

Study shows where professionals want to migrate within the European Union

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Warsaw, Poland. Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Eastern Europe is the region in the European Union that is least appealing to professionals as a place to settle. A study led by researchers from the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock

that used data from the employment platform LinkedIn to gauge migration interest found that fewer professionals from countries in Northern, Southern, and Western Europe want to move east. But Eastern Europe's appeal might change in the coming years.

As a [driving force](#) of economic, demographic, social, and political change, migration is a top priority for policymakers, but studies were often hampered by incomplete statistics, outdated data, and surveys limited in scope, the authors write in a paper, published in *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*. The team of researchers worked with the LinkedIn "recruiter" tool to search for users in the 27 countries of the European Union plus the United Kingdom who had signaled in their profiles that they were open to relocating across borders for a new job.

"Using LinkedIn enabled us to leverage a previously untapped data source to get a comprehensive look at professional migration interests," says Emilio Zagheni, Director at the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research and one of the study's authors. The data was collected between October 2020 and September 2021, before the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"When people are surveyed, intentions to move are often vague and a move may never materialize. A key difference in our study is that we looked at behavior on LinkedIn. People who express an interest relocating for a job tend to be at a more advanced planning stage. If the opportunity arises, they may really be open to moving," says Zagheni. The data could thus signal future migration flows within Europe.

In absolute numbers, Northern and Western Europe are most attractive to LinkedIn users, the researchers found. Of professionals open to relocating for work about 60% wanted to head to countries such as Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, or Sweden.

Italy, Spain, and other countries in Southern Europe attracted around 40% of migration interest, while Eastern Europe appealed to only a scant third (30%).

Moreover, many LinkedIn users who would consider moving east often already live in the region or close to it. "For Bulgaria, for example, it's people from Austria or Greece or from countries such as Romania and the Czech Republic who are more open to relocating there. It's much more likely that people from the region or from neighboring countries are interested in moving to Eastern Europe," says Zagheni.

One exception included countries with large communities of Eastern European professionals. "We see a high openness to move to Poland from Germany and the U.K. We assume that it's partially related to return migration." In other words: Polish professionals who want to go back home.

But why is there so little general interest in heading east? With visas and work permits not an issue in the European Union, Zagheni suspects that language barriers and weaker economies play important roles. "Given that we're using LinkedIn data, we think that the main driver reflected in the data is employment opportunities."

A lack of suitable jobs in a region can sometimes even hide an otherwise existing openness to move there. This is something the researchers already see with Southern Europe. While the overall numbers showed that a majority of migration-open LinkedIn users want to move north or west—into regions of the Union where jobs are plentiful—it was only when the scientists accounted for factors such as differences in [population densities](#), internet, and LinkedIn penetration, that they realized that Southern Europe was also a much-desired destination.

"Unexpectedly, there was a higher fraction of people in Northern and

Western Europe who would want to move south, compared to what we would have expected to see purely based on differences in demographic factors, internet usage, and related variables. We interpret this observation as a sign of a mismatch between the lack of opportunities in Southern Europe and the number of people who would potentially want to go," says Zagheni.

Something similar might soon come into play with Eastern Europe, he thinks. "Countries such as Romania and Poland have a lot of unfulfilled potential. Structurally, the factors might already be in place that could lead to more desire to move there. These would include a desire to return home for a large pool of highly qualified expats. Then it becomes only a matter of giving people the right incentives and opportunities."

In addition, even now, Eastern Europe might look attractive to job seekers from elsewhere in the world, Zagheni points out. After Russia invaded Ukraine, many people moved from there to Poland or the Czech Republic. "Some of the worries that these countries have in terms of losing population may not be as dire as they might think because there might be a number of countries, including outside of the European Union, that find them particularly attractive," he says.

More information: Daniela Perrotta et al, Openness to Migrate Internationally for a Job: Evidence from LinkedIn Data in Europe, *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* (2022). [DOI: 10.1609/icwsm.v16i1.19332](https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v16i1.19332)

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