad are relatively high among our sample. About half of the respondents states to have such aspirations. This is in sharp contrast with data from Eurobarometer surveys among the general population. The Eurobarometer on geographical and labour market mobility, for example, indicated that 17% of respondents envisaged living and/or working abroad in the future (European Commission 2010). Furthermore, Table 2 indicates that the mean age of the surveyed individuals is 23.42 years old. The gender balance of the sample is quite equal, although men are slightly overrepresented. When considering the educational level of the respondents, it can be noticed that very few (2.65%) obtained no formal education or only went to school until the age of 15. The countries where the highest number of individuals with no formal education is reported are Austria (25), Bulgaria (44), Germany (24) and Romania (32).

Considering the employment status of the respondents, it can be noted that most young people were employed at the time of the survey. The overall unemployment rate in our sample (14.9%) is lower than the European average in 2014 (21.4%) (Eurostat 2015). This might be due to the fact that the sample includes individuals until the age of 30, whereas the numbers of Eurostat only cover the young population until the age of 24. When comparing the share of unemployed young people in our sample with the unemployment statistics of the Eurostat (Figure 1), however, it becomes clear that for almost all member states, the youth unemployment rate is higher than the one obtained in the sample. The unemployment ratio, however, is generally lower compared to the numbers reported in our sample.

In line with the general population as reported in other studies, the majority of respondents did not yet live abroad. Furthermore, the division of the sample according to the urbanisation level is quite homogeneous. Finally, it can be noticed that most individuals do not respond extremely on the question inquiring about the adaptation of the

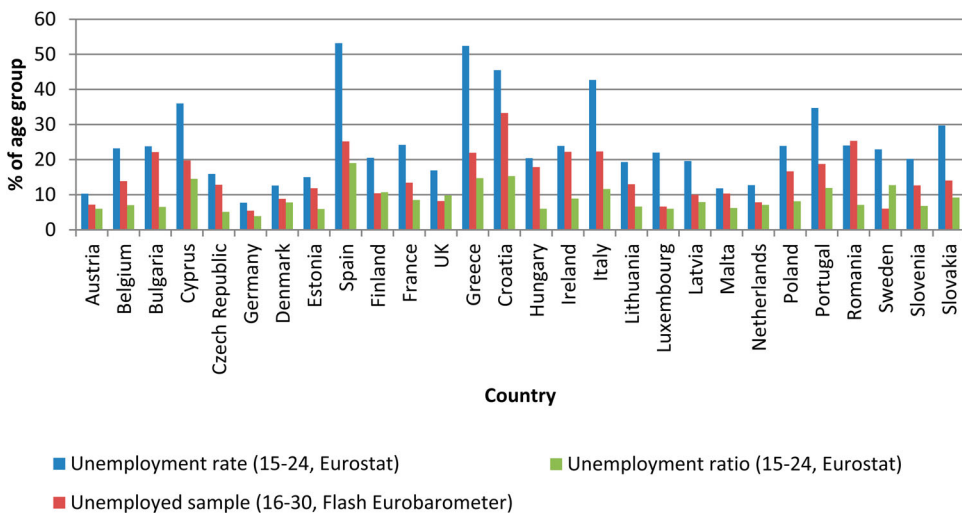


Figure 1. Comparison of Eurostat youth unemployment rates and ratios with the share of unemployed young people in the sample.

educational system and the labour market. In contrast, respondents of the Flash Eurobarometer 395 more often reported medium to strong feelings of marginalisation.

Multi-level analysis

The null model (not shown in table), including the outcome variable and the random-effects, indicates that there is significant variance across countries considering young people's migration aspirations, making the multi-level approach recommendable.

Individual-level effects

Table 3 presents two models. In model I, the individual-level variables are added. Together, the individual-level variables explain about 10% of the total variation. First, it can be observed that, in line with the expectations, the odds of moving to another country for study or work are greater for males, and decrease with an increasing age. Furthermore, model I reveals that the odds of moving to a different country are high among young

Table 3. Multi-level binary logistic regression (odds ratios, standard errors in parentheses).

	Model I Individual characteristics	Model II Macro context	Model III EU membership
Individual-level			
Gender (ref: female)	1.13 (0.044)**	1.13 (0.044)**	1.13 (0.044)**
Age	0.93 (0.006)***	0.93 (0.006)***	0.93 (0.006)***
Education (ref: 16–19 years old)			
Until age 15/no education	0.92 (0.118)	0.93 (0.119)	0.93 (0.119)
20 years and older	1.17 (0.062)**	1.17 (0.061)**	1.17 (0.062)**
Still studying	1.54 (0.110)***	1.55 (0.111)***	1.55 (0.111)***
Employment status (ref: employed)			
Unemployed	1.26 (0.073)***	1.25 (0.073)***	1.25 (0.073)***
Student	1.49 (0.103)***	1.49 (0.103)***	1.49 (0.103)***
Experience living abroad (ref: no)	2.19 (0.116)***	2.18 (0.116)***	2.18 (0.116)***
Urban settlement (ref: rural area)			
Small or medium sized town	1.25 (0.060)***	1.25 (0.060)***	1.25 (0.060)***
Large town	1.51 (0.077)***	1.51 (0.077)***	1.51 (0.077)***
Opinion education-work adaptation (ref: not at all adapted)			
Not very well adapted	0.85 (0.060)*	0.85 (0.060)*	0.85 (0.060)*
Fairly well adapted	0.67 (0.048)***	0.67 (0.048)***	0.67 (0.048)***
Very well adapted	0.59 (0.056)***	0.60 (0.056)***	0.60 (0.056)***
Feeling youth marginalised (ref: no, not at all)			
No, not really	1.11 (0.131)	1.11 (0.132)	1.11 (0.132)
Yes, to some extent	1.16 (0.127)	1.16 (0.127)	1.16 (0.127)
Yes, definitely	1.47 (0.165)***	1.47 (0.165)***	1.48 (0.165)***
Country-level			
Youth unemployment level		1.00 (0.017)	1.02 (0.018)
General unemployment level		0.95 (0.030)	0.95 (0.028)
GDP per capita		1.00 (0.003)	1.00 (0.003)
AIC per capita		0.98 (0.005)***	0.99 (0.007)
Youth unemployment ratio		1.09 (0.044)*	1.03 (0.048)
Duration EU membership			0.99 (0.006)*
McKelvey and Zavoina R^2	0.10	0.14	0.14
ICC	0.06	0.03	0.02

* $p \leq .05$.

** $p \leq .01$.

*** $p \leq .001$.

people who are still enrolled in education. Whereas no differences could be detected between those who received little formal education and those who received education until they were 16–19 years old, the odds of moving abroad significantly differ with those who received education to at least the age of 20, as well as those who are still studying. Similarly, young people still enrolled in education are more likely to move abroad compared to those who are employed. Furthermore, unemployed individuals also have higher chances to consider migration as a possible option. Interestingly, prior experience of living abroad shows to be highly correlated with migration aspirations. Individuals with such experience have 2.19 higher odds of moving abroad in the future compared to those without such experience. In addition, the model reveals – contrarily to our expectations – that individuals living in rural areas are less likely to move compared to young individuals living in urbanised areas. Finally, when considering the individual opinions of young people, it can be noticed that those who consider the domestic educational system and the labour market to fit quite well have lower odds of moving abroad. Those who express feelings of marginalisation, in contrast, are much more likely to move to another European country in the future.

Context effects

In model II, explanatory variables at the country-level are included. Together with the individual-level variables, they explain 14% of the total variation. As can be noticed, the significance of the individual-level characteristics does not change. The model clearly shows that no correlation can be detected between migration aspirations and the general unemployment level, the youth unemployment level and the GDP per capita. A significant negative relationship is detected, however, between the AIC per capita and migration aspirations, as well as a positive relationship between the youth unemployment ratio and migration aspirations. The results thus provide partial evidence on the link between macro-economic conditions and migration aspirations. So the higher the relative welfare in a country, the less likely it is young people will move abroad. Contrarily, the higher the youth unemployment ratio, the greater the odds young people leave the country for study or work. In model III, I add the duration of EU membership as an additional contextual variable. Interestingly, this variable is inversely related to migration aspirations, indicating that people from newer member states are more likely to have migration aspirations compared to those from ‘old’ EU member states. Furthermore, whereas the individual-level correlations persist, the significant relationships between AIC per capita, youth unemployment and migration aspirations disappear.

In a final analytical step, I investigated several normal interaction as well as cross-level interaction effects (see [Table 4](#)). First, I investigated whether there is an interaction effect between educational level and employment status (students excluded). However, no significant interactions could be detected. Second, the interaction between the youth unemployment ratio and educational level of the respondent is investigated, as such interaction can indicate how individuals from different educational backgrounds respond to the crisis. The results show that higher educated people are more likely to move abroad when the youth unemployment ratio is higher. Third, I investigate a three-way interaction between youth unemployment ratio, educational level and employment status (students excluded). The analysis only shows a significant effect for individuals who received education until the age of 16–19 and were employed at the time of surveying. The odds of moving

Table 4. Interaction effects.

Interactions	Odds ratio (standard error)
Education × employment status	
No education × unemployed	0.92 (0.363)
Education until age 16–19 × unemployed	0.90 (0.247)
Education until age 20 or more × unemployed	0.88 (0.241)
Cross-level interactions	
Youth unemployment ratio (YUR) × education	
YUR × no education	1.07 (0.056)
YUR × education until age 16–19	1.08 (0.045)
YUR × education until age 20 or more	1.10 (0.046)*
YUR × still studying	1.10 (0.05)*
Youth unemployment ratio × education × employment status	
YUR × no education × employed	0.95 (0.03)
YUR × education until age 16–19 × employed	0.96 (0.011)***
YUR × education until age 20 or more × employed	0.98 (0.012)
Youth unemployment ratio × gender	0.99 (0.011)

Note: All interaction analyses control for the variables included in Table 3.

* $p \leq .05$.

*** $p \leq .001$.

abroad are lower for these individuals. Finally, I investigated the interaction between the youth unemployment ratio and gender, to investigate whether there is a gender effect in migratory responses to economic conditions. However, no evidence for such gender effect is detected.

Discussion

In recent years, the national and international media suggested that with growing levels of youth unemployment, young people in the EU would increasingly move abroad, particularly from countries hit hard by the crisis to North-Western European countries. Nevertheless, empirical research into this assumed relationship remains limited today. Therefore, based on a representative sample of young people aged 16–30 in all member states of the EU, I aimed to unravel which individual background characteristics, personal perceptions and macro-economic factors are correlated with migration aspirations among young individuals in the EU. The paper hence provided empirically grounded insights into the drivers of youth migration within the EU.

Considering the individual characteristics that make young people consider the option of international migration, several findings stand out. First, prior experience abroad is related to the highest odds of moving abroad in the future. Therefore, the results clearly show that those who move within the EU are likely to become repeat migrants. Second, the findings revealed that men are more likely to move within the EU compared to women. This might be related to the caring responsibilities often attributed to women, which might make an international move less easier. Nevertheless, it should be noted this finding might not be equally applicable to those aiming to study abroad. After all, it has been demonstrated that female students are more likely to consider a study period abroad compared with male students (e.g. Salisbury, Paulsen, and Pascarella 2010; European Commission 2014). This gender effect on migration aspirations thus warrants further investigation. In this paper, I investigated whether the interaction between the youth unemployment ratio and gender impacts on migration aspirations. However, no

significant effects emerged from this analysis. It is hence plausible that men and women respond in a similar way to adverse economic conditions, but that family and social constraints more often limit the possibilities to move for women. Study abroad, in contrast, might take place in earlier phases of life, when students do not yet dispose of a family and children, making participation a conceivable option. Third, and in line with previous research, the odds of moving decrease with an increasing age. This again can be related to the specific life phase young(er) people are situated in. The younger individuals are, for example, the less likely they have a family on their own or a mortgage which should be paid for. Fourth, the findings clearly indicate that the propensity to move is higher among the highly educated. This result contradicts some theories in the classical migration literature postulating that positive selection of migrants would mainly take place when 'pull' factors are more important than 'push' factors (Lee 1966). To dig deeper into this, I investigated the interaction between the youth unemployment ratio and educational level. Once again, the findings contradict theories of positive migrant selectivity under certain criteria, as higher educated people are more likely to move abroad when the unemployment ratio is higher. Fifth, the results revealed that students are more likely to move compared to employed people. This might again be related to the fact that students are freer from the constraints of everyday life and have fewer (familial) responsibilities. Interestingly, the unemployed also display higher odds to move abroad, indicating that geographical mobility becomes a plausible option when domestic labour market opportunities are closed down. Moreover, when considering the interaction between education, employment status and youth unemployment ratio, it becomes clear that in countries with a high youth unemployment ratio, those who received secondary education and are employed are the least likely to move. Those who move are hence likely to have a less stable position in the home country. Sixth, the expectations considering out-migration of rural areas are not confirmed. On the contrary, young people living in urban areas are much more likely to move abroad. This might point to a pattern of internal rural-urban migration for those living in rural areas, whereas those living in medium to large cities might have more cosmopolitan influences and are hence more likely to move abroad when economic conditions become worse. Finally, I revealed a correlation between individual opinions and migration aspirations. The results suggest that when people are unhappy with certain aspects of public life in the home country, they are more likely to move as well.

Context effects, on their turn, explain part of the variation in migration aspirations as well. No evidence was found for a correlation of the general unemployment level, the youth unemployment level and GDP per capita and migration aspirations. Nevertheless, a significant negative relationship could be detected considering the AIC per capita and migration aspirations. This indicates that the higher the relative welfare in a country, the less likely it is young people will move abroad. Furthermore, a positive relationship was detected between the youth unemployment ratio and migration aspirations. In line with the expectations, with higher numbers of unemployed peers, the greater thus the odds young people aspire to move abroad. A competition effect might be at play here. With a higher youth unemployment ratio, competition for vacancies becomes more fierce, as more people apply for the same jobs, and the chance of securing a job becomes smaller. Hence young people move to places where they consider to have more opportunities to pursue their life goals. Interestingly, the correlations between AIC

per capita, youth unemployment ratio and migration aspirations do not persist when controlling for duration of EU membership. This indicates young people in new EU member states are more likely to migrate to 'old' EU member states. This finding indicates that aspirations for moving from the periphery to the centre are not only influenced by economic conditions, but might also reflect broader patterns of youth migration motivated by a variety of goals such as education, leisure, travel and experience. After all, the removal of borders between European countries particularly offered increasing possibilities for becoming mobile to the young population in new member states, whereas young people in 'old' EU countries already had access to these possibilities before subsequent EU-enlargements.

The presented analysis allows to formulate some constructive albeit critical remarks regarding current youth mobility policies. Intra-European mobility is being promoted by the European Commission because of its positive effects on the European economy. As a beneficial side-effect, intra-EU movers would be more likely to identify with Europe. Nevertheless, my results suggest – in line with other studies showing the socio-economic selectivity of, for example, Erasmus students (see e.g. Lörz, Netz, and Quast, 2015) – that youth mobility within Europe remains rather an elite phenomenon, as people from higher social strata are more likely to be mobile. As such, much remains to be done in terms of providing young people from lower socio-economic strata the possibility of being mobile. Furthermore, intra-European youth migration flows driven by economic hardship, whereby young people experience a significant mismatch considering the work they do in destination countries in comparison with their educational degree, might not be the mobility form European policy-makers have in mind. To qualitatively improve mobility within Europe would require tackling the reasons for out-migration for highly educated young adults in countries hit hard by the crisis. This way, intra-EU mobility would become an option rather than a necessity. It can be hypothesised, for example, that youth mobility driven by limited prospects feeds Eurosceptic feelings, particularly when the image exists European rules enforce more budget cuts in the home country. Future research could indicate whether this indeed is the case.

Finally, several limitations of this study should be mentioned. First, I only dispose of cross-sectional data. As such, no causal inferences could be made. Second, the Flash Eurobarometer survey did not contain any information on the desired destination countries of young adults. Nevertheless, for a fully flexed empirical elaboration of youth migration dynamics within the EU, such information would be highly valuable, as it would allow to investigate how differentials (in GDP, AIC, employment rates, but also salaries, welfare benefits, etc.) between source and destination countries might guide intra-EU youth migration. Third, it would be desirable to have more information of the household characteristics of young adults (e.g. their relationship status, living situation, eventual children) as well as their social networks and how this impacts on their migration aspirations. After all, it has been well documented in the literature, for example, that those who are more inclined to move are young, highly educated and single (e.g. Nekby 2006; Braun and Arsene 2009; Bijwaard 2010; Constant and Zimmerman 2011, 2012; Kahanec and Fabo 2013). As a result, it would be highly relevant to compare the family situation of young adults with and without migration aspirations. Fourth, a more fine-grained measures considering the specific aspirations and motivations of young people would be desirable as well. Whereas my analysis heavily focused on economic factors, the

results suggest European youth migration is not only motivated by economic considerations. Furthermore, motivations for working abroad might significantly differ from those for participating in a study exchange. Unfortunately, the Eurobarometer does not allow to differentiate between targeted mobility forms. Particularly qualitative research could be helpful in this regard, as it can help to further disentangle the complex mobility decision-making processes of young people. Fifth, whereas I included a variety of individual-level and contextual variables to explain migration aspirations of young people in the EU, the models merely explain 14% of total variance. Other unobserved factors are hence at play, and it can be hypothesised that particularly psychological characteristics of individuals might play a role. Migrants are, for example, often characterised as being adventurous and risk-takers, disposing of a different personality profile (e.g. Boneva and Frieze 2001; Polek, van Oudenhoven, and Berge 2011). Consequently, combining the presented insights with personality characteristics in future analyses appears might be a promising venue for future research.

Note

1. This variable might be biased as it might include young people who were already living abroad at the time of data collection. Therefore, I ran all models without this variable included. The results do not change without this variable, and results of this alternative specification can be obtained on simple request to the author.

Acknowledgment

This paper is dedicated to my son Lars, who was born the day I submitted this paper to the *Journal of Youth Studies*.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This contribution is funded by the European Research Council Starting Grant project [no. 263829] 'Families of migrant origin: A life course perspective'.

ORCID

Christof Van Mol  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9275-101X>

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