

Inhalt / Contents

Gudrun Ziegler	
(Fremd-)Sprachenlehrkräfte ausbilden in Europa: Themen, Herausforderungen, Empfehlungen	5
Michael Kelly	
Strategic issues for language teacher education in Europe	22
Mirjam Egli Cuenat	
Curriculums pour une éducation plurilingue et interculturelle, le projet suisse <i>Passepartout</i> et la formation des enseignants	43
Charles Max	
The development of initial teacher education focusing on multilingualisms: the innovative approach of Luxembourg	59
Miquel Strubell	
Problems and solutions for the mobility of language teachers in the European Union	79
Mirela Bardi	
Common Evaluation Frameworks for Language Teachers	100
Ildikó Lázár	
Teachers' beliefs about integrating the development of intercultural communicative competence in language teaching	113
Alícia Fuentes-Calle	
LINGUAPAX – Working for peace and linguistic diversity	128
Cornelia Brückner	
Internetbasiertes Lernen und Arbeiten im Fremdsprachenunterricht – Herausforderungen und Chancen	132
Ursula Stohler/Daniel Henseler	
Wer im Gedicht den Schlitten zieht	
Handlungsorientierte Aufgaben im universitären Unterricht von russischer Literatur	148

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Problems and solutions for the mobility of language teachers in the European Union

A report on a European research project

Miquel Strubell

Abstracts

Mobility within the European labour market is a key aspect of the Lisbon Agenda. In a multilingual Europe, mobility is linked to foreign language learning, and this in turn to an adequate place for foreign language teaching in schools. An essential element to success is to have highly qualified and motivated foreign language teachers, and one element in their professional competence is, according to some sources and particularly to the European Commission, to obtain professional experience in language teaching in other countries as part of their initial training or during their professional career. However, several sources suggest that the amount of mobility in this profession (beyond mere Comenius exchanges) is extremely limited. The European Commission therefore commissioned an investigation into the topic. This was published (2006) as *Detecting and Removing Obstacles to Foreign Language Teaching Abroad (DROFoLTA)*, *Cerner et lever les obstacles de la mobilité des professeurs des langues étrangères*, and *Ermittlung und Beseitigung von Hindernissen für die Mobilität von Fremdsprachenlehrern*. The current paper presents and discusses the main findings of the report.

La mobilitat a l'interior del mercat laboral europeu és un element clau de l'Agenda de Lisboa. En una Europa multilingüe, la mobilitat es relaciona amb l'aprenentatge de llengües estrangers, i això, al seu torn, amb un lloc apropiat per a l'ensenyament escolar de les llengües estrangers. Un element essencial per a l'èxit és que els professors de llengües estrangers siguin altament qualificats i motivats, i un aspecte de la seva competència professional és, segons algunes fonts i particularment la Comissió Europea, l'obtenció d'experiència professional de l'ensenyament d'idiomes en altres països, o bé com a part de la seva formació inicial, o bé durant la seva carrera professional. Ara bé, diverses fonts indiquen que el volum de mobilitat en aquesta professió (més enllà de simples intercanvis Comenius) és molt limitat. Per això, la Comissió Europea va encarregar la investigació a un equip. L'informe va ser publicat (2006) com a *Detecting and Removing Obstacles to Foreign Language Teaching Abroad (DROFoLTA)*, *Cerner et lever les obstacles de la mobilité des professeurs des langues étrangères*, i *Ermittlung und Beseitigung von Hindernissen für die Mobilität von Fremdsprachenlehrern*. En aquest treball es presenten i debaten els principals resultats de l'informe.

Der Lissabon Agenda entsprechend ist Mobilität ein wesentlicher Aspekt des europäischen Arbeitsmarktes. Das Lernen von Fremdsprachen stellt im mehrsprachigen Europa dabei eine wesentliche Voraussetzung dar, die in der Regel an Schulen im Fremdsprachenunterricht geschaffen wird. Die Berufskompetenz von hochqualifizierten und motivierten Fremdsprachenlehrkräften wird nach Quellen der europäischen Kommission verbessert, wenn sie in anderen Ländern Erfahrungen im Unterrichten sammeln können und dies im Rahmen ihrer Erstausbildung oder auch beruflichen Laufbahn. Dennoch zeigen verschiedene Studien, dass die Zahl der Mobilitätsaufenthalte von Fremdsprachenlehrkräften außerhalb von Comenius Austauschprogrammen sehr gering ist. Die Europäische Kommission gab daher eine Studie zur diesem Themenkomplex in Auftrag. Diese wurde 2006 mit dem Titel *Detecting and Removing Obstacles to Foreign Language Teaching Abroad (DROFoLTA)*, *Cerner et lever les obstacles de la mobilité des professeurs des langues étrangères*, and *Ermittlung und Beseitigung von*

Hindernissen für die Mobilität von Fremdsprachenlehrern publiziert. Der vorliegende Beitrag präsentiert und diskutiert die Ergebnisse der Studie.

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Introduction

This paper discusses the findings of a report prepared for the European Commission in 2006.¹ One of the key ideas behind the process of European integration is that Europe will be more competitive to the extent that its labour force is more mobile. As early as 1968 the European Council began to regulate the freedom of movement for workers within the Community, in order to break down barriers to mobility (European Council 1968). Yet as integration proceeded, very little actual mobility took place, beyond a boom in tourism once air transport was liberalised and low cost flying became an everyday affair for many Europeans.

Since we are talking in this presentation about teachers, it might be thought that teacher mobility, in general, is a long-standing objective of the Union. That is not the case. Not until 14 years after the Treaty of Rome was signed did the ministers of Education of the member states first meet. At that time the Treaty did not envisage action in the field of education (which was to be incorporated into the Maastricht treaty in 1992). Nevertheless, that 1971 meeting began to set the ball rolling for developments in this field. The Janne Report (1973), drafted by a 34-member group of experts and coordinated by a former Belgian minister of Education, said that there was a need to reinforce foreign language proficiency (Siedersleben & Dahl 2003). The following year (1974) the ministers of Education adopted a Resolution on cooperation in the field of education (European Council 1974). Among the “priority spheres of action” that cooperation was to relate mainly to the “encouragement of the freedom of movement and mobility of teachers, students and research workers, in particular by the removal of administrative and social obstacles to the free movement of such persons and by the improved teaching of foreign languages”. In their view (or within their spheres of responsibility) freedom of movement was thus to involve a two-pronged approach: the removal of administrative and social obstacles to the free movement of teachers and others; and the improved teaching of foreign languages. As yet, though, no one seemed to be thinking of the mobility of foreign language teachers.

Let us return to labour force mobility in general. A special Eurobarometer survey (European Opinion Research Group 2001) looked into this issue in more detail and found that just 4.4% of citizens in the then 15 member-state European Union (EU) had moved house at least once to another EU country. This figure was slightly higher than average in France (5.6%), but only significantly so in several of the smaller countries: Luxembourg (20%), Ireland (13%), and Austria (13%), all of which share a feature, that is the relevant dominant language is spoken in another EU country. Participants responded to the question: “And have you moved house at least once to another country, but one within the European Union?”

1 Contract No. 2005-270/001-001 S02 88EPAL

Country	Yes	No	Don't know
Belgium	6.4	86.4	7.2
Denmark	5.2	93.3	1.5
Germany	3.4	89.7	6.8
Greece	2.4	97.6	0.0
Spain	2.8	95.7	1.5
France	5.6	91.7	2.7
Ireland	13.4	80.4	6.3
Italy	2.1	97.9	0.0
Luxembourg	20.4	73.4	6.2
Netherlands, The	6.6	91.3	2.1
Austria	13.0	86.6	0.4
Portugal	4.2	95.6	0.2
Finland	5.8	85.5	8.7
Sweden	4.6	94.8	0.6
United Kingdom	4.2	91.1	4.6
EU 15	4.4	91.9	3.7

Table 1: Item: Having moved house to another country, Data in percentages (European Opinion Research Group 2001: 108)

Even worse: Europeans did not seem very enthusiastic about the prospect in responding to the following question: “Would you be ready to live in another European country of the European Union where a language other than your mother tongue is spoken?”

Country	“Very willing”
Luxembourg	18.4 %
Belgium	14.9 %
France	14.1 %
Denmark	12.0 %
United Kingdom	11.9 %
Sweden	11.7 %
Finland	10.8 %
Ireland	9.6 %
Netherlands	9.3 %
Austria	9.2 %
EU-15	8.7 %
Greece	7.5 %
Germany	6.3 %
Portugal	5.6 %
Italy	5.4 %
Spain	3.9 %

Table 2: Item: Ready to live in another European country, Data in percentages (European Opinion Research Group 2001: 108)

A High Level Task Force was set up to prepare a report, with recommendations, on skills and mobility, and devoted a whole section to the issue of labour mobility. The recommendations in its final Report (2001) make good reading:

1. Expanding occupational mobility and skills development
 - a Ensure that education systems become more responsive to the labour market and to an increasingly knowledge-based economy and society
 - b Introduce and consolidate effective lifelong learning strategies for workers
 - c Lower the barriers between formal and non-formal learning and introduce Europe-wide validation of qualifications
 - d Redouble efforts in less-advanced Member States and regions
2. Facilitating geographic mobility
 - a Remove remaining administrative and legal barriers
 - b Develop language skills
 - c Promote cooperation between education systems and recognition of qualifications
 - d Develop an EU-wide immigration policy
3. Enhancing Information and Transparency of job opportunities

Note that one element singled out for *facilitating geographic mobility* (item 2.b) is to *develop language skills*, that is, the lack of these skills is seen as an obstacle holding up greater levels of mobility from one state to another. However, the High Level Task Force was still not thinking of the mobility of foreign language teachers.

Before moving into the issue, let us point out that it is taken for granted by the European institutions that mobility is necessary for foreign language teachers to be effective. Indeed, there is a generalised opinion among teachers that such mobility is “a good thing”. Yet we have been unable to track down even a single controlled experiment to compare the outcome in professional skills of investment in aiding the geographical mobility of teacher trainees or serving teachers, with that of teachers trained in their own country with the best pedagogical equipment and techniques. Thus the European Commission tender, which resulted in the report being presented in this paper was, in our view, motivated by a highly subjective yet generalised opinion, unsubstantiated by empirical evidence.

The closest approximation to such a study is offered by the important report *European Profile for Language Teacher Education: A Frame of Reference*, by Michael Kelly and Michael Grenfell (2004). They regard teachers’ training as needing to incorporate at least four relevant elements:

1. Experience of an intercultural and multicultural environment;
2. Participation in links with partners abroad, including visits, exchanges or ICT links;
3. A period of work or study in a country or countries where the trainee’s foreign language is spoken as native;
4. The opportunity to observe or participate in teaching in more than one country.

Their conclusion, based on widespread opinions, is clear:

Whether the extended stay abroad is carried out before or during teacher education, the benefits to the trainee, both personally and professionally, are very real. Besides the obvious improvement in language ability, trainees are given insight into the culture and every day life of another country.

Meeting people and participating in events and activities are also beneficial to trainees and increases their communication skills and cultural awareness. These experiences will be passed on to the learners, making the language more tangible and relevant (Kelly & Grenfell 2004: 12).

Many of these claims are based on research (Smith & Zárate 1992; Zárate & Smith 1990). Some research was not available at the time of the fieldwork of the research we shall report upon in this paper (e.g. Ehrenreich 2006). We must insist, however: the empirical evidence showing that living abroad is the most cost-effective way of achieving the beneficial results listed, is lacking.

As early as 1976 the European Council (and the Commission) stated their belief that it is “good” for foreign language teachers, and trainees, pass a period of time in the country where the language they (will) teach is spoken (European Council 1976).

<i>Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers of Education, meeting within the Council, of 9 February 1976 comprising an action programme in the field of education</i>	<i>Resolution du Conseil et des Ministres de l'Éducation, réunis au sein du Conseil du 9 février 1976 comportant un programme d'action en matière d'éducation</i>
17. In order to enable the greatest possible number of students to learn the languages of the Community, the attainment of the following objectives shall be encouraged : [...]	17. Afin de permettre au plus grand nombre possible d'élèves d'apprendre les langues de la Communauté, la poursuite des objectifs suivants sera encouragée : [...]
- the principle that before qualifying as a foreign-language teacher a student should have spent a period in a country or region where the language he is to teach is spoken ...	- le principe que tout futur professeur de langue accomplisse un séjour dans un pays ou une région parlant la langue qu'il enseignera ...

In 2001 the European Council adopted a Resolution, on “Linguistic diversity and language learning in the framework of the implementation of the objectives of the European Year of Languages” (2002) which included the following invitation to the Member States within the framework, limits and priorities of their respective political, legal, budgetary, educational and training systems:

<i>Council Resolution of 14 February 2002 on the promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning in the framework of the implementation of the objectives of the European Year of Languages 2001</i>	<i>Résolution du Conseil du 14 février 2002 sur la promotion de la diversité linguistique et de l'apprentissage des langues dans le cadre de la mise en œuvre des objectifs de l'année européenne des langues 2001</i>
... (6) to encourage future language teachers to take advantage of relevant European programmes to carry out part of their studies in a country or region of a country where the language which they will teach later is the official language;	... (6) à encourager les futurs professeurs de langue à profiter des programmes européens pertinents pour faire une partie de leurs études dans un pays ou une région d'un pays où la langue qu'ils vont enseigner plus tard est la langue officielle;

So the Council is convinced of the advantages of experience abroad, which explains why, in the Directorate-General for Education & Culture's *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006*, one of the studies envisaged was to be specifically on the *Obstacles (real and/or perceived) for the mobility of teachers of foreign languages* (the other studies were Edelenbos, Johnstone & Kubanek 2006; and Hagen 2006).

Our team took on the study the mobility of teachers of foreign languages. First though, while we are on the subject, allow to jump ahead and to give the opinion of the 6250 foreign language teachers from across Europe who participated in our on-line survey, on the subject of the value of mobility for their profession. We asked them the following: “Do you believe that all foreign language teachers should work for an academic year in a country where this language is spoken?” (Williams et al. 2006: ref. v. 24/52). Over two-thirds replied that it is either “essential” or “highly desirable”.

Possible answers	Number of teachers	Percentages
It is essential	1790	28,6 %
It is highly desirable	2483	39,7 %
It is desirable	1566	25,1 %
It is not necessary	339	5,4 %
No reply	72	1,2 %
	6250	100,0 %

Table 3: Item: Teachers should work for an academic year in a country where the language is spoken (Williams et al. 2006: ref. v. 24/52)

We might imagine that those who have had direct, first-hand experience of working abroad will have a special opinion about this. But there are no significant differences in their views when they provide answers to the following question: “Do you believe that all foreign language teachers should work for an academic year in a country where this language is spoken?” The study took into account whether or not the participant had completed a mandatory period in a foreign country during their studies. “Did your studies to become a language teacher include an obligatory period in a foreign country?” (Williams et al. 2006: ref. v. 25/46)

Possible answers	Studies did include an obligatory period		Studies did not include an obligatory period	
	Number of responses	Percentages	Number of responses	Percentages
It is essential	282	30.3 %	1508	28.4 %
It is highly desirable	355	38.1 %	2128	40.0 %
It is desirable	228	24.5 %	1338	25.2 %
It is not necessary	56	6.0 %	283	5.3 %
No reply	11	1.2 %	61	1.1 %
	932	100 %	5318	100 %

Table 3: Item: Obligatory period in a country where the language is spoken (Williams et al. 2006: ref. v. 25/46)

It is clear (and perhaps disappointing for some) that those who did spend a compulsory period in a foreign country during their training as future teachers do not have, as a result, a different opinion from those whose training didn't include such a period abroad.

Let us return to the main thrust of the paper. We have seen that the Union regards the lack of language skills as an obstacle to mobility. Given the pressure on the school timetable, and also for pedagogical reasons, the EU began to encourage member states to increase the teaching of languages in schools, from an early age. This was stated in these terms in the Presidency Conclusions, Barcelona European Council (European Council 2002):

The European Council calls for further action in this field [...] – to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age ...	Le Conseil européen demande de poursuivre l'action dans ce domaine comme suit [...] – améliorer la maîtrise des compétences de base, notamment par l'enseignement d'au moins deux langues étrangères dès le plus jeune âge ...
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The Action Plan referred to above was aware that the rapid increase in demand for primary and secondary school teachers of foreign languages, meant that in-service measures were urgently needed. Thus the Commission decided it needed a report on obstacles to the mobility of foreign language teachers.

Method

Our project on obstacles to the mobility of foreign language teachers was aimed on collecting, collating, and contrasting, both objective and subjective data from three separate sources, in order to answer the specific question: What are the objective and subjective obstacles to the (medium-term) mobility of foreign language teachers in Europe, and how might these be addressed? (Williams et al. 2006):

1. The first consisted of desk research, which sought to identify legislative and implementational developments, with the support where necessary of official contacts in each State (usually ministries, sometimes contacted through embassies). Several reports commissioned or published by the Eurydice service for information on education systems and policies in Europe and the Directorate-General for Education and Culture were helpful sources.
2. The second involved focus groups of the main stakeholders associated with language teaching. These were conducted in four states selected in relation to a heuristic model involving different orientations to teacher mobility. The focus groups were to be organised in a necessarily limited number of countries. We chose two in the west and two in the south, in each case one in the north and one in the south: Riga (Latvia) and Sofia (Bulgaria); and Dublin (Eire) and Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain). In each case we endeavoured to bring together representatives of educational authorities, trades unions, professional associations, school inspectorates, organisations of private school owners, pedagogical renovation movements.
3. The third component consisted of an on-line survey of language teachers in the 31 target states. We shall describe this in more detail below.

The countries included in the study

The countries to be included in the study were defined by the Commission's call for tenders: all member states, including newcomers Romania and Bulgaria; the European Economic Area countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway); and the applicant country, Turkey. This was not to prove a problem as far as official sources were concerned, or for the teacher survey itself. However, it was unlikely that we would be able to obtain a sufficiently large sample for conducting the study in a number of smaller states.

We were instructed to regard "mobility" as covering the medium-term: from one term to a couple of years. It was not therefore to be confused with short-term Comenius exchanges, or with changes in lifestyle.

The website

The project needed its own website on mobility (Mobility - UOC-IN3, <http://www.uoc.edu/in3/mobility/>) not just to inform about the on-going work, but also, and importantly, to allow teachers to access the on-line questionnaire we designed. Moreover, both website and questionnaire were in seven languages, including the main foreign languages taught across Europe (English, French, German, Spanish, Italian and Russian) as well as the team's main working language, Catalan.

The questionnaire

The contents of the questionnaire were devised so as to seek answers to the main experimental questions: “What factors are perceived by foreign language teachers as acting as obstacles to their participation in trans-European mobility?” and “What factors explain the willingness or otherwise to take part in trans-European mobility, among foreign language teachers?”. A thorough search through the relevant literature (Kelly & Grenfell 2004) allowed the team to detect the main obstacles that were foreseen. As well as questions asking for answers to a series of items, some of the items offered multiple replies. As a result, the database has 148 variables to process.

The questionnaire was designed using a multilingual product, NetQuest (<http://www.netquest.es>), licensed to the coordinating university (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya). Designing a questionnaire which is to be available in seven versions, but has to be understood in the context of over thirty European countries, proved to be a daunting task:

- ▶ Phrasing the questions so as to render the replies comparable;
- ▶ Working with seven languages;
- ▶ Coping with 31 different education systems;
- ▶ Varying criteria for filling jobs, recognising diplomas;
- ▶ Varying ages of primary- secondary transition;
- ▶ Divergent terminology.

Member state correspondents

A network of member state correspondents was needed both to assist us in official contacts and also to ensure participation by foreign language teachers in each country’s schools. They were to access, wherever possible, discussion lists and circulars. A measure of their success is that even today, over three years later, a search Google detects more than 310 websites which refer to the acronym of the study: DROFoLTA (April 14 2011).

In the event, it proved impossible to cover all countries, and despite many attempts France, Denmark and Greece did not have a correspondent. In spite of this, in Denmark we managed to mobilize a very high number of teachers. The work of these Member state correspondents was formalised through a contract, with remuneration on a sliding scale broadly in line with the population of each country.

Focus groups

We focused on seven themes of relevance. They were presented as topics which would guide the ensuing discussion. Each focus group had up to twelve participants and lasted up to two hours. With the consent of the participants the oral proceedings of each of the four meetings were taped, transcribed and analysed independently of one another.

Results

The report (Williams et al. 2006), gives a full coverage of our findings. What I shall concentrate on here primarily are the results of our on-line survey. The on-line survey was open from December 2005 to March 2006, and we obtained full answers from 6250 foreign language teachers from across Europe, distributed as follows:

List of countries and number of participating teachers per country			
Austria	412	Liechtenstein	34
Belgium	179	Lithuania	78
Bulgaria	150	Luxembourg	4
Cyprus	9	Malta	45
Czech Republic	189	Netherlands	98
Denmark	672	Norway	80
Estonia	52	Poland	325
Finland	182	Portugal	126
France	158	Romania	195
Germany	198	Slovakia	41
Greece	37	Slovenia	122
Hungary	312	Spain	323
Iceland	53	Sweden	101
Ireland	20	Turkey	312
Italy	1457	United Kingdom	180
Latvia	70	Other countries	37

Table 5: Number of participating teachers per country (Williams et al. 2006)

It is clear that the rate of response varies by country, and that the variation cannot be explained by the size of the country. Teachers in Italy, Denmark and Austria provided by far the highest rate of responses in numerical terms, followed by Poland, Spain, Hungary and Turkey. Given that it proved impossible for us to ascertain the number of full-time foreign language teachers in each country, we were unable to weigh each subsample so as to build a representative sample. We were careful, nevertheless, to check that the largest subsamples did not unduly bias the results to individual items.

Language(s) taught

Other studies have looked into this issue specifically (Strubell et al. 2007). As explained elsewhere (Strubell 2009) 70% of those taking part in our survey taught English, followed by 18% who taught German, 17% who taught French, 7% who taught Spanish, 3% Italian and 2% Russian. It is evident by adding these percentages that some teachers in the sample taught two or more languages at the time of the survey: the overall average was 1.27 languages per interviewee. In some countries the average was only slightly over: France (1.03), Malta (1.04), Turkey (1.05), Poland and Bulgaria (1.06), and Lithuania (1.08). At the other end the small samples in Ireland and Liechtenstein averaged 1.75 and 1.65 respectively; in Sweden it was 1.71; and in the United Kingdom, 1.65. This finding needs to be duplicated and ratified in other studies, for it is of great importance and can help break the stereotyped image of the teacher of a single foreign language. It is unquestionable that the extra investment (in terms of time and expense) required to extend the teaching capacity of an existing foreign language teacher to a new foreign language is much smaller than the cost of providing complete initial training for a future foreign language teacher. Our impression moreover is that in a number of countries where demand for English has exploded in a short space of time (former Soviet bloc countries; but also Spain, for instance) the demand has largely been covered by teachers of other languages, the demand for which has declined. Fortunately, in most countries the increase of English has not been at the expense of the teaching (and learning) of other foreign languages.

We make no claim that the proportion of teachers of each language in our survey can be extrapolated to the universe of foreign language teachers in Europe. Our system

to encourage teachers to take part in the survey included individual associations of teachers of specific foreign languages, and their different effectiveness in dissemination and encouragement may well have introduced biases in some countries.

Type of educational establishment

It could be foreseen that the willingness to take part in mobility would not be the same in a primary or a secondary school, for instance. The type of educational institution where a participant is currently employed (Williams et al. 2006: ref. v. 25/32) provide insights with regard to the following question “Having considered the advantages of teaching abroad and the obstacles you would have to overcome in order to accept such a position during the next academic year, would you accept the offer?” (Williams et al. 2006: ref. v. 64).

Type of educational institution	Willing to accept teaching abroad offer		Not willing to accept teaching abroad offer
	Number of participants	Percentages	
			Number of participants
Preschool	11	84.6 %	2
Primary school	862	67.4 %	416
Secondary school	2286	70.2 %	970
Vocational college	206	71.3 %	83
Adult education college	303	77.3 %	89
Language school	295	85.3 %	51
Others	503	74.9 %	169
$\chi^2 = 56.4, df = 6, p = 0.000$			

Table 6: Willingness to accept offer to teach abroad according to educational institution (Williams et al. 2006: ref. v. 25/32, ref. v. 64)

The hypothesis is confirmed. Willingness varying according to the type of educational establishment, though it may be noted that there are no differences between the three types of establishment the study was designed for: Primary school, Secondary school and Vocational college.

The main results can be summarised as follows:

1. Willingness to take part in mobility was very high (just over 70 % said they were willing to take part in mobility “next year”), and there were no gender differences; the latter emerged in the assessment of the applicability of various obstacles to the personal circumstances of each respondent. We can look and see whether previous experience abroad leads to a greater or smaller willingness to take part in mobility. According to the fact whether or not participants had accomplished an obligatory period in a foreign country during their studies to become a language teacher (Williams et al. 2006: v. 25/46), the answers to the following question were analysed: Having considered the advantages of teaching abroad and the obstacles you would have to overcome in order to accept such a position during the next academic year, would you accept the offer?” (Williams et al. 2006: v. 64)

	Number of teachers/ (%) that said they were willing to accept a teaching abroad offer	Number of teachers/ (%) that said they were not willing to accept a teaching abroad offer
Participants whose studies to become a language teacher included an obligatory period abroad	664 (71.2 %)	268 (28.8 %)
Participants whose studies to become a language teacher did not include an obligatory period abroad	3806 (71.6 %)	1512 (28.4 %)
$\chi^2 = 0.04$, $df = 1$, $p > 0.5$		

Table 7: Willingness to accept offer to teach abroad according to obligatory period abroad during training (Williams et al. 2006: ref. v. 25/46, ref. v. 64)

It is clear that an obligatory period abroad during initial training has no bearing upon the willingness of teachers to take part in mobility.

We can next look at the respondents' replies to experience in teaching abroad. According to the fact whether or not participants had a one term minimum experience in teaching abroad (Williams et al. 2006: v. 70), the answers to the following question were analysed: "Having considered the advantages of teaching abroad and the obstacles you would have to overcome in order to accept such a position during the next academic year, would you accept the offer?" (Williams et al. 2006: v. 64)

	Number of teachers/ (%) that said they were willing to accept a teaching abroad offer	Number of teachers/ (%) that said they were not willing to accept a teaching abroad offer
Participants who have taught for at least a term in another European country	569 (78.3 %)	158 (21.7 %)
Participants who have not taught for at least a term in another European country	3901 (70.6 %)	1622 (29.4 %)
$\chi^2 = 18.39$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$		

Table 8: Willingness to accept offer to teach abroad according to experience in teaching minimum one term abroad (Williams et al. 2006: ref. v. 70, ref. v. 64)

In this case there is a clear and significant difference. Participants who have taught for at least a term in another European country are significantly more willing to take part in (for them, further) mobility.

2. Sex was a crucial variable in assessing the relative importance of each obstacle. Five out of six respondents were women, and personal obstacles in their case were often highlighted as more important than other kinds of obstacle.
3. Obstacles were least and motivation highest among the younger schoolteachers who were not encumbered by family responsibilities. Age indicates an interesting result with regard to the following question: "Having considered the advantages of teaching abroad and the obstacles you would have to overcome in order to accept such a position during the next academic year, would you accept the offer?" (Williams et al. 2006: v. 64).

Age grouping	Number of teachers/(%) that said they were willing to accept a teaching abroad offer		Number of teachers that said they were not willing to accept a teaching abroad offer
Under 30	752	81.0 %	176
30-39	1275	72.3 %	489
40-49	1351	67.8 %	643
50-59	986	69.8 %	427
60 or more	105	71.9 %	41
$\chi^2 = 57.8$, $df = 4$, $P = 0.000$			

Table 9: Willingness to accept offer to teach abroad according to age group (Williams et al. 2006: ref. v. 64)

It is clear that the younger group, aged under 30, are more willing to take part in mobility abroad.

4. Willingness of foreign language teachers to accept a position during the next academic year in another EU country was clearly higher in new (or candidate) countries (see Strubell 2009) where there were also differences in the importance attached to the obstacles:

Participants from candidate/new EU countries	(%)/Number of teachers that said they were willing to accept a teaching abroad offer	
Poland	87.1 %	325
Turkey	86.5 %	312
Hungary	84.9 %	312
Italy	73.6 %	1457
Spain	69.0 %	323
Denmark	60.9 %	672
Austria	41.0 %	412
$\chi^2 = 322$, $df = 6$, $P = 0.000$		

Table 10: Willingness to accept offer to teach abroad in participants coming from candidate/new EU countries (Williams et al. 2006: ref. v. 64)

5. There was widespread agreement in the concern that mobility could interfere with domestic responsibilities, and the perception that teachers engaging in transnational mobility will end up having to invest in net terms.

Let us look in turn at some of the main obstacles detected (Williams et al. 2006).

a. Few opportunities for foreign language teacher mobility

We detected a serious structural problem, when it came to looking at what countries were chosen by our sample:

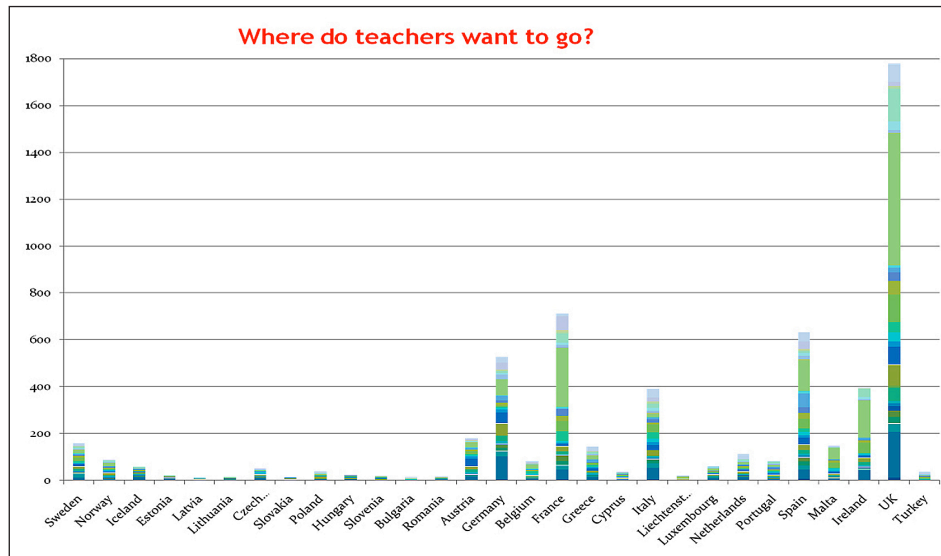


Figure 1: Preferred country for teacher mobility stay abroad (Williams et al. 2006)

Far and away the most popular country was the United Kingdom. This is not surprising, given that 70 % of our sample taught English (often alongside another foreign language). Coupled with other English-speaking countries (or at least with a strong English-language tradition), Ireland, Malta, and Cyprus, over 2300 of our sample (over 35 % of the total) aimed at countries whose total population is probably less than 15 % of that of all the countries studied. Overbooking, or at least over-demand, is very clear in this case, and is especially serious given that the United Kingdom and Ireland are the two European countries where foreign languages are least in demand.

This structural problem is not serious in the case of languages where the other main foreign languages are spoken natively: Germany and Austria, Italy, France (and Wallonia) and Spain. Russian is the odd man out, because the main country in which it is spoken natively was not included in the study.

A further problem arises from the fact that the native language of most foreign language teachers is not one of these six. The native German who is qualified as a teacher of French (say) will be expected to teach German in France; but what about the native Czech, or Portuguese, or Latvian, or Pole, who is likewise qualified as a teacher of French: it is unlikely that there will be any substantial demand for these languages, so what language would they be expected to teach in France?

Secondly, we found that there were few bilateral and multilateral teacher exchange agreements, covering an extremely limited number of teacher placements. Moreover, in some countries there were doubts about the objectivity of the selection procedures, or even about the appropriateness of the criteria applied (for instance, surely a greater return can be expected by choosing young, well-qualified teachers than highly experienced teachers close to retirement). The schemes we tracked down involved the United Kingdom (“Teacher Exchange Europe”), Germany (“Bilateraler Lehreraustausch”), Spain (Programa de Intercambios “Puesto por Puesto”), and France (“Échanges poste pour poste”, including exchanges with Austria and Ireland). Currently such exchange schemes have been dropped altogether, largely because of the lack of candidates.

Thirdly, many teachers commented that the procedures for recognising the validity of foreign language teachers’ qualifications were still complicated and lengthy, despite EU directives simplifying them.

b. Lack of information on opportunities for mobility of foreign language teachers

A generalised complaint was the lack of information about opportunities for working abroad. In our report we pointed out that the European Job Mobility Portal EURES (<http://ec.europa.eu/eures/home.jsp?lang=en>) was hardly used at all by schools or educational authorities to advertise their posts (what few jobs for foreign language teachers that were advertised were outside the brief of our study: mainly private language schools, or enterprises). We suggested that a specialised website, along the lines of the European Researchers' Mobility Portal (<http://ec.europa.eu/eures/home.jsp?lang=en>), might be an interesting initiative.

c. Relevance of personal circumstances

Personal circumstances rated high in the questionnaire answers, as well as in the open-ended space for comments at the end of the questionnaire. In our opinion, this was due to the fact that we are dealing with a highly feminine workforce: 83 % of respondents were women. Though we were not able to be certain about this, we concluded that in some countries the percentage of women foreign language teachers is higher than in the teaching profession as a whole.

A selection of comments listed below highlights the issue, including family issues, lack of language competencies of family members, differences in salaries to be faced with in the other country, debts at home or career issues for family members (comments 1 to 5):

1. “Je ne suis pas intéressée de partir à l'étranger à cause de la famille.”
2. “Mon mari n'est pas en mesure de travailler en allemand (connaissances de langue insuffisantes) et mon salaire seul ne suffirait pas à nous nourrir tous les quatre!”
3. “Ich habe alte Eltern (zudem ist mein Vater ein Pflegefall), die derzeit meine Unterstützung brauchen.”
4. “My 15 year old son would find it difficult to go to Germany as he does not speak that language and my husband would certainly not go and live abroad, so personal difficulties are even bigger than professional ones”.
5. “Estic pagant una hipoteca, tinc una filla de 27 anys que viu amb mi, tinc dos animals de companyia.”

d. Relevance of economic considerations

Another bloc of obstacles concerned salary, taxation and pension scheme contribution differences. Though 25 % were not sure to what extent they would be relevant, just over 50 % of our survey participants that did have an opinion described economic considerations as highly relevant when responding to the question “I would have to pay out of my pocket part of the costs attached to moving abroad”.

The following comments illustrate the issue (comments 6 to 9):

6. “Es gibt keinen finanziellen Anreiz - weder im Gastland noch bei der Rückkehr sondern nur finanzielle Einbußen!”
7. “Non si parla di salario e questo è importante, poichè le scelte verrebbero molto condizionate dall'entità del salario proposto.”
8. “Es ist unmöglich, im Ausland zu arbeiten und in beiden Ländern den finanziellen Verpflichtungen bezüglich Unterkunft nachzukommen, besonders wenn man ein Eigenheim besitzt.”
9. “Otro obstáculo sería el financiamiento, si es que no cuento con mi salario y no consigo alguna beca para financiar mi estancia en otro país.”

e. Few facilities to encourage mobility

Finally, there was the general feeling that mobility abroad went against the system, and was not contemplated. Thus requirements were cited as an obstacle:

10. “In Denmark, for temporary employment only, the decision about language competence is up to the school boards. There are no legal distinctions in the rules of recognition of teachers of foreign languages and other subjects.”

Moreover, lack of job security and professional advancement was cited as an obstacle:

11. “Sono stata contattata to insegnare a (...) e dopo una prima valutazione in Italia di quanto sarei stata penalizzata come stato di servizio, penalizzazioni assicurative e pensionistiche, perdita di diritti acquisiti, ho deciso di rinunciare.”
12. “If I were invited to apply for a teaching job abroad, I would only accept if it could be dealt with within my current contract and would never quit my job, just to be able to teach abroad. This for social security reasons.”

Finally, specific training requirements are also described as an obstacle:

13. “I believe a Danish teacher training is somewhat different to most other countries’. I therefore find it difficult to relate my qualifications to requirements in many other countries.”

France

Specifically in France, though the sample was small (only 158 replies) three items did stand out, compared to the overall picture:

14. “Les services administratifs qui se chargent de ces mutations sont rigides.”

Over a third (as against 22 % of the total sample) stated that the lack of flexibility of administrative services was “totally” applicable in their case.

15. “Travailler à l'étranger pourrait interférer dans ma vie de famille.”

Over a third stated that this was “totally” applicable in their case, a much higher percentage than in the whole sample (20 %).

16. “Mon conjoint/compagnon/ma compagne ne pourrait pas laisser son emploi actuel.”

Over half the subsample stated that this was “totally” applicable in their case. No other item received such a high percentage of such replies, though at the same time we may argue that travel in Europe is so straightforward these days that perhaps there would be no need for the partner to leave his/her job, while the teacher is working abroad for a relatively short time.

Conclusions

It seems clear that despite an extraordinary level of willingness to take part in mobility to another country, foreign language teachers do not have specific European-level policies to support them. The EU Lifelong Learning programme does offer opportunities for teacher trainees (such as COMENIUS assistantships, http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/eu-programmes/index_en.htm) to spend periods of 3 months to one school year as assistants, and in-service training (IST) is available for teachers who want to attend a course or shadow a colleague to learn about language or non-language related jobs in a partner school.

It also seems evident that any policies devised will need to take into account the fact that most teachers are women, and thus to focus their offer on the periods within teacher's professional lives in which they are most likely not to have domestic commitments.

Perhaps the best example to follow is that of several countries the respondents in which said that they had had to spend a period abroad as part of their compulsory initial training. Overall this figure was only 15 %, as we say above. Leaving out the smallest samples in our survey, 87 % of our interviewees in Finland stated they had had to study abroad, as well as 54 % of our sample in the United Kingdom; while only 5 % of our Danish sample, 7 % of our Italian sample, 8 % of our Turkish sample, and 9 % of our Austria sample stated likewise (Our Liechtenstein result (59 %) is not surprising, given that the country offers potential teachers no higher education facilities at all; see Strubell 2009). We believe that if the whole of Europe can move towards this goal, while bearing in mind that the English-speaking countries cannot be expected to cope with the likely demand, then the experience of working in another country's education system, while learning or perfecting a foreign language, will be achieved by future generations of foreign language teachers.

An important conclusion involves the perception among teachers of both bureaucratic obstacles to mobility, and also of some degree of financial sacrifice in engaging in mobility. It is true, of course, that widely differing salaries from country to country are largely compensated by similarly differing costs of living in different EU countries. Nevertheless, it might be in Europe's interest to assign to the European Commission a budget to help compensate, on an objective yet case by case basis, for the real loss in income that mobile foreign language teachers may experience.

The team was disappointed by the widespread perception that bureaucracy is a highly effective deterrent to mobility. It must be borne in mind that the process of European integration is still very young, and comes behind several centuries of state policies to build self-contained educational systems designed, in part, to produce a citizenry loyal to the State and regarding all neighbouring countries as a potential threat. The selection and training procedures to ensure that the professionals in charge of the system (the teachers) would undertake their task efficiently have changed only very slowly, and it is precisely among foreign language teachers that this tension is most acute.

In this context, in some countries it is private schools, who are in general not subject to the same constraints as state schools, which have moved forward most in the employment of foreigners for foreign language teaching.

Recommendations

The final section of the report (Williams et al. 2006: 80-87) covered five main areas where room for action was identified. In most cases they are directly related to issues highlighted in the last section.

1. Opportunities for foreign language teacher mobility

1. Structural Imbalance. The vast demand across Europe for work experience in the UK and Ireland, where opportunities are least, is a serious problem, which might be partly allayed by shortening teachers' stays in these two countries.

2. Bilateral and multilateral exchange agreements. These guarantee social benefits and promotion prospects, yet seem to be largely unsuccessful, except in some cross-border situations. Changes in selection criteria were proposed.
3. Procedures for recognizing the professional qualifications of foreign languages. It was suggested that member states simplify the procedures needed (outside exchange schemes) to accept the qualification of trained foreign language teachers wishing to work only temporarily in the host country.

2. Information as regards foreign language teacher mobility prospects.

Information was scarce, and the number of jobs advertised very small. The authors suggested a mobility strategy specifically for foreign language teachers, including the setting-up by the Commission (or at its initiative) of a central clearing-house for such jobs.

3. Personal circumstances

The special needs of working mothers might be studied in order to increase their involvement in mobility.

4. Financial issues

Officially organised exchanges need to bear in mind the differences in the cost of living, particularly for those earning (low) salaries in the former Eastern bloc. Taxation and pension scheme issues might also be addressed.

5. Allowances for the mobility of foreign language teachers

- ▶ Specific requirements for foreign language teachers. The report called on the educational authorities in each country to consider ways of overcoming the obstacles highlighted by foreign language teachers either wishing to come to their country or to leave it temporarily to work abroad
- ▶ Career advancement. Experience that is important in terms of in-service professional advancement from the point of view of the teacher is regarded by many national authorities as a parenthesis in that person's career.
- ▶ Teacher training. The authors believe that convergence in the academic training of foreign language teachers towards generally accepted minimum levels across Europe would enhance opportunities for mobility, as some administrative obstacles would be reduced or eliminated.

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